

23 feb 2014  
a note from the founder



Welcome to our second annual “State of the Foundation” newsletter. After the rapid growth in our first two years of operation, 2013 proved to be a year of consolidation for SKI Charities, with our efforts focused on strengthening our existing programs.

In Zimbabwe we saw the extension of our SKImfi microfinance program beyond the city of Mutare and into the countryside, with a new mandate to train participants in foundational business skills. This effort has yielded incredible impact, with quantum leaps made by our beneficiaries from their previous rural lifestyles. Additionally, our SKIpgo scholarship program proudly witnessed the graduation of two of our girls to primary school and the continued blossoming of their younger SKIpgo peers.

Last year when I announced our new SKImfi location in Lebu, Chile, it was with great anticipation and expectation. And we have not been disappointed. Our project manager Anita has built a population of talented and driven beneficiaries who are realizing how hard they can work and how much prosperity they can create. Later in this newsletter is an interview we conducted with Sra. Marianella, a beneficiary and indigenous community leader who is using SKImfi to leverage her artistic and commercial skills.

The SKI Charities team in Zimbabwe and Chile is the reason for our success. Elizabeth, Lindsay, Causemore, Anita, and our local networks mean everything to us, and you as our audience are greatly appreciated. SKIC depends on your feedback and support, so please take any chance to stay in touch.

Our work to empower the economically excluded is only beginning. The amount of hope and confidence we can bring to so many is immeasurable. From our family to yours, we wish you only the very best for 2014.

Handwritten signature of Shyam Krishna Iyer.

**SHYAM KRISHNA IYER**  
Founder, SKI Charities Inc.  
<http://skicharities.org>

# 2013 recap

## ski microfinance institute

# 2013

was a productive year for the SKI Microfinance Institute (SKImfi). SKImfi was deployed in Lebu,

Chile in December of 2012, making 2013 its first full year of operation in South America. Over the course of the year, the number of female entrepreneurs has grown steadily per quarter.

Lebu's conservative climate has many women there feeling powerless and dependent on others. Most look at the government for assistance that has not come. The city also has a large population of indigenous women, who are doubly excluded from the social and political spheres. Because the general tendency is for women and indigenous people to be overlooked, many SKImfi participants were initially baffled by the attentiveness and support extended to them by SKIC. Giving these women a chance to make a living for themselves has not only provided them and their families with a sense of monetary stability, but it has also revitalized their mental images of themselves as women and has enabled them to excel.

SKIC's goal of empowering economically excluded women living in the most isolated locations of the world was a big reason why Lebu was an appropriate choice for a second place of operations. In keeping with this aim, SKImfi also became active in more rural locations in Zimbabwe - Honde and Chipendeke - where participants felt similar economic isolation.

In both Chile and Zimbabwe, SKImfi enrolls participants in groups of 4-6 in an effort to encourage camaraderie amongst businesswomen. This system - popularized as "solidarity lending" by Muhammad Yunus, the father of microfinance - has helped to foster a strong entrepreneurial spirit amongst SKImfi members. Signs of this supportive environment can be seen when looking at data recorded monthly over the course of 2013: of the hundreds of participants in Zimbabwe, not one person fell into debt. Despite a weakened consumer market within a struggling economic backdrop,

SKImfi Zimbabwe participants are grinding out profits, in contrast to their public counterparts. In both Mutare (SKImfi's city location) and in Honde and Chipendeke (rural locations of Mutare), sales were relatively stable over the course of 2013. Interestingly, sales increased markedly each month throughout the year in Honde and Chipendeke. This can be attributed to the fact that there has always been a demand for goods in these rural areas, but never a supply.

And while participants in Honde and Chipendeke were making roughly the same profit as those in Mutare, they had far fewer customers (about 20-50% of the customers that a participant in Mutare would see). While Mutare participants may have more customers, they make less per sale because there is a greater demand for goods in the city. It is also less expensive for a SKImfi beneficiary in Mutare to get raw goods and materials. This higher volume enables beneficiaries to sell their products at a cheaper rate than in Honde or Chipendeke, where such products may be more difficult to come by. Because the rurals have a more captive market, and their consumers have fewer options, they can charge higher prices.

Expanding SKImfi Zimbabwe to rural areas has proven the value that our beneficiaries add to their communities at large. Beneficiaries in Honde and Chipendeke have contributed greatly to their economies, creating wealth not only for themselves but also for their friends and families. Without the goods and services that SKImfi participants offer, consumers in these rural areas would have to travel far and pay even more money for products that, until now, had been unavailable to them.

