

The Jesuit Worldwide Learning Initiative towards Holistic Formation of the Marginalized through Higher Education to transform the World

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Abstract:

Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) provides higher education to the youth at the margins of societies. The people and communities at the margins are increased many fold due to conflict among the nations and within the nations due to various geo political and other types of discriminations. These people, who stand at the margins, are deprived of basic human rights including the right for education. Education is the only solution, which could alleviate the poverty and reduce the economical and social backwardness. And today the environmental exploitation is leading to extinction of effective ecology, which very much affect the poor whose livelihood is practically at stand still. The environmental degradation and poverty alleviation are urgent issues that need to be addressed by the global community as a whole.

Sustainability is the key for a better and balanced relationship between human development and healthy environment. If we need true progress to be made, we should understand the interconnectedness between human beings and the environment. We make development sustainable to “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland Report, 1987). Environmental degradation poses a major threat to human security. The poor have traditionally taken the brunt of the blame for causing society’s many problems including environmental degradation. But a number of issues such as water and air pollution and wastewater disposal are from industrial sectors. The environmental degradation affects our human health and hygiene. The number of human mortality especially of children is increasing day by day due to water related as well as air-borne diseases.

The first and the foremost Sustainable Development goal is to “end poverty in all forms everywhere”. Each and every country of the world is looking forward to eradicate poverty so that even the poor and vulnerable people also could enjoy equal rights to economic resources, healthy living conditions as well as access to basic infrastructure and technology. Moreover, the poor nations and poor people are more severely vulnerable to effects of environmental damage than the rich. The two biggest factors contributing to poverty are: Lack of education and improper implementation of poverty eradication policies at the grass-root level and many international reports claim that poverty contributes to environmental degradation which in turn affects the health and hygiene of the community. The JWL believes that higher/tertiary learning and the formation of a global community of learners address the root causes of poverty, isolation, despair, conflict and displacement in order to build a more peaceful and humane world and education fosters hope.

Imparting education to the economically poor and the marginalized of the society (such as the refugees, socially discriminated etc) makes them first to think critically; and then to act as entrepreneurial leaders with social responsibility. The Jesuit

Worldwide Learning (JWL) offers the best to the least in education and the social service component in the JWL pedagogy forms the individual as social transformers. JWL offers quality education at three levels: basic, intermediate, and tertiary levels. Starting with English, professional courses are offered, with the diploma programs at the key to degree program in any recognized universities across the globe.

The focus on the poverty and the environmental degradation are inter-related and if we want to eradicate both the problems the starting point is education, the effective instrument for the holistic formation of the youth. The youth play the vital and crucial role in the society. Therefore, through education of the youth we should be able to transform the world a better place to live in.

Keywords: Education to the Marginalized, Empowering the Poor, Jesuit Worldwide Learning

Introduction:

Jesuit Worldwide Learning: Higher Education at the Margins (JWL) is an initiative of the Society of Jesus (Jesuit Order founded in 1540) that, through partnerships with local organizations and universities around the globe, creates access to higher education for the unserved or underserved communities. It draws on the rich and centuries long Jesuit tradition of higher education and through a blended on-site and on-line approach mobilizes the resources of Jesuit and other worldwide networks of educational institutions.

Mission:

The Mission of JWL is: Learning together to transform the world.

Vision:

The vision of JWL is: To empower those at the very edges of our societies – be it through poverty, location, opportunity or circumstance – through access to higher education, so that they can contribute their knowledge and wisdom to our global community of learners so that together we foster hope to create a more peaceful and humane world.

Our services:

The educational service, based on the service provider model (of Star Alliance), serves the refugees, the internally displaced, the disadvantaged, and the marginalized in the society. The following are the services offered by JWL:

- To bring together those who would normally be unable to access higher education, with institutions seeking a practical way to take education where it is needed most;
- To collaborate fully and freely to create global, virtual, immersive learning environments through which Jesuit higher education can be delivered in a manner that is scalable, sustainable, and transferable;
- To promote human dignity and gender equality with educators accompanying learners;

- To give life to the principles of Ignatian pedagogy offering higher education capable of transformational learning; ^[1]_{SEP} and
- To share the common human and spiritual values of all religions and cultures.

