



Empower a woman, unleash a leader

Mercy Corps

“There is nothing [a] man can do that a woman cannot do,” Rashidat says with a confident grin.

At just 18, she knows something we do, too: A woman empowered with knowledge and resources is a source of unstoppable change.

Approximately \$17 trillion could be added to the global economy if women had the same access to jobs and income as men do. And research shows when women are given an equal voice in their communities, their children are healthier, their lives are more stable and their societies are more peaceful.

Yet oppressive cultural traditions and limited access to education, job training and financial services regularly keep them from thriving. Many of these women have been doing unpaid domestic labor since they were very young, but have not experienced the empowerment of getting paid for their work.

That’s why we believe in investing in young women like Rashidat. We help them gain skills, build livelihoods and reach their goals, unleashing their potential to improve their lives and become leaders for their families and the world.

It’s hard for a girl to prosper in Nigeria. Poverty, indifference, and early marriage and pregnancy prevent many from completing their educations or enrolling in school at all. Right now, millions of girls across the country aren’t enrolled, which puts them at risk of never reaching their full potential.

Rashidat was forced to drop out when she was just 7 years old.

“I lost my parents,” she explains. “That is when I stopped schooling.” She moved in with her aunt and uncle, but wasn’t able to return to her education.

As she grew older she faced more obstacles: access to job training and banking services is limited for girls, too. But even when her options to succeed were bleak, she never lost hope. “I always believed I would be great,” she says.

Her life took a turn when she got involved in a job training program through Mercy Corps, a Global Impact charity partner. The program provides in- and out-of-school girls in Nigeria with life skills, business training and financial education, so they are better equipped to support themselves and their families.

“My favorite topic is how to start a business with small capital and loan taking,” Rashidat says, “... because I never knew about it before. [When I learned that] I saw a way forward.”

Empowered with knowledge and inspired by her love of fashion, she started putting small amounts of money away whenever she could, eventually saving enough to buy tools and beads to start a small jewelry-making business.

Already, her handmade accessories — necklaces, bracelets, belts, purses — are in high demand. “I’m always happy when I see people wearing my beads,” she says. “I will look at them and say ‘I am the one who did this.’ I feel proud of myself.”

Now, Rashidat has plans to expand. “I want to have a shop. I want to have a business card. I want to be great,” she says. Her business is so successful she’s even hired several other young women and taught them how to bead, though she hopes they eventually leave to start their own ventures, too.

“There are so many things girls can become in the future,” she says. “Girls are talented. There is nothing you give a girl that she cannot do.”

Photo Credit: Corinna Robbins/Mercy Corps