The women of SKImfi have also narrowed the divide between rural and urban economies. With our beneficiaries' continued work ethic and dedication to the program, SKImfi will remain an empowering network of strong and independent entrepreneurs.

# 2013 recap

## ski program for girls' opportunity

**A**fter two complete school years in Zimbabwe, the SKI Program for Girls' Opportunity (SKIpgo), and our family of young scholars continues to grow and flourish. New scholars come from low-income families in the Mutare area, displaying educational and natural ability. Our team identifies girls with untapped talents as well as their families' dedication to help them succeed.

Elizabeth, SKIpgo's project manager, monitors the girls' academic and developmental progress as well as guides the girls' families through the journey of reinforcing the lessons that they learn in school. One young scholar and her family remain in Elizabeth's mind as particularly meaningful. Elizabeth made a home visit, where the four-year-old lives with her mother and grandmother in a one-room house that they divide with a curtain. "The grandmother was in tears and so thankful that her grandchild had improved so much academically, socially and behaviorally," Elizabeth says. "It is so exciting that people really want to help the girl child. I was so willing to work with SKI Charities because I have seen women suffer a lot, and this project reaches the children who are involved in that suffering."

Through SKIpgo, the girls receive books, uniforms, and transportation - along with full acad-

emic scholarships. The removal of a crucial financial stressor is of great assistance to the girls and their families, but the more valuable day-to-day change for our scholars is the interconnected network of caring, committed professionals that fosters their growth upon joining the SKIpgo family. Our team works with the girls' teachers to assess the detailed academic progress that they are making. SKIpgo staff holds regular parent conferences to advise families about best practices for continuing learning outside the classroom, and they also make regular home visits to monitor the implementation.

Crucially, the SKIpgo scholarship is also a preventative measure. Too many females in developing countries go down a different path where education isn't prioritized. Some women get pregnant very early, or don't have the confidence to say 'I'll have a husband later. Let me get an education first because that will strengthen my family, my future, and the future of the community.' The SKIpgo program incentivizes education, something on which many Zimbabweans already place a great deal of value.

Our founder, Shyam K. Iyer adds: "As an outsider, it can be difficult to appreciate the daily improvements in each girls' development. But when I see them answering my questions, brimming with confidence, and telling us how much they love school, it's difficult to miss the intellectual and social gains our girls are experiencing. All because of education and a love for learning, which exists deep inside and SKIpgo simply encourages."





# 2013 recap

## lebu, chile | beneficiary interview



### What kind of work do you do?

I work in local crafts. Everything is handmade and unique to our culture. We get the materials nearby and make the same goods our mothers and grandmothers made. This is what the women in our family have done for generations

### What kinds of crafts?

Mostly accessories and the small items people use. Purses, wallets, decorative bands. The leathers and skins we use are from local sources and I dye them with vegetable oils. So it's all from our environment and still environmentally friendly.

### Do you have any other plans in the future?

Right now I make everything myself and share a small kiosk with other women. Some of them are also part of SKImfi. But I would like to have my own shop that I can sell from every day. I also want to make more items and there are many other women with the skills so it would be good to hire them to help me.

### How has your life changed since you joined SKImfi?

Business has been great. I only have so much time and money so the microloan from SKImfi has given me more of both. My kids are in school and with my extra income I can buy them what they need and support them as I should. I'm part of the local church and many people look up to me because of my participation in the program and my success.

### Do you have a message to our audience and sponsors?

Just that there are many of us who want to join SKImfi and those of us already in the program want to grow. So do whatever you can to help the foundation to help us! And if anyone wants to buy our crafts or local chocolates we'd love to export!

# 2013 recap

wrapping up | more details



## Stickers

Many of our friends have inquired about receiving stickers to post and photograph in their part of the world. Contact us through our website or [info@skicharities.org](mailto:info@skicharities.org) to place an order and we will send them to you while supplies last. Payment isn't required but a photo of the posted sticker is!

## Other resources

As a global organization we are proud to have many like-minded charities working to similarly assist those most in need. Please visit our web page <http://skicharities.org/other-resources/> to learn more about our friends and their important work being done around the world.

## Support

SKI Charities is growing fast and we can use your help to keep up. If you or anyone you know is passionate about our work and ready to pitch in please contact us. We specifically need bloggers, publicists, and researchers. Even if you don't fit into any of those categories, we would love to work with you to empower the economically excluded.