

Cuso International's magazine on global volunteering

CATALYST

SPRING 2023



**Increasing
tech education
for women
in Cameroon**



Above: Madame Sabine (left), a farmer in Awae, Cameroon with Cuso International volunteer Nelly Rakotozafy. Photo: Brian Atkinson

Together we can take meaningful steps on the road to gender equality.

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Catalyst is published by Cuso International.

Cuso International is an international cooperation and development organization that works to create economic and social opportunities for marginalized groups. Together with our partners, we are focused on efforts to advance gender equality and social inclusion, improve economic resilience, and deliver progress on climate action. We believe that by sharing skills, we can build better futures. Founded in 1961, Cuso International works in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Canada.

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Please send your comments, ideas, and submissions to: editor@cusointernational.org

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On the cover: Hadidja Moussa, TechWomen Factory participant, in Cameroon.
Photo: Giordanno Brumas

Message from the CEO

In this issue of Catalyst, you will find amazing stories from Cuso International program participants, volunteers, and alumni that highlight how our programs make a difference in people’s lives around the world.

You will read about our work in Inuit communities in the Northwest Territories providing hands-on support for students, education programs supporting women in technology in Cameroon, and work in Afro-Colombian communities that is helping people recognize and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

You will also read about Venezuelan migrants getting the tools they need to grow their business in Peru. As we approach International Refugee Day on June 20, Cuso International remains committed to its work with local governments, the private sector, and community partners to improve the economic and social conditions of migrants around the world.

Earlier this year, Cuso International introduced our 2023–2027 Strategic Plan, which is a roadmap for how our collaboration work with partners will help address the root

causes of inequality and improve the economic and social conditions of marginalized groups. We are committed to strengthening gender equality and social inclusion, improving economic resilience through sustainable solutions, and advancing climate action.

I am thankful to Cuso International staff and members for their work putting the plan together. In the coming months, I will continue to share news with you about our strategic priorities, the goals we’re working to achieve, and the specific results that will let us know we’ve achieved our goals. I hope you will join us as we continue this journey.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "N. Moyer".

Nicholas Moyer
Chief Executive Officer



Above: Gregoria (left), Urban Garden participant, with Doris (middle) and Noemi
Photo: Marlon Flores



Above: Genovefa, participant of the Small Industries Development Organization (SIDO) program, in Tanzania. Photo: Juditha Bernard

Uplifting women entrepreneurs in Tanzania

Genovefa is a cheerful, confident 59-year-old woman with a passion for entrepreneurship.

Her journey as a business owner started roughly 30 years ago when she was working as a teacher. She was looking for ways to supplement her income, so she began making various food products to sell, including fruit jams, maize flour, and pickles.

As a small business owner, Genovefa often needed help finding essential resources for entrepreneurs and small businesses in Tanzania. In addition, she found formalizing her company to be complex and filled with bureaucratic hurdles. This often left her feeling discouraged as a budding entrepreneur.

“When you are growing as a business, you have to face some challenges, but sometimes a challenge might be an opportunity,” she says.

After retiring from teaching, Genovefa put all her energy and focus into producing peanut butter. After attending an information session about an entrepreneurship program, she was introduced to the Small Industries Development Organization (SIDO), a program provided by Cuso International in Tanzania.

“I was so motivated with what SIDO was doing,” she says.

The program helps new entrepreneurs transform their innovative ideas into vibrant businesses in their

communities and access funds to support their businesses. It also delivers training workshops on marketing and leadership.

For Genovefa, the program helped purchase a roasting and grinding machine for her peanut butter business.

“Before SIDO, I was making peanut butter with a local machine, but these machines were not very good,” she explains, adding that the right technology has accelerated her business significantly.

Not only has it helped increase her product production, but it has also increased her confidence as a woman in the business industry.

“Sometimes in Tanzania traditions, they tend to say that women cannot do certain things, but I say no, I was born a woman, and I see this as a gift, so I am going to do it,” she says.

Genovefa’s business name is Famashine Company Limited, named after her three children. She currently employs six staff members and hopes one day to employ twice as many people and double her production.

“SIDO is doing very well,” she says. “The program is giving women like me the training we need so we can manage our businesses and help others.” ■



Above: Cuso International volunteer Jacque Karungi in Nigeria.
Photo: Jacque Karungi

Working to improve gender equality in Nigeria

In Nigeria, gender inequality remains a critical challenge. The statistics tell a sobering story of how prevalent gender-based violence (GBV) is in this country of 220 million people: one-quarter of girls experience sexual violence. Nigeria has the highest number of child brides worldwide and one of the highest numbers of teenage pregnancies worldwide.

Cuso International volunteer Jacque Karungi wants to change these statistics. As a Gender Analyst, she works with local communities in Calabar, a port city near the Cameroon border, to address gender inequality and human rights violations.

