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A Journey towards Empowerment: The impact of Liberal Studies on graduates and their communities

Personal empowerment



The Diploma's impact on graduates' lives is most reflected in the empowerment that graduates developed throughout their Diploma journey. This section presents the process and the consequences of developing empowerment through the Diploma. We seek to demonstrate that the knowledge and qualities developed during the programme enable graduates to form lasting virtuous energy that supports community development. This chapter ultimately articulates how graduates' empowerment eventually leads to their self-actualisation as well as that of their communities.

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“If I had not had a chance to study in Diploma programme, I think I was not going to be who I am today. [...] I would not have a voice. I would not have the power to stand as a woman in the community, in my family. [...] So it is like light that takes away darkness from my eyes. I am able to see now [...] the right path to take.”

– KK_A7_MZ

1 Becoming empowered

Graduates have referred to the Diploma as a “key” that “opens doors” (MD_A7_F) and helps them to become empowered. By analysing the role of the learning process, and the process of self-actualisation, we evaluate the impact of the Diploma in shaping graduates’ empowerment.

1.1 The learning process: More than knowledge and skills

Graduates interpret the Diploma as a source of empowerment through the knowledge and skills gained in this academic programme. Supported by Stromquist (2015), Önder (2019), and Sharma (2016)’s research findings, acquiring knowledge that helps to challenge forms of oppression, allows to become agents of change, and redistributes decision-making power composes the main elements that engender the process of empowerment.

1.1.1 Education and literacy

The nature of the Diploma programme fulfils the knowledge needs of graduates, framing access to education as key to their empowerment. According to this graduate in Afghanistan, empowerment can only be gained:

“[...] by having knowledge and having information about different things. So, empowerment doesn’t simply mean having just power, or having

materials. Empowerment [...] means having knowledge [...] about the ways that we are doing things.” (AB_A6_H)

As she explains that she is empowered through the knowledge she received in the Diploma, she highlights that the Diploma taught her examples of how to become engaged and apply the knowledge “in a good way” (AB_A6_H). While this graduate illustrated the role of developing knowledge to develop empowerment, this graduate in Jordan expresses that the Diploma represents a space not only to gain information, but translate this newly acquired knowledge into various learning opportunities.

“Before I started Diploma, I was a bit like shallow, [...] [with] less information. When I started Diploma, I was digging in my study, courses, and get hungry to know more and more, which makes me unstoppable to achieve learning, [it] was like self-development.” (JA_A1_A)

This thirst for knowledge developed during the Diploma is seen as supporting one’s personal growth (JA_A1_A, JA_A5_A). This graduate in Malawi elaborates on this idea of the importance of developing certain skills to become empowered, mentioning critical thinking as a source of empowerment:

“It has empowered me on how I can think critically in a situation to a concept, to an argument, to a behaviour or to anything [...] It has empowered me and it gave me a very good way to create things which can help people. What if they say this community, we have this crisis. So



are you going to start doing something [...] why [are there] those crises? How they came? [...] those are critical thinking [...].” (MD_A1_HD)

Developing this skill through the Diploma is presented as a means to enable the application of knowledge and skills in a concrete situation. For example, this application can be translated in terms of claiming one’s own rights. This aspect of empowerment is significantly more prominent in Jordan, as this country alone represents more than half of the codes referring to the theme of “rights claiming” (52%), reflecting how empowerment becomes intrinsic to advocacy. Indeed, according to this participant from Jordan, developing knowledge meant being able to claim for one’s rights:

“It opened my eyes on my rights. So, knowing that I have rights, I am a valuable human being and I deserve the best and I should work hard and benefit from the opportunities [...] it opens doors for me [...]. So empowerment in general is a building on the skills of the person and building on his\her knowledge and make him or her realise his rights or her rights and just to help him see that [...] he or she has the necessary skills and knowledge. And he or she [...] should put in practice all these things, in order to help him or herself.” (JA_A7_A)

Knowledge as a self-development tool can therefore be used to realise that everyone is entitled to rights and human dignity. The Diploma, as an eye-opening programme, enables graduates to apply the knowledge and skills gained to the benefit of the community. For this graduate in Kenya, without the opportunity to study in the Diploma programme, he would not have been able to “make good social change in his community, but with this knowledge and skills that [he has] acquired from the Diploma programme [...] [he is] now able to go out and contribute effectively to social change of the community” (KK_A13_MZ).

Similarly, this graduate exposes the significance of gaining knowledge in order to become empowered and support others:



“It has empowered me yes, there is no doubt about that [...] because it has given me the knowledge, the education that I need, and that I would use to help other people. When you have the ability to think about your community, to think about your own life, this itself is actually empowerment. Because now, if I look at myself, now and before, I am totally different. I have a different way of thinking than before. So, this is how I believe that the Diploma had empowered me.”

–KK_A4_JR

Through this personal transformation, the Diploma’s impact is beyond the scope of the individual as this graduate’s willingness to support others can also be a source of empowerment. The graduate in Afghanistan furthers this thought as he articulates intercultural knowledge as a means to achieve empowerment and self-confidence:

“If we have the ability to know about the others’ religions, about the others’ culture and about the specific topic, then we have the confidence to speak about that one [...] It help me to improve my knowledge and it really empowered me, [it] empowered me to go on with the life and now I think I know many things about the others and about the others’ cultures [and] religion.” (AB_A6_H.)

