



JESUIT WORLDWIDE LEARNING  
HIGHER EDUCATION AT THE MARGINS

## Research Report

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



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## Setting the scene

Context, methodology and conceptual model





## 1 Introduction

In May 2021, the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC) published a report entitled, *Thinking Higher and Beyond: Perspectives on the futures of higher education to 2050* (IESALC 2021). The report highlights that the mission of universities in the years leading up to 2050 is to take active responsibility in the development of the potential of all humans; promoting well-being and sustainability oriented towards justice, solidarity and human rights, respecting culture and diversity, creating space for dialogue and forging collaborations between local and global communities and with other levels of education, other social institutions, and the economy. On the other hand, another recent report, *Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis*, from UNHCR (2019), states that the international community is missing out on the chance to educate young refugees to prevent future conflicts and build more resilient, sustainable, and peaceful societies. At the core of this global challenge is a lack of recognition of higher education as a humanitarian priority: according to UNHCR only 5% of refugees have access to higher education (UNHCR 2021), compared to the 37% of the global population (UNHCR 2019). As the same report acknowledges, for refugees the access to higher education “is the surest road to recovering a sense of purpose and dignity after the trauma of displacement.” (p.5). The empowering benefits of higher education for refugees are evident at both individual and community levels: higher-level education turns students into leaders, and it harnesses the creativity, energy and idealism of refugee youth and young

adults. By doing so, it casts them in the mould of role models, developing critical skills for decision-making, amplifying their voices, and enabling rapid generational change (UNHCR 2019). Furthermore, the prospect of gaining access to higher education serves as a strong incentive to complete primary and secondary levels of school. Higher education is also an instrument of protection in refugee crisis contexts, and it plays a vital role in helping to develop the human and social capital necessary for rebuilding lives and communities (Gladwell et al. 2016).

Jesuit Worldwide Learning’s goal is to address this global challenge by providing equitable high-quality tertiary learning to people and communities at the margins of societies - be it through poverty, location, lack of opportunity, conflict or forced displacement – so all can contribute their knowledge and voices to the global community of learners and together foster hope to create a more peaceful and humane world. The first programme offered by JWL in 2010 was the Diploma in Liberal Studies, in collaboration with Regis University (US). This report aims to demonstrate the transformative impact that higher education can bring to individuals and their communities, through the voices of the Diploma graduates. The goal of this study was to listen to the voices of Diploma graduates, so as to understand the lived impact of their education and how it has transformed ‘the margins’. We talked to 136 graduates who studied in Kenya, Malawi, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Jordan, recorded more than 176 hours of interviews and gained insight – from them, from their experiences, from their own narratives – into the benefits that higher education brought to their lives and those of the people in their communities.



The following sections aim at briefly introducing the Diploma in Liberal Studies, its mode of delivery, the locations in which it has been offered, and presenting the methodology of the study and the research participants. Finally, the report is introduced through a structure that follows the developed conceptual model, from the acquisition of key knowledge and skills to

the nurturing of existential competencies for building self and community empowerment. We hope you will enjoy this exploration that will lead us to discover the lived experience of the young people who took the opportunity to study with JWL and agreed to share it with us.



Figure 1: Countries in which the Diploma in Liberal Studies is offered



## 2 The Diploma in Liberal Studies

The Diploma in Liberal Studies, offered in collaboration with Regis University (US), has been running since 2010 and is the first academic programme offered by JWL. At the time of this study, out of the total of 1,073 students enrolled, 305 were still active in the programme and expected to finish by end of 2021; 335 had withdrawn, which includes some who have been resettled; and 433 students had successfully graduated. With a foreseen completion rate of over 60% this programme appears as successful, particularly in comparison with blended online learning programmes in Europe and the United States, which have completion rates that vary significantly but remain stable around 50% (Benetos & Gagnière, 2018).

At the core of the programme, like every programme offered by JWL, is a blended online learning approach, deemed crucial to implement two key components of the Ignatian educational philosophy: companionship and guidance, and to adapt the Ignatian model to students at the margins. Companionship and guidance are promoted through community learning centres, where students are accompanied by a local facilitator and work in groups, but are also integrated at a global level, with international online faculty teaching the courses and promoting discussion and reflection in the so-called global classroom. This model promotes critical

thinking, social awareness and a positive view of self and others (Gladwell et al. 2016). Within Ignatian pedagogy, the process of teaching and learning follows a continuous learning cycle with five distinct stages (Context, Experience, Reflection, Action, and Evaluation). These steps are embedded in each unit of the programme, with the intent to promote critical thinking and leadership skills and achieve the ultimate goal of Ignatian pedagogy, as stated by Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ (1973): forming men and women for others. The Diploma in Liberal Studies is composed of 15 courses, each equivalent to 3 US credits, and delivered in a blended-learning mode for 8 weeks where the students work individually on the online material and meet weekly or bi-weekly to discuss with peers and with a learning facilitator, in a local community learning centre (CLC). The online content is hosted on the Georgetown University platform and online professors are recruited by JWL to support the students online, who study in a global classroom, give them feedback on their work and grade their assignments.

Over the years, the Diploma in Liberal Studies has become a very successful programme delivered in 13 learning centres across 8 countries: Afghanistan (Bamyan rural centre and Herat urban centre), Jordan (Amman urban refugee centre), Iraq (Domiz Refugee Camp and Khanke Internally Displaced Persons Camp, Erbil urban centre), Malawi (Dzaleka Refugee Camp), Sri Lanka (urban centres), Kenya (Kakuma Refugee Camp), Myanmar (urban centre), and Zambia (remote rural town).





### 3 The locations

This section briefly presents the sites where the 136 graduates who participated in the research studied.

Kakuma Refugee Camp is situated in a semi-arid area in the North of Kenya, near the South Sudanese and Ugandan border. It is the second oldest and longstanding refugee camp established in 1992 hosting refugees from all the conflicts around Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and the Great Lakes region. With more than 150,000 refugees mainly from South Sudan and Somalia, it is the second biggest refugee camp in Kenya. JWL started to implement the pilot online programme in Kakuma Camp in 2010, offering the Diploma in Liberal Studies in collaboration with Regis University. Back then, it was a challenge to provide internet access at the learning centre. Students had to cover long distances on foot in order to get to the centre, proving resilience and commitment to use this unique opportunity for higher education. By end of 2020, 195 students graduated from the programme. Many of them are still in the camp, while others have been resettled or returned home.

Dzaleka Refugee Camp, just forty kilometres outside the Malawian capital city Lilongwe, was the second pilot site for the Diploma in Liberal Studies (also starting in 2010). The internet connection was less of a challenge, than in Kakuma Refugee Camp. The camp dates back to 1995 and was set up in a former high-security prison. When the refugees from Mozambique returned home, the new refugees from conflicts in the Great Lakes region were hosted in Dzaleka. From 1,000

habitants at that time, it developed to a camp – akin to a rural city of mud houses, hosting over 30,000 refugees mainly from Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the early days, the partner organisation, JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service), brought books to the camp and since they did not have yet permission to enter the camp, the books were thrown over the fence, being picked up by refugees who built up a small library in boxes in the dormitory. A real library building followed sometime later. Some groups met to discuss great philosophical ideas. Their hunger for higher education was always there – and JWL could make this dream a reality. Having around 200 young adults in a community following their courses every day, connecting with the rest of the world, changes the outlook in their lives and the life of the whole community.

Amman in Jordan became the third pilot programme location. It had originally begun in Aleppo, Syria, where the last English language session was held by candlelight in Spring 2012. The programme was closed soon after the war reached Aleppo. The Jesuit Centre in Amman became the new host for a new programme which began in Autumn of 2012. Internet and infrastructure were not problematic but urban life is expensive, in particular transport for refugees to come to the centre. JWL students came from Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, and Somalia. To this day, JWL students in Amman are the most diverse learning community. They see it as their family – a family of different religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. People who were forced to flee their countries of origin, find their new home and family in the JWL learning community, and a new way of thinking.



Bamyan and Herat in Afghanistan saw new JWL community learning centres open in 2015. Bamyan is a small town in the central mountainous part of Afghanistan where the two renowned big statues of Buddha were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. Just 300 m from the one cave, where the female Buddha was overseeing the high planes of Bamyan between two mountains ranges of 5,000 m peaks, is where the JWL learning centre is located (run by JRS, as local partner). Students came as far as one-day journey from the neighbouring Daikundi Province, to be able to attend the English Language programme and join the higher education programme. The first graduates of the Diploma in Liberal Studies returned to their villages in the Daikundi and Gore Provinces and opened new learning centres (with support from the local administration and JWL), teaching English and now enabling some to do professional and academic courses with JWL. The programme is translating itself into benefits for many youths and communities which are very open to education for boys and for girls. The Hazara (Shia Muslims) communities in Afghanistan greatly value education. Many of them were refugees in Pakistan and Iran, as they are targeted by the Taliban. As in Bamyan, many students at the Herat learning centre (JWL computer rooms are hosted at the Herat Technical Institute) belong to the Hazara community.

Iraq became a more recent focus of JWL, from the end of 2016. The Syrian war and then ISIS' invasion of the Sinjar mountain, Mosul and the plane of Nineveh, displaced hundreds of thousands of Syrians, Yezidis and Iraqi Christians who found protection in the refugee camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the cities of Dohuk and Erbil. JWL began with a small learning centre in Domiz Camp – in two containers – and one group of students meeting at the Catholic University in Erbil. In Khanke Camp (hosting over 20,000 Yezidis), the English Language programme was first programme on offer, later followed by the higher education programme. The JWL community in Iraq includes all religious and cultural communities – Syrians, Muslims, Yezidis, and Iraqi Christians. The first graduates in Erbil (2019) moved back to their hometowns and like their colleagues in Afghanistan opened two JWL Community Learning Centres in Qaraqosh and Bartella (Christian communities). Likewise, students and first graduates of the Yezidi community in Khanke Camp moved back to their hometown in Sinjar and opened a new community learning centre to continue their own studies and to reach out to the youth of a very deprived and traumatised community.



## 4 Methodology

The methodological underpinnings of this research are based on a participatory approach (Hall, 1992) nurturing transformation. First of all, we held a participatory workshop with students, graduates, onsite and online facilitators, centre and country coordinators and headquarters staff, to collaboratively reflect on what impact is and how we define it within JWL, in terms of personal transformation (self-perception and behaviour) and communal change. The impact dimensions identified in the workshop are summarised in Fig 2.

In order for the research team to develop an interview protocol, the 30 workshop participants were asked to rank the identified dimensions. The following 6

dimensions were selected as the most important: critical thinking, leadership, empowerment, self-confidence, sense of community, and intercultural and interreligious sensitivity.

This collaborative work formed the basis to elaborate the semi-structured interview protocol, that was structured as such:

- An initial section to unpack what happened in graduates' lives after the Diploma.
- A section digging into the learning journey and the changes it produces.
- A section unpacking the 6 identified dimensions, focused on capturing how the graduates define these dimensions and concrete examples in their lives. and the involvement in the community of the graduates.

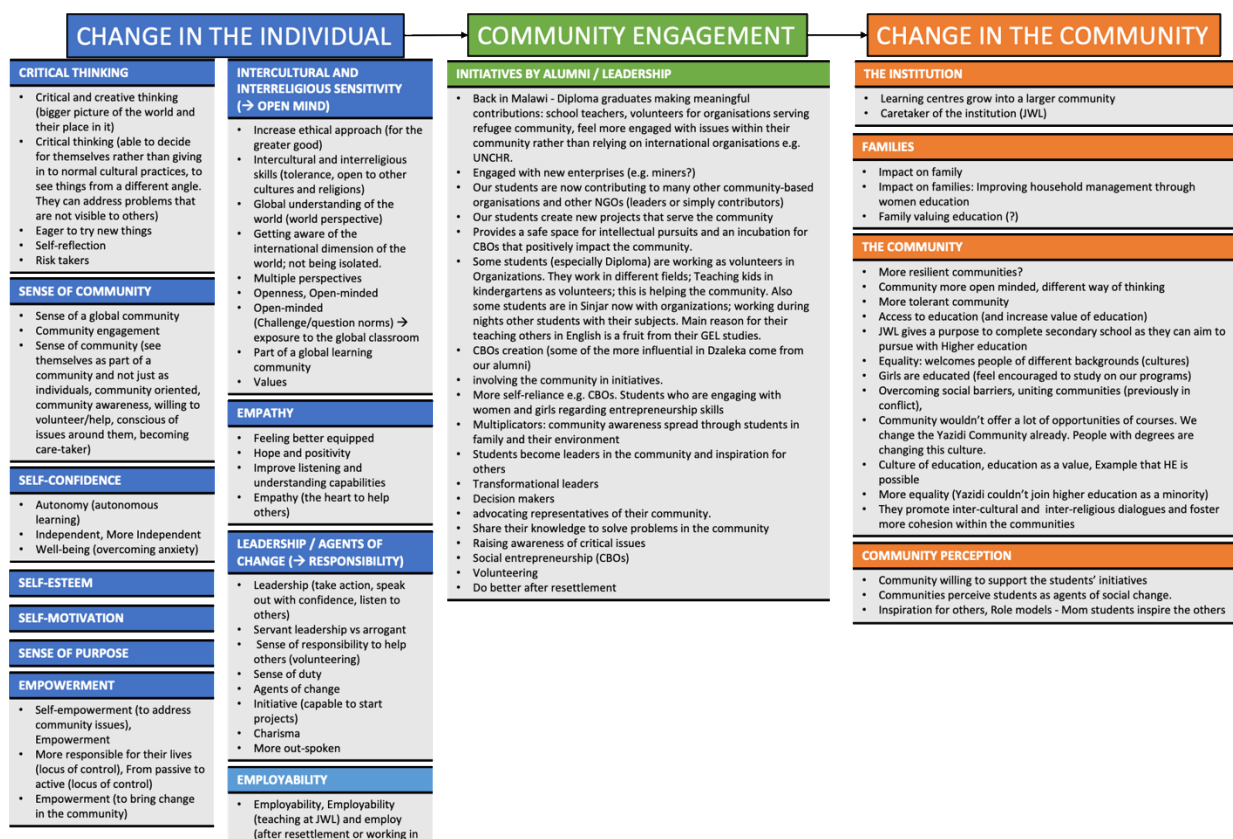


Figure 2: Participatory workshop's outcome



- A section exploring the societal impact and the involvement in the community of the graduates.
- A section to capture the dimensions they deem the most important in terms of impact in their lives.
- A final section trying to identify any possible negative outcomes and undesired impact that the Diploma had in the lives of the graduates and their communities.

In line with JWL's transformational approach to research, this project was an opportunity to work on the capacity building of JWL graduates, and so we selected research assistants in Dzaleka refugee camp (Malawi), Kakuma Refugee

Camp (Kenya), Amman (Jordan), and Afghanistan to conduct interviews with their fellow graduates. The research assistants attended a 1-day online training on data collection and research ethics and the international research team met once a week to report progresses and challenges, but also to create a peer-learning environment, leading to the creation of a community of practice over the two-months of data collection (September and October 2020). The interview protocol was piloted in Iraq in August 2020, and then refined by the research assistants, who interviewed one another to get used to the interview process.



Figure 3: Interviewer and interviewee in September 2020



Table 1 shows the number of interviewees for each location.

Country	JWL site	# Interviews
<b>Afghanistan</b>	Bamyan	19
	Herat	11
<b>Iraq</b>	Duhok	1
	Erbil	5
<b>Jordan</b>	Amman	8
<b>Kenya</b>	Kakuma	53
<b>Malawi</b>	Dzaleka	39
<b>Total</b>		136

Table 1: Interviews by location

Thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2011) was used to analyse the data. The thematic coding process was conducted with the help of the software Dedoose. After each interview was transcribed by the global research assistant team, they were uploaded to Dedoose to be coded and further analysed. The codes were developed based on a thematic approach, using a top-down - bottom-up cyclical process. For the first few interviews, main themes were noted down on a separate piece of paper in order to isolate the main categories of codes. After listening to few interviews, the coding structure was created in Dedoose until all identified themes were fully represented. Additional themes were identified over the courses of the analysis and were later included, whenever there was a new salient dimension that emerged from the data. The analysis had a total of 117 codes, with 10 main categories, 108 parent codes, and up to three sub-level categories of codes.

Once the data was coded, an analysis of the percentages reflecting how many times the selected code was applied to excerpts of the interview transcriptions

was drawn. The analysis used a normalised dataset which allows mitigating the differences in numbers of interviews per country and gender and it also included sub-code count. The analysis of the code application was elaborated for the gender and country perspective. Whenever codes revealed a clear and meaningful pattern, we used this analysis to support findings from aggregate quote analysis. To structure the report, each key dimension was built based on the analysis of quotes of the relevant codes referring to this dimension. When selecting the quotes to include in the presentation of the findings, we aimed to keep a representation of all the sites in which interviews were conducted.

There were two main limitations to the research design. First, given that interviews were conducted by JWL staff (the Global Research Team), participants may have felt unable to fully express themselves, and to report possible negative impacts of the Diploma in their lives. Additionally, another potential bias may have emerged from the presence of different interviewers. Although all the interviewers had the same training, certain interviewers had a different approach to some questions, which resulted in emphasising some aspects more than others during the interview.

Among the 136 interviews conducted, 93 interviewees were males (68%) and 43 were females (32%). While males were overall more represented, there were more female participants than males in Afghanistan and in Iraq. This trend is in line with the gender distribution of the overall population of graduates.



<b>Country</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Afghanistan</b>	12	18
<b>Iraq</b>	1	5
<b>Jordan</b>	5	3
<b>Kenya</b>	43	10
<b>Malawi</b>	32	7
<b>Total</b>	93	43

Table 2: Participants' gender by country

is in line with the overall Diploma graduate population, with the two largest and oldest centres offering the Diploma being in Kakuma and Dzaleka refugee camps.

Most participants (69%) are refugees or former refugees now resettled. Again, this



## 5 Structure of the report

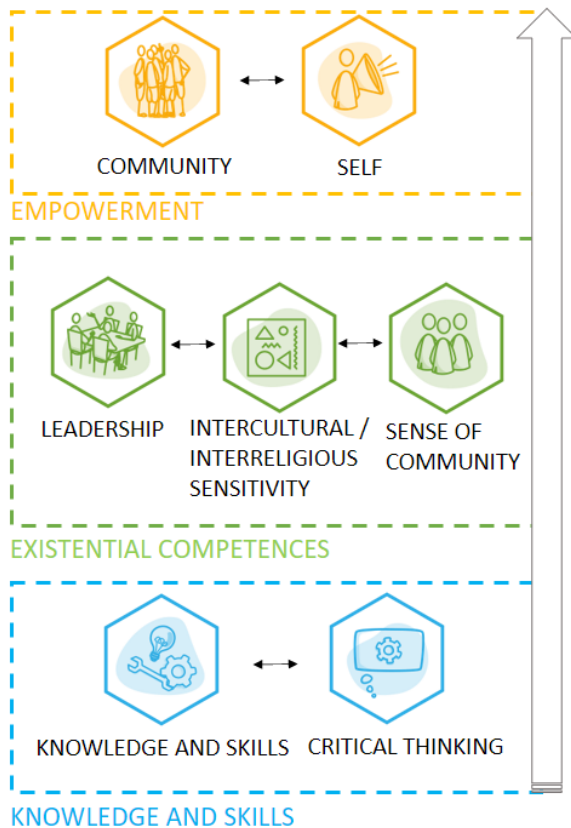


Figure 4: The Conceptual model

This report presents the results of a one-year project which aimed at understanding the impact of the Diploma in Liberal Studies in the lives of its graduates and their communities, listening to their voices, and unpacking how the key dimensions of impact identified by JWL were mobilised, lived, and understood. We will do so by presenting an element of the conceptual framework that was developed from the analysis of the interviews (Fig 4) in each chapter. The framework is based on the concepts of *savoir* (knowledge), *savoir-faire* (skills) and *savoir-être* (attitudes – or, as they are called in the Common European Framework of Reference and will be called in this report: existential competences) (Brühlmeier, 2010). It relates the acquisition of these

competencies to the development of empowerment, both in terms of individual empowerment and in terms of empowerment of communities and shows the relation between competencies and empowerment at each stage of the process. The framework also highlights the intersection between the self and others, by articulating the reciprocal relationship that nurtures these two kinds of empowerment.

Chapter 1 investigates *savoir* and *savoir-faire* (knowledge and skills) acquired during the Diploma, identified by the graduates as the most important ones in terms of the impact they had in their lives. The chapter will review soft and hard skills (Baartman & De Bruijn, 2011) reported by graduates and explore the opportunities that taking part in the Diploma gave to graduates in terms of access to higher education, network, and professionalism. The chapter concludes with what it meant for graduates to gain this knowledge and skills, in terms of personal growth.

Chapter 2 focuses on critical thinking, a skill, or as Rubinfeld & Scheffer (2014) define it, a habit of mind, at the core of JWL (and Jesuit) education. The graduates articulated this habit of mind and unpack what sharpening their critical thinking means for them: strengthening their analysis and evaluation skills, their approach to problem-solving, their capability to adapt and act autonomously. From the accounts of their experiences, it is clear that critical thinking is the skill enabling graduates to unlock their potential to nurture key existential competencies (*savoir-être*) that are employed in their daily lives, transforming the acquired knowledge into action: leadership, intercultural and interreligious



sensitivity and sense of community, which are the focus of the following 3 chapters.

Chapter 3 unpacks how leadership is defined and lived by graduates. Leadership, and in particular Servant Leadership (Lavin, 2018) is at the core of Jesuit education and a pivotal learning element of the Diploma in Liberal Studies. This approach to leadership can be summarised by the motto “men and women for others” (Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ, 1973). The chapter explores what graduates define as good and bad leadership, and how leadership is important for the self and for others. They explain how the concept of Servant Leadership experienced in the Diploma is enacted in their daily life. Finally, they reflect on the skills and values that come with a Servant Leadership approach.

Chapter 4 delves into an existential competence very dear to JWL and actively nurtured by its educational model, through the global-classroom component: interreligious and intercultural sensitivity. In the chapter, we discuss the various levels of tolerance and respect articulated by the graduates by mobilising Bennett’s model (2004); the chapter then zooms in to capture the reflection of the graduates on how the Diploma programme and the JWL educational model support the development of this competence. Finally, it

sheds light on the impact – the results of acquiring this competence to contribute to the creation of more peaceful communities.

Chapter 5 presents the last existential competence identified in the conceptual framework: sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In the chapter, the voices of the graduates guide us on how they engage in their communities and what reasons compel them to be involved as agents of change; reasons related to the values developed during their Diploma journey.

The last two chapters explore how this enriching journey becomes transformational by enabling the graduates to empower their communities through their engagement (Chapter 6) and by nurturing a sense of empowerment of the self (Chapter 7). Chapter 6 presents graduates’ reflections on the effects and changes that this nurtured sense of community and graduates’ personal empowerment brings to the people living in their communities and, therefore, how the communities are transformed and empowered. Chapter 7 provides accounts of how the graduates gained self-empowerment through the Diploma journey and what the effects of being empowered are in terms of personal and community development.





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## Chapter 1: Knowledge and skills

The beginning of an academic journey and beyond



“If it wasn't for JWJ, I wouldn't be where I am right now, I wouldn't have found an opportunity with higher education, and now I am having this opportunity because JWJ was there to help me when other organisations totally failed. The only thing I can tell you is an appreciation to JWJ for the good job that they are doing changing life of many people as they have also changed my personal life.”– *KK\_A4\_JR*



# 1 Gaining skills

In the graduates' narratives, gaining skills always serves a double purpose: self and community empowerment in light of the motto 'men and women for others'. During interviews, graduates refer to certain skills that they identify as having been developed throughout the Diploma journey. We identified the following main soft skills: professionalism, communication, time management; and the following major hard skills: business, social work, English language, digital skills, and research.

## 1.1 Soft skills

Graduates frequently referred to skills that are intangible (Balcar 2014) and closely related attitudes that were developed throughout their Diploma journey.

### 1.1.1 Professionalism

In terms of soft skills, gaining professionalism is often perceived as one contribution of the Diploma to the alumni's lives. For this graduate in Malawi, developing professional skills was one of the most crucial takeaways from the Diploma:

*"The most important thing that the Diploma help me [with] is to live a professional life. Yeah, because before being in the Diploma programme, I knew that people work, I knew that people do business, but I didn't have the professional skills to undergoing this the proper way. Programme has made me to know all those skills that are applicable in your professionalism." (MD\_A5\_R)*

While professionalism helped this graduate navigate through life's challenges, for others, being professional implies more practical skills such as knowing how to write emails (MD\_A2\_T),

doing things formally in keeping with relevant etiquette (KK\_A1\_R), and communicating in a professional manner. Whether this is through advising people more tactfully (MD\_A15\_T), approaching people from different backgrounds (cultural, religious, etc.) (MD\_A2\_T; MD\_A5\_R; KK\_A3\_R) or engaging in professional conversation more broadly (KK\_A14\_MZ), communication appears as an essential component of professionalism. For instance, a graduate in Malawi expresses that the Diploma has helped him "to develop professionally in associating with people from different religions" (MD\_A2\_T). While professionalism is understood in terms of developing communication tools that fit diverse communicative cultures, for this counsellor, participating in the Diploma programme helped him to reflect on his method of communication:

*"I used to sit down with young people, I advise them they tell their problems. I think by then I wasn't professional, but now I think I'm a professional because there are seven steps that I need to take in order to counsel someone or advise someone. So, it changed me." (MD\_A15\_T)*

Besides this personal reflection on professional communication during counselling sessions in Dzaleka refugee camp, some graduates also viewed this new skill as serving community needs:

*"[...] but now [...] anything I have to do I have to do it in a professional way. I'll have to link with the community, I have to include them in everything. [...] but [...] with my current situation [...], I feel proud of this Diploma programme." (KK\_A14\_MZ)*

Therefore, professional skills developed throughout the Diploma seem to have a



cross-cutting impact, influencing graduates' confidence, personal, professional and community life.

### 1.1.2 Communication

Communication is often one of the first skills mentioned when Diploma graduates are asked to reflect on the impact of the programme on their journey. The theme of communication was mentioned in 213 excerpts, which makes it the skill the most identified during the interview. For this graduate in Afghanistan, completing the interpersonal communication course was essential to understand and improve his communication skills:

*"We studied interpersonal communication course [...]. It was really, really enjoyable for me. In that course I came to know how to interact with others, what are social distances, what are traditions and cultures in talking, in behaving others. I came to know about verbal communications, about nonverbal communication and about how to influence others while you are talking, about first impressions, about conflict resolution, about how to bring peace among two individuals who had a conflict among a group and so on so forth."* (AH\_A1\_N)

This enhancement of communication skills is not limited to verbal interaction. graduates also refer to the importance of body language (JA\_A8\_A), writing (JA\_A3\_A), reading (JA\_A8\_A) and listening skills (IE\_A5\_M) as being developed during the Diploma. The mastering of these skills can even lead to the development of a storytelling capacity. This graduate in Iraq cites that the Diploma:

*"[The Diploma programme] help [me] to [...] express about [my]self and to be more like a*

*storyteller because [...] many times you have to tell our stories."* (IE\_A4\_M).

Additionally, some graduates employ their newly acquired skill in their professional setting, such as this teacher, who also transfers communication knowledge to her students:

*"In Diploma, we studied [...] interpersonal communication, [...]. So, now when I'm teaching my students, so I know how to communicate with them. So, all the topics which I studied in Diploma. So there, it means anywhere I can use them."* (AB\_A14\_H)

This applicability in diverse settings is also a source of confidence-building. For instance, this graduate in Kenya relates confidence to freedom of expression:

*"Self-confidence basically is the ability for one to be able to express him or herself without any fear. [...] Being able to freely express, [...] and confidently express yourself in terms of speaking when you're communicating with others."* (KK\_A9\_R)

This form of freedom through communication also enables graduates to become more aware of themselves. This Iraq alumna shares that studying interpersonal communication:

*"[...] was very, very nice, very high courses and provided us with many skills, how to communicate with people from different cultures, from different regions, with different backgrounds. [...] So [it] tells me [...] to be also more aware of myself because it helps us to learn more about our values. It helps us to share our experiences, our life experiences, our stories. [...] we found that our voice has been heard there, as they were like listening to our opinions or ideas. So, this helps us to be more aware about ourselves."* (IE\_A4\_M)



Therefore, learning about communication does not only enable one to be more confident in interacting with people but also empowers graduates to express themselves freely and amplify their voices. In the words of this Afghan participant, learning about “interpersonal communication or having a good communication [...] can help us to achieve our goals, to achieve whatever we want.” (AB\_A10\_H). In practice, the utilisation of communication skills appears to help mitigating challenges and allows one to arrive at one’s ends without sparking conflict.