“My work as a Cuso International volunteer is contributing to positive global change that will go a long way to help in reducing poverty and inequality,” Jacque said.

Since starting her placement, Jacque has worked with 45 survivors of GBV to equip them with livelihood skills and improve their economic situation. The women she’s helped receive starter packs containing basic tools that allow them to pursue careers that match their skillset. For example, women trained in hairdressing are given salon equipment, including a portable sink, and those trained in make-up artistry are given makeup kits.

“When I began to learn the training on shoemaking, my relatives and close friends laughed at me and were almost discouraging me. After one month, I started making some money from sales and I am happy,” said one participant.

Jacque has also helped to provide 50 Cameroonian refugee women and girls with dignity kits. These kits include reusable sanitary pads, detergent, bars of soap, underwear, a bucket with a lid, shaving sticks, and a mat.

Around the world, volunteers like Jacque deliver on-the-ground assistance through the Cuso International program SHARE, which aims to improve the economic and social well-being of the poorest, most marginalized and vulnerable people, particularly women and girls, in developing countries, with a view to contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

“My goal is to be a change agent supporting communities to identify their opportunities and challenges, helping them believe in themselves, and looking for sustainable answers for long-lasting change,” Jacque said.

Through her placement with the United Nations Population Fund, a Cuso International partner, Jacque is gaining new skills that she intends to apply to her future career in international development. Her long-term goal is to work as a GBV program manager with the UN, leading GBV interventions and advocating on issues related to refugee protection at a national and international level. She’s already gained experience at the state level through her volunteer work, providing technical support to government and non-governmental organizations to advocate for strengthening and implementing existing laws against GBV and for enacting new laws.

“Whereas my background is in nutrition, I have had the opportunity to broaden my skillset,” she said. “I have



Above: Cuso International volunteer Jacque Karungi in Nigeria.
Photo: Jacque Karungi

learned how to design and manage programs and projects that prevent and respond to GBV and harmful practices in both the development and humanitarian context.”



Above: Maria Gomez, Honduras. Photo: Quione Navarro

Strengthening entrepreneurial knowledge for women in Honduras

Maria Gómez Andrés has a path of flowers growing outside her house that she enjoys taking care of. Nearby is a river where she can swim and cool off from the hot weather. She works hard in agriculture to help support her seven children but faced barriers due to her limited education.

Growing up in Palagua, Honduras, María had a difficult childhood. The 39-year-old was just 10 years old when her mother died.

“We had no way to take her to the hospital because there was no hospital and no money,” she said.

At the time, María was in second grade. She had to give up her studies to dedicate herself to housework and care for her two brothers, ages 11 and four, and her one-year-old sister. Despite what little they had, she says the family was happy and always tried to make the most of life.

Starting to work at a young age is not uncommon in Honduran communities like hers. Traditionally, the role of women is to be housewives. Young girls go to school but spend their free time helping at home.

Now, seeing her own children study, María was excited to learn with them, describing one of her best memories as not

needing to ask them to read to her. With a desire to learn more, she decided to get involved in a training program led by Cuso International, joining 91 other women participants.

The training is a part of a Cuso International project that seeks to strengthen entrepreneurial capacity and provide migrants with tools to support food security. María is now part of a women’s group that promotes inclusive and sustainable development at the local level, where she has connected with other women who are in similar circumstances.

The project is a part of the World Food Program’s Climate Adaptation Training to Agri-Businesses and Municipalities project, which aims to improve food security and resilience capacity by providing gender-responsive business training to small producers, as well as saving and credit groups.

“For me this whole process has been one of learning, practice, and definitely a lot of interest. Now I know how to save. I didn’t even save a lempira before and now I have my own fund for any emergency that may arise,” says María.

The training allowed María to see things in a new way and pass that knowledge on to others. María is now the president of Unión y esfuerzo, one of the savings groups in the Palagua community. The group can manage capital, give loans, and meet needs and emergencies, she explained.

“The training gives us the knowledge and the necessary tools to be able to move forward. If it did not exist, we would be at a standstill,” says María.

María is working towards owning her own plot of land to farm. She also wants to grow more as a woman, and as a member of her family and community. In the future, she hopes women in Honduras are considered as having greater importance, that they have good job opportunities and aren’t limited, and that they have access to loans, better health, and education. ■



Above: Maria Gomez, Honduras. Photo: Quione Navarro

“I’m very grateful to be able to learn more, to be able to go into business, and for all the help that we’ve gotten.”



Above: Carlos Cáceres (left) and Nidia Ramona, SCOPE participants, in Peru. Photo: Marlon Flores

Gaining the right tools to grow a prosperous business

The ongoing political conflict in Venezuela has displaced millions of people, including Nidia Ramona and Carlos Cáceres, who arrived in Lima, Peru as migrants in 2017.