JWL is committed to offering tertiary education in communities at the margins of societies – those societies that through poverty, location, lack of opportunity, conflict or forced displacement exist among the rural or urban poor, indigenous or isolated displaced people. Together JWL and its Community Learning Centers form a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious global community of learners enabling all to contribute their knowledge and voices to foster hope to create a more peaceful and humane world.

Global English Language:

This is a prerequisite for taking up higher education. The Language Program brings a comprehensive high-quality, internationally known approach to learning Global English using the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR). JWL will provide students with an internationally known certificate (International English Language Testing System: IELTS) after all levels have been completed. The test will be partly online in collaboration with Cambridge Language Institute. JWL is also working with Cambridge English Language Assessment to provide the accredited testing [Linguaskill] so students can take their new English skills anywhere in the world and be recognized for it.

The Global English Language Program is part of an ongoing effort to further JWL’s mission of “Learning Together to Transform the World.” Each student and facilitator will have access to a global interactive network hub where they can interact and engage in global conversations, practice their skills, and share learning. The Global English Language Program offers a flexible learning structured based on a daily workload of 5-6 hours, all six levels can be completed in one year. However, the Language Program has the flexibility to accommodate different schedules and offers structured time guidelines for each lesson. Moreover, the Language Program includes multiple activities outside of the classroom to ensure students enhance the skills they have learned. The course is based on ‘English Unlimited’ by Adrian Doff and JWL has designed a learning kit to enhance effective learning process.

JWL started out by offering short-term classroom based Community Service Learning Track Courses (CSLT) with a duration of 6 to 12 months online course to train students in a whole range of skills. All courses are developed in collaboration with university faculties to reflect tertiary level quality. JWL will work with partnering universities to develop professional and vocational curriculum that will award certificates based on the UNESCO standard of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET). JWL started in 2017 to develop Certified Professional Programs lasting one year and the new courses will be taught online with classroom components.

Professional Vocational Certificate:

The following certificate programs are offered to the students as a blended model (online tutoring plus in-house mentoring). The Subject concentrations are:

- Primary Teacher Training
- Youth Worker
- Psychosocial Case Management
- Community Healthcare Provider
- Community and Development Business
- Peace and Reconciliation
- Sustainable Agriculture

Diploma in Liberal studies:

The JWL Academic Program includes both credit-bearing and certificate level courses. The Diploma in Liberal Arts Studies, includes 45 credits of coursework over three years and is awarded by Regis University in Denver, Colorado. The Diploma program has been developed within the framework of Ignatian pedagogy that seeks to develop the whole person, or *cura personalis*. Within each course and across the curriculum, student learning is structured around the concepts of experience, reflection, and action. ^[1]_[SEP]

Preparatory Courses:

The diploma is inbuilt with preparatory courses:

- Ten Foundational Courses – 3 credits each during the first two years
- 1. Academic Writing;^[1]_[SEP] 2. Interpersonal Communication;^[1]_[SEP] 3. Dynamic Algebra;^[1]_[SEP] 4. Introduction to Physical Science;^[1]_[SEP] 5. Ethics and the Human Person;^[1]_[SEP] 6. Interdisciplinary Arts;^[1]_[SEP] 7. Religions of the World;^[1]_[SEP] 8. Introduction to Political Thought;^[1]_[SEP] 9. Introduction to Sociology; and^[1]_[SEP] 10. Electives
- Concentration/specialization would be on Teacher training; Business, and Social Work etc.

