



WUSC AND CECI WELCOMES CANADA'S INTEREST TO DEVELOP A YOUTH SERVICE INITIATIVE.

We understand that this initiative includes both domestic and international components. We have participated in the related consultations organized by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) on August 18th and 19th, and value the inclusion of youth voices in this discussion.

WHO WE ARE

World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) are uniquely Canadian organizations, longstanding development partners of the Government of Canada, and leading practitioners of volunteering for development and of youth engagement and empowerment. In 2004, WUSC and CECI formed a consortium for the Uniterra program, currently being funded by Global Affairs Canada under the Volunteer Cooperation Program¹.

This venture draws upon best practices and innovations in international volunteering, including a number of streams dedicated to offering overseas development opportunities to Canadian youth in a structured results-oriented framework. WUSC and CECI work in developing countries, including several member states of the Francophonie, where our programming aligns with the 2015-2022 Youth Strategy of the Francophonie² approved in Dakar (November 2014).

1. For more information on the Uniterra program, our approach and countries of focus please visit: Uniterra.ca

2. Stratégie jeunesse de la Francophonie 2015-2022, XVe Conférence des chefs d'État et de gouvernement des pays ayant le français en partage Dakar (Sénégal), les 29 et 30 novembre

WUSC seeks to create a world in which all young people can grow up in safe, secure, and supportive environments, and where they can learn, work, and play a vital role in their country's development. WUSC's programming in Canada and in over 25 countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas aims to encourage civic engagement through leadership and life skills opportunities for youth in Canada and internationally. In all our work, WUSC promotes youth inclusion and youth empowerment as a cross-cutting measure. Contributing to this, is a dedicated youth network in Canada that is comprised of 80 student groups and more than 1050 volunteers on Canada's university, college and cégep campuses.

CECI's mission is to combat poverty and exclusion by strengthening the development capacities of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations including youth and women in 20 countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas. Youth and more specifically young women are at the heart of CECI's sustainable economic development; agriculture and food security; humanitarian aid and human security, and gender equality interventions. Globally, CECI's youth-centered approach aims at anchoring young women and men in their communities and countries by engaging them in the creation of both economic and social opportunities as well as safe and secure environments in which they can fully exercise their rights.

- ▶ For over 65 years, the Uniterra **International Seminar** has offered Canadian students and young professionals a unique experience to exchange and share knowledge across cultures. First initiated by WUSC in 1948, the International Seminar connects youth across regions of the world to collaborate on an impact-driven research project linked to local organizations overseas.
- ▶ Since 2014, a **Youth Leaders in Entrepreneurship** Seminar brings together young social innovators and entrepreneurs from Canada and overseas to build their skills, develop their networks and grow their businesses. This youth-driven initiative (planned, managed and facilitated by youth) enables youth to identify common barriers, and build reciprocal solutions that transcends borders.
- ▶ The **Students Without Borders® (SWB)** program offers work placement opportunities to many youth to contribute to global development efforts overseas. Students and recent

graduates are recruited from over 15 university or colleges across Canada to work with local partner organizations in a professional capacity for 3 to 12 months. Many interns fulfill co-op placement requirements or receive academic credits towards their degree or diploma. This initiative was initially piloted in 2005 and has quickly expanded. On average, SWB places 100 youth volunteers in 15+ countries per year.

- ▶ **Quebec without Borders**, implemented by CECI and funded by the Ministère des Relations internationales et de la Francophonie (MRIF), offers young Quebecers the opportunity to take part in international solidarity group internships in Africa and Latin America. The program creates solid partnerships and builds long-lasting ties between Canada and Overseas countries.
- ▶ Since 1978, WUSC's **Student Refugee Program (SRP)** has enabled student refugees to resettle to and pursue their studies at universities, colleges and cégeps across Canada. Using a unique model of youth-to-youth sponsorship, students across Canada are provided an opportunity to connect with those from refugee contexts. Sponsored students are provided not only with financial support, but with academic and social support for a minimum of 12 months upon arrival to Canada. The SRP students, in turn, teach young Canadians about the realities of life in diverse contexts of forced migration, broadening their perspective on the world. This motivates students to raise awareness on their campus and in their community of the challenges facing millions of refugee youth, and other development issues overseas.
- ▶ The thousands of youth contributing to WUSC and CECI's work, in Canada and overseas, amplify their impact through **public engagement** activities. Student volunteers belonging to WUSC student groups, and Uniterra volunteers returned from overseas, raise awareness on humanitarian and international development issues by engaging with their communities, the media, online publications, experts, and private sector actors. With support from WUSC and CECI, they coordinate events, such as the cross-Canada Uniterra Symposia Series, and participate in events like the WUSC-CECI International Forum, where collaboration and creativity are critical components in their wide reach.