For this graduate in Malawi, these communication skills allowed him to defend himself and his friend when they were facing a challenge at work (MD\_A6\_F). Working for an international organisation, he realised that there was an error with his salary, as part of his income was left unpaid. As he “tried to communicate” with the manager, he explained to him that there was an error in the calculations of the salary and asked the coordinator to follow up on this. As his request was accepted and the income was rightfully returned to him and his friend, he concluded that the Diploma “really helped [me] to have this self-confidence, and even to defend [my] fellow colleague” (MD\_A6\_F). Hence, thanks to the Diploma, communication skills are not only developed but also applied in daily life, which ultimately serves as empowering and life-navigating tool.

### 1.1.3 Time management

Lastly, time management is among the frequently cited soft skills listed as acquired during the Diploma. This importance given to time management is especially prevalent in Afghanistan and

Iraq, as quotes related to “time-management” code in interviews from these two countries represent respectively 38% and 32% of the overall code frequency. As studying the Diploma programme is time-demanding, some graduates share how they learnt how to manage their time to be successful in their JWL journey. For this Afghan alumna, the Diploma helps her in terms of doing work very easily even though she may feel overloaded, as she believes that she can do it. She explains that:

*“For example, like I am doing my courses taking sometimes two classes at the same time. Sometimes [...], I have four classes I need to take preparation, I need to check my notebook, [...] I need to plan, write reports and so many of these, all things but again I feel strong. I feel that I’m still strong and I believe on myself that I can do anything that comes to me like, I can like manage it very well.” (AB\_A10\_H)*

Consequently, this learning experience contributed to being more confident when managing multiple responsibilities. Similarly, this graduate in Afghanistan successfully managed to complete his last courses in Diploma whilst teaching a class (AB\_A15\_H). This multi-tasking ability developed during the Diploma is well encapsulated in the words of this participant:

*“The key thing which I learned is being on time [...]. It’s really helpful if you want to be a success[ful] person, you should do your works well and be on time and take your responsibilities and do them well in your life.” (AB\_A2\_0)*

Therefore, this capacity to organise one’s agenda and embrace responsibility in a balanced manner through time management is understood as being an essential factor for gaining control over



one's life and being empowered. This participant in Afghanistan develops this idea as she states that:

*"I would explain that I'm empowered because I can explain how I can manage my life and I have control over my life. And I can manage my time and I can take decisions on what I'm going to do."* (AB\_A15\_H)

Therefore, the development of time management skills appears to be a determining skill in shaping graduates' lives, from their daily studying responsibilities to their broader life goals.

## 1.2 Hard skills

More concretely, graduates share specific skills that are easily observed and measurable (Balcar 2014). Among the skills related to the knowledge gained through their learning journey at JWL, some derived directly from the concentration tracks of Business and Social Work. While these concentrations appear as anchoring streams to develop some of these hard skills, the Education concentration in the Diploma was less frequently mentioned as fewer graduates opted for this track. However, certain skills seem to relate closely to the teachings of the Education track, such as the English language skills.

### 1.2.1 Business skills

Closely related to the soft skill, professionalism, graduates mention business as one of the impactful hard skills learnt in the Diploma. For this graduate in Afghanistan, studying the business concentration in the Diploma helped her understand how to start a business, how to keep it running, how to be connected to customers, how to provide to

their needs and ultimately apply it for the community:

*"So, when I start a business, I can fill a gap in my community. First, I should find the problem, [...] And find a solution for it. So, it is a very important point that I learned in this programme."* (AB\_A1\_H)

This newly gained perspective, more conscious of the business needs, is also shared by a graduate in Kenya who now runs a 43-employee soap-producing company:

*"The time I graduated I had in mind to this business of soap and it was a very good to me because there were some challenges before, but after completing this Diploma, it assisted me so much to operate very well my company."* (KK\_A8\_R)

Building from the theoretical knowledge learnt during the Diploma, this participant applied this newly acquired skill to enhance his business management. Similarly, this graduate in Kenya was able to expand his business project after gaining this type of knowledge from JWL's Diploma (KK\_A5\_MZ). While before the Diploma, he understood his work, fish farming, as "simple" and "just for fun", after gaining enriching knowledge about how to improve one's society and its ethics through the Diploma, he realised that his activity could be expanded, turning it into a community-based organisation in Kakuma:

*"I came to understand the business part. How should I make this Community-Based Organisation walk without losing money, without losing time, without losing energy? I should make it helpful for the community. I should make it benefit for self and community."* (KK\_A5\_MZ)



While learning how to manage a business is perceived as fulfilling a purpose to the benefit of the community, it is also considered as a means to empower and invest in the community. According to this graduate in Kenya, applying and transmitting his newly gained knowledge in his organisation was the first thing she did after finishing the Diploma (KK\_A11\_G). As his work was to analyse challenges in business and provide a general evaluation of the business, he also shared his perspective to encourage refugees facing difficult economic conditions:



"[...] most of the refugees do complain about them not [being] able to meet their needs in terms of financial stability. And I remember telling them: It's beyond our capability [...] but, with the little we have can we think of developing something useful. Let's invest in ourselves and develop multiples skills to enhance [...] the culture of investment. [...]. I could make many understand that the little that they get [...], it wisely [to] begin different business to supplement what they are getting."

– KK\_A11\_G

Therefore, gaining business knowledge from the Diploma has not only been a key component for graduates to innovate and formalise their business ideas but also to contribute to the community by addressing its needs and transferring this newly acquired knowledge.

### 1.2.2 Social work-related skills

As a concentration of the Diploma, many graduates emphasised the importance of

learning about social work. For this graduate who is now a social worker in Afghanistan, enrolling in the Diploma programme raised her awareness about social issues:

*"Before the Diploma, I honestly, I didn't know anything about social work, about the community, about how we can join, how we can communicate with other people, how we can ask them some questions, how we should not ask them other questions, I mean what type of questions we should ask about people or what type of questions we should not. Diploma taught me about communication skills, about the confidentiality of people, about the sensitivity of people." (AH\_A4\_N)*

Similarly, acquiring knowledge about social work practices is identified by other graduates as supporting professional development. For this graduate in Kenya, JWL's Diploma programme equipped him with the knowledge that was "really needed" in his career as he currently works as a social worker, therefore "using the impact of that professionally" (KK\_A9\_R).

Furthermore, developing knowledge about social work is seen as a vital tool to support and protect one's community. Solving community issues appears as the main target of graduates with social work skills. In the context of Afghanistan, this Social Work concentration graduate highlights how she uses her social work knowledge to deal with local gender issues

*"[...] in some community, people are against girls' education. Then, it is not something good. So, it is the responsibility of a social worker to go to that community to find out and search what is the source for this that they are not allowing their girls to go to school. So, these are all the things that I have learned from Diploma and it can help me." (AB\_A9\_H)*



Therefore, social work-related skills become more than competencies for graduates – they turn into a mindset. From the perspective of this alumnus in Jordan, the Social Work concentration:

*"[...] created a sense of consciousness apart the injustice things around us. Not only, you know like: oh! From outside, but also, from inside. Our daily life, things that we see, the impact of such policies on our life, the impact of such norms and rules of the society on some people. So, I had that perception since I finished my Diploma programme, and I believe not only raising my awareness but also pushing me in a situation where I want to have some impact on the situation, be a contributor. So, I'm challenging these systems. [...] It's not easy to challenge them! But I'm challenging them." (JA\_A4\_A)*

Applicable in many aspects of life, this newly developed mindset can be used as a

means to develop peace-building skills. For example, according to a graduate in Afghanistan:



**"This programme helped me to use justice in my personal life, in my social life, in my professional life [...], I can use justice in my thinking also, in my decision making [...], in my family also I can use justice, or in my community [...]. So, it is very important to point that it can help me [...], as an Afghan youth to use it [to] bring peace, [...] in Afghanistan."**

– AB\_A1\_H



Figure 5: Graduation ceremony in Amman, Jordan



Therefore, whether the impact is most felt on the professional life of graduates, in their communities or daily lives, social work-related skills appear as one of the fundamental bases of knowledge to develop key dimensions of JWL's impact, such as community involvement, leadership, empowerment, and peacebuilding.

### 1.2.3 English language

Given the nature of the programme, graduates refer to the programme as an opportunity to develop and strengthen their English language skills. For Jordan, English appears to be a significant skill developed during the Diploma as it represents more than half (53%) of all the codes applied for "English language". For this graduate in Jordan, practising English was her goal during the Diploma:

*"Honestly, in this Diploma, my goal was to improve my English, to improve my writing skills. This is the first time I write English in my life. I do it! I just have pushed myself to do it. The professor was very helpful for us" (JA\_A6\_A).*

This improvement of English language skills has even been recognised as being a form of empowerment. According to this graduate:

*"One way that the Diploma programme has empowered me is the English. Before my English was not good before I joined Diploma programme, I could not speak very well. I could not transfer the message to the other person very well, but now I can talk very well. I can exchange ideas with a person very well, so this is the kind of empowerment as I have empowered my knowledge." (AB\_A1\_O)*

As graduates are applying their English skills as means of empowerment, the impact of enhancing one's English skills is

not only about knowing a language, but also about having a voice.

Additionally, the strengthening of English language skills enables graduates to give back to their community by, for instance, transmitting this knowledge to others. This teacher graduate explains that the Diploma helped her improve her oral, reading, and writing skills, which ultimately helped her to become a teacher (AB\_A2\_H). For others, improving their English language skills means assisting their respective communities through translation. According to this alumnus in Malawi, the community can benefit from his knowledge gained through JWL because if somebody asks him for a translation from Swahili to English, he can "write for them in English, then provide it for them" (MD\_A2\_R).

While this application of knowledge through the English language can be used to the benefit of the community, it can also be employed professionally. This graduate in Iraq shares that her learning experience in JWL helped her to expand her professional horizon through developing her English language oral skills:

*"[...] because English language, truly is like an international language, especially in Iraq, we want to find a better job because if you don't have English language, you cannot work in a good place and [...] you can't get also a good opportunity." (IE\_A2\_M).*

Similarly, this francophone graduate in Malawi shared that being comfortable in both the French and English languages helped him to "work anywhere throughout the world without any problem" (MD\_A1\_F). Therefore, this linguistic ability can support not only the community but also one's professional development.





Consequently, the impact of developing such literacy during the Diploma is multi-dimensional in graduates' lives.

### 1.2.4 Digital skills

The Diploma programme also contributes to the betterment of graduates' lives in terms of computer literacy. This seems to be particularly true in Afghanistan and Iraq, as more than 50% of quotes related to this theme come from these two countries (31% and 26% respectively). Having to study online, graduates mention how their learning journey with JWL helped them to strengthen their digital skills. According to this graduate in Malawi, online learning was seen as a source of learning opportunities:



**"What I learnt will, okay, will help me in the sense that, we are learning in digital way, digitalising, everything now is online, we are leaning on how to make a video, to access learning online, to learn using what we call classroom meeting, or Zoom meeting, those are the key tools that will help me to survive in the future."**

– MD\_A4\_F

While online learning is articulated as a way to develop digital skills, some graduates particularly emphasised certain computer skills acquired, such as typing or proficiency in Excel (KK\_A12\_R). For this online graduate, online learning resulted in a significant impact as:

*"It has changed me a lot, firstly I would say in terms of skills, it has made me familiar with the computer since I was doing my essays on the*

*computer typing every day, so I became a bit a fast typer and also I gained some skills on computers that I didn't know, I got to be familiar with all Microsoft office, how to present, I got many skills on that."* (MD\_A1\_T)

Therefore, the contribution of the Diploma was pivotal in developing graduates' digital skills, which are identified as being crucial to engage in professional and educational opportunities.

### 1.2.5 Research skills

Some participants shared how the Diploma enabled them to develop research skills. This graduate in Kenya was able to practise research during the Academic Writing course which has proven "helpful to this day" (KK\_A3\_R). Applied in a professional setting, this other graduate in Kenya shares how the Diploma supported his growth as a researcher:

*"I work mostly in the research and now I'm also preparing my paper, my research paper [...] on people [...] who are doing the research in the camp and the Northern researchers and southern researchers I said who should come and interact with the refugees. So, with this leadership role that I am playing in the camp, it could not happen without the skills I gained it [...] from you, [...] the Diploma courses. So, [...] I'm also now working on a research in [...] one of the organisations in the camp. So, this how I translate my skills to the community."* (KK\_A2\_MZ)

Therefore, as the Diploma supported this graduate in enhancing his research skills, he was successfully able to apply it within the community through his leadership in assisting researchers and developing research projects in the Dzaleka refugee camp. Consequently, developing research skills is one of the potential impacts of the Diploma.



## 2 Gaining opportunities

Graduates acknowledge the skills they developed during the Diploma programme can open the doors to new opportunities. Whether academic, networking, or professional opportunities, graduates identify the role of the Diploma in shaping new experiences.

### 2.1 Academic

Given the nature of the programme, many alumni highlight the impact of the Diploma as contributing to their academic growth. It was reported that 65% of graduates pursued further studies (Tshilombo and Rega, 2021). Different dimensions characterise this gain of academic opportunities.

This emphasis on the Diploma shaping academic development is particularly relevant in Jordan, as it cumulates at 29% for quotes related to academic opportunities compared to other countries, while only 9% for the quotes related to professional opportunities and 15% for the quotes related to network opportunities. This emphasis on academia is also strengthened by the strong representation of Jordan regarding quotes that refer to education (encapsulates 27% of quotes linked to “education”, 38% of quotes related to “peer learning”, and 41% of quotes linked to “learning challenges”). We infer that the overall importance given to academic opportunities for Jordan is due to the difficult conditions that these alumni face, due to strict national labour policy and refugee regulations.

#### 2.1.1 Access to education

First, the Diploma is understood as being crucial in the development of their access

to education. For many, graduating from the Diploma allowed them to have the confidence to apply to higher education institutions and continue their academic journey (JA\_A5\_A; IE\_A2\_M; KK\_A4\_JR). Recognised as the “first step” to pursue higher education, this graduate in Jordan explains how the Diploma programme encouraged him to apply for further education programmes:

*“I applied for master's degree. and this [...] Diploma help me to do this because; they asked me for an English certificate in order to study master's degree. [Although] I don't have an English certificate, [...] I have my record from Regis. This has helped me to get my seat in the University.” (JA\_A5\_A)*

Acting as a foundation to further academic growth, the Diploma is seen as essential to the development of future academic opportunities. As the “introduction to the academic world” or “first foundation” to bachelor's degree (MD\_A10\_F; MD\_A1\_HD; MD\_A1\_R), participants articulate the Diploma as being a key component in developing their academic knowledge path. For this graduate, the Diploma helped him to achieve many things:

*“[...] because it gives me one step ahead whatever I go. That's the only qualification which I present first. [...] The education I took at JWL [...], it has given me first of all that the introduction of academic world. Let me say University education works at a very high standard. It's where I got the first foundation or the 1st in formation. On social work and liberal studies, because [...] the basic introduction of social work studies, which I got at JWL has enabled me.” (MD\_A1\_HD)*

For this resettled graduate who pursued a degree, the Diploma was not only helpful in shaping the core foundation of academic knowledge, but also in gaining transfer credits from his university:



*"First of all, I think it has acted as a foundation of my bachelor degree. I told you that I was asked just to take the programme courses, all the credits from Regis were accepted as electives and I'm still hoping that some will be transferred in the programme courses meaning that it is the foundation of my bachelor's degree. So, this has helped me save money as the first thing. Second, [...] it will help me just do my bachelor's degree in three years, different for what I was supposed to do if I was a new student. And also, I think some of the classes I'm going to take will be somehow similar to what I've already done meaning that I won't get a lot of troubles. Let me give you a good example: when I arrived here in Canada, I did not have many problems with academic writing because I already done it with JWL, I knew everything concerning academic writing [...] so, it means that JWL education really helped me or shaped my thinking and my future." (MD\_A1\_R)*

**This testimony illustrates the many aspects in which the Diploma facilitates new academic opportunities.**

**Like this graduate resettled in Canada, other participants mention how the Diploma was a financially viable opportunity to access higher education. For many, joining a free higher education available in their place of residence was also a financial opportunity. According to this Afghan graduate:**

*"I think when I was graduated from high school, I think [...] I could not join or attend university because my family was not supporting financially me. So, I had no money to attend to other provinces, to go other provinces and study. But this Diploma programme helped me and encouraged my family to let me to come and join this Diploma and get benefit from this." (AB\_A1\_H)*

**This alumna in Kenya reflected the same idea in terms of her gratitude for the programme:**

*"My gratitude goes to JWL and they should know that we are very proud for having given the opportunity to learn. We are financially unstable; we tried our best to get the scholarship." (KK\_A7\_G)*

**Therefore, graduates also identified the role of the Diploma as providing access to higher education to people who would otherwise not have the financial resources to do so.**

**In addition to encouraging graduates to pursue higher education through the provision of financial support and providing them with a foundational academic basis, the Diploma is presented as being a source of empowerment and hope. For this graduate in Iraq:**

*"JWL gave us opportunities to study courses or participate in programmes so that that gives me more confidence and empowered me more and more I see myself. I see myself like I am walking, I'm not stopping." (IE\_A2\_M)*

**This alumna from Malawi further elaborates this idea:**



**"This education has played a very big role in my life. Especially, in my academic life because it has made me to uncover the opportunities that I didn't know because looking at my past life compared today, I've seen that I have restored the hope that I had lost some time back. Yeah, so, this academic has played a very big role. By sharpening my mind and making me to begin to think fresh and to see a bright future."**

**– MD\_A5\_R**



In this “life-changing journey”, not only does the Diploma provide access to higher education when its graduates think their chances of doing so are non-existent, but also gives them a “brighter future” (KK\_A1\_G). Therefore, both in terms of practical needs and moral support, graduates “got the Diploma when [they were] needing it” the most (KK\_A1\_G).

### 2.1.2 Peer learning

Another characteristic that shapes the nature of the academic opportunities identified by graduates is the peer-learning aspect of the Diploma. Learning emerges from exchanges between students that are fostered during the Diploma, whether online or in-person. Seen as a strong contribution to their learning journey, peer learning allows them to apply their knowledge in a group setting and explore others’ perspectives (JA\_A8\_A, JA\_A5\_A, AH\_A1\_O). According to this graduate in Afghanistan, the online setting of the Diploma enables her to spark new discussions that are fruitful to her learning experience:

*“[...] because when we were setting online Diploma, we had many classmates from other parts of the countries or both. When they were sharing their discussion their debates, we saw many differences and we became aware of [...] that we have other and different cultures. So, Diploma helped me to understand these [intercultural] issues better.” (AH\_A1\_O).*

For this graduate in Malawi, peer learning is the source of sharpening her critical thinking:

*“During our studies we are having like a group discussion in which we are having a peer review. You, you check your peers’ work and then you. You like corrected or you debate on that, whether positively or negatively. So, the change that I’ve*

*seen is that [when] we were doing this group discussion, I was able to do the best and I learned that criticising someone is not using like hatred. Know you criticise somebody by knowing the other side of the view of the issue. So that made me to understand that OK, critical thinking means seeing something at your view and seeing something at somebody’s view. So that is how I have learned that. [...] But before I didn’t know that skill”. (MD\_A5\_R)*

Therefore, peer learning appears as one of the opportunities for development provided by the Diploma.

### 2.1.3 Learning challenges

While graduates acknowledge their experience in the Diploma as an opportunity some also refer to challenges faced during this experience. Nevertheless, some of these challenges have also been understood as a source of development, building resilience and confidence. For example, as the type of assignments has been presented as potentially challenging for some participants, once overcome, the graduates share how this resilience fuelled their self-confidence and motivation to succeed. This graduate in Jordan shares how her learning difficulties helped her develop her self-confidence:

*“Honestly! honestly! honestly! The most important thing for me is that the Diploma gave me confidence. First thing, [...] anything new in my life, I can do. The Diploma was from a distance. I was able to learn from a distance. I was able to absorb from the foreign teachers. It was the first time in my life. [...] I was able to write in English. I was able to express my opinion. I was able to absorb the vast amount of information. Frankly, [...] the book was very big. It was a challenge for me to read the book. I read the topics they were presenting to us, I can analyse and understand them. That in itself, it was a challenge for me. Very difficult challenge. The situation in which I*



*live. Because of my child, I was able to organise my time. I was able to decide whether I could or not. The Diploma helped me a lot. I deferred courses in the Diploma, and they were flexible with me. They were very cooperative. Frankly, they were nice. This is one of the things that helped me complete the Diploma.” (JA\_A6\_A)*

This alumna in Afghanistan expressed how difficult it was in the beginning for her to write her assignments due to the different types of teaching provided by the Diploma:

*“In Afghanistan, [...] We just listen to the teacher and memorise the things, the information that he or she taught us teach us and here in Diploma at the first it was very hard for me to know my assignments to think about my assignments and at the first of this Programme, I was somehow, I was facing with more problems because I didn't know how we should write my assignments. After that, during and the Diploma [...] I could, I learned that how I should learn my assignments? How I should think about my assignments? How I should recognise the main idea of assignments and after thinking I could write my assignments in a best way.” (AH\_A4\_N)*

This overcoming of learning challenges has been identified as bringing a sense of pride to graduates. An alumnus in Jordan shared how he felt proud that he graduated as during his journey he felt like giving up as he was working very hard and was under a lot of pressure (JA\_A1\_A). For yet another graduate in Kenya, the support received during his learning journey helped him overcome his lack of computer skills and prevented him from dropping out, eventually boost his motivation to succeed in the programme (KK\_A3\_JR).

Therefore, the learning challenges encountered during the Diploma programme appear to contribute to the development of graduates' confidence, presenting the Diploma as a unique opportunity to build one's resilience.

#### 2.1.4 A unique type of knowledge

Lastly, one of the characteristics of the Diploma programme mentioned in interviews is the unique form of knowledge that is conveyed. Presented as “mind-changing” and “door-opening” to the intellectual world (MD\_A1\_HD, MD\_A1\_R), the Diploma is articulated as providing a different learning experience than they would normally get in their local educational institutions (IE\_A2\_M, JA\_A6\_A, AH\_A6\_N). For example, this graduate in Jordan highlights the difference in teachings between JWL Diploma and her national university:

*“[in] our system in University, when I studied statistic at the University of Jordan, just books and you keep it and go to make exam. But in Diploma, no! you have to read, you have to think, you have to write your opinion, to criticise. You will have to analyse. It's more analyse, more than just keep it. This is the first time, I studied like that. So, it's a good journey. I am blessed to have it.” (JA\_A6\_A)*

This emphasis on developing a critical and in-depth type of knowledge is also shared by another Afghan graduate who compares the Diploma learning experience to her local educational system as follows:



Figure 6: JWL community of learners in Dzaleka Refugee Camp, Malawi

*"As I told you, the differences were very obvious for myself because in Afghanistan, in education curriculum or system, we have just knowledge of science or any other thing but not for life. Maybe we have some just subjects which are not very important at school, which they are teaching the way of life for children but, maybe at that age students are not just realising such issues, but at the university I myself did not study such issue which would be relevant to my family, to my own just community so, because of that I could notice the differences very obviously. That was very different because online Diploma knowledge just come from our own family and ourselves and whatever we were studying was relevant to us, was our own stories. We could just express ourselves very well because we had the knowledge, we had the experience of that but, the things that I studied at the university was only knowledge that I could apply maybe for my career" (AHLA6\_N).*

**The emphasis on the application of knowledge and skills in graduates'**

community, family and daily life appears as one of the distinguishing characteristics of graduating from the Diploma. Consequently, the quality of knowledge developed during the Diploma appears to equip graduates with a competitive advantage.

Therefore, the Diploma emerges as impactful in terms of opening academic opportunities for students. Whether it is opening new doors in graduates' academic journey, building resilience through overcoming learning challenges, learning through interactions with peers from all over the world, or developing multi-modal learning, the Diploma is seen as a steppingstone for developing academic potential.



### 2.1.5 Network

The Diploma programme has been identified by graduates as contributing to developing their networking opportunities. Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya and Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Malawi rank

rather highly for the total representation of the code “network opportunity” (34% and 43% respectively of the quotes related to “network” code), reflecting a context more prosperous for opportunities led by refugees.

## Gender perspective

Using a gender lens to analyse codes related to knowledge and skills, we observe that despite a similar weight in the number of quotes regarding opportunities from female and male interviewees; the child-codes analysis reveals a disparity in the type of opportunity that participants refer to by gender. In fact, males seem to benefit more in their professional life. Quotes from male participants are predominant for the following codes: network (63%), professional opportunities (67%), professionalism (61%), and research skills (81%). Comparatively, although quotes related to academic opportunities seem evenly balanced between the two genders, the sub-code analysis demonstrates that females tend to significantly benefit from this type of opportunity. Female participants are referring to quotes related to education goals (61%), drop-out (61%), peer learning (60%) more significantly. Additionally, female interviewees’ quotes appear as more dominant for the skills related to English language code (73%), suggesting a stronger emphasis on education and academic opportunities.

This can be explained through the nature of the professional positions that the two genders are more likely to hold in the contexts where the Diploma is delivered. As a lot of female graduates previously had or have teaching positions, they tend to place a stronger weight on their academic and teaching opportunities whereas male participants tend to have jobs in different fields, with an orientation on business development and entrepreneurship. Therefore, this difference of emphasis regarding the type of opportunity gained from the Diploma reveals the potential for different journeys based on gender.

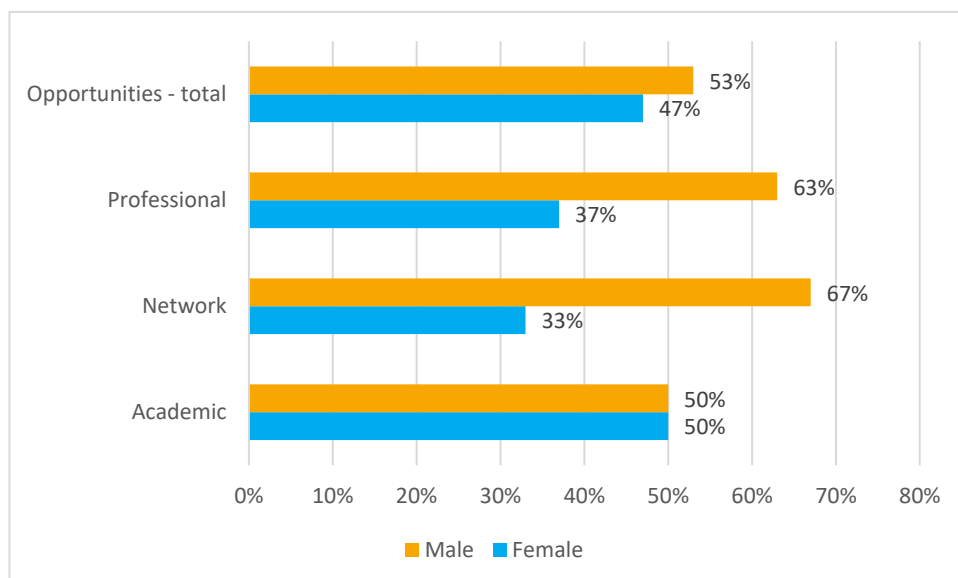


Figure 7: Analysis of the quotes related to 'opportunities' by gender



First, graduates understand the place of the Diploma in the development of their network within the JWL community. For instance, this graduate in Afghanistan shares that she feels happy and proud of herself to have had the chance to study in the Diploma as she has been able to interact with different people from other places and to have been able to exchange information (AB\_A3\_H). For this graduate in Jordan, the Diploma was important to meet and learn from colleagues:

*"I think if I didn't take these online studies, I wasn't able to meet to a good people. I mean my colleagues that I started with them. They helped me in many ways through reading their writings and discussions. I have learned many stuffs from their cultures and their religious, and [...] as well as their personal life."* (JA\_A8\_A)

For this alumnus in Malawi, interactions within the JWL community also encompassed interaction with sponsors and people engaged in diverse projects:

*"JWL is an interesting institution whereby it has created a lot of connections for the students and through JWL we have been introduced to a lot of sponsors and individuals who are interested in different projects especially those that help the community, with those connections that we already have in JWL, I think it will still continue to shape my future as we go along this journey".* (MD\_A2\_T)

Therefore, the networking opportunities within the JWL community are revealed as vast and diverse.