Life in Refugee Camp:

Life in a Refugee camp is hard, and it is about to get harder. Due to poorly funded infrastructure the living conditions of people are pathetically difficult. In the camp normally the life will be very difficult because of various reasons, namely the people were not allowed to move from one place to another freely; and there will be a lot restrictions by local government and other political reason. There are also a lot of illegal activities, drug menace, and other antisocial activities. In addition, the problems will be more to the vulnerable group of people like old people, women, children, young and vulnerable girls will be insecure because of prevailing ecosystem.

The sanitation facilities are not up to the standard. Overflowing of toilets, overstretched water results in the outbreaks of diarrhea, pneumonia, measles and cholera. One third of the camp's population lacks adequate shelter, according to the UN. Even firewood is scarce; some people actually have sold part of their food rations to buy wood to cook with. The supply sufficient quantities of clean, safe drinking water have become a critical challenge with refugees now receiving less than the standard 20 litres of water per person per day.

As the migrant population/refugees is increasing, there is need for more space for construction of more huts, which resulted in the clearing off adjoining forest areas and growing demand for more land for crop production, as well as wood for fuel, because there are more mouths to feed. Continuous rapid population growth also implies increased use of land in economies dependent on rain fed cultivation.

According to the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), based on 1989 estimates, roughly 11 million trees were cut for shelter needs during the initial period of refugee influxes in Africa (Cardy, 1994). This represents the deforestation of over 12, 000 ha. In addition, about 4 million tons of fuel wood were consumed by refugees in Africa. This type deforestation results in the deterioration of environment and affects the quality of life.

Intervention by JWL and its Learning Centers:

Eventhough providing the basic amenities are the responsibilities of the International governments and UN bodies, it may not be possible for them to meet all the requirements of the Refugees. Therefore, in order to sublimate what the International and other United Nations bodies advocate, it is necessitated the intervention and service of NGOs.

At present the JWL has established community Learning centers in different parts of the world such as Bamyan, Herat, Gibrael, Goz Beida, Erbil, Khanke, Domiz, Amman (in the Middle East), Kakuma, Dzaleka, Beira (in Africa), war affected regions in Sri Lanka namely (Mannar, Vavunya, Hatton, Puthiyakudiyiruppu, Trincomalle, Sampur and Monarangala), some parts of India (Madurai, Thiruvannamalai, Mumbai, Thiruvananthapuram), Taunggyi and Yangon in Myanmar, and Nepal for the poor and marginalized communities.

The courses offered by JWL help the refugee youth to continue with their education in local universities or abroad when they are resettled – Some are doing their higher studies in the UK, the USA, Canada, and Australia. The courses are not merely academic exercises, but offer real help to many of the thousands of the refugees in the camps. "When people become refugees, their access to many basic human opportunities including the right to education, self-improvement, and the dignity of work is suddenly closed". They are provided with Higher education via computer learning even though graduates cannot leave the camp. "Every course is delivered online by a range of volunteer faculty from universities within and beyond the Jesuit Commons, and is accredited by Regis University."

In addition to the academic information, the program should address the social needs of the people. One such area is public health. The major prevalent diseases among the refugees are Tuberculosis, vector-borne diseases, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS, and complications related to pregnancy and childbirth and childhood vaccine-preventable disease (aside from measles) are examples of potentially serious and fatal illnesses. The community health course offered by JWL has increased the knowledge about the various aspects of health and hygiene they were able to take care of the community needs. Participants in a community health course measure the blood pressure of people at Dzaleka Refugee Camp, Malawi and take care of their primary health needs.

To understand the service of JWL, it is good to see the effect from the experience of the beneficiaries. The following are the feedback given by some of the beneficiaries of the program:

"The only thing my father left me with was this advice before he died: 'I don't have anything to give you, but I ask you to continue with your education. Education will be your mother and father when I am no longer there.'"

Charles, now 21, fled the Democratic Republic of Congo after his father was assassinated for supporting a political leader. Now living in Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Malawi, Charles wanted to follow his father's final guidance.

