

**Cuse**  
International



# SOLSTICE

m a g a z i n e Summer 2025

A storytelling magazine celebrating global impact, volunteerism, partnerships, and possibilities.



Greetings,

As we make the most of the warm summer weather, let's take a moment to reflect on some of the many success stories we've had recently here at Cuso International.

We're launching new programs, including the Renewed Women's Voice and Leadership project in Tanzania. This five-year project will help strengthen the capacities of local organizations and community leaders as they advocate for gender equality, economic independence, and social justice.

Even in the face of immense global challenges to the work that we do – such as global cuts to international development assistance and ongoing political turmoil in some of the countries where we work – Cuso's teams and partners everywhere continue to display extraordinary commitment as they work to make their communities stronger.

I invite you to read inspiring stories of the people we work with. People like Maikol, a Venezuelan migrant who is finding new opportunities in Colombia; Charly, a young entrepreneur in the Democratic Republic of the Congo who is overcoming discrimination to build her own business and economic future; and many more!

In these pages you'll uncover first-hand accounts from our volunteers as they work with partners and participants around the world. I am continuously amazed at the dedication of our volunteers who have such an impact around the globe and grateful to the donors who make this work possible.

As we continue this life-changing work, I want to thank you for your ongoing support for Cuso International as we continue this journey to build a more equitable future for all.

Thank you and enjoy reading!

Nicolas Moyer  
Chief Executive Officer

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### Cover

Charly Solo, Talents Pluriels participant. Photo: Cuso International

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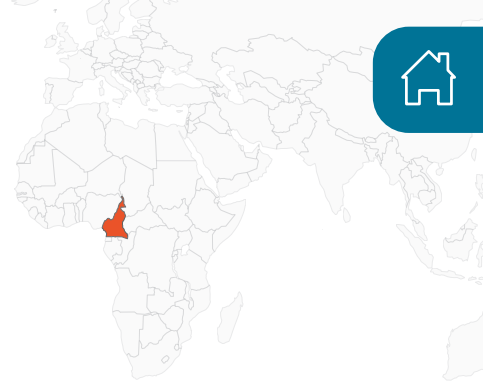
# SECTION 1

A photograph of a woman and a young girl standing in front of a blue wooden wall. The woman, on the left, is wearing a black lace-trimmed top and has her arm around the girl's shoulder. The girl, on the right, is wearing a grey t-shirt with a circular logo that says 'NORTHWEST TREE HEALTH' and 'COSO' and is smiling broadly. A large blue rounded rectangle is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing the title text.

## Across the Globe Country Spotlights

*Program participant Betty Rodriguez and her daughter. Photo: Cuso International*





## NUTRIMBOA: FOUR WOMEN COMBAT MALNUTRITION AND REDEFINE FEMALE ROLES IN CAMEROON

**In Cameroon, women are often expected to be caregivers, responsible for raising children and farming, while leadership, technology, and entrepreneurship are seen as unsuitable for them. However, with support from Cuso International, four remarkable women are challenging these norms with their NutriMboa mobile application.**

**NutriMboa**, developed in 2022, is the work of **four Cameroonian women, Borelle Mafogang, Olivia Vanessa Piwo Piembek, Danielle Cynthia Assong Elombat, and Siysila Ndzeshang**. Together, they created a tool that addresses one of Cameroon's most pressing issues: malnutrition.

NutriMboa provides nutritional education, a database of local dishes, and personalized meal recommendations to help users make healthier choices. "The application acts as a nutritional guide, offering recipes based on local and affordable foods according to users' profiles, enabling them to prepare nutritious meals using readily available ingredients," said Danielle.



Borelle, a PhD holder with a patent from her research, is passionate about using science to solve community problems. "Our global vision is to reduce malnutrition," she said. "I hope NutriMboa can be used by anyone who needs to be educated nutritionally in any part of Africa."

*Borelle, participant of Cuso International's TechWomen Factory project in Cameroon.  
Photo: Yann Yap*

Olivia, who grew up facing challenges like poor nutrition and limited access to education, believes the app could be a way to "raise public awareness of the importance of eating well."

"We want to help Cameroonians eat better and alleviate the problems of child and maternal malnutrition," she said.

For Danielle and other Cameroonian women, **NutriMboa is more than just an app. It's a symbol of inspiration and empowerment.**

It challenges traditional gender roles, proving that women can lead, innovate, and create solutions to pressing community issues.

"Today, I'm happy to know that I'm a source of inspiration for young women of my age, as many of them are increasingly interested in the digital professions, which indirectly helps to break down gender stereotypes," said Danielle. She also believes that NutriMboa is encouraging more women and girls in her community to pursue STEM careers.



*Danielle, participant of Cuso International's TechWomen Factory project in Cameroon.  
Photo: Yann Yap*



The creation of NutriMboa has been made possible through the skills and confidence the women gained from Cuso International's TechWomen Factory program. This initiative provides young women with training in data science, digital art, and web development, equipping them with the tools to succeed in the digital economy.

Since 2021, the TechWomen Factory, in partnership with the Cameroon Youth School Tech Incubator (CAYSTI), empowers women aged 18 to 35 by equipping them with advanced digital skills to enhance their career prospects. The program offers three training streams: data science, digital art/graphics, and website design, providing participants with a high-quality, cost-free digital education.

By 2024, the initiative has already made a significant impact: among the 146 beneficiaries who completed their training, an impressive 68% employment rate has been achieved, showcasing the program's success in transforming lives and creating opportunities for women in Cameroon's digital economy.



For Olivia, the program is life-changing. "It has enabled me to change my mindset, to train myself to be better and more competitive in my professional career," she said. "I've started dreaming big again for my life and my professional career."

*Olivia, participant of Cuso International's TechWomen Factory project in Cameroon.  
Photo: Cuso International*

"I've also been able to develop my entrepreneurial spirit and, thanks to the SoftSkills masterclass, build up my self-confidence and leadership skills," said Danielle. "I can now look forward to turning my ideas into reality and aspire to create businesses that not only succeed financially, but also have a positive impact on society and solve local problems."

With the support of Cuso International and their own determination, Borelle, Olivia, Danielle, and Siysila are not only combating malnutrition, but also redefining what it means to be a woman in Cameroon.



*Siysila, TechWomen Factory participant, in Cameroon.  
Photo: Giordanno Brumas*

## About the SHARE Project

Funded by Global Affairs Canada, the SHARE project is designed to enhance the economic and social well-being of underserved communities with technical assistances. Since 2020, Cuso International has implemented SHARE across ten countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, collaborating with governments, private sector stakeholder, academic institutions, and local organizations to drive sustainable development.





## MAIKOL'S JOURNEY: FINDING OPPORTUNITY AFTER HARDSHIP

**The past few years have been challenging for Maikol, a Venezuelan migrant now living in Colombia. Like millions of others, he was compelled to leave his homeland due to ongoing political conflict, making the difficult decision to seek stability elsewhere.**

### A Career Disrupted

Before leaving Venezuela, Maikol built a career as a credit analyst in the banking sector. He also gained experience in customer service, call centers, sales, and as a cashier. However, the crisis at home forced him to uproot his life and search for opportunities abroad.

His first stop was Peru, where he lived for two and a half years. Without legal documentation, Maikol took on informal jobs, including loading and unloading trucks and working as a motorbike taxi driver. The COVID-19 pandemic added to his struggles, making life increasingly unstable. Determined to improve his circumstances, Maikol set his sights on Colombia, hoping to legalize his status and find a stable job.

### A Helping Hand from Cuso International

During an interview for a temporary job in Colombia, Maikol's path crossed with Cuso International. The organization followed his journey closely, identifying barriers that could prevent him from securing permanent employment, such as adapting to a new work environment, transportation issues, and housing challenges. When necessary, Cuso provided cash assistance to ease these obstacles.