Additionally, the Diploma programme has been presented as being an important opportunity to develop community and professional networks. For example, the empowerment received during the Diploma has been identified as a factor

encouraging this female graduate in Malawi to participate in networks for women:

*"Honestly, Diploma programme has empowered me and also the other example is that there were some other programmes that were only special for females to attend like networking [...] And there were like some motivations. You know, those things they were like making life easier and keeping you going on being encouraged. You know, we're able to meet even other women from other places, even from Europe coming to share their experiences academic life, even their personal life, some of them. So, when you see them and you compare yourself, you see [...] where they have gone far. They become like a role model to you so I can say Diploma has really empowered me."* (MD\_A5\_R)

For this graduate in Kenya, the greater sense of community gained from the Diploma eventually helped him to build networks of people "who can help one another when there are opportunities" (KK\_A1\_G). The same willingness to develop professional development networks is present in Malawi as this graduate shares his networking project:

*"When we came up with idea of supporting other organisations, [...] we came to [...] realise that there are so many people who have ideas and some are already and run organisations that are already productive, they need the support like they don't have external networks. So [...] instead of doing what other people are doing, we came up with the idea of supporting what other people are doing."* (MD\_A4\_T)

Therefore, graduates' networking opportunities go beyond JWL's community.





### 2.1.6 Professional

While the Diploma can serve as a networking opportunity from which professional growth can emerge, it can also serve as the starting point of a new professional journey. This professional growth is salient in the context of Kenya and Malawi, as quotes linked to professional opportunities-related codes come mainly from interviews in these two contexts (43% for Kenya and 25% for Malawi). Looking back at business and professional skills, we can see that 38% of the quotes of the code “business” are from graduates in Kenya, and 26% come from graduates in Malawi. In addition to the large representation of Kenya and Malawi in these codes, the application of “professionalism” code is almost exclusively present in Malawi (42%) and Kenya (53%) as they both represent 95% of the application of the code. These results are likely due to the less restrictive circumstances in these locations and more refugee-supportive environments.

Being a graduate of the Diploma increases one’s competitiveness in the job market (KK\_A9\_MZ). This graduate in Malawi presents this benefit of the Diploma in the following way:

*“[...] so I can be able to tell the people that I have the Diploma, a company can trust me that I am capable of doing something which could be different from not having Diploma right now, so I believe that without having Diploma, my life wouldn’t be the same right now.” (MD\_A1\_T)*

The Diploma is portrayed as giving legitimacy to graduates’ professionalism when applying for jobs. This resettled graduate from Malawi explains how the

Diploma helped him transition into the Canadian job market:

*“In Canada, when you apply for a job what they ask, what is your qualification? You don’t have any qualification, it means you don’t have right to any good job [...] But when I presented my Diploma qualification, they accept it, and I integrated the market as someone who went at school. So, it had much impact in the work market” (MD\_A9\_F).*

Adding:

*“So, whatever I’m doing like a job, [...] I’m earning like a salary myself, I take it [as] it’s coming from that Diploma, because without it, nobody could hire me. Without it, nobody could have accepted that I went at school. But because of it, I’m earning something to live, because of it, I’m hoping for a better future.” (MD\_A9\_F)*

Therefore, the emphasis on the recognition of qualification and the professional opportunities that the Diploma leads to appears to have a significant impact on graduates’ lives. However, graduates have also nuanced this effect by pointing out the limited national recognition of the Diploma. This graduate in Afghanistan shares her concern:

*“Actually no, I do not feel any negative impact just I was worry about the certificate that I has taking from the Diploma because it was not recognised by Afghan people. Sometimes my friends, my colleagues, even my colleagues they told me that you just waste our time. You wasted your time because the Diploma that you get that is not recognised by Afghanistan. It is something that you waste your time. But again, I don’t care about that one just the knowledge that I got from the Diploma [...] is very rich and I don’t care about its credit, certificate and any other things.” (AB\_A10\_H)*



Figure 8: JWL's model allows students the flexibility to study anytime, anywhere (Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq)

This lack of credit recognition does not hamper graduates' thirst for knowledge to grow and seek further professional development.

Furthermore, the Diploma programme is seen as a career jump-starter. Indeed, according to Tshilombo and Rega (2021), 91% of the graduates reported at least one job experience after graduation. After graduation, this alumna in Iraq was offered a role as an English teacher and coordinator of one of JWL's learning centres (IE\_A3\_M). According to this graduate in Afghanistan, completing the Diploma led her to start teaching at Jesuit Refugee Service for one year and then progressing to another job at World Vision "all because of online Diploma" (AH\_A9\_N). While the Diploma was important for new professional opportunities for some, for others it meant developing entrepreneurship skills to start their own business (KK\_A6\_MZ, KK\_A4\_MZ). From the perspective of this

graduate in Kenya, the impact of the Diploma is seen as "opening the door to jobs" and starting his business as he refers to the Diploma as "helping [me] and also in the future it will continue [do] the same"(KK\_A7\_R). For this graduate in Afghanistan, graduating from this higher education programme meant that he could take on the role of a business consultant for his friends:

*"So, they are thinking that I am a university graduate. So, this really also affects my friends, I can help them in their business, for example; those people who are in Afghanistan they are not professional businessmen, but I have learned professional business. So, they sometime tell me that you can help us in our business for example; in our database or farms and anything else. It is not important that every time I get some money, but it is important that I can help them during their work, so I can help my friends on their business and also find out jobs easier and faster."* (AH\_A2\_N)



In addition to being a resource to others, this graduate is able to leverage knowledge gained during the Diploma to support business development in his community while expanding his career growth. While the Diploma is articulated as a major supporting element for graduates' professional growth, this alumnus in Afghanistan narrates that attending the Diploma mean he had to compromise on work:

*"[...] because it was at the beginning of the Diploma and my work was in Afghan Wireless Company and [...] in the part of sales and customer service. I had also experience from Roshan Company and I was hired, and our Diploma started, in the starting of this. When I was saying that here is also good office and also, I have opportunity of internet and also everything, so they agreed. They said that not you cannot go at four or three o'clock and cannot go to your studying out of the office, but I decided in the last opportunity that I do not want to miss my business study or Diploma but rather I would like to miss my work. So I lost my job and did not lost my Diploma study." (AH\_A2\_N)*

Despite having to make a choice between his professional and the pursuit of academic studies, his willingness to prioritise his studies unveils that the opportunity to enrol in the Diploma was more important than working for his former employer. Therefore, the Diploma programme is understood by participants as having a considerable impact on their professional development whether it is in terms of gaining academic recognition, increasing their competitiveness in the job market, or building their entrepreneurial skills. In the words of this graduate in Kenya:



**"JWL Diploma was like a bridge, it opened many ways for me, so by having certificate, I was able to transcend from one work to another, whenever I see an opportunity"**

– KK\_A3\_R



### 3 Beyond gaining knowledge and skills

While certain types of opportunities and skills are mentioned during interviews as being central to the teachings of the Diploma, participants also expressed what gaining this knowledge and skills meant for their personal growth as well-rounded human beings. Some participants explained how their Diploma learning experience helped them build their self-confidence. For instance, this graduate in Malawi stressed that if he hadn't had the chance to participate in the Diploma programme, he would not have the confidence he has today:

*"[...] because like I would be saying that I have no knowledge since I was just a high school graduate so my confidence would be low." (MD\_A8\_T)*

For this graduate in Kenya, not participating in the Diploma programme would have meant not be able to pursue other higher education degrees because he would not have been able to develop his self-confidence (KK\_A7\_JR) and "go and climb higher". This motivation gained through the Diploma is also shared by this Afghan participant:

*"I think Diploma has the most important role in this part since I want to explore what I have learned from online Diploma, I want to explore what I was taught by JWL to my community." (AH\_A8\_N)*

Motivated to apply the knowledge learnt in her community, this graduate reveals how the Diploma encourages her to pursue the Diploma teachings in daily life. This graduate in Malawi extends this thought as

he reveals the multidimensional impact of the Diploma on his life:

*"This Diploma will shape me much in the future because I'm seeing that if I cannot be employed but my life will be a changed life because I have got a vast knowledge whereby I can still be assisting whenever I can be in my family, in my village wherever I will be or staying, the knowledge I get from the Diploma much that my concentration was social work it means more things will be done in my life." (MD\_A7\_T)*

According to this graduate, the purpose of having knowledge becomes more than having a job, as it encompasses the notion of attending to one's community and serving its people. This graduate in Malawi comments that he:

*"[...] appreciate[s] having the skills from this Diploma, they help me too much and they still, so I appreciate too much since I got the skills without paying anything if I was to pay maybe I couldn't have got whatever I got. So, this is the appreciation I can get to JWL." (MD\_A13\_T)*

This graduate in Iraq concludes her interview by stating:

*"I just want to say thank you so much to us like, it's very nice having this opportunity that JWL provided for us for free and you know, like the intention to help people to learn to improve themselves. It's very valid, valuable, like so thank you so much, and I hope all the best for JWL." (IE\_A4\_M)*

Therefore, these examples of gratitude-sharing reveal the profound impact of knowledge and skills developed throughout the Diploma on alumni's life.



## 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Diploma programme enabled graduates to expand their academic, networking, and professional opportunities while developing new sets of knowledge and skills which ultimately prepare them for greater success and self-development. Graduates see new doors open in their lives and apply the knowledge and skills gained to their daily lives, sharing these within their communities. Ultimately,

the purpose of graduates' learning experience in the Diploma is beyond acquiring knowledge and skills that better prepare them for professional and academic opportunities; it is holistic as it also leads to graduates' intrapersonal as well as community development through their effective actions. Thus, the knowledge and skills developed during the Diploma appear as the foundational element to reach personal and community empowerment.

### Key points

- Graduates refer to a particular set of skills and knowledge as being developed through the Diploma journey - soft skills: professionalism, communication, time management; hard skills: business, social work, digital skills, English language, research, health knowledge.
- Developing these sets of skills during the Diploma opens new doors for graduates' academic, networking, and professional lives.
- Many graduates identified the Diploma as essential for them to pursue further higher education opportunities and for their professional development.
- The knowledge and skills acquired during the Diploma serve as the foundational step to support graduates' growth in self-confidence and community engagement.



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## Chapter 2: Critical thinking

A tool to 'think outside the box'



**"I am thankful of the Diploma programme that helped me to now think critically and take better decisions."** – AB\_A4\_H



# 1 The key components of critical thinking

Graduates refer to specific elements that help them develop critical thinking, perceived as crucial in their journey towards empowerment. Analysis and evaluation skills are mentioned in the interviews as key components of critical thinking, in line with the literature (Dwyer 2017); furthermore, the interviews emphasise the key role of interpersonal communication in nurturing and applying critical thinking. The intertwining of these dimensions results in transforming critical thinking from a skill into a mindset, as argued by Franco et al. (2021).

## 1.1 Analysis and evaluation skills

First, analysis and evaluation skills appear as two critical skills intertwined with the growth of critical thinking. Indeed, one of the most common expressions used to describe critical thinking by participants is “thinking outside the box.” In order to think “in depth”, participants refer to the need to identify and understand the limitations of the “box”. A graduate in Afghanistan relates to critical thinking by explaining that:

*“[when] I think deeply about the issues, I consider all the aspects [and one should] not judge a book by its cover.” (AH\_A1\_0)*

The importance given to understanding facts over biased judgements reveals the two pre-requisites of a critical mind: analysis and evaluation skills (JA\_A5\_A; KK\_A13\_MZ). As graduates become aware of their surroundings in any given situation, they can develop rational thinking that is based on a thorough evaluation of the

environment they find themselves in. According to this graduate in Kenya, this type of mindset helps build self-confidence for any given situation:

*“Right now, I’m quite different person unlike the time when I have not joined the programme. So currently, I’m able to think critically [...]. Nobody can come and deceive me for any issue, when someone approaches me for any issue, before whatever the person explains to me, [...] so I’m able now to think critically.” (KK\_A13\_MZ)*

As graduates build a rational perspective, this critical mindset allows the formation of their judgements. For this graduate in Kenya, developing this bias-free mindset is precisely what critical thinking means:



**“Critical thinking is a way of looking at issues without being biased or in hurry, you take time to think about something, just differentiate facts from opinions without fear of contradiction.”**

– KK\_A1\_G

Therefore, the Diploma is seen as supporting the building of an evaluative consciousness of surroundings through a process of analysis and evaluation, ultimately leading to graduates’ growth in critical thinking.

Analysis and evaluation are often mentioned together as part of the first step in the decision-making process or in identifying a solution to a problem. For instance, this graduate in Kenya demonstrates his critical thinking skills by giving the following example:

*“Yes, I would just make an example of maybe [...] [the] example of kids fighting over one orange; [...] the first thing I have to [do], you may not know*



*what is going on between the two kids, why are they fighting over that orange, so you have to ask them their interests, let them lay out, then you have to see based on the interests of the person, and then you have [...] judgement, when you judge something, you have to first analyse before you put your judgement, so critical thinking you have to analyse something before you take an action"* (KK\_A7\_JR)

Like this graduate, many participants introduced a situation in which they analyse the circumstances before evaluating the situation and taking any further action. According to this graduate in Malawi, when he has to solve issues, he makes sure that before any decision is taken, he uses critical thinking and take time to analyse the situation:

*"A person can come, they narrate their conflict with other people, after listening, I say "okay, just give me time" before I answer to any conflict/issues I received."* (MD\_A8\_F)

Taking time to fully understand the situation emerges as fundamental for graduates to be able to apply their analytical and evaluation skills. Through this evaluative process, another skill appears essential to ensure smooth problem-solving and develop critical thinking: communication.

## 1.2 Communication skills

Whether communication skills are understood as speaking, writing, or listening, graduates specify the role of interpersonal exchanges as part of their journey to develop critical thinking. Indeed, graduates articulate that effective communication skills can facilitate the identification of adequate solutions. For instance, this graduate in Iraq mentions that it is crucial to identify who the sender and receiver are in a given exchange, to understand the situation:



Figure 9: This tank from the early 2000s could not be removed from this field in Afghanistan, so the community decided to paint it.





*“So, this is a critical thinking, you should know [how] to receive the message and to interpret, [...] this word is information that can [become a] solution to make a decision.” (IE\_A1\_M)*

In addition to applying communication skills in a problem-solving setting, communication is also part of an emancipation process supported by critical thinking and nurturing self-confidence. Feeling free to communicate with anyone through the help of the Diploma programme, this participant is ready to apply his critical thinking to any situation requiring problem-solving, permitting him to advance on his empowerment journey:



**“First of all, now, I can go dialogue with anyone without fearing, go in discussion and deep with everyone, without being fear what they say. [...] I have power, and now I can face it.”**

– KK\_A1\_G

Therefore, as a skill developed during JWL Diploma, critical thinking appears as more than a simple decision-making tool. It involves multi-dimensional skills such as communication, analytical, and evaluation skills. This multi-faceted aspect of critical thinking is ultimately articulated as contributing to graduates’ personal development and reshaping their daily lives



## 2 The consequences of developing critical thinking skills

As a result of the strengthening of these critical skills, other soft skills emerge, which enable graduates to improve their daily lives. Problem-solving, adaptability, and autonomy skills are the three main skills referred to by graduates that result from developing their critical thinking.

### 2.1 Problem-solving

One effect generated by graduates' critical thinking is related to situations requiring solving a problem. The importance of the problem varied across examples, with some situations exploring everyday decision-making and others referring to more significant issues such as conflict resolution in the community. This research analyses three different aspects of life in which Graduates apply critical thinking: community, work, and personal life.

### 🔍 Gender perspective

The parent code 'critical thinking' is present almost perfectly equally in the interviews from the two genders. However, we notice some differences in the children-codes in terms of balance between gender. As the chart below shows, 'conflict-resolution' related quotes are more prominent in males' interviews, whereas 'communication' related quotes are expressed predominantly by female participants. This different approach to critical thinking reflects that for women critical thinking seems to be understood as a tool for personal development, emphasising the communicative virtue of this mindset as highlighted in the chapter, whereas male participants' utilisation of critical thinking mirrors a mindset seeking to solve larger-scale conflicts, often taking place at the community level.

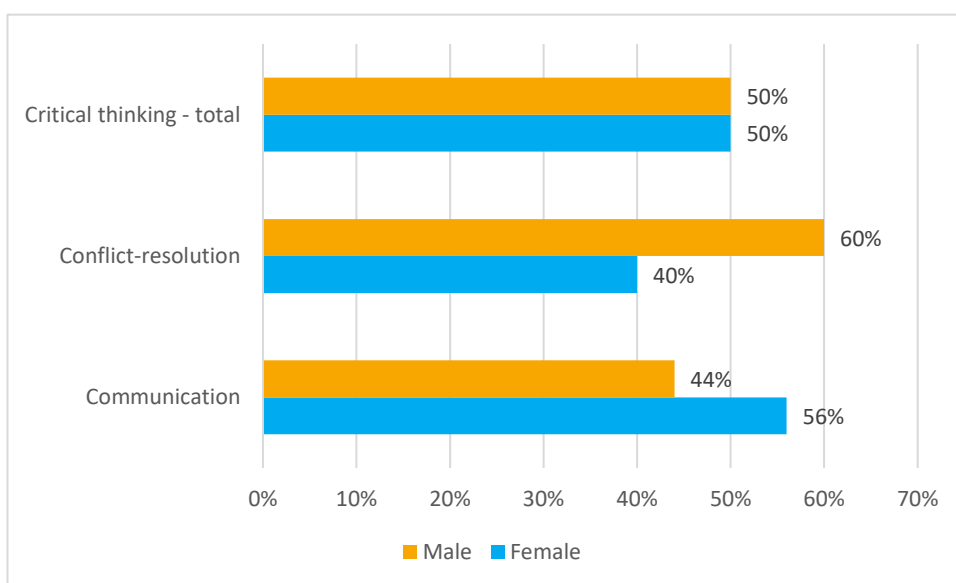


Figure 10: Analysis of some of the quotes related to critical thinking by gender



### 2.1.1 Community problem-solving

First, participants expressed critical thinking in terms of solving situations in the community. Whether the problems are rooted in political, gender, intercultural, public health or representation issues, critical thinking is often illustrated as a process in which the participants solve issues that their community is facing. For example, this community leader participant identifies the need to apply a critical mindset to ensure the wellbeing of her community. As she explains how she proceeds when a student is unable to go to school, she mentions that:

*"One of the goals of the chairperson is that to make decisions, critical decisions. [...] Another thing is that the role of the Chairperson is that to solve challenges in the community"* (KK\_A4\_MZ)

This pairing of critical thinking with problem-solving reflects how a critical mindset is applied for the purpose of the betterment of the community.

One way that graduates employ their newly acquired skill is through their hygiene sensibilisation in the community. For example, this graduate shares that as people in his community were not following personal hygiene guidelines, he taught people how to develop personal hygiene habits such as washing hands, washing cloth, etc., before concluding that "this is how critical thinking has changed me" (KK\_A1\_R).

Furthermore, this graduate in Kakuma explains how she was able to solve the problems in the community working as a hygiene promoter. She recalls that as a hygiene interpreter, she "solve problems in community until it was successful, and it was through the help of this Diploma" (KK\_A15\_MZ). Thus, transmitting health

knowledge through the teachings of the Diploma can also be a means for graduates to apply their problem-solving and critical thinking skills to better support and engage with their community.

This motivation to contribute to the betterment of the community through critical thinking can even lead to peace-making, as this graduate explains:

*"The critical thing is all about coming up with the possible solution, how to solve conflict among people in the camp, so Diploma [...] has really empowered me on critical thinking, especially in the community. People do call me Peacemaker, and previously no one was calling me a peacemaker."* (KK\_A13\_MZ)

For this refugee in Jordan, critical thinking is the tool that allows him to find solutions and think in different ways about the conflict in his home country, Sudan, "instead of staying there and be angry or doing a negative thing about it" (JA\_A5\_A). Nevertheless, given the profound change that gaining critical thinking represents in one's minds, if the graduates' environment is not welcoming of this change, it can also result in challenging graduates' relations to their communities. For this graduate in Kenya, developing critical thinking signified confronting the reaction of his community:

*"You know, I used to say the negative part of [the Diploma] is when you are exposed to critical thinking and you start thinking critically, people may think you have problem because you don't believe normally and they begin thinking that this guy has a problem and the fear of the unknown become the chain if they give me an opportunity, they think I might take it from them, that is the negative part of the Diploma. [...] I think I became a problem to some people who like to live on lies."* (KK\_A13\_G)



In the context of Afghanistan, challenging one's community is rooted in gender issues. For instance, this Afghanistan graduate presents how she applies critical thinking to enable other girls to attend school:

*"In a community that we are living, it has a problem which we are not allowing their daughters to study. So, here we need to have critical thinking. [...] we have to understand what is the root of this problem in the community. So, we have to find [...] what is the problem, who is not allowing their daughters. If we find all the information and the problems, based on [...] our search, we can find solutions."* (AB\_A3\_H)

Therefore, developing critical thinking may also result in graduates having to confront their community and the status quo. In these different applications of critical thinking, conflict-resolution is used to improve the livelihoods of their respective community.

### 2.1.2 Work problem-solving

Second, this form of problem-solving, intrinsic to building a critical mind, is identified as part of graduates' professional lives. Critical thinking helps them navigate their professional lives in a smarter way, which can even lead to professional growth as this graduate in Afghanistan highlights:

*"In the past before participating in this university [Regis University] maybe I could not solve the problems easily, but after that when I learned a [class] with the name of critical thinking, so it taught me how to solve the problems of yourself and myself and the people and also others. For example, during the work I can analyse better and search to find a solution for the problem, so it is one of the benefits of critical thinking during the work and my life."* (AH\_A2\_N)

However, for refugees with limited or no right to work, developing this critical mind can be a source of frustration. This participant in Jordan enunciates this issue:

*"I [...] haven't been given [...] a chance to do the things based on my knowledge, as I said earlier [to] you. So, I'm here only a refugee, and I don't have an option to use the knowledge I have in order to measure myself whether I'm a critical thinker or not."* (JA\_A2\_A)

Therefore, the local working conditions for refugees may potentially hinder their application of critical thinking. Despite these local constraints, critical thinking has been articulated as supporting the strengthening of graduates' problem-solving skills in their professional lives.

### 2.1.3 Personal life problem-solving

While critical thinking can be helpful to solve professional problems, graduates also use it to solve personal issues. For instance, this graduate in Kenya mentions that thanks to the Diploma, she improved her critical thinking abilities which helped her balance between family duties and work and study commitments (KK\_A5\_5). Another graduate in Afghanistan summarises this perspective:



**"Diploma empowered in case of thinking critically [...], take better decisions, prioritise the things I want to do. Before I join Diploma, I had no plan for what I should do to have a better life but now I have my clear plans and very confident to do them, [...] and to make good decisions."**

– AB\_A4\_H



Critical thinking is articulated as a tool for life, supporting graduates in making the right choices in their personal lives.

Additionally, some graduates merge all these spheres to use critical thinking across all aspects of life. This alumna in Afghanistan reflects that:

*"Once upon of time, I had so many problems with my family. And beside of that one, I was very busy and I was teaching English, I was studying online Diploma and I was busy in other places. Just one day, I was thinking that why I am thinking in a different way. Why I'm like always depressed about the problems or the works that I'm doing. Then I couldn't just organise my works. [...] So, one day I was just thinking critically how I can solve these all problems, the problems that I face with my family, it was financial problems. Or the problems that I faced with my workplace, with which was that I was involved in so many activities [...] and I was not able to organise, arrange them and manage them. And that critical thinking helps me to organise and manage my very works that I was doing in, step by step, [...] I was able, and I succeed to do everything very well." (AB\_A10\_H)*

Therefore, this life-changing skill developed through the Diploma appears to allow graduates to do more than solving daily problems. Graduates' testimonies show the importance of critical thinking to drive a comprehensive change in one's perspective, potentially building up personal growth.

## 2.2 Adaptability & autonomy

One consequence of participants' development in critical thinking is expressed through the concept of adaptability and autonomy. According to interviews, critical thinking is understood as an approach enabling students to become more independent from any potentially influencing factors. Whether

these factors affect graduates in their personal, social, or economic lives, adaptability skills and sense of autonomy are some of the key impacts of developing strong critical thinking. This perception of critical thinking is particularly significant in Jordan as it encapsulates 42% of the quotes related to the "adaptability" code. Used in an introspective way, critical thinking is seen to permit the development of an independent mind that has the potential to question authority, customs, and others' perspectives (KK\_A4\_JR). A participant from Malawi expressed that:



**"When it comes to critical thinking, you shouldn't limit yourself, you should go beyond what you see and beyond what you hear, so that you can come up with other answers."**

– MD\_A4\_T

This willingness to build one's own perspective regardless of what others may think is particularly salient in the case of this female graduate from Iraq (IE\_A4\_M). She shared that when someone questioned why she is looking for work, instead of "just being at home" and that although she is single and 31 years old, she is not afraid of anything because she has all the knowledge, and the Diploma made her more "dependent on herself, not on others" (IE\_A4\_M). This ability to go beyond traditions and to decide for oneself shapes an agency that translates into a form of adaptability and autonomy through a critical thinking process. Eventually, this process is presented by graduates to engender a new form of maturity that helps them grow personally. For example, this



graduate reflects this personal development as follows:

*"You cannot understand yourself if you're not a critical thinker. So, [...] this programme helped me to get to know myself, to understand myself and to know what I want for myself. So, all these things without critical thinking, that means you cannot move. So, [...] critical thinking helps me particularly to get to analyse each and every information. So I'm not a kind of person of saying 'yes, yes' to everything or 'not, no' to everything. So whenever I get the information I have to analyse the information and then adjust myself to one side. So this some of that vantage of critical thinking, so [...] you become more mature because a critical thinker person is different from the hardware people used to say 'yes, yes' to everything or 'not' [to] everything [...]. I'll be able to reflect critically [...] and at least I have my personal position which at least can be defended compared to before [...]. (MD\_A4\_L)*

In addition to this intellectual independence detached from others' perspective, critical thinking is also related to developing adaptability and autonomy that permits challenging one own's thoughts and being able to approach situations from multiple perspectives. This multifaced form of thinking can also lead to empathy, as this graduate from Kenya demonstrates:

*"Like I told, in Dadaab and Kakuma, women like you will find a lot of problems, but when you haven't gone through this programme [...], you can give yourself the kind of the rational thinking that will be very limited. But with the Diploma, one is able to understand from different angles, even if the things you are going through, or in the community at large [...] you can see from different angles the issues [...] than your initials thought." (KK\_A5\_G)*

This ability to understand what others could think can help to find solutions that were not originally thought of and build

mutual understanding between communities. For example, this graduate explains that:

*"We are here in Malawi, especially in Dzaleka camp, we are [...] with different communities, [...] with people from different background, so, you know, we are in constant trouble, misunderstanding [...]. So critical thinking [...] helps me when I'm in problem with someone. [I] used to say [...] to analy[se] the problem and see why can't I accept that I'm the wrong person? I have to [...] apologize so that we can move on. So, with critical thinking, [...] you are able to anticipate things or actions, so it helps you see this discussion can lead us to ABC problems, so let me just say 'I apologize, accept [the] apology'. [...] Without critical thinking in community like ours, daily life will be in total mess or in trouble. So that means I have used critical thinking in at resolving problems or community issues." (MD\_A4\_L)*

Being able to accommodate different situations and adapt to various circumstances are also identified to be crucial capacities for developing critical thinking. For example, this participant in Jordan illustrates how the Diploma helped him to gain this form of adaptability:

*"[Interviewer: Do you think that Diploma could help your future?] Yes! if I go to a new place that I feel free, and I can participate with a new community. So, I can develop, and I can put an idea to the ground." (JA\_A2\_A)*

While this graduate explains how critical thinking can be employed as a form of freedom to adapt to any community, this Kakuma participant highlights the power to be able to adapt to various contexts to grow professionally:

*"For us refugees, even if you are [not] competent enough, you will end up being a messenger, that's why I am telling my students in JWL that you are beyond what you are doing, even if you are now a messenger. It just a matter of time [for you] to*



*explore your ability [...]. [If] you aren't able to do [what you want to do], then you can come out and form your own organisation [...]."* (KK\_A1\_G)

**As a business leader in transport food chain, he is**

*"[...] telling every student you may not be working as doctors, administrators in a company but you can do this in a special way, at the personal level.[...] So if you show people that you are curious to learn and you are given an opportunity, use that opportunity to achieve what you are given, you will find yourself more competent than any other person despite the status and your current status or circumstances."* (KK\_A1\_G)

**His ability to adapt to local circumstances while turning obstacles into opportunities for personal growth reflects how a critical mind can be used as a form of resilience and empowerment.**

Additionally, the aforementioned graduate's teaching on how to use critical thinking to reach independence and develop adaptability skills is key to reaching this emancipation. Through their examples of autonomy and independence, many graduates demonstrated that teaching others how to employ such thinking was part of the process of strengthening critical thinking. For instance, one participant in Malawi shared that, aware of the high level of poverty in his community, he helped lead a permaculture project that taught vulnerable people to start their own production of food. With currently more than 20 active gardens in his community, he contributed to supporting his community in being less reliant on food donations and "be independent in their lives." (MD\_A5\_L)

**Not only do graduates refer to critical thinking as a key factor to achieve**

**personal independence and empower others, but also to gain financial autonomy. This willingness to be financially independent by growing one own's food while seeking to improve living conditions reflects how critical thinking is employed in both the personal and community aspects of daily life. Financial independence, similar to the independence from customs and others' perspectives, builds agency for graduates:**

*"Everything is different in my life now and it will be different. Because now I'm in different activities that are that the source is Diploma. [...] I'm a self-confident, self-independent person. I'm not asking others to pay me money. I can work and I can like get my salary and I can do whatever I want"* (AB\_A10\_H).

