

# Catalyst

A close-up photograph of two Black women smiling warmly. The woman in the foreground is wearing a white t-shirt and a colorful, patterned headwrap. The woman in the background is also smiling and has her hair in braids. They are standing in front of a wall with a warm, textured, orange-brown appearance.

Cuso International's magazine on global volunteering Spring 2019

*The Face of*  
**Innovation**





# lifeCHANGER

Liliana Corella  
Rural Tourism Advisor, Peru



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Cuso International is a not-for-profit development organization that works to eradicate poverty and inequality through the efforts of highly skilled volunteers, collaborative partnerships and compassionate donors. Established in 1961, Cuso International is a registered charity in Canada and the United States. Funds raised have enabled more than 15,000 volunteer placements around the world.

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**On the cover:** Farmers in Cameroon are facing a rapidly changing climate and unstable weather patterns. Madame Sabine is among those developing new ways to adapt. See the story on page 5.

Photo: Brian Atkinson



Volunteers Tiffany Tong, left, and Marjorie Guillemette-Lavoie, right, at partner organization Basey Association for the Native Industry Growth in the Philippines.



## From the CEO

**W**e are big believers in innovation at Cuso International because it's at the heart of everything we do. We help facilitate change by introducing new methods, ideas and practices. Our founders were innovators when they developed a volunteer-partner model to fill skill gaps in developing countries. They created change by sharing their skills with others. And each iteration of Cuso over the past six decades is evidence of our ability to innovate. It is in our DNA.

That is why I'm so excited by this issue of Catalyst. Our volunteers and alumni continue to amaze me in the ways they approach their placements. They are constantly thinking of innovative tactics to tackle poverty and inequality in long-term and sustainable ways.

You are the innovators who make this work possible. Whether you volunteered 50 years ago or five months ago, you have been, and continue to be, a voice for change.

Inside these pages you'll see examples of volunteers in action from Cameroon, Laos and Peru. All this shows how, together, we continue to build a volunteering movement that has impact, yields results and addresses the complex global development needs of our time.

We are looking forward to celebrating our past innovators with milestone reunions as several groups come together this summer (check the Alumnotes section for more details on these events).

If you're thinking of hosting a reunion, please get in touch with us, and I hope you enjoy the read.



Glenn Mifflin  
CEO, Cuso International





# Sharing Skills, Building Futures

Zamda Shaaban, right, owner of Tausi coffee.

**T**wo years ago, Joan and David Cooke were looking for ways to make a difference. The British Columbia couple are now doing just that—helping business owners in Tanzania modernize their processes and crack global markets.

Currently in their second year of a volunteer placement with Cuso International’s Tanzania Local Enterprise Development (T-LED) program, Joan works as a finance management advisor while David advises entrepreneurs on business management practices.

“Our mandate is to teach these businesses and farmers new business techniques,” Joan says from the Cookes’ base of operations in Tanzania. “We have a guided talk with the owners. They start with an elevator pitch of their business. We ask them what they are proud of. Then we ask them the money question: ‘What three issues keep you up at night?’”

Tanzania’s economy has seen steady growth over the last decade. While there is more demand for local suppliers and farmers, many small and medium business owners have been unable to fully capitalize on the opportunity. With a focus on supporting small and medium enterprises run by women, Cuso International’s T-LED project supports these entrepreneurs by working with them to gain the tools,

training and expertise they need to succeed and grow.

Zamda Shaaban, owner of Tausi Coffee, knew she had a product people wanted but didn’t know how to take her company to the next level. T-LED helped her learn the skills she needed to ramp up her sales and pocket more of her hard-earned money.

“I have learned how to find a new market and develop my product for that market. I learned how to make a business plan,” she says. “I have also learned the importance of keeping financial records.”



Volunteers David and Joan Cooke.



The Cookes, both in their 60s, have been key instruments in the success and growth of T-LED.

Originally focused on agriculture-based businesses, T-LED is now also working with manufacturers in the tailoring and clothing industry, poultry farmers, and those in the processing industry, which includes coconut and sunflower oil producers.

The work, although challenging, is also extremely rewarding.

## Our mandate is to teach these businesses and farmers new techniques.

“I remember we had a group of women one time,” says Joan. “One woman was using public transportation over long distances to deliver her products. The product was going back and forth because the customer and the driver were not meeting at the same time.”

Another woman in the group mentioned how she found a workaround. She drops her products off at the office of a delivery company, allowing customers to pick it up at their convenience.

“Through networking, the businesses were able to help each other out,” Joan says. “Networking helps these business owners keep the momentum going.”

Zamda says the assistance provided through T-LED is priceless, particularly for young women entrepreneurs. In less than a year, she has increased her coffee production by 200 kilos a day and expanded her sales to seven regions in Tanzania and across the border into Uganda. Her success continues to have positive ripple effects on her employees, their families and communities.

“We have gained a lot of knowledge,” she explains. “I advise all young entrepreneurs to join T-LED because they are good, and they make us great.”

Watch a video of Zamda in action at [youtube.com/cusointernational](https://youtube.com/cusointernational).





# There's an App for That

Women farmers build climate resilience in Cameroon



Photo: Brian Atkinson



Madame Sabine, left, and volunteer Nelly Rakotozafy use a smartphone application during the harvest.



Photo: Brian Atkinson

Madame Sabine is tackling farming challenges her parents and grandparents never had to face. Rapidly changing weather patterns, unreliable rains and an increase in drought, flooding and windstorms are making farming an increasingly precarious way to earn a living in Cameroon.

And it's hitting women the hardest.

"Women are the ones who do most of the family farming," says Madame Sabine, whose family has farmed the land for generations. "We are the ones feeding our families." And yet women don't have the same access to information—such as alerts for extreme weather events—as their male counterparts. This results in lower productivity levels and fewer profits for female farmers.