"Fortunately I had a chance to complete my secondary education here in the camp," he says. After finishing school, Charles took a course in Community Health. Under a tree, he and his fellow students were recently measuring people's blood pressure. "The objective of the course is to ensure that once we complete our training, we can assist people with their health," explains Charles. "People here at Dzaleka do not necessarily always know what affects their health. We share information with the people so that they remain healthy."

In short, the JWL provides all the basic practical support that students need to access higher education. They are provided with the learning space outfitted by solar electricity, computers and network access, onsite academic support and co-ordination with universities and instructors. At the end of program, they are offered with continued encouragement and support as alumni as they go forth into the community to serve. Our goal is to offer higher education to those community members who can rise above the limitations of refugee life and serve as leaders.

In addition to community health, special needs are taken care of such as communication and journalism, psycho-social counseling, training of trainers, performing arts, child protection, business and entrepreneurship etc. In vocational training centers, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) provides computer training, brick laying, carpentry and joinery, tailoring etc.

Here is another testimony – It is from Siwema Gyslaine Irambona:

"I love studying at the online university. It would of course be much better if I could be in a class directly like a normal university student but I am so happy with this opportunity. My wish is to finish my studies. I would love to be able to get a PhD someday. I want to become somebody who has enough skills so that I can help others. I would love to work for UNHCR," says Irambona.

Irambona was recently selected to be one of the "refugee ambassadors" to help launch the Connectivity for Refugees project in Dzaleka camp.

Education as Solution:

Fr Peter Balleis SJ, the Executive President of JWL, always starts his discussion with a map outlining the world's hot spots for poverty and educational insufficiency. He would say:

"These are the areas where the wars are, where the ideologues are. We will not fight them with weapons. We will fight them with new ideas, new ways of thinking, with education. This is where teaching the humanities takes on the most importance, because while job training is important, teaching the humanities is teaching how to think. This is foundational."

JWL doesn't ignore the importance of professional or technical skills. Hence, JWL also teaches technology: Computer is part of the curriculum for younger students, a challenge given the dearth of technology to be found in many areas on the margins. "Wherever situations are bad, that's where we need to go," Father Balleis said.

Again the fruit describes the tree: "So far so good, the program is really touching lives within the refugee community," Ghaisen said to CNS in an email. "I honestly think that it is exceeding its goal of bringing change within the communities."

JWL has started the education program with liberal arts. Why the focus on the liberal arts in addition to professional certificates? Father Balleis explained that it all comes down to critical thinking as a means of enabling action and change.

"It is that Jesuit thinking which forms people into responsible leaders in their communities, people for others, so that they might make changes in their communities wherever they are." He added, "It will bear fruits in the lives of the people." It costs Jesuit Worldwide Learning \$2,000 a year per student to run a university diploma program in the liberal arts; \$1,400 for a vocational program; and \$600 for an intensive English language course.

"A lot of people ask why we don't just focus on English because you can reach more people for the same amount of money," recalls Chrsita Bathany, the Global HR person for JWL and she answers, "Our response is that the diploma students are the ones who will be the peacemakers. Every peaceful society needs students in all these programs."

Conclusion:

The mission undertaken by Jesuit Order under Jesuits Worldwide Learning is a novel and innovative mission in order to bring about change in the life of thousands of refugees and others who are pushed to the margins of society because of social and political condition. This Jesuits higher education main emphasis on social change through higher education is one of the success stories towards liberation of poor and marginalized from social insecurity. This education provides a dignified social and sustainable life to millions of students who aspire to become someone worth remembering in their community.

The refugees and the other marginalized are at the bottom of the social pyramid. And by forming the people at the periphery and building up social leadership, the transformation of the society would permeate from bottom up. The marginalized have hope of better lives of freedom and dignity; and JWL program provides the bridge to the world of opportunity. After JWL education, equipped with critical thinking and filled with social values, the JWL students emerge as leaders of hope for a better world. This is the dream of JWL and there are already signs of the dream coming true.

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