Before she and her husband migrated, Nidia, a 40-year-old mother of a son and daughter, worked on the administration board at a Venezuelan university and sold cosmetics as a side business. Carlos worked at a vineyard.

When they arrived in Peru, the couple’s transition was difficult and they found themselves selling food in the streets. Venezuelans often spend long days travelling to neighbouring countries, and because they’ve left Venezuela illegally, they carry only their essential clothing. What little money they do manage to bring with them is not helpful because the Venezuelan Bolivar, their currency, has hardly any value.

“It was really hard,” said Nidia.

After the COVID-19 pandemic started, Nidia and Carlos decided to start a pizza parlour business. When Nidia learned about Cuso International’s Sustainable Colombian Opportunities for Peacebuilding and Employment (SCOPE) project, she knew she had to apply.

Working with Cuso International local partners Encuentros SJM and Asociación Kallpa, the SCOPE project supports vulnerable Venezuelan and Peruvian populations to land formal jobs or create self-employment opportunities in the Lima/Callao, Piura, and Arequipa regions in Peru.

Through SCOPE, Nidia and Carlos have received marketing tools and legal advice to strengthen their business. They’ve also participated in workshops about sales and customer service.

“Things have gotten better since we started. We have better income and have more space,” said Nidia.



“Since we’ve been working, we feel like a part of the community, like it’s our home.”

Above: Carlos Cáceres, SCOPE participant, in Peru. Photo: Marlon Flores

The days are long at their restaurant, De LILIS PIZZAS. Nidia and Carlos prepare most of their ingredients from scratch before opening their doors to take orders for eight-slice pizzas—which customers can order for pick-up or delivery.

Although life was challenging when the pair first came to Peru, Carlos says things have improved since they started their business.

“Since we’ve been working, we feel like a part of the community, like it’s our home,” he said.

Nidia and Carlos hope to grow their business and move into a bigger space. Although they are having success at their current location, Carlos said he knows there is potential to grow.

“I’m very grateful to be able to learn more, to be able to go into business, and for all the help that we’ve gotten,” said Nidia.

Nidia and Carlos are just two of more than 10,000 migrants and vulnerable people who have received support from Cuso International’s SCOPE project. Due to its success in Colombia over the last eight years, SCOPE expanded into Peru in 2023. ■



Above: Carlos Cáceres (left) and Nidia Ramona, SCOPE participants, in Peru. Photo: Marlon Flores



Driving action on climate change in Afro-Colombian communities

In Afro-Colombian territories on the Pacific coast of South America, community members have noticed weather changes and have found fish in new places. But because they often lack access to the Internet, these hard-to-reach communities find it challenging to learn the latest information about climate issues.



Above: Two individuals participate in climate action and gender equality workshops in Colombia. Photo: Sebastián Martínez Silva



Above: Cuso International volunteer Sebastián Martínez Silva is working in Afro-Colombian territories, leading workshops on climate action and gender equality. Photo: Sebastián Martínez Silva



Above: Cuso International volunteer Sebastián Martínez Silva leads workshops on climate action and gender equality in Afro-Colombian territories. Photo: Sebastián Martínez Silva

Left: Individuals participate in climate action and gender equality workshops in Colombia. Photo: Sebastián Martínez Silva

Helping increase their knowledge is Sebastián Martínez Silva, a Montreal-based biologist and volunteer with Cuso International. Sebastián has been working with local partner organization Fundación A-Kasa, to help communities recognize how environmental degradation is adversely impacting them, and how they can mitigate its effects.

“Part of the process means giving community members the ability to manage their own circumstance and participate in actions that will make a positive difference to them,” said Sebastián.

Along with colleagues at Fundación A-Kasa, a long time Cuso International partner, Sebastián initially wanted to speak with the community about ecotourism and climate change. He quickly learned that the local women did not have a say in business or financial decisions.

“It became important to include this aspect in our conversations,” explained Sebastián.

Working with Fundación A-Kasa, Sebastián initiated a series of workshops in the Colombian coastal villages of Mulatos, Iscuandé, Cuerval, and Playa Chacón.

“We wanted the community to understand their potential and ability to manage their own development,” said Sebastián.

The workshops dealt with gender equality and the importance of women’s work in the community, the impact of climate change, and how gaining a better understanding of the issues can strengthen communities. Green business ideas, such as cocoa processing, ecotourism, and selling crafts for tourists using local and responsibly harvested materials, were also included in the discussions.

Ana Virginia Campaz, a nurse in the village of Soledad Pueblito, knows the workshops are an important element for community members to learn and acknowledge these issues are real.

