

# From Exclusion to Empowerment: Transforming lives of girls with disabilities in Kuje, Nigeria

Report by:

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In Kuje, a community in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, many girls with disabilities once lived on the margins, excluded from education, vulnerable to violence, and with little hope for economic independence.



Today, that story is changing.

Through a project implemented by the Advocacy for Women with Disabilities Initiative (AWWDI), with support from the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF), girls with disabilities are gaining skills, confidence, and a voice in their communities.

## Building a Foundation for Inclusion

The project, *"Empowerment of Girls with Disabilities through Inclusive Education, Economic Independence and Protection from Gender-Based Violence,"* addressed three major barriers:

- Limited access to inclusive education
- Lack of economic opportunities
- High exposure to gender-based violence

From the beginning, the goal was clear, **No girl should be left behind.**

Through school engagement, community outreach, and stakeholder collaboration, safe and inclusive spaces were created for learning and growth.

## Project Launch: Empowering Girls with Disabilities in FCT Abuja

In September 2025, AWWDI launched the project at the Junior Secondary School Paseli, Kuje, Abuja Federal Capital Territory FCT during a One-Day Inception and Role-Sharing event held on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2025.

The event brought together girls with disabilities, school authorities, community stakeholders, and implementing partners. The opening address by AWWDI Executive Director Mrs. Patience Ogolo-Dickson and a goodwill message from CDPF's representative, Madam Gaudence, set the tone for a collaborative and inclusive initiative.

School Principal Dr. Richard Ugbone welcomed the project, reaffirming JSS Paseli's commitment to creating an enabling environment where girls with disabilities can learn alongside their peers without discrimination. A particularly moving moment came when children with disabilities sang the national anthem in an inclusive setting, a simple but powerful symbol of equal opportunity.

**"True inclusion means providing equal opportunities in education, leadership, and economic empowerment."**

### **Advocating at the Top: Courtesy Visit to the Federal Ministry of Education**

On 18th September 2025, AWWDI paid a courtesy visit to the Federal Ministry of Education in Abuja to advocate for disability-inclusive education. The meeting was held with Mr. Omotomi A.K., Deputy Director for Language and Special Needs Education.

The Ministry commended AWWDI's efforts and reaffirmed its commitment to inclusive education, including incorporating sign language into the national curriculum and removing tuition fees in federal technical colleges. In a concrete demonstration of partnership, the Ministry presented AWWDI with the Inclusive Education Policy, two supporting policy documents, and the new national curriculum.

### **Breaking the Silence: Stakeholder Sensitisation on GBV and Disability Rights**

On 9th December 2025, AWWDI hosted a landmark one-day sensitisation event at Edo House, CBD Abuja, bringing together school teachers, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), government agencies, and women with disabilities.

Executive Director Mrs. Patience Ogolo-Dickson led a powerful session that confronted the realities of gender-based violence (GBV) affecting women and girls with disabilities. Using anonymous personal testimonies, participants uncovered the depth and diversity of GBV, from domestic violence to sexual harassment, economic abuse, and verbal violence. The session emphasised that GBV is not limited to physical violence, and that women with disabilities face double discrimination due to intersecting barriers of gender and disability.

Legal frameworks including the CRPD, Nigeria Disability Act, VAPP Act, and Child Rights Act were discussed, with emphasis that rights on paper must translate into rights in practice.

**35**

Women with Disabilities  
Attended

**83%**

Proportion with  
Disabilities

**6+**

Legal Frameworks  
Discussed

### **Engaging Community Leaders: Two-Day Advocacy Meeting with Key Stakeholders**

On 28th–29th January 2026, AWWDI organised a two-day advocacy meeting in Maitama, FCT Abuja, targeting key stakeholders including traditional rulers, women with disabilities, and community leaders. The meeting aimed to highlight the marginalisation faced by girls with disabilities and to harness the influence of traditional and community leaders in driving inclusion.