Madam Benda, who comes from a long line of small-holder farmers, can attest. She remembers being able to anticipate the weather when she was younger but that's no longer the case.

"We knew when the little rains would come. We knew when to expect the big rains," she says. "Now, it's all unpredictable. I couldn't plant my corn when I usually plant it because the rains didn't come."

Madame Sabine and Madame Benda are among 40 farmers participating in Cuso International's program Building Up Climate Resilience of Women Farmers in Awaé, Cameroon, located 55 kilometres from the capital city of Yaoundé.

The program, one of three Innovation Fund projects

Now, it's all unpredictable. I couldn't plant my corn when I usually plant it because the rains didn't come.

selected by Cuso International alumni, aims to narrow the gap between female and male farmers.

Cuso International volunteer Nelly Rakotozafy is among those spearheading the project. Participants receive





**Left:** Volunteer Nelly Rakotozafy, third from the right, is helping farmers become more climate resilient.

**Below:** The Innovation Fund project in Cameroon is focused on equal access to information for women farmers.

crop seeds bred specifically for the country's changing climate and training on improved agricultural techniques, such as a farm-friendly smartphone application.

"I've been working with these women for a few months now and they all have stories about how climate change is affecting them," says Nelly. "The app will give them information about what weather is predicted for the day or even hourly. If there's a storm coming, they may choose not to plant that day."

The mobile app contains information from training sessions, provides weather forecasts and farmers can discuss their experiences and request assistance using a chat platform.

"If one of the women is having trouble with her corn, she can share that with the group and someone may have information that can help her," says Nelly.

In a country where agriculture accounts for roughly 70 per cent of the workforce, climate resilience and women's economic empowerment are important factors to improve food security and achieve inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Cuso's pilot program—a joint initiative with Cameroon's Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Institute of Agricultural Research for Development—will wrap up this year.



Photo: Brian Atkinson





# Voice for Change

Every day, Cuso International volunteers are using their voices and abilities to create lasting change around the world. Working with local partners and communities, they are reducing poverty and inequality, and finding innovative ways to share information, impart knowledge and transfer skills.

In Ethiopia, medical staff at Assosa General Hospital were able to apply the skills and knowledge they learned to save the life of one-year-old Abdulalem Mathair from malaria, a potentially fatal disease.

Cuso International alumna and board member Lynn Graham says it's essential to see this important work continue.

She is championing Cuso's Voice for Change campaign, which supports the organization's programs to advance gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women, improve access to high quality economic opportunities for young people, and address health challenges such as lack of access to care, child mortality and poor maternal health.

Currently at 70 per cent of the \$7-million goal, a further \$2.1 million needs to be raised by the end of 2020. "The major motivation for my giving is the positive impact that Cuso International is having each year on thousands of individuals in many countries—from creating opportunities for young entrepreneurs to enhancing gender equality to





Photo: Brian Atkinson

**Left:** Medina and Abdulalem Mathair are celebrating the recovery of their youngest son, one-year-old Abdulalem.



Lynn Graham

improving birthing practices for young mothers,” says Lynn, who was among the first wave of Cuso International volunteers in the 1960s.

Moms and babies in developing countries are at a much higher risk of mortality. Every day, approximately 16,000 children die before reaching their fifth birthday. Roughly 830 women die each day from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.

Dr. Zerihun Chala, Assosa General’s Delegate Medical Director, began enlisting Cuso International volunteers two years ago to assist in building the hospital’s capacity to treat and save more people, particularly mothers and children. And change is happening—both in country and within volunteers.

“The experience was transformational and had a

significant influence on the directions my life has taken,” says Lynn about her two-year placement in

**We need you on our side to help us address deeply troubling health issues around the globe.**

Ghana. “I am eternally grateful to have had this opportunity and want to ensure others can too.”

*To support the Voice for Change campaign, please contact Laurie Buske, Director of Resource Development, at 1-888-434-2876 x263 or [laurie.buske@cusointernational.org](mailto:laurie.buske@cusointernational.org).*



# Reaching the Top

Kate and Katherine discuss the rewards of taking on the Peru Challenge

For Kate Gamache Pellerin, scaling Machu Picchu wasn't just an opportunity to challenge herself. For her, it was also important to know she was helping others.

"It was about giving back," says the certified staff consultant at Randstad Canada, a corporate partner of Cuso International. "This experience—it changed me."

Kate, 29, was among a group of 11 alumni, supporters and staff who took on the Peru Challenge, a four-day, 46-kilometre trek through the Lares Valley to the Sun Gate. She signed on to prove to herself she could accomplish anything.

"I was very sick last winter. I developed anxiety and my asthma came back," she explains. "For two weeks I stayed in bed. I couldn't move. I couldn't take four stairs. When I received the email about the Peru Challenge, I had a big energy push. It really helped me get my mind back, my inner energy back. It gave me confidence."

Reaching the top was a moment Kate, and all the other hikers, will never forget.

"It was the craziest experience ever," she says. "All the feelings that we pushed through came back to us. We were so excited, we were so tired. It was a mix of energy. We cried a lot. Everyone was so happy we all made it."

The group raised more than \$38,000 for Cuso's programs, including its partnership with Centro de Bartolome



Kate Gamache Pellerin from Randstad Canada.



de las Casas, in Cusco. Meeting the women at the centre working to promote eco-tourism really brought home the purpose of the Peru Challenge.

"It was nice to see the real human impact. Those women are connected with nature, they're connected with their community and they're connected with their kids. It's about everyone coming together so everyone can make it," says Kate.





**Left:** Team Cuso International 2018.

**Below:** Hikers meet women working in eco-tourism with a local Cuso partner.



Cuso and Randstad Canada have been partners for more than a decade, promoting global philanthropy and corporate social responsibility programs. The partnership has proven to increase retention and satisfaction among staff, as they get to see firsthand the significant impact they are having on communities in developing countries.