*SCOPE participant Maikol with Cuso International's Eduardo Diazgranados (left) and Aymeric Astre (right).  
Photo: Cuso International*

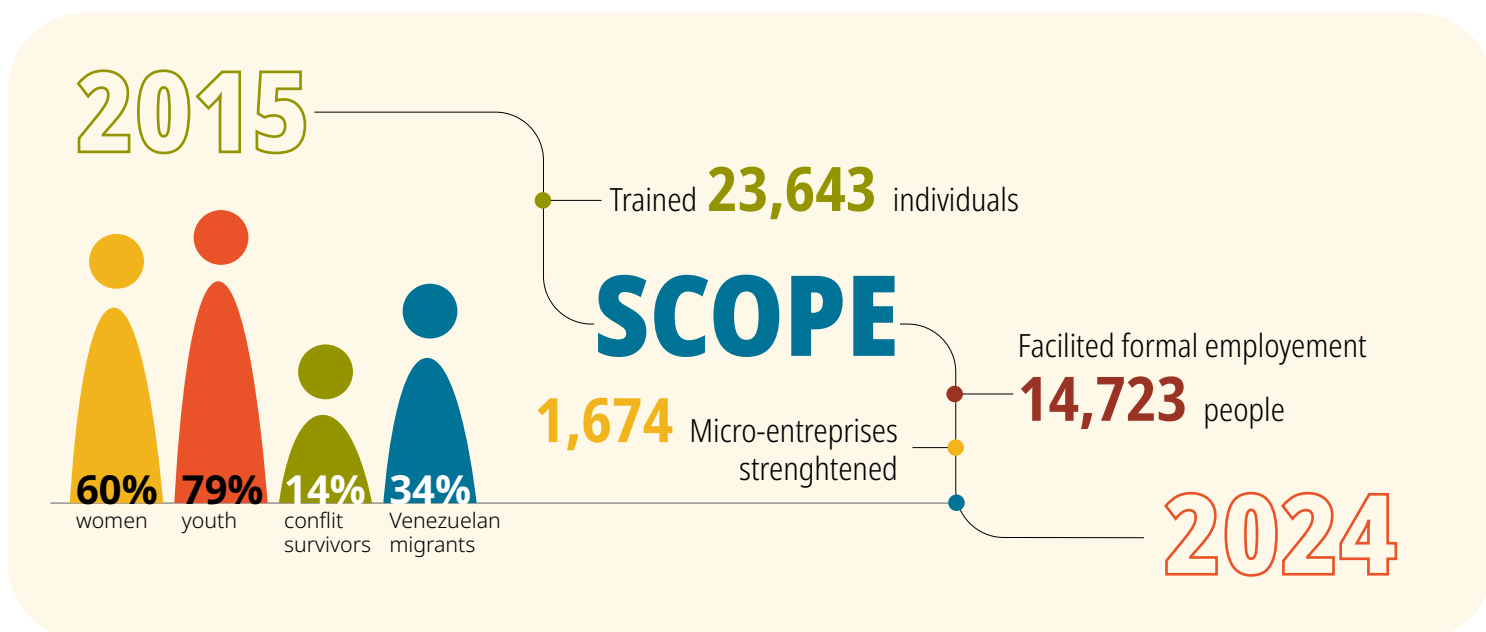


"They were always looking out for me."



## Building a New Future

This support was part of **Cuso International's Sustainable Colombian Opportunities for Peacebuilding and Employment (SCOPE) project**. The initiative has empowered women, youth, conflict survivors, and Venezuelan migrants by connecting them with formal employment opportunities across Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador.



## A Year of Progress

Today, Maikol has been working for Luker Chocolate in Bogotá for over a year. He feels welcomed and included in his new role.

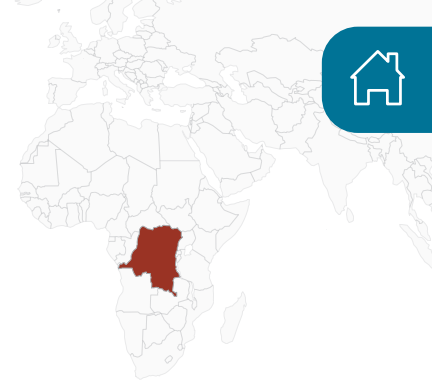
"I have felt quite well here. As an immigrant, I have experienced no discrimination and have adapted well to the work environment and its processes."

"To Cuso International: thank you very much for the support you have given us!"

Maikol is eager to continue learning the technical aspects of chocolate production, such as weighing ingredients and injecting products into molds.

Maikol's journey illustrates how opportunity, combined with dedicated support, can transform lives and build brighter futures, even in the face of immense challenges.





## SUPPORTING A YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR TO BUILD THEIR BUSINESS AND THEIR ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Charly Solo grew up with a physical condition that caused her to face discrimination within her family, at school, in church, and among acquaintances. She was often overlooked and denied the chance to express her opinions. In response, she would assert, “I’m physically handicapped, but not mentally.”

After her mother passed away, Charly found herself without a stable place to live.

“The houses I stayed in were sometimes ashamed of me. I was hidden from people’s eyes. At times, I questioned why I was born and thought the crying that marked my infancy would continue throughout my life. My joy came

after I graduated from state school, gaining a sense of independence and feeling ready to face life,” she shared.

**Despite enduring discrimination, Charly completed both primary and secondary school.** She dreamed of working in the media, particularly on TV, but faced discouragement.

“Unfortunately, my father discouraged me due to fears of humiliation because of my physical condition. As a result, I stopped at a state sewing diploma when I truly wanted to attend university,” she recalled.

In her region, women are often excluded from decision-making processes. They face numerous challenges, including mistreatment and a lack of recognition.

Through partnerships with local organizations **Jeunialissime** and **Si Jeunesse Savait**, the Talents Pluriels project provides training to marginalized youth, including women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people living with albinism. The program promotes gender-sensitive business practices and supports participants in their job searches.

The program enabled Charly to better meet customer demands and organize her business documents. It also guided her toward achieving her dreams.



Charly Solo, Talents Pluriels participant. Photo: Cuso International

“By participating in this program, I hoped for guidance, follow-up, and support—and Cuso made that possible. Acquiring new skills was challenging at first, but **my determination carried me through.**”



*Charly Solo, Talents Pluriels participant, with Cuso International's Richine Masengo. Photo: Cuso International*

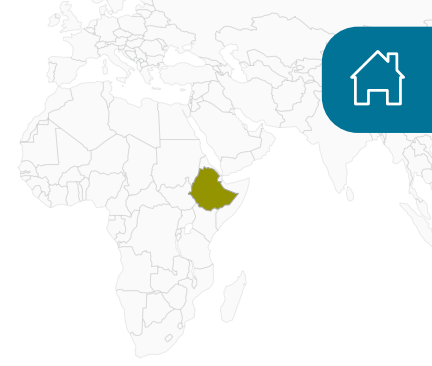
Since joining the program, Charly has learned how to navigate social dynamics and support others in overcoming unemployment. The program taught her to manage her profit margins, save money to pay employees, and set fixed prices for her products.

**“Thanks to this project, I’ve become self-sufficient. In my community, doubts have faded about the true intentions of organizations working to help young people,” she noted.**

“I dream of expanding my project across all 26 provinces of the DRC—and even beyond—to share ‘Made in DRC’ products with the world,” she added.

**Discover Talents  
pluriel [website](#) ▶**





## SUPPORTING EDUCATION GOALS FOR GIRLS IN ETHIOPIA

**Girls in Ethiopia face many hurdles when accessing education. They are less likely to attend or complete school because of societal, economic, and cultural barriers, and this gender gap often relegates girls and women to domestic or sometimes unpaid labour, diminishing their roles in both homes and communities.**

Working to improve this is Cuso International's U-GIRLS 2 project. Since 2020, the project has supported economically disadvantaged girls with special needs, working to address existing barriers that impede girls' ability to stay in high school. This includes providing school materials, including exercise books, pens, a school bag and uniform. There are also trainings, such as leadership, life skills, and reproductive health. A monthly stipend covers her transport costs and other expenses.

The program also provides gender equality and social inclusion training to teachers, school administrators, education officials, and family members. This comprehensive approach helps foster a more supportive environment for girls at home, at school, and throughout the community.

Bethlehem Kassahun first joined the project when she was in Grade 9 at Bambas Secondary School. Now in Grade 11, Bethlehem says the project's support has contributed a lot to the betterment of her academic results.

