



Charles Sturt  
University



challenges  
abroad



The Community-Based  
Global Learning  
Collaborative  
Asia-Pacific Hub

# Global Social Impact Project 2025

Battambang, Cambodia





# Social Impact Projects



## Introducing Global Social Impact Projects in 2025

The Global Social Impact Projects represent an innovative evolution of Charles Sturt University’s work-integrated learning model, now extending beyond Australia to create meaningful international partnerships and cross-cultural collaboration that establish an international profile for the region.

Building on the success of our 2024 domestic Social Impact Projects, the 2025 Global program expands our reach through the establishment of the Asia Pacific Hub for Community-Based Global Learning Collaborative. This strategic initiative creates a regional hub connecting our community partners with an international network of North American universities and community organisations, fostering community-based global learning initiatives across regional Australia and the Asia Pacific region.

The Asia Pacific Hub advances Charles Sturt University’s Education Strategy Vision by creating authentic global learning experiences that develop students’ Graduate Learning Outcome of Global Citizenship – demonstrating the capacity to work effectively in a global world across social, cultural, economic, geo-political and environmental contexts. Through partnerships with educational institutions, NGOs, and industry partners across the Asia Pacific, the hub integrates community-based global learning projects directly into our curriculum, providing students with hands-on, real-world international experience.

A cornerstone outcome of this initiative is students participating in Global Social Impact Project internships through our partnership with Challenges Abroad in Battambang, Cambodia. These students collaborated with international peers on social justice issues within local Indian communities, applying their global citizenship capabilities in authentic cross-cultural contexts.

These projects continue supporting the National Priorities Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF) through Case Study 1’s work-integrated learning initiatives for regional communities, while now expanding into Case Study 3 by strengthening international collaborations with global industry and community partners.

This dual approach creates a truly global learning ecosystem that addresses universal social challenges while respecting cultural diversity and local contexts, embodying Charles Sturt’s “Empower Communities” theme of “Partnering for real regional solutions” with global impact.

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## Strategic alignment with Education Strategy Vision

The Global Social Impact Projects directly align with Charles Sturt University's Education Strategy themes, demonstrating how our international initiatives support the university's core mission of creating real-world experiences that drive regional outcomes with global impact.



### Empower communities

#### *Global collaboration for local impact*

Connects communities across the Asia Pacific to identify universal challenges like climate change and resource scarcity. Develops innovative solutions with broader regional and global impact through strategic international partnerships and community-based learning initiatives.



### Inspire students

#### *Authentic global learning experiences*

Provides work-integrated learning that develops essential skills, attitudes and professional networks through meaningful international collaboration. Creates inclusive pathways supporting students from all backgrounds in accessing transformative global educational opportunities and career development.



### Be exceptional

#### *Innovation for global educational reach*

Strategically selects cutting-edge technologies that enhance global learning environments and enable seamless international collaboration. Provides innovative spaces for testing emerging educational technologies within authentic community-based projects and cross-cultural learning experiences.

Charles Sturt's commitment to "real-world experiences" and "working alongside communities to solve challenges that drive regional outcomes with global impact" provides strong institutional backing for positioning global social impact projects as core to the university's educational mission.

## Program expansion for 2025

**Global reach:** The 2025 program funded 4 Charles Sturt students to participate in a transformative program with Challenges Abroad in Battambang, Cambodia, developing globally competent graduates through authentic community partnerships addressing real social challenges.

### Key features:

- Stackable 2 credit point subjects for students undertaking EMP subjects
- 80 hours of WIL for students completing the subject (multiple EMP subjects)
- Cross-cultural competency development
- Two pathways: Digital Inclusion (EMP112) and All Abilities (EMP110)
- Program duration: 2-4 weeks
- Strategic partnership with Challenges Abroad delivering measurable community outcomes

The Global Social Impact Projects offer students unprecedented opportunities to engage with a diverse array of international stakeholders, including NGO professionals, community leaders, individuals with lived experiences from different cultures, and peers from various disciplines across the globe. This expanded exposure broadens their understanding of global community needs and fosters meaningful cross-cultural connections.

## Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Global Social Impact Projects in 2025 partnered with Challenges Abroad in Cambodia to work in local communities on projects addressing United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The program funded 4 students to participate through two distinct pathways:

- EMP110 – All Abilities: Disability inclusion and accessibility (SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities)
- EMP112 – Digital Inclusion: Digital inclusion for education and employability (SDG 4 – Quality Education, SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth)

Students engaged in hands-on project development, combining local Cambodian knowledge systems with academic frameworks to co-design practical solutions that communities identified as priorities for their own development.