Facilitated by Dr. Kolawole Jayeoba, the programme showcased real stories of transformation, including a woman with disability who, through education, established a business, secured government employment, and went on to employ others. Her story powerfully illustrated that inclusion is not charity, but a pathway to self-reliance and active contribution to society.

Traditional rulers from Pasali, Chibiri, and Chukuku communities were among those present, alongside representatives of the Wives of FCT Trade Rulers Association. Their participation signified growing recognition among cultural leaders of the need to champion disability inclusion.

<b>65</b> Total Participants (2 days)	<b>61.5%</b> Women with Disabilities	<b>5</b> Traditional Rulers Engaged
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## SKILLS, CONFIDENCE & INDEPENDENCE

### Vocational Training at JSS Paseli: Women Rising

At the heart of the AWWDI-CDPF project is a five-month vocational skills training programme for girls and women with disabilities at JSS Paseli Skill Centre, Kuje. Participants have been trained in catering, cosmetology, agribusiness, tailoring, and hairdressing, skills chosen for their potential to generate income and build economic independence.

Two rounds of Monitoring and Evaluation visits by AWWDI (in January and February 2026) documented extraordinary progress. Girls who arrived with low confidence and limited vocational knowledge are now earning income, building savings, and dreaming bigger.

Trainers also reported growing in their own skills - developing patience, flexibility, and inclusive teaching approaches. Many acknowledged they gained new perspectives through their engagement with the girls, underscoring the two-way nature of true inclusion.

#### Monitoring Findings

By the second M&E visit in February 2026, girls demonstrated noticeable improvements in technical skills, confidence, communication, and teamwork. Attendance improved, absenteeism fell, and peer collaboration strengthened. Trainers adopted repetition, flexibility, and individualised attention to ensure no participant was left behind.

### Community Engagement: Raising Awareness on SGBV and Inclusive Education

On 27th February 2026, the project team conducted a community engagement and awareness-raising activity across neighbourhoods in Kuje, Abuja. The team went directly into communities to reach girls with disabilities, their families, school staff, and community members with messages on SGBV prevention and inclusive education.

75% of the 60 participants were women with disabilities. Interactive sessions, scenario-based demonstrations, Q&A dialogues, and the distribution of brochures and educational materials ensured that messages were practical, accessible, and grounded in lived realities.

A standout moment came from Mary, a young girl with a hearing impairment, who despite communication barriers actively participated and shared her personal experiences, her courage inspiring everyone in the room.

## CELEBRATION: GRADUATION CEREMONY

### A Day to Remember: Graduation of Girls with Disabilities

On 13th March 2026, JSS Paseli, Kuje came alive with celebration. Over 222 people gathered for the Graduation Ceremony marking the successful completion of the five-month vocational skills training for girls with disabilities, a fitting close to this transformative project.

222	22	5
Ceremony Attendees	Girls with Disabilities Graduated	Vocational Skills Areas

The ceremony featured welcome remarks from Executive Director Mrs. Patience Ogolo-Dickson, goodwill messages from JSS Paseli Principal Dr. Richard Ugbono, representative of the Director of Special Needs at the Universal Basic Education Board (UBEB), and community traditional leaders. A project impact video moved attendees, visually capturing the journey of the girls, from hesitant beginners to confident, skilled women.

Dr. Ugbono praised AWWDI for taking a different approach, not just visiting for photographs, but providing hands-on training and equipping graduates with tools and equipment to practice what they had learned. The UBEB representative encouraged graduates to remain focused, disciplined, and committed.

