



# DIASPORA VOLUNTEERING

**“WE WANT TO GIVE BACK, TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN, TO REPAY THE INVESTMENT THEY MADE IN US.”**

## OUR APPROACH

The Cuso International Diaspora Volunteering Program aims to support and promote the mobilization of diaspora communities to actively contribute – through volunteering – to the fight against poverty and disadvantage in their countries of heritage or origin.

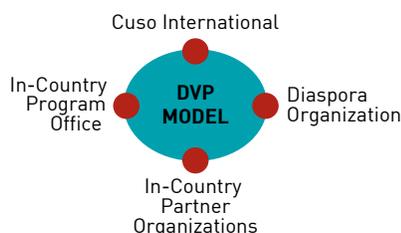
Through the DVP, Cuso International:

- Engages members of the diaspora to offer professional support in their countries of heritage through our programs;
- Builds a reliable network of volunteers and diaspora-serving organizations to help develop an effective approach to diaspora volunteering;
- Promotes the value of volunteering within diaspora communities in North America.

The Cuso International DVP responds to the priorities of our in-country programs and in-country partner organizations. Volunteer placements are developed by our local partners, and reflect the needs of the organizations in which the volunteers will be placed.

Our approach to diaspora engagement focuses on the placement of individual volunteers, as well as developing links between diaspora-serving organizations in North America and local partner organizations in their countries of heritage. Through partnerships, we can accomplish our goal of providing dynamic volunteerism opportunities to developing countries while supporting our partners’ outreach efforts.

### CUSO INTERNATIONAL DIASPORA VOLUNTEERING PARTNERSHIP MODEL



## WHAT IS DIASPORA VOLUNTEERING?

The Cuso International Diaspora Volunteering Program (DVP) provides diaspora communities with the opportunity to volunteer and contribute to development initiatives in their country of heritage. We recruit members of various diaspora groups who have the professional skills, hands-on knowledge and perspectives needed to work in solidarity with our partner organizations to reduce poverty, share skills and change lives.

Cuso International also works with many diaspora communities in North America on international development efforts beyond overseas volunteering. These communities have much to contribute to awareness-raising and the mobilizing of action for global development.

For Cuso International the term ‘diaspora’ has a diverse and dynamic meaning. Our programs reflect – and are shaped by – the diversity of the people that define the many diaspora communities in Canada and the United States.

## WHY DIASPORA VOLUNTEERING?

At Cuso International we recognize that the migration of many skilled professionals out of developing countries can be an obstacle to a nation’s development. This so-called “brain drain” often means that countries are left with skill shortages in essential sectors such as health and education. Linking diaspora communities to their countries of origin or heritage through volunteering, resource-sharing and skills transfer can offer much needed expertise.

Support from many diasporas for global development is nothing new – there is a strong history of communities supporting a range of initiatives in their countries of heritage. Diaspora communities possess critical cultural knowledge, as well as education and expertise needed in their home countries, and they play an invaluable role in social and economic development.

## CURRENT INITIATIVES

Cuso International is currently partnering with three diaspora communities in Canada, and is working to develop partnerships with additional diaspora organizations in North America.

### ETHIOPIAN DIASPORA

Since 2007, Cuso International has been working with an Ethiopian-Canadian organization called Association for Higher Education and Development (AHEAD), based in Ottawa. AHEAD is a non-profit organization dedicated to facilitating institutional capacity development in Ethiopia through mobilizing resources and expertise available within the Ethiopian Diaspora in Canada. The partnership between AHEAD, Cuso International and VSO Ethiopia is based upon a commitment to shared development objectives and goals, including engaging diaspora communities as full-fledged partners in the fight against poverty in their home country. We are also developing new partnerships with other Ethiopian Diaspora groups across North America.

### RWANDAN DIASPORA

Cuso International has recently launched a DVP with the Rwandan Diaspora in Canada, looking at how diaspora volunteers can support the aims of our education program. Cuso International and VSO Rwanda are working in partnership with the Directorate General of Diaspora, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and the Rwandan Diaspora Global Network based in Kigali and throughout the world. The goal is to increase the overall impact of volunteering in Rwanda by recruiting Rwandans living overseas to return to the country for short or long periods to undertake specific volunteer placements.

### GUYANESE DIASPORA

Cuso International partnered with the Canada-Guyana Teacher Education Project (CGTEP) as its main partner, as well as provided limited technical support to the St. Stanislaus College Alumni Association Toronto (SSCAAT) and the Guyana Burn and Healthcare Charitable Foundation (GBHF). Efforts are being made to explore new partnerships with similar Guyanese organizations to continue work in the future.

## FUTURE PLANS

The opportunities to connect with diaspora communities in North America are promising and diverse. Cuso International is currently exploring opportunities to engage with additional diaspora communities in both Canada and the United States. Feasibility studies have been completed for Thailand/Burma, Jamaica, Ethiopia, El Salvador, and Rwanda. In addition, a Nigerian and Cameroonian Diaspora Volunteering Program may be an exciting opportunity for Cuso International.

The Cuso International DVP has great potential to become an effective strategy to mitigate the negative effects of lost skilled professionals in the countries in which we work. We are committed to growing this program to meet the ever-increasing demand for skilled professional volunteers who can contribute to our development programs overseas.



## VOLUNTEER PROFILE: SOLOMON BELAY

Solomon Belay spent almost six months in Ethiopia in 2010. He didn't go for vacation or to visit family, but was motivated by a desire to contribute to the development of his country of origin.

A PhD candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, Solomon shared his skills in curriculum development and instruction with the Medical Education Unit of the College of Health Science, Addis Ababa University. He worked with colleagues to develop curriculum and improve the teaching skills of the faculty. Solomon went to Ethiopia with a desire to make a positive difference in the country he grew up in – he felt a need to give back. “We are more obliged to contribute to the development of our countries of origin, to repay the investment they made in us,” he says.

Solomon's achievements went far beyond the formal work he had been assigned to do. He also contributed to other projects including providing teacher training at a school for marginalized children. “I did so much more than what a non-diaspora volunteer could have done. I knew the language, the mentality, how to handle the bureaucracy,” he says. “No matter what the challenges were, it was highly satisfying. Through volunteering you enrich your professional skills, you gain new friends, and you view life from a different angle.”

## ABOUT CUSO INTERNATIONAL

Cuso International is an international development organization that works through volunteers. We have 50 years of experience promoting volunteering as a tool to fight global poverty and disadvantage. By supporting people who share their skills, creativity and learning with people and communities around the world, we are contributing to a movement of volunteers for the world. Visit [www.cusointernational.org](http://www.cusointernational.org) for more information.



Program undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)