Professor Janelle Wheat  
Pro Vice-Chancellor  
Division of Learning and Teaching  
Charles Sturt University



*Welcome to the inaugural Global Social Impact Projects program.*

*As we expand our successful 2024 domestic program to an international scale in 2025, we embrace the opportunity to create positive and lasting solutions through global collaboration and cross-cultural innovation.*

*The landscape of tertiary education continues to evolve, and our 2025 Global program represents a step forward in international education partnerships. These changes provide unprecedented opportunities for our students, community partners, and international collaborators to co-design solutions to social justice issues that transcend borders.*

*Together, we are translating creative ideas into actionable solutions that align with our Charles Sturt values and our ethos Yindyamarra Winhanganha – ‘The wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in’ – now shared across cultures and continents.*

*Special recognition goes to Dr. Faith Valencia-Forrester from Charles Sturt University and Challenges Abroad, for their leadership in transforming our local success into a global initiative. Their dedication to international and cultural collaboration has made this ambitious undertaking possible.*

Sustainable development has been identified as one of the most critical global challenges facing communities worldwide, particularly in developing regions recovering from historical conflict and working toward inclusive development.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework for addressing complex social, economic, and environmental challenges. However, meaningful implementation requires collaborative, grassroots approaches that engage local communities and leverage diverse perspectives and expertise.

The Social Impact Project Cambodia aims to facilitate international student collaboration and cross-cultural learning to develop awareness of complex sustainable development challenges and generate innovative, culturally-appropriate solutions for implementation in local Cambodian communities.

Our focus centres on building practical understanding of sustainable development implementation through direct community engagement. Within this focus, we strive to investigate effective approaches to SDG implementation, understanding what works in local contexts and why successful interventions take hold.

Objectives	
Professional practice	Build discipline-specific competencies through real-world application in international development contexts. Develop lifelong learning mindsets by engaging with complex challenges requiring continuous adaptation and critical thinking.
First Nations cultural safety	Examine power, privilege, and cultural dynamics through critical reflection on colonial legacies and social justice principles. Apply cultural safety frameworks from First Nations perspectives to cross-cultural engagement in Cambodia, promoting respectful, equitable partnerships.
Global citizenship	Develop cross-cultural collaborative skills for addressing sustainable development challenges across diverse contexts. Build capacity to work effectively in global environments through direct engagement with international partners and communities.
Sustainable and ethical practice	Engage in ethical decision-making by balancing social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors. Develop community-centered initiatives that respect local knowledge systems and promote long-term resilience.



Approach

The project enhances sustainable development understanding through community-based international collaboration aligned with Charles Sturt University’s Education Strategy Vision 2030. Students develop SDG-focused initiatives in partnership with Challenges Abroad and community members through Collaborative Innovation Solution Sprints responsive to local community priorities in Battambang, Cambodia.

This approach develops cross-cultural professional practice through multidisciplinary teams focusing on interconnected SDGs relevant to community needs. Students engage in meaningful dialogue about sustainable development challenges while implementing culturally-appropriate solutions that address community-identified priorities.

The project embodies Charles Sturt’s signature themes of building career journeys through experiences, partnering for real regional solutions (applied internationally), and meeting students at their place of learning.

This is achieved by:

- **Cross-cultural professional practice development** through project teams focusing on digital inclusion and disability support, with embedded reflection on cultural safety and ethical practice
- **Global citizenship in action** through meaningful cross-cultural dialogue between international students, local NGO partners, and community members about sustainable development challenges, power dynamics, and collaborative approaches to social justice
- **Evidence-informed collaborative design processes** that support students in developing innovative, culturally-appropriate ways to address community-identified needs across multiple SDG areas, integrating sustainable and ethical decision-making frameworks
- **Professional experience through direct implementation** involving hands-on project development and community engagement during the international placement period, with structured reflection on professional practice and lifelong learning
- **Knowledge sharing and critical reflection** with innovative solutions and lessons learned published as resources for future international development initiatives and academic programs, including analysis of cultural safety, global citizenship, and sustainable practice applications



Key partners

- **Academic partners:** Faculty from Charles Sturt University
- **Community partners:** Challenges Abroad, local schools, disability organisations, and community members in Battambang, Cambodia
- **Student participants:** Charles Sturt University students across multiple disciplines
- **Development practitioners:** Local NGO staff and professionals

Primary activities

- Collaborative Innovation Solution Sprints*
- **Pre-departure preparation and professional development:** Cross-cultural competency training incorporating cultural safety frameworks, SDG education, global citizenship development, and ethical practice in international development contexts.
  - **Community immersion and reflective practice:** Direct engagement with Cambodian communities to understand priorities and existing resources, with structured reflection on power dynamics, cultural positioning, and ethical considerations in cross-cultural collaboration.
  - **Collaborative solution design with sustainable practice focus:** Working with local partners to develop context-appropriate interventions that balance social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors for long-term community benefit.
  - **Professional implementation and evidence-informed practice:** Testing and refining solutions during international placement with continuous reflection on professional learning, cultural safety application, and sustainable practice principles.
  - **Critical evaluation and global citizenship reflection:** Documenting outcomes and sharing learnings with academic and development communities, including critical analysis of global citizenship development, cultural safety practices, and sustainable development approaches.