"Since then, my average grades have increased. My average grade in the first semesters was 80%. I am standing first in my class and second in the whole school," she said. "The tutorial sessions helped me a lot. We are also taking an English language course during the summer season which is helpful."

Bethlehem says the life skill and leadership trainings helped change her life significantly, giving her a "yes, I can" mindset.



**"The sexual and reproductive health trainings have also helped me understand that I am equal to boys. It has enabled me to make decisions myself, to protect myself from peer pressure, and to be well prepared for upcoming challenges in my life."**

*Bethlehem Kassahun, U-GIRLS 2 participant at Bambas Secondary School, in Ethiopia. Photo: Cuso International*

Funded by Global Affairs Canada, Cuso International works in partnership with the Institute of International Education (IIE) to provide supports and break down barriers to girls' education goals.

## WHEN WOMEN ARE EMPOWERED, EVERYONE BENEFITS

**Since 2017, the armed conflict between the Cameroon Armed Forces and armed separatist groups, known as the Ambazonia War or the Cameroon Civil War, has affected Cameroon's Anglophone region.**

The ongoing violence has had catastrophic impacts on the civilian population. Many live in terror and uncertainty, almost half a million people have been either displaced or forced to migrate to neighbouring Nigeria, and thousands of lives have been claimed.



*Women receive training and resource.  
Photo: Cuso International*

This includes Theresa, who moved to Ogoja after leaving Cameroon because of the crisis.

“Money in my pocket would mean making my own decisions and not being vulnerable,” she said.

But she and her six children still faced challenges upon arriving in Nigeria. Theresa was concerned about their security and welfare, especially with no source of income or support. For a female-headed household, accessing resources, economic development, and supplies seemed unachievable. Not to mention bearing the “refugee tag” in a new country.

“It was hard to live in Nigeria despite escaping the violence in my home country,” said Theresa. She worried about generating income, especially after her husband deserted the family. “The future seemed bleak.”

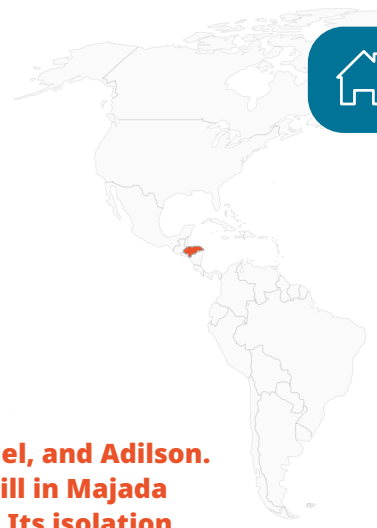
But Theresa never faltered to provide for herself and her family. She looked for opportunities and community initiatives within the refugee settlement and was selected to be a part a project by Cuso International aimed at providing 15 women an opportunity to develop skills in mushroom cultivation.

Funded by Global Affairs Canada as part of Cuso's Sharing Canadian Expertise for Inclusive Development and Gender Equality (SHARE) project, and in partnership with Atem Foundation, the mushroom cultivation project provides training and resources to marginalized women in rural communities. The initiative has helped to make markets accessible, promote environmental sustainability, and empower women in the community to be more economically independent.

For Theresa, she has a great sense of enthusiasm, passion, and determination to make the best of this opportunity. She sees this training as a support in taking her out of despondency and dependency. The support will make way for a better and brighter future for herself and her children.

As this is her first business venture, Theresa will continue to receive business development support to enhance her business scale-up and sustainability.





## HELPING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES GET THE RESOURCES THEY NEED IN RURAL HONDURAS

**The cool breeze of a warm afternoon envelops the home of brothers Oscar, Fidel, and Adilson. Surrounded by silence, they find peace. Yet their small, remote house atop a hill in Majada Verde, Talanga, Francisco Morazán, Honduras, presents significant challenges. Its isolation, coupled with the brothers' disabilities, makes accessing food and water especially difficult.**

Growing up, the brothers would rise at dawn to walk 30 minutes to school. After classes, they played football, with Oscar serving as the team's goalkeeper.

They were raised by their mother, a loving, hardworking woman, midwife, and respected community leader. Their father left when they were young. Living far from the community meant constant economic struggles and limited access to food and health services. However, driven by love and resilience, they persevered through adversity.

Their daily routine of school and household chores continued without incident—until one pivotal day when Oscar was 12. He began experiencing weakness in his legs, making it increasingly difficult to play football or climb the steep paths home. He gradually lost almost all the strength in his limbs.

Doctors ran various tests but found no clear explanation for his mysterious illness. "This is something unknown," they told the family. "We don't understand it."

Tragically, the same fate awaited Oscar's younger brothers, Fidel and Adilson. At age 12, they too developed similar symptoms, affecting their legs, arms, and hands. Unable to walk independently, they now rely on support canes to move around their small home.

Their struggles deepened in 2022 when their mother died from cardiac arrest, leaving them alone to face the harsh realities of their environment—especially the urgent need for water.

The brothers' only water source was a small well shared with neighbors. To secure even a few buckets or bottles, they had to leave home by 2:00 a.m. Given their physical limitations and water scarcity, they often couldn't store enough for cooking, washing, or bathing. At times, they had to rely on neighbors for help.

"Sometimes we would come home thirsty, wanting just a glass of water, but we couldn't manage to bring any because of how far and high up we live," Fidel recalled.

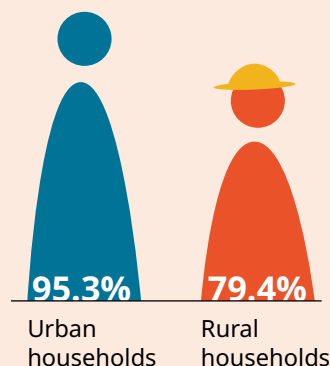


*Oscar, Fidel, and Adilson get the resources they need. Photo: Cuso International*



In **2019**

According to El Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), households in Honduras who had access to adequate water service



For the brothers, the dream of having clean drinking water seemed impossible—until Cuso International arrived in Majada Verde with a program aimed at strengthening inclusion in disaster risk reduction at regional, national, and local levels.

The program promotes inclusive risk management by offering training on family and community emergency planning and advocating with national authorities to incorporate disability considerations into their protocols.

Before long, work began to bring drinking water directly to the Amador brothers' home. Pipes, rods, and cement were sent by bus from Talanga, and within days, the installation was complete. Water finally flowed to their remote home.

“Thanks to God and Cuso International, who kept their promise, we now have water. Now I wash my face, wash my clothes, and bathe directly from the tap. I’m so grateful—you have no idea.”

“We’re happy because having water at home was a dream,” added Adilson.

Despite this achievement, the brothers still face significant challenges. Access to adequate food, improved living conditions, and essential facilities like a sturdy floor, sink, and latrine remain pressing needs. They hope these next obstacles can be overcome with the continued support of those committed to helping vulnerable and forgotten communities.

**Since 2021, Cuso International's program, funded by BMZ, has supported 87 families in Majada Verde.**



## COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM IN CUSCO: ADVANCING INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**In Cusco, community-based ecotourism has become a transformative tool for Quechua-speaking Indigenous women, who have actively participated in rural tourism projects since 2018. By developing products that are specific to their community, the women can sell these products in local markets. These initiatives not only generate income but also strengthen the autonomy, confidence, and leadership of these women within their communities and households.**

For Fortunata, the secretary of a community hotel and a mother of four, the project represents more than economic opportunity, it's about community. With the support of her husband, she has improved the hotel facilities, and her next goal is to upgrade the bathrooms to provide greater comfort for visitors. Fortunata highlights the value of working as a team, where she shares knowledge and experiences with other women in the community, creating a space for fellowship and mutual learning.

“Our group is not only a place to work, it's a place where we support each other. I feel motivated because I earn an income, and my husband supports me, especially with the tourism activities. That makes a big difference. //”



*The Quechua-speaking Indigenous women in Cusco, SHARE participants. Photo: Cuso International*

Through partnerships with Centro Bartolome de las Casas (CBC) and Cuso International, which provide supports including trainings and workshops, community tourism in the region has developed as an opportunity to promote adaptation to climate change and improve the quality of life for families.

