

Newsletter

Happy New Year!



JWL MYANMAR STUDENTS CONNECTING TO TRANSFORM THEIR COMMUNITIES AND THE WORLD

For over 50 years, the military dictatorship in Myanmar violently repressed ethnic and religious minorities. It is only since 2011 that the country began to experience a slow democratisation process. Although it has a history of valuing and emphasising education, Myanmar's education sector has been left crippled by the military regime. Only a few years ago did investment in the education system begin to increase, particularly in higher education.

The Jesuit Region of Myanmar (JRM) made it its goal to provide more young people in Myanmar with high-quality education through its various institutions. In order to offer students an even broader range of higher education opportunities, a partnership was established with Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL). Since 2014, JWL's Diploma in Liberal Arts has been offered to students in Taunggyi. The program, supervised by Regis University (Colorado, USA) and offered through St. Aloysius Gonzaga English Language Institute, lasts 3 years.

Most students study in Taunggyi but one student, Maria, lives in Yangon with her parents and virtually connects with classmates. Due to poor internet connection, this is not as easy as one might think. Students have nonetheless created a Facebook group in order to facilitate communication among themselves, sharing experiences and supporting each other – near and far.

Maria is particularly interested in the courses in ethics, sociology and interpersonal communication – knowledge that is urgently needed for the of a multi-ethnic state like Myanmar and in light of its current struggles. She is also fascinated and inspired by the global, intercultural exchange that is made possible by Diploma program's online element (wherein students can interact with teachers and fellow classmates across the globe). Like many JWL students, her work and focus are centered around hope for a better future. Not only does Maria hope to find good employment and the financial benefits that could support both her and those close to her. She also hopes to gather and foster all that she has learned to the benefit of her family and the wider community.

John, a fellow student of Maria, has recently had to move from Taunggyi to Yangon in order to find work. Together, with the online support of their fellow classmates and that of Father Simon (their tutor in Yangon), they are pursuing their distance learning studies in pairs and hope to complete them next year.

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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT:

REMY GAKWAYA

My name is Remy Gakwaya, Burundian by nationality, currently in Dzaleka, Malawi. When I started to learn English I also started taking computer courses and tutorials through online websites until JWL presented a six-month ICT track. I learned a lot through this and then did a lot of research about Android development, as there are many work opportunities in that field.

I believed that if refugees were able to work freely and were equipped with programming knowledge, this could be the answer to poverty and hard life in refugee camps (income opportunities). Therefore, I started a lab with one computer which was so interesting to many youth in the camp. Two individuals supported me with four used computers which I am still using to teach computer programming in JAVA and a concentration on Android Development.

Since then, I have got hundreds of youth who are hungry and interested to learn from me and getting skills in android development. However, I take a small number of youth because of my lab capabilities.

I managed to get a second online job in which I will include some of my students to make sure that they start making money and gain online work experience. With this skill, I believe that any nation will be able to accommodate refugees because of the skills and knowledge that they have, allowing them to make positive contributions towards the development of both host and home countries.

I would be happy if many people would join me and takenoLAB in supporting this goal of empowering refugee youth by giving knowledge and skills in computer science, that would help them in their future life.



JWL – a concept and experience not soon forgotten

Dr Lukas Koehler was JWL Academic Director for Europe, until his recent election to the German Parliament. A Doctor of Philosophy, his areas of interest include environmental ethics and sustainability, intergenerational justice, as well as human rights and development studies.

In the past he has volunteered to work with refugees in Munich, assisting unaccompanied minors with their schooling (maths, German). Dr Koehler was still undertaking his PhD at the Munich School of Philosophy when he heard about JWL and the concept immediately drew his attention. "Teaching academic knowledge to people on the margins is just a great concept, and I really like the idea of Jesuit pedagogy."