## Project C: Cambodia Overview

### Project Overview

The Cambodia Social Impact Project is a transformative collaborative initiative designed to support Cambodian communities through sustainable, community-driven development aligned with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through our strategic partnership with Challenges Abroad, this comprehensive project funded 4 students to participate through two critical pathways over 2-4 weeks:

- **EMP110 – All Abilities:** Creating inclusive environments and supporting people with lived experience of disability through accessibility improvements, awareness raising, and community engagement.
- **EMP112 – Digital Inclusion:** Addressing digital exclusion barriers to support education and employability through technology access, digital literacy, and skills development.

Our approach encompasses community visits, stakeholder engagement, and collaborative project development with Challenges Abroad in Battambang. Through hands-on implementation, we provide students with authentic global learning experiences while addressing community-identified priorities.

The project's significance lies in demonstrating that sustainable development occurs through relationships, trust-building, and sustained engagement rather than isolated interventions or top-down programming approaches.

### Vision

To support inclusive, accessible communities in Cambodia where all individuals have opportunities to participate fully in education, employment, and community life through digital access and disability inclusion.

### Mission

We bridge gaps in access and inclusion through collaborative engagement between international students and local communities, implementing evidence-based, culturally relevant interventions addressing digital inclusion and disability support while providing transformative learning experiences.

### Values

- **Community empowerment through collaboration:** Fostering genuine partnerships where academic expertise and grassroots wisdom create innovative, culturally appropriate solutions with community-led development.
- **Cultural sensitivity and respect:** Honouring local traditions, customs, and knowledge systems, recognising sustainable development must build on cultural understanding and indigenous practices.
- **Evidence-based impact:** Grounding all interventions in thorough research, comparative analysis, and data-driven decision making ensuring measurable, sustainable outcomes.
- **Inclusion and accessibility:** Recognising that development must include all community members, particularly those facing barriers to participation.
- **Global learning and knowledge sharing:** Contributing to international development understanding by comparing experiences, sharing lessons, and building worldwide community bridges.





## Methodology and approach

### Phase 1: Community Assessment and Stakeholder Engagement

Students conducted comprehensive community needs assessment through engagement with Challenges Abroad, local organisations, schools, and community members. They developed understanding of existing resources, barriers to inclusion, and community priorities through observation, interviews, and collaborative planning sessions.

### Phase 2: Collaborative Problem Identification and Analysis

Through partnership with local stakeholders, students examined barriers to digital inclusion and disability support to reveal priority challenges alongside existing community strengths. Analysis frameworks identified opportunities for intervention while documenting successful local initiatives that demonstrated inherent community capacity.

### Phase 3: Community Engagement and Direct Implementation

Students delivered community interventions through culturally appropriate engagement methods, including awareness sessions, accessibility improvements, digital literacy workshops, and resource development. Implementation focused on building local capacity and creating sustainable approaches to continued progress.



## Impact and outcomes

### • Student Learning

Students developed practical competencies in community engagement, cross-cultural communication, and sustainable development implementation directly translating to professional capabilities. Cultural competency enhancement through direct community exposure in Cambodia built empathy and deep understanding of complex development challenges impossible to gain through classroom learning alone, preparing students for development and community engagement careers.

### • Community Benefits

Improved community understanding of disability inclusion and digital access opportunities led to increased awareness and engagement. Enhanced community capacity through workshops, resources, and collaborative problem-solving built foundations for continued progress. Students' contributions to accessibility improvements and digital literacy created tangible benefits for community members.

### • Institutional Impact

Development of a replicable framework for academic-community partnerships in Cambodia created models applicable in similar contexts. Evidence-based recommendations for inclusive development contribute to broader discourse, while strengthened understanding of global development challenges enhances international collaboration and sustainable partnerships.

## Future directions

The Cambodia Social Impact Project framework provides templates for similar academic-community partnerships in Southeast Asia and developing nations with flexibility for local adaptation while maintaining effectiveness and community ownership principles.

Project findings inform advocacy for improved inclusion and accessibility, particularly addressing gaps between policy and implementation through evidence-based recommendations for community-centered development approaches.

Ongoing partnership with Challenges Abroad ensures sustainability and continued support for emerging local initiatives while maintaining university connection and technical support.