While this example reveals the power of having knowledge in order to engage with others, this graduate in Kenya illustrates –



by reflecting on his community involvement – the role of accessing knowledge to support others who may lack basic needs literacy:

"When JWL talk of empowerment in education I had never taken serious[ly] but I have realised the moment I started involving [in] Kakuma, especially in business, people who cannot read, who cannot write, whenever we take up the call, [...] they can't even tell their individual number or their manifest they always look for someone [to] read for them, so this is when I sit down and look at the empowerment [in] education, and I believe yes, we may not be having the luxury of education but the little we have is a real empowerment. The empowerment to me is the person who can read and write and know what is written in a piece of paper is fully empowered." (KK_A1_G)

This graduate encapsulates the rise of a new consciousness, highlighting the importance of education in building one's empowerment journey.

As graduates gain a higher degree of education, their status in their community changes. This graduate in Malawi explains what graduating from the Diploma meant for her status in the community and her personal self-esteem:

"It changed me in the way that in the life we reach some point whereby you have to be identified through your level of education and whenever you reach a place like those whereby you are not considered by your name, you are not considered by whom you are, but you are only considered by, [...] the level of education [...]. And then whenever you say that 'OK, I have a Diploma in education, I have a bachelor's in social work', automatically you feel at the place where you are supposed to be because you deserve the place where you are since the people [...] need [you] here. [...] So, it gives me a confidence and assure me that in the world I can also go anywhere, and I will not miss any opportunity since the level of education I have is considered everywhere." (MD_A7_F)

Therefore, gaining knowledge and skills is more than developing an understanding of

a given situation. From graduates' perspective, accessing education can allow them to better serve their community, gain awareness of their human rights, grow in confidence and, essentially, become empowered.

1.1.2 Self-awareness and opening doors

According to graduates, obtaining the Diploma is more than just getting a degree. A means to become self-aware and create opportunities, the Diploma programme transforms knowledge into a self-empowerment tool. For instance, this graduate in Jordan explains how empowerment is linked to knowing oneself:

"To accept him or herself in the first place. So it is about accepting yourself, knowing your weakness and strength, working on your strength and improving it and working on your weakness [...] and not being afraid to say what's right [...] and to speak for yourself [...] and share your ideas and thoughts freely without any judgement." (JA_A7_A)

This profound introspection and acceptance of oneself are characterised by a growth in self-awareness during the Diploma. In the words of a graduate in Afghanistan, having self-awareness means that one "will have abilities" and one "do not have fear" (AH_A3_N). As an enabling tool, self-awareness allows graduates to make "constructive decision[s]" (KK_A10_G) and develop their personalities to achieve their "dreams and goals" (AH_A8_N). This better understanding of oneself can be a source of resilience. For this graduate in Malawi, gaining a new perspective about life during the Diploma played a role in avoiding losing her life:



“Before I entered in the programme, I was so much worried. And honestly, there's a time I wanted to commit suicide because I didn't see any future about my life, I saw I've lost my family they are dead. Who is supporting me? No one, you see, until when some [...] friends introduced me to the programme when they were doing a mobilisation in the community. So when I sat down and reason deeply, I saw that, OK if I do this, I think I can restore my mindset. So [...] A good remark in my life's history that I'm very confident.”

—MD_A5_R

The resilience found in the Diploma reflects that this programme is more than academics; it is also about developing one's future, regaining motivation, finding confidence in life and becoming empowered. Thus, the Diploma programme enables students to navigate life's challenges and find their path. This graduate in Malawi encapsulates the idea:

“[The Diploma is] most important to me, because it has opened the doors. That was like the beginning of my journey. Yeah, despite the life in a refugee camp, so everything which I did there was meaningful [...] and it started from there. [...] It gave me [...] a way.” (MD_A1_HD)

Therefore, whether it is through graduates' growth in self-awareness, personal development, or the role of the Diploma in giving meaning to their lives, the Diploma programme appears essential in shaping the empowerment of graduates. Becoming more than an academic

programme, the Diploma allows graduates to take time to find themselves and redefine their future. While developing knowledge is understood as a crucial contribution of the Diploma on graduates' road to empowerment, the symbolic value of gaining this knowledge is crucial as graduates are opening doors that enable them to grow personally and achieve their goals.

1.1.3 The role of a supportive environment

Graduates have highlighted the role of encouragement in supporting them to overcome challenges through their JWL journey and become empowered, as explained by this alumnus in Malawi:

“[The Diploma] really helped me increase my [depth], as I told you before I was nobody but now, I can be somebody for some people, before I was like discriminated, people did not take me as a valued person but when I got this thing, it was like something critical to me because it really changed me automatically.” (MD_A9_T).

While this graduate expressed how the guidance provided through the Diploma helped his personal growth, another graduate in Malawi emphasised the role of a supportive environment for success in the Diploma programme:

“It's my sister because all the time when I was going at school there, she was the one preparing food for, she was the one giving those encouragements that you should go to school, so I was going at school looking at how other are getting piece of works just to fight for food you know? Shaping just life in this camp, she was there giving those encouragements. So, it was tough for them giving those encouragements, preparing me some meal when I come back from school, it was very hard for them [...] But this sister apparently takes this [as] a tough thing for me to achieve all these changes.” (MD_A9_T)



As this graduate demonstrates the importance of receiving support and guidance from his family in order to achieve his goal, encouragement appears as a crucial step towards one's empowerment.