“ To me, things about climate change and many other things are clearer now. ”

– Ana Virginia Campaz

“It motivated me to know clearly why and how things happen and how they are changing every day.”

Ana is one of nearly 70 people who participated in the workshops, the majority of whom were women and people under 30 years old.



Above: Cuso International volunteer Sebastián Martínez Silva and colleagues at local partner Fundación A-Kasa in Colombia.
Photo: Sebastián Martínez Silva

During a second round of workshops, Sebastián found there were more men coming to the gender-focused sessions. They talked about how men don't have to be loud and aggressive, that women should not always be the ones in the kitchen, and the importance of giving women space to express themselves.

"This is very important because if we're going to talk about gender, we need to be both at the table," said Sebastián.

The workshops also took a very specific entrepreneurial track. Members learned the basics of how to develop and sustain green businesses, using their natural resources responsibly. The workshops also reinforced the importance of ensuring women in the community have more of a say when it comes to formulating business ideas and being entrepreneurs themselves.

"If the community gets more money from marketing a resource, but women don't have a say in what they do with their money, nothing is going to change," said Sebastián. "The process of getting ahead will be slower."

Attending one of the workshops was Deyanira del Carmen Erazo Paredes, a 57-year-old mother of three. Following the workshop, she quickly noticed changes in the community, such as serving food in ceramic dishes instead of using disposable plastic boxes.

With a small group of community members, Deyanira started building an eco-hotel. Her goal is to grow the

business and change the mentality of young people about their potential roles taking action against climate change.

"I know they don't see it now, but in the long term they will see that not only is fishing a source of money and work, but there are also other things that can be done to generate economic resources," she said. "We have begun to look at our territories in a different way and with much more value. Every day that there are meetings people want to attend more, they want to listen."

As Sebastián spends time with community members, he too is learning through their fishing, cooking, and everyday activities. He now has a much better understanding of the needs of each community and the kinds of projects each one wants. Sebastián is looking forward to hosting more workshops in 2023, and he aims to have a more specialized approach in each community.

"I want everyone to be onboard, but even if just 10 per cent of the people actually make use of the information we talked about, I think it will make a big difference," said Sebastián.

As they were leaving one of the workshops, one young participant, Derlin, told Sebastián that most of her family and community members tell her she should be thinking about starting a family. But she wants to go to Cali to become an engineer. "I know with this education, I can do more to help climate issues in my community," said Derlin. ■

Right: Hadidja Moussa, TechWomen Factory participant, in Cameroon.
Photo: Giordano Brumas



Accelerating learning in Cameroon

Two dozen students huddle at their computers, inputting and analyzing data with a savviness that would put the average person's tech skills to shame.

Welcome to TechWomen Factory's data science classroom in Cameroon.

The students here come from every corner of the country, with expertise that ranges from engineering to nutrition to pharmaceuticals. Yet they share a common frustration: they're missing opportunities because they don't have the right technical training. Women encounter particular resistance trying to enter Cameroon's nascent IT sector—it is still seen as a male vocation.

TechWomen Factory is here to change that. First established in April 2021, the project is supported by Cuso International in partnership with the Cameroon Youth School Tech Incubator, a pioneer in the design of educational programs and learning platforms for Cameroonian youth. TechWomen Factory is primarily aimed at assisting women 18–35 years old who are jobless or underemployed by adding a high level of digital competency to their existing credentials.

A year ago, before the program launched, Hadidja Moussa says she wasn't feeling optimistic about her career prospects. Like the other young professionals in the classroom, she had earned a degree in another field but been unable to find a position.

“We had lost hope, but thanks to TechWomen Factory, we have discovered our talents and we hope to give the best of ourselves.”

– Hadidja Moussa

TechWomen Factory has three training streams: data science, digital art/graphics, and website design. It represents a unique opportunity to receive a high-quality digital education at no cost to the student.

A student named Insa Rennes explained, “In Cameroon, there are not a lot of schools that teach data science, and the schools that are currently training are very expensive. So, when this opportunity was presented to me and it was free, I seized it.”

It speaks to the value placed on the program that some participants here have one degree, or even two, but want to invest their energy in this training, aware of the future it could build for them.

The students are highly enthusiastic about what they've learned so far, eager to share the details of their individual projects. What jumps out immediately is not only the quality of the work, but also its focus on community impact.

Habiba Samuel is working on an app that can analyze patient data to predict preeclampsia in pregnant women, while another student spoke about developing a database to better understand the nutritional composition of local foods to promote a healthy diet.

Once they finish their training, the students say they're looking forward to securing work placements where they can apply their new skills. TechWomen Factory matches them with suitable positions and sets them up with access to mentorship and funding for their careers and businesses.

Hadidja, who also plays a role liaising between the learners and the administration, said she thinks the additional responsibility she's taken on will help her secure a job with a company in the future.