**As graduates construct a critical mind, it translates into building both material and psychological independence.**

Therefore, critical thinking appears as a crucial means to gain autonomy, adaptability skills and independence, which can potentially result in self-empowerment and giving back to the community. The JWL Diploma appears to foster such personal and social development, as in the words of a graduate:



**"The solid areas that JWL is focusing in supporting the refugees are the pillar of future, not just to educate something to pass the exam, but to be independent."**

**- KK\_A8\_G**



### 3 Conclusion

Critical thinking appears as a key component of JWL's impact on its graduates and communities. Used constantly as a tool to navigate daily challenges, critical thinking is identified as a life-changing mindset that can drive graduates to advance on their personal

growth journey. This emancipation is contagious. Along with their development, they utilise this critical thinking in their personal life but also their work, family, and communities. Thus, given its empowering effects, critical thinking is understood by participants as one of JWL's most relevant impacts.

#### Key points

- Development of critical thinking skills is one of the JWL Diploma's biggest impacts on its graduates and their communities. It is often identified by graduates as among the first skills developed during the programme and is the second most applied category of codes (a total of 714 quotes coded under critical thinking).
- Graduates refer to critical thinking as encompassing analytical, evaluation and communication skills which are developed through the Diploma.
- The results of graduates' enhanced critical thinking are anchored in the building of problem-solving, adaptability and autonomy skills.
- Critical thinking appears to be applied across graduates' community, professional, and personal spheres of life.
- Critical thinking is a key tool to navigate life's challenges and enhance graduates' personal development.





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## Chapter 3: Leadership

Becoming a servant leader



**“Now I am having the light [...] when I am going to the dark way and just holding the light so, this light is leadership and the darkness is the problem, so I am going and it shows me you can just pass where you want to go.”– AH\_A2\_N**



# 1 Leadership according to graduates

Participants' understanding of leadership encompasses a multifaceted and value-based meaning, reflected in a continuum differentiating good from bad leadership.

## 1.1 Good vs. bad leadership

First, leadership is often perceived from an evaluative standpoint which allows graduates to identify the defining factors of good leadership from bad leadership. To do this, they often start by defining what good leadership is not. For example, a graduate in Kenya expresses those leaders who have "no sense on how to bring people together" and deal with hatred and discrimination should change their style of leadership to avoid such inequality in the communities (KK\_A4\_MZ). For this other participant in Malawi, having leadership does not equate to being a good leader as:

*"They have an illusion about that what they think is leader. They're not leaders and if many organisations today [...] are not succeeding, it's because of the lack of leadership skills [...] if I'm to examine, to define what leadership is, leadership, I can say it's the way you save, it's the way you rule others. It can be in a bad way or in a good way. [...] I learned about servant leadership. Not everyone is a servant leader." (KK\_A4\_MZ)*

This recognition that having strong leadership is not dependent on titles or positions but instead on the way the community is cared for, opens new dimensions of understanding of what a good leader is.

Frequently, graduates refer to examples of good leaders that they studied during the Diploma, like Mandela, Gandhi, and Maathai (MD\_A1\_F). Some of the

characteristics emerging from their analysis of good leadership during the Diploma are the interconnected abilities to encourage others (AB\_A1\_H) and be positive. This graduate explains this interlinkage by expressing the need for good leaders "not to focus on the negativity of individuals" but instead "[on the] positivity of individuals" to encourage others and turn them into good leaders. (KK\_A19\_MZ). This willingness to bring out the best in people and spread a wave of good leaders is illustrated in the words of this graduate in Malawi who shares how other leaders have inspired him to improve his leadership:

*"Mandela has done it and his leadership have motivated [me] to be a good leader, a leader who work and who can die for saving lives of others" (MD\_A1\_F).*

Hence, from the knowledge gained in the Diploma about leadership, alumni reflect on the meaning of leadership by differentiating good leaders from bad leaders through good leaders' unique capacity to give hope to others and bring out the best in everyone.

## 1.2 Leader of oneself

Graduates reveal that being a good leader is not only about leading others, but also requires leaders to effectively lead themselves. Perceived as an innate tool that one has to hold on to and develop throughout life, leadership is a reflexive competence that allows one to guide one's future. This alumnus in Malawi elaborates this thought further by intertwining the concept of leadership to the power of learning:

*"When you believe that life is for learning from one another, this is whereby you start realising the power of leadership, you come to understand*



that everyone was born a leader but then it is up to each and every individual to decide how to be that leader.” (MD\_A2\_T)

While this perspective highlights the impact of JWL on realising one’s in-born leadership, this graduate proposes a more intrinsic process of leadership applicable to any given situation, even when following a leader:



“Leadership comes out from you as person, not only when you are leading, but also when you are [following] a leadership. We have a mentality of saying the leaders are those that in the position, forgetting we [are] our own leaders by showing an example that can even inspire the leaders who are in the position.”  
– KK\_A1\_G

### 1.3 Leader of others: community, work, family

Graduates’ narratives mostly refer to leadership being deployed to serve others, fulfilling a vision and purpose. This participant in Afghanistan expresses the value of his role as a leader:

“When I am working as a leader, I am directing people, motivating people and helping them to where it is needed. Also, when I am at home. I can give motivation to my family and my friends and my community.” (AH\_A2\_N)

He also speaks about leadership as being applicable to different contexts: “I am a leader of myself, I am the leader of my family, and I am the leader of my friends” (AH\_A2\_N).



Figure 11: Graduates in Iraq showing leadership skills in a community tree planting activity



This multidimensional aspect of leadership is also identified in other interviews. While this graduate mentions family and community as areas of leadership, others refer to professional life. For instance, this English teacher in Afghanistan shares how the Diploma helped her build leadership skills:

*"As I said, leadership in online Diploma, it helps me to have a good management in my class and employed those good characteristics of a great leader in my leadership." (AH\_A1\_0)*

Whether in alumni's respective communities, their family or professional lives, graduates demonstrated that leadership can be practiced in many spheres of daily life. At the community level, this graduate in Kenya reveals the effect of the Diploma on leadership skills (KK\_A16\_MZ). She articulates this impact in terms of growth of agency in her community:



**"Before I was enrolled to the Diploma, I thought that everything was impossible. [...] I couldn't even take any initiative to play in a role in the community. But when I passed through the Diploma and I also learned the course called leadership, I became aware of what is of me, what I should do at least to bring change in the community and that's how I accepted the role of being a leader in the community."**

*- KK\_A16\_MZ*

This reflection highlights the transition from being unconscious of her leadership potential to mindfully becoming a leader among her community through the support of the Diploma. Thus, after grasping commitment and motivation within themselves with the help of the Diploma, graduates describe leadership as a tool oriented to serve others.



## 2 The feature of a leader

While leadership can be considered as a distinct competence, graduates state that in order to be a leader, one must have a specific set of styles, skills, and values, in line with features also identified by the literature (Boone 2018; Morgan, 2020; Mumford and Higgs, 2019).

### 2.1 Style of leadership

Graduates identify certain leadership styles as crucial elements to become a good leader.

#### 2.1.1 Servant leader

One of the key styles of leadership that participants recurrently mentioned is servant leadership. Furthering the findings of Greenleaf and Spears (1998), and Blanchard and Broadwell (2018) on servant leadership, graduates' perspectives develop an idea of leadership that encompasses the notion and objective of serving others. In the words of this graduate living in Jordan, "leadership is not about you! It is about you and others!" (JA\_A5\_A). While leadership is oriented toward others, one graduate explains that acquiring an education means being "at the service of others" which also means to be a leader, "but a servant leader!" (MD\_A4\_L). This graduate in Malawi provides an account of servant leadership:

*"A man who died recently [...], who was living with stroke since 2012, he died in 2018 because he was not able to control himself. It's why since 2012 I have helped him. I washed him three times a week during six years, 3 times a week is the sense of having humanness to understand the community and to do something. Especially when you see someone is abandoned, you can approach him in order to tell him to have courage,*

*to have patience, and to continue to live even though the life is very difficult."* (MD\_A1\_F)

Therefore, this graduate exemplifies that as a leader, one should be willing to take on true commitment to help others and support them in solving their issues. This graduate in Kenya further elaborates this thought:

*"As a leader, you have to accept that you are for the people, and the people will be for you if only you are for them, and you are addressing their issues, and they trust you"* (KK\_A7\_JR).

This inseparable bond between the people and oneself is therefore the key characteristic of a servant leader.

#### 2.1.2 Leading by example

Intertwined with the idea of responsibility towards others, being a role model is perceived as an essential attribute to being a good leader. This graduate highlights this perspective as he defines that "a good leader must be a good example in the society, so I always try [...] to be a good example, a role model" (MD\_A1\_R). As leading by example becomes the norm for these graduates (KK\_A10\_MZ), this alumnus in Kenya gives an example in which he acted as a role model by not fighting back when his neighbours did not respect his home perimeter:

*"It was not easy because you know we are living differently, we are Congolese, they are South Sudanese [...]. As I told you, I was a role model [...] they consumed some meters on my compound and I respected it and [...] they expected me to quarrel [...] but I kept quiet, and this showed them the spirit of Ubuntu which is inside me. When I called them, everybody responded and I started telling them the way we are living is not better, [all of us are refugees], we have to ameliorate our life by doing this, [...] we have to find first of all the roots of the problem [...]. It was not easy, so far,*



as you can see the community is very calm, probably if that is not the case, you could hear some shout within the community in this neighbourhood but thank god, the empowerment I got from JWL, it assisted me to implement to what I'm talking to you currently" (KK\_A5\_JR)

This same motivation to become an example for the community is articulated by this participant in Malawi, who emphasises the role of the Diploma in inspiring other women in her community to pursue their educational goals:

"I got some leadership skills in the sense that in my society, I'm considered as a leader and [...] most of people [...] they do discourage their daughters to go to school or to go further with education, believing that after education they won't be employed. They will just remain at home and get married and start taking care of children. But me, I'm a good example of leadership in the sense that I go in the camp and then, try to sensitise the community concerning women or girl's education, giving them my example [that if] [...] I didn't reach diploma, I wouldn't be able to get this job that I'm doing here. And as a female, due to my studies, [...] I'm able to even support my family financially due to education, so women can also be leaders." (MD\_A6\_R).

Therefore, setting the standards of good leadership through examples appears to be one of the virtues of a good leader for alumni of the Diploma programme.

## 2.2 Values

### 2.2.1 Courage

In line with the findings of Lowney (2009) regarding servant leadership, participants identify courage as one of the important values of a leader. This aspect is prominent in interviews conducted in Jordan, encapsulating 30% of the quotes related to courage. According to interviews, leaders may face difficult challenges, often associated with

important risks that will require them to demonstrate their courage. For example, this graduate from Afghanistan sees her courage as leadership through her potentially dangerous work commute:

"One of the risks that I have taken is traveling to Kabul. Because you know the situation of Afghanistan is not good, especially traveling from Bamiyan to Kabul. It is a big risk that I'm taking every time." (AB\_A4\_0)

As she defines courage through her ability to take the risk of experiencing a difficult situation, she reminisces that through her studies at the Diploma that courage was one of the key characteristics of being a leader (AB\_A4\_0). In addition to overcoming fear, courage requires resilience. This same Afghan participant shares her professional progression was only possible because of her determination to succeed:

"We have to never give up and we have to take risks and we have to start from the less and we have to be satisfied with even in small things you do so [...] So first I was a student, by hard and hard-working [...], I could be the leader and I'm leading [...] centres now." (AB\_A4\_0)

### 2.2.2 Humility

Humility is understood as a core value of a good leader by participants. This alumnus from Kenya illustrates this link between leadership and humility as he is conscious that:

"[...] even with your achievement, you should be humble, down to earth [...] Wherever I go, let me not be defined by my position but my action" (KK\_A1\_G)

and concludes by highlighting the interconnection between servant leadership and humility:



"One thing this programme instilled in me is humility. Serving people with humility. I am grateful for the effort of JWL." (KK\_A1\_G)

This intertwining of humility and servant leadership translates through the willingness of the participants to evaluate one's leadership from the perspective of

the people that they are serving. A graduate in Malawi exemplified this point as he is shared that it is not up to him to tell whether he is a good leader, but rather up to the person that he is serving to decide on his leadership competence (MD\_A2\_T).

## Gender perspective

Leadership is slightly more prevalent in female interviews as 56% of the quotes related to this code are from female participants. While this percentage gap can be considered relatively small, it can still help us to better understand how leadership is experienced differently by female and male graduates. The quotes related to the children-codes of 'public speaking' (61%) are particularly relevant for females. This difference may suggest that female participants apply their leadership skills as a tool not only to find their voice (AB\_A10\_H), but also to inspire other women to access education and take leadership roles in their communities (MD\_A6\_R, IE\_A4\_M, AB\_A2\_O, IE\_A2\_M). Despite living in societies where it is often challenging for women to practice leadership, female participants highlight their leadership skills in terms of encouraging other women to pursue education and reach new professional horizons.

Compared to female participants, males more frequently refer to ideas of collective work (62% of the quotes linked to this theme were mentioned by males). One interpretation of this difference could be that the focus is on a more classical understanding of leadership, where a leader manages a team. However, the emphasis seems to be placed on teamwork rather than the leader's personality, given the importance of humility in shaping the core understanding of leadership.

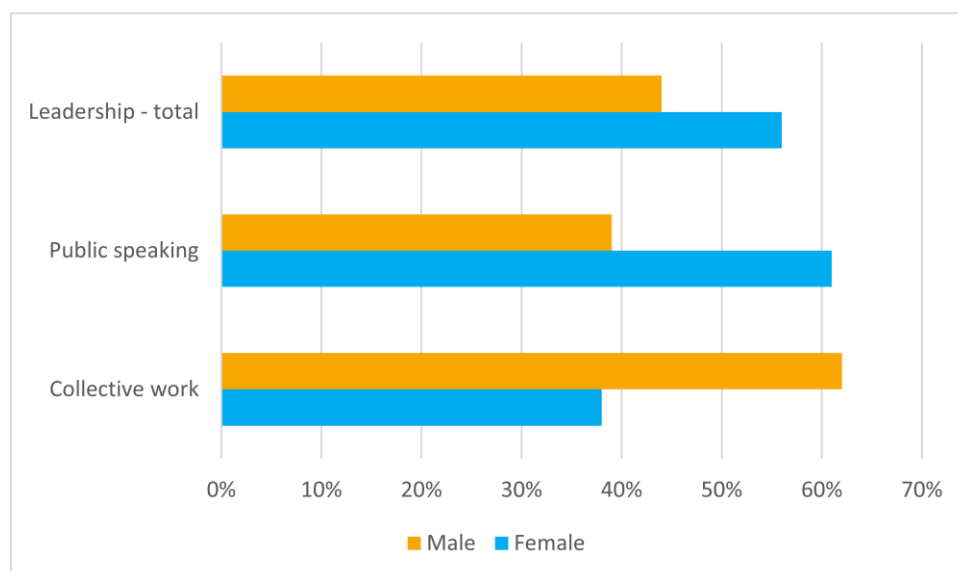


Figure 12: Analysis of some of the quotes related to leadership by gender



In this context, feedback becomes crucial to building good leadership. Receiving feedback is understood as the key element to know the quality of one's leadership, (KK\_A8\_MZ). Therefore, participants show that their willingness to seek feedback mirrors their humility as leaders that accept and welcome others' opinions.

However, this form of humility can ultimately result in some graduates not recognising their role as leaders despite demonstrated examples of leadership. Although conscious of his leadership skills in a project in which he helped develop courses in Kabul, this graduate responded as follows to the question about whether he sees himself as an agent of change:

*"I cannot frankly tell that I am an agent of change because I, with the changes we have, [...]. We know, I am very far away of change. Though I have changed, but still, I cannot, I cannot you know, call myself an agent of change."* (AB\_A12\_H)

The minimisation of his proven leadership skills reflects his humility to acknowledge his leadership role. Thus, humility appears as an essential quality for a good leader, even when the weight of the leader's actions can be minimised.

### 2.2.3 Honesty

Closely related to humility is the value of honesty, also crucial for a good leader. For this graduate in Afghanistan, honesty is identified as the first step to becoming a good leader. She recalls her learning experience in the Diploma: "I know that a leader should be first honest in her/his community" (AB\_A2\_H). This crucial importance given to honesty is furthered by the willingness to be transparent with one's community. A participant specifies

the need to solve issues peacefully and in a transparent manner:

*"If there's something you want to change, do it peacefully. Just sit with them and show them [...]. If this one goes like this and this problem would happen. [...] They will understand, instead of going there and decide on your own and you come to impose: 'this is supposed to be like this, and this is supposed to be this'. They will strike, and you will not be good times."* (KK\_A8\_MZ).

### 2.2.4 Empathy and patience

According to participants, another significant part of being a good leader is to develop empathy and patience. The aforementioned graduate already hints at this need to develop mutual understanding between the leader and the community through transparent communication (KK\_A8\_MZ). This idea of an empathetic and respectful relationship may eventually lead to trust between actors involved. This alumnus speaks about the idea of tolerance and patience to reflect this new relationship between leaders and the people:

*"You have to possess the character of tolerance and you have to also be patient, [...] because everything does not come in a short time, it comes in a long, long, long way and you have to be somebody who's hard working"* (KK\_A6\_MZ).

Therefore, possessing an empathetic and patient attitude toward one's community is perceived as vital to develop positive leadership.

### 2.2.5 Integrity and equality: Just, fair, and impartial

From graduates' perspective, a good leader should also possess qualities of integrity and equality. In the words of a graduate in Kenya, a leader must:





*"[...] be a person with Integrity, a person must be exemplary to the people because as a leader, you must ensure that you love everyone. A leader must be fair to everyone. A leader must not discriminate. A leader must not be greedy, and it must not be corrupted. [...] a leader must be transparent especially dealing with the issues to do with money" (KK\_A13\_MZ).*

This enumeration of a good leader's qualities is centred on the values of impartiality and fairness. By accentuating facilitation as a technique to achieve high standards of morale into practice, this graduate in Kenya depicted the role of impartiality to develop efficient leadership style when discussing a hypothetical challenge between two communities:

*"Only my work is to moderate, to ensure they come to conclusion, we will not enforce anything. As a leader, you are not supposed to take sides, because when you take sides, you are going to make things worse, you are going to make them escalate and it will get out of hand so that what my [understanding of] leadership is." (KK\_A3\_G)*

### 2.2.6 Responsibility

Responsibility is understood by alumni as one key component of leadership. One graduate explains that:

*"Before doing the Diploma, you know I was an irresponsible person, I was just doing things in a hurry or in a way I was not caring about that one. But after the Diploma, I think I got the feeling of, you know, to be responsible for the things that I do and for having a good community" (AB\_A6\_H).*

This is particularly salient in the context of Afghanistan as 28% of the quotes related to 'responsibility' come from this country. In Afghanistan, many participants shared their difficulty in accessing education (particularly for women) and how they often had to challenge other members of their communities in order to attend the

programme. They often referred to the responsibility to set a new standard for other girls seeking to pursue their education (AB\_A10\_H, AB\_A4\_H, AB\_A2\_O).

This feeling of responsibility, supported with the teachings of the Diploma, can eventually encourage graduates to take further leadership roles in other spheres of life. The alumna in Malawi expresses this by suggesting that:



*"Before you start leading somebody, you have to start from somewhere. That somewhere must be from you first of all, then the next door, then the entire community within. So, leadership helped me to release keys to others."*

– MD\_A3\_F

This willingness to care for others and one's environment is illustrated in the example of one graduate in Afghanistan, mentioning that if one sees a bottle on the road as he explains:

*"It is our responsibility and it is our community that we have [...] to take that bottle and put that [...] in a wastebasket and through that, I can make him understand that we should be having [...] a feeling to concern about our community" (AB\_A6\_H).*

This responsibility toward the community is emphasised from the perspective of a community elder in Kenya, who is renamed 'Mr. JWL' as he is consulted by zonal and block leaders before any community decision-making (KK\_A9\_G). Therefore, the importance given to the community through responsibility-sharing is one



pivotal aspect that makes as a 'good' leader, according to graduates.

## 2.3 Skills

In addition to having specific sets of values, graduates identify a set of skills that are essential to practice good leadership. Supported by the research findings of Riggio and Tan (2013), graduates identify the four following soft skills as major components of their leadership competence: collective work, problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication skills.

### 2.3.1 Collective work

First, collective work management is identified as a key element to develop good leadership skills. This aspect of leadership seems to be particularly relevant for participants in Jordan as their excerpts represent 32% of the quotes related to collective work. Highlighting the quality to "have that spirit of calling each and everyone, [and] working as a team" (MD\_A8\_F), graduates understand that good leaders "seek for advice from the rest of the people" (KK\_A16\_MZ). This teamwork approach relies on the value of equality among team members. This alumnus states that in order to develop strong teamwork, equality should be set as a basic standard:

*"We all feel equal, and we equally empowered in sharing our ideas even communicating and that's really helpful for me as a leader having good connection and good interaction [...] with all the people I'm working with and with all the people I'm living with, in the community" (KK\_A5\_MZ).*

This collective approach can even alleviate some of the burdens that leadership brings. For example, this graduate explains that before the Diploma:

*"[I] was doing everything alone but [...] after getting knowledge from Diploma, [I have] now delegated some responsibility to other people and all work went well and also [I] was set free". (KK\_A7\_R)*

### 2.3.2 Problem-solving

Additionally, graduates pinpoint problem-solving as one of the skills that a good leader should have. For this graduate, evaluating one's leadership should be solely based on one's ability to resolve conflict:

*"It is not easy to describe yourself, I have to show people how I proceed in decision making in my leadership. The way that I can explain someone how I am a good leader is the way I resolve conflict. Then you can describe that someone is a good leader." (MD\_A4\_R)*

This graduate in Kenya emphasises this skill by elaborating on the approach one should take when solving problems:

*"When solving problems as a leader, [...] first of all you have to avoid discriminating people. You have to be humble when solving problems. You don't have to be rude in what you are doing. So that people will feel at least at home when you are solving problems [...]. You have to solve problems equally without favouring others as the leader." (KK\_A15\_MZ)*

Encompassing values of equality, humility, and respect, problem-solving emerges as a key feature of graduates' approach to critical thinking. Therefore, problem-solving skills are presented as intrinsic to leadership, as in the words of this graduate in Malawi:

*"[...] leadership is about taking the lead in solving problems [...]." (MD\_A5\_F)*



### 2.3.3 Critical thinking

Furthermore, critical thinking is seen as a key characteristic of a good leader. From the perspective of this participant in Malawi, critical thinking can be defined based on leadership. He states that “critical thinking is a fact that you understand something, and you guide or lead [...] in a good manner,” (MD\_A7\_F). Therefore, from this viewpoint, critical thinking appears to be a mindset that permits leadership development.

### 2.3.4 Communication and public speaking skills

Lastly, according to interviewees, communication skills seem to be one of the most important skills a leader should have. This is particularly reflected in the context of Afghanistan as 32% of the quotes linked to ‘public speaking’ are from participants in this country. This graduate who held a chair position in the Human Rights Counsel in a refugee camp in Malawi and leads a social and economic movement in his home country unveils the relevance of communication within leadership:

*“Communication is one of the keys [to avoid conflict]. The heads should communicate with their toes. Yeah, the chair should communicate with the cleaner. Yes, the director of the company should have a very good communication with [his] workers. Or any leader must have like*

*effective communication with the followers. That's the most important thing, because from communication, you will be able to discover the deficit [...] that you have, like the challenges which people have.” (MD\_A1\_HD)*

While communication can be understood as a crucial tool to develop leadership for the community, it can also be for the benefit of one’s life. Particularly, public speaking seems to be influential for some graduates in terms of building their self-confidence and developing leadership skills (AB\_A4\_H, AB\_A10\_H, IE\_A2\_M). For example, this graduate in Iraq shares that before the Diploma, she was shy and did not know what to say and how to deal with people. But after the Diploma, she explains that she can go anywhere, talk with anyone, and do everything (IE\_A2\_M). Another graduate, sharing a similar experience of fear of public speaking prior to the Diploma, mentions that:

*“Now even if I speak among thousands and millions of people, I do not feel such kind of way. I'm very brave, I'm strong and I can believe on myself and I can do whatever I want.” (AB\_A10\_H)*

This liberation of the voice of graduates reveals the influential role of the Diploma on their leadership and self-confidence. Hence, graduates recognise the importance of strong communication skills to build strong leadership.



### 3 The path to leadership

During the interviews, graduates shared how gaining knowledge and skills particularly helped them to develop their leadership competence. While alumni pinpoint two main ways to learn about and build leadership, there is a clear consciousness that “knowledge equals power” (MD\_A10\_F), and therefore developing leadership through knowledge can lead to developing one’s self-confidence and potentially becoming empowered (MD\_A6\_R, KK\_A5\_MZ, MD\_A1\_HD). For example, this graduate shares how:

*“[the Diploma] has empowered [me]. It has helped me in terms of leadership. Because [...] this is the truth from my heart. It was my first time to discover what is leadership.” (MD\_A1\_HD)*

This self-transformation through knowledge highlights the value of the teachings of the Diploma in shaping a basic understanding of leadership and how to develop one’s own competencies in that area. While the Diploma is generally mentioned as shaping one’s approach to leadership, the course named ‘Introduction to Leadership studies’ is frequently referred to by graduates as an important milestone in their leadership development. For instance, this graduate in Kenya explains that:

*“It helped us to know the qualities of a good leader, how to become a good leader, how to lead*

*people. So leadership, it mainly helped me in my academic journey like for example joining student-based organisations, it is a student leadership. So how you approach students matters a lot. How you deal with everyone’s how you interact with everyone’s, how you lead them, not only in the school, not only in the institution but also in a community” (KK\_A13\_R).*

This widening of perspectives on what leadership means through the teachings of the Diploma is also explored through peer learning. This graduate in Malawi demonstrates the efficacy of learning from one another to develop leadership:



**“The first thing I learnt from JWL is every time to believe that we learn from one another, when you believe that life is for learning from one another, this is whereby you start realising the power of leadership.”**

– MD\_A2\_T

While knowledge about leadership can be gained from books and lectures, it is also understood as being built through peer learning. Thus, according to interviews, graduates could develop their leadership through the teachings of JWL in the learning environment available to them both onsite and through the global virtual classroom.



