“The vision of FIDA/pcH is clearly to become a leader of the cooperative business model in Haiti as an effective means of empowering rural peasants to develop their economic and social capacity by being investors in, owners and managers of their own cooperative enterprise as governed by the Seven International Principles of Cooperative.”

January 2010
In the days following the earthquake of January 2010, it was difficult for those of us who experienced it to imagine how Haiti could ever emerge from this death and destruction? In particular, in those immediate moments as buildings fell into dusty tombstones, I felt that everything my family had believed in and worked for, was over. I recall asking the first arrivals of the Canadian military what people were saying (as we had been cut off from all communication). The soldier said, “Everyone is saying poor, poor Haiti. What more can happen to this country?” Indeed, what more can happen?

Three days later I was at the home of my colleague, Pierre Richard Pierre. Sitting around his dining room table he began to tell me his own experience of those first days, of how he walked through the devastation of his community, seeking guidance and vision for the rebirth of his country. He began to see what was possible, that the people from the city would flee to the countryside, the part of Haiti where there is safety and the greatest potential for Haiti to restore its agricultural potential. He saw that here was the hope. And it was where we were. In this terrible act, God had given us a gift.

Together, we crafted a five-point vision strategy on pieces of foolscap. I still have those notes that remind me of the fierce determination and belief we had in a time of darkness to make the vision a reality.

This is what it looked like:

First, we believed if we were to be able to serve the thousands that were flocking to the rural areas, we needed to establish a head office “Campus” outside of Port au Prince. We would aim to seek land large enough to house an office, meeting area, accommodation for staff and visitors, lab facilities and/or acreage for experimental testing of crops and market produce.

Second, if our vision is to be a leader in the cooperative model then we must work to have a presence in each of Haiti's ten departments.

Third, if we are a resource provider to cooperatives then we must aim to diversify and expand services to meet their needs according to area and growth potential.

Fourth, if we believe in a productive and sustainable vision for Haiti, we must develop expertise in services and resources that assist other organizations in better understanding the new Haiti.
And finally, in order to fulfill the vision, to seek out and develop “partner consortiums” with a complementing vision to enhance services that can be delivered to communities who are motivated to invest in the cooperative business model.

We have passed the mid point in this 2020 Vision. Just what has been accomplished?

- We have our first permanent base in Fon Batis with a fabulous view of the mountains: The land donated by a farmer.

- While we are currently in three departments, we have requests for partnership representing all ten departments that we hope to eventually be able to serve. “Petit, petit zwazo fè nich li” - Little by little the bird makes her nest.

- We have expanded our expertise in poultry/goat raising, drip irrigation, urban garden, marketing, water reservoir systems, plastic recycling, seed technology, literacy, and credit portfolios.

- We have developed expertise in pre and post project assessments, motivational missions, audits, adult literacy, institutional reinforcement, participatory training and so on.

- The earthquake drew great attention to our work with agricultural cooperatives as agriculture was, and remains, viewed as the sector most able to revitalize Haiti’s economy. In the last five years, we have engaged with numerous partner organizations on varying levels and continue to be sought after as a model of economic development in Haiti.

A vision is only worth its salt if it captures the hope and imagination of many. Along with the thousands of peasant men and women who have believed in what cooperative could do for their lives, you, too have believed and invested in their desire and ability to be productive and responsible citizens of their country.

**Together, we have nurtured trust, harmony and unity in places where once such did not exist.**

Indeed, what more can happen to this country?

productive cooperatives Haiti • The Foundation for International Development Assistance
There was palpable excitement as the day dawned on May 21, 2015 in the community of Tapio, one of three emerging cooperative areas in Zoranger. Politicians began arriving at the church; children hovered around the steps, peering through the windows as newly invested cooperative members convened for their first Annual General Meeting. For the past six months a “marketing committee” trained in the principles of cooperative travelled throughout the village telling the message of what cooperative could do to enhance their lives. Not everyone was sure this was a good idea but eventually 67 men and women purchased 74 shares at a value of 1000 GDE each (about $25 USD) plus paid a registration fee of 250 GDE (about $5 USD). This is no small thing in a community that has known poverty for most of its life. However, they had witnessed the success of the six families who had participated in the poultry pilot project in the previous year. Their new investment is more than blind hope. This cooperative is their own business! Success is in their hands! The politicians loudly declare their support for the cooperative movement and, in particular, for the Tapio Poultry Cooperative.

The first action of the day establishes and ratifies the bylaws, each item read aloud as these men and women are peasants who have yet to become literate. They are then given the opportunity to ask questions before voting on the new policies that will guide their business. The second part of the day is reserved for elections for seven positions on the Management Committee and five positions on the Surveillance Committee. There are fifteen candidates for the Management Committee, ten men and five women. One candidate is not present and the members vote to not allow his name to stand. It is then declared that there must be at least two women elected for the Management Committee.
The members are presented with symbols to represent the candidates. All must agree. Each candidate then draws from the accepted symbols and is given one minute to make their platform speech as to why they should be elected. The candidate who drew the shovel says, “My sign is the shovel. I am not emotional. Vote for me because I will stick to business!” The candidate who drew the rooster says, “I am the rooster, we are building coops so if you vote for the rooster you are voting for the right thing!” Another says, “I am corn. You know if you don’t have corn, you have nothing. Vote for the corn!” Then speaks the axe, the cow, the chicken, the pick, the horse and so on.