Eustaquia Quispe, aged 71, lives with her husband and takes pride in her role in the tourism project. Alongside her peers, she not only generates income but also finds motivation and camaraderie in the work, cooking together and sharing the fruits of their labor. While most of the women are dedicated to farming and livestock, tourism provides them with additional income and a sense of purpose as they welcome visitors from different parts of the world.





Although her husband works away from home, for Libia Quispe, aged 38 and a mother of three, the income she generates from tourism helps to meet her family's basic needs, while one of her children is preparing to attend university. Her dream is for the women's group to continue growing and strengthening, achieving stability and permanence over time.

The group's president, Juanita, 48, shares how her life has changed through community tourism.

"I used to be afraid of speaking in public. But since I started working with handicrafts in Cusco, that has changed. Now I feel more confident, and thanks to community tourism, I've learned how to welcome visitors and stay organized. This work keeps me busy, gives me income, and has changed how I see life," she said.

Though she still faces challenges, such as caring for her animals, Juanita sees ecotourism as an opportunity for personal and economic stability.

"Even though I can't travel much because I have to take care of my animals, I'm happy to have a role in the group. What I value most is the space of sisterhood with my teammates: we cook together, share ideas and even complaints but we always learn from each other."

**Community-based ecotourism in Cusco not only drives the economic development of Indigenous communities but also promotes autonomy, leadership, and resilience among Indigenous women.** Through collaborative work and the support of partner organizations, these women now have the opportunity to share "authentic Peru" with the world—a country where culture, nature, and community effort come together to create responsible and sustainable rural tourism experiences.




Funded by Global Affairs Canada, the Sharing Canadian Expertise for Inclusive Development (SHARE) project is designed to enhance the economic and social well-being of underserved communities with technical assistances. Since 2020, Cuso International has implemented SHARE across ten countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, collaborating with governments, private sector stakeholder, academic institutions, and local organizations to drive sustainable development.





# SECTION 2

A woman with glasses and a wide smile is walking through a lush green forest. She is wearing a light-colored bucket hat and a dark blue polo shirt. In the background, other people are visible, some wearing hats, suggesting a group activity or hike.

## Humans of Cuso Volunteer & Alumni Features





Edith Chan, Cuso International volunteer.  
Photo: Edith Chan

## BEYOND VOLUNTEERING: EDITH CHAN'S LASTING INFLUENCE AT ABILITIES FOUNDATION

The rain poured relentlessly on the graduation tent, but nothing could dampen the spirits inside. "Do you know where you're going to? Do you like the things that life is showing you?" sang the Year 1 duet, their voices clear and hopeful. The graduating class of 42 responded in unison, hands moving gracefully in Jamaican Sign Language: "I'm not worried 'bout a thing...I know who's in control."

At its center stood Edith Chan, a Cuso International volunteer who had arrived in Jamaica as an auditor at Abilities Foundation and became the conductor of this powerful moment.

For months, Edith and the students of Abilities Foundation practiced for this day – a heartfelt send-off for the graduates of Jamaica's only vocational education institute.

**Since 1992, the Abilities Foundation has empowered people with disabilities through vocational training and providing life skills coaching. Cuso has been instrumental in its development, not only leading strategic planning in Abilities Foundation's early days but continuing its support today by sending volunteers.**

Edith played a key role at the Abilities Foundation, assisting with policies, procedures, and beyond during her one-year volunteering with the organization.

"She helped the accountant reconcile all the accounts, assisted us with our marketing and our training," said Susan Hamilton, the Executive Director of the Abilities Foundation. "But what I think stuck out most to me was her work with the students because that was never in her work plan."





As it happened, the school was looking for someone to try a music program. "I can play piano, a little guitar... maybe I can help?" Edith offered. What started as a small contribution soon became something bigger.



"I became the drumming, keyboard, and singing teacher."

"Little did I know that four months later, I would be here conducting the graduates as they belted out, 'When Jesus says yes, nobody can say no.'"

Every lunchtime, Edith coached students in piano and guitar. She organized drumming sessions with paint buckets and congas. She wrote scripts, directed performances, and rehearsed with students every single day.

"Edith made them feel like they matter," Susan said.

Beyond music, Edith trained teachers in Excel, accounting, and IT skills, empowering staff to work more efficiently. She helped streamline reports, supported social enterprises, and even assisted the school's accountant- a woman with disabilities - who gained newfound confidence.

For Abilities Foundation, Cuso volunteers like Edith are invaluable.

"We would never be able to have someone like Edith on our staff. There's just no room in the budget for that," Susan said. "Every Cuso volunteer just came with their particular skills that they supported the institution."

Edith's experience was a testament to the power of volunteering. Beyond offering expertise, volunteers like Edith brought encouragement, inspiration, and the willingness to go beyond a job description to truly connect with the people they served.

The impact didn't stop at graduation. The music program she helped launch was set to continue. The systems she had improved in accounting and administration would benefit the foundation long after she left.



For Susan Hamilton and the Abilities Foundation staff, volunteers like Edith were not just temporary contributors - **they were catalysts for lasting change.**



Cuso International's Taste of the World event celebrates International Development Week. Photo: Yohannes Ayalew from Ethiofidel

## BUILDING A BETTER WORLD TOGETHER: CUSO INTERNATIONAL CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WEEK

Cuso International's "Taste of the World" event in February celebrated International Development Week and 35 years of Canadian commitment, bringing together alumni, civil society organizations, diaspora communities, and advocates at the Centre for Social Innovation.

The gathering underscored the power of unity and the shared commitment to building a better future. "Relationships, collaboration, and partnership will be more important than ever," said Nicolas Moyer, Chief Executive Officer of Cuso International, reflecting on the path forward.

The event highlighted the significant progress Cuso has made in international development over the years, including increased access to education, improved life expectancy, and reduced disease rates. Yet, it also served as a reminder of the challenges ahead, particularly in the face of global cuts to foreign aid.

"I already knew that aid was in trouble around the world," said Nicolas. **"If we're all global citizens who believe we are making the world a better place, we have to ask ourselves how we can make sure that we will find ways to push back, preserve the spaces, and do more in this moment."**

The event also featured stories from volunteers who had worked on the frontlines of international development, showcasing the impact of Cuso's volunteer programs.

Unblind Tibbin, who had completed volunteer placements in Nigeria and Cameroon, shared his experiences. In Cameroon, he worked with a school to integrate extracurricular activities, helping students become more engaged in their education. In Nigeria, he supported youth centers that provided training for out-of-school youth, helping them develop skills for employment and entrepreneurship.





"Cuso stood out to me because of its collaborative approach," Unblind said. "We focused on learning together, integrating, and truly listening to understand before contributing."

Michelle Davis, who had volunteered in Jamaica, spoke about how her experience helped her overcome the weight of racism she faced growing up in Toronto.

"The first change I noticed in myself was that I smiled a lot more," she said. "I was in a place where everyone looked like me, from the Prime Minister to the cleaner. It lifted something off my shoulders."

Michelle's story highlights the profound personal growth that often accompanies international volunteer work, demonstrating how the exchange of knowledge and experiences benefits both volunteers and the communities they serve.

May Chow, who had recently returned from Tanzania, shared her work with the Tanzania Women's Chamber of Commerce. She spoke about meeting a remarkable woman who had brought Wi-Fi to the economic capital in the 1990s. "She taught me about Tanzania's history, economy, and the political perspectives of people in the country," May recalled. "When we got there, I understood how much impact she had on the farmers and the entire community."

**Since 1961, more than 14,000 Canadians have volunteered through Cuso, bringing their knowledge and skills to communities in Canada's North and around the world.** The program is built on meaningful partnerships, with volunteers working directly with local organizations to support locally driven solutions and long-term development.

**"You don't import change; change comes from them," Nicolas said. "Cuso is not so much about going and doing. We're about engaging and supporting."**

Cuso's work is deeply rooted in creating opportunities for underserved groups, particularly women, who often face systemic barriers to education, employment, and leadership. From supporting gender equity initiatives in Ethiopia to helping migrants in Colombia access employment, Cuso's volunteers play a vital role in driving international development.