Cuso alumni Katherine Eberl Kelly, 65, and her husband Paul, 73, credit their time volunteering in Botswana for instilling a sense of strength in them. It came in handy when Katherine sprained her ankle on day three of the hike.

“We looked at it—not too closely—strapped it up and off we went,” she says with a laugh. “Volunteering is an experience that influences the rest of your life. It gives you a certain level of confidence in yourself that you

## Cuso and Randstad Canada have been partners for more than a decade, promoting global philanthropy.

are resilient.”

With plans underway for another Cuso Challenge in 2020, Katherine says it’s an experience she would recommend to anyone.

“It is awesome, in the true sense of the word, to have trekked that far,” she says. “We’re really happy we took on the challenge. Don’t be afraid to take it on, it’s worth the effort.”

*Interested in learning about the 2020 Cuso Challenge? Please contact Amie Gibson, Fundraising Officer, at 1-888-434-2876 x245 or [amie.gibson@cusointernational.org](mailto:amie.gibson@cusointernational.org).*





Videographer, photographer and producer Robert Lawlor is on his fourth placement with Cuso International. It's the experiences, and the people, that keep him coming back for more.

**Q: Describe your current placement:**

A: I am on a four-month placement with Cuso International: three months in Calabar, Nigeria; two weeks in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo; and another two weeks in Cotonou, Benin. I will be shooting videos and taking photographs of the different projects Cuso International is involved with. I will be meeting with volunteers, partners and beneficiaries to capture the work that is happening on the ground.

**Q: Why did you choose to re-volunteer?**

A: I admire the work Cuso International is doing and never once have I been disappointed. These placements offer me a chance to see life as it really is in developing countries. I have been able to see what life is like for those living on the shores of Lake Victoria, I have been fortunate

enough to be a guest in a Masai village, and I have seen the best and worst of what life has to offer these people.

More importantly, I have been able to share the skills I have as a television producer with various beneficiaries—whether it's using a digital camera, shooting a news-type interview, different approaches to asking questions, or finding new ways to edit a TV show, I have been able to work one-on-one with beneficiaries who are eager to learn and then put it into action.

**Q: From your placements, what stands out as the most memorable?**

A: I have been able to see and experience so much. I think the most memorable experiences come from the human interaction. I have been in the fields when Tanzanians were harvesting cassava. Instead of just

shooting them doing it, I put down the camera and assisted them. I wasn't very good at it, but the workers loved the fact that a "mzungu" was getting his hands dirty.

I also had the chance to shoot a caesarian section in a rural hospital. I had never shot one before in Canada, let alone in a developing country. I wasn't too sure what to expect, but I was willing to experience it. When that baby boy came into this world not breathing and turning blue, I kept shooting as the Cuso International medical volunteers worked endlessly to get him to take his first breath. It was a nerve-wracking few minutes that seemed like an hour. I am happy to say, he did breathe, he did cry, and he was put into an incubator.

To be in the middle of all that and then to return the next day to see both mother and child were fine was just amazing. Experiences like that will never leave you.



**Q: What was the most challenging aspect of your volunteer experience, and how did you overcome it?**

A: Probably the most challenging aspect of the volunteer experience is being away from everyone and everything that is familiar to you. Family, friends, comfort food—everyday things that we take for granted. We aren't there for holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, births, deaths and other

events. But in return, we experience things we never imagined. I look at it this way: it's a small price to pay to be able to have some of the best adventures in life.

**Q: What is the best part of your experience?**

A: When two people from different cultures come to the table, anything can happen. It is the give and take, the listening and sharing, knowing

when to help and when to step back and watch them figure things out on their own.

I have formed great relationships from volunteering. Whether it was other volunteers or individuals I worked with, these people are now my friends. We are socializing, emailing, texting, calling each other on a regular basis. It is the human interaction that has continued that is the best part of the whole experience.

## Spotlight: Annie Demirjian



Volunteer experience 'gave me the expertise and confidence to work in critical situations'

**A**nnie Demirjian moved to Canada from Syria when she was 11 years old. As a curious and adventurous young adult, she joined Cuso International in 1979 and travelled overseas to teach French to Nigerian high school students.

When she returned home to Canada three years later, Annie

worked for the federal government on energy conservation, oversight and accountability and public sector reform, as well as in various advocacy roles for the next decade.

At the beginning of the Iraq war in 2004, she joined the United Nations and became the go-to person to help countries around the world—

including Iraq, Somalia and Libya—transition to post-conflict stabilization, moving towards democracy.

Annie says the Canadian values of modesty and humanity helped guide her work in conflict zones around the world.

"The institutions that supported me initially—academia, the federal government and Cuso International—gave me the expertise and confidence to work in critical situations and see how conflicts could be resolved," says Annie. "I am always asking, 'How can I help individuals help their communities?'"

Today, Annie is the Director of the Glendon School of Public and International Affairs at York University. "It's wonderful to finish my career teaching young Canadians and promote international education," she says. "My hope is that they too will become globalists and humanitarians."

*Do you know someone who should be featured in a future Spotlight? Email details to [editor@cusointernational.org](mailto:editor@cusointernational.org).*



# Women's Strength

'After years of hard and consistent work, our voice is taken into account'



**S**usana Valerio knows first-hand of the important work Movimiento Manuela Ramos (MMR) is doing in Peru.

"Manuela Ramos opened my eyes," she says. "Until MMR came, I didn't know I was being mistreated or that I had a chance of improving my life and the life of my kids."

Peru is one of many countries around the world struggling with gender-based violence. According to a report from Statistics Peru (INEI), more than 68 per cent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 had experienced some form of gender-based violence in 2016.

Unequal power relationships between men and women within families and communities, male-dominated socio-cultural stereotypes and a high tolerance of familial violence are all factors at play.

This is where groups like Manuela Ramos come in.