Figure 13. A graduate in Kakuma, Kenya performing public speaking skills at the graduation ceremony

## 4 The consequences of being a leader

After sharing their understanding of what leadership is, what the values of a good leader are and how they developed their leadership skills, graduates shared their perspectives on the consequences of being a leader.

Finding one's voice or carrying and amplifying the voice of the voiceless is one consequence in which graduates find their leadership potential tested. This refugee in Jordan expresses:

*"Many communities have been affected with the war in their country, and they don't have a chance to show the voice to the world. I see that from the readings from the paper I do, interacting with them and within that it gives me the courage that*

*to be in their voice. But also, I don't have a chance to practice right now, but when I got the opportunity, I can do it."* (JA\_A2\_A)

While this participant is limited by political and social factors in Jordan in expressing and applying his leadership, his readiness to take on the responsibility to amplify community voices reveals the courage of the graduate to address social issues in this context.

This resilient feeling is also shared by this participant in Malawi who expressed how he used the teachings of the Diploma to build leadership and a courageous spirit:

*"[the Diploma] did support my leadership skills. In the first place, I would think how I can do a lot of things if I had an opportunity, but now with JWL's teachings and how they are training us, they have been giving us the spirit to try out that thing you want to do and put it in action to be the leader you*



want to be. And truly I think with JWL, after I started operating my own project, I realised that truly JWL has a great role to play.” (MD\_A2\_T)



“Many have been asking me who brings you up to this level. I do tell them it’s JWL. They asked me is JWL a person? We want to talk to JWL. We were two Uganda graduated from JWL and our achievements become a story of the day. I was breastfeeding by then. The example they would give was ‘look at her she is a mother of three and she has done a lot no man in this community tried. What about you? You have opportunity here in the camp.’ I became [...] [a] reference and consultant. I feel big.”

– KK\_A7\_G

This form of empowerment through leadership can be translated in terms of self-confidence. Whether it is through voicing out a concern or standing in front of a public delivering a speech, self-confidence appears as a key consequence of performing a leadership role. For example, this block leader shares that before she joined the Diploma, she was always afraid to face other block leaders, always putting her head down when addressing them (KK\_A7\_G). But after she joined the Diploma, she became more confident, “very strong” and “happy again”

(KK\_A7\_G). She adds that this inspired her “to stand for the voiceless,” as she became a community caseworker (particularly fighting against gender-based violence). She illustrates this transformation through the following example:

*“Here in block 11, people like drinking, and fighting for no reason and men are beating their wives, and girls are being raped, and theft, I remember I put down and talk to them. I asked myself what made me this way, I remembered oh, it was the community advocacy in the Diploma it has really impacted me.” (KK\_A7\_G).*

She concludes by highlighting that this overcoming of challenges made her feel more important, confident and a better leader than when she first joined the Diploma:

This example highlights the impact of the Diploma in shaping this personal growth through developing the intrinsic skills of leadership and confidence simultaneously. Thus, through many examples of community leadership, graduates articulate their willingness to not only amplify their own voices, but also those of the communities and marginalised people. This personal growth and increase in self-confidence are therefore the consequence of the leadership skills gained through the Diploma.



## 5 Conclusion

Leadership appears as an essential competence that graduates develop during their JWL journey. Whether gaining a strong understanding of leadership in class, developing related values and skills, or building self-confidence, alumni often

perceive leadership as one of the key takeaways of the Diploma programme. While critical thinking is the mindset that enables one to plan for actions, leadership applies critical thinking to serve a specific purpose. In the case of JWL graduates, this transition from critical thinking to leadership is not only emancipating for the leader but also for their communities

### Key points

- Leadership is one of the most important impacts of JWL's Diploma programme as it affects not only graduates, but also the communities they serve.
- Alumni nuance distinct types of leadership, with a special focus on servant leadership.
- Graduates' perspective on leadership encompasses a set of styles, values, and skills, including servant leadership, leading by example, honesty, humility, courage, equality, empathy, responsibility, collective work, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills.
- The knowledge and skills acquired through the Diploma are understood as critical to developing leadership.
- Graduates share that their leadership experiences in various spheres of their life can result in personal growth and an increase in self-confidence.



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## Chapter 4: Interreligious and intercultural sensitivity

Experiencing differences through values of equality, respect and tolerance



“Now it's different because I have understood the other person's religion, cultures. Before I used to say my culture is the best, [...] my religion is the real one, but now through Diploma I came to know that everything is equal. Every culture is good.”

– KK\_A10\_R





# 1 Interreligious and intercultural sensitivity: various levels of tolerance and respect

Throughout graduates' Diploma programme journey, interreligious and intercultural sensitivity appears particularly salient at various levels of perception of 'other'. According to the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), the experience of difference fluctuates on a continuum that commences with ethnocentrism and extends to ethnorelativism with different stages between the two extremes (Bennett & Bennett 2004, Intercultural Development Research Institute 2018). This model can help us understand the process that graduates go through during their journey in the Diploma. The analysis of interreligious and intercultural sensitivity was done jointly as graduates did not have separate answers when discussing religious and cultural diversity.

## 1.1 Acceptance

The first stage of the ethnorelativism continuum is the acceptance step as diversity is "acknowledged and respected"

(Bennett 1986, p. 184). During the interviews, each participant expressed at the minimum a level of acceptance. While their views on the 'other' may have been on the ethnocentrism side of the continuum prior to the Diploma, no participant shared views that belong to the ethnocentric side of the DMIS model (Bennett & Bennett 2004) after having completed the programme. A general level of acceptance toward others is at the basis of participants' interreligious and intercultural beliefs. This participant from Malawi defines the intercultural continuum as follows:

*"Intercultural sensitivity, [...] I can say that [...] it's the way people get to cope with others culture, or the way people understand others' culture in a positive or in a negative way and cope with it, even though it's positive but you accept to cope with it. Even though it's not, a positive or negative you accept, and you know this is his culture and I need [to] cope with it despite what." (MD\_A9\_F)*

This definition of intercultural sensitivity illustrates not only the diverse degrees to which one can experience this skill, but also sets a minimum that seeks to accept differences, as in the ethnorelativism part of the DMIS continuum.

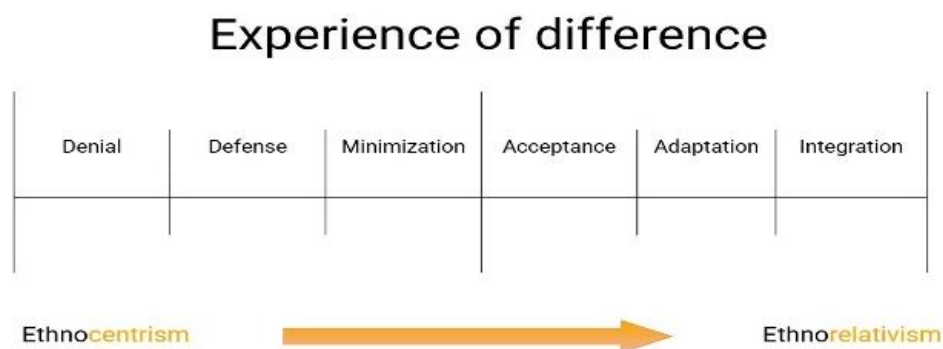


Figure 14: The DMIS model (Intercultural Development Research Institute 2021)



### 1.1.1 Meeting halfway: respect and reciprocity as solutions

Elaborating on the view of the aforementioned participant (MD\_A9\_F), the acceptance stage acknowledges that there might be conflict because of religious or cultural differences, but stresses respect and acceptance as means to mitigate these conflicts. This graduate in Malawi explains that:



“[...] to live in a peaceful society, they need to accept, and take the other people's belief. [...] for example, if you say that OK, my culture is superior to yours, that will create conflict in this society, and it can even lead to war. But if you say like OK, that's your belief, I accept it the way you like, I acknowledge it the way it is [...]. This will help in keeping social-coexistence and collaboration among people, [...]. So, for us to keep peace, we have to accept their culture [...] and respect it.”

– MD\_A6\_R

The emphasis on collaboration and using this sensitivity to prevent wars reveals the core tensions that constitute developing interreligious and intercultural sensitivity. While respect, even in conflict, becomes the norm, graduates explain why such skills are very sensitive to one's identity:

*“Through this Diploma, it has shown [to] me [that] I [am] not supposed to provoke somebody's religion. Like that religion is very important like mine.” (KK\_A1\_R)*

Therefore, reciprocity and respect function at the heart of the mechanism to accept differences. These two values are used by

this graduate businessman in Iraq who was able to find a balance between religious and professional duties with his employees. He explained that whenever his company was under time pressure for certain professional tasks, he told his employees who wanted to pray during work hours that “God is ready, anytime you can pray with him” but when his employees are not working for time-sensitive tasks, then they can go “to relax to pray” (IE\_A1\_M). Therefore, this graduate illustrates how cultural and religious differences can be accommodated to find in-between arrangements, even when one agrees to disagree.

### 1.1.2 Acceptance of cultural differences through knowledge

Furthermore, beyond valuing respect and reciprocity when experiencing differences, graduates articulate the importance given to interreligious and intercultural sensitivity for the purpose of coexistence in a multicultural and multireligious setting. In terms of cultural diversity, this alumnus in Malawi reflected on his intercultural values:

*“I am open to everyone; you know that I have different friends from different communities and nationalities. Before I was too close to my own people, but you know that I am no longer like that person. I have many friends who are Congolese and Rwandans but am not a Congolese, either a Rwandan, so am opened to their culture but I also preserve mine too. And when I visit them, [...], we share together food. If I respect their culture, it does not mean that they have necessary to respect mine.” (MD\_A1\_R)*

The emphasis on non-reciprocal respect reflects that space for disagreement is preserved on the other end of the party for the guarantee of intercultural coexistence.



This space that respects differences is understood as being built from interreligious and intercultural interactions. This alumnus in Malawi explains that the idea of “coming together that were there as not sharing the same religion, but [...] interact[ing]” is possible through respect as “it is all about the way we don’t compromise each other’s religion” (MD\_A11\_T). This acknowledgment of differences and potential disagreements also allows building tolerance between cultures or religions. From the viewpoint of this graduate in Kenya, acknowledging differences enables a peaceful cohabitation in an interreligious setting:

*“When it is possible, allows that tolerance of culture and religion so that you can be seen [as] people, people who are tolerant. We tolerate and celebrate each other. Learn how to live with them, first [of] all the acceptance of their existence, the second thing [is] how can we live together without hurting each other. You start learning you as a Christian and me as a Muslim and see that gap that needs our effort to live together. If you acknowledge the coexistence, you become an interreligious and intercultural person.” (KK\_A1\_G)*

This step-by-step process encompassing acceptance and tolerance in order to build a peaceful community is crucial to turn acceptance toward diversity. This alumnus in Malawi shares how the teachings from the Diploma made him non-judgmental and opened him up to embrace diversity around him:

*“I speak different languages because we live with different people, I accepted them for who they are, so now I know Chichewa, I know Swahili, I know Bembe, Fulilu I know all of these because I accepted, I was changed, then I said these are also human beings, they never chose to be who they are, so we are all one [...] so right now [...], I’m*

*able to accept any person, any religion, and culture.” (MD\_A15\_T)*

Therefore, his acceptance of diversity turned him to embrace these linguistic differences and be engaged with his surroundings.

Consequently, acceptance, appearing as a crucial stage to define the nature of the interactions with ‘others’, results in setting a (potentially new) standard of equality among all graduates. While a space for disagreements and differences can be acknowledged during this process, the adoption of respect and equality as fundamental principles enables graduates to place being human before cultural and religious characteristics. Thus, at the very minimum, JWL’s teachings allow for the anchoring of the guiding principles of tolerance and acceptance toward others.

## 1.2 Adaptation

While some interviews point at the process of accepting interreligious and intercultural differences, some show a process of adaptation toward differences. This is the second stage of the ethnorelativism model, which points to an adjustment of a “behaviour and thinking” in order to adapt to the cultural differences (Bennett 1986, p. 185).

### 1.2.1 Participation in a different culture/religion

The adaptation phase can translate into demonstrating appropriate behaviour in a different cultural or religious setting (Bennett 1986). From the participants’ perspective, this step is externalised as graduates share how the Diploma journey helped them understand how to react in a multicultural context. A graduate in Malawi expresses how intercultural



communication helped him to develop this intercultural agility:

*"It was easier to understand other cultures, interact with the other cultures without any problem because for time being when we enter in new culture, it was not eas[y] to adapt the new culture, but since I get that opportunity [...] to get knowledge, it was easier for me to adjust [to] the multicultural [environment]." (MD\_A6\_F)*

This graduate turned this adaptability into practice when he met an intercultural challenge. He narrated that when he was invited with a friend by villagers around the camp to have a shared meal, his friend wanted to run away as they found mice as a meal. But after telling his friend to calm down and that they are not going to eat the food, he thanked the host, wished them to enjoy their meal and that him and his friend were very satisfied (MD\_A6\_F). According to him, the Diploma helped him "to assist [his] friend who wanted to run away" and to demonstrate a respectful intercultural behaviour (MD\_A6\_F). This example illustrates the importance given to communication in order to be comfortable in a different cultural context.

### 1.2.2 Intercultural communication appropriateness

Many graduates also refer to communication as being crucial to developing strong interreligious and intercultural skills. For this participant in Afghanistan, learning to discuss with people from different religions and cultures was "really hard" at the beginning because he did not know their culture. After the Diploma, he felt comfortable enough to say that if he were now in a classroom with students from diverse backgrounds, he would be able to "have good [...] and effective conversations with them without any concerns" (AB\_A6\_H).

Additionally, for this businesswoman participant in Malawi, communication with diverse cultures is seen as crucial for her business: she explains that when a Somalian used their "mentality" when buying products, seeking to bargain and reduce the price, some other people may think "they are insulting" them. As she understands the complexity of intercultural communication, she also highlights its challenges: "Sometimes successful, sometimes, bothered, because it's not easy for [her] to relate with [some customers]" (MD\_A3\_F). Therefore, communication appropriateness, although understood as essential to daily interaction, is also presented as a potentially challenging tool to master.

Additionally, this intercultural adaptability is mentioned concerning issues intersecting with gender. For example, a participant in Kenya highlights his gratitude for JWL when facing interreligious communication challenges:

*"I really thank JWL because they real equipped me [with the] basics on understanding religious beliefs [...], first of all, you might be working with Muslim lady and if you [...] know that their religion doesn't allow to greet stranger from them, you might easily understand better, but if you didn't know, you might think is kind of underestimation, [...]. Surely, JWL equipped me [...] to be living with different people according to their slogan like creating men for others, [...] is a kind of inclusivity, it means we are many people, but we are working together." (KK\_A5\_JR)*

For this other graduate in Kenya, she stresses the need not to judge people's culture and the importance to understand each other as she gives the example of her interaction with her neighbours. She explains that:



*"In our culture, men don't enter to the kitchen, it is a taboo. Even my son, here no matter how much he is hungry, he cannot go the kitchen and prepare something for himself, he must wait for me. In fact, I told her [the female neighbour] that is bad manners. After two weeks of the graduation, I came and apologised to her, and I admitted I was sorry judge you that way from now onward I understand that is your culture."* (KK\_A7\_G)

Therefore, from this point of view, displaying appropriate communication in a multicultural setting relies on one's ability to respect differences and have a mutual understanding of cultural diversity. The Diploma's impact on graduates' lives is substantial as alumni not only develop intercultural agility but also appropriate communication tools that equip them to prosper in interreligious and intercultural settings.

### 1.3 Integration

Lastly, the integration stage is identified as "the application of ethnorelativism to one's own identity" (Bennett 1986, p.186). Some interviews depict this last stage of the continuum whereby graduates' interreligious and intercultural sensitivity are presented in an integrated form. This translates into a context in which religion and culture are not relevant categories of identification in a culturally diverse group. As the 'othering' process based on culture and religion is fading, intercultural understanding may even come as a form of freedom. This integration stage in interviews is articulated in the aspect of embracing diversity, removing discriminatory prejudices, and developing a sense of freedom in experiencing differences.

#### 1.3.1 Embracing diversity

With an intercultural approach gained during the Diploma, graduates share their commitment to diversity. This process seems to be particularly relevant in Kenya whereby an approach that seeks to use equality and inclusion is promoted (as 34% of the 'inclusion' code is allocated to Kenya) as a mechanism to develop peacebuilding (with 26% percent of 'peacebuilding' codes addressing Kenya). This graduate in Kenya encapsulates this idea of 'being stronger together' in the following example:



*"When we cook food and [...] make a stew, there are other ingredients [...]. Why do we add food ingredients in a stew? It is meant to improve the taste, so the same way when we come together people from different cultural backgrounds, we can be more powerful than being individuals. So, we need to come together regardless of the differences that we have. But if we work together, we can achieve more if we do it at our own level, individually, we can achieve less."*

– KK\_A13\_MZ

This same willingness to embrace differences is demonstrated from this Afghan participant in terms of religious differences:

*"You know in Diploma programme, I learned that religion is not the thing which makes us or cause that we are enemy of each other. You know some people think that for example I'm Muslim so I should be the enemy of Christians [...]. It is a wrong idea. So, I think religion is created to collect the people in groups. So, you know when we are alone, we are so weak; but when we are in a group, then we are strong to face challenges, to*



solve the problems. Because of that, the religions are created.” (AB\_A5\_H)

Therefore, alumni’s perspective on experiencing differences is beyond respect and tolerance, as some of them stress the benefits of differences and the power of diversity.

### 1.3.2 Removing discrimination and prejudices

In addition to acknowledging diversity as a strength, graduates emphasise how their Diploma journey helps them articulate their interreligious and intercultural sensitivity as removing prejudices and reacting to discrimination. This graduate in Malawi explains how the Diploma changed his beliefs through interactions with peers:

“Respondent: Yeah, from Rwanda I know that those Hutu people, they are bad people because I knew they killed from the genocide [...]. So, when I came here, then I was told that Hutu [...] are here then I said “we’re going to die” because I know [...] they’re naturally bad, but today that’s an information. The first friend that I have it’s a Hutu.

Interviewer: Then did you meet that friend in the community or Diploma?

Respondent: Yeah, in Diploma, then I [...] was saying that while I was thinking [that] these people were different from what I’m living today. Do you see, [it] is thanks to Diploma’s integration?” (MD\_A5\_L)

The process of removal of discriminatory views is shared by this graduate in Afghanistan:

“Diploma [...] removed the discriminatory views of mine. Before I joined Diploma in liberal arts studies, [...] I am a Hazarah, I was thinking all ethnic groups in Afghanistan are very bad. In fact, it was a kind of single story in my mind that Tajik, Uzbek, Pashtun, and all other ethnics are very bad. I was thinking just about my own culture. We have a very rich culture; we have a good culture, and I wasn’t thinking that other cultures are also good. [...] Other places other cultures, religions also follow not bad ways. They also follow good ways. So, this is the very, very effective and useful point and tip that I could learn during my studies in Diploma.” (AB\_A12\_H)



Figure 15: Self-study time at the JWL learning centre in Malawi



Beyond removing prejudice toward cultural or religious differences, graduates explain how the Diploma helped to dismantle cultural misunderstandings and racism, whether they are victims or bystanders of these discriminations. For this Afghan participant living in Iran, she shares how her accent has caused her to face problems, but she has now embraced this difference and if people tell her, they have problems understanding her, she states that she “will explain for them, it is no problem” (AH\_A3\_N).

This Kakuma graduate’s experience in a community service organisation made him realise the approach taken by his manager was “wrong”:

*“Because when [we were] having an orientation [in] Nairobi, they have given us a lot of precaution, you know “don’t relate to the Somalis, they are radicals,” [...]. Yeah “again, when you go to the community of the Sudanese, [...] one ethnic community called the Nuer [...] are very violent. If you provoke them, [it is not] until they see blood, [...] they [will] stop fighting.” Ok, “you go to the Dinka, you know, they’re like this. Go to the Congolese, you know...” I was asking myself “we going to a Zoo or are going to serve the community [...]?”. [...] Why will I have to live in a community which [I] have already [been] told me all the bad things about this community?” (KK\_A12\_G)*

Throughout his reflections on cultural prejudice by his leader, he realised that this biased thinking and lack of empathy and mutual understanding did not allow him to effectively serve the community. He shared that once he had arrived in the Somali community, he found that there were no Somali women applicants despite his organisation’s advertisement, and that “there was something wrong” with their approach. As he went to discuss with Somali community leaders, he was able to

get ‘an overview’ of their religious and cultural practices, which allowed him to find solutions on how to better engage the Somali community. Therefore, this participant demonstrates how he used critical thinking to challenge the discriminatory approach of his supervisors in order to better serve the community.

Another example of demonstrating intercultural skills to prevent racism is encapsulated in the following case where an Iraqi graduate explained that he had to call on kids who were screaming “blacks” at Ethiopian workers in Iraq (IE\_A1\_M). For this participant in Kenya, cautioning against discriminatory behaviours has also meant receiving appreciation and building supportive relationships. After explaining the consequences of discriminatory behaviours, she advised the two ladies who were having misconceptions about each other’s culture to “educate” themselves about the “importance of culture” and the results were positive:

*“After my meeting with them, I was surprised when they left my place happy and hugging each other and thanked me for having time with them.” (KK\_A7\_G)*

Thus, stepping up as an active bystander helping to dislodge cultural misunderstandings and discriminatory behaviours has been identified by graduates as one application of their interreligious and intercultural sensitivity. Consequently, developed during the Diploma, graduates’ articulation of cross-cultural and religious differences contributes to building interreligious and intercultural bridges and reducing related conflict.



### 1.3.3 A form of freedom

Lastly, this integrated form of interreligious and intercultural sensitivity among participants can even lead to a form of freedom, in which there is a recognition that we are all united by being humans. This type of comprehension of interreligious and intercultural sensitivity is particularly applicable in Jordan, which represents 59% of the quotes related to the topic of 'freedom' and 36% of the excerpts relating to the "inclusion" code. This intertwining of freedom and inclusion reflects an integrated comprehension of interreligious and intercultural sensitivity. For example, this participant Jordan expresses that:



**"What I only say: human being we are the first, number one, all religions came after. So, we have to look at us human being regardless, so everyone deserves joy and happiness, and pain is pain for everybody."**

- JA\_A2\_A

Free from any social categorisation, humans appear united. For this participant in Kenya, being exposed to religious diversity can be a source of strength and privilege:

*"I like about the Diploma most [is] of these religions, they all teach the same thing kindness, love, compassion, unity helping others. I think this is something I really like and also had the privilege to get to know more because [in] my home country, Somalia, we are not exposed to learn other religion, because we don't have many*

*people from other communities who are living with us back home, so all what we know is our religion. Getting or becoming a friend of people with different faiths, it makes us strong."* (KK\_A5\_G)

In addition to demonstrating a unified understanding of religious diversity, one participant illustrates this undivided approach to human beings by referring to Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

*"That was article number one saying that every [human] being, or all beings are free and equal, so there's no super[ior]. Every human, every living thing is equal. And free in dignity."* (MD\_A3\_R)

This vision transcends interreligious and intercultural differences to integrate a perspective focusing on human beings as a whole rather than the differences, which assumes at the core absolute and incontestable freedom.

Therefore, some graduates formulate a more transversal meaning of interreligious and intercultural sensitivity in their interviews which reveals an integrated form of experiencing differences. As graduates are able to replace their prejudice or other's discriminatory behaviours with the idea of cultural and religious differences as a strength, it enables them to surpass religious and cultural distinguishing characteristics to adopt a unified and comprehensive approach to diversity that assumes dignity, equality and freedom as core principles.





## 2 The path to interreligious and intercultural sensitivity in the Diploma

During the interviews, graduates identify several factors that allowed them to develop their interreligious and intercultural sensitivity.

### 2.1 Knowledge

First, the knowledge developed during the Diploma is depicted as essential to the building of one's interreligious and intercultural sensitivity. While specific courses that contribute to this are mentioned such as World Religions class (KK\_A1\_MZ), Intercultural Communication (MD\_A6\_F; MD\_A7\_F) and Introduction to Political Thought (AH\_A1\_N), graduates speak more broadly about what it means to have knowledge and become aware of others' religions/cultures. This graduate speaks about the World Religions class as being important for him to develop intercultural comprehension and an understanding of freedom of worship:



*"We call [it] world religions, this education it really sharpen me in living the society because in the Africa or in Kakuma we have different [...] religions, [...] and most of the time there is a lot misunderstanding whereby people trying to claim like they are the rights, these people say we are rights, but due to [...] the knowledge that I have got, now I understood that everybody has freedom of worshipping whatever he choose."*

– KK\_A1\_MZ

For this graduate, World Religions course was his favourite class because:

*"We have studied the religions that are in the world and [...] we have noticed that in some religions there are points which are very good points and those points could be applied in our religions too. And besides we have studied that if we go another country, how we should treat the people [...] in different places [...] and their religion and knowing their culture will really help us how to treat with them and how to behave with them."*  
(AB\_A6\_H)

Seen as "mind-changing", "unforgettable" and "one of the best courses taken" in his life, this graduate in Kenya explains how the World Religions class allowed him to build a new philosophy. Additionally, he stresses the primordality of this class for today's context and helping to reduce conflict:

*"Currently the world is puzzled by religion, religion is really causing so much trouble, [...] terrorism, discrimination. So, [...] people are making like a very big decision based on their faith, which is something that they should understand physically before they could [...] do something."*  
(KK\_A8\_G)

Besides World Religions class, learning about political thought helped this graduate in Afghanistan removes his prejudice as he formulates that before the Diploma, he had the idea of "bigotry", but he explains how the Diploma helped him change this perspective:

*"There was a course by the name of political thought, in that political thought you were noticing that not only your country is going through this situation, but there are some other countries, like Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland conflict there were a lot of innocent people that were killed, so, studying those concepts you came to know how to find a sustainable way to get rid of such kind of*



situation, how to put an end to war, to discrimination, to bigotry, to races to all these catastrophes and challenges that we are feeling it and suffering from. Diploma in liberal arts is amazing in all these.” (AH\_A1\_N)

In addition to Introduction to Political Thought class, for this participant, Intercultural Communication was a key element of his learning journey at JWL:

“There is a lot of keys I learned in my Diploma journey, yeah for instance, intercultural communication. When I learn intercultural communication, it was easier to understand other cultures, interact with the other culture without any problem.” (MD\_A6\_F)

While these courses have been mentioned as impactful to develop such intercultural thinking, they are nevertheless not without challenges. According to this graduate in Kenya, questioning the meaning of identity, culture, and religion was part of this process:

“You know, in my culture [...] it is very difficult to separate culture from religion and even [...] when I was like doing Diploma, some of the courses were related to identity, personally it was very difficult to understand and clarify what is culture and what is religion, because everything [...], cultures or religions have been influenced by religion. You know, [...] refugee, people who left their country long time ago, [...] aren't well supported because of insecurity problem, like civil war [...]. It is very complex [...] to know cultural identity. [...] but with [...] the Diploma, I was able to understand better, [...] do a lot of research on what's culture and what is religion, I think I have a better view on culture [...] I actually know that every culture is unique and beautiful in its own way.” (KK\_A5\_G)

He finishes by sharing his gratitude for this class as with the help of the onsite facilitator and professor, he was able to differentiate culture from religion and

understand the importance of discussing interreligious and intercultural topics (KK\_A5\_G). Accompanied by the Diploma teaching staff, his reflection turned his learning challenges into a profound understanding of the meaning of culture and religion. This learning realisation is also shared by this participant in Malawi, who reflects on refugee identity as a path to build this intercultural understanding during the Diploma:



“First of all I was born in a country but I was never raised there, so the thing is I came here I learnt about my community, I learnt about other people's culture, I learnt more about my religion as well, and learnt about other people's religions, and how that make the whole community, people live together, people make a community with different life styles, but in the end, one thing brings them together, we are all refugees, we are all identified as refugees but they don't identify us with our own nationalities, so it gave me a cultural sensitivity, in the way that it made me know how different we are and how similar we are, and what brings us together.”