Through its volunteer program, Cuso continues to empower communities while fostering mutual learning and lasting relationships between volunteers and the people they serve.

As the night concluded, attendees left inspired and motivated. Hamsha Pathmanathan, an alumna of Cuso International, summed up the feeling in the room: "It's always great to be surrounded by individuals who are in this field. Hearing their stories makes you feel like you can make an impact, no matter where you are."

The event served as both a celebration of how far we've come and a call to action for the work that lies ahead. It highlighted the power of partnership in driving meaningful change and underscored our shared ambition to create a more just and equitable world. As Nicolas put it, "Thinking about how we can work together to build a better world is essential. It's the very foundation of international development."





## ELIZABETH'S JOURNEY WITH CUSO INTERNATIONAL: A VOLUNTEER STORY OF IMPACT AND GROWTH

*Cuso International volunteer Elizabeth Yunga.  
Photo: Cuso International*

After retiring from a 20-year career as a gender advisor, Elizabeth Yunga didn't settle into a quiet life. Instead, she found a new calling with Cuso International (Cuso), channeling her passion for gender equality and community development into volunteer work that took her across continents - from Cameroon to Nigeria and Dominica, where she faced challenge in unexpected ways.

**Growing up in Cameroon, Elizabeth had always been driven by a desire to empower others, working with organizations like Plan International and Save the Children.** Retirement didn't dim that drive. "I like giving back to the community. It's gratifying to support people while learning from them," she said. For Elizabeth, volunteering became a way to share her expertise while immersing herself in new cultures and challenges.

Over the past year and a half, Elizabeth has embarked on three placements with Cuso. Her journey began in Nigeria, where she worked with Education as a Vaccine (EVA) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Later, she traveled to Dominica, where she spent seven months developing a gender training manual for the Ministry of Health's gender bureau.

In Dominica, Elizabeth encountered a stark reality. The Bureau of Gender Affairs, unlike the dedicated ministries she had worked with in Nigeria and Cameroon, was a small unit attached to the Ministry of Health's Social Services Department. This structure made it difficult for the bureau to advocate for gender issues at a national level, and many staff members lacked a clear understanding of gender mainstreaming. It is widely acknowledged that resistance to gender equality was palpable.



"I had to find a way to help them understand what they were going through," said Elizabeth. "So, I developed a session on change management and resistance to gender equality, which we discussed together."

But the challenges didn't end there. Dominica's gender landscape was very different from what she had encountered in Africa.

**"Gender is not the same everywhere. Coming from Africa, where there are issues like female genital mutilation, early marriages, and parents not sending their girl children to school, it is not the same in Dominica,"** said Elizabeth.

The country had a higher level of female education and fewer issues with early marriages, but gender-based violence remained a significant concern. "The staff and I had to review the scenarios in the gender training manual to reflect the reality of Dominica," Elizabeth said.

While many NGOs were actively fighting gender-based violence, Elizabeth noticed a gap: they were treating symptoms, not solving the root causes.

"This is because they need training on how to analyze a gender-based violence situation right to the root causes after ensuring the survivor is safe," she said.

In her training manual, Elizabeth encouraged staff to look beyond the immediate crisis. "We have to find out why the perpetrator is abusive, even while he is in jail," she said. By shifting the focus to include both survivor and perpetrator, Elizabeth aimed to create long-term change. "This will also help the service provider give him the necessary support to understand the implications of his actions on the whole family," she added.

For Elizabeth, volunteering with Cuso has been a deeply rewarding experience. Her manual was not only well-received by local staff but also shared with Cuso's country offices in other regions. She takes pride in knowing that her efforts, supported by Cuso, will continue to benefit communities beyond her placement.

She emphasizes the importance of commitment, patience, and flexibility for anyone considering volunteering with Cuso. "You must be committed and patient," she said. "What you expect may not be what you find on the ground, but with Cuso International's support and an open mind, you can make a real difference."

## About Cuso International

Cuso has been facilitating volunteer placements for over 62 years, sending more than 14,000 skilled professionals to over 100 countries. With placements in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Northern Canada, Cuso offers opportunities in fields such as agriculture, business development, education, gender equality, and more. Volunteers receive comprehensive training, in-country accommodation, return airfare, health insurance, and a modest living allowance.

If you're looking for a meaningful way to stay engaged and make a difference, consider volunteering with Cuso. Visit [\*\*Cuso International\*\*](https://www.cusointernational.org) to learn more about current opportunities and how you can contribute to creating a better world.





# SECTION 3

## Voices from the Field

### Partner & Community Stories

*A woman farmer, project participant, in Benin. Photo: Cuso International*





# CUSO INTERNATIONAL HOSTS PARTNERS MEETING IN GRENADA: A MILESTONE FOR CONSERVATION TRUST FUNDS



*Cuso International and partners in Grenada. Photo: Reynaldo Bernard from Unique Photography*

**From January 22-24, 2025, Cuso International convened a significant partners meeting in Grenada, gathering representatives from the conservation trust funds (CTFs) benefiting under the CORE Project.** The meeting brought together key partners from the Protected Areas Conservation Trust in Belize (PACT), the National Conservation Trust Fund of Jamaica (NCTFJ), the Green Heritage Fund of Suriname (GHF), the Protected Areas Trust of Guyana (GPAT), the Dominica National Conservation Trust Fund (DNCTF), the Grenada Sustainable Development Trust Fund (GSDTF), and the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Trust Fund (SVGTF). This marked the first in-person gathering of all partners and Cuso International in-country project support officers since the inception of the project.

The workshop served as an essential platform for knowledge exchange, fostering collaboration among the National Conservation Trust Funds (NCTFs). A notable highlight was a training session on Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL), led by Cuso Volunteer Magdelene Cooman based in St. Lucia on the BluePrints for Equality Project also being implemented by Cuso International. The training was very well received, as the NCTFs recognized the potential benefits of applying these methodologies to enhance their own operations.

In addition to the training, participants embarked on a field trip to Morne Gazo, where the Grenada Sustainable Development Trust Fund showcased their ongoing work with local partners. The visit provided a firsthand view of conservation efforts on the ground. The event also featured a special ceremony highlighting the Trust Fund's work with a local women's group, focused on advancing gender mainstreaming within their conservation initiatives.

The meeting saw active participation from the Cuso International team and the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund (CBF), contributing to the overall success and sense of fulfillment at the event. This gathering not only strengthened partnerships but also underscored the shared commitment to sustainable development, conservation and gender mainstreaming in the region.



# ST. LUCIA: EMPOWERING GIRLS BY SUPPORTING THEIR OWN ENTREPRENEURSHIP JOURNEY

International Women's Day is a time to reflect on the progress made in women's fight for equality and celebrating women and girls and their achievements, while also highlighting the ongoing efforts still needed.

**This includes St. Joseph's Convent, an all-girls school in Castries, St. Lucia, that holds an economic fair in celebration of International Women's Day. The fair gives students an opportunity to showcase and market their own businesses not only to fellow students, but to students at other schools and the community at large.**

Last year, Cuso International helped support the school with the event, with breakfast and lunches for the students on the day of the fair, a sound system, and marketing ahead of the event. Although the school had held the event previously, the added support was noticeable.

"Cuso really helped us to do a lot of marketing. That we were not able to do on our own and then we found that a lot more people benefitted from the fair," said Lynn Paul, coordinator at St. Joseph's Convent. "The participation was far greater than in the past and it is because of the marketing. We would not have been able to afford it, so Cuso really was critical to the success of that."

Students from other schools, community members, and some government ministers attend the successful event, which showcased 40 entrepreneurs.

"It gave me a lot of money, and it gave me the chance to learn what a real entrepreneur does. It helped me to figure out where I'd like to go in life, if that is an option, because now I have some experience with that," said one entrepreneur who sold baked goods. "It took a lot of effort, but it was very successful."

Leading up to the activity, the students also went through a two-day training on entrepreneurship, including how to present their products and what is expected of an entrepreneur.

The day not only provided an opportunity for students to learn how to run their own businesses, such as marketing their product, it was also an opportunity to encourage empowerment for the students and the women and girls in the community.

"In St. Lucia we have a lot of women with skills, and they do not know how to go about marketing their skills, they do not know how to go about showcasing their skills, and when they see our children, our students, they see the level our students are at, it motivates them," Lynn explained.