Each shareholding member is given seven ballots. Two members are chosen as observers. The symbol of each candidate is placed at various ballot holders such as a bowl or a hat or a bucket. The voting begins! Once each member has placed their ballots, the ballot holders are collected and the ballots of each candidate are counted aloud by the entire membership and written by their name.

The winning candidates, five men and two women are confirmed: young, passionate, and visionary: Seven men and women chosen through a democratic and transparent process to lead their cooperative to economic success. Truly, it is a new day.

The Second Principle of Cooperative is “democratic member control”; all members have equal voice in making decisions and setting policies.
The agricultural sector in Haiti is being challenged to source appropriate seed. Moreover, it is challenged to source sufficient seed to meet the need of farmers throughout the country. The non-renewal of stocks and efficient genotypes have caused an emergence of common diseases such as anthracnose, mildew, and leaf spots resulting in a drastic drop in yield. Stockpiling new seed will greatly benefit the cooperatives. To this end, FIDA/pcH introduced a new variety, tested by MARNDR (Ministry of Agriculture and Department of Natural Resources) in Haiti.

Three cooperatives in Fon Batis have been selected and this past planting season, received loans in the form of credit and seed to improve the food security of their members: a grain stock and seed stock. The seed stock will be sold to members as well as loaned to members to meet the obligations of providing services to the members. The cooperative benefits because the loan to members generates a profit (through nominal interest fees) and through direct earnings linked to the sale made by members.

The stock is controlled by the cooperative. Given this seed is expected to have better yields, the surplus production of certified seed and grain will be purchased by the cooperative. The sale of the stock will enable the cooperative to repay the capital credit loaned.

The Seventh Principle of Cooperative is “concern for community.” By addressing members’ needs, cooperatives seek to bring about sustainable change in their community.
Following the success of the poultry pilot in Zoranger, a 300-broiler unit was introduced in the Chenchiron Cooperative in Fon Batis. Thirty members were selected for training on techniques to breed and raise broiler chickens.

The micro coop was built in three days. It measures 4m x 3m with a stone floor, metal roof sheet and a wire mesh perimeter. It is equipped with feeders, drinking troughs, rechargeable solar energy lights, and hand crafted heaters to provide warmth for the chicks in cooler temperatures. To sterilize and clean the space and equipment between production cycles, formaldehyde, a sprinkler pump, brooms, brushes, disinfectant bleach cleaner and rubber sandals were purchased.

While the coop can hold up to 300 chickens per production cycle, the cooperative started with a batch of 100 chicks. A maintenance schedule was developed in partnership with all the participating members. The production cycle, which lasts about 42 to 45 days, is under the supervision of a more experienced and trained member. All members are taught to perform the following tasks:

- Cleaning and disinfection of the troughs
- Filling the feeders, adding fresh water and vitamins
- Adding fresh water and vitamins
- Observing the birds' behavior to determine cases of illness
- Removing and replacing wet bedding and use for composting
- Providing heat when necessary

The participants also learned to observe the difference between the conduct of intensive commercial chicken farming and the rearing of local chickens. They were amazed how quickly the chickens grew and how much money they could make in such a short period. However, everyone agreed that it still took diligent work to be successful!
Traveling to Haiti brings out the best in people. I’ve seen it happen so many times that I’ve become convinced there must be something magical in the bottled water foreigners drink while there. Truth be told, it is the Haitian people and their unique and genuine manner of interacting with others that makes a trip so special for visitors. Poet Lord Tennyson once wrote, “I am a part of all that I have met.” I believe the same can be said for the participants of our recent FIDA US tour.

In August I had the opportunity to host my first tour with an amazing group of women from Iowa! We spent a week together visiting FIDA/pch projects, meeting with cooperative members, and immersing ourselves in various cultural experiences. Human connection is a powerful thing and it happens so easily in Haiti if you are present in a spirit of humility (our group from Iowa certainly was!). Such connectivity awakens empathy and understanding amongst people from all different backgrounds and cultures. In short, it challenges worldviews and softens hearts. Our first FIDA US tour group will attest to this. At the end of their first week in Haiti, all began to see the country much differently than when they first arrived. Several participants acknowledged they no longer felt sorry for Haiti. Rather, they felt optimism for the country because of the evidence of resources and possibilities. They witnessed cooperative members working together to advance themselves as a community. Throughout the tour everyone expressed amazement of the natural beauty of Haiti! These types of tour experiences are so important as we seek to challenge preconceived ideas about Haiti, and to change the narrative surrounding this country.

The New Year offers such opportunities for you to travel to Haiti beginning with a 7-day tour to Haiti in the latter part of March and another to be scheduled in the summer months (dates to be set soon). We still have a few openings. In the fall of 2016, I will be hosting a unique FIDA US fundraising adventure that includes two days of hiking through the southern mountains of Haiti. Spaces are limited! All interested persons and/or groups are invited to contact me for more information. Let Haiti become a part of you!