

# Our experience

📍 NIGERIA

Cuso's work in Nigeria focuses on capacity development, employment, and climate smart entrepreneurship support for young women and other vulnerable groups. By sharing skills, building confidence, and strengthening partnerships, Cuso's delivers gender-transformative youth economic empowerment.



**7,000+**  
JOBS CREATED



**5,577**  
ENTERPRISES CREATED



## Key activities

- Skills development for employment
- Support for agribusinesses
- Financial inclusion
- Private sector engagement
- Environment and climate action
- Gender equality and inclusion

# Youth Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Access and Development (YouLead)

YouLead was designed to reduce youth unemployment in Nigeria by enhancing the entrepreneurial and workforce capacities of young women (primarily) and young men for more inclusive and environmentally sustainable jobs in green natural resource sectors in Cross River state.

2014 YEAR–2019 YEAR

**\$15,976,443 CAD**

FUNDED BY GLOBAL AFFAIRS CANADA

## YouLead Project impact

- **Support to youth:** support services provided to over 14,000 youth participants.
- **Businesses creation:** Creation of more than 3,000 new green youth-owned businesses.
- **Business expansion:** Expansion of over 600 existing green youth businesses.
- **Job creation:** Generation of over 2,000 employment opportunities for young people.

## Key activities

### Policy support to government

- Worked with the State Planning Commission in finalizing the Green Economy Green Jobs Framework

### Technical, vocational and entrepreneurship capacity building

- Comprehensive training in technical, vocational and entrepreneurship areas related to sustainable natural resources and green entrepreneurship.
- Business development, and financial literacy training focused on essential skills such as budgeting, credit management, bookkeeping, customer service, negotiation, and networking.
- Mentorship and market linkages for green entrepreneurship.

### Financial support for youth-run businesses

- Support to partner financial institutes to develop 11 youth-oriented products.
- Link youth entrepreneurs to financial institute credit and youth-friendly services, ex. joint workshops and credit appraisals in community town halls.
- Young Entrepreneurship Business Support Plan (YEBSP) established to provide seed funds.
- Multipurpose cooperatives with membership of 40 youth (mainly female) benefiting from seed funds, grants, and loans.
- Youth entrepreneurs received loan facilities from the project's three partner banks.

### Business start-up support

- Coaching for Innovation, finding new ways to promote gender-responsive natural resource management systems.
- Career counselling, ICT training, internet access, social and peer support.
- Introduction of Youth Resource Centres for youth entrepreneurs to access various services.
- Cuso also recruited over 60 volunteers to coach and support the young entrepreneurs



# Skills for improvement of lives and livelihoods for Cameroonian refugees (SKILLS) Project in Nigeria

The SKILLS initiative is a Cuso project funded by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Launched in 2019, SKILLS focuses on supporting Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria by providing vocational training and fostering entrepreneurship in Cross River and Benue states. The project aims to address food security, foster economic independence, and build resilience within refugee communities. The core mission is to help participants establish and grow micro and small enterprises, contributing to their self-reliance and improving their standard of living. The project places particular emphasis on empowering young women to address their economic challenges and gain access to and control over income. Cuso assists refugees in acquiring life skills and business development knowledge, while promoting financial inclusion through enhanced group savings and loan schemes, as well as linkages to microfinance institutions. Digital literacy and other sustainability tools are integrated into the project to ensure lasting impact.

## SKILLS Project impact

- **Support refugees:** Over 7,424 participants trained since 2019, resulting in the creation of 5,000+ jobs and 1,977+ micro and small enterprises.
- **Agricultural development:** 1,840 participants trained in sustainable farming practices via the Farmer's Field School.
- **Economic resilience:** Increased financial literacy and access to financial services, including savings, credit, and insurance.
- **Environmental stewardship:** Promoted climate-smart agricultural practices and energy-saving equipment, benefiting up to 60% of households.