While this empowerment gained through the Diploma reflects how this graduate benefits from the Diploma's support to his personal growth, he also turned this supportive energy into a willingness to provide support and empower others.

1.2 Self-actualisation

Defined as the process of realising one's potential to the fullest based on one's unique capacity (Maslow 1969), self-actualisation is nurtured by the effects of graduates' empowerment, with increased confidence and courage, as well as growing positive energy.

1.2.1 Self-confidence

Graduates referred to a rise in their self-confidence through their journey in the Diploma. Intertwined with their empowerment, self-confidence appears essential to their personal growth. This graduate in Malawi shared that:

"Diploma empowered me [...] in different ways, it has built in me self-confidence, now I really have faith, something that I believe that I can be very helpful in the community in different way through being a student of Diploma. It has created a lot of opportunities for us especially when it come for asking for jobs and many more things." (MD_A2_T)

As this alumnus demonstrates how building self-confidence is transposed in restoring hope for graduates, the effect of this empowerment is consequential. This is further elaborated in the words of this

graduate that defines what self-confidence means:

"Self-confidence is by believing in yourself, believing that you can do something better, no matter how weak you can be, so that spirit is one way of having self-confidence." (MD_A1_T)

Feeling capable of anything, graduates develop this fearless confidence in themselves. This graduate in Malawi embodies this feeling of empowerment:

"I was very much empowered. [...] the aspect is self-confidence because as of now I can. I'm not afraid of doing something. [...] I was standing before in front of thousands of people just [...] like hosting festivals and also interpreting. [...] I work without fear. [...] I'm confident in whatever I do. [...] It's one of the most important [thing] which I got from JWL as well. OK, being confident, believe in myself. Being able to say I can do this. Trying 1st and then if I can fail, there's no problem, but the confidence of trying. It's one of the things which I got." (MD_A1_HD)

This feeling of fearlessness and increased self-confidence is also reflected in the actions of this graduate, who narrates how she grew her self-confidence in terms of public speaking. She remembers how she was shaking one of the first times she went to class, how her voice was "vibrating" and she could not speak well with her peers (AB_A10_H). Now, she feels brave and strong, even if she speaks "among thousands and millions of people."

Workshops on how to build self-confidence which she attended during the Diploma helped her "to empower [her] self-confidence" (AB_A10_H). Consequently, she now believes in herself and believes she can do whatever she wants (AB_A10_H). This new awareness about one's capacity is further described in the words of this alumnus:



"Before joining this course, I was thinking that I'm very useless person. I'm not able to do anything. But after completing so many different courses [...] I learned that [...] I really knew myself, who am I and what is my responsibility in the community, [...] And studying this course really help me to boost my self-esteem, [...] my self-confidence. [...] It really empowered me, now I'm thinking I'm very strong person. I can do everything. There is nothing impossible for me." (AB_A13_H)

As this graduate grew his sense of responsibility and capacity through the Diploma, he built a new awareness about his potential and motivation to engage in his community. This personal development is presented to be in relation with a better understanding to oneself, as explained by this participant from Iraq:

"When you become more confident, [...] I have known myself more.[...] So this is the first time where I was like, reflecting on my values. I have known [...] what are the most values that I value in life. [...] so when you know your values, you know what you want. [...] It's made me more confident. (IE_A4_M)

This better understanding of oneself resulting in a growth in self-confidence has led graduates to feel as though they can manage and overcome challenges. According to this graduate, the Diploma made her realise that despite daily challenges at work, she "feel[s] strong" and that "[she] believes [i]n [her]self that [she] can do anything that comes to [her]" and "can manage it very well" (AB_A10_H).

Thus, as the Diploma allows graduates to believe in themselves and their capacity, this programme emerges as a space to develop their self-confidence, which ultimately further projects their personal growth.

1.2.2 Courage

An additional consequence of building graduates' empowerment throughout the

Diploma is that they also develop their courage. For some graduates, empowerment is understood as "giving values" and "opening what [one] is capable of doing [...] and achieving" (MD_A15_T). With "the spirit of not giving up" despite challenging situations, the Diploma is seen as giving the "courage to go ahead" (MD_A6_T). Gaining such courage has led some graduates to pursue successful paths. For example, this graduate in Kenya shares how the confidence acquired through JWL led him to build knowledge and skills that enabled him to win multiple grants, develop community projects, open his professional opportunities, and summits at the UNICEF, etc. For him, this success is just a "matter of confidence.":



"If you have rights and believe in yourself, the team you have, and everybody around, you don't fear competition. [...] Confidences and courage takes away the cowardliness, [...] you do [...] your best and leave the rest and see what will come, that is how I learned confidence from the Diploma and up to now."

-KK_A3_G

While this graduate demonstrates the relationship between building courage and confidence, another graduate expressed how confidence built his courage, and how this ultimately benefitted the community:

"I could not make a decision without the fear of the unknown, I could wait of someone to come and do something for me instead of me to start it. I could not even voice my problems out to be heard, I could not stand in presence of people to speak. But now I can stand in thousands of



people without fear, the courage I took to solve a case between two communities, if I wasn't because of the confidence the Diploma impacted in me, I could not have made it to solve the case between the two tribes, Dinka and the Nubian. Another example the case that I solved between the two gentlemen who wanted to adopt the child. It was the help of the Diploma that I managed to solve the case [...]. Doing things that you are capable of without hesitating is the pillar of self-confidence." (KK_A9_G)

Hence, the effects of the graduates' empowerment through the Diploma are interlaced with a growth in self-confidence and courage which often become beneficial for the community.