“This program has allowed me to discover my hidden talent,” says Hadidja. ■



Above: TechWomen Factory participants, Cameroon. Photo: Giordanno Brumas

Right: Cuso International volunteer Margot Ferguson in Hay River, Northwest Territories. Photo: Margot Ferguson



Supporting students' education in the Northwest Territories

More familiar with the bustling city life of Toronto, Margot Ferguson is becoming accustomed to the quiet in Hay River, Northwest Territories. The Northern community offers a different landscape, different sociology, even a different winter.

“It’s been very different, but it’s been really wonderful,” said Margot. “The community is really nice and the people have been so welcoming. I feel lucky for the connections I’ve made up here so far.”

Volunteering as part of Cuso International’s Canadian program, the 22-year-old works as an educational assistant

at Diamond Jenness Secondary School, supporting teachers in math, communication technology, and English classes.

Margot works with students in small groups, as well as one on one. Sometimes, she works with the entire class, helping with assignments and bridging the gap between students and teachers.

Education challenges in the territories are nothing new. A number of students have fetal alcohol syndrome disorder, which results in learning difficulties. Lack of motivation among students is also a problem.



Above: Cuso International volunteer Margot Ferguson enjoys outdoor activities in Hay River, Northwest Territories. Photo: Margot Ferguson

Over the past few years, Margot says the community has seen an increase in crime. Drug use and homelessness are also challenges, and the community continues to face the legacy of residential schooling.

Most recently, students have been struggling because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools in the community have seen low attendance rates and low rates of students submitting assignments.

Margot hopes to help identify deficits in the education system and make suggestions about how best to make a change.

“I just try to do my best within the school day to day. I work individually with different students and I try to understand their individual struggles and how best to work with them to succeed on a one-on-one basis,” she said.

Although many students have had an impact on Margot, one Grade 10 student stands out to her. With his curiosity

and excitement to learn, Margot said she sees a lot of potential.

“Then I’ll bring it up and it’s met with him having already determined how far he’s able to go because of maybe family history and maybe the town around him,” she said. “I think about ‘how do I break that barrier, how do I let him see himself go a bit further.’”

Margot knows her own privileged upbringing can prevent her from connecting with students as closely and she wants to. She is white and grew up in a secure, middle-class family in a city with a lot of opportunities. She went to McMaster University, where she got an Honours Bachelor of Integrated Sciences, a minor in anthropology and a minor in statistics.

“I think some students find it difficult to connect with me because they notice that I’ve had a different upbringing and I am privileged,” she said.



Above: Cuso International volunteer Margot Ferguson in Hay River, Northwest Territories. Photo: Margot Ferguson

Volunteering with Cuso International has given Margot the opportunity to step out of her own world, be more open minded, and gain a new perspective on different ways of life.

Margot is not the first in her family to volunteer—a big factor in her decision to do so. Margot’s father, Mack, volunteered with Cuso International in 1984, doing mechanical work in Ghana.

“He loved Cuso, he loved his experience,” she said.

While in Ghana, Mack met his wife, Margot’s mother, who was volunteering with Peace Corp. Now, they are passing down the volunteering tradition to Margot for her to explore, grow as a person, and discover the possibilities that life has to offer.

“You start to discover things about yourself, which she certainly is,” said Mack. “Where your strengths and weaknesses fall, you start figuring those things out. At the same time, you grow dramatically.”

Before leaving for the Northwest Territories, her parents gave her plenty of advice. They encouraged her to make friends in the community, make the most of the local culture, soak everything in, and say yes to opportunities.

Since getting to Hay River in August 2022, Margot has followed through on that advice, learning a lot about the community that has welcomed her. When she returns to Ontario, she hopes to highlight the pressing need for helping professions and social programs in the region.

“I feel one part about being here I’ve really enjoyed is that I’ve been able to have an impact on people,” she said.

“I think if people came up here, they would understand that the Northwest Territories is a wonderful place. It’s so beautiful. I think if more people came up here, there would be a bit better resource allocation in Canada.”

– Margot Ferguson

SPOTLIGHT

#IamCusoInternational

Balogun Samson
 📍 Nigeria

#IamCusoInternational because I love to share knowledge. Cuso International gives me the opportunity to share my expertise and contribute to the protection of women and children by amplifying their voices.

Volunteering as a Communications Advisor with the Basic Rights Council Initiative in Nigeria, Balogun has assisted with various media-related duties, including shooting and editing campaign videos, doing social media engagement, and storytelling.

Balogun said the fulfillment he gets any time a survivor of abuse sees justice has been a highlight of his work. His favourite part of volunteering with Cuso International has been meeting new people and learning about their cultures and food.



