

SPRING 2024

CATALYST

Cuso International's magazine on global volunteering

**Supporting
economic
opportunities**





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Futures to build. 🍁**

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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Catalyst is also available in French.

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On the cover: Roselin, a SCOPE participant, in Colombia.
Photo: Cuso International

Message from the CEO

Greetings,

In this issue of Catalyst, we are highlighting the achievements of economic migrants in Africa and Latin America. We invite you to read their stories and rejoice at their successes. Whether by learning new skills, starting their own small business, or developing new partnerships, we have seen how Cuso International program participants, women and men alike, are becoming more resilient to changing economic conditions. Helping build that capacity in the communities where we work is one of our top strategic priorities.

In these pages, you will read about a Cameroonian refugee who has started a new life in Nigeria and is now assisting other Cameroonian refugees. Earlier this year, we celebrated our Sustainable Colombian Opportunities for Peacebuilding and Employment (SCOPE) project, which after nine successful years concluded at the end of March. The program has helped thousands of women, youth, victims of conflict, and Venezuelan migrants find formal employment. We know you will enjoy that story!

You will also find articles about our work in Peru, where women are recovering their knowledge of traditional Andean medicine, while also increasing their family income; programs in Benin that are raising the awareness of men-

struation hygiene; and about girls and women in Ethiopia who are receiving academic and financial support to pursue their educational goals.

As International Refugee Day (June 20) approaches, we reiterate our commitment to working with local governments, the private sector, and community partners to improve the economic and social conditions of migrants around the world.

Our dedicated volunteers and alumni make this work possible.

That is why, on behalf of the entire Cuso International family, I want to express our immense gratitude for your ongoing support as we continue this journey to build a more equitable future for all.

Thank you, and happy reading!



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

Nicholas Moyer
Chief Executive Officer



Above: Two fisherwomen participating in a fishing tournament in Honduras. Photo: Josue Cabus



Above: A cooperative of Indigenous farmers participate in a agricultural program working to build farmers' resilience to the impacts of climate change in Mbalmayo, Cameroon. Photo: Giordanno Brumas

Cameroon: Supporting farmers to ensure long-term livelihoods and food security

A program in rural Cameroon is working with a cooperative of Indigenous farmers to produce crops and adapt to climate change.

Located about an hour outside Cameroon's capital Yaoundé, the Mbalmayo area has rich and fertile soil ideal for harvesting. It is a commercial and transportation hub known for a variety of goods including textiles, fruits, vegetables, and handicrafts.

Their main crop is corn, but farmers also grow other staples that take less time to mature like plantains, yams, and cassava. They are experimenting with crops not common

to the region and, so far, have had success with cabbage.

But climate change has made it difficult for farmers to predict weather patterns for planting. The war in Ukraine has also impacted the cost of fertilizer. Reliant on rainfed agriculture and lacking resources such as credit, these farmers are vulnerable.

The agricultural program run by Cuso International's local partner Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Famille



Above: A cooperative of Indigenous farmers participate in a agricultural program working to build farmers' resilience to the impacts of climate change in Mbalmayo, Cameroon. Photo: Giordanno Brumas



Above: A woman farmer participates in an agricultural program building farmers' resilience to the impacts of climate change in Mbalmayo, Cameroon. Photo: Giordanno Brumas



Above: A woman farmer participates in an agricultural program building farmers' resilience to the impacts of climate change in Mbalmayo, Cameroon. Photo: Giordanno Brumas

(MINPROFF) is working to build the farmers' resilience to the impacts of climate change. Practicing climate-smart agriculture will help ensure their long-term livelihoods and food security.

The program consists of 13 women and four men. By using sustainable practices, such as agroforestry and soil conservation, smallholder farmers reduce environmental degradation and build resilience to climate change.

"We have learnt a lot: how to conduct business in the markets, how to improve the health of the soil to increase our yields in the fields. We have a good partnership with Cuso International, and it's been a great journey so far. We wish to continue forward. We have much more work to do," said Essadjo Kono Emilienne, the leader of the cooperative.

"We have learnt a lot: how to conduct business in the markets, how to improve the health of the soil to increase our yields in the fields."