"Our main goal is to eradicate gender-based violence and achieve equality of opportunity," says Susana Galdós, founder of MMR and a member of Cuso International's board of directors.

"In a patriarchal and macho society, like the Peruvian one, feminist organizations such as Manuela Ramos are the ones with the courage to defy traditional roles, promote laws for women to have equal opportunities, denounce gender-based violence and encourage women to believe that—no matter your gender or identity—you can be whatever you want. Because you have rights."

Since 1978, MMR has worked to empower women and promote equal rights. Addressing the inequalities and disadvantages women face, the organization is focused on ending violence against women and increasing women's



Movimiento Manuela Ramos uses protests to raise awareness and advocate for change in Peru.



participation in decision-making. To succeed, it's essential to change deeply-rooted societal and cultural norms and widely held beliefs about what is acceptable.

"If society wants to move forward, half of the population can't be in an inferior position or face inequality of opportunities," says Gloria Nieto, a Cuso alumna who volunteered with MMR. "You need to work on creating a culture based on equal education for men and women to really improve things."

Manuela Ramos is doing this using two main education models. Community workshops help to explain women's rights, teach the foundation of healthy relationships and address people's questions and concerns. On a larger scale, protests and performances give voice to MMR's work and build momentum for societal change.

And Manuela Ramos doesn't work alone.

"We work closely with other organizations," says Carmen Espinoza, executive director of MMR and former Cuso International employee. "It is this support amongst each other which gives us the strength and allows us to count on different human rights groups, unions and civil society to achieve accomplishments and promote change."

The most recent collaborative initiative is called *Kallpachay Warmikuna*, or Women's Strength. Cuso International has partnered with four leading women's organizations in Peru to strengthen the country's national women's movement and advance women's rights. The Canadian government is providing \$5-million in funding over five years to Cuso International for the project.

Along with Manuela Ramos, the three other partners are Estudio para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer (DEMUS), which focuses on the defense of women's



human rights at the local, national and international level; Flora Tristán, which works to advance gender equality and advocates for gender-sensitive public policies; and Organización Nacional de Mujeres Andinas y Amazonicas (ONAMIAP), the only national organization that works

values, as well as activists who are the ones marching and performing in the streets.”

Swamy de León, Cuso alumna and former MMR volunteer, saw positive results during her placement. A social psychologist by trade, she would meet with women to explain their rights and support them through difficult moments.

“We worked at police stations with women who were abused or mistreated, giving them legal advice and counseling them on what to do and how to do it,” she explains, adding the officers treated the women with dignity and respect and provided them with protection

and security when needed.

Although there has been opposition to the feminist movement, the hard and persistent work of MMR and other organizations continues. And change is visible.

The 2016 protest *Ni una menos* (Not one less) was the largest demonstration against femicide and violence against women in Peruvian history. MMR has successfully lobbied for legislation that makes ending gender-based violence

## If society wants to move forward, half of the population can't be in an inferior position or face inequality of opportunities.

with both Amazonian and Andean Indigenous women.

Cuso International has worked in Peru with a strong focus on gender programming for more than 30 years.

“Their work is invaluable because they give more visibility to the feminist movement, especially young women, who are the future,” says Tania Guilbert, current Cuso volunteer at Manuela Ramos. “We look for open-minded women who understand and share feminist







Volunteer Tania Guilbert, left, at a Manuela Ramos march.

one of Peru's seven political priorities. The organization's work has also been successful in doubling the number of women's centres, changing advertisements to be less sexist, and creating gender diplomas at universities.

"After years of hard and consistent work, our voice is taken into account. If MMR speaks, it's heard," says Carmen. "Now it's a matter of pride to be feminist in Peru."

Susana Valerio is grateful for the support she received from Manuela Ramos and is one of many survivors who now volunteers with the organization.

"MMR empowered me to spread the message and reach other women in my community," she says, adding it was important to her to give back to the organization that gave so much to her.

She credits MMR for helping her break free from the cycle of violence and cultural stereotypes, and for giving her and her children a future of possibilities.

Most importantly, Manuela Ramos taught her that she is strong, she is resilient, and she has rights.



**Opposite:** Manuela Ramos successfully lobbied to make ending gender-based violence a political priority.

Young women are bringing more visibility to the feminist movement in Peru.





# Leading the

Young entrepreneurs in Nigeria are providing a boost to local and regional economies



Poultry farmer Chinenye Okon says the YouLead program helped her become financially independent.



# Way

Even with 220 egg-laying hens, Chinenye Okon is unable to keep up with orders from Calabar's restaurants, hotels and market vendors, let alone those from her friends and neighbours.

"I can't meet the demand for eggs," says the 37-year-old entrepreneur.

Chinenye enrolled in Cuso International's Youth Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Access and Development (YouLead) program in August 2016. She received hands-on training at a local farm for two months, where she learned to raise and sell birds for meat.

"We actually had nests there," says the married mother of three. "We started from eight-day-old chicks. They matured for eight weeks and then we sold them off."

She launched her farm less than a year later.

"It keeps me busy and it gives me the fulfillment of meeting the needs of other people," says Chinenye. "It also empowers me that I am financially independent."

YouLead provides employment training in such specialties as eco-tourism, forestry, aquaculture and agriculture, promoting work in Nigeria's natural resource sectors. The empowerment of women is an essential element of the program. Women and men have equal access to education, training and mentorship opportunities. This often leads to financial independence, and self-employment is one route through which women can gain autonomy.

"You can take care of yourself. And gain respect amongst your brothers, your sisters, your in-laws," says Chinenye. "When you have your own business, you can manage your time and make your own decisions."

She intends to grow her flock and raise upwards of 500 meat birds a month, while boosting her egg-laying stock to 1,000 birds by the end of this year. She is looking to acquire cages to protect the eggs, crates to store them in and materials to package dressed meat birds for her customers.