Kalkidan Tadesse
 📍 Ethiopia, 2022

#IamCusoInternational because I am passionate about volunteering, and I love the idea of helping the world.

Kalkidan is volunteering as a Database Administrator with Cuso International partner Authority for Civil Society Organization (ACSO). By monitoring and maintaining the group’s database, Kalkidan increases ACSO’s efficiency and precision, enabling them to focus more sharply on supporting civil societies in Ethiopia.

“I am proud to be a part of the volunteerism empowerment team at ACSO,” said Kalkidan. “Let’s help each other, let’s do it!”

Jose Adonaiy Ramos Reyes
 📍 Honduras

#IamCusoInternational because I want to assist with social equality and environmental justice.

Volunteering as a Project Monitoring Advisor with Cuso International partner Mesa de Organizaciones Comanejadoras de Áreas Protegidas de Honduras, Jose advises and monitors national organizations dedicated to protecting sensitive areas of Honduras.

Jose’s favourite part about volunteering is his community outreach work. He is proud to be working with communities and talking about important environmental issues, climate change, social equality, adaptation, food security, and food sovereignty.

“I congratulate Cuso International for its enormous work for countries whose society is still living in social, economic, and environmental inequality.”



SPOTLIGHT

#IamCusoInternational



Rasaq Olasunkanmi

📍 Nigeria

#IamCusoInternational because I believe in the inclusive development of vulnerable people and I believe that we can stop all forms of social exclusion if we work together.

Rasaq’s volunteer work as a Resource Mobilization Advisor with Cuso International has impacted more than 35 women’s rights organizations. By building resources and writing grant proposals, Rasaq is helping local organizations get the support they need to address sexual abuse and gender inequality in Nigeria.

“My favorite moments volunteering for Cuso International are when I see changes in the lives of people and organizations that have benefited from our programs.”

Sebastián Martínez Silva

📍 Colombia

#IamCusoInternational because I believe that solidarity, equity, and socio-environmental justice lead to productivity and happier lives.

Sebastián has been volunteering with Cuso International partner National Natural Parks of Colombia. He provides scientific support by researching and monitoring coastal habitats, strengthens partner organization outreach in rural communities, and helps create projects that support ecosystem conservation to mitigate climate change.

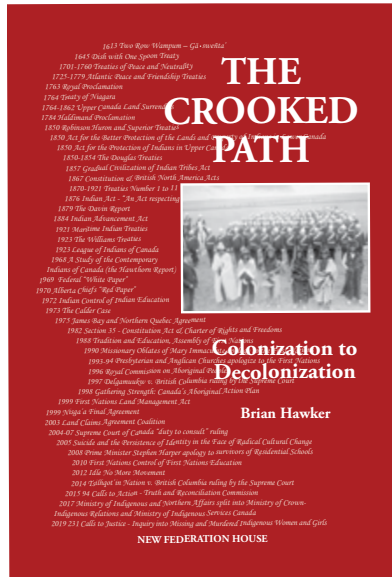
Some of Sebastián's favourite moments volunteering are arriving onsite to work with a new community and reflecting on all he’s learned through his experiences. He is proud of the success he’s seen in training two groups of beekeepers to start sustainable production projects.

“I am also proud of the work of recognizing and integrating the empirical and ancestral knowledge of fishermen within the monitoring and research program of the Corales de Profundidad protected area.”



ALUMNOTES

SHARE + CONNECT



Brian Hawker

📍 Tanzania 1968–1970

Cuso International alumni Brian Hawker has written a book, *THE CROOKED PATH: Colonization to Decolonization*.

For 145 years, the Indian Act has laid out the rules of engagement between Indigenous people in Canada and the non-native majority. It governs every important aspect of the lives of Indigenous people, but every statistic in every study and survey confirms that it doesn't govern well.

After working for 20 years in many remote reserves in Northwestern Ontario, the author concluded that vested interests support the view that things will never be able to change, and that the status quo causes needless suffering for Indigenous children. This book makes the case that change will happen when key players enact a new relationship uncontaminated by the

false hope that only money and politics, the failed remedies of the past, will fix everything. There is hope for long-term reforms that are responsive to the needs of Indigenous children and families across the country.

Brian Hawker has worked as a university ombudsman and as a consultant in First Nations human resource development. His projects include preparing two aboriginal, adult, basic-level literacy workbooks, designing an accredited, community-based traditional native arts program, developing a teacher's manual for teachers of Cree syllabics, and doing a needs assessment as part of the development of an aboriginal BEd. in adult education.

Nancy Edwards

📍 Sierra Leone 1978–1981

Book clubs, podcasts, and YouTube videos—I've entered a new phase of engaging with readers of my book *Not one, not even one: A memoir of life-altering experiences in Sierra Leone, West Africa* (produced by Friesen Press, 2022). It's been fun meeting former Cuso International volunteers (cooperants) in the process.