1.2.3 Lasting virtuous energies

Lastly, graduates articulate the results of their empowerment as creating lasting beneficial energies. For example, graduates' personal growth has been understood as long-term changes in their personalities. This graduate in Malawi presents self-confidence as believing that one can become anything:

"That self-confidence in me, I can say that I got it and it helped me too much, today I have almost six years here, so without that issue the self-confidence I could have left the camp, but today I'm here since I believe that I'm here in a tough life but one day I will make it." (MD_A13_T)

Graduates have internalised the Diploma's teachings in their personality and shared how this changed their lives. For this alumnus in Malawi, the Diploma allowed him to "have the chance to try [his] own life, to be the person [he] want[s] to be" and chose his professional journey that differed from his parents' expectations (MD_A2_T). For other graduates, this empowerment motivated them to open new professional doors by starting their own community projects (KK_A1_MZ). For instance, this graduate shares how, through empowerment developed during

his studies with JWL, he changed his perspective on professional opportunities:

"It was somehow difficult for you to have those chances of job opportunities, but with empowerment from JWL is not only like looking for possible jobs, but now I was empowered to even be able to start up my own projects which I am currently doing" (MD_A2_T)

Like this graduate who applies his empowerment professionally, this graduate reflects how he used his empowerment to move from jobseeker to job-creator:

"Also it [has] open doors to me so I can either employ myself and create a job and then employ others or I can even seek the work from other organisation. I [am] able [to] work with the knowledge that I got from Diploma" (KK_A1_MZ)

As graduates use their empowerment to create opportunities not only for themselves but also for their communities, they are at the origin of lasting impact that contributes to empowering the communities. Through this benevolent energy, graduates become actors of change that create positive momentum in their communities. According to this graduate in Kenya, the Diploma programme had a lasting impact on his personality and community:

"My family and my best friend see that I am a changed person, like I said before, I was always an enemy to everybody, could not treat everybody fairly as it should. But now with the help of the Diploma, and now everybody is saying that JWL has really changed with initiatives in the community, and I am now taking leadership in this community, and I have changed the life of so many in the community. I think this is the area where everybody in the community see that has changed in me that was negative before but that is positive now." (KK_A4_JR)

This positive breath in graduates' lives and their communities depicts the virtuous



mechanism of the Diploma's impact. This is also reflected in the removal of nefarious behaviours, as expressed by this graduate in Kenya:

"For example, before I joined the Diploma program as a result of peer influence, we used to indulge in drinking alcohol of other things, but after I have acquired this Diploma [...] I decided to give up [alcohol consumption] but we still friends, but they know that [I have] given up drinking." (KK_A13_MZ).

This new approach to life, detached from negative influence, results in building a positive dynamic in graduates' lives, bolstering their empowerment. The words of this graduate in Iraq encapsulate this new fearless and empowered approach to life:



"I [am not] afraid to do things, even if there is like a small chance to fail, I just want to do it [...] JWL gave us opportunities to study courses or participate in programs so that gives me more confidence and empowered me more and more. I see myself. I see myself like a I am walking, I'm not stopping."

-IE_A2_M

Therefore, graduates' empowerment propels a spiral of virtuous energy which results in long-term effects on their lives. Whether it is through graduates' knowledge and skills, self-confidence or courage, the empowerment developed throughout their Diploma journey has had lasting effects on graduates' lives and their communities that engender graduates' self-actualisation.



2 The effects of personal empowerment

Developing graduates' empowerment has been identified as having diverse effects on graduates and their communities.

2.1 Financial empowerment

One consequence of developing personal empowerment through the Diploma is the supporting of graduates' financial empowerment. This seems to be particularly relevant in the context of Kenya and Malawi, as they respectively represent 27% and 29% of the codes relating to financial empowerment. For example, this graduate in Kenya explained that obtaining a professional opportunity was a source of financial empowerment for him. Before joining the Diploma, he had no job opportunities, but after graduating from the Diploma, he "was employed by UNHCR" and he was "empowered [...] financially" (KK_A1_R).

This professional development has also translated into shaping the financial empowerment of others. For this graduate in Kenya, not only did the Diploma enable him to "fit in any job market", but also "serve the community" and use the money that he will be earning to benefit poor people (KK_A13_MZ). He further states:

"So personally, and how I believe JWL has empowered me [...] educationally [...]. I can also support them as part of also extending the empowerment to other do not get such opportunity, people who are not working." (KK_A13_MZ)

This willingness to support others' financial empowerment is reflected in the example of this graduate who led a permaculture project to teach his

community how to produce and eventually sell their food, thus reducing reliance on food donations from UNHCR (MD_A5_L). For this graduate in Afghanistan, this financial support to others is understood in terms the economic help to her family:

"Through studying this programme, I become self-independent and economically and financially, I can support my family. This is one thing, another thing is that I can help my brother, sister and my aunts, uncles. I encourage them to take this programme in order to become self-independent and to become a person who is respected by everyone in the community. [...] Everything is different in my life now and it will be different. [...]" (AB_A10_H)

This financial freedom not only benefits her, but ultimately also her environment, as she encourages her relatives to embark on the same journey of financial independence and empowerment. This economic aspect of empowerment is therefore multidimensional, as it can spark other forms of empowerment. For instance, this graduate in Kenya mentions this pluralist aspect of empowerment:

"Empowerment is like making me strong, isn't it? [...] I have been empowered in so many ways, I have been empowered in getting jobs, in thinking as I told you before, I am able to write some of the articles, I am also able to create interaction" (KK_A3_R).