BASED ON OUR EXPERIENCES AND LEARNING, WE OFFER THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING CANADA'S DEVELOPMENT OF A YOUTH SERVICE INITIATIVE

1. **Rename to Youth Leadership Initiative**

The proposed initiative should be renamed to instigate youth to participate in a youth service initiative. A Youth Leadership Initiative would better reflect the co-development and collaborative dimensions that bring Canadian youth and youth overseas together to tackle development issues. As a Leadership Initiative, this program would foster youth to become development change agents, business leaders, social innovators and active global citizens in Canada and overseas. Relevant leadership training, coaching and mentorship should be made available to youth so they can become these leaders.

2. **Foster youth reciprocity**

It is important to develop an initiative that fosters reciprocal learning relationships between youth and youth-led organizations. Empowering youth, youth working with youth for youth, is central. Both in Canada and overseas, youth are not only beneficiaries or recipients of services, but important actors, decision-makers, and contributors to the building of responsive and sustainable solutions to the challenges of global development. A flexible funding mechanism that offers South-South, North-South, and South-North models of service, learning and exchange is recommended.

3. **Promote feminist values**

This initiative should not be limiting itself to a specific sector, but it should be used as a mechanism to promote a feminist agenda in Canada and overseas. Creating learning, exchange and networking opportunities and investing resour-

es to empower young women and young men to become gender-sensitive leaders in Canada and overseas can go a long way to breakdown socio-cultural barriers, change perceptions and build stronger societies where young women have a voice and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decisionmaking in political, business and community life.

4. **Support youth-led and youth-focused organizations**

If youth are given opportunities to access needed services, participate fully in their communities, and exercise their full rights, then they will be able to tackle the unique development challenges faced by their communities. Youth-led and youth-focused organizations are well placed to create opportunities for youth, and must be supported.

5. **Work in partnership**

Facilitating links between youth and businesses to create opportunities for youth – who benefit from economic growth, and fostering employment, entrepreneurship and self-reliance through these networks and opportunities is key.

With the SWB program that works closely with Canadian universities and colleges to establish partnership agreement, WUSC and CECI also recognize the value of such collaboration. Often, these agreements increase the commitment of the institutions towards the student volunteers and improve the preparation, success of placement and return to Canada of the students/ youth.

6. **Enable volunteering for development**

We believe that volunteer cooperation is an effective way to involve young Canadians in our country's development programming, thereby building and sustaining a public constituency for Canada's long-term and enhanced global engagement. It is an important public diplomacy tool in the countries in which Canada engages in development programming, as volunteers can be the most visible and valued aspect of Canada's local presence. We also caution the Government against validating any form of "voluntourism" – youth service initiative that would promote volunteer placements with little structure, little or no impact, and foster concern, in Canada and overseas, about our country's global development efforts.

7. Meet local needs

Working closely with local partner organizations to develop assignment descriptions that outline key tasks and responsibilities that are both relevant to the local need and the students' academic interest is key. These tailored assignment descriptions help to ensure the right person is in place, to build the capacity of local partner organizations and will give the student relevant work experience. As with all of our volunteer cooperation programming, SWB undertakes a screening and interview process to ensure the selection of committed and skilled participants that can meet the needs defined by our local partners. Additionally, partner selection - and the importance of selecting committed partners - that can meet development objectives is vital to a successful program.

8. Provide youth engagement opportunities

Any youth service initiative should include a continuum of youth engagement in Canada, during their overseas assignment and upon return to foster global citizenship. Overseas efforts should be leveraged in Canada where youth can put their skills and knowledge into practice, and maintain their engagement beyond their overseas assignments.

9. Advance youth pathways to employment

Offering overseas assignment to youth that provides professional experience will enhance their employability in Canada and upon their return to kick-start their careers. Overseas assignments also expose youth to new environments, providing them the opportunity to develop interpersonal skills (such as intercultural skills, and work ethic) and soft skills (such as patience, flexibility, and communication skills). These skills are equally important for employers as any academic qualifications or professional experience.

10. Reduce financial barriers

Financial and opportunity costs continue to be significant barriers preventing many youth from participating in overseas efforts, particularly those from marginalized communities. To address these barriers, this initiative must provide paid internships and/or other financial incentives (including student loan forgiveness) to motivate and enable youth, and in particular indigenous, marginalized, disadvantaged and disengaged youth to participate in a youth service initiative. Integrating a paid internship component or pathway to employment upon return (through a mentorship program and/or an in-Canada work placement) would also further motivate young people to participate in a youth service initiative, and allow them to apply the skills and learning they obtained during their overseas assignment.

11. Promote use of technology

Using information communication technologies (ICT) and social media to link Canadian youth together and with youth overseas is a powerful tool for connection. Enabling further and more a sustainable youth outreach, use of technology should be core to the proposed youth service initiative.

12. Provide in-country support

To address safety and security concerns that particularly affect youth, who may have limited experience overseas, pre-departure preparation, health and security training, and in-country support should be mandatory requirements for any program.

We welcome this Youth Service Initiative, and we look forward and remain open to collaborating with the Government of Canada on its design.