– MD\_A15\_T

Graduates also emphasised the importance of peer learning in the onsite and global classroom, to explore these concepts. For instance, this participant in Malawi enunciates how the Diploma changed his perspective as he studied with students from other religions:

“Because when it comes to religion, I never liked Muslims, the way they conduct their things but when we were studying together as students at



*JWL you could find I was cooperating with people like [names person – this person] is a Muslim! We became friends we could talk, chill so it has helped me understand more who Muslims are.” (MD\_A10\_T).*

Learning with other nationalities has been articulated in terms of success for this graduate in Kenya. He expresses that “work[ing] with people from different countries [...] helped [him] to be successful” as he learned during his Diploma journey to “value other people from different cultures” (KK\_A12\_R). This interreligious and intercultural learning through peers is also shared by this alumnus in Malawi who found that studying with people from other cultures and countries meant accepting to be living in a multicultural community:

*“The time I reached here I just got helped with a Christian person who supported me in many things, you can see even from Burundi to Ethiopia is far, so how can you think maybe such person is helping me! In the same house, I was sitting with Congolese, I was sitting with, of course Burundian as me, and Malawian, [...] At the beginning, [...] I was not getting along, since I thought that it would be tough [for] me to live with them, but going with Diploma, getting the skills from there, having the videos of different [...] cultures, how other people live, it helped too much to see how I can live with these people I met here, living with them though we don't have the same culture. So, what I can say is living is that multicultural community, the Diploma helped me to understand that I need not to put aside at all my culture but to give chance to other cultures or religions.” (MD\_A13\_T)*

In a similar approach to diversity through learning with peers from different backgrounds, this graduate expressed how building an interreligious and intercultural learning community helped him overcome his prejudice:



*“First of all, I was making discrimination. Because here in refugee camp we have many religions. [...] So, that is why for me, I was not able to sit with a Muslim and also other religious, I was also loving only my religion. That is why from my Diploma, exactly in the course which I learnt about religion of the world, I got a point which was very important for me to know that every religion, every people in the community are the same so [...] we can understand each other and no one to discriminate because of his religion, his culture, [...] and also remember as I am a student, I do meet with other students from different religion there but right now from the Diploma, all of us we are the same and we are the friends, and we do support each other.”*

*– KK\_A2\_R*

Thus, the Diploma, not only through its courses, but also through its intercultural learning space allows graduates to reflect on their ideal when interacting with ‘other’ and enhance their interreligious and intercultural sensitivity to lead them to embrace an inclusive and respectful approach to diversity.

## 2.2 Introspection and empathy

Introspection is a mechanism that supports the interreligious and intercultural learning of graduates, which can in turn result in building empathy. Participants frequently reflect on their misbelief and how during the Diploma they were able to change their approach to diversity. This is particularly relevant in the context of Afghanistan, representing 37%



of the quotes related to discrimination, 22% of the quotes related to mutual understanding, and 27% of the quotes linked with the ideas of values and morale. Given that these codes respectively reflect issues relating to discriminatory behaviours or experiences, empathetic behaviour toward others, and values embedded in cultural and religious identities, these results may suggest an application of intercultural knowledge based on the willingness to remove discriminatory behaviour and the development of strong values that are based on reciprocity to deal with interactions in a diverse setting.

This participant in Afghanistan articulated how a dispute with other JWL peers helped her challenge interreligious prejudices:

*"I was starting the world of religion in Diploma programme. One of my classmates said something wrong about Islam then I couldn't just tolerate [...] and I act very badly with [him]. And I*

*told something rude [...] and I said that you are stupid why you are in this way, and this is not true. [...] [...] but at the end I apologised, and he also apologised [to] me because, in fact it was my problem also, because [...] in a very bad way, I made him understand that his idea is wrong. But I could make him understand in a good way also like [...] explaining whatever you heard is not right about Islam or about Muslim [...] but at the end I learned that [...]. Sometimes the people they just blame each other's religions, each other's beliefs and cultures and I also was the part of those people but now all my perspectives and ideas changed. Now for me it doesn't matter that the people belong to which group, which ethnicity, which race, which religion, which cultures but they are all human and we are all human. We need to respect each other; we need to love each other."* (AB\_A10\_H)

This newly gained perspective through interaction with JWL classmates contributed to challenging her approach to interreligious conflict and allowed her to develop stronger interreligious conflict-management skills.



Figure 16: Graduation ceremony in Kakuma, Kenya



Like this graduate who apologised to her peers, the two following examples demonstrate a similar behaviour when graduates become aware of their discriminatory biases. The alumnus in Kenya revealed his strengthened interreligious and intercultural sensitivity as he explained that he once used to have negative prejudices about Muslim people, but after the Diploma, he was able to build a clearer definition of religion and faith and develop his interaction with people with different backgrounds while still serving the community as “one community” (KK\_A9\_G). His shift in perspective is particularly evident when he expresses how he sought to apologise to his Muslim peers:

*“One day, I called my Muslim [friend], pray to apologise for all whatever I have said about his religion and his culture. I became the instrument of religion and [an] advocate. The Diploma helped me to understand culture and religion to the fullest.” (KK\_A9\_G)*

The same introspection is shared by this graduate in Malawi who expresses how the Diploma made him “non-judgmental” and develop an acceptance of diversity:

*“I am a friend of people with different religions, so when I finished the course I managed to say sorry to the people I offended because where there is a Muslim and a Christian there is always an argument, my religion is good yours is bad, so when encountered this course, when I learnt what religion is and how people chose their religions and why, I thought it twice to say sorry to my friends, and I became non-judgmental so I feel like it's normal, for someone to choose different religion.” (MD\_A15\_T)*

This reflection on one’s own biases shows a radical change in interreligious and intercultural perspectives.

This interreligious growth is also experienced in issues related to gender:



*“Before I was thinking that a young Muslim girl cannot attend the school but, through the skill I gained in the Diploma programme especially regarding this religion, I understand that even a young Muslim lady can go to school and occupy some leadership position even in the community, whereas before I was not thinking about that.”*

– MD\_A8\_F

This “before and after the Diploma” approach to reflect on graduates’ interaction with people from diverse backgrounds reveals the importance of the role of introspection in mitigating conflict entangled in interreligious or intercultural issues. This graduate, who identifies himself as a “very conservative” Muslim, articulates how the Diploma made him approach religious diversity in a respectful and empathetic manner:

*“I don't think if God will have a favourite religion in this world, so [as] long as you do the good things, do not kill, still thing about others, anything [that] hurts you hurts other. Do not cause to any other person in the name of religion. I don't think any religion will advocate for bloodshed although people thing Muslim will be advocating for bloodshed but [...] if you look at it really and take your time and study the Muslim religion, it does not advocate for any kind of war, so this all combined with what I have learned from the course and personal experience, the Diploma made to sit down to rethink about the religion belief, no religion is against other religion, all what we need to do is to be just as He is. It shows me the equality of religion.” (KK\_A1\_G)*



This willingness to build peace and mutual understanding between religions denotes a new approach developed during the Diploma. This is also expressed in the words of this other graduate in Kenya who explained how poor interreligious and intercultural sensitivity can turn religion into a source of conflict:

*"[I thought] you can't interact with other religion and other religions are bad. Yours is only the greatest but after taking the course, I have learned that [...] all people believe in the religion. They're the same way I believe in it. [...] I respect that [other] religion, but I don't believe in it and the same person also respect my religion and but doesn't believe in it. But if we start criticising others by telling them that your religion is bad why you are doing that, [...] that brings many of conflict, like for example we have in my country [...] mostly they fight for religion, they say these people like this and that, just among us this brings a lot of conflict. But [...] after studying the world religion, [...] I've learned to appreciate their culture and they have also learned to appreciate my culture and I have broadened my thinking capacity on inter-religious" (KK\_A4\_MZ)*

This perspective thus reflects how knowledge of other religions brings empathy and respect while building a more peaceful environment in interreligious settings. The reciprocity highlighted in the former quote also demonstrates how one's view on religion is as important as another's. This Afghan alumnus illustrates why such perspective of empathy and mutual respect is crucial as he understands that one's religious and cultural identity is importantly shaped by one's cultural and religious surroundings:

*"I will say that you know if someone is praying a stone, he likes to pray that: if someone is praying God, so he likes to pray God. So that's their belief and we should be open and accepting this religion. [...] most of the time I think, if I was born in United States of America, I will be Christian. [...]"*

*And if I was born in China, maybe I follow Buddhism. And now if I born in Afghanistan, as long as [...] that's something that we like that religion, and we will follow that. [...]. So [...] I will say to my friend that religion is everything for everyone and it is free. So, we cannot force someone to follow one religion, but we can help them to join to the religion which we are following. We can help just but we cannot force them." (AB\_A3\_0)*

The self-reflection on one's cultural and religious identity and approach to diversity allows for graduates to develop values of empathy, respect, and equality. Consequently, such values enable graduates to develop strong interreligious and intercultural sensitivity during the Diploma.

### 2.3 JWL setting the standard

Lastly, JWL is understood as embodying the interreligious and intercultural values discussed above by participants. First, JWL is seen as inclusive of everyone, without discrimination. For this participant in Kenya, JWL is serving "everyone" in the camp:

*"This course has shaped us. What Regis, under JWL, [did] into this camp changed everything and everyone. [...] I can say this without fear of contradiction, every community has certificate from Regis University. [...] I am grateful for the effort of JWL." (KK\_A1\_G)*

Another graduate in Kenya values how:

*"JWL integrates religion whereby JWL welcomes different religions in the system of learning. There's no way saying only Christian should access the programme or only Muslims should access or Hinduism [...] so it welcomes and there is no specific focus on that." (KK\_A19\_MZ)*

This inclusive approach to education is also highlighted by a participant in Malawi,



who explains that despite being the work of a faith-based organisation, JWL serves communities from diverse religious backgrounds (citing Lebanon, Afghanistan, Jordan, Kenya) showing how JWL considers anyone seeking to pursue higher education equally (MD\_A5\_R).

However, graduates' community members can be more sceptical about JWL as a faith-based organisation which provoked some challenges for graduates. According to this graduate in Afghanistan, studying at JWL meant facing community prejudice:

*"As you know we are living in a traditional community. [...] So, they think that if the Jesuits are training the students so they may wash the minds and they may change the religions. [...] So, some people do not have good feeling interacting with me. They think that if I have studied in a Jesuit organisation, so I maybe [will] change my religion. [...] So, the negative impact [of the Diploma is] that some people think negatively about me. Actually, this is a stereotype that they have about me and my studying because always studying in a foreign organisation or in a Jesuit organisation doesn't mean that you are becoming a Jesuit. [...] As we have studied in religions of the world in Diploma program, I'm searching about my religion and about the other religions. So, I'm aware and conscious about my religions. So, I will choose my own religion according to my research [...], according to what I have understood about the religions. So, it is not depend[ing] on the people's decisions." (AB\_A4\_H)*

Additionally, this non-discriminatory approach to education serves as a source of inspiration for graduates when seeking to serve the community. This alumnus in Afghanistan concludes his reflection on the Diploma by showing how being a graduate signifies to represent interreligious and intercultural standards:



**"I can conclude with one sentence that, 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 to the culture, gender, religion, ages and so on so forth that you can think."**

– AH\_A1\_N

From the perspective of this graduate in Kenya, the Diploma embodied these inclusive norms which led him to reclaim his full identity despite numerous undesired changes in his past:

*"First of all, one of the challenges was that my name is always different. When I came into JWL is the only family that accepted me who I am because to identify yourselves all is a difficult thing. When I came here in Kenya and in 2006, I had to change my name so that I can fit into the society [...] so that these things may not fall on me, but in these new early days, I have to change back to my name so changing it from academic to one in system of the refugee [...], it's something different. So, when I joined here [...] JWL, they told me that the identity is always the best thing I'm as JWL we always nature for how you identify yourself and for how you move yourself as an individual so as much as you're fighting to change up your details. We are also here we are concerned as a person and they actually made me enlighten, made me feel part of the society and the Diploma at large so I had to do my work. I used to walk from here to Arrupe, it is a milestone, but I have to walk because [...] it is the only community I had at the moment to do my Diploma. The community like the coaches, everybody, contributed to my success and to my development as an individual." (KK\_A14\_MZ)*



This example depicts the profound impact of the Diploma on this graduates' life by reflecting standards of inclusiveness, respect, equality and valuing the person for who they are as human beings. Therefore,

this powerful testimony illustrates how the Diploma not only embodies certain standards but also empowers others to embrace these values.



*Figure 17: Students in the community learning centre in Dzaleka, Malawi*





### 3 The consequences of developing interreligious and intercultural sensitivity

This section seeks to understand the consequences of developing such intercultural and religious sensitivity.

#### 3.1 Awareness of others and a global community

First, this increased interreligious and intercultural knowledge has contributed to the development of graduates' consciousness about others and the international community, regardless of whether or not this 'other' is part of the same religious or cultural group as the participant's one. This awareness of diversity can start with a local scope and extend to a global one.

##### 3.1.1 Diversity

First, in terms of local diversity, alumni realise the importance of religious and cultural diversity. For instance, this Afghan graduate expressed how learning with his Afghan peers led to raising awareness of the diverse cultures present in his country:

*"I was from Bamyan centre my classmates were from for example Daikundi province. We had different cultures. We had different backgrounds and different lives, lifestyles. So, we came together we were discussing, and we were sharing these differences, diversity, and similarities. I come to know about their cultures, and I have learned a lot. As I mentioned also previously, I could remove or resolve many*

*stereotypes that I had about them, about their culture and about their life."* (AB\_A4\_H)

For this other graduate in Afghanistan, this awareness of others is depicted as a source of richness and beauty:



*"Imagine that your religion and relation course, the classmates were coming from different backgrounds. I didn't understand some of the values based on the religions. I was searching and I was really amazed how beautiful the religions are and I was thinking how beautiful it is to have different religion in a place and to tolerate them all together."*

– AB\_A11\_H

This interreligious and intercultural mindset is put in practice when community leaders ensure a diverse representation and a fair participation in community events. For example, when organising forums or events, this community leader ensures that no one is excluded from this process:

*"When we are organising such forums, we used to embrace the participation of the participants all religions. [...] there is a balance where we don't exclude any religion. Any person from any religion is allowed [...] to pray that shows I am interreligious person."* (KK\_A2\_G)

This community leader in Malawi follows the same method of representative participation:



Figure 18: Graduation ceremony in Dzaleka, Malawi

*"I make sure that there is this representative of cultures. [...] maybe we have a Congolese. We have a Burundian. We have an Ethiopian, so that all of us [...] ye can work together as children of 1. I'm saying family, right? Yeah, I know it's strength for us when we are working." (MD\_A5\_L)*

Developing such interreligious and intercultural sensitivity forges an awareness of others that helps build an inclusive environment which ultimately supports an equitable and just participation.

### 3.1.2 Global community

This new consciousness also leads to developing a sense of global community. For example, this graduate in Kenya stated his intercultural sensitivity in the following way:



**"In Kakuma camp now [...] with people from hundred tribes and all of us, we have different cultures. We have different ideas, different way of socialising, of interacting and it's quite difficult for someone to come to really understand each of these parts of cultur[es] separately. But if you can get a global view of the culture in the camp, you get to respect it and you get to live well in that culture, then you really have the sense of your community."**

– KK\_A5\_MZ

Despite the potential difficulties of communicating in culturally diverse settings, intercultural communication is seen as means to develop one's sense of community and forge a global community.



This other alumnus in Kenya shares this willingness to embrace a global approach to community as he reflects upon his friends' group:

*"Before joining the Diploma, for sure I was too much depending [...] on the issues of cultures [...]. We only Congolese that I was having as friends and when I joined a Diploma, I came to understand like not the culture should not set a limit to me, now I have friend who are Darfuri, I have friends who are Somalis and also have friends who are Rwandese, Burundi from different ... almost 10 nationalities in Kakuma, Kenya. [...] Yes [before the Diploma]. I was not really that sure that I really liked Muslim or somebody from Darfur, somebody from Somali can make somebody from Congo who is a Christian to be his friend. But during the time that we learned all over, it has really changed our ways of seeing the religions [...]."* (KK\_A1\_MZ)

This transcending of religious and cultural boundaries in community building constitutes one of the Diploma's most significant impacts on graduates' lives.

### 3.1.3 Peacebuilding

With a new approach to understanding the 'other' and interacting with people from diverse backgrounds, graduates express how developing intercultural and religious sensitivity enables them to contribute to peacebuilding in their environment. This Iraqi graduate shared how the Diploma made her realise that "not all people are bad" and she can "accept" and "forgive them", despite all the suffering encountered due to religious conflict in Iraq (IE\_A2\_M). While this example illustrates a personal change that helped her move forward on a peacebuilding journey in her community, other participants elaborate how, by educating their community members, they invited their communities to join this peace-restoring path. For example, this Afghan

participant explained how she was able to challenge the minds of her community members by taking a leadership role in a peace workshop:

*"I was also like an agent of change for them because I was part of the team which at the beginning everyone did not accept that what is peace and we do not have peace in our country but somehow I persuade them in a way that we have peace that we are here and we will bring peace in our community in different ways and that they believe me and they accept me as a peace leader, as an agent of change in here, in my community, in classes, in my workplace at all."* (AB\_A10\_H)

In the same way, this graduate in Jordan articulated how gaining this intercultural knowledge can be used to educate people in their country of origin and reduce conflict that led them to flee in the first place. As he explains that because of the tribe diversity in the Darfur region, people are not able to have "peace easily" and share the "same idea". He adds that with 3,000 Darfuri living in Jordan who do not share the same idea, there is a need to mobilise and unify the Darfuri diaspora's voices toward a national goal through education:

*"So [...] if just we choose 100 persons from these people, and they all have the same idea and the same goal, [...] every person connects, changes in his own family. So, you know! like we need to separate this idea through people here. Everybody has special responsibility to do. [even] if he just calls their family over there [to tell them] "this thing is bad, don't do this. And this is good, do this." So, this will change people. Especially, the racism, how to fight against the racism. How to fight against prejudice. All these need a community working together to make it easy for them."* (JA\_A3\_A)

Hence, these examples reflect how developing an interreligious and



## Gender perspective

Interestingly, male and female participants equally refer to topics related to interreligious and intercultural sensitivity (each represents 50% of the quotes linked to interreligious and intercultural sensitivity's theme) demonstrating a balanced impact between the two genders in the application of this competence. However, when analysing the sub-categories, the striking difference regards male participants that emphasise themes related inclusion (82%) and freedom (74%). Quotes linked to inclusion describe a behaviour or a willingness to be inclusive of others. Quotes related to freedom refer to graduates' feeling or demonstrated behaviours of feeling free from social categorisation, transcending interreligious and intercultural differences to integrate a perspective focusing on human beings as a whole. This distinct approach to understanding interreligious and intercultural sensitivity reflects an application of these skills for males that can be interpreted as a method to solve conflict and develop tactics that support a peacebuilding process.

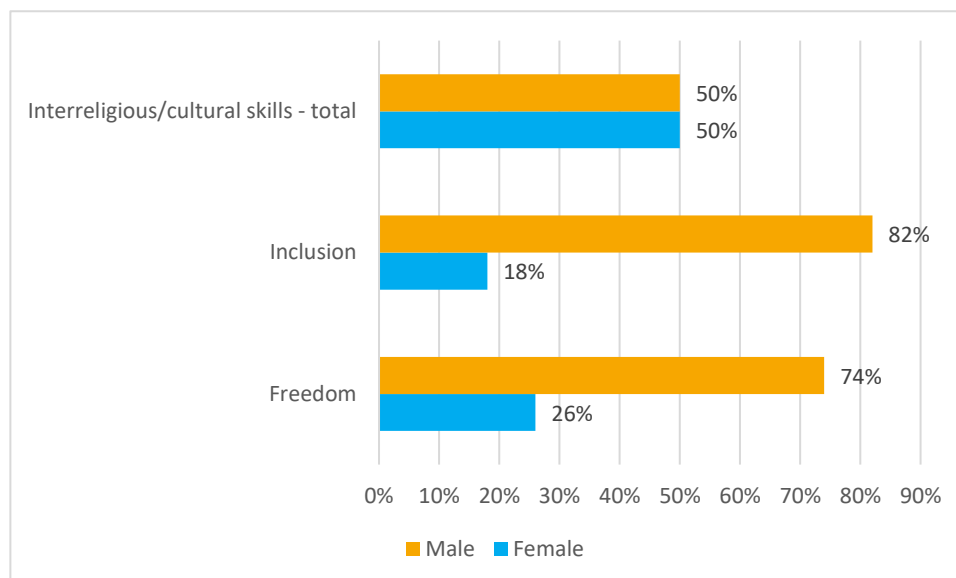


Figure 19: Analysis of some of the quotes related to interreligious and intercultural sensitivity by gender

intercultural understanding can lead to embarking on a peace-building journey for graduates and their respective communities.

### 3.2 A form of empowerment and leadership

While the impact of obtaining this interreligious and intercultural sensitivity is crucial to shaping the graduates' perspective and their communities' view on society in a peaceful approach, it also intrinsically affects alumni's personal

growth in terms of empowerment and leadership. This participant who has the role of community elder disclosed how the Diploma equipped him with tools when serious intercultural conflict sparked, demonstrating the importance of his leadership in such situation:

*"I did solve a case between Nubian and Bhar-el gazel, this fight was a deadly fight. There was a life lost, I was at Arrupe learning centre when this fight occurred, I missed 97 calls from different people. I called a lady from Nubian called [...], she told me people are fighting and the gravity of the*



fight is extremely heavy, please stop what you are doing and come rescue lives. I had to leave my studies to come and help. I was the community leader and same time block leader, so my role was very essential and influential. I arrived thirty minutes earlier before the police came. When police came, they fired gunshot into the air to separate them. Immediately after they were separated, I called community leaders to meet with Bhar-El- gazel leaders before meeting with Nubian. We went there and talked to them. After meeting up with them we then came to Nubian leaders we talked to them. After the leaders I called both the youth leaders of the two communities. It took us 5 hours to come into [an] understand[ing]. This Diploma has something unique [...]. I handled the case with all the skills I acquired [...] in Interpersonal Communication and cultural sensitivity. We called the parties to come together for the talk and it was the toughest conflict I ever solved". (KK\_A9\_G)

This ability to solve intercultural conflicts is not only seen as a source of leadership but also empowerment. According to this graduate in Kenya, his empowerment through the Diploma is encapsulated in the example whereby he acted as a role model when his neighbour stepped over the limit of his property. As he did not cause conflict and used peaceful tactics to solve the challenge, he sees this as an example of his empowerment "in this community that [he] brought peace stability" (KK\_A5\_JR).

While this empowerment can be derived from solving challenges, it has also been identified as emerging from obtaining knowledge. For example, this alumnus explains how gaining such knowledge was a source of development and power for him:



"I'm empowered by this programme; I'm saying empowered with knowledge. I have knowledge about different fields about this is sociology to evaluate my society, what's happening in my society, when it comes to religions, I can see covered the problem where we don't have this transcendence of religions where we are divided between different religions in each religion. We have different sects so, but I think with that knowledge, I am empowered right now. I don't look at things very innocently right way. I look at them very critically."

– AH\_A7\_N

The same empowerment is expressed regarding learning about different religions and cultures:

"It has empowered me. It has given me a sense of appreciating people's culture as the best thing ever as the I also appreciate mine. [...] From that [world religion] course work, I found out that there are more than hundred religions that's means people have their own ways of worshipping. If you look at the Asian part of the world, all people there have their own religions likewise to African they have own religions and I find out that the best thing to make overall judgment about the religion is just have faith." (KK\_A2\_G)

In turn, developing such knowledge can be meaningful not only to build interreligious and intercultural sensitivity, but also to contribute to the empowerment of the graduates. While learning about diversity can be a source of personal growth, this host community graduate in Malawi explains how for her, learning in a diverse



setting was a mind-opening and empowering experience:



“It has empowered me seriously, well in Diploma the most beautiful thing is that whenever we were learning, there a lot of people you encounter sometimes that you didn’t even have a clue of, for example I am a Malawian and I did my school with refugees, I came to understand who refugees are. Before I was thinking that may be refugees are very difficult people to go with, but now it’s like I have opened another book, it’s like I have read another story that I had no clue of so I can say that it has impacted me so greatly today I can conduct business with a refugee, today I can socialise with a refugee so it has impacted me so greatly.”

– MD\_A10\_T

attending lectures; studying with refugee peers is seen as an enriching aspect of the Diploma, broadening her minds and perspective while setting her up for greater success. Ultimately, gaining interreligious and intercultural knowledge and experiencing it in the classroom or in the graduates’ respective communities is articulated as a key impact of the Diploma for alumni not to only develop an awareness about diversity and build peaceful interreligious and intercultural communities, but also develop their leadership and become empowered.

Therefore, according to this Malawian graduate, studying in the Diploma was more than about reading books and



## 4 Conclusion

Graduates perceive the development of interreligious and intercultural sensitivity as a fundamental impact of the Diploma on their lives and their communities. Different levels of interreligious and intercultural interaction are visible among graduates. JWL's teachings appear to instill standards of equality, respect, and tolerance among all its students. This allows for the dislodging of some of graduates' prejudice around cultures and religions. As JWL embodies these interreligious and intercultural principles, graduates apply what they learnt through

their classes and interactions with their peers in their communities and daily lives. Many of them reflected on how their perspective regarding religious and cultural diversity changed, often resulting in greater open-mindedness, building a more peaceful community, and even developing leadership and empowerment. Consequently, the interreligious and intercultural knowledge gained during the Diploma produced a considerable impact on graduates' lives.

### Key points

- Interreligious and intercultural skills are perceived as one of the biggest contributions of the Diploma to the lives of graduates and their communities.
- Graduates understand interreligious and intercultural sensitivity differently along the ethnorelativism continuum, while preserving the core values of respect, tolerance, and equality.
- Interreligious and intercultural sensitivity is seen as being developed through the knowledge gained through classroom and peer interactions throughout the programme.
- Additionally, alumni often analyse their growth on these interreligious and intercultural issues through an introspective process that results in building empathy and strengthening their interreligious and intercultural sensitivity.
- JWL's embodiment of interreligious and intercultural values inspires graduates to implement this new sensitivity outside JWL's community.
- Developing this interreligious and intercultural knowledge builds graduates' awareness of the world's diversity and helps remove discriminatory behaviours. This eventually allows for the development of a sense of community from a local scope to a global one and fosters a peace-building process and harmonious society ideals.



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## Chapter 5: Sense of community

Building communities through empathy and servant leadership



**“Diploma is a bridge to me [...]. The heart of the community, I got that heart of the community after I studied the Diploma. I never knew what community was.”**

**– KK\_A3\_R**





# 1 Building an awareness of the community at different levels

Graduates expressed how their learning journey through the Diploma helped them build a new awareness of the community. We present how this awareness is characterised by an inclusive approach to community and developed in various spheres of life during the Diploma.