Empowerment can be used as a driver to improve not only graduates' economic situation but also their professional lives. Another graduate elaborates on this cross-dimensional impact of financial empowerment by highlighting the responsibility as an educated member of the community:

"The other empowerment is economy. Why am I saying this? Even if you are educated, you cannot just sit with your paper, let's say for example from 2014 to 2017 I have completed my Diploma and



then I take my paper and go sit on it and wait for people to come and empower me. No one knows what you have until you display it so that you are empowered and ready to empower others [...] and the definition of empowerment is that you [...] show that you are empowered by acting in a local level." (KK_A1_G)

Through its impact in building independence, professional growth, or sparking others' emancipation, financial empowerment is consequently a crucial contribution of the Diploma to graduates' lives and their communities.

2.2 Guidance and encouragement

Graduates are able to gain empowerment by providing and receiving guidance in a supportive environment. Through their Diploma learning path, they realise the benefits of encouraging others and applying this advice in their respective lives.

2.2.1 Guiding others as a form of mutual empowerment

While graduates have benefitted from encouragement during the Diploma journey, they have also actively provided guidance to others. For example, this graduate in Afghanistan illustrates the significance of encouraging:

"The most important thing in here is encouragement. If we teach them, if we encourage them, if we motivate them, they will get empowered." (AB_A13_H.)

This willingness to provide encouragement to others is shaped by a change in consciousness that is "getting rid of all that greediness" (AB_A13_H.). This alumnus in Afghanistan explains this mind shift and the responsibilities that are engendered from this change of perspective:

"You come to know who you are, why you have been created, what are your machines in this world, why you should help others. You get rid of all that greediness inside you. You stop thinking only about yourself, that [...] I should have a job, I should have money, I should have a car, I should have a four flat apartment something like that. You get a sense of sympathy, empathy, cooperation. You start helping others. So, [...] you will come to know that who you are, what are your exact responsibilities in this world and that is serving to others, that is dedicating your life to the service of humankind regardless [of] the culture, gender, religion, ages and so on so forth [...]. This was really mention[ed] in the Diploma." (AH_A1_N).

As the Diploma allows graduates to become active in the community, it leads them to provide support, motivation and inspiration to their community members. For instance, this graduate in Malawi explains that:

"Diploma [...] empowered me and it gave me skills that I'm working now in the community to make the community a better place to bring change in the community. Through the Diploma fellow youth [...] want hear like my reasoning, they present kind of issues they face, what their dream is, I kind of work with the youth to make them [...] believe in themselves and work towards achieving their goals, all this is because the Diploma that I got the education, the skills they made me seen as a person who can have a scene and be an inspiration to other people." (MD_A11_T)

Like this graduate who encourages and motivates his community, this graduate is able to bring back hope to vulnerable people by using empathy as a method of empowerment:



"The Diploma empowered me in the way that [...] we had to learn about being, [...] like putting yourself in others' shoes. This is the starting of empowering other people, understanding the problems of other people and working on how you can improve their lives. This is a very big a thing that I got from the Diploma. [...] I can see a lot of people in need, and I'm trying to work on how I can help these people, not by giving them money, not by giving them material things, but by helping them to understand themselves. [...] I'm empowering those people who are feeling like they're desperate. [...] whenever we share stories with those people, whenever we share our background [...] they come up to understand that `OK, the situation I'm facing and not the first one` and they arrived to understand that OK there is still a new hope [...] This is the empowerment that we're trying to bring within the society."

—MD_A7_F

Empathy as a tool for self-empowerment that is also used to empower others is presented as a crucial tool with mutual benefits for both the one being helped and those who are helping. As empowerment becomes a synonym for helping others (KK_A7_MZ), it enables graduates to apply their knowledge not only to become self-reliant, but also to empower others. This graduate in Malawi illustrates this idea:

"Diploma showed my empowerment in the way of making to be standing firm in the way of like being more collaborative with people and

knowing how to defend others whether publicly or at home and know how to solve things no matter how difficult it is. I always be there to find solutions." (MD_A5_T.)

This support to the community is also reflected through this graduate's use of poetry to share messages of empowerment with his community:

"When I write poems, and I tell a story [...]. You know I am also empowered to tell my message even my people who never want to listen to my message, if they read, they come across they will be challenged to understand that something happening here, so that alone is empowerment" (KK_A1_JR)

This graduate in Kenya demonstrated this willingness to help and contribute to the empowerment of others as she supported a student who was about to drop out of school (KK_A4_MZ). Thanks to the mentoring provided, in addition to supporting her financially by paying for her tuition fees, she succeeded to make the student return to her higher education journey (KK_A4_MZ).