- Essadjo Kono Emilienne

With training and capacity-building activities to improve agricultural skills, the program helps improve nutrition and increases the economic empowerment for women and girls in the region. Training and support for more efficient farming also means women and girls, who are often responsible for domestic chores and other unpaid care work, have more time to pursue other activities.

The members of the cooperative also support each other. After one farmer's husband died, the community came together to support the woman and her children. It is customary that after a women's husband passes, she is not able to work for one year. The smallholder farmers managed her plot of land for her, providing the woman the ability to sustain and provide for her children.

In the future, the farmers hope for additional support to build a general store where the cooperative can package and sell a variety of products. Getting an additional machine would also give the farmers the ability to process and ground the corn, making other products such as cornmeal and corn flour. ■



Above: The Quechua women of the Chari community are recovering their knowledge of Andean medicine. Photo: Cuso International

Women in Peru strengthen their knowledge in traditional Andean medicine and increase their family income

The Quechua women of the Chari community are recovering their knowledge of Andean medicine and traditions, while also revaluing this knowledge towards community tourism.

In recent years, the community has seen a decrease of tourists due to social conflicts, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other external factors.

Cuso International and local partner Centro Bartolome de las Casas are helping vulnerable women in the Andean community secure a better quality of life for themselves and their families by producing medicinal products that will

bring income to their homes, while also strengthening the leadership and empowerment of the Quechua rural women.

These women have low levels of formal education, most of them are illiterate, which limits their employment opportunities.

Through the project “Rural Women Revaluing and Recovering Ancestral Knowledge in Traditional Andean Medicine for Community Tourism” these women are diversifying their products by using native plants in the area. Installing medicinal plants, including hierba buena, c'hiri ch'iri, cedroncillo, marigold, chamomile, and mint in orchards and live fences, the women are able to make products such as ointments for burns and muscle pain, syrups, soaps, and patches.

“We have many healing plants that we know and others that we don't. We want to use them to cure ourselves, our families, and for the tourists that visit us in the community,” said participant Eustaquia Quispe Pucho. “When we get sick, we buy pills and tablets, and we want to know the properties of the plants and how to use them to cure ourselves. That is why we have asked the project for a professional who knows the subject and can help us work and advise us well.”

Eustaquia is one of nine women and their families, including one woman who is visually impaired, taking part in the program. Ten workshops taught the women about the development of medicinal products, costs, sanitary and trademark registration, and production for participation in fairs.

The women are selling their products in local markets and fairs, as well as markets in Cusco. Helping to preserve the environment, products have glass packaging, and the labeling, logo, and wrapping is done with environmentally friendly materials.

Not only are these nine women and their families recovering this medicinal knowledge and traditions, but they are also committed to sharing that knowledge with other women in the community, already reaching 460 people.

“The ancestral knowledge of medicinal plants will not end, we will teach our children,” said Eustaquia. “Everything we have learned we will transmit to our children and others interested in the subject. There are many plants that we also do not know their properties, but with the teacher we will work all this out.”

The project is part of Cuso International's Sharing Canadian Expertise for Inclusive Development and Gender Equality (SHARE) program. Initiated in 2020 and funded by Global Affairs Canada, the project helps improve the economic and/or social well-being of marginalized and vulnerable people. ■



Above: Women and men learned about menstruation and safe sexual intimacy during training sessions in Benin. Photo: Cuso International

Training helps increase awareness of menstruation hygiene in Benin

Puberty can be a frightening and confusing time for any girl, especially when the topic is considered taboo. Fortunately, one program in Parakou, Benin is trying to change that.

From February 27 to March 3, a Cuso International partner implemented a micro-project where women and men learned about menstruation and safe sexual intimacy and women learned how to make reusable menstruation products. The program helped break menstruation stereotypes in the community.

Called *gestion de l'hygiène menstruelle des adolescentes et jeunes filles de Parakou* (The management of menstruation hygiene for young girls of Parakou), the program delivered training to 33 women and 30 men in a workshop format led by Association pour l'Education, la Sexualité et la Santé en Afrique.