Charles Sturt University students

Richard Holz	Bachelor of Arts
Cheyenne Doyle	Bachelor of Arts
Michelle Peters	Bachelor of Arts
Rekai Austin	Bachelor of Business



“

This experience has been transformative in shaping my understanding of how to create meaningful global impact. Working with university students in Battambang, I developed and delivered workshops on digital literacy, focusing on evaluating credible versus non-credible sources for research. Creating presentations that worked effectively with translators taught me the importance of culturally responsive teaching methods. This experience has strengthened my commitment to a career where I can contribute to people living safe, educated, and digitally empowered lives. – Michelle Peters (student)





# Detailed Program

# Learning Outcomes

## Program overview



### Participants

4 students from Charles Sturt University



### Duration

Two weeks



### Host

Challenges Abroad

## Key program components

### Academic focus

- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Community development practices
- Social responsibility initiatives
- Inclusive development approaches

### Cultural immersion

- Cambodian cultural orientation
- Language basics
- Local customs and traditions
- Community integration

### Field experience

- Multiple community visits
- Direct project implementation
- Stakeholder engagement
- Real-world problem-solving

### Assessment and documentation

- Reflective professional articles
- Project documentation
- Community presentations
- Learning outcome evaluation

## Cross-cultural competencies developed



### Cultural awareness

- Understanding diverse approaches to social inclusion
- Recognition of cultural factors in community development
- Appreciation for local knowledge systems
- Sensitivity to different communication styles and cultural contexts



### Global citizenship

- Development of international networks
- Understanding of global interconnectedness
- Ability to work across cultural boundaries
- Commitment to international social justice



### Professional skills

- Cross-cultural communication
- Community-based project management
- Inclusive design approaches
- Reflective practice and professional development





# Global Partnerships in Action

Written by Dr Faith Valencia-Forrester

Academic Lead, Designer and Developer for the Social Impact Projects

Division of Learning and Teaching | Charles Sturt University



*Every day during our inaugural Global Social Impact Projects collaboration with Parul University in Gujarat, India, I was overwhelmed by gratitude for this transformative experience. What we achieved wasn't traditional study abroad – it was genuine community-based global learning that prioritised authentic partnership over cultural tourism.*

## **The power of authentic partnership**

*Rather than arriving with predetermined projects, our students worked alongside Indian communities to address locally identified priorities. This approach created space for mutual learning that challenged all our assumptions about international education and demonstrated the true potential of our Global Social Impact Projects model.*

*The Parul University campus pulsed with energy that reinforced why physical presence matters. There was unmistakable vibrancy that virtual learning cannot fully replicate – while digital tools expand access, our time at Parul reinforced the unique value of shared spaces and spontaneous encounters.*

## **Reciprocal learning in action**

*When invited to present about collaborating on Social Impact Projects, I discovered I learned as much as I shared. The exchange was genuinely reciprocal – Parul University's perspectives on community engagement and educational innovation offered fresh frameworks for our own work. Their whole-hearted commitment to community engagement creates distinctive conditions for authentic partnerships.*

*In the villages we visited, I was struck by the warmth and genuine welcome from people whose circumstances differed vastly from my Western context. This wasn't about romanticising poverty but recognising that joy, community, and human connection transcend economic conditions in ways that challenge assumptions about development.*

## **What makes this approach different?**

Our Global Social Impact Projects collaboration demonstrates an alternative to extractive international education through:

- **Community-defined priorities:** Working on projects communities identify as crucial
- **Long-term relationship building:** Establishing ongoing institutional partnerships
- **Mutual learning:** All participants simultaneously teaching and learning
- **Cultural humility:** Acknowledging we have much to learn from local knowledge systems

## **Connecting to Charles Sturt's vision**

This collaboration directly advances our Education Strategy Vision 2030 by empowering communities through authentic partnerships, building career journeys through experiences, and developing Global Citizenship capabilities. Students returned with enhanced cross-cultural competencies and deeper understanding of their global responsibilities.

## **Looking forward**

The students who participated will carry these insights into their careers, embodying “high-impact practices” that transform perspective. They've experienced what it means to engage across cultural differences with respect, curiosity, and humility – skills desperately needed in our interconnected world.

This experience represents broader transformation in international education. Our model suggests that genuine partnership characterised by shared decision-making and mutual benefit creates results that benefit everyone involved. The transformation goes beyond adding international experience – it fundamentally shifts understanding of our place in the world and responsibilities to one another.

This collaboration exemplifies Charles Sturt University's commitment to authentic global partnerships that honour diverse knowledge systems while addressing real community priorities. Our Global Social Impact Projects model demonstrates that meaningful international education happens when we approach it with genuine humility and commitment to mutual learning.

*Dr Faith Valencia-Forrester*





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