2019–2025

**\$2,500,000 CAD**

FUNDED BY UNHCR

## Key activities

### Technical, vocational and entrepreneurship capacity building

- Comprehensive training to recognize and enhance the existing skills of refugees and host communities.
- Opportunities for participants to acquire new skills tailored to improving their livelihood situations.
- Business development and financial literacy training focused on essential skills such as budgeting, credit management, bookkeeping, customer service, negotiation, and networking.
- Mentorship for trades like tailoring and hairdressing to ensure long-term success.

### Support for agribusinesses

- Practical training through Farmer's Field School to enhance food security and income generation.
- Integration of climate-smart agriculture techniques for sustainable farming practices.

### Business start-up support

- Distribution of tools and equipment to help refugees start or expand their businesses.
- Pathways for economic independence and resilience for both refugees and their Nigerian hosts.

# Sharing Canadian Expertise for Inclusive Development and Gender Equality (SHARE) in Nigeria

SHARE, a multi-country project, improves the economic and social well-being of the poorest and most marginalized, particularly women and girls. It does this through building the capacity of local partners to deliver more inclusive, innovative and environmentally sustainable development initiatives, projects and services in response to the local needs of poor and vulnerable groups and communities. Through SHARE in Nigeria, Cuso International has advanced localization by providing technical support from skilled volunteers (both Canadian and Nigerian) and grants from SHARE's Special Project Funds in response to needs of local partners civil society organizations as EVA, MEHCAT and others. Technical assistance and mentorship is provided in the areas of gender, inclusion, resource mobilization, farmers field school, economic resilience, climate action, and waste /plastic management.

2020–2024

**\$87,000,000 CAD**

FUNDED BY GLOBAL AFFAIRS CANADA

## Transforming business to green models

- Supporting entrepreneurs to transition from traditional charcoal ovens to gasoline.
- Put in place models to reduce carbon emissions.

## Support climate action

- Support women and young women to adapt to climate action.
- Support women and young women to advocate for access to clean and potable water.

## SHARE Project impact

- **Participants supported:** 130,913 participants supported up to 2024.
- **Volunteer placements:** Over 37 volunteers supporting project participants.
- **Partners supported:** 20 local civil society partners supported.

## Key activities

### Boost economic prosperity and resilience

- Provides training and resources to marginalized young women and women in rural communities.
- Supports entrepreneurs by increasing productivity leading to higher incomes.
- Improves women and young women's economic independence, livelihoods, and empowerment.



# Success stories

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### Jacinta's cassava business

Before the project, cassava processing was a male-dominated trade. "I am grateful to Cuso International for leading me in the right direction. I gained self-confidence during the training and it pushed me to start the biggest cassava plant in my community. Now my big picture is to buy more equipment and to exports my garri outside Nigeria. I will advise women not to be limited by cultural expectations of what a woman can or not do. I grind, press and fry cassava in my factory, other woman can do the same if they put their mind to it."



### Bessie's palm farm

27-year old Bessie, a single mother, used to only extract oil from her palm trees. "I used to throw away my palm kernels, fronds and chaff. Now, I use the fronds for brooms, the kernel for palm kernel oil and the oil for fire / fuel. No part of my palm tree wastes. Before, I sold my oil immediately after harvest without waiting for the price to increase. Now, I keep my palm oil and wait for prices to stabilize before I sell so I make a better profit. Thank you, YouLead, for educating us on what to do. Now we are living a better life."

### Kate's chicken farm

When Kate was ready to expand her business, credit seem inaccessible to youth-led businesses because they lack collateral assets, financial resources, and years of experience. "I had to borrow from money-lenders who had a very high interest rate, for every 150,000 Naira, they would charge 35,000 Naira per month as interest. When I heard about the micro financing loans from YouLead, I applied. Microfinance banks have a low interest rate and so I can borrow 250,000 and only pay 18,000 as interest in 6 months. "I want to be a role model to my sisters and my community ... Being a woman does not stop you from going into business."



