

Sokona Bocar Sow

ELTI winner

My International Experience

Being born in a poor country, we tend to say that dreams come true only abroad. The quest for that dream takes us to the United States, which we have nicknamed "the continent where dreams come true." So I took my bags to the U.S. and there, my view of the world changed on all fronts for several reasons.

First, my experience in the U.S. has given me confidence in myself and my abilities. As an African proverb says "A bird sitting on a tree is never afraid of breaking the branch because his confidence is not on the branch but its wings" that means if I have an idea or opinion, I have to argue and not remain a listener to the ideas of others by lowering mine. So, I have gained self-confidence.

Second, culturally also changed my point of view. There are five continents in the world and all of them have their own culture and civilization. I have learned that people with different cultures, educations, countries, religions, or colors of skin can live in perfect harmony. For instance, this is the case at University of North Carolina at Charlotte, in which people who come from each part of the world with different Greeting, Body language, Mentality, and so on form a big family, like one world, one continent and one vision. This is possible because they put humanity before difference. For example, last week, I made a sketch with Sana a classmate who comes from Saudi Arabia, in which we must show the different meanings of gestures; when I cross my legs and show the bottom of my shoes, she told me that it is rude to show the bottom of

your shoes in Saudi Arabia and telling me that, she pointed me her finger, so told her it is rude point someone with your finger in Africa. It was just beautiful and amazing.

Finally, this adventure taught me that wealth, luxury or foods to eat are not the real sources of happiness, but true happiness is to appreciate what we have. For example, I remember this story of Karl Rabeder, an ex-millionaire and former Austrian businessman who renounced his luxurious villa and his fortunes after a trip to South America. The experience opened his eyes and he said: "I realized that most poor people who live over there are much happier than the average European. Advertising says we need to have the latest brand of jeans or a big house, but the people who own all this were not the happiest.

In the end, international experience has taught me to see the world in all colors and from all angles. I have also learned to believe in myself, to see difference as an asset and also to be happy with what I have. Today I realized that America is not the only continent of dream because wherever we are, we can realize these dreams. Every human being is the master of his destiny so when the world tells you "no" you should say "yes" because a negative mind can never give a positive life