Rosius Dannou, program officer at Cuso International's Benin office, explained the importance of men being included in these trainings. "We want to bring down toxic masculinity and have the men support the women and girls of our country," said Dannou. Having men learn about their partners' health helps break down negative stereotypes associated with menstruation.

Thanks to the help of Cuso International volunteers, women were taught how to make their own reusable pads using cloths and how to properly clean them. They were also taught how to make and use menstruation cycle beads, which are used to count and track the days of the menstruation cycle.

Participants brought their new knowledge to others in their community. "It was a great event, and I learned a lot of new

"We want to bring down toxic masculinity and have the men support the women and girls of our country."

- Rosius Dannou, program officer at Cuso International's Benin office

information," said participant Bougnon Bénon. "I will now make sure to teach my boys about women's health."

The training was supported by Cuso International's Sharing Canadian Expertise for Inclusive Development and Gender Equality (SHARE) project, which aims to raise awareness of sexual, reproductive, and maternal health, sexual and gender-based violence, and positive masculinity.

With such success, Rosius hopes to bring new events next year to help Benin communities continue to grow.

"We hope to continue promoting positive masculinity in the community and bring more workshops with the help of Cuso International," explains Rosius. This program is a great example of how education and awareness break down societal taboos and promote equality. ■



Above: Women and men learned about menstruation and safe sexual intimacy during training sessions in Benin. Photo: Cuso International



Above: Sebrina, U-GIRLS 2 participant at Assosa Secondary School, in Ethiopia.
Photo: Biniam Enkuselassie Workagegnehu

Gender equality program in Ethiopian schools turns Sebrina into an aspiring lawyer

Despite a difficult start to high school, 18-year-old Sebrina walked across the graduation stage to cheers from her family this spring.

“Today is a really big thing,” says Sebrina. “My family are really happy.”

For Sebrina and other young women in Ethiopia’s Benishangul Gumuz Regional State (BGR), earning a high school diploma is no small feat. Girls are less likely to at-

tend or complete school because of societal, economic, and cultural barriers. This gender gap in both education access and achievement relegates girls and women to domestic or (often) unpaid labour, diminishing their roles in both homes and communities.

Enter U-GIRLS 2, a project supported by Cuso International that provides schoolgirls with resources, training, and a financial stipend so they can focus on their studies and achieve personal and professional growth.

This targeted program was a perfect match for Sebrina, who was falling behind in school because of domestic demands placed on her as the primary caregiver for her two younger brothers. Their parents' property was destroyed in the region's ethnic conflict. They are staying in an Internally Displaced Person's (IDP) centre, while Sebrina and her brothers are in the city. Initially, her family had been skeptical about her joining U-GIRLS 2 and focusing on her studies. They needed the extra income Sebrina was earning from cooking and cleaning for other families after school.

The program anticipated pushback such as this and has an action plan for it. Beyond the direct support for schoolgirls, U-GIRLS 2 facilitates broader societal change in BGR by training teachers, school administrators, education officials, and others in gender equality and social inclusion. To date, more than 6,500 other parents, guardians, and community members have received education on gender-related barriers to education and gender equality, including Sebrina's family.

"That really helped to change their views," Sebrina says.

Over the course of her studies, Sebrina has developed passions for different potential careers. At first, she thought she wanted to be a doctor and help women who don't necessarily feel comfortable sharing their concerns with male health care professionals. This can have devastating consequences—Sebrina has seen local women die in childbirth.

But lately, she thinks she wants to study law.

"I really want to advocate," she says. "I want to really support women who don't get justice."

Since the project began in 2019, U-GIRLS 2 has directly supported more than 400 girls and women aged 15-25 to attend, remain, and succeed in their education. It targets seven secondary schools across BGR in partnership with the Benishangul Gumuz Regional Education Bureau and the Institute of International Education. Cuso International expects more than 90 per cent of these participants will attend university after the project. ■

Below: Sebrina, U-GIRLS 2 participant, in Ethiopia. Photo: Biniam Enkuselessie Workagegnehu





SCOPE project wraps up after nearly a decade supporting economic opportunities in Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador

After nine years helping women, youth, victims of conflict, and Venezuelan migrants find formal employment, Cuso International's Sustainable Colombian Opportunities for Peacebuilding and Employment (SCOPE) project concluded at the end of March.