"I have big plans," says Chinenye, who is now looking to move to a larger property. "I can make it and

## I have big plans. I can make it and succeed in this business.

succeed in this business. I am determined to succeed."

Cuso alumna Millicent Letoya, who volunteered as an organizational development advisor in Calabar for six months in 2017-18, specializes in equipping non-profits with the tools needed to succeed. Interweaving gender equality, she creates a solid foundation through the development of policies and strategic plans.

"I just want women to be able to contribute to their communities in every position and at every level," says Millicent, who is originally from Kenya and lives in Toronto. "It doesn't matter whether they are doing youth development or they're doing environmental work. Policies on gender are important to have in place."

Mfon Essien, a local partner with the YouLead project, says it's common for women to outnumber the men in his training classes, given their interest in agriculture.

The Calabar-area farmer has, since 2016, trained approximately 250 entrepreneurs in poultry and fish





**Upper left:** Volunteer Millicent Letoya.

**Above:** Local farmer Mfon Essien provides hands-on training for YouLead participants.



**Left:** Volunteer Jon Ntewak.

farming. He also has a greenhouse operation and offers microfinancing.

“There are many people from university who have never seen a greenhouse,” says Mfon. “They’ve never seen a chick raised from a day old to maturity.”

Practical lessons delve into livestock care, managing risk, food safety, product preparation and marketing, as well as broader topics on agriculture, economics, government and the

This is a wonderful program.”

And with more people pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities in agriculture and aquaculture, local and regional economies are receiving a boost.

According to Nigeria’s National Bureau of Statistics, an astounding 55.4 per cent of youth were unemployed or underemployed at the end of 2018.

Through YouLead, Cuso International is working to reduce the “staggering” youth unemployment and poverty rates, says Jon Ntewak, who has completed two Cuso volunteer placements in Cross River State and is preparing for a third in Tanzania.

During his second placement in 2017, farm visits were part of his routine. He learned farmers often struggle to obtain loans and market their products. On one such trip, a fish farmer explained how he was having a difficult time securing regular clients. Jon helped connect him with a local hotel manager, who bought his fish.

“Through information, you help reduce poverty. That to me is the pillar. That to me is what keeps me going back,” says Jon, a retired City of Toronto social worker who is originally from Nigeria.

“It was sobering for me at first. It felt good.”

As the first entrepreneur in his family, Offiong Okon’s catfish farm is a source of pride among his relatives. The 34-year-old took part in an aquaculture training program for three months then attended YouLead classes in Calabar where he fine-tuned his entrepreneurial skills.

“That was a program that motivated me a lot,” he says. “They taught me that I should think big and start very small.”

Starting with a modest 300 catfish in 2016, Offiong now has 5,000 in stock. His farm is said to be the largest of Cuso’s beneficiaries established in Calabar to date, and his clients include local hotels.

“Being a businessman, I can take care of my bills and also help my siblings. It assists me to take care of my family,” says the father of one. “It’s a business that has given me joy.”

Through information,  
you reduce poverty.  
That’s what keeps me  
going back.

environment. Many trainees launch their farms soon after.

“We encourage them, visit them and make sure they are on track,” says Mfon. “There’s a lot of knowledge, a lot of exposure, a lot of people now seeing the opportunities available.



# A Perfect Fit

Volunteer's work in Laos receives international recognition

It's been more than two years since Peterborough resident Elizabeth Thippawong landed in Laos as a Cuso International volunteer—and there is no question she's made her mark.

Not only has her work as a project management advisor with the Gender Development Association (GDA) made strides in the country, it's been recognized on the international stage. Elizabeth was at the COP23 UN Climate Change Conference in Bonn, Germany in 2017 to receive the Transformational Gender Just Climate Solutions Award on behalf of GDA.

"When we got the email that we won, I was in complete disbelief," she says. "I felt my heart drop to my stomach."

Her winning project used a women's empowerment lens to bridge

**Below:** Cuso International volunteer Elizabeth Thippawong, right, won a Gender Just Climate Solutions award with her placement organization.







**Left:** The 4,500 beneficiaries of a project led by a Cuso International volunteer were women and their families.

traditional harvesting practices with sustainable harvesting initiatives. The 4,500 project beneficiaries were women, their families and fellow community members—many of whom belong to the Hmong and Khmu ethnic groups who have been systematically marginalized in Laos.

Women community leaders participated in train-the-trainer workshops to enhance their capacity and knowledge in the field of agriculture, sustainable harvesting and income generation. The project increased women's inclusion and impact on community decisions.

"The women are being uplifted as experts," says Elizabeth. "Women are traditionally the ones who harvest. They should be the policy makers."

News of the award came with an invitation to be a

keynote speaker at the UN climate conference. It was a great opportunity to highlight not only the project, but the entire country. Laos has one of the fastest growing economies in the East Asia and Pacific region and is the 13th fastest growing economy globally.

"It was an international platform," says Elizabeth. "The support we've received from people and the interest we've had has been great. Laos is finding its foothold in the international community."

Elizabeth was invited to return to the COP24 UN Climate Change Conference, held in Poland last December, where she helped advocate for the inclusion of gender considerations in international climate negotiations.

Elizabeth and her coworkers recently completed their first community assessment. Initially, five teenage girls and their families signed on for the study. The assessment evolved to include 65 people.

"That was an amazing experience," says Elizabeth. "Everyone wanted to join in. It was a totally mixed demographic—men, women, youth, elders—everyone was just genuinely interested in coming out."

The majority of Laotians live in rural areas and 70 per cent rely on what food or crops they can collect during the day. "These are people who don't get to go to the grocery stores," says Elizabeth.

"Women are the ones in the family responsible for this collecting. There's a high number of girls dropping out of school early. Women are going back to foraging immediately after childbirth. Also, with population density, resources are becoming scarcer."

Looking at how people can work more collectively to protect food sources while maintaining their traditional culture, the assessment documented people's experiences through interviews, videos and photos. When it comes to climate change, much can be learned at the grassroots level.