"Having this showcase, persons know about it, they come, they don't just come to see the products and purchase the products, it also motivates them, especially those who are unemployed, to try – 'I can do that as well.'"

A school with high-performing students, people often associate the school for academics in the study of physics, chemistry and biology. The fair is also a great opportunity for people to recognize a more complete picture of what the school offers, such as a focus on the arts.

Even down to the design of the T-shirts and banners that Cuso sponsored, students were involved in putting the fair together.

**"The students were the ones who put together everything. It was amazing. So, when you talk about girl empowerment it was a very good example of a girl empowerment program."**



# CAPACITY BUILDING REALIZED: A REWARDING SURPRISE!

Beverley Corinaldi, Cuso International volunteer

**At our first training workshop in St Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG), Julia from the Division of Gender Affairs was not open to even introducing herself during the roundtable introductions. She indicated being shy and introverted. Her colleague, Hannah, while also indicating being shy and introverted, opened at the introductory phase, actively participated in the group discussions and presented at plenary.**

For our second training workshop four months later, what a pleasant surprise having asked both Julia and Hannah if they could consider co-facilitating segments of the day's proceedings with me and was greeted with positive enthusiasm from each!

I spent some time briefing/coaching them on firstly co-facilitating an icebreaker game of "Whom am I", giving clues for the participants to identify who was that Caribbean leader. Julia and Hannah took turns in reading out a set of accomplishments of Caribbean women and men, issuing additional clues, where necessary and guided participants to indicate who these accomplishments were referring to.

While some participants could easily associate the accomplishments with the past Governor General of SVG and with those of the current Prime Minister, where participants had difficulty identifying, Julia and Hannah added probes to further engage participants. The two co-facilitators incorporated suspense, excitement and comradeship in guiding participants to "solve the mystery".

The exercise in co-facilitation with high-level engagement of the participants was beyond excellence prompting the opportunity to have them further co-facilitate other aspects of the day's proceedings.

Encouraged by the way in which they engaged participants, worked together, and especially witnessing Julia's interaction with the material and with the participants, they co-facilitated the True-False questions, an exercise to keep the participants engaged, while imparting facts to sensitize on gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

Having witnessed the blossoming of the earlier shy and introverted Julia into an engaging and captivating co-facilitator, I had to build on the level demonstrated by coaching them on some of the technical aspects and obtaining their agreement to continue co-facilitating. We resurrected a slide presented at the earlier training workshop that explains the term equity and equality presented in the form of graphics. Julia expertly led the discussion around the need for equity measures and interventions to support achieving of equality. Levels of equality (formal versus substantive) were explained, noting the objective of gender mainstreaming and gender equality initiatives and interventions sought to achieve substantive equality in the longer term.

**“ Julia expertly led the discussion around the need for equity measures and interventions to support achieving equality. ”**





Not wanting to be left out of the opportunity to also co-facilitate during this segment, Hannah offered to put forward an approach she had learned from the Director of Gender Affairs to understanding equity versus equality using the different sizes of shoes for different people. This too was well-received by participants!

The Cuso International volunteer with legal background provided a detailed explanation of substantive equality towards achieving gender equality and the role of equity in supporting progress to equality.

Before ending of the day's proceedings, Julia asked to facilitate a trivia session with questions she, herself, developed during the afternoon break. Some of the trivia questions were from the earlier icebreaker Julia and Hannah co-facilitated in the morning session, while others were newly created ones. This topped off a learning session of imparting facts and sensitization on gender mainstreaming and gender equality to public servants and community representatives, while also building the capacity of the Division of Gender Affairs staff to facilitate gender equality concepts.



*Beverley Corinaldi, Cuso International volunteer.  
Photo: Beverley Corinaldi*





# SECTION 4

## Deep Dive Thematic Features



**When you volunteer with Cuso International, you are heading out on a journey that has been well-perfected through decades of experience.**

## APPLY

The journey begins before a volunteer even thinks about applying. Our in-country staff work hard, together with each partner organization, to determine how volunteers could best support those organizations and in turn, how the placement could also benefit the volunteer.

From there, the job description is posted, and people start applying. Our Global Talent Advisors will do a pre-screening of all applicants. At this stage, when someone is declined, it's usually because of residency, they don't have enough experience, or the role needs a university degree. But the great part is anyone can apply again in the future.

## ▶ INTERVIEW

In the next stage, potential volunteers will go through the panel interview process, which includes questions that focus on the six-dimensions that our team has determined make an excellent volunteer: Positive and Realistic Commitment, Commitment to Learning, Flexibility and Adaptability, Self-Assurance, Working with Others, and Sensitivity to the Needs of Others. Our in-country staff also participate in the panel interviews, which sometimes include someone from the partner organization the volunteer would be working with.

## ▶ BECOME A VOLUNTEER

Once accepted as a Cuso volunteer, they need to get a medical clearance, any necessary vaccines, and references need to be submitted. They also take part in a 3-day training known as SKWID (Skills and Knowledge for Working in Development). It is around this time that Charlene Armstrong, Cuso's Senior Advisor for Global Safety and Travel, will work with the volunteer if an entry visa is needed and to get their flights sorted.



*Sandra Ngondji and Laurence Kangne, two Cuso International volunteers. Photo: Yann YAP*





## IN THE COUNTRY

Once in their placement country, volunteers will go through orientation – typically with other volunteers starting at the same time. Although there is a fairly set agenda across all placements, different countries will add different things. For instance, in Tanzania, volunteers will do an intro to Swahili course.

“While many people there speak English, the national language is Swahili. For them to have that basic knowledge and understanding makes it so much easier for the volunteer to fit into their community or with their partner organizations,” said Charlene. “Just to even go in and be able to say, ‘How are you?’ in a local language is so important.”



*Cuso International volunteer Christopher Popowycz with program participant Zulma Carolina Galeano Osorio. Photo: Quioney*



A volunteer’s safety and security are at the forefront throughout the entire journey. **Risk assessments are done for every location Cuso volunteers are working in, not just the country.** These assessments cover a range of topics, including politics, infrastructure, level of harassment someone might encounter, acceptance of LGBTQIA+, natural disasters, and much more. **Country Security Plans** are also made that detail all the steps to be taken for a wide variety of emergencies. Information like who is responsible for what, who at the Canada office is responsible for things, and who should they be in touch with are included.

There are also **contingency plans**, and these are preparation or a response to anything outside of the day-to-day. Upcoming elections and an increase in violence and unrest in areas, for example, and much more.



*AGAPE Knowledge Open School (AKOS) program in Tanzania. Photo: Cuso International*

## VOLUNTEER’S RETURN

When a volunteer returns, they go through what is known as **reintegration**. Offered multiple times a year in English and French, volunteers are invited to speak about all aspects of their placement – the good and the bad – their experience coming back to Canada, and what they see themselves doing in the future in development. It’s also a space for them to connect with other volunteers and allows for a sense of closure.

The journey of a Cuso volunteer goes beyond their placement. From sending Christmas cards and email check-ins, to phone calls decades after their time volunteering with Cuso, **being a Cuso alumni** means belonging to something more.

“It’s just so beautiful to see how they’ve evolved in their time with Cuso and how much being a member of Cuso, an alumnus of Cuso, means to them,” said Charlene. “I love that about the journey and the fact that people feel like they belong to something after they’ve gone through it.”







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







# Your Turn Action & Engagement

**Are you a Canadian ready to use your skills for meaningful change globally? Volunteer with Cuso International and become part of a global movement driven by people helping people.**

As a Cuso volunteer, you'll work alongside local colleagues and partners to contribute to long-term, sustainable development in communities across Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada's North.

You will also gain valuable work and personal experiences by applying your knowledge to real-world challenges, expanding your global network, developing cross-cultural understanding, and acquiring new skills.

**Cuso also supports you every step of the way.** We offer travel, housing, insurance, modest living allowance, comprehensive pre-departure training, in-country support, and re-integration assistance.

There are three ways to get involved: volunteer internationally, e-volunteer from home, or work in remote northern communities in Canada. Each pathway allows you to create meaningful impact in a way that fits your life.