This contagious form of empowerment which the Diploma provides is reflected by the number of community-based organisations run by JWL alumni and the hope it spreads:

"[the Diploma] is helping to encourage and to motivate people and to teach people how to learn to help others, how to be creative? [...] but you know already how many founders for some CBOs there in Dzaleka, [...] I can see the fountain, there is hope... [...] If you see [...] all those people, they all took courses from Diploma programme JC-HEM, [...] now it is JWL. [...] All those founders, they come from this. This, this route of route of motivation. [...] I do call [the programme] root of motivation. You understand this help the local people with trauma [...] when this Diploma programme started, it's really helping people to give hope when there's no hope anymore. [...] This programme is strong in Malawi." (MD_A3_



Therefore, the programme appears as essential in bringing back hope when it is most needed. Through building a strong community that seeks to provide help to vulnerable persons, graduates appear as agents of change in their communities, spreading hope and empathy around them. This community support not only results in the empowerment of the graduates but also their respective

community members, making the impact of the Diploma's extensive. While there are many ways this dual empowerment is occurring, teaching is articulated as one of the prominent sources of empowerment.

2.2.2 Case study: Teaching

Teaching appears as a recurring theme affecting the empowerment of graduates and their communities. This seems

Gender perspective

While empowerment is reflected almost equally across the two genders (women represent 52% of quotes related to empowerment and men encapsulate 48% of these quotes), it appears that graduates employ differently their empowerment. For male participants, it seems that their empowerment is more reflected in a financial aspect as they represent 66% of codes regarding financial empowerment. Additionally, this type of empowerment seems to be characterised by a willingness to influence and help as they represent 56% of the excerpts mentioning this theme. This type of engagement demonstrates a form of empowerment that seeks to provide material support for graduates as well as for their communities. Contrasting with this financial approach to empowerment, women's empowerment is depicted in terms of claiming rights as they represent 71% of the quotes related to the topics of 'rights claiming' and 57% of the excerpts related to the idea of self-development and personal growth'. This seems to be applied in the context of teach as female participants encapsulate 58% of quotes related to this theme.

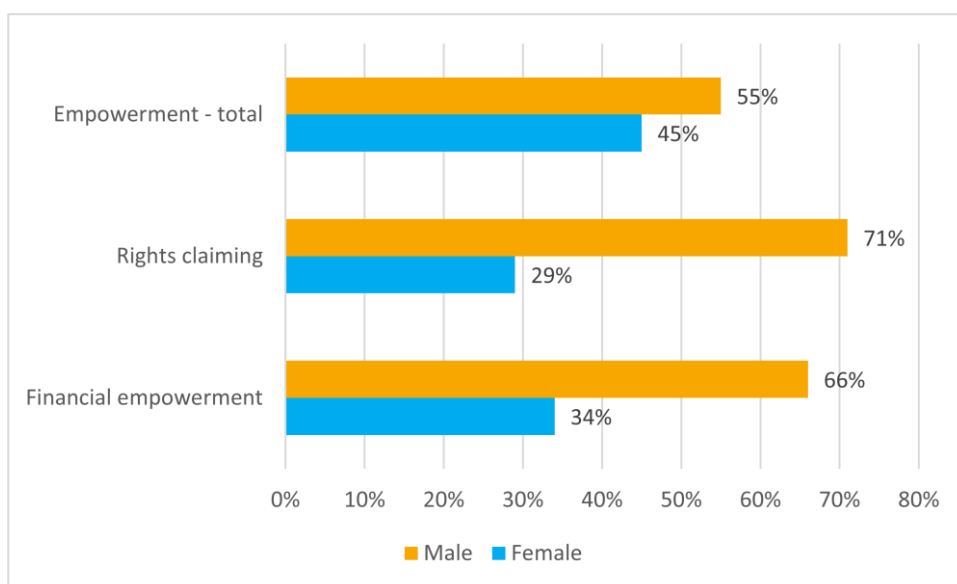


Figure 1: Analysis of some of the quotes related to personal empowerment by gender



particularly prominent in the context of Afghanistan and Iraq, as they respectively encapsulate 35% and 25% of the codes relating to teaching. According to this graduate in Afghanistan, teaching as a tool to transfer knowledge becomes a source of empowerment as it can “bring some positive changes” not only in the life of community members but also in the life of graduates (AB_A2_H). For example, this graduate articulates how his empowerment benefits his community:

“I am even empowering other students according to the knowledge I got from the Diploma. I am even sending people, or street children to school to empower them so that they can be empowered there at school. Because of the knowledge I got from Diploma concerning compassion, the love to others and also

concerning how you can empower other people” (KK_A7_R)

Similarly, this alumna teacher uses her empowerment to inspire other females to pursue their educational journey:

“When I see women. I encourage them to study. I encourage them to work, not to be afraid [...]. I'm a teacher. So I have many woman students. They say [...] to me, we have a family. We have children, we cannot study, we cannot do these things. I tell them “always study, take your right, [...] if you can manage your time and you can study and work in the same time, [...] and take care of your family [...] so do not stop to study and if you have any dreams, you [...] can go and do your dreams. Not because you are a woman, you're just like [me], like I'm a woman. I can do this thing”. No, I encourage them to do whatever they want, or whatever they dream.” (IE_A2_M)



Figure 2: Students receiving and giving guidance in the community learning centre in Erbil, Iraq



Like this graduate who seeks to help others through teaching, another alumnus in Jordan enthusiastically reflects shares how teaching allows her to become empowered:



“When I give my knowledge! When I teach others! When I help others! this is the things that I have learned from Diploma. The Diploma gives me many things and I have to give these back to the others. And I think this is empowerment.”