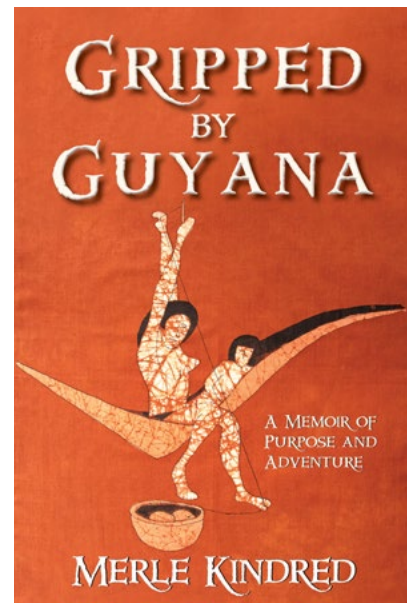
If you'd like to suggest my memoir for your book club, let me know. I'd be pleased to join a conversation with your members. In recent podcasts and YouTube videos, I have discussed my Cuso International work in Sierra Leone, a subsequent career in global health, and the memoir-writing process. For regular updates, I invite you to look at the book club and events pages on my website: www.nancyedwards.ca

Merle Kindred

📍 Jamaica (1978–1980)

📍 Guyana (2017–2018)

As Cuso International moves forward with its strategic plan, my memoir adds another returned volunteer testament. *Gripped by Guyana: A Memoir of Purpose and Adventure* is now available through local bookstores and on Amazon.



LIVES LIVED

REMEMBERING OUR VOLUNTEERS



Marnie Girvan

📍 Tanzania 1965–1969

📍 Jamaica 1971–1975

My cousin Marnie and I were best friends growing up and when she died last October, she took her half of our childhood memories with her.

She and her husband Paul left their first posting in Tanzania with two small Swahili-speaking sons who learned English in Jamaica, returning to Canada in July 1975 sounding like Bob Marley!

They settled in Ottawa, and Marnie took on administrative responsibilities with Cuso International, leaving in 1979. She worked as Director of MATCH until the boys were older before accepting a posting abroad with the Canadian High Commission in Colombo, Sri Lanka. A highlight of her

time there (and mine!) was a festival of films by Canadian women, which we planned and ran together in 1998. Her last position was in Kampala with the Commonwealth Secretariat, defining and encouraging roles for women in the Ugandan government.

Cuso International was a formative influence on her life, and she contributed her energy, wisdom, and joy to make the world a better place for women and girls.

Wilfred Dale Posgate

📍 India 1961–1962

Wilfred Dale passed away January 9, 2023, in Victoria, Canada.

Born in London, UK, Dale moved with his parents to Toronto and attended the University of Toronto Schools and University of Toronto. He taught political science at York University in the 1970s before moving to the west coast in 1980.

During his 83 years, Dale packed his life with activities he held dear: his volunteer work for Cuso International, and his professional work with the Canadian International Development Agency in Bangladesh, Thailand, and Afghanistan. He had a passion for politics, literature, music, sailing, and thoroughly enjoyed his many travels, particularly throughout South and Southeast Asia. His family and friends will miss him deeply.

Thank you to the Victoria Community Health Services nurses and occupational therapist for your outstanding support.

Eric Norval Davies

📍 Zambia 1974–1976

📍 Sierra Leone 1980–1981

The family of Eric Davies is heartbroken to share that Eric passed away suddenly at home in the early hours of January 14, 2023, with his son Ben.

Eric graduated with a BSc in biology and a BA in history from the University of New Brunswick after which he spent two terms in Africa as a teacher for Cuso International in Sierra Leone and Zambia during the 1970s. Following that, he moved to Ottawa where he worked for the Red Cross as a biomedical research scientist. This is where he met and married Cathi Harris. In 1988, they moved to Mississauga, where Erin and Ben were born. He worked as a biomedical research scientist there until 2007. He moved back to the Ottawa area in 2008, where he lived until 2011. He retired to Woodstock, New Brunswick to help care for his mother.

Eric was an avid reader who loved cooking and music. He had many interesting stories from his days in Africa and in the biomedical field, which he loved to share over a glass of wine. He was a generous soul who loved his friends and family.



Debra Jean Martyn

📍 Tanzania 2011–2012

📍 Myanmar 2018

Debra Jean Martyn passed away peacefully at home on February 18, 2023, at the age of 71.

Born in West Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia on October 26, 1951, she was the daughter of the late Mary Ina Hayman and Lawson Kenneth Hayman. She lived in West Tatamagouche through her childhood.