SCOPE started in Colombia in 2015, with funding from Global Affairs Canada, to support employment opportunities for vulnerable and disadvantaged youth.

Evolving with the needs of the communities, in 2019 SCOPE began working with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to help with a growing migration crisis due to the ongoing political conflict in Venezuela, which has displaced millions of people. Due to SCOPE's success in Colombia, the project expanded to Peru and Ecuador in 2022.

Participants include Nidia Ramona and Carlos Cáceres, who arrived in Lima, Peru in 2017. Through SCOPE, they received marketing tools and legal advice to strengthen their

Above: Mariana, SCOPE participant, in Colombia. Photo: Ximena Plaza

Right: Sodexo employees participate in Cuso International's SCOPE program in Colombia. Photo: Cuso International





Above: Luisa Serna, SCOPE program participant, in Quibdo, Colombia. Photo: Cuso International



Above: Andrea Aguirre, SCOPE program participant, in Peru. Photo: Marlon Flores

Below: Astrid, SCOPE program participant, in Colombia. Photo: Cuso International

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



pizza-parlour business. They also attended workshops on sales and customer service.

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

To create safer and more inclusive work environments for marginalized groups, SCOPE designed the “Ruta Inclusiva”, an innovative toolkit that provides gender equality and social inclusion training to more than 500,000 employees in Colombia.

“Inclusion is important because it helps us to increase our productivity,” said Juan Pablo Castillo, Director of Corporate Affairs at partner Sodexo. “Our desire is to generate a healthy organizational culture and promote respect among our staff.”

SCOPE also worked with local governments to strengthen their capacity to design more inclusive employment policies and programs that address the barriers marginalized groups face in accessing economic opportunities.

Over its nine-year lifespan, SCOPE trained 23,643 people, linking 14,723 people to formal employment – 60 per cent women, 79 per cent youth, 34 per cent Venezuelan migrants, and 14 per cent victims of conflict. The project also strengthened 1,674 micro-enterprises, like Emily’s hand-crafted accessories.

Emily benefitted from a pilot project helping small businesses become key vendors of large enterprises. Participants also increased their management, accounting, and technical skills.

“It has been something extremely positive,” said Emily. “We successfully closed a deal with the D1 convenience stores. They were very kind. They made the payment process easier, the delivery system, everything. It was an absolutely unforgettable experience.”

We are deeply grateful to all SCOPE staff and partners for their dedication and contributions. Rich from this experience, we will use the many lessons learned to inform future programs. ■





Above: Cuso International volunteer Adriana Montes and local organization the Fundación Victoria Elena create the "Ven y te cuento" program in Colombia. Photo: Cuso International

Program improves quality of life for young girls and boys in rural Colombia

For children in the mountainous village of La Marina, in Tuluá, Colombia, relating to their peers and their family environment can be difficult. An increase in gender-based violence and the presence of structural machismo is negatively impacting their quality of life. The rural community is also vulnerable to recurring armed conflict.

With a lack of programs for children in the region, Cuso International volunteer Adriana Montes and local organization the Fundación Victoria Elena created the "Ven y te cuento" program. The program works to strengthen social skills and promote self-confidence and empowerment for girls and boys through reading, while also learning about gender quality, positive masculinity, and human rights.

Twenty-two girls and 10 boys between 8 and 10 years old participated in the program. Over six months, workshops allowed the children to express their ideas and feelings,

while helping reduce stress and anxiety. The children participating seemed to be calmer, more compassionate, and empathetic.

This includes eight-year-old Juan Manuel Chausa. When he started the program, Adriana remembers him showing aggressive behaviour, a rebellious attitude, and episodes of anger towards his classmates.

"Juan Manuel participated in the programme and today he is a child who has learned to transform his episodes of anger and is conciliatory and cheerful in the classroom. His teachers and himself recognise his change of attitude," she said.

Seeing the children's transformation, honesty, and active participation stands out to Adriana and she hopes the community can take part in similar programs in the future.