## Did you know?

Cuso International has three different volunteer programs:

### 1 Canadian volunteers

A volunteer living in Canada

### 2 National volunteers

A volunteer from the country they are volunteering in

### 3 South-south volunteers

A volunteer in the global south going to a different country we work in

## START YOUR VOLUNTEER JOURNEY TODAY!

[Learn more about volunteering with cuso international](#) ▶





# SECTION 5

## Innovate + Inspire Future-Facing Ideas





# EMBRACING THE UNEXPECTED: MY VOLUNTEER JOURNEY IN SURINAME

By Marc Pryce - a CORE Project Volunteer

Three weeks before boarding my flight to Suriname, I packed my suitcase with a mixture of excitement and uncertainty. This would be my first time traveling to a country I knew very little about—and my first long-term stay away from home. Unlike a vacation to New York, this journey was a leap into the unknown.

My route took me through St. Maarten and an overnight in Trinidad and Tobago before finally landing in Suriname. As the plane touched down, excitement bubbled up inside me. I couldn't wait to experience the culture, the people, and a whole new way of life.

I was greeted at the airport by my In-Country Project Support Officer, Adley – a native of Suriname, whose warm smile instantly made me feel welcome. Along with Gio, the taxi driver who would help me navigate my first week, they became my first connection to this new world.

Driving into Paramaribo, I was struck by the country's natural beauty, contrasted by signs of poverty. It was puzzling—how could a country rich in gold, oil, and rainforests face such economic hardship? I soon realized that like many places, Suriname is a land of contrasts.

The first week was filled with orientation, training sessions, and learning about the local culture and context; all arranged by Cuso International to assist with the transition. But it was through daily interactions with the people that I began to understand Suriname on a deeper level. The generosity and warmth of the Surinamese, especially those born here, left a lasting impression. Whether giving directions or simply offering a kind word, they made me feel at home.

My first Saturday was unforgettable. Adley and Gio took me on a walking tour of Paramaribo, where history and culture came alive. Later, we visited Cola Creek, a popular local spot known for its black water and natural setting. I sampled local foods and observed a unique cultural trait—nearly everyone in Suriname knows how to swim, which perhaps explains why the country's only Olympic medal is in swimming.

The following day, I joined the Green Heritage Fund Suriname for a dolphin monitoring trip on the Suriname River. It was a powerful reminder of the country's rich biodiversity and the importance of environmental preservation.

I was also fortunate to witness Holika Dahan, the eve of Phagwa (Holi). Watching the symbolic pyre burn, I learned about the celebration's meaning — the triumph of good over evil. The next day, I joined in the Phagwa festivities, a vibrant, joyful explosion of colors, music, and unity. It was heartwarming to see people of all backgrounds celebrating together in harmony.

**So far, this journey has been incredibly rewarding — filled with personal growth, cultural discovery, and unforgettable experiences. It has taught me life lessons I may never learn anywhere else. I look forward to the rest of my journey and encourage others to volunteer with Cuso!**





# CUSO INTERNATIONAL LAUNCHES RENEWED WOMEN'S VOICE AND LEADERSHIP PROJECT IN TANZANIA TO EMPOWER WOMEN AND YOUTH

**Cuso International is proud to announce the official launch of its RWVL (Renewed Women's Voice and Leadership) Tanzania project, dedicated to promoting the rights, empowerment, and inclusion of women, young women, and other equity-deserving groups across Tanzania.**

The RWVL Tanzania initiative aims to strengthen the capacities of local organizations and community leaders to advocate for gender equity, economic independence, and social justice. At its core, this 5 year project seeks to build resilient communities by supporting equitable opportunities, leadership development, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

This initiative aligns closely with Canada's recent announcement of significant international assistance aimed at advancing gender equity globally. On March 8, 2025, Canada's government reiterated its commitment by announcing funding of over \$193 million for 20 projects worldwide, reflecting a long-standing dedication to protecting and empowering women and girls in all their diversity.

Amid growing global disruptions, empowering women and youth is critical to building sustainable, equitable societies. Cuso's RWVL Tanzania project is an essential part of this broader global effort.

**For more detailed information on RWVL Tanzania and other active projects, [visit our website](#) ▶**



*Participants of the Kizimba Business Model in Tanzania. Photo: Pevil Albert*



# SECTION 6

**Where Are  
They Now?  
Alumni Updates**





## FROM SIERRA LEONE TO THE STAGE: A GLOBAL HEALTH LEADER REFLECTS

**For Cuso International alumni Nancy Edwards, global health isn't just a profession it's been a lifelong mission shaped by lived experience.**

Volunteering with Cuso in Sierra Leone from 1978-81, Nancy worked as a community health nurse, teaching classes and supervising student's field work in an innovative primary health care program.

**"It was a life-altering experience. I learned immensely from the nursing students, villagers, traditional birth attendants, Chiefs, and other health workers,"** said Nancy. "I have carried this learning with me in both my personal life and my career."

That experience laid the foundation for decades of leadership. When Nancy took her first academic post in 1984, she brought a deep global health perspective into her work. "I brought the community health experiences I had learned in Sierra Leone to other settings including Pakistan, the People's Republic of China, and Jamaica; and to my community health work in Canada," she said.

"It was both a privilege and a humbling experience to return to the African continent in the latter stages of my research career to co-lead research studies in several countries on nursing and HIV and AIDS."

Nancy is a distinguished professor and Professor Emerita at the University of Ottawa, where she was the director of the Community Health Research Unit from 1994-2009, and the director of the Population Health PhD program from 2000-2002 and 2015-2016. Among many of her accomplishments, she has three honorary doctoral degrees and has received numerous awards.

*Cuso International alumni Nancy Edwards performs her play.  
Photo: Nancy Edwards*





Now, she is on a new journey. Nancy has written *Rethinking Good Intentions*, a story-telling play largely based on her memoir **Not One, Not Even One: A Memoir of Life Altering Experiences in Sierra Leone, West Africa.**



"I thought the play would reach both a wider and perhaps a different audience than the memoir. I was introduced to popular theatre in Sierra Leone where I experienced the strengths of oral traditions and storytelling. A play seemed such an appropriate way to share some of my experiences in the West African country," she said.

**"I realized that a play could be used to provoke discussion among students interested in international development and/or global health in a different way than the traditional readings students are assigned in a course."**



*Cuso International alumni Nancy Edwards while volunteering in Sierra Leone. Photos: Nancy Edwards*

In 2024, Nancy performed the play at five fringe festivals that summer, as well as for other audiences including three universities. Some universities hosted post-performance panels where participants shared reflections and engaged in meaningful discussions. At Trent University, Nancy met with nursing students preparing for international clinical placements. Viewing the performance online, students were able to virtually share their reflections and have in-depth discussions.

This summer, she will be performing the play at the Conference for the Canadian Association of African Studies in June and at the Victoria Fringe Festival in August, with ongoing discussions about other possible performances.

To learn more, visit **[Nancy's website and the "play" page.](#)**





# 80 YEARS YOUNG, STILL GIVING BACK: HOW A CUSO ALUMNI TURNED HER BIRTHDAY INTO A FUN FUNDRAISER

**Barbara Moore looks back on her experience as a Cuso International volunteer in Ghana (1968–1970) and how she's still giving back.**



*Barbara in Ghana, summer 1969.  
Photo: Nancy Jones Seppala.*

## **Let's start from the beginning. How did your journey with Cuso begin?**

Oh, it goes back quite a way. I was 16 when Cuso was founded in 1961. That same year, I won a public speaking contest and received a book about Albert Schweitzer, the doctor and humanitarian who worked in Africa. That book, along with my parents' values, planted the seed. My father was a social worker, and both my parents were pretty tuned in to progressive ideas. By university in the 60s, which was such a politically charged time, I started seeing posters about Cuso on campus. Between civil rights, the Vietnam War, African independences, and student protests, it felt like the world was turning. And Cuso felt like a real way to be part of something positive to use my BA in English and sociology for something meaningful, maybe even make a difference. It was also a chance to have an adventure.