## 1.1 Rise of a community consciousness

Graduates share how their experience in the Diploma led them to develop a sense of awareness about their community. According to this graduate in Jordan, enrolling in the Diploma allowed him to develop a new type of engagement in his community through the application of skills learnt:

*"In Diploma, I learned critical thinking. I build leadership skills. And engagement with community. [...] Before Diploma, I was not like that, taking initiative. But now, [...] I am able to do things that I never experience before like volunteering, engaging in the community. [...] Now I am able to engage more. Now, I am helping others. And also, give advices for many of the families here." (JA\_A5\_A)*

This new drive to help the community is also reflected in the words of the Afghan participant who explains how he is now "conscious of [his] people's problems" and thinks about how to solve them (AB\_A4\_H). For this other graduate in Afghanistan, studying in the Diploma allowed him to "get the feeling of the community" as well as develop a sense of "responsibility" toward the betterment of

his community (AB\_A6\_H). He explains that he used to think negatively about his community:

*"I had the conclusion [that] my community is a backward community and we got no opportunities, and we have less schools in our community. Then I decided to be one of the persons, [who is] helping the children of that community, [...] I believe that through studying and through educating we are able to [...] shape a good community for us." (AB\_A6\_H)*

Determined to transfer what he learnt to his community, he grew a new sense of responsibility and a new perspective, which ultimately allowed him to strengthen his community engagement. This shift in perspective toward one's community can be particularly characterised through a switch from an individual to a collective consciousness. For example, this graduate in Kenya explains how he changes his perspective while completing the Diploma:

*"Diploma helped me to increase my sense of community, whereby before I used to think about myself, but now, I think about the people around me, the community." (KK\_A10\_R)*

Now, he is working for NGOs and supporting his community in any way he can, for instance by building trenches to prevent flooding (KK\_A10\_R). This outward expansion of one's consciousness to include one's community can even result in increasing the efficiency of involvement in the community. For example, this graduate formulates that the Diploma made her involvement in the community more "organised and helpful," having "helped [her] to improve [her sense of community] and to structure it." She explains that:



*"I have now the ability to train people on case management, on social work, to write plays [...] to criticise something or a bad thing in our community. So, it was like, I'm sending a message through the play" (ID\_A1\_HD).*

This new capacity to bring change to her country is particularly reflected in the strong representation of Iraq in the quotes related to the topics of 'democracy' (42%) and 'society development' (48%), representing almost half the quotes linked to these subjects.

Therefore, the Diploma programme is not only helpful for graduates to develop a new awareness of the community, but also in making this new understanding more responsive to the community's needs.

## 1.2 An inclusive understanding of a sense of community

As graduates build a new awareness of the community, they also enlarge their definition of community, which becomes more inclusive. According to this alumnus in Kenya:



**"A sense of community is the feeling that, that person is the same as us, no matter [...] where they are from. In community, [there is] no tribes, no nationalities, community beats those terms that we give ourselves [...] we don't put them, we don't consider those words. Because the community is much wider than this."**

– KK\_A3\_R



Figure 20: Students in Erbil, Iraq



As the Diploma “encourages [graduates] to embrace togetherness, coming together and working as one people” (KK\_A2\_G), this has led some alumni to change their approach to serving the community. For example, this participant in Afghanistan explained how she opened her community engagement to a more diverse group of people:

*“After graduating from the Diploma, I show more respect to different groups of people in my own community [...]. Maybe before [...] my relationship was limited in maybe a small group which is very similar to me, which they are from my own tribe [...], but after [what] I learned from online Diploma that my knowledge has increased, I could make my relationships just wider, and I can go with any kind of people to be in the community.”* (AH\_A6\_N)

Similar behaviour is depicted in the interview of this participant in Jordan whereby both host and country of origin communities are now included in the approach to serving communities:

*“It makes me more aware about my society. Whether in Somalia and Jordan society as well. I can easily engage with the society that I live in.”* (JA\_A8\_A)

### 1.3 Different spheres of sense of community

From this new inclusive approach to communities, different spaces of community involvement emerge from graduates’ depiction of their sense of community. This graduate from Kenya refers to this inclusive sense of community by identifying different extents of community involvement:

*“Community is all about everything that’s around. It’s not only the people, even the environment. And community is not only about the people with whom I share the same origin, the same values,*

*[...] it includes everyone. [...] As long as there is people around me, it’s already my community because I have responsibilities and I have a role to play toward those people and that environment and that [is] for me the community.”* (KK\_A8\_G)

From this perspective, developing a sense of community requires an understanding of one’s environment. These environments can be categorised in terms of the academic, professional, social, religious, cultural, and family aspects of graduates’ lives. In terms of academic spaces, JWL has been presented in interviews as a community space whereby graduates can build and apply their new sense of community. For example, this graduate in Kenya mentions that he “cultivated a sense of community within the school community” through discussing and working with classmates (KK\_A13\_MZ). In Jordan, this feeling of community is denoted in terms of the exchanges with peers from diverse backgrounds:

*“Back in Jordan, when we were there, we had students from different cultures. [...] also there were Sudanese, there were Iraqis, Palestinians, all these. And we all had [...] this sense of community. We care about each other, we laughed [with] each other, we shared food together, we built this sense of community. We had the feeling whereby, we would call each other if we are not coming [at] the centre [...], so we had strong community there, to be honest.”* (JA\_A4\_A)

Besides JWL as a site to develop and apply this sense of community, graduates refer to the role of social, professional, and religious environments as spaces for community engagement. According to this participant in Kenya, his community involvement is applied across these different spaces:



*"I am helping street children in my community, I told you that I have an English school, helping women and elders, I told you that I have a business, I have a business selling second-hand clothes because clothes are very far from Kakuma, I try to bring them near the community, in that way I say that I am very active. [...] I tell you that even in the community I am a church leader in the community. I am even helping people spiritually." (KK\_A7\_R)*

While this example represents an application of one's sense of community in various spheres of life; other graduates illustrate their community consciousness in more specific dimensions. For instance, the sense of engagement in the cultural space of the community is reflected in the words of this graduate in Malawi, who speaks about the importance of setting the examples and leaving one's positive legacy on the lives of others:



**"I have transformed people because I worked with children with difficulties [...] children with bad behaviour. Currently, they are now good children. I assisted children to [...] have a certain arts to perspective. [...] I started teaching them on how to write a poem. Well, now it's a very big organization of poetry. It's a club of poetry which helps children to [...] to know how to write. So everyone without [any] discrimination in the community is benefiting, has benefited, will benefit [...] on myself because I remember the sentence when we did [...] the intake essays in the Diploma, [it] was: "[Who] would you be you after death? [...] which means what impact will I leave to the community."**

– MD\_A1\_HD

In addition to this active and diverse support to the community, some alumni also articulate their community involvement in their family lives. For example, this participant in Jordan translates the meaning of community engagement in terms of family responsibilities:

*"So, sense of community starts also within the household [...]. So it is about the smallest actions his or her parents are taking the appreciation they are showing to the other people [...], the sense of teamwork they are showing in their actions and through also engaging in different ceremonies of celebration. So, the children see this from their parents and this will help them build sense of community." (JA\_A7\_A)*

Hence, graduates have applied their sense of community in multiple contexts, reflecting an inclusive approach to understanding communities. Consequently, graduates' new awareness of community developed through the Diploma not only helps to widen the meaning of community, but also more efficiently supports communities across diverse environments.



## Gender perspective

Graduates' sense of community engagement is articulated differently based on gender. As 55% of the quotes related to community are attributed to males and 45% of the quotes linked to community are mentioned by female participants, it seems that there is only a slight difference in the importance given to community between the two genders. Particularly, male alumni lead in terms of excerpts related to society development (representing 66% of the quotes on the idea of society development), and serving others (encapsulating 58% of the quotes on the notion of serving others). These codes suggest strong and vast forms of community engagements from male graduates that often require important community mobilization. This is often reflected in the diverse community engagement in many graduates involved in multiple organizations at a time, holding different leadership positions. For female participants, a sense of community seems to be reflected in a different manner, stressing topics such as resilience (58%) and respect (56%). This suggests that while male participants engage in community work with organisations, female graduates are more often involved in the community as individuals inspiring others to have their resilience and engage in the community. Therefore, male and female graduates apply different styles of community engagement.

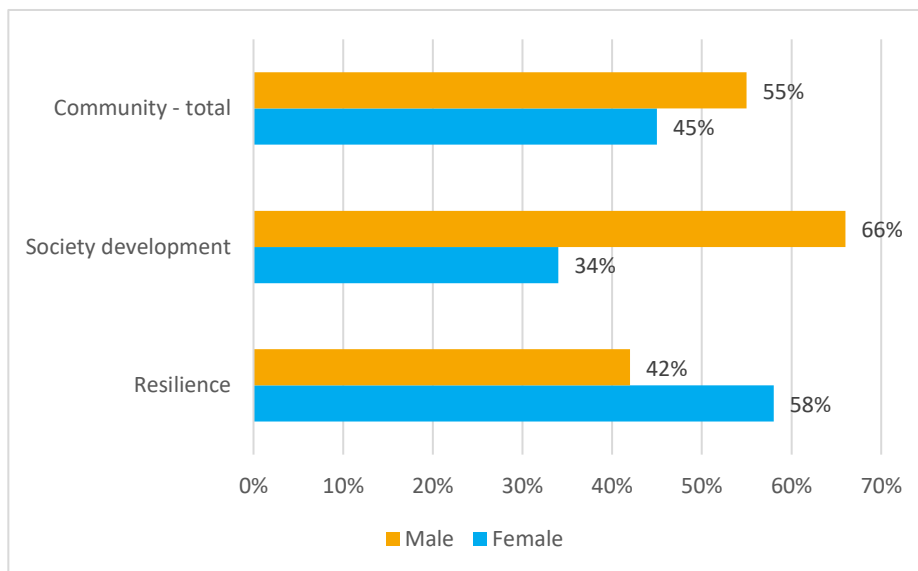


Figure 21: Analysis of some of the quotes related to community by gender



## 2 Mechanisms of sense of community: empathy and servant leadership

Through the analysis of the types of engagement in the community, two major mechanisms were identified as the drivers of graduates' sense of community: empathy and servant leadership. Similarly to Martin (2015) and Scott and Graham (2015)'s findings, building an empathetic behaviour has been recognised as supporting the growth of one's sense of community. Additionally, servant leadership has been presented as one of the main drivers to develop this capacity (Meylahn and Musiyambiri 2017, Shekari and Nikooparvar 2012, van Dierendonck and Patterson 2015).

### 2.1 Empathy for the marginalised people

After building an awareness of the community to serve diverse contexts, graduates articulate their sense of community in terms of providing compassion, support, and care for marginalised/vulnerable peoples as a tool to build their sense of community. This compassionate involvement in the community is of service in multiple ways. Whether through providing resources, support or care for orphans, poor students, ill persons, vulnerable women, or persons with disabilities, graduates have engaged in many activities and organisations to support the wellbeing of their communities.

For instance, this alumna shares how the Diploma initiated her "commitment" to "work for the wellbeing of the community" and her "dedication" to "save lives no

matter what" (MD\_A6\_R). She illustrated this willingness to protect her community by giving the following examples: She sponsored orphaned children who failed their classes to go back to school, hoping to prevent them from engaging in prostitution; every morning she cleaned the bowl used to fetch water to prevent diseases from spreading in her community; she also volunteers as an Operations Assistant for the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), giving courage to students by providing them with supporting additional learning material to pursue their education (MD\_A6\_R). This commitment to the wellbeing of society is also encapsulated in individual support. This graduate in Kenya demonstrates that engagement in the community does not have to be through an organisation but can come from an individual's initiative to provide care to peers:

*"For example, there was someone who was sick for more than 5 days without someone to come and look at him. I realised it because it passes days without seeing him in the tape come to fetch water and then went to his home. Then found him lying in the house. He was seriously sick, and I asked you I asked him what's going on and he told me that he has no one to help him. He has no one to take [him] to hospital. So, I took that [initiative] I hope other people [will] help [...] to take him to hospital and [...] now he's survived. So that is how I am active in the community and helping the community and make sure that the community is benefiting from me." (KK\_A8\_MZ)*

This compassionate behaviour demonstrates a selfless engagement in the community. For this alumna, this type of engagement in the community reflects being *men and women for others*:

*"When we graduated, 'We are made men and women for others,' you see, when we graduated, we called ourselves to be off from studies, but*



toward the community. [...] We knew that the skills that we had learned was nothing unless we interpreted that into the service for others. [...] I can give you [as examples] many courses in Diploma. You will see that we think, we focus on people. Ethics is all about people, you see, how to live with others. Religion, it helps you understand and live with others and in Diploma, I develop these skills too. To see myself as a member of the community [...], the community will never develop if I did not do anything about it. [...] my community will remain the same. I had to do something about [everything] that I wanted to change.” (MD\_A10\_F)

As he identifies the main classes that helped him to drive this sense of community, he gives the example of when he volunteered every day at the hospital, “going around the camp looking for sick people, especially elderly people, [...] that they can be given medication but forget, but they are seriously sick” and serving as a community agent to help inject doses “for people with TB (tuberculosis) and with diabetes” (MD\_A10\_F). His commitment to the community is particularly highlighted in his concluding sentence, which shows great depth of compassion and care:

*“If one person dies in the community, that pains me, you see which means the problem of one person is mine.” (MD\_A10\_F)*

While this graduate describes his support to ill people as an application of the knowledge he gained during the Diploma, his framing of this shared pain articulates the mechanism of empathy that is to attempt to feel what the other is feeling. This graduate in Jordan elaborates this idea through reflecting on her teaching experience with JRS:



**“I'm thinking about others so I'm thinking about 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 other people. I put myself in their shoes and I feel their pain.”**

– JA\_A7\_A

For this businesswoman graduate in Malawi, this empathy is reflected in her actions as she put herself in her neighbour’s shoes:

*“So as we are in the community we build up one another. For example, the common example, you can see that I have provision in my house like I'm doing a business in. My neighbour is not doing any business. What can I do? I am eating every day. They sleep with hunger. So to show that I contribute to my community. I have to share my food stuff, [...] then maybe tomorrow I see that neighbour. ‘You know you can also do a small business to help you gain [money].’” (MD\_A5\_R)*

By providing guidance to her neighbour in addition to sharing her food, she demonstrates empathy, caring for the wellbeing of her community peers (MD\_A5\_R).

During interviews, several graduates reflected on how to best interact with and respond to the needs of persons with disabilities. For instance, this participant in Malawi explained how she employed the knowledge of the Diploma to treat people compassionately and respectfully:

*“Diploma taught me [...] not to be looking down on people no matter how they are, so before I used*



*to have the perspective like when you are seeing people with disability they [are] not able to do things, [...] I was wrong, but through Diploma I have identified that no matter which condition the person might seem to be we are all equal, so there must be equality in everything we do, the voice of those disabled must be heard, they must tell their story, [...] do a great change in the community.” (MD\_A5\_T)*

This improved understanding of persons with disabilities’ needs depicts the willingness of graduates to employ the teachings of the Diploma in their daily lives in order to become agents of change in their communities. This support to marginalised people is also highlighted in the work of graduates seeking to support

orphans’ needs to attend school and meet vulnerable peoples’ needs. For example, this graduate used some of the money he earned for the greater good of the community by providing necessary goods like soap and sugar to people in prison, in hospitals, and to orphans (MD\_A9\_T). Similarly, this graduate – along with other JWL alumni – mobilised resources for orphans to attend school. (KK\_A1\_G). Hence, graduates have expressed (through diverse examples) a deep sense of compassion towards the community that is often translated into providing support and care to marginalised people.



Figure 23: International Day of Peace in Kakuma, Kenya





## 2.2 Servant leadership

Closely related to building an empathetic approach to the sense of the community is the presence of servant leadership in the form of involvement in their communities. Servant leadership is particularly reflected in the willingness of graduates to apply their knowledge and skills in the community, seeking to think for the community and become “men and women for others” (MD\_A1\_HD, MD\_A4\_L). Indeed, understanding leadership as not about oneself but rather for “you and others” (JA\_A5\_A), graduates unveil their sense of community in the examples of being a selfless servant. For instance, this graduate in Kenya working as a volunteer interpreter for UNHCR is not searching for other jobs because she does not “want to give up the [work she] is doing for the community” (MD\_A2\_F). This example of servant leadership is further elaborated by the reflection of this community worker seeking to combat domestic and gender-based violence through the different types of leadership he learnt from the Diploma (MD\_A4\_L). For him, learning about the different styles of leadership helped him to redefine his understanding of leadership, adopting a style seeking to serve others:

*“We get education for others, so educating men and women for others. That means after getting the education now you are at the service of others that means you are a leader. But a servant leader. [...] But it really helps me [...] to understand myself and also to make myself at the service of others. [...] So whenever you are waking up in the morning, so you have to think not only for you but for others, this is like the road. So it helps us to be involved actively in our community and being involved actively is [...] identifying problems and trying to resolve the problems.” (MD\_A4\_L)*

This approach using servant leadership as a roadmap to community engagement allows this graduate to emerge as the

‘voice of the voiceless’ whereby the community members are the beneficiaries of his involvement. This community benefitting approach of the Diploma is further reflected in the willingness of graduates to motivate others. A graduate in Kenya expresses this thought beyond the idea of Diploma’s impact as for him it becomes integral to the meaning of being a graduate:



**“I should not say I am a graduate [if] I should not involve in community. By participating in the community activities, you are motivating others to see that everyone can do that work despite your education status.”**

– KK\_A6\_G

From this flourishing energy seeking to give back to the community emerges a servant leadership style. This other graduate in Malawi voices this passion for the community in the following words:

*“My life could have not been like this the way I am now and this passion of working for others couldn’t have been in me.” (MD\_A9\_T)*

As community engagement becomes a passion (KK\_A13\_R, MD\_A9\_T), graduates reflect this by sharing servant leadership examples that seek to provide lasting solutions. For instance, this alumnus in Kenya explained that before he joined the Diploma, he used to buy bread and juice for street children. But after studying the Diploma, he realised that this was not enough and decided to mobilise the community to support these children to go to school, in order for them to eventually “earn money so that they can buy



themselves those bread and juice and even contributing to the community” (KK\_A7\_R). This servant leadership example shows the willingness of the graduates to apply their critical thinking to contribute to the community, with lasting effects. The same form of leadership is demonstrated by this graduate who decided to collaborate with his community to cover transportation fees for women students commuting to school (KK\_A1\_G). While this started on an individual basis seeking to safeguard the safety of a commuting female student, this one-on-one support turned into a community collaboration as the need grew, and eventually led to the provision of more sustainable solutions that would enhance the safety of the community (KK\_A1\_G).

The example of this alumna in Afghanistan demonstrates that the range of the application of servant leadership does not have to be quantitatively extensive to be impactful. As she felt responsible for the wellbeing of a poor woman who could not pay her rent, she decided to ask her community to help after the evening prayer. Ultimately, she successfully mobilised her community to provide a solution for this vulnerable woman (AH\_A10\_N). Therefore, whether through developing a group-based or individual-based approach to community issues,

these examples of lasting impact on communities reveal servant leadership as a driver for engagement in the community. This switch from ‘self-centredness’ to ‘thinking for others’ consequently gives agency to graduates to “change problems that are affecting not only [them] and [their] communities, but even the people living [in] the surrounding communities” (MD\_A4\_L).

As a result of this newly gained consciousness of the community, some graduates express how it also helped them boost their confidence, find resilience, and ultimately give back to the community. This participant in Afghanistan shares that:

*“My life would be different if I was not participating in this program. [...] Just I was maybe sitting at home; I was getting married then but right now I’m a different person. I’m thinking that I can be a leader in the community and a part of solutions in the community that I’m living, not a part of pollution.” (AB\_A8\_H)*

Therefore, the community can also be a source of inspiration to embrace leadership and potentially overcome one’s marginalisation. This commitment to the betterment of the community can also be self-beneficial as it can allow graduates to find resilience and transmit it to their communities.

### 3 Conclusion

In their interviews, graduates have highlighted the importance of the Diploma in helping them to grow their sense of community. This new consciousness of the community is employed to embrace servant leadership and compassion

towards one's community in order to improve its wellbeing. Ultimately, this sense of commitment to the community presents graduates as agents of change, contributing at various levels to the wellbeing of their communities

#### Key points

- The development of a sense of community and strong community engagement is considered as a crucial impact of the Diploma.
- Throughout the Diploma, graduates expand their understanding of community to adopt a more inclusive and diverse approach to their sense of community.
- Graduates express a new awareness of the community developed in various spheres of life.
- Graduates' sense of community is driven by an empathetic and servant leadership approach seeking to address challenges in the community, using the interconnected element of community to widen the benefits of this involvement.



JESUIT WORLDWIDE LEARNING  
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## Chapter 6: Community empowerment

Addressing collectively challenges in the community



“Let me say empowerment is when you enable someone to do something for himself. [...] teach someone how to fish and give him the hook to go and fish for himself; that is empowerment..” – KK\_A13\_G



# 1 Applying graduates' sense of community: working towards community empowerment

Graduates' experiences reveal their willingness to work towards the empowerment of the community. Supported by the literature findings, the role of advocacy, the importance of the interdependence of the community, personal wellbeing and the willingness to address community problems are the main factors that allow graduates to achieve this collective emancipation (Ersing, 2003; Persily and Hildebrandt, 2003; Gates, 2017 Coulombe and Krzesni, 2019). Ersing (2003) confirms the use of advocacy as one of the principles to promote community wellbeing and eventually empowerment. Regarding the interdependence of personal and community empowerment, Persily and Hildebrandt (2003) developed a community empowerment framework that demonstrates the intertwining of individual and community forces to improve community wellbeing. As for the eagerness to solve community challenges, Kasmel and Andersen (2011) used community problem-solving skills as one factor to measure community empowerment, demonstrating the importance of interconnecting these two elements.

## 1.1 Advocacy: a tool for improving community's wellbeing

Framing their new comprehension of community in terms of responsibilities toward the betterment of their society, graduates refer to their engagement in communities through an advocacy approach. This characteristic is particularly salient for Kenya and Jordan as they each represent 29% of the quotes related to the theme of 'advocacy'.

One Diploma class through which graduates saw their advocacy skills improve is Community Advocacy. This course is understood as having an essential impact in shaping this sense of community. For this graduate in Kenya, this course enabled him "to stand" and get the "heart of the community" (KK\_A3\_R). Moreover, this course was understood as helping graduates to "work hand in hand in the community" (KK\_A3\_JR) and "peacefully" advocate for the needs of the community (KK\_A9\_G). Beyond this specific class, the knowledge and skills gained during the Diploma are seen as enabling graduates "to contribute efficiently to the social changes of the community" unlike prior to joining the Diploma, when contribution to society would have been minimal (KK\_A13\_MZ).

This new knowledge embraced by graduates is applied to support the protection of human rights and advocate for the rights of communities. For example, this graduate in Kenya mentions that:

*"One of the things that I learned in Diploma programme and it's currently helping me so*



*much in my community, it's about [...] human rights.” (KK\_A7\_MZ)*

This idea of using one’s sense of community to support the betterment of a community is further elaborated by the examples of this graduate in Jordan:



*“I would mostly say when I was back in Jordan, going to UNHCR or maybe representing Somali and community in Jordan, my Diploma education was always the front line of helping me to advocate for my community. That was a good example! But also, for myself too, to advocate for myself and try to get out refugee life, find the resettlement, find a new life.”*

– JA\_A4\_A

Therefore, engaging in advocacy can not only be beneficial to support one’s community, but also advance on the road to self-empowerment. This personal growth is reflected in the words of this alumnus from Malawi who presents the Diploma as having “unlocked the potential that was hidden in [him]” (MD\_A3\_R). He explains that this potential:

*“[...] was acting like an effective social change agent [as] social caseworker. Everywhere we work, we advocate, we accompany and we serve people we live together with by respecting their dignity.” (MD\_A3\_R)*

While this new community approach can be empowering for graduates and their communities, it can also signify that graduates realise the limits of their agency as people at the margins:

*“Because now within [...] Jordan, I learned about how to be an advocate within my community, within the people I do serve for them. but now also I see the limited of resources, the lack of opportunities, are not giving me chance to do what I want to do.” (JA\_A2\_A)*

This reality-check on the extent of refugee graduates’ involvement in the community reveals how the strict regime governing refugee’s lives in Jordan sets the limits of community engagement. This is particularly reflected in the 29% of the quotes related to the theme “advocacy” mentioned by participants in Jordan, as participants in this country lead in the representation of the quotes related to the ‘voice of the voiceless’ (43%) and ‘resilience’ (37%).

Consequently, advocacy appears as a major tool for graduates to engage in serving the community, whether it is used to claim rights, support communities, or challenge restrictions on refugees’ lives.

## 1.2 Interdependence between graduates and the community

Drawing from this selfless approach to leadership, graduates raise the idea of interdependence between themselves and the community to illustrate their willingness to give back what they were given and work toward the betterment of the community. This alumnus encapsulates this notion of interdependence by highlighting the links of the community and individuals:



**“The importance of the community is that [...] remember nobody is an island. We are interdependent human beings, and for that reason [...] when people live together, they can achieve more in the community; when you live individually, you will achieve less so that is what I want to say that creating a sense of community is very, very crucial in human life because that is one way of achieving the goal or objectives of the community”**

– KK\_A13\_MZ

As a driver to achieve goals, community engagement can help to improve the conditions not only in the community, but also in one’s personal life. This graduate in Malawi demonstrates this point through his reflection on his community involvement after his JWL journey:

*“I was like, kind of isolated. [...] So when now [I] get the education, it was like a mental shift. I moved myself from that isolation and now learn to be to make myself important in the community.” (MD\_A4\_L)*

As he has become engaged by advocating for the rights of single mothers and widows in Dzaleka, he explained that “being a man of others” is more than simple words:

*“There is a kind of bond between community members and the love that overflows from us is what helps us to keep this place more safe. [...] I’m not sure if Dzaleka would be [a] welcom[ing] place like today. So [...] the programme helps not only me but the whole community to be a better place to live.” (MD\_A4\_L)*

This mutually beneficial impact of one’s engagement in a community demonstrates the consequence of graduates’ new consciousness of the interconnectedness of the community and individual. This new understanding is used to promote opportunities and transfer knowledge to the upcoming generation. This graduate in Kenya illustrates how, in order to give back for what she has benefited from, she became involved in promoting education for orphans in the community:

*“The motto is like you and you are given a chance to do something. So give a chance to the upcoming generation that if I was given this opportunity I should not sit on it, but at least create more opportunities for the rest that are coming so that they can reach your level.” (KK\_A16\_MZ)*

This willingness to give back to the community through favouring opportunity and education for others is also shared by graduates who became teachers. For example, this graduate in Afghanistan explains her motivation to become an English teacher:

*“As a girl, I should be able to serve my people. So, in Diploma [...] it helped me to improve my English. Right now, I’m giving back that one to my community. I’m a teacher and I’m serving my people.” (AB\_A9\_H)*

As the principle of “giving back” appears as integral to the Diploma (MD\_A14\_T), graduates manifest their willingness to transfer knowledge to the community and apply it throughout one’s life to seek to improve the living conditions of oneself and the community. This perspective is seen as framing an approach to life:

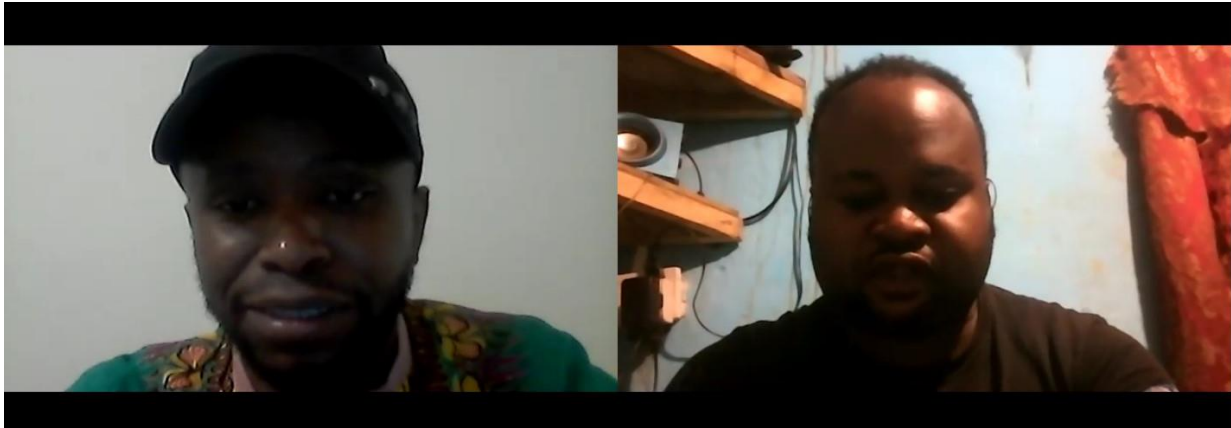


Figure 24: Online interview connecting a graduate in Canada and JWL research assistant in Dzaleka, Malawi



“I think the Diploma will help me to get maybe what I need, in making my lifestyle change. I can’t change my life without changing my community or environment so since I got the skills on how I can live [a] better life or how I can live with people, [...] I can say that it will help me to get along with my life in my future.”

