

“ONCE SOCIAL CHANGE BEGINS,  
IT CANNOT BE REVERSED...”



*...You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read.  
You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride.”—CÉSAR CHAVEZ*

Rayjon E-Bulletin 2022 #7

Deep in the mountainous villages surrounding the city of St. Marc, Haitian families have not been immune to the upheaval in their country. The political turmoil, rising cost of living, food and water shortages, and gang violence are a part of their daily reality. Most schools are closed, hospitals barely functioning, and public transportation non-existent.

And somehow, in the middle of so much chaos and hardship, they are finding a path forward.



**Simone**, a proud member of the Haitian Women’s Federation in her village, holds one of the first 500 saplings grown in their new nursery. The highly versatile breadfruit can be ground into flour for use in an infinite variety of nutritious foods. Saplings are being sold and distributed back into the community—generating a sustainable source of income to be reinvested back into the community to support education, health care and business development that will benefit *everyone*.

**This holiday season we’re standing with Simone.**

**We believe in what Haitian & Dominican leaders like her are capable of.**



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## Finally – Face-to-Face with our Dominican Partners

After nearly 3 years with no travel, it was an absolute gift for 9 Canadian members of Rayjon to travel to the Dominican Republic earlier this month, to meet face-to-face with our partners. We saw the **incredible progress made through strong leadership and hard work**. Completed water projects, bathrooms in marginalized communities, urgent health care successes, and more.

**We came together to imagine the future.**

And, we even had some fun: a community celebration with music and drama, impromptu merengue dance lessons, and a visit to a beautiful strawberry farm nestled in the "Swiss Alps of the DR." Simone, a proud member of the Haitian Women's Federation

### Trip Details:

This was the first Rayjon trip since January 2020 and the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and following Rayjon's updated strategic plan. The primary goals of the trip were:

- to connect with partners and communities, with a focus on listening and building relationships;
- seeing, documenting and celebrating progress and successes;
- engaging in dialogue and meetings to inform future planning
- respecting and empowering local planning and partnerships.

### Key meetings and conversations:

- Visiting the PLADESCULBA centre in the community of Barrio 41





- A trip to Constanza, to meet with our partners from Puente, and learn more about the incredible water projects they have completed in the region



Lush, fertile valley in Constanza, DR



Valentín proudly explains a community water system, bringing safe drinking water to families

- Meetings with ASCALA, our partners facilitating documentation, health care, and women's empowerment initiatives. The health care team and doctor Bertha took part of our group to visit one of the bateys serviced by the mobile medical clinic.

With all partners we were able to discuss the future of our collaboration. There is much opportunity for expansion and continued work, together. (Stay tuned!)

ASCALA's amazing health care team provides weekly mobile medical services to some of the most remote, marginalized communities in the DR.



We also met and spent time with young and motivated community leaders who were identified through the Puente projects and first became engaged through the floor and bathroom projects. These young leaders have been energized and are keen to continue identifying local priorities and planning to



Darío, president of the Barrio 41 community committee... WOW.



improve the quality of life for their community members. (In the next edition of this bulletin we'll share Darío's story!)

### Other activities and FUN:

Rayjon Eyeglass Program Manager Bob Topliffe presented information about the Eyeglass program to our partners in Constanza (Puente), who are interested in hosting a clinic in the Costanza area (2023?).



An interactive story was read by teacher Dianny and acted by John and Piera to preschool students.

We enjoyed a fabulous **community celebration** and dinner event featured performances and speeches from community leaders, the youth music teacher and students as well as performances by members of our team from Canada.



John and Piera, performing as "Piggie and Elephant"



Gilberto (youth music teacher) on guitar, accompanied by Luís (ASCALA team leader and community advocate)



Community celebration, Barrio 41



El Rancho de las Fresas, Constanza, DR

We visited a beautiful strawberry farm (El Rancho de Las Fresas), where strawberry tea and other variations were served. Who imagined we'd be roasting strawberry-flavoured marshmallows under a Christmas tree in the DR?