It was an opportunity to have impact and to further his knowledge about teaching, for the realities of setting up a course for German students are quite different to those aimed at students from different cultural contexts. A particularly challenging aspect was "understanding how to break down knowledge in a way that is teachable online, but more so to understand the difference in the background of the students we're teaching to." For example, water may be referred to in lessons and coursework. It is likely that a student living in a drought-stricken area will relate to water differently than a student living in one that is affected by monsoons. "The biggest challenge," says Dr Koehler, "was to adapt my mindset."

Working on the development of an environmental course with a great team, adapting a concept that appears to be teachable on a broad scale and knowing the impact this could have, was particularly rewarding. The "bright light shining" in the eyes of subject matter experts he interacted with was also encouraging. "It was absolutely great to see that other people think the same way about the project as I did."

Dr Koehler intends to carry the spirit of JWL and his experiences along with him as he moves into Parliament. "Working with JWL changed me in a very positive way and maybe I'll carry on the knowledge of what is going on with initiatives [of] JWL and JRS, into the political world." The current political situation in Germany is such that there is still some uncertainty as to which relevant thematic committees would be formed, but Dr Koehler remains hopeful. "Depending on which areas, of course I will remember my time at JWL."

Going to the margins



After a year of pastoral work in India, Orville DeSilva, S.J., was looking for a challenge when he caught wind of an opportunity to start a blended learning program in Afghanistan. He has been living in Afghanistan for the past four years and is only one of two Jesuits currently living in Afghanistan. As JRS/JWL Director there, he has overseen the establishment and running of three community learning centers (CLC), two in Herat and one in Bamyam. The JWL Diploma in Liberal Arts and Global English Language program (GEL) are currently being offered at all three CLCs. Many students have to walk for an hour to get to the CLCs but this appears to be a minor hurdle in the face of their determination to learn.

JWL and JRS reach out to vulnerable communities and in this case, largely the Hazaras (which have long faced discrimination). The CLCs provide a space for students to come together to study and it has been encouraging to see so many of them are young women partaking the courses (making up 50 per cent of the total number of students). Men and women study together, which is uncommon in Afghanistan. However, working closely with the Department of Education and the local community a relationship of trust has been established. Students have gone on to find good employment opportunities in various sectors and parents see the difference this education makes to their children's lives.

One student went to India to do a Masters in biotechnology. She graduated with distinction and came back to Afghanistan. She continues to give back to the community by working with JWL and teaching at the University of Bamyam, on a voluntary basis.

Just the mention of Afghanistan may predominantly conjure images of war in the minds of many and Father Orville has certainly faced some hair-raising times there. Nonetheless, "there is not a single moment that I regretted being in Afghanistan," he says. "The people of Afghanistan are friendly and hospitable. It has been a learning experience to work in a country which belongs to another tradition altogether but by and large, I see a lot of openness among the people." Most of all, Father Orville has been encouraged by students' dedication to learning. The courses they follow are not only about the acquisition of knowledge, but also about forming minds and developing attitudes. He has seen the change in students from the day they started through to completion of their studies. "Oppressed for so many years, they seize the opportunity... and do well."



Protecting Cultural Heritage: JWL Alumnus sets up library to preserve his local language

Galdo Dente Moding fled his native South Sudan due to civil strife and persecution. He has been living in Kakuma, Kenya, since end of 2004. Back home, he was a farmer, tending the land and taking care of cattle.

In Kenya, he managed to complete his primary education and in 2013, he also obtained his Kenyan Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Two years went by without any viable opportunities for Galdo to further pursue his education. Finally, in 2015, he was able to start the JWL Community and Development Business course and went on to complete the Primary Teacher Training course. His journey continues, as he has now embarked on the JWL Diploma programme which he is due to complete in 2020.