“I learned that, in the processes of training and accompanying minors, it is very important to establish links of empathy and dialogue in order to carry out successful outcomes.”

Adriana learned about the program through discussions with the program’s creator Beatriz Eugenia Vera. Earlier attempts to implement the project were challenging because of a lack of resources. But Adriana’s interest and passion for the project persevered.

“Adriana did not stay still and continued thinking about how else the Foundation could adopt the program. It was at that moment that it occurred to her to be the bridge between Cuso International and the Fundación Victoria Elena in order to obtain the sponsorship,” said Beatriz.

“Infinite gratitude to Cuso International, Fundación Victoria Elena, and of course, to Adriana Montes Sanchez for making possible spaces of empowerment and transformation in our children.”

“Infinite gratitude to Cuso International, Fundación Victoria Elena, and of course, to Adriana Montes Sanchez for making possible spaces of empowerment and transformation in our children.”

A second phase of the program is planned, which would include working closely with parents to ensure the learnings are also embedded within their home life.

"If you support Cuso International, you are part of the construction of a great social fabric that benefits thousands of people around the world. You are supporting a network of development workers who give their knowledge to build a more supportive and equitable world, with people trained to face the challenges of everyday life. Supporting Cuso International means betting on a better future".

The program is part of Cuso International’s Sharing Canadian Expertise for Inclusive Development and Gender Equality (SHARE) program. Initiated in 2020 and funded by Global Affairs Canada, the project helps improve the economic and/or social well-being of marginalized and vulnerable people. ■

Below: Participants of the "Ven y te cuento" program in Colombia.
Photo: Cuso International





Above: Albert Asu in Nigeria. Photo: Cuso International

Nigeria: Helping Cameroonian refugees develop crops and skills

The ongoing conflict in Cameroon's western region has caused thousands of people to flee their homes to seek safety, stability, and to start a new life in neighbouring Nigeria, including Albert Asu.

Albert grew up in Mamfe, a town in the South-West province of Cameroon, with his parents and five siblings.

"Mamfe holds many fond memories for me, as it's where I attended primary and secondary school. I follow the Christian faith, specifically Catholicism. My upbringing was normal, with caring parents who did their best to provide education and healthcare. Despite the distance, I still feel my parents' love through our phone calls," he said.

Socially, Cameroon had a vibrant nightlife and weekends were filled with celebrations, said Albert. But as he grew older underlying tensions became more apparent and the prolonged and deadly conflict led to Albert and his family becoming refugees in Nigeria.

Since 2019, Cuso International's Skills for Improvement of Lives and Livelihoods for Refugees (SKILLS) project is helping refugees regain their independence and live a dignified life with an improved standard of living. Partnering with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the project provides training and business starter packs to help

refugees establish sustainable, self-reliant businesses or access employment.

"The UNHCR-Cuso International livelihood support project has been instrumental in providing safe integration for refugees who are displaced and uncertain about the future in their host country. The project has been a beacon of hope, enabling Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria to establish small businesses, acquire new skills, and support their families," said Albert.

Albert, a certified chartered accountant with an M.Sc. in professional accountancy, first got involved with the program because it gave him the opportunity to serve the refugee community. He also wanted to gain a better understanding of what he might encounter while working in Nigeria.

"As a Cuso International community volunteer, I gained valuable insights from the management of the livelihood project. Witnessing community members running small businesses around town brought me immense joy," he said.

With a growing concern for food insecurity Albert ventured into the agricultural sector, using regenerative agriculture to ensure that his own livelihood needs are met. With Now, a farm in Calabar, Cross River State, Albert practices regenerative agriculture using organic manure, pesticides, and herbicides. He cultivates tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelons, okra, and Cameroon pepper.

So far, he's hired six refugees and some nationals that support him as casual labour while also earning a living. Albert is excited at the prospects the farm holds and wants to partner with other refugees, sharing knowledge and transferring skills, such as sales and marketing.

A pumping machine and irrigation channels throughout the farm allow the workers to cultivate crops year-round. A sustainable marketing strategy will enhance collaboration and partnerships using sales representatives at various outlets to facilitate access to the crops.