## **And where did Cuso send you?**

Ghana, my first choice actually, so I was lucky. I was posted to a small village called Peki in the Volta Region. I had no teaching certificate, but we had six weeks of training in London, Ontario, including a crash course in classroom skills. I wasn't exactly a natural at it, but I found I enjoyed teaching more than I expected. That first night in Peki, alone in a cinder block house with no running water and unfamiliar sounds outside, I wrote to my parents and said, "If you could see me now, you'd ask whether I was brave or just a bloody fool!" (laughs)

## **What was that experience like overall?**

Challenging. Inspiring. Life-changing. I was the only white woman in the village that first year, and the cultural adjustment was steep. But I made deep connections, some that lasted decades. My students worked on their families' farms on weekends. They understood the land and life cycles in a way I'd never seen. That stayed with me. And then there were the adventures. In the summer of '69, a group of us hitchhiked around West Africa. We just took off and hoped for the best. And we were fine! Most people were so generous. It was a different time.



### Sounds like it shaped you profoundly.

Oh, absolutely. When I returned to Canada, I didn't feel like I quite fit in anymore. I'd changed. Eventually, I returned to Nigeria as field staff for Cuso. In total, I spent about 13 years involved with the organization, in the field, in Ottawa, in various roles. Later, my husband and I decided to live what I called a more "elemental life," growing food and living in community. We bought land with others and tried to live simply, with purpose. That path, I believe, came from what I experienced in Ghana.

### And decades later, you decided to support Cuso again... on Facebook!

(laughs) Yes! Facebook suggested I could dedicate my birthday to a cause and it just made sense to choose Cuso. My daughter was visiting and helped me. It was simple, meaningful, and felt like a great way to reconnect with people and the values that have shaped me. I've supported Cuso on and off over the years depending on where I was in life. But this was different; it was public and celebratory. Other alumni could do it too. It's a great way to keep giving back, even if you're not in the field anymore.

### Any advice for other alumni or for the younger generation?

The issues haven't changed that much. But the tools we have to tackle them have. It's easy to feel overwhelmed today. But you can make a difference. You don't have to save the world, you just have to show up and do what you can.

### What are your hopes for Cuso in the next 50 years?

That it keeps adapting but stays true to its core: mutual exchange, learning, and service. The need hasn't gone away. If anything, it's evolved. There are always going to be people who want to help, and others who want to learn. Cuso provides a powerful space for both. I just hope it keeps reaching out to new generations and giving them what it gave me: a sense of purpose, adventure, and deep connection.

### Thank you so much, Barbara. Any final words?

**Just don't underestimate the power of small acts. Whether it's volunteering, starting a fundraiser, or just being open to learning from others, it matters. You will change, and you will make a difference. And that's really the point, isn't it?**

## Want to organize a fundraising event for Cuso?

For ideas, tools, and support, [click here](#).







# SECTION 7

**Lives Well  
Lived**



**In this section, we pause to honor the memory of those who have left us—volunteers, staff members, and friends whose lives were deeply intertwined with Cuso International's mission. These remarkable individuals carried our shared values of service, compassion, and global solidarity into communities around the world, leaving lasting impacts that continue to inspire us today.**

Their stories remind us that behind every development project, every partnership, and every moment of positive change, there are real people who chose to dedicate their time, skills, and hearts to building a more equitable world. While we mourn their passing, we celebrate the legacy they've left—not just in the communities they served, but in the lives they touched and the example they set for all of us.

Their commitment to service lives on in the work we continue to do, and their memory serves as a guiding light for future generations of volunteers and development practitioners.

### **Jennifer Mitton**

On May 13, Jennifer Mitton passed away peacefully in her home. Jennifer volunteered with Cuso International in Nigeria from 1984 to 1986.

Among her many achievements, Jennifer was the editor of a newspaper she published and circulated a couple of times a year. The cover of the newspaper always had her own original drawing.

### **Ozzie Schmidt**

On May 25, Ozzie Schmidt passed away. Ozzie's involvement with Cuso goes back to the 1960s and includes working at the Botswana field office and at the board level.

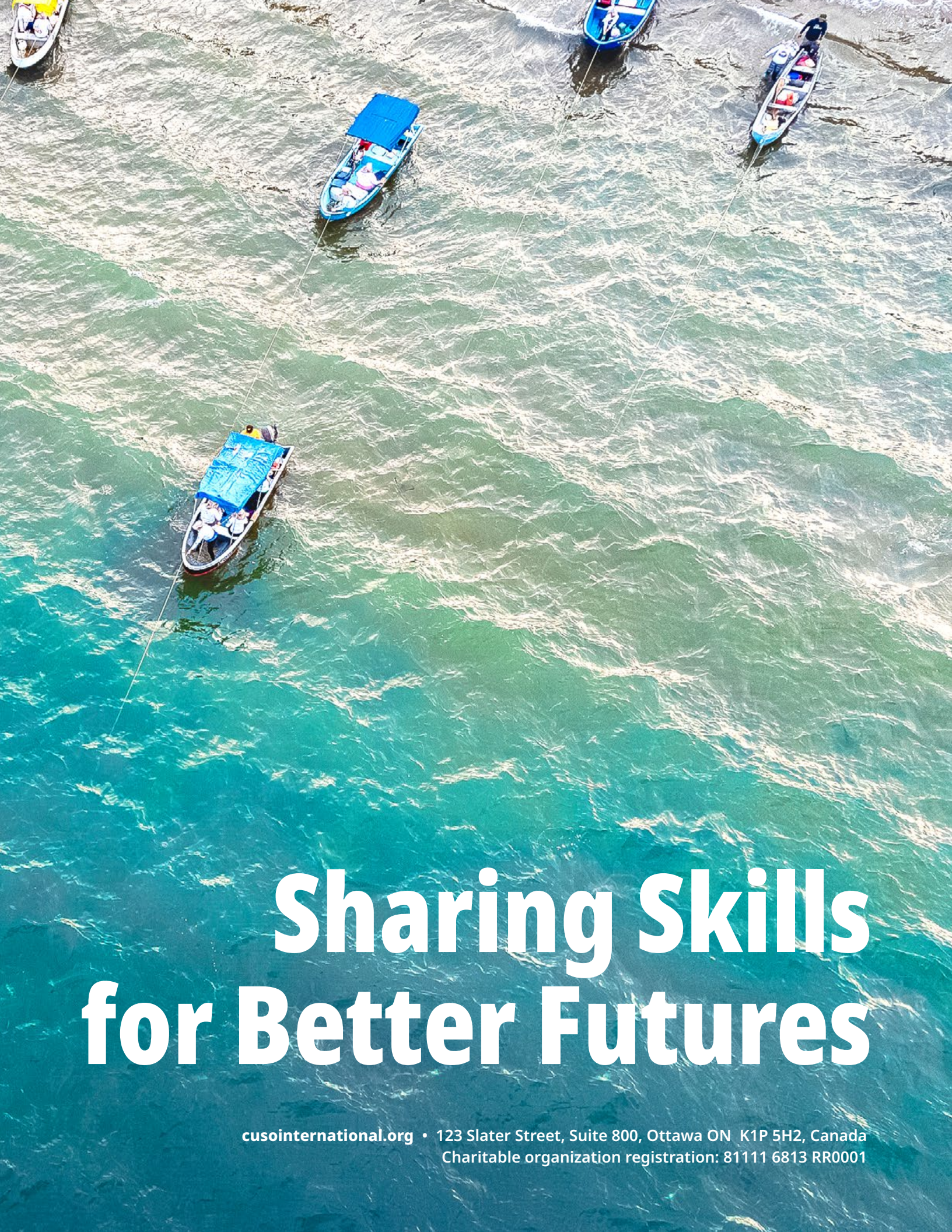
### **Barbara Johnson**

On May 2, Barbara Johnson died of cancer at age 79. Barbara volunteered with Cuso International multiple times, including in Colombia and Chile.

### **Michael J. Murphy**

On February 8, Michael J Murphy died in his bed in Saskatoon. Cuso International volunteer in Zambia from 1969-1972, before working as a field officer in Zambia then Malawi. Michael went on to work as Cuso's regional director for East Central and Southern Africa for two years.





# Sharing Skills for Better Futures

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Sharing Skills  
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