

Girls 4 Girls

Joe Munnelly works with Irish Jesuits International.



At Irish Jesuits International, we believe everyone should be supported to reach their full potential and have the opportunity to grow. Education is the vital stepping stone to a brighter future, but often in the places that we work poverty and marginalisation mean communities become vulnerable, and often displaced persons, especially women and girls, suffer the most, as discrimination is common.

Partnered with Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Nigeria, we have focused on addressing the huge inequalities and barriers young women face to accessing education and career development.

Nigeria still suffers from the Boko

Haram insurgency, which led to the horrific kidnapping of over 100 schoolgirls. Although formal education was their target, key infrastructure like communication masts, markets, bridges, schools and other recreational facilities were also attacked, alongside the killing of hundreds of teachers. As you can imagine, this has meant a generation of teachers has been lost, and hundreds of learners have been set back due to the horrific violence of the past decade.

To mend the wounds of the past and to empower learners to grow, especially girls, the Girls 4 Girls (G4G) project was established to support vulnerable children who otherwise

had no opportunity to attend school.

Through careful selection based on vulnerability status, 500 out-of-school girls were identified and re-enrolled in school. Additionally, the 1,000 G4G participants received invaluable support from JRS, including educational assistance and hygiene kits. The beneficiaries were chosen from low-income households, where affording school supplies and essentials was challenging.

In addition, the project involved fifty boys as champions for girls' education and rights, who played a crucial role in raising awareness and organising dialogues at schools with the support of head teachers.

The project didn't just focus on formal education but also looked at how to best support women and girls where they were at and their immediate needs. Many girls faced challenges in generating income and were at risk of early marriages, relying solely on their husbands for survival and well-being. However, through the project's interventions, girls were encouraged to acquire skills for economic empowerment.

JRS assessed and selected 500 girls, providing them with training and start-up kits tailored to their skills, such as tailoring, knitting and cap making. This support has empowered girls to utilise their skills within the G4G spaces, fostering independence and self-reliance.

Shatu is a fourteen-year-old girl living with a disability in Yamarkumi community, Biu. Before she was discovered, during the Girls 4 Girls selection process, Shatu had little hope of attending school.

Thanks to the support of school

stakeholders and community leaders, Shatu underwent assessment using the Learning at the Right Level method and was placed in primary four.

Today she is so grateful for the chance to receive an education and better her life: 'This project has given me hope and a future I never thought possible.'

Empowered with new skills and the support and encouragement to feed their minds and creativity, girls like Shatu aren't left behind and have the tools for their own self-development.

This project is an example of what is termed 'Gender Responsive Education', which simply means learning and teaching approaches that pay attention to the specific learning needs of girls and boys and being considerate of the barriers or hindrances to self-development. It is founded on gender equity, which places those at greater need at the centre. Globally women are at a disadvantage, so interventions that focus on addressing the additional stresses and burdens women and girls face is paramount. It is less about giving women the advantage in education but rather about fairness and giving all the opportunities to learn and grow.

Gender Responsive Education is about empowering vulnerable groups to take ownership of their lives and initiate positive social change, which is about lifting all people up as no one should be left behind, especially in learning and upskilling.

To help us continue empowering girls like Shatu, you can support projects like G4G and do something amazing! Visit: www.iji.ie/donate-to to make a donation or call us: (01) 8366509