# Youth empowerment approaches

## Skills development for employment

Cuso collaborates with skills development institutions to equip young people, particularly young women, with demand-driven skills relevant to their location and interests. In rural areas, training focuses on agriculture, while in urban setting, training focuses on small enterprise development skills and technical and vocational education and training for agriculture and entrepreneurship. Cuso regularly conducts labor market and skills analyses to identify the sectors with the highest potential for youth employment. We work closely with skills development institutions to conduct these analyses, review and align curriculum to labor market needs, develop and deliver soft skills training, create linkages with employers, provide mentorship and coaching to program participants, and facilitate apprenticeship program placements.

## Youth Village Savings and Loan Associations (Youth VSLAs)

Through Youth VSLAs, Cuso, in collaboration with local implementing partners, provides life skills, basic financial literacy, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and career pathway selection. Youth VSLAs are also used as a platform to deliver training on harmful gender norms and sexual and reproductive health. Cuso facilitates linkages of Youth VSLAs with formal financial institutions to increase youth access to banking services and products. Cuso's approach to financial inclusion involves strengthening the capacity of financial service providers to offer youth-friendly products and services,



removing barriers to access especially for young women, and ensuring that our targeted youth participants are financially literate. This includes knowledge on savings, loans, and other tailored financial services and products.

## Private sector engagement

Cuso's programs engage with private sector actors to identify market opportunities and explore the business case for working with youth. This includes business participation in labour market and skills analyses, mentorship and coaching programs, and providing practical training, internship, and apprenticeship opportunities. In addition to project-specific engagement, Cuso maintains ongoing relationships with the private sector through one-on-one consultations with businesses and quarterly focus groups. We maintain a database with nearly 145 small, medium, and large businesses in Nigeria in key sectors such as textiles, food processing, and agriculture.

### Youth community engagement

Positive Youth Development and Meaningful Youth Engagement approaches are integrated throughout all of Cuso's economic empowerment programming in Nigeria. Cuso works with local implementing partners and government entities to equip young women and young men with knowledge and skills. We facilitate practical opportunities for youth to practice these skills and strengthen their capacity through peer-to-peer sessions, awareness raising events, and youth clubs and Youth VSLAs. These venues provide a space for young people to challenge norms and stereotypes, discuss gaps and root causes of inequalities and exclusion related to socioeconomic status and access to education, and participate in and influence decision-making.

### Gender equality and social Inclusion

Cuso is dedicated to ensuring that young women and men have equal opportunities to contribute to, as well as benefit from, economic and social decision-making. Our commitment is focused on the long term, working to create opportunities by providing resources and sharing the skills needed for individuals to thrive, while addressing the social, cultural, and economic barriers faced by women and girls.

### Food security and livelihoods

Cuso works in collaboration with youth, private sector businesses, governments, civil society organizations, and others to create inclusive and sustainable opportunities in employment, entrepreneurship, natural resource management, and food security. Our efforts focus on empowering women, girls, and youth by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and

technologies needed in agriculture, including in non-traditional agriculture roles for young women, Cuso collaborates with agricultural extension agents to transfer technology to rural farmers and with the private sector, including financial institutions, to improve market access and provide loans for youth.

### Environment and climate action

Cuso promotes green jobs by developing tools and resources, and capacity building for circular economy practices, such as a green economy framework for state-level implementation of green economy initiatives. We assist young farmers with climate variability and change information, and help businesses adapt to climate change by helping them avoid, prevent, reduce, mitigate, or offset potential negative environmental impacts. Through our volunteers, we enhance the capacity of partners in environmental management, assist businesses and value chains in developing environmental management plans, raise awareness about the benefits of renewable energy products and help co-develop with youth cost-effective adaptation strategies. Additionally, we work to enhance local capacity on climate change and environmental sustainability by supporting natural resource management planning and coordination.

