

# **WIL'S DOMINICAN REPUBLIC TRIP- 2015**

## **Hosted by Schools for Sustainability Inc.**

The WIL 2015 trip was selected for several reasons; one because Dominican Republic was the location of our 11th village bank and two, because of one of our members has an exciting project there, Schools for Sustainability, whose mission is to transform communities through social and economic mobilization by teaching sustainable practices. The third is DR's proximity to Haiti, our 7th & 8th village banks, giving us an incentive to learn more about the relationship between the two countries.



The Dominican Republic is a Caribbean nation that shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti. It has Spanish colonial history going back 500 years as opposed to Haiti's French Creole history. Their overlapping trials and tribulations account for most of the difficulties that exist today. But, the motivation and determination that women in both countries have, is very inspirational and shows that WIL can make a difference in the lives of these women.



Our small group of 6 WIL members was lead by two dynamic women from Schools for Sustainability, Jackie Crutchley and Alyssa Reymos-Reynoso, along with two very capable assistants, a van driver and a very large body guard. We were well taken care of to say the least! Our itinerary took us up into the village area of Monte Plata, about an hour outside of Santo Domingo. Most of our visits and cultural experiences were in this

region. Meals in a beautiful covered outdoor pavilion, visiting lecturers, salsa & merengue dancing lessons, tasting of the local foods and rum were all highlights of the trip. But the most meaningful was our visits to the villages; meeting with the women, seeing their homes, visiting a local school and hospital and of course, touring the School for Sustainability land with their Aquaponics Unit and their dream for the future. The Monte Plata Community that Schools for Sustainability is trying to support, is mostly Haitian and one of the poorest. The first school and Aquaponic Unit will service this community, giving them jobs and educating them about the need for sustainability.

On our return to the Santo Domingo area, we were able to visit with the women from Esperanza, the Microfinance Institution that handled our #11 village bank. We observed their weekly meeting where each woman pays back her portion of her loan. It begins with a song, a few speeches and then a very organized payment routine. We then visited two households who had received loans; one sold flowers and the other cooked and sold food.

Another highlight of the trip was a day at the beach swimming in the warm Caribbean Sea and having dinner with one of our members, Maria Elshamy and her aunt, who graciously hosted us in her home. Maria also arranged for us to visit the Modern Art Museum to see a Dominican Art Exhibit and then a beautiful farewell dinner on the plaza in the Colonial Zone. It was the perfect send off!

The WIL trip to the DR was a unique experience in learning about the country, its women and its future. Hearing the Dominican Republic women tell the stories of their struggles and their hopes for their children, makes you realize how important our Microfinance mission is and how meaningful these WIL trips are to its members.