– MD\_A13\_T

Hence, the understanding of this interconnectedness between the wellbeing of oneself and one’s community emerges as life-changing for graduates, realising the mutual benefits implicated when seeking to give back. While their engagement might not be benefitting them directly, the interdependent aspect of community and their willingness to give back build a virtuous circle whereby their implications in the community lead to an overall improvement of the community’s living conditions, including their own. Consequently, graduates utilise this mutually beneficial approach to the community as a driver to engage in the community

### 1.3 Addressing problems in the community

Lastly, with this strong sense of community, graduates illustrate how they use their knowledge and skills gained during the Diploma to address challenges in the community. Many of them shared examples of community engagement whose impact was to keep people away from drugs, prevent early pregnancy, disease, address issues related to access to health care, and reduce conflict and violence. For instance, this community graduate explained how he used his dancing and music skills to support the wellbeing of his community:

*“So in my community, [...] the population in the camp, 70% is made of young people, and when you look at the number of young people, most of them are going astray, and most of them are not even going to school, [...] so I thought it twice to create a dancing group and also create different youth art where I would be talking about morals, I facilitate young people on different topics about social reproductive health, rights, [...]. Another thing that I do is that I train young people how to dance, and I also find opportunities for them to [...] join bigger dancing groups, in order for them not to be idle, not to involve in drug substance abuse, unwanted pregnancies and many other related things.” (MD\_A15\_T)*





This involvement reflects this graduates' motivation to tackle core challenges in his community by employing his talents as methods to build a greater sense of community and improve its wellbeing. Whereas this example targeted diverse health issues, among others, this graduate in Kenya demonstrated his sense of

community through his support to his community during the COVID-19 pandemic (KK\_A1\_MZ) by launching a campaign that reached more than 250 people.

## Gender perspective

Graduates' sense of community engagement is articulated differently based on gender. As 55% of the quotes related to community are attributed to males, it seems that community involvement may be more salient for male graduates. Particularly, male alumni are leading for excerpts regarding the topics of advocacy (64%) and giving back relating to the idea of interdependence between the community and its members (73%). This important presence of male quotes regarding advocacy and community interdependence suggests a stronger willingness for males to work toward the empowerment of their communities through their community engagement approach which often implies an advocacy approach to community mobilisation. The willingness to work to contribute to community empowerment seems to be reflected in a different manner for females, stressing topics such as resilience (as female participants represent 58% of the quote mentioning the idea of 'resilience') and respect (as female participants represent 56% of the quote mentioning the idea of 'respect'). Therefore, male participants seem to be more vocal on advocating issues in the community stressing the importance of giving back to the community, whereas female participants emphasise a community empowerment approach based on resilience and respect.

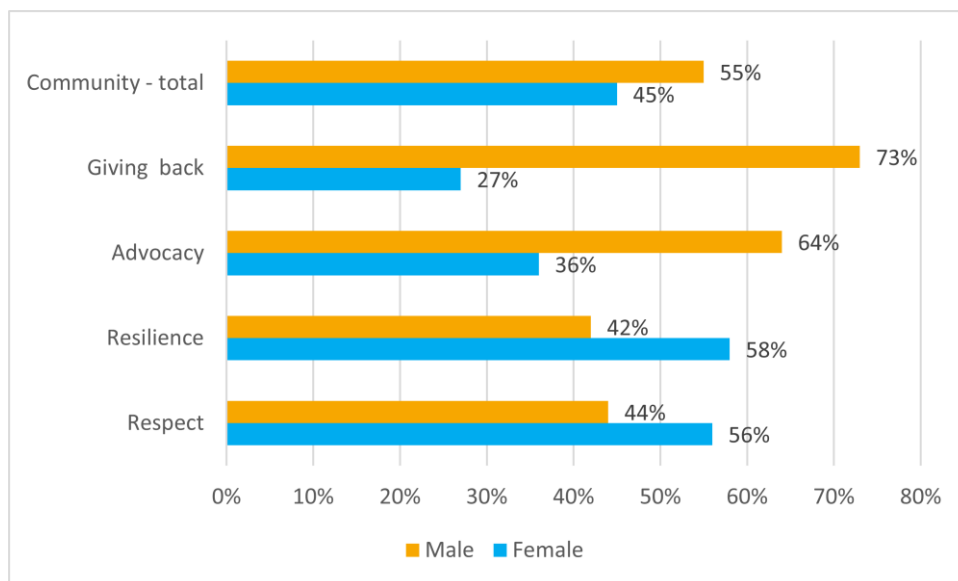


Figure 25: Analysis of some of the quotes related to community empowerment by gender



He and his team went from door to door to sensitise the community about the risk of COVID-19, teaching the community how to wash their masks and protect their children in addition to providing food for the most vulnerable families during lockdown (KK\_A1\_MZ). Other graduates have also contributed to addressing COVID-19 challenges by providing free soap, masks (KK\_A8\_R) and education for children in the community (KK\_A12\_MZ). This strong community mobilisation reflects graduates' willingness to support the wellbeing of their community and provide solutions to existing challenges.

In addition to this large-scale community engagement, graduates articulated a sense of community based on individual initiatives to support the community. For example, this graduate demonstrated a willingness to address gender-related issues by mobilising her family as agents of change:

*"When I was in Afghanistan, there was a girl whose family was trying to force her to get married. This girl did not want to get married with that man. So, I ask my family to go to her family and talk to them. When my father [and I] went [to] her family to try to convince them [...] how it can damage her future and it was a good achievement for me." (AH\_A8\_N)*

This example demonstrating servant leadership characteristics reveal the willingness of graduates to provide solutions based on individual initiative to problems in the community. This individual contribution of graduates in a collective environment is considered a key strategy

to address the community's challenges. For instance, this graduate in Kenya explains how his singular mobilisation to talk to people involved in drug abuse and unhealthy activities has contributed to transforming these community members:

*"I explain to [people involved in drug abuse and unhealthy activities] the effects of [...] drugs and [...]. And of course, I've been doing such things. I have some of the friends that are transformed from what they were doing. Some were smokers, just idols, were not doing anything because they did not know where they are going but after explaining to them now even some of them applied last year in [the] Diploma programme and they were accepted. That progress is now they are going and that was another good way of helping. Some of them have joined other activities like [...] local training and other things." (KK\_A11\_MZ)*

As he enunciates his contribution by sensitising people following unhealthy activities, he concludes that everyone benefits from his involvement, as he adds that "even women are also benefitting" because he would intervene whenever they have issues and guide them in finding solutions (KK\_A11\_MZ). This individual initiative detached from any organisations depicts the willingness of graduates to be agents of change in whatever context they have an impact. This can also be reflected in the development of graduates' resilience, becoming change-makers through their actions within their communities. For example, this graduate in Iraq shared how her determination to access school led her to become independent and stronger (IE\_A2\_M).



Figure 26: IDP camp in Khanke, Iraq

She explained that despite her desire to pursue her studies, she could not complete her studies as she got married very young (at 15) and had children, in addition to the war and her family members being opposed to completing her studies (IE\_A2\_M). When she got the opportunity to join the Diploma, she expressed how she developed her resilience:

*"When I got opportunity to study [...] in the Diploma. Actually, I fight it to [...] study really, I fight it to study and a I studied and everything after that changed it. [...] My mind, my experience, everything will be, has changed it, so I became more and confident I became... I left my shyness and I could get opportunities to work [...], I can now depend on myself. I don't wait to anyone to do something for me. No, I want to do it by myself." (IE\_A2\_M)*

Reflecting on her experience, she concludes that she does not want to limit this change to herself, and hopes that other women will embrace this tool:

*"So I want all, all women to do the same thing like a to became independent. [...] You can also [...] teach that for your or your children or people you know, so that was very, very important for me." (IE\_A2\_M)*

Therefore, this form of empowerment illustrates how this individual journey can

in turn support a collective one, creating opportunities for other women and encouraging them to join this path. Similarly to this Iraqi graduate who had to overcome challenges emerging from her close community, the resilience of this graduate in Kenya who is currently a businessman providing transportation service for schools, among other activities, exemplifies the strength to challenge his community and pursue his goal:



**"I have another challenge, you can see, I am a disabled person. In my community they always asked me: "why can't you sit down? just sit and relax, you are already disabled" [...]. They tell me: Why are you disturbing yourself? you are already being disturbed by the disability, you can sit and eat" so you know they will never recognise my contribution. It is people like you maybe who meet me in role in the office or in the business market, that sees that I am doing something. But for my immediate community, they will never see. But now gradually they are seeing a different person with different perspectives and this what encourage me."**

-KK\_A1\_G



He continues to explain why it is so challenging for him to gain recognition from his community:

*"Now they have realised in terms of business, I am better, in terms of education I am continuing doing well. [...] it is changing that perspective people when it comes to disabled people, they look at it: "oh this one is dull, of this is also not possible, this is impossible" [...] they cannot allow [...] persons living with disability to school because they see those who did it before are doing better than anyone so there is not exceptional for them, it is possible. It is only us who are limiting, preventing them achieving. This is why I'm a living example for my community but before they have the upbeat, they are not sure, some were asking "can you even reach that school?" (KK\_A1\_G)*

This exemplary form of resilience demonstrates that being a changemaker in one's community does not necessarily mean addressing problems collectively – it

can start by challenging a community's misconceptions through one's individual actions and surpassing all community expectations. Therefore, this graduate's testimony exposes how through strong community engagement and personal success, one is able to become an agent of change in the community, even in a context where the actions are not recognised by one's own community.

Demonstrating an unwavering willingness to address challenges in the community, alumni presented their contribution to the community as beyond collective action, using their individual resources to provide solutions in their communities. Such contributions are understood as mutually beneficial for graduates and the community, allowing alumni to give back to their community.



Figure 27: Interview in Dzaleka, Malawi



## 2 The scope of impact of graduates' sense of community: dual empowerment

As graduates have demonstrated a strong sense of community utilised for the betterment of the community, a number of consequences emerge from this intense mobilisation.

### 2.1 Snowball effect

First, given the significant contribution of graduates to the community, their engagement has inspired others to do the same, creating a snowball effect. A graduate in Kenya explained that this idea of transmitting the inspiration to become agents of change came from his Diploma learning experience, citing two specific examples:

*"There are two things [that] encouraged [...], one is Magari Mathai example, metaphor of that small bird which try to put off the fire that is burning with the drop of water, the second is [...] the first video we learn in the Bridge to learning where it says we start with big rock so, after I went through the Diploma after learning those things I realised professor Magari Mathia said that bird take water trying to put off the burning forest so, for me I took myself as that bird which try to put off the whole fire with the drop so I have to do what is in my capacity as a person. [...] the same Dr. Mark Final which start with big rock, the big rock for me is where I am that mentality of starting small to big [so] that I can solve. [...] those are the two videos ever inspired and encouraged me to [do] what I am doing now and it's helping me to move forward." (KK\_A1\_G)*

This consciousness of collectively building a better tomorrow for this graduate's community by "starting small"

encapsulates the mechanics of the snowball effect of the Diploma's impact on graduates' communities. The increased awareness of the potential of one's action within the community leads graduates to become agents of change, prompting others to engage in similar behaviour and ultimately resulting in the improvement of community members' lives. This amplifying phenomenon is illustrated in the example of this graduate in Afghanistan facilitating a peace reconciliation workshop in his community:



"[In Sociology] I got this sense that we are human beings, and we are interrelated. [...] The others' problem is our problem. We have responsibilities in the communities. [...] We are not living in this world alone, [...] the other people can help us. For example, all the people want peace [...] and now we are struggling war and injustice in our community. [...] It is my responsibility as a person who have been trained for peace and reconciliation to conduct workshops and help the students to have a better relationship with others, to bring peace for themselves first, their families and communities in greater level. Having this sense of community and knowing it is my responsibility, [...] I am currently conducting workshops for my students and other teachers at my workplace."

–AB\_A4\_H

By speaking about the interrelation of human beings and shared responsibility to improve communities, this graduate



exemplifies the wide range of impacts that the Diploma can have on communities.

This transfer of skills and knowledge in the community in order to “transform the world” (KK\_A19\_MZ) is particularly reflected in the impact of giving women access to education. According to this female graduate in Jordan, women empowerment through education can have a snowball effect, as “education is [what they] want, [so they] can change within [themselves] and [their] societies and [their] families” (JA\_A8\_A). Indeed, appearing as role models in the community, female graduates inspire other women to pursue their educational journey and challenge society’s perspective on women accessing education. This graduate in Afghanistan illustrates this contagious inspiration for women’s involvement in education:

*“Studying in this programme help me that I become as agent of change in my community. [...] Before this time, no [one] allows their daughter to study to other province or some other places in [...] my village. So, when I go to Bamyan and I studied about three years Diploma. So, [...] my life changed a lot and when I come back to my community, other said and think that her father allows her to study to other provinces. So, we also should allow our daughters to study to other provinces in order to bring some changes in their life.” (AB\_A2\_H)*

This encouragement to increase women’s access to education through standing as a role model in her community runs in parallel with a recognition of the changes brought to one’s life and community. This phenomenon is also identified in Malawi, as this female graduate’s contribution to the community is acknowledged and welcomed by her community:

*“The Diploma changed me because [...] I can say I’m a role model in my community since today I see the impact of women in education, so, this Diploma brings many changes in my life and my community. So, now people today, people are proud because the way we can see the community now, the community is proud of women, how women are involved in education. They are involved and they are eager to learn, to go to school and to have a good impact in society, in our society we are living, and we hope that if we go far, we can make a good contribution in the society.” (MD\_A2\_F)*

Therefore, the achievements of these graduates inspire other women to pursue further educational opportunities and eventually benefit the community. Consequently, these graduates have demonstrated that the impact of their community engagement goes beyond their direct contribution to the community, as they inspire others to be empowered and become agents of change. This snowball effect of the Diploma makes its impact on graduates’ life and their communities vast and limitless.

## 2.2 Community empowerment leads to personal empowerment

The consequences of developing such a sense of community through the Diploma have been identified by graduates as allowing them to build resilience and eventually their self-empowerment. By enabling graduates to think broadly (KK\_A3\_JR) and advocate for their communities (ID\_A1\_HD), the Diploma is seen as a tool whereby graduates can be empowered. “Giving the power to talk more for [one’s] community” (ID\_A1\_HD) through the expertise and knowledge developed in the Diploma is seen as a means to apply graduates’ empowerment to the benefit of the community. The quote



from this graduate in Kenya reveals how the Diploma shapes graduates' empowerment through acting as role models within the community:



"They will always thank this programme for wonderful and amazing transformation they have done to me and the refugees. They always say 'we need to [thank] JWL [for] the solid foundation they are giving [to] the refugees'. [...] We were two Uganda graduates from JWL, and our achievements become a story of the day. I was breastfeeding by then. The example they would give was 'look at her, she is a mother of three and she has done a lot no man in this community tried. What about you? You have opportunity here in the camp.' I became [a] reference and consultant. I feel big."

—KK\_A7\_G

Another graduate in Kenya presents the Diploma as a source of personal growth through his work for vulnerable members of his community:

*"The Diploma has empowered me a lot, it made me think of something much bigger than what I had before, so I was used to work in the down level especially in the community, I was stepping for the people who could not handle themselves, so like the voiceless in the community, I talk to myself, let me stood up for this, of course we are told that you cannot keep quiet, when you see something, you need to step up, and find solutions, how you can help those who cannot move forward, help change the community in any possible way that you can. So I was really empowered in so many ways, putting it in an*

*example like when I was running the course, I was mostly [...] [trying to] make sure that my students achieve the goal of the course, I really empowered them as well."* (KK\_A3\_JR)

As for this graduate, empowering others equates to empowering oneself and community involvement is crucial to spark this personal growth. The same understanding of community empowerment applies to this graduate in Malawi, who sees the work of his foundation supporting single mothers, widows and orphans as a source of mutual empowerment, while preventing these persons from engaging in 'not morally good activities' [citing prostitution] (MD\_A4\_L).

These mutual benefits of empowering others are encapsulated in the definition of empowerment of this graduate in Kenya, who opened a secondary school in the camp:

*"Let me say empowerment is when you enable someone to do something for himself. [...] teach someone how to fish and give him the hook to go and fish for himself; that is empowerment."* (KK\_A13\_G)

Therefore, the consequences of graduates' engagement in the community are not only resulting in the empowerment of the beneficiaries of their actions, but also of themselves. This mutual empowerment depicts the impact of the Diploma as emulating inspiration across individuals and communities. With a snowball effect, the Diploma allows graduates to become role models in their communities that in turn inspire other members to act in the same way, working for the benefit of the community.



### 3 Conclusion

The Diploma is seen as a space in which graduates can not only build an awareness of the community that is rooted in advocating virtues, but also propels them to work toward the improvement of the community's wellbeing. As graduates highlight the interconnected nature of the community, they understand that addressing challenges in the community

profit to the collective betterment of community members' living conditions, including theirs. This involvement serves as a source of inspiration for their peers, creating snowballing effects of the Diploma in the community, which ultimately portrays the Diploma as empowering both its beneficiaries and its agent of change.

#### Key points

- Through advocacy, the interconnected elements of the community, and a willingness to address community challenges, graduates empower their communities.
- Graduates' community members become agents of change in their communities, and this leads to the empowerment of the person and of their communities.
- A sense of interconnectedness between the graduates and the community that leads to personal and community empowerment.
- Graduates are able to conceive creative solutions to address local and ultimately empower their communities.





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## Chapter 7: Personal empowerment

A shared journey towards self and community actualisation



**“** 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 with local people [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 make 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 solve the case [...]. Doing thing that you are capable 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 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).

## Gender perspective

While empowerment is reflected almost equally across the two genders (women represent 52% of quotes related to empowerment and man 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.

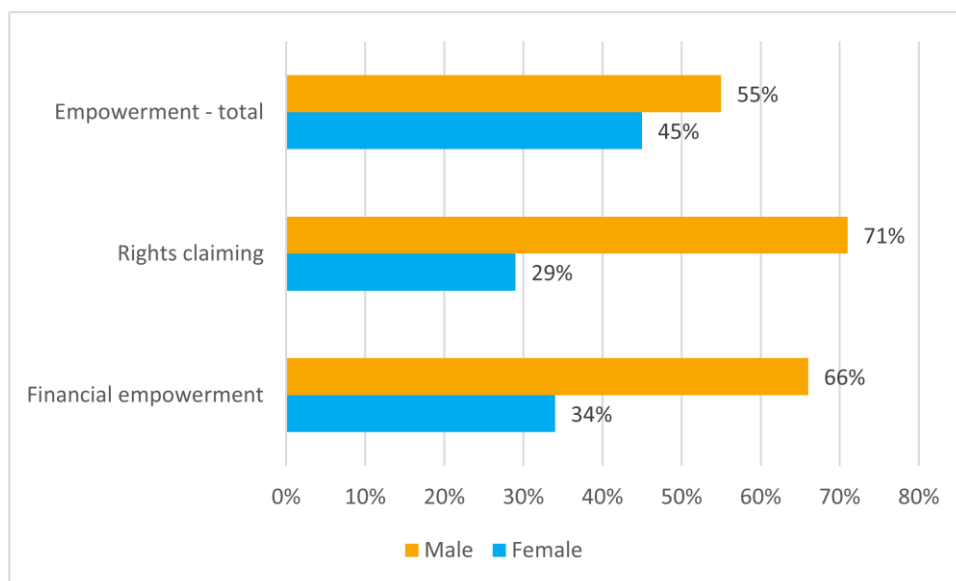


Figure 28: Analysis of some of the quotes related to personal empowerment by gender



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

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.

Therefore, graduates' empowerment propels a spiral of virtuous energy which



## 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

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)*



Figure 29: Students receiving and giving guidance in the community learning centre in Erbil, Iraq



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).*

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:



"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

*"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:





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)*



Figure 30: Graduates at the graduation ceremony in Dzaleka, Malawi



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).*

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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## Concluding remarks: an impact beyond knowledge

The legacy of the Diploma programme on the graduates, their community and JWL





After 10 years, the impact of the Diploma in Liberal Studies on graduates and their communities is profound. Graduates have shared their stories which demonstrate the depth of the programme's impact through the various skills, experiences and values developed during their learning journey. From the analysis of graduates' voices, a conceptual framework was identified which elaborates the development of knowledge and skills, existential competences and empowerment as interconnected elements of the Diploma's impact.

Graduates mentioned key knowledge, soft and hard skills developed during their Diploma journey which opened up doors in terms of networking and access to academic and professional opportunities. Among those skills, critical thinking is deemed as life-changing. According to graduates, it allows for the acquisition of a new mindset which is applicable in all spheres of life, promotes problem-solving, adaptability, autonomy, and boosts their self-confidence. These are the basis on which the Diploma nurtures three key existential competences: servant leadership, intercultural and interreligious sensitivity, and sense of community.

These three intertwined existential competences are promoted not only through the content in the curriculum, but also by the way in which the curriculum is taught, grounded in the principles of companionship and guidance as well as through the example set by JWL itself. First, graduates define leadership with great emphasis on service; they elaborate on the idea that a servant leader is first and foremost a leader of oneself, and then a leader of others. They articulated the values and skills that make a servant

leader and elicited how this translated in all spheres of life. The main consequence of becoming a servant leader is to acquire the capability of finding one's own voice and to be able to carry and amplify the voices of the voiceless.

The second existential competences that emerged from the interviews is intercultural and interreligious sensitivity, as culture and religion are two concepts very interconnected in the words of graduates. We mirrored graduates' perceptions of their intercultural and interreligious sensitivity with the DMIS model (Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity) to show that all the interviewees developed their sensitivity to a level that enabled them to respect and dialogue with other cultures and religions, embrace diversity and not discriminate. This is a crucial competence to work towards the creation of peaceful communities, particularly in the contexts where our graduates live. They reported that this development was made possible not only by courses taught in the Diploma, but also by the way the Diploma was taught, with the promotion of guided dialogue and exchange in the local and global classrooms with colleagues with different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds; the promotion of introspection; and the inclusivity JWL showed in accepting and treating students regardless of their origin or religion. The result of this increased level of sensitivity is the active work of Diploma graduates to promote inclusivity in their local settings, as well as awareness of the role that this competence can play at a global level in contributing to peace.

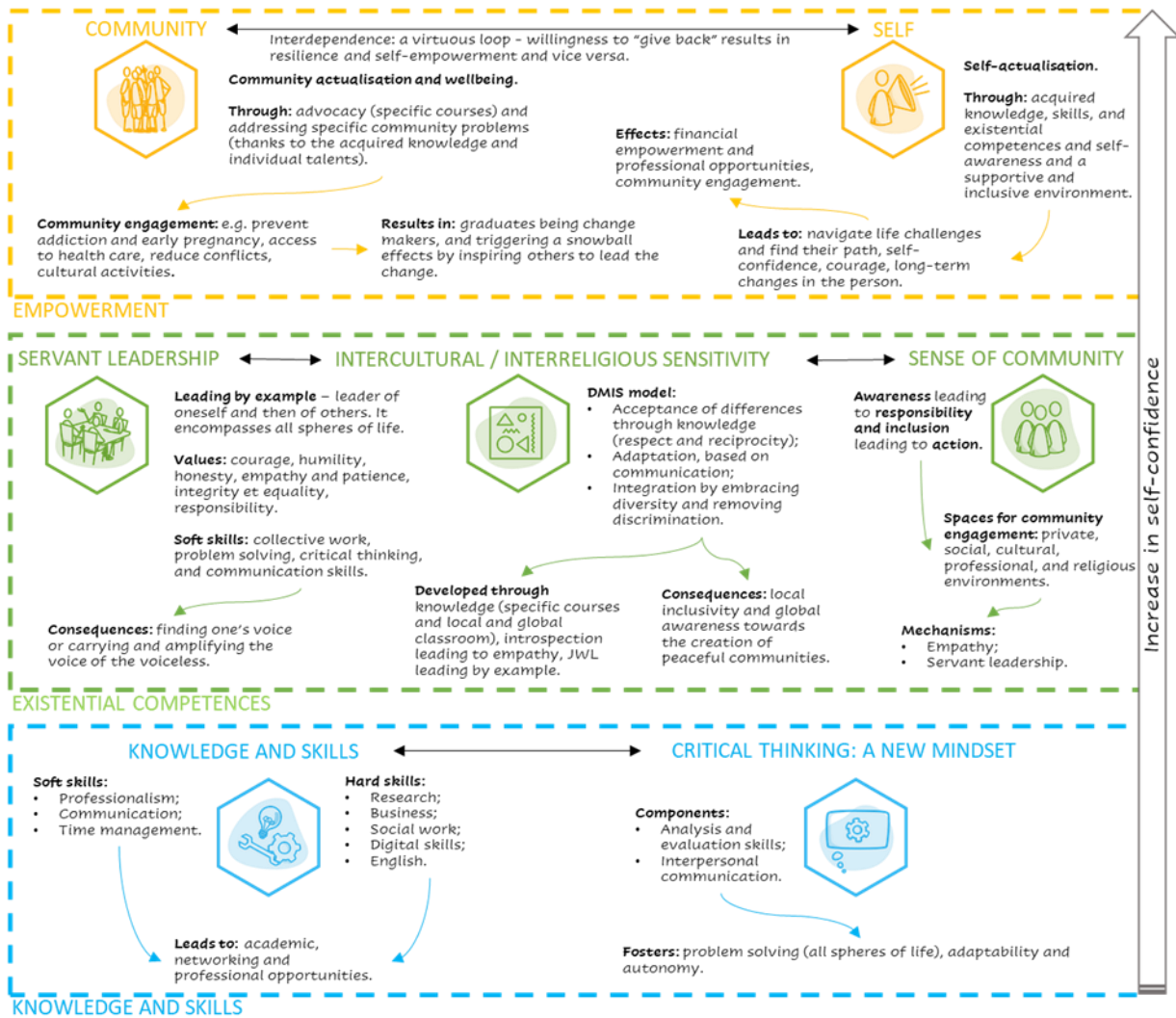


Figure 31: Unpacking the conceptual model

The third existential competence unpacked in the report is an enhanced sense of community and a more inclusive understanding of community that brings with it a sense of responsibility towards every component of one's own environment, which then leads to action. Graduates reported being engaged in multiple spheres within their communities and highlighted servant leadership and empathy (developed as intercultural and interreligious sensitivity increased) as key tools for meaningful impact, thus demonstrating the interconnectedness of the model's three existential competences.

The acquisition and development of these knowledge, skills, and existential competences nurture self-confidence and ultimately lead to empowerment. Graduates articulated two dimensions of empowerment: community empowerment and self-empowerment. Strongly highlighting the interdependence between the two in a virtuous cycle, graduates' eagerness to 'give back' to the community results in increased resilience and sense of self-empowerment, and this feeds back a renovated willingness to "give back" to one's community. They also reported how their community engagement, through advocacy and by addressing specific social issues transformed them into



change makers, and triggered a snowball effect whereby others in the community are inspired and take action themselves. Finally, graduates unpack self-empowerment both from a personal point of view (having more jobs opportunities and financial sustainability) and from a social point of view (being engaged in the community). They attribute this self-actualisation not only to knowledge, skills and existential competences acquired during their Diploma journey, but also to the educational experience as a whole – one that nurtures self-awareness and is embedded in an inclusive and supportive environment. Through this experience, graduates were better equipped to navigate life challenges and find their path,

and produced long-term changes within them, giving them the courage and self-confidence to do so with an open and empathic mind.

This report reveals how the Diploma programme became more than a higher education programme accessible to learners at the margins. It became the means by which graduates, and their communities can choose their own definition of development and self-emancipation. This encourages us to continue to pursue our mission of providing communities at the margins with quality higher education programmes, and learning together to transform the world.



Figure 32: Graduation procession in Dzaleka, Malawi





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