**"Empowering girls with disabilities through skills development and education builds their confidence, independence, and ability to contribute meaningfully to society. — Mrs. Patience Ogolo-Dickson, Executive Director, AWWDI"**

## SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE TRAINING CENTRE



**" Yusuf Saratu's story is a powerful testament to resilience and the transformative impact of inclusive vocational training. After an accident led to the amputation of both of her hands from the shoulder, Saratu faced immense physical and emotional hurdles, eventually dropping out of school.**

### Overcoming Physical Barriers

**In our interview with her, Saratu shared the specific challenges she faced during the five-month training program. In the cosmetology department, tasks like mixing**

liquid soap and Vaseline were physically difficult because she did not have hands to hold the tools. To overcome this, Saratu adapted by using her feet to stir the mixtures and handle materials, showing incredible determination to keep up with her peers.

### **Finding Independence and Purpose**

The training provided Saratu with more than just technical skills; it gave her a path to financial independence:

- **Income Generation:** While still in the training program, Saratu began producing and selling liquid soap and Vaseline within her community.
- **Self-Sustenance:** She used the money earned from these sales to pay for her own transportation to the training centre.
- **Future Goals:** Saratu is actively saving her proceeds with the goal of returning to school to complete her education.

### **A New Outlook on Life**

Saratu expressed that before this intervention, she felt limited by her disability and the stigma associated with it. Today, she feels a renewed sense of confidence and courage. Her message to other girls with disabilities is clear: "Don't give up. Don't allow your disability to hold you back. Help yourself with skills so that you can go back to school".

Through the support of AWWDI and CDPE, Saratu has transitioned from a position of dependency to becoming a budding entrepreneur and an advocate for her own future."



" Cecilia Omini's journey is a powerful story of reclaiming dignity and building a future beyond the shadows of societal stigma. Cecilia, a young woman living with albinism, spoke candidly about the deep-seated discrimination she faced before joining the project.

### **Overcoming Stigma and Isolation**

In our interview with her, Cecilia shared that she was frequently mocked and told she was "cursed". People would tell her not to come close or talk to them, fearing they would "catch" her condition. These experiences often made her feel that she had no voice and no place in the world outside her home.

### **Finding Her Capacity in Catering**

Joining the five-month vocational training at the JSS Paseli Skill Centre completely shifted her perspective:

- **Professional Skill Acquisition:** Cecilia joined the catering department, where she mastered the art of baking cakes and producing various snacks for sale.
- **Building Confidence:** Beyond just learning to cook, Cecilia learned how to believe in herself and her own capacity to compete in the marketplace.
- **Financial Resilience:** She has already started using her skills to bake for birthday celebrations and local events, providing her with a source of income that supports her household.

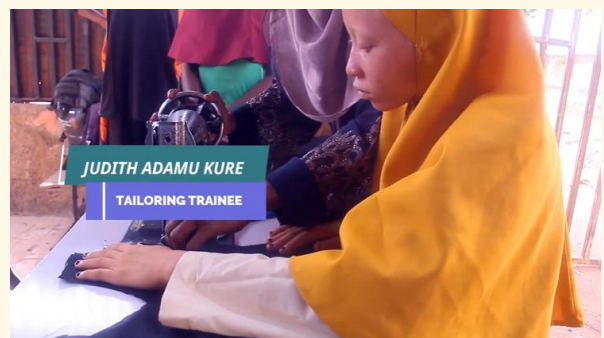
### A New Chapter of Independence

Cecilia expressed that the most significant change is her transition from dependency to self-reliance. She no longer feels the need to "beg" or rely on the mercy of others for her basic needs.

Her message of hope to other girls with disabilities is a testament to her transformation: "Be ready to learn, believe you can do it, and speak up—because if you don't speak up, nobody will hear what you are going through". Through the support of AWWDI and CDPF, Cecilia has not only gained a career but has also reclaimed her sense of self-worth.

**" Mary's Story: A Voice for Others** Mary, a young girl with a hearing impairment, found her voice during our community sessions. Despite the communication barriers she once faced, she stood up to speak about the importance of protecting girls with disabilities from violence. Her courage has inspired her peers to speak up for their own rights."