In the future, he wants to integrate various investment plans for interested partners and individuals as a way of generating funds for the farm and supporting farm expansion.

"My aspirations for the future include making a significant impact in promoting green agriculture and contributing to food security, so individuals in the refugee community won't have to spend all their earnings just to afford food."

Albert said he is grateful for Cuso International and those who support the work being done by the organization. ■

SPOTLIGHT

#IAmCusoInternational

Leandro Lima

📍 Benin

#IAmCusoInternational for the passion and dedication we bring to our work. I've had four mandates with Cuso International and I'm very satisfied!

Leandro, based in Vancouver, has been volunteering with Cuso International partner organization Carrefour Jeunesse Afrique in Benin. Working as a leadership and mentoring consultant, Leandro helped train and mentor young people. He also presented the potential dangers of plastic in the environment.

The results of his work have been noticeable. Recently he drew up an environmental charter to be placed in every office at the organization's centre. While it was agreed the centre should be a plastic-free environment, they also recognized the need to set an example for young people.

"To round off my term of office, I donated three mango trees to be planted around the centre. It was a great experience, as the student carpenters and I worked as a team. I



reminded them of the importance of taking care of nature," said Leandro.

"Thank you to Cuso International for opening its doors to me and giving me the opportunity to serve four terms with you!"

Elizabeth Ndenecho Yunga

📍 Nigeria

#IAmCusoInternational because I love to teach people how to fish and not give them fish to eat. I am thrilled with Cuso's approach: building the capacity of partners who live the reality of the vulnerable population at the grassroots level. So that they can better support and work with them to meet their needs. I believe that acquiring new skills is important, but more important is applying them practically in our work.

Elizabeth, based in Montreal, is volunteering as a gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) advisor with Cuso International local partner Education as a Vaccine (EVA) in Nigeria. She has been training staff to be more aware of the importance of gender assessment and addressing the root causes of gender inequalities in their projects.

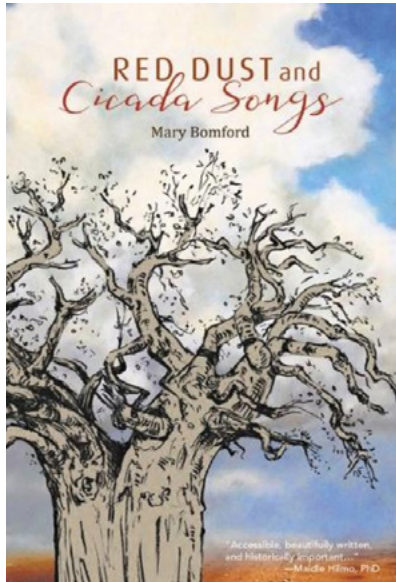
"I felt gratified when Grace, one of the trainees said: "I did some gender training before, but after these sessions, now I am able to conduct a gender analysis effectively. I have put into practice the knowledge gained in writing propos-



als. In the last two proposals I contributed to, I analyzed gender issues in the communities and ensured that groups most affected were prioritized in the interventions. In one of the proposals, it was asked how the project will consider gender in the implementation. Responding to this question was easy because of the knowledge I gained from the training...." I am glad to contribute indirectly to the change EVA is making in young girls and boys' lives through Grace's interventions."

ALUMNOTES

SHARE + CONNECT



Mary Bomford

📍 Zambia, 1969-73

At the age of twenty-one, Canadian teacher Mary Bomford and her husband of just eight weeks embarked on a journey that would directly alter their careers, their marriage and their family. That journey would trace an invisible but palpable thread through the rest of their lives.

Enticed by dreams of adventure, in 1969 Mary and her husband Larry moved to Lundazi, a town near the eastern border of Zambia to work as CUSO volunteers in the secondary school there. At the time, the country, a nation newly independent after decades of colonialism, was looking for volunteers to fill the teacher shortage until enough young Zambians had completed their teacher training. New to marriage, teaching and Zambia, Mary and her husband embarked on a profound journey

connecting them to the country, their students, and their colleagues. Zambia gave them the experience of a second home, filled with moments of delight in the beauty of the area and enriched by the culture of the Zambian people.

