

# Tijani Bukari — Focused on the Purpose

By Monica Malhotra



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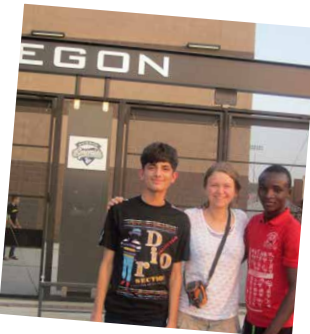
During our youth, what do we think about regarding our country, its citizens, and our own impact on society? Do we even think about these things at all? A strong sense of curiosity about the world led Tijani Bukari, a Deaf student from Ghana, to participate in the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State.

“Studying in the United States was a wonderful opportunity for me, opening my eyes and my mind to the world—a new world I never knew existed.”

Tijani attended the Maryland School for the Deaf and enjoyed learning about the history of the United States, especially Deaf history, disability rights, and the discrimination people with all types of disabilities faced through the years.

Experiences of discrimination continue to this day in Ghana. Tijani knew from studying in the United States that such

“When I return to Ghana I want to teach people about the disability laws practiced in the United States. I want people with and without disabilities in Ghana to be equal.”



barriers had been chipped away at in America; he not only learned how laws were changed to address discrimination, but he experienced equality for himself.

“In the United States, Deaf people are considered equal to hearing people. They can go to the university, get an education, and get the same jobs as other people. I want to reduce discrimination in Ghana. I will teach people at my school about the laws so we can have a better life.”

The YES program provides scholarships for high school students from countries with significant Muslim populations to spend up to one academic year in the United States. The purpose is to foster mutual understanding between cultures and share experiences. Tijani himself speaks about the importance for people from different backgrounds to understand each other. He enjoyed speaking about his life in Ghana and teaching people about his home culture.

“In order to achieve greater global understanding, it is important to learn about people and their beliefs through international exchange.”

In the summer after his exchange, Tijani was one of 22 YES alumni selected from northern and Sub-

Saharan African countries to attend a pan-African YES alumni workshop in Dakar, Senegal on Community Health Education (CHE), sponsored the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The four-day workshop offered an interactive approach to help participants learn how to approach complex health-related problems and develop community-based educational strategies and overall plans to address them. Tijani’s interest in this workshop was to gain the knowledge to educate people with similar disabilities in Ghana about the laws that can be implemented for more access in all aspects of society.

“I met many new people and learned so much about leadership and diversity. It is my wish that people everywhere can work together in unity to create a better life.”

Tijani found new purpose in the United States. He experienced an inclusive society and learned about ways he can contribute to further advancing his own.

“Many Africans flee poverty and oppression to seek a more secure and better life in new places. It is important for our youth to get a good education in order to improve their community and the world around them.”