-JA_A5_A

In addition to becoming a “better version” of themselves through helping others, teaching can project graduates as role models for their community (JA_A7_A). This Jordanian alumna who has been a teacher to refugees for 5 years explains that through the Diploma, not only did she become “a better human being [...] who is willing to help others”, but she also empowered her students to embark on this life-changing journey:

“I taught [refugees] English. I was not just a teacher, I was a good friend and a good sister to them. So I was listening to their problems. So I was not only a teacher, but someone was there to help them, listen to them and, and sympathise with their current situation. [...] I'm thinking about the transferring my knowledge to other people, [...] I learned about that it is not only about me, but it is about others. [...] so I sympathise with the other people. I put myself in their shoes and I feel their pain. [...] They [her students] always send me messages and they tell me that I [made] changes in their lives. A positive change. And they always look up to me and they want to be [...] like me. [...] And so yes, this is really makes me happy and this is makes me always happy again.”(JA_A7_A)

As a teacher, this graduate demonstrates the impact her teaching experience had on her community's wellbeing. While her professional teaching experience inspired others to become empowered, another graduate in Kenya shows that being seen as a teacher does not have to come from teaching professionally. Being a “person who has gone to this level of education” through the Diploma makes her feel that she “[has] made it [...] and on [her] way to make it even more” (KK_A9_MZ). As her community has benefitted from her, they have given named her “Mollimu”, meaning the “teacher”, “not because [she] just teach[es] biology”, but because she is enrolled in the Diploma (KK_A9_MZ). Hence, teaching appears as a unique form of guidance, through which graduates can be projected as role models and encourage their students to find their own forms of empowerment.

Consequently, teaching – or more generally, providing guidance and encouragement – emerges as a special means of empowerment for both graduates and their communities, which directly benefit from graduates’ knowledge and new life perspectives. Graduates, as the drop of water propagating empowerment waves, emulate a mutually beneficial impact providing encouragement and widening the length of these waves to reach and affect their community.

2.3 Community self-actualisation

Graduates’ self-development has a ripple effect, resulting in the self-actualisation of the community. Supported by the findings of Joo et al (2020) and Rocha’s (1997) empowerment theory, graduates explain that through their empowerment, they are able to contribute to the community and



support its growth. This consequence of graduates' empowerment is expressed by this alumnus in Kenya:

"The life journey of education, [...] from very beginning of the program, it [has] actually enlighten[ed] my critical thinking in that now I can challenge myself [...] and I can also use my knowledge gained from the Diploma [to] actually empower [...] or impact the community [...]. It was actually good from beginning mode, it is gave me motivations." (KK_A6_MZ)

This eagerness to transmit this empowerment to the wider community has been further articulated by this graduate in Malawi, who understands his role as a social worker "that [has] been empowered to advocate for others" through the Diploma (MD_A3_T). Similarly, another graduate and community leader in Kenya redefines his position through an inclusive lens demonstrating his willingness to transmit his empowerment to his community:

"Before I was centred of my community that title they used in Kakuma tribal leader, today I hate it. This is something that I feel it's exclusive, we need to be inclusive in doing things like now I am inspired to do many things and am appealing that the feeling that I have potential to help on the ground here. I have realised that there is potentiality in Kakuma. Kakuma isn't just a camp not a refugee camp [...]. Kakuma is like bakery, we are being prepared and sent to the field so that how I take it. It has a lot of potential as JWL students and we have a lot to do still more." (KK_A3_G)

While this graduate reflects his change of perspective regarding his community leadership role in order to realise the empowerment potential of the community, another female graduate - and leader - concentrates her energy to support her community's actualisation in terms of women's rights:



"Diploma supported in the way of my growth mostly, when I was able to conduct different meetings about people, mostly about girls who are vulnerable, women who are violated all those kind of things, I have always been a good example by using my own experience as a leader who has been through a lot of challenges in life, so I just tell them that the way of being a single mother getting impregnated in the young age, you still can make it once you are being dedicated yourself, you are telling yourself that I can do it, when you have that kind of positive change in you, you can really transform the community to torch such kind of brilliant ideas."

-MD_A5_T

This collective empowerment on gender issues is further reflected in graduates' actions to stand up for and claim women's rights, encouraging other women to do so as well and pursue their life goals. This graduate in Kenya shares that the Diploma supported her empowerment as it gave her the "courage to advocate for [her] life and the rights of other people in [her] community", particularly for "women who are denied their right to go to school", or "to work for themselves" (KK_A4_MZ). The consequences of this kind of empowerment have been identified as spilling over into the community and resulting in its empowerment, as expressed by this alumnus in Kenya:

"I can just give an example by those girls who are educated. They are able to change the



community. [...] They are able to have a good life. They are able to solve problems which [women are facing] in the community like domestic [...] violence. So those women who are educated through education, it will empower the community [...] by changing cultural practice, like cultural belief [...] someone [who is] going to school is able to change his life, or change the community." (KK_A13_R)

This empowerment effect on the community is further exemplified by yet another graduate from Kenya who shares how the "Diploma was a key for everything including [her] community":

"Since we are living in the community where so many, especially women, are not interested [in] studies in my community so, when I started doing that and after finish, I saw some improvement because many women follow me in that for the other intake they wanted to apply, so they were expecting a big things in doing the Diploma so [...] other follow me and said that they were expecting to get a nice job [...] and after that other came behind me and they were doing that, for me it was just to encourage many women to join the program." (MD_A2_F)

Beyond accessing educational and professional opportunities, the empowerment of women in the community through education has been identified as providing empowerment and resources to fight sexual gender-based violence and prevent them from engaging in unhealthy behaviour such as smoking and harmful use of alcohol (KK_A7_G). Additionally, this collective empowerment has led women to reclaim their voices (JA_A8_A). For one graduate in Iraq, this voice-reclaiming was translated through writing plays that "criticises society" and "think more critically about the reasons [...] and consequences of violence" (ID_A1_HD). As her play was acted and seen by many of her community members, her voice as a woman was amplified in her community. This example demonstrates how graduates' empowerment can also

empower the rest of the community. Consequently, graduates' empowerment through the Diploma results in the self-actualisation of the community, which is empowered through this virtuous energy diffused by graduates' actions.

