

## **Girls Empowerment through Computer Literacy**

**Country of Implementation: Sierra Leone**

**Sponsoring College: Concordia College, Moorhead**

**Project Leader: Daniel Monya Pambu, Sierra Leone; Waterford Kamhlaba UWCSA '19**

### **SUMMARY**

This project sought to address the gender digital divide in Sierra Leone by providing girls at a rural school with computers and computer literacy so that they are able to navigate the digital world effectively and efficiently, empowering them as they look to future careers. This project is also a means of advancing progress on Sustainable Development Goal 4, Quality Education, and Goal 5, Gender Equality, while promoting the country's Free Quality School Education program.

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

I have always loved the process of learning, which might be because both of my parents are teachers. In applying for a Projects for Peace award, my belief in education prompted me to think about how I could be able to do a project back home that promoted education. I had been in contact with Joseph Kaifala (UWC RN '04) who shares the same passion for education and more so girl's education. I had been in touch with him in 2020 after my graduation from UWCSA as I used to borrow books from his library to learn and stay busy during the COVID pandemic. It was during this time that I learned about his work at the [Jeneba Project](#), with which he aims to provide girls with quality civic and traditional education in Sierra Leone. After reading about his work and hearing testimonies from his work, I felt confident about contributing to his work. I was also in touch with a high school friend who is making a difference in the lives of fellow young people through information technology, through an organization called Rabbit Education. I reached out with the idea of implementing a computer literacy project. He welcomed this and was happy to provide his expertise, as he mentioned this was a timely intervention. These relationships on the ground in Sierra Leone played a vital role in influencing me to decide on my project. The project was implemented at the Sengbe Pieh Academy for girls in Robis Lungi in Port Loko District, Northern Province of Sierra Leone. This town is 76 miles away from the country's capital city Freetown. This high school is an all-girls institution with 75 students aged 15-20 years and it is where the Jeneba Project is based. For the project, I purchased computers for the school, set up a computer classroom, and held computer literacy classes for the students with Rabbit Education.

The project was to be done in 6 weeks but that ended up being shortened to 5 weeks due to logistical challenges after arriving in Sierra Leone. A primary challenge was getting cash using the Concordia credit card, due to shortcoming in the banking system. Another big challenge was the high inflation level in the country. The cost of materials needed was constantly changing as the country's currency fluctuated against the US dollar, making things more expensive than expected. Also, during this period, Sierra Leone experienced a rainy season which made water transportation between Freetown and Lungi perilous, and even the students who live around Robis could not easily get to school. Therefore, some started classes late. Nevertheless, they were so inspired to learn, and they found ways to get to school. This was really motivating for us as facilitators. Communication is very important and doing the "pay as you go" for internet and calls made it more expensive and difficult to communicate with partners and even my campus liaison.

One of the unexpected positives was when a friend, Mr. Donald Smith who is an Information Technology Consultant with 23 years of teaching in Sierra Leone, the United Kingdom, and the United States, came in for lectures and interaction with the girls. He was pleased with the rate at which the girls were learning and how interested they seemed to be in asking him questions about Information Technology, careers in the field, and how they could integrate what they were learning in this project into their future careers, ranging from law to healthcare. On the last day of the lectures, we had an examination and presentation time where the girls showed us what they had learned all through the past weeks. It was very satisfying to see the progress they had made, going from not knowing how to switch on a laptop to being able to use it to produce works in Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. We crowned everything off with a certification ceremony in which the community and leaders were invited to celebrate the girls for their job well done. This was very pleasing and fulfilling, showing that the time and resources spent were worth every penny.

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I did not do any fundraising, but the Sengbe Pieh Academy through the [Jeneba Project](#) contributed immensely and supported me as a project Leader all through the different phases of the project, providing volunteers to help in the day-to-day running of events and shadowing the facilitators. This showed their commitment to the sustainability of the project.

### **REFLECTION**

I view peace as not just the absence of war, but a state in which everyone experiences equity, with their needs met. Even in the absence of war or conflict, if needs are not met equitably there will always be both interpersonal quarrels that disrupt the process of learning and growing as a community. My project helps tackle the problem of the gender divide in education which mostly females are on the disadvantaged end. Providing access to digital literacy gives these girls a skill they will be able to use in higher education and in their careers. This will cause more women to be accepted into a professional workforce which mostly requires computer skills. They will also be able to start businesses using the basic skills they have learned, being self-reliant financially and helping in the economic development of the country.

Personally, I learned a lot from them and got to see that we should just give people a chance to development – and then you will get to realize the hidden potentials to be tapped into to create a peaceful society. Being home after a couple of years in the United States made me feel conflicted. I realized that a lot of changes had happened at home, and so much more work and attention is needed. It made me feel more motivated to give back my resources to help develop Sierra Leone, my home. During a conversation one day on the ferry back to Freetown after work at Robis Lungi, Joseph Kaifala mentioned that “a chance is all we needed”. This short but powerful statement stuck in my head throughout my project implementation, and it was evident in how much potential these girls showed us. I then imagined how many girls like them had not been given a chance in places all around the world. It made me reflect on my own life. I was given a chance to go to UWC and that changed my life. I was emotional at some point when I noticed how motivated these kids were at grasping this chance that was made available to them. I believe that if every human in this world was given a chance to reach their potential, we would all be in utmost peace and happiness.

### **PERSONAL STATEMENT**

In doing this project, I experienced mixed feelings. On the one hand, I was so happy to be helping to promote inclusive and quality education. But when I heard the testimonies of gratitude from the girls, I was to an extent sad realizing how much inequality there is, knowing that in richer developed countries, children as young as 2 years had some form of computer available to them and even take it for granted. I felt moved when Adiatu Jalloh, at age 14 the youngest in the cohort, mentioned that she had only heard about computers but had never seen or played with one.

I was also grateful that I learned to develop leadership and management skills. Joseph Kaifala purposely told me to take full responsibility for my project, as he reiterated that the main point of a Davis Peace project is for students to learn from their successes and failures while influencing the world. He always checked in and helped and advised me when needed. This project was a good way to demonstrate Concordia College's core focus on influence the affairs of the world. I was able to do this by promoting peace by tackling complex problems and making explicit connections between the classroom and the wider world.

*A chance is all we needed – Joseph Kaifala*

*I am forever grateful for this opportunity after seeing the impact of serendipity in my life, helping to provide a quality and inclusive education for girls at home was something I never envisioned. This chance given to these girls through the Davis Project is one I believe will create a ripple effect in their lives as they achieve a peaceful life. – Daniel Pambu*