**" Judith Adamu Kure's story highlights how professional training can replace self-doubt with ambition and skill. Judith, a young girl with albinism, shared that before the project, she struggled with a significant lack of confidence.**



### Turning Vision into Skill

In the documentary, Judith explained that her condition sometimes affected her vision, making it difficult to see from a distance, especially when an instructor was cutting fabric. However, through the inclusive methods used at the JSS Paseli Skill Centre, she was able to overcome these hurdles:

- **Mastering the Craft:** Judith joined the tailoring department and successfully learned how to sew clothes entirely by herself.
- **Economic Potential:** She is now confident that she can sell the clothes she makes to earn an income for herself and her family.
- **Gaining Independence:** The training has empowered her to stand on her own financially, reducing her need to rely on others for support.

### **A Vision for the Future**

The program has transformed how Judith sees herself and her place in the community. She no longer feels limited by her disability but instead sees it as a part of her journey toward success.

Judith has set ambitious goals for her new career: "I will have my own shop and train other girls with disabilities". Her advice to other girls is to never give up and to stay committed to learning from their teachers. Through the partnership between AWWDI and CDPF, Judith has evolved from a shy student into a skilled tailor with a plan to empower others."



" Omoboriowo Aishat's story is a beautiful example of how physical challenges can be overcome with the right support and a determined spirit. Aishat, a girl with a physical disability, spoke about the daily pain and limitations she faced before discovering her potential through this project.

### **Overcoming Physical Constraints**

In our interview with her, Aishat shared that her physical condition often caused her significant pain when walking or standing for long periods. This made traditional classroom settings or physically demanding jobs very difficult for her. However, the agribusiness training at JSS Paseli Skill Centre provided her with a way to work that accommodated her needs.

### **Growth in Agribusiness**

Aishat found a new passion in the agricultural sector:

- **Specialized Skills:** She successfully learned the practical skills needed to rear both chicken and fish.
- **Hands-on Learning:** Despite the discomfort of standing during practical sessions, she remained committed to mastering her craft.
- **Path to Ownership:** The training has given her the tools and knowledge necessary to manage her own agricultural ventures.

### **A Goal for Independence**

Aishat's outlook on life has shifted from one of limitation to one of high aspiration. She no longer views her disability as an end to her productivity.

Her plans for the future are clear: "I want to start up my own business and grow it gradually... so I can support myself and my family". She also encourages other girls with disabilities to follow her lead and learn a skill that can help them stand on their own. Through the support of AWWDI and CDPF, Aishat has transformed her physical challenges into a foundation for economic independence."

Hosea Gift's story illustrates how overcoming physical barriers through skill acquisition can lead to a profound sense of personal and economic empowerment. Gift, a girl with a physical disability that affected her movement, shared how these limitations once restricted her freedom and confidence.



### Mastered Skills in Hairdressing

Through the vocational training at the JSS Paseli Skill Centre, Gift found a creative and practical outlet for her ambitions:

- **Professional Training:** Gift joined the hairdressing department, where she learned the technical skills required to style and care for hair professionally.
- **Overcoming Limitations:** Despite her physical challenges, she mastered the tools of the trade and demonstrated a high level of competence in her work.
- **Economic Readiness:** By the end of the program, she felt fully prepared to enter the workforce and begin earning her own income.

### A Change in Perspective

The impact of the project went beyond just learning a trade; it changed how Gift viewed her own potential:

- **Renewed Confidence:** Before the training, she felt there were many places she could not go and things she could not do because of her leg. Now, she speaks with a newfound sense of self-assurance.
- **A Message to Others:** Gift's advice to other girls with disabilities is to be confident and to "go and learn something that will help them".
- **Gratitude for Opportunity:** She expressed deep appreciation to AWWDI and CDPF, stating that their work is a "good work" that truly supports those who need it most.

Through this initiative, Hosea Gift has transitioned from feeling limited by her physical condition to becoming a skilled professional with a clear path toward a self-reliant future.





