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NIGERIA

SUCCESS STORY

With Skills Come Brighter Prospects

Nigerian woman affected by polio renews hope with sewing training



Photo: Mohammed Jiya-Doko

Members of Kano Polio Victims Trust Association during a rally at the palace of the Emir of Kano, northern Nigeria.

“I gave up hope of ever learning anything... The future looked bleak,” said Amina Abdullahi before starting USAID-supported sewing training in Nigeria.

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Amina Abdullahi sat on a wooden stool in a crowded workshop. With a slight smile, she held a hand-dyed cotton cloth on its edge, guiding it through the new sewing machine. As she pushed the cloth, one could see that both her hands were slightly twisted.

She is just one of thousands in Nigeria who have contracted polio, an infectious, viral disease that invades the nervous system and can cause paralysis. Many of those who have contracted polio face discrimination in Nigeria and find it difficult to lead a normal life. For Abdullahi, the situation worsened when her father died and she became the sole provider for her family. Although trained as a tailor, she could not find employers who would let her practice in their shop.

“I gave up hope of ever learning anything, as no one would accept me. And, with my father’s demise, the future looked bleak,” she said.

Abdullahi learned of the Kano Polio Victims Trust Association, an organization set up to provide financial and technical support, including vocational training, for its members so they can engage in cottage industries to support their families. Hoping to learn new skills and set up her own shop, Abdullahi joined 30 women in the tailoring class where they took turns practicing on two sewing machines. They often had to wait around for as long as four days to get a chance at the machines. Most of them gave up.

Learning of the situation, USAID provided the association with new equipment, including 10 sewing machines, five knitting machines and two specialized embroidery machines. The news spread fast among association members, and Abdullahi and most of the other trainees returned to the center, along with 23 new members in the tailoring classes.

Later, Abdullahi was admitted into the advanced vocational skills acquisition training. “I was filled with tears when my name was called as one of those to benefit from the special training,” she said. After only three weeks in this advanced class, she has improved her sewing skills and is confident she can use them to fulfill her dream of opening her own shop.