2.4 Cross-cutting effects

Empowerment denotes itself from the other dimensions of the Diploma's impact through its cross-cutting characteristics. Present in diverse settings, the empowerment of graduates has had consequences on many aspects of graduates' lives. This transversal effect of empowerment is illustrated through this Afghanistan graduate's cooking metaphor. She explains that education is like ingredients:

"If she [her mother] can access to these kinds of education, the ingredients that she is using in the [cuisine], then [...] she can prepared the food very delicious yeah. So, like empowering is the same. So when we do not have access to something we [can] not be empowered. When we are able to have access to a kind of opportunity, we will have access to a kind of facilities or any other things that makes us to become empowered." (AB_A10_H)

Applied in daily life, this intersecting impact is articulated as helping graduates to develop public-speaking skills, teaching methods, communication skills, interreligious and intercultural sensitivity, positive thinking, team-working skills, leadership and self-confidence (AB_A1_H, AB_A6_H). This transversal aspect of the Diploma is also reflected in the ability of this programme to create a space for personal and community growth, even in interreligious settings. For instance, this participant from Jordan shares how the Diploma gave her a "space to share [her] opinion":



"They have to empower, to give the opportunity to be a leader, to have a rule in the society. [...] I am Muslim and wear hijab and shared another [opinion] with another religion. I go to church. That's the first time, I entered the church and shar[ed] my opinion. [JWL] empowered me to help me to [get] many skills like English skills and writing skills, thinking skills, many things. This is very important for women, I think. [...] it gives me space to write essays to express my opinion, give me space to have many friends from many countries, [...] They respect our opinion. They respect our religion. That's very important. They push us to achieve [...] to succ[eed] the courses. [...] always I was pushing myself, despite I was a mother, [...] so, it's hard [...] to be a woman, have a family, have a baby and complete Diploma. This is, I think, it is very power[ful] to have it." (JA_A6_A)

This inclusive aspect of the Diploma is understood as creating a far-reaching impact on communities. According to another graduate, the Diploma's large intake of students represents a significant benefit not only to those who seek to

pursue their educational journey and develop their professional opportunities, but also to all the community members:

"For me the impact of Diploma [...] to be honest, it is not only me, Regis Diploma is an asset to me, [...] every member of the community that is Kakuma. Imagine we have around over 2500 students who have completed secondary school and we don't have that guarantee 100 [will] make it to the university. Regis came in as a Savior, let me [be] very frank [...] maybe Musinde Muliro take 30 students, Dafi scholarship will take 50 students and WUSC take 20-30 students, that is the maximum numbers they take. So, ask yourself about the remaining huge number of the graduates. If you look at Regis, the community courses, Sport facilitator, English language and Primary Teachers Education all this course take a huge number of students. This is the only organisation that take such numbers. In fact, for me in term of education the impact is very good and very touching [...]. It has strengthened the economy of the families when you look [there] are family depending on this programme. (KK_A1_G).



Figure 3: Graduates in Dzaleka, Malawi



Therefore, the Diploma's impact is understood to be beneficial to graduates as much as their communities, be it in financial terms or graduates' willingness to guide others. The impact of the Diploma is not only limited to graduates' personal empowerment, but also as it reaches out to the wider community, graduates'

diverse forms of action ultimately benefit back their respective communities.

Hence, the empowerment gained during the Diploma emerges as crucial in the development of graduates and their communities, prompting both a personal and collective self-actualisation.



3 Conclusion

Graduates' empowerment, developed through the knowledge and skills and the process of self-actualisation during the Diploma, sparks waves of empowerment in graduates' personal lives and those of their respective communities. With lasting transversal effects supported by the financial empowerment and guidance opportunities received, this virtuous energy is channelled into graduates'

diverse actions that contribute to the community's development and, in turn, graduates' personal development. This cross-cutting aspect of the Diploma shows the spillover effect of its impact, both in length and depth. This reveals the transformative characteristics of the graduates' empowerment in their lives and those of their communities. Consequently, the empowerment of graduates through the Diploma appears as indissociable from that of their communities.

Key points

- Graduates identify the role of the Diploma in shaping their empowerment through gaining knowledge and skills, the process of self-actualisation composed of self-confidence and courage-building in a context of supporting environment to support them in channelling lasting virtuous energies.
- Graduates' empowerment essentially results in both a personal and collective actualisation, as they empower their community financially and/or provide guidance and encouragement to community members.
- Teaching appears to be one of the recurrent forms through which graduates are able to launch the process of self-actualisation as well as that of the community.
- The Diploma creates virtuous lasting energy which when channelled through graduates' diverse actions, contributes to the community's development. This reveals the transformative impact of graduates' empowerment on their lives as well as their communities. Consequently, the empowerment of graduates through the Diploma appears as indissociable from that of their communities.



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