Debra attended Acadia University, where she earned a BSc in home economics and met her future husband, Peter Martyn, whom she married in 1974. After university, Debra moved to Prince Edward Island as a district home economist, and then to Labrador. In 1975, she and Peter settled in Montreal, where she ran a group home for cognitively disabled adults. She joined the staff of Edgewater Elementary School in Pincourt, Quebec in the early 1980s, where she worked until her retirement in 2006, assisting students with disabilities.

In 2001, she began a second career teaching English internationally. She began in Suwon, South Korea as a Kindergarten teacher, and then at Guilin University of Technology in China. After retirement, she volunteered with Cuso International. She taught teachers in Kibaya, Tanzania and worked as a product designer at Chu Chu in Yangon, Myanmar. At Chu Chu, she created merchandise out of recycled materials. She was a mother, homemaker, world traveler, gardener, and sewer. She welcomed her children, Heather and Alex, in the 1980s and spent the next 20 years

raising her family with the calm and loving competence she was known for. After retiring in Tatamagouche, she spent time on her hobbies: gardening, puzzles, sudoku, traveling, knitting, and sewing. She volunteered on the executive team of The Fraser, a local gallery promoting visual arts and crafts. At the Fraser, she expanded on her lifelong interests, learning a variety of fibre and visual arts.

Debra leaves a lifetime of joyful memories and love with her family. She is remembered with love by her extended family and her many friends. Our family would like to thank Dr. Daniel MacDonald, Martha Ferguson, and the many staff at the VON for their knowledge, guidance, and steady care through Debra's illness.

A champion of education offers a final lesson in giving back.

(Neil McBurney, Rwanda, 2008)

Neil McBurney deeply believed in the power of education and its ability to elevate a person's life. His adventurous spirit and passion for teaching, traveling, and volunteering took him all over the world, to places such as Norway, the U.K., South Korea, Japan, Germany, Spain, and Thailand.

Making Vancouver his home for close to two decades, Neil was an active volunteer in several local non-profit organizations. He was a "language/culture buddy" to many new immigrants. He recorded academic texts for visually impaired students at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and participated in research studies at UBC Hospital.

But perhaps Neil's most impactful and fulfilling travel and teaching experience took place in 2008, when he volunteered with Cuso International in Rwanda when he was 65. There, he spent six months as an educational volunteer teaching adults English.

"That was very important for him, to volunteer and help people that wanted to help themselves," says Neil's son, Dave. "Nothing meant more to him than seeing somebody progress no matter what part of the world they were from."

While in Rwanda, Neil was moved by the level of poverty and the challenges the local population faced for basic necessities. "It was a real eye-opener for him," says Dave. "But he had just such glowing things to say about his experience. And I know he really took great pride in his spending time there."

After returning home, Neil remained in contact with some of the students he taught in Rwanda and personally supported one through college. He was also continually delighted to receive letters and messages from former students prospering, in large part, because of their education.



The experience was so fulfilling and had such a profound effect on Neil's life, he named Cuso International as the sole beneficiary of his estate. (Neil passed away in 2021 at age 81 from lung cancer.)

He never reached out to share that he was planning to give Cuso International such a generous gift, likely because any acknowledgement and recognition were not important to him. What mattered was that Cuso International continued its work to better people's lives around the world through the gift of education.

**To learn more about how you too can continue to play a vital role in Cuso International's mission by leaving a gift in your Will, please contact Laurie Buske, Director, Resource Development.
Phone (toll free): +1.888.434.2876 x 263
Email: laurie.buske@cusointernational.org**

You too can take action and leave a legacy for generations to come.

Below: Cuso International Challenge trekkers reached Machu Picchu, raising money to help the most marginalized around the world. Back row, left to right: Marianne Dent, Kelsi Rousseau, Amy Meckelborg, Mark Johnson, Astrid Nielsen, Faith Savarese, Christine Beaudry, Amie Gibson, Jason Ewart Roden, Janice Chmurzynski

Front row, left to right: Emma Orawiec, Cynthia Smith, Anna Thornton, Lynn Amatuzio, Darlene Johnson, Dieda John, Dr. Betty Rozendaal. Not shown: Josee DesRosiers, Meghan Maack, Lizanne Porter
Photo: Cuso International



MACHU PICCHU

CAMEROON



Above: Aude Aigui Eloundou and Brenda Makemtia at the International Volunteer and Solidarity Fair in Cameroon. Photo: Giordanno Brumas



HONDURAS

Right: Cuso International volunteer Christopher Popowycz, with Zulma Carolina Galeano Osorio and Albertina Concepción Rodriguez in Olancho, Honduras.
Photo: Quioney

ETHIOPIA



Above: Sebrina, a participant in Cuso International's U-Girls 2 program, in Ethiopia. Photo: Cuso International

Getting
SOCIAL

#cusointernational