## They're dealing with climate change every single day, they just don't call it that.

"A lot of climate change initiatives and knowledge exist within these communities," says Elizabeth. "They're dealing with climate change every single day, they just don't call it that."

Jennifer Muldoon, Cuso International's Global Lead for Environment and Natural Resources Management, is impressed with Elizabeth's work and how it underscores the important role volunteers play.

"She's very well-spoken and capable but also really culturally and socially aware of her role in supporting women's organizations," says Jennifer. "They set the priorities and needs, and we work in cooperation with them. This really has a significant impact on organizations and their sustainability. It's really exciting."

That impact is evidenced by the Gender Development Association's growth. The

organization had a small staff of three employees and two volunteers—counting Elizabeth—when she first arrived.

"Since we won the award we've tripled in size. It really motivated our growth, showed we're capable," she says. "Now we have 10 full-time paid staff, plus we're able to take on a rotation of volunteers."

The placement has also had a profound impact on Elizabeth, whose father immigrated to Canada from Laos. "I was looking for an opportunity to come back and work in my home country. It's not a very common opportunity," she says. "This just seemed like a perfect fit. And it's been amazing."



Elizabeth Thippawong at the 2018 UN climate change conference.

**Below:** A recent community assessment in Laos saw 65 people take part.





# Alumnotes

Share and connect

## David Beer

Jamaica 1963–64; Zambia 1964–77; 1978–80; Zimbabwe 1987; Zambia 1989–91; South Africa 1994–96; 1996–2000

Bill (William) Sparks and I are looking to hear from volunteers who were in Zimbabwe, Botswana and Zambia. Contact us at [davidoza@yahoo.ca](mailto:davidoza@yahoo.ca) or [william.sparks@rogers.com](mailto:william.sparks@rogers.com).

## Tony Fantillo

Bolivia 1967–69

I would like to connect with other Cuso International volunteers who were in Bolivia in 1967–69. I replaced John Callagan in La Paz, and I remember Tim Thompson Erving. I have lost contact with many of the other volunteers who were there and would be interested in a 50-year reunion. Email: [fantillo@gmail.com](mailto:fantillo@gmail.com).

## Neill McKee

Malaysia 1968–70

I was a Cuso International volunteer teacher in Sabah, Malaysia in 1968–70 and Cuso Deputy Director in Malaysia during 1973–74. My book, *Finding Myself in Borneo*, is available through Barnes & Noble, IngramSparks and Indigo. The book is a creative

nonfiction travel memoir and is very entertaining and honest. My 45-year career took me to 80 countries on assignments and I lived overseas for

18 years in total. It all began when Cuso recruited me at the University of Calgary to go to Sabah, Malaysia in 1968.



## Fern Tsai

Thailand 1969–71

Remember July, August 1969 in Bangkok? We will be having a 50th reunion from July 5–7 in the Ottawa area. You are invited! Spouses, partners, and people whose posting overlapped with this group, are welcome. We are still hoping to connect with several friends: Danny and Susan Lee; Sharon Cook; Dale Nikiforuk; Russell Bodeway; Lillian Douglas; Boden Piesche. If you know how we can reach them, please email: [candaceanderson43@gmail.com](mailto:candaceanderson43@gmail.com).

## Gordon Breedyk

Ghana 1969–71; community volunteer 2010–11

The Ghana Reunion went exceptionally well. It really was a wonderful experience. As someone who phoned this morning said, “We walked in the room, which sort of felt like our living room, and it was immediately like we

had never parted.” There is much to say, but I will leave it there for now.

## Lynda Muir

Botswana 1971–73

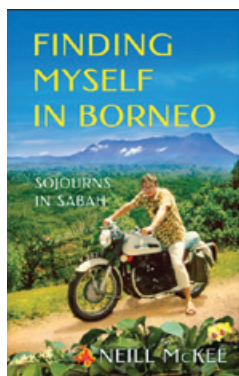
There is a CUSOBOT Reunion taking place on Saturday, July 6, 2019. Cuso Botswana volunteers from the 1970s and '80s will be gathering in Ottawa this July. There'll be food and music, dancing, a slideshow, discussions, and the chance to reconnect with old friends. Bring your musical instruments and make a weekend of it. A local hotel is offering a corporate rate. And we invite Botswana alumni and members of the larger Cuso family in the Ottawa area to open their homes to out-of-towners. If you can provide billeting, contact: [lyndamuir23@gmail.com](mailto:lyndamuir23@gmail.com). For more details visit our website: [cusobot.weebly.com](http://cusobot.weebly.com). Or email: [allanbculham@gmail.com](mailto:allanbculham@gmail.com).



## Merle Kindred

Jamaica 1978–80; Guyana 2017; 2018

Cuso International is deeply woven into the fabric of my life. I started development work with Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) in the





U.S. Virgin Islands (1967–68). Ten years later I served with Cuso in Jamaica training teachers.

In 2017, I was back with Cuso in a six-month posting in Guyana in strategic planning and in 2018, I accepted another six-month assignment in Guyana focusing on ecological and economic development in two remote Indigenous villages.

Presently, I'm gathering stories and reflections from this long history.

### Jim (James) McRae

Botswana 1982–84; community volunteer 2010–11

I am putting the finishing touches to my book, *The Africa Diaries: A Love Affair*. It is about my life as a volunteer. Look for its release in the coming months.

### David Coon

Nicaragua 1990

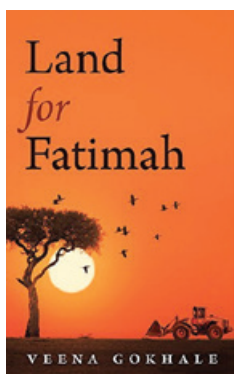
David is the leader of the New Brunswick Green Party that now holds the balance of power in the province. He and his partner, Janice Harvey, were Cuso volunteers.