**Cultural learning:** Our group had a guided tour of the [Memorial Museum of the Dominican Resistance](#) in Santo Domingo. This was a very valuable visit which gave us a lot of information about the history of the DR, the resistance movement against dictatorships and social injustice, and the heroes of the movement. In particular, the visit drove home the horrendous history of injustice towards Dominicans of Haitian descent, and reinforced the need to continue advocating for their full rights and citizenship.



## Crismary - Rockstar Leader

Throughout our recent travels in the Dominican Republic we made an intentional effort to meet with local leadership and partners as part of our Mission and Vision to focus on community driven projects and solutions. One such partner is [Puente](#), an organization in Constanza which shares many of our values. We are partnering with Puente in Barrio 41 and outlying bateys on community-led water, sanitation, and flooring projects. Today we would like to highlight one of Puente's leaders, Crismary Gutierrez.

**Crismary** is a dynamic young woman with a passion for social justice and supporting those in need in her community. Crismary was born in Santiago into a large family. She was raised by her grandmother and studied business administration in post-secondary. She rose through the ranks in the business department of a Zona Franca (Free Trade Zone), then in the accounting department of a service business, until one day, as she sat in her cubicle, she realized that she could be putting her skills to use to support the people of the Dominican Republic, in a job setting that would bring her more joy.

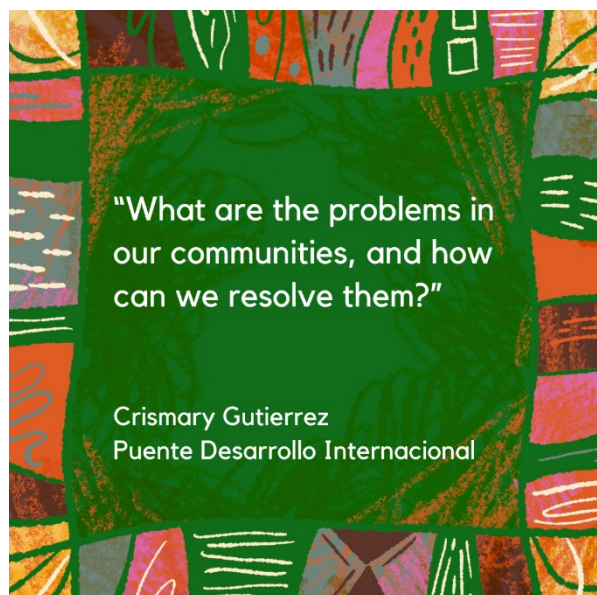
Along with her partner Scott, they co-founded [Puente](#), which means "bridge" in Spanish. Today Crismary is the country Director, wearing many hats for the organization. Her main role is to make sure that all of Puente's initiatives come to fruition and also to empower residents to continue with those initiatives. Cris is known for the energy, enthusiasm, and knowledge she shares through "charlas"—

workshops or “chats” with community members providing knowledge and skills in leadership, data collection, preventative health care, community collaboration, and more.

Now a flourishing organization that focuses on community data collection to drive locally directed projects, Puente is proving to be an excellent partner for Rayjon. Young women like Crismary, with a personal history grounded in the Dominican Republic and the drive to use their skills to lift others to better lives, are the future of sustainable development. We are honoured to partner with such a talented and inspiring Dominican woman.

**Gracias, Crismary.**

(In case you missed it—you can listen to Crismary’s voice in our recent podcast [“Tapestry 2030 Season 2: Dominican Driving the Vehicle of Change”](#)).



**“What are the problems in our communities, and how can we resolve them?” —Crismary Gutierrez, Puente Desarrollo Internacional**

To our many supporters, we must say again a tremendous thank you. Your talents, time and donations empower Haitian & Dominican leaders making lasting changes in their communities.

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