Years later, Mary reflects on her experiences of the landscape, culture and people in the hopeful time following independence. *Red Dust & Cicada Songs* is an exploration of the deep and lasting connection she still feels for her time in Zambia.

About the author: Mary Bomford has written a series of family histories including *Lou Hamel: CPR Telegrapher*, held in the Camrose Railway Museum, and *Yvonne's Yesterdays* held in the archives of the Sisters of St. Ann, Pacific Northwest. Mary has volunteered for Amnesty International and raised funds for African AIDS Angels. She worked in Special Education for most of her teaching career. As an early-primary reading specialist, she wrote a series of personalized beginning readers for her students, and in retirement, has written for her grandchildren.

You can shop for the book at local bookstores in Canada on the Caitlin Press website. The book is also available at Barnes & Noble and Waterstones.

Neill McKee

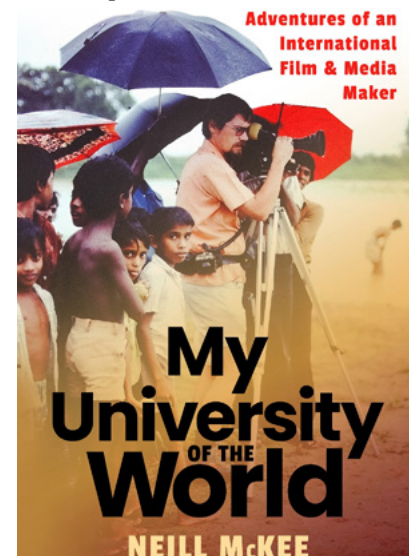
📍 Malaysia, 1970

Neill McKee takes us on an entertaining journey through the developing world from 1970 to 2012. His memoir is filled with compelling dialog, humorous and poignant incidents, thoughts on world development, vivid

descriptions of people and places he visited and worked in, and over 200 images (ebook and hardcover in color), all of which bring readers into his "University of the World." The story starts when he becomes a "one-man film crew," documenting the lives of Canadian CUSO volunteers working in Asia and Africa as teachers, medical doctors, nurses, engineers, agriculturalists, foresters, technicians, and a biologist. He learns the craft of filmmaking and meets and marries Elizabeth "on the hoof."

Throughout the short chapters and in a brief epilogue, McKee reflects on the long-term impact of the projects he documented and of his media creations. This is a book for anyone interested in world affairs and development, film and multimedia production, the use of media for behavior and social change, exotic travel, and interesting career choices.

Read more about the book and where it can be purchased on Neill's website.



LIVES LIVED

REMEMBERING OUR VOLUNTEERS



Sharilyn (Sharry) Burns

📍 Papua New Guinea 1976–1978

Sharry was born and raised in Edmonton, the daughter of Jeanne Hipkin Burns and David Burns.

After completing her studies in education at the University of Alberta, she taught in Sedgewick, Alberta for several years before applying to CUSO in her mid-twenties. She was posted in Papua New Guinea from 1976 to 1978 where she taught at Wewak High School.

Upon her return to Canada, she lived in Calgary and was an ESL teacher with the Calgary Board of Education for some twenty-five years, the balance of her teaching career. She was highly regarded by her students and her colleagues.

Upon retirement, Sharry first lived in Vancouver and then moved to Victoria. She passed away suddenly in Victoria in January 2024 at the age of

72. She is survived by her spouse Susan See, her best friend Ruth McMurtury (PNG 1975-1976), her brothers Rod and Tim, nieces Ruth and Beth and their families and nephew Mark, several CUSO Returned Volunteers she met through the CUSO/SAIT office in Calgary, and many gay and straight friends in Alberta and British Columbia.

Donations in Sharry's memory may be made to Cuso International

Rosita Ulrich

📍 Papua New Guinea 1980

Rosita died in her husband, Alvin's arms, from cardiac arrest on the evening of November 8th after returning home from dialysis.

Rosita Mediavillo Ulrich was born September 15, 1948, in Pasig, Metro Manila, Philippines. She attended the same school for 12 years and hence had many long term classmates who always kept in contact with her. She finished a degree in Education and taught for five years at Rizal High School.