### Veena Gokhale

Tanzania 2005–07

In spring this year, my novel *Land for Fatimah*, was launched by Guernica Editions. This, my second work of fiction, is set in an imaginary east African country. It tells the story of four strong women, set against a backdrop of dispossession and international development. I hope you will take a look! My two-year stint in Tanzania partly inspired it, though many other ideas about social justice did as well.



### James Kyles

Uganda 2007; Tanzania 2008; 2008–09

My three placements through Cuso International/VSO led to the creation of a smallholder coffee project in northwest Tanzania near the town of Bukoba, which has tripled yields and quadrupled incomes from the only cash crop of 270 subsistence farming families.

We are also putting four kids through school (their mom died during my placement and I felt someone had to step up).

We got far more out of the experience than we put into it. Volunteering with Cuso has made my retirement years more satisfying than they would have been otherwise.

### Barry Gallant

Myanmar 2016–17; Guyana 2018

A great evening was held in Dartmouth, N.S. with three couples recently back from assignments in Myanmar and Guyana. We discussed volunteering internationally and are hoping to expand the size of our group. Anyone who is a return volunteer, or those planning a volunteer assignment are welcome to join us.

Volunteers of all ages are welcome. We are interested in discussions around sustainability, gender equality and the sustainable development goals. Email: Bgallant@ns.sympatico.ca.

### Jennifer Reddy

Guyana 2016–17

Cuso International alumna Jennifer Reddy was elected to the Vancouver School Board in October 2018.

### Odette Kamanzi Gahongayire

Rwanda 2010–11; Cameroon 2017–18; 2018

My experience with Cuso International Cameroon was very rewarding on the professional, personal, cultural and social levels. I have been very lucky to work with the right people, the excellent colleagues and the wonderful partners. I am proud of my accomplishment during my one-year stay in Cameroon, although I recognize there is much more to improve. I consider Cuso International my second family.

### Carmen De La Torre

Bolivia 2018

It is a pleasure for me to read *Catalyst*, thank you Cuso International and the Foundation for the Conservation of the Chiquitano Forest (FCBC). Both institutions gave me the opportunity to volunteer. To Cuso, my immense thankfulness for teaching me the meaning of an institution dedicated to raising the knowledge and training of the poorest people in the world. To the FCBC, my indebtedness for allowing me to translate their website from Spanish to English and, above all, to show me the beauty and nobility of work and the dedication of your valuable team.

### Thinking of a reunion? Contact us!

We would love to help you connect with your fellow volunteers. Your regional alumni ambassador and our staff can work with you to coordinate the details.

Contact [editor@cusointernational.org](mailto:editor@cusointernational.org).





# Lives Lived

## Sandy Smith-Windsor

Papua New Guinea 1976–79

Sandy left his friends and family in his favourite place, Katepwa Lake, Sask. while waterskiing on a beautiful September day in 2018. His Cuso International experience in Papua New Guinea was a foundation for a lifetime of volunteering. He was an elementary school teacher for 33 years, coaching school teams, organizing Terry Fox runs and planting trees in the playground.

The Smith-Windsor family welcomed 25 international students into their home and Sandy took great joy in sharing Canada with the students as well as travelling to their home countries to meet their families.

## Olive Keith

Nigeria 1978–79

It is with sadness that the family of Olive Enid Keith announce her passing at the Saint John Regional Hospital on Aug. 2, 2018. Olive enjoyed a career as a Registered Nurse. She practised as a Public Health Nurse in Saint John. Her expertise in the field of communicable disease earned her the respect of medical professionals. She is remembered for her knowledge, care with children, sense of humour and kindness.

Over her lifetime Olive travelled widely, touching down on six continents: North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia.

The Olive Keith Memorial Prize in Community Nursing has been created at the University of New Brunswick and is being funded by her colleagues, family and friends.

## Kenneth Jansen

Papua New Guinea 1985–87; 1992–93; Indonesia 1993–95

On Nov. 14, 2018, Kenneth Richard Jansen passed away peacefully in Tisdale, Sask. at the age of 69. He will be forever remembered by his wife of 46 years, Leslie Lamb.

Ken and Leslie volunteered in Papua New Guinea in the 1980s and 90s, working in sustainable community economic development and education. Over five years in Papua New Guinea, lifelong connections were made, and various projects still stand today. In 2007, Ken and Leslie semi-retired to Tisdale where Ken continued with his woodworking until 2014.

## Freddy Trejos

Staff

Freddy passed away on Nov. 12, 2018. Freddy dedicated over 20 years



of his working career to Cuso International and retired in April 2016 as the Regional Finance Manager for Latin America, based in Costa Rica. Those who have worked with Cuso International for some time will likely remember and cherish your memories of Freddy. He was a passionate contributor to our work and the evolution of our organization.

## Tom Schatzky

India 1962–64; community volunteer 2010–11

Tom Schatzky died peacefully in Ottawa on Oct. 11, 2018 in his 80th year from pancreatic cancer.

Tom's adventurous spirit took him to many corners of the world. Involved with the founding of Cuso International, he belonged to the 1962 group sent to India. Among his varied careers he was involved with UNA-Canada, Centennial Year Miles for Millions, the Shastri Institute, McMaster University Adult Education, the Niagara Institute and the International Year of the Child.

For 20 years Tom worked at CIDA (Asia Branch). In his retirement he volunteered with CESO in Nunavut and mentored refugees and immigrants through CCI Ottawa. Tom always had a profound sense of injustice and supported the underdog throughout his life.





### John Buswell

Ghana 1972–74

John passed away suddenly at the age of 68, on July 5, 2017, while on his farmland near Borden, Sask. He returned to the farm in the late 1970s following his time spent in northern Ghana.