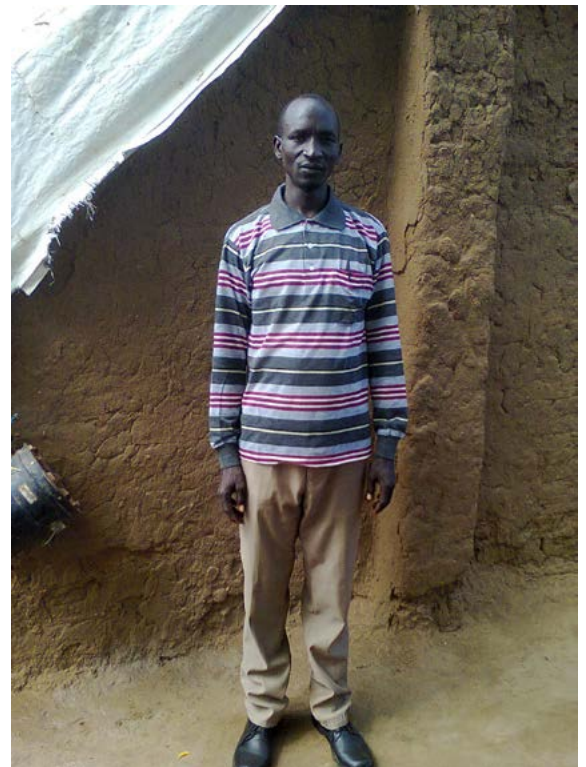
Galdo belongs to the Lopit tribe, from the Eastern Equatoria region of South Sudan. The Lopit language, which has six main/well-known dialects, has more of an oral tradition. Putting his newly acquired skills and knowledge to use, Galdo started the Ihuju Writing Project in order to ensure the survival of the Lopit language, establishing records and creating a space for the transmission of Lopit culture. With the support of community members as well as researchers (including a team of researchers from the University of Melbourne) the project aims to “write down Lopit stories and texts covering the history, mythology and present day

culture of the Lopit community,” to be made available on a website and in a library in Kakuma Camp. All of this tradition would be written down in multiple dialects, ensuring that those aren’t lost, either. The library would be a knowledge repository as well as a space for students to come together, study and learn. Furthermore, there would be English translations in order to “support emerging literacy skills in both languages.” In future, these resources could be shared with other refugees camps.

This initiative could provide an example of best practice for the United Nations. “Language is a central element and expression of identity and of key importance in the preservation of group identity,” said Rita Izsák, the then United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues, presenting her report to the 22nd session of the Human Rights Council ([UN News Centre, March 2013](#)). “Language is particularly important to linguistic minority communities seeking to maintain their distinct group and cultural identity, sometimes under conditions of marginalization, exclusion and discrimination,” she added.

Galdo seems to thrive on being an active member of his community. He volunteers as a primary school teacher and works for the International Rescue Committee (IRC) as Medical Record Clerk. “I like teaching and if an opportunity [is] given to me then

I will be ready to perform my duty with excellency.” In the past, he has also been a member of the School Management Community of a Kakuma primary school. “I am dreaming to be a leader in future,” says Galdo, “and I have been practicing leadership skills.”





JWL IN THE NEWS

Have you been keeping up with us? JWL has recently been featured in many Jesuit online Advent campaigns. To read all about them, go to the news tab on jwl.org, go to our [Facebook page](#) or [Click here!](#)



["As one human family, we are all migrants, journeying in hope." – Pope Francis](#)

JWL is embracing the Pope's call to support migrants and refugees.



Kakuma, Kenya International Migrants Day 2017

On December 18th 2017, International Migrants Day, the United Nations made an appeal for cooperation in the management of migration, "to ensure that its benefits are most widely distributed and that human rights of all concerned are protected – as recognized by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

In his message on this commemoration day, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said "evidence overwhelmingly shows that migrants generate economic, social and cultural benefits for societies everywhere."

Nonetheless, he added that "hostility towards migrants is unfortunately growing around the world. Solidarity with migrants has never been more urgent."

[UN News Centre, 18 December 2017](#)

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