Rosita then went to teach Home Economics and English in Papua New Guinea for six years at Kerowagi, Kainantu and Muaina Secondary Schools. While there she met Alvin Ulrich who came as a Cuso volunteer to help set up village cardamom, coffee and chili plantations. After 15 months, they married in Manila, worked another year in PNG and then came to Canada where Alvin completed his MSc degree in Agricultural Economics.

For five years, Rosita volunteered by teaching English at the Open-Door Society and worked part-time for Immigrant Women of Saskatchewan. She enjoyed staying at home, visiting friends, gardening, cooking huge meals and entertaining visitors with her stories, funny questions and comments and laughter. She travelled extensively in Europe, Africa and Asia by herself and with Alvin, who had consulting jobs overseas, including working in Zambia for two years.

About 10 years ago Rosita was diagnosed with kidney disease and had daily dialysis at home or tri-weekly at the Kidney Center. In spite of this, she still travelled and continued to brighten people's days with her smiles, humour, conversations, food, flowers and stories.

Rosita leaves to mourn her loving husband, Alvin, a brother, Dr. Rene Mediavillo (Eileen), several brother and sister-in-laws (Paul and Judy, Florian and Zinnia) and 12 nieces and nephews. She was predeceased by her parents, two brothers and their wives.



The joy of nursing and a decades-long continuation of giving back

Growing up in a small town in rural Manitoba, Sara Shuster always had an interest in volunteering, strongly influenced by her parents.

While completing her undergraduate degree in nursing at the University of Manitoba, Sara learned more about possible international volunteering opportunities, thinking that nursing was a skill that could be useful in other parts of the world. After working for a few years, she applied to volunteer with Cuso International, and soon found herself headed to work in Ghana.

In Ghana from 1983-85, Sara was the nurse in charge of the pediatric unit at a local small town hospital and was given the job of reorganizing the hospital pharmacy. She later moved to another small community in the country, where she joined other Cuso volunteer nurses in the out-patient clinic, as well as taking on administrative roles.

“It was a very rewarding, interesting, fulfilling experience and I was really glad that I had that opportunity,” she said.

The experience was different than anything she had done before or since. She learned a great deal, and although there were sometimes limitations, she discovered creative and appropriate local solutions that people were using that surprised her.

“The local nurses were very skilled in many ways, and I think the real richness was that we had an opportunity to share stories,” she said.

The experience has had a lasting impact, helping foster a life-long interest in international development. It has also helped to shape how she thinks, how she views the world, and how she gets involved with volunteer work in her own community. She’s also remained in touch with some of the nurses she worked with in Ghana.

“It was only two years, it was a big part of my life that I continue to value, and I’m interested in what’s going on in international development work and how it’s evolving.”



Upon returning to Canada, Sara helped establish a nursing interest group – the Global Health Interest Group – in British Columbia. The group provided a forum for other nurses who had had international experience, or those who were interested in it, to get together and talk, learn, and share their experiences.

Now retired, Sara has more than 40 years' experience in nursing, primarily in public health, as well as teaching for 10 years in the nursing program at the University of Manitoba.

Over the years, Sara has stayed involved with Cuso International, including as the organization’s representative for the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation. She also donates to Cuso International monthly, and by leaving a gift in her Will.

“Cuso provided me with a truly special and enriching experience. I believe in the work that they’re doing. Cuso International has evolved over the years in order to remain relevant and sustainable in a changing world, which is critical,” she said. “I want to contribute to what they’re doing and the projects they’re supporting.”

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 Nicole Burgess, Associate Director, Philanthropy and Engagement.

Phone (toll free): 1-888-434-2876 x 205

Email: nicole.burgess@cusointernational.org

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

Below: Cuso International showcases different projects at a fair supported by the European Union in Honduras.
Photo: Cuso International



HONDURAS

CAMEROON



Above: Participants of Cuso International's TechWomen Factory project at a graduation ceremony in Cameroon. Photo: Yann Yap

Right: Cuso International volunteer Grâce-Divine in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
Photo: Cuso International



DRC



PERU

Above: Dina (right), Women's Voice and Leadership participants, in Peru.
Photo: Cuso International.

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