He married Miram Steacy (Sierra Leone 1973–77) in 1980 and they had a daughter, Kerry. John was greatly involved with his family and his community. He loved to share his experiences of being a Cuso International volunteer with friends and always wished that he could return to Africa to visit. He would have been pleased that his Cuso friends came to support Miriam and Kerry and the rest of the family at the celebration of his life.

### Graham Simpson

Board of Directors 1976–79

The family announces with profound sadness that Graham passed away peacefully at the Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon on Nov. 19, 2017. Born in Wellington, New Zealand, Graham obtained bachelor and master's degrees in agriculture before obtaining his PhD in plant physiology at the University of London, England in 1959. He started

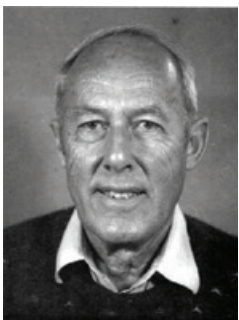
his career that same year in the department of crop science at the University of Saskatchewan and served as director. Graham then became the director of the International Development Centre, Saskatoon Drought project. Professor Emeritus Simpson was inducted into

the Saskatchewan Agricultural Hall of Fame in 2012.

### Janet Murphy-Goodridge

Papua New Guinea 1982–84

Janet passed peacefully at home



## A life well lived

### Remembering Dolores (Lola) Pedret Gambia 1987–94

After a life truly well lived and filled with many adventures, accomplishments and contributions to society, Lola left this world peacefully on Aug. 1, 2018 at her home in Vancouver.



Her life started in Reus, Catalonia, Spain. In her own words: “I was not blessed by much more than a sturdy character and loving parents.” She survived the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War by focusing on her passion for education and mountain climbing. She always believed that education changes lives, and the world, for the better.

In 1955, Lola immigrated to Toronto with her husband Benjamin Pedret and began what she describes as her second life as a loving mother and homemaker while embarking upon a 30-year career in architectural drafting. Lola always considered herself blessed to be given the opportunity to live in this “incredible country” and to be able to call herself Canadian.

In 1985 she retired to start what she refers to as her third life. Lola spent 21 years teaching and living in West Africa. Much of that time she taught geometry, mathematics and drafting for Cuso International. She considers many of her former students as extended family, caring about them far beyond the bounds of the classroom.

Lola is survived by loving family and close friends. She will be deeply missed.

surrounded by her family on March 29, 2017, at age 58.

Janet embraced life with enthusiasm, often exploring the paths less travelled. She loved her family; she loved her friends. Her professional life began as a volunteer nursing instructor in Papua New Guinea and ended as a policy advisor on maternal child health issues for the federal and provincial governments. She was a passionate supporter of breastfeeding. She loved travel, especially the exotic off-beat destinations.





## Flashback



Who do you recognize? Help us dust off this memory by sharing your stories or identifying those in the photo.

Please email us at [editor@cusointernational.org](mailto:editor@cusointernational.org) or send us a tweet at [@CusolIntl](https://twitter.com/CusolIntl) using the hashtag [#flashback](https://twitter.com/hashtag/flashback). Submissions will be shared via the next edition of *Catalyst*.



### Did you recognize anyone in the photo?

We asked our readers to send in their best guesses. Here's what we received.

Those pictured, from left, are: unknown, Father Bill Smith, Claudette Legault, Patricia Hurdle, Fergus O'Byrne, Katherine Pearson, unknown, Jean Christie, unknown; and Beth Woroniuk.

Read the full account and other submissions at [cusointernational.org/alumni](http://cusointernational.org/alumni)





# ANSWERING THE CALL

## Building a legacy

“CUSO INTERNATIONAL SET ME ON my life’s path as an educator and a volunteer. I am thrilled it continues all these years later in its work to eradicate poverty and champion equality. I am so proud to see it continue to flourish, giving volunteers the opportunity to take their skills where they are needed.”

Judy, who marks her 50th anniversary as a Cuso alumna this year, is inspired by the organization’s ongoing and evolving work in the fields of women’s rights and gender equality, sustainable agriculture and technology.

A champion supporter of Cuso International, she encourages others to consider the impact of leaving a gift in their will.

By establishing a legacy gift to benefit Cuso International, you are directing your generosity towards a community that reflects your values. You are making a lasting difference in the fight against poverty and inequality.

“My wish for Cuso is to continue being relevant in today’s world, always seeking new ways to connect and collaborate with people to improve all lives. It’s



Judy Cameron, Jamaica '69

why I am proud to contribute to building its legacy fund.”

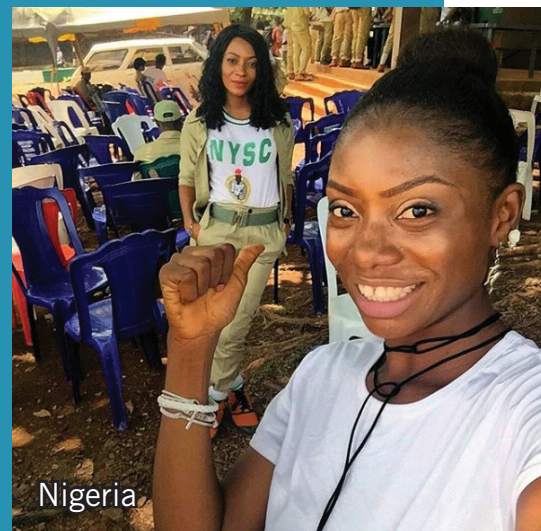
May is Leave a Legacy month in Canada. What better time to start thinking about your lasting impact? To learn more about how you too can continue to play an integral role in Cuso International’s mission by leaving a legacy gift, please contact Meghan Maack, Manager, Major Gifts and Legacy Giving.



**Phone (toll-free): +1.888.434.2876 x205 | Email: [meghan.maack@cusointernational.org](mailto:meghan.maack@cusointernational.org)**



# Getting Social



#cusointernational

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