



“You are there to learn, absorb, seek additional information, respond to your assignment with professionalism and competence- never to judge. Be patient, think things through and use the wisdom of your maturity and higher education to consider what you see and hear with an objective critique.” Dr. Lorne Jaques, Faculty of Social Work University of Calgary.

At IOM Pretoria (South Africa)

The new learning endeavour took me to Pretoria in South Africa for my internship with Migration Health. As an ambassador of the University of Calgary, I was there not only for my professional growth but, also for the reputation of my academic institution. This said, I must conduct myself in a way that honours those who sent me there.

I was interested in having an in-depth understanding of the issues and causes, as well as the politics and social consequences of international migration and internally displaced people; to expand my knowledge related to training and capacity building in international migration and the impact of migration on development. I have a particular interest in the psycho-social conditions, circumstances and the aspirations of young migrants. I was interested in learning about how IOM (South Africa) manages the reintegration and resettlement of this population and of course the policies and practices of the International Organization of Migration more broadly. My main goal was to build on important social work skills necessary to enhance my ability to serve people

whose experiences are similar to mine and to do that with a greater degree of professional maturity.

The overall objective of IOM consists of: to contribute to the improved standard of physical, mental and social well being of migrants by responding to their health needs throughout all phases of the migration process, as well as the public health needs of host communities. IOM aims to manage migration health and address vulnerability to ill health, including HIV and its impacts, through the following components: 1) Service Delivery and Capacity Building; 2) Advocacy for Policy Development; 3) Research and Information Dissemination; 4) Regional Coordination; and 5) Governance and Control. IOM targets the following mobile and migrant groups: labour migrants and mobile workers; forced migrants and irregular migrants; and people affected by mobility. Their activities target areas where migrants are present and where they can be accessed including: cross border communities; risk zones or "hot spots" along transport corridors; workplaces; migrant communities and urban settlements; migrant sending sites; detention centres; and emergency settlements including refugees and Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps.

My first two weeks at IOM and in South Africa was very shocking and I quickly learnt that expectation and realities do not always correspond. However, I quickly adjusted to my new learning environment, the reverse culture shock, and the working dynamic with my colleagues. This allowed me to be able to learn from them. I always say that: if we know how to get the best of ourselves by critically thinking about the outcome of our action, and thoughts, we will be able to get the best out of others.

I started by embracing the cold weather of Pretoria and to deal with the wrong internet device that was sold to me on the market. The first day, I participated in workshop on Gender and Development. Gradually, I started taking interest on people and things around me with an open mind. I participated in various internal and external learning activities. I travelled all over seeking new knowledge and understanding of certain realities of migrants' live conditions. I have a privilege to interview people on the street, to meet with young migrants, patients with HIV, cross-border migrants at Musina, labour migrants at Waterberg, various stakeholders and most memorably my good friends Baboon. All these encounters allowed me to see other dimensions of life, to understand people in their social, environmental, and structural contexts.

In fact, we must understand as it's said that: No one leaves their home willing or gladly. When people leave their earth, the place of their birth, where they live, it means that there is something very deeply wrong with the circumstances in their countries. When people crossing borders or geographical boundaries, they are signs, they are symptoms; they are proof that something is very wrong somewhere on the international scene. Migrants are driven out of their home countries primarily for economic hardship, political unrest, war, natural disaster, ethnic conflict, religion persecution, gender discrimination, and transgression against people's fundamental human rights. Most of what migrants dream is a normal and better life. In brief, migration is a response to acute need. Migration causes family disintegration; migrants are faced with xenophobia, discrimination, marginalization, racism, forced assimilation, increase vulnerability, exploitation, increase threat to their lives, negative stereotype, and above all lost of their identity. Migration causes brain drain for developing nations as the quest of better life pushes well educated and trained professionals to move to developed countries in detriment of their native lands.

As a community development practitioner, I have learnt that migrants' issues need long term perspectives planning in all aspects of economic, social and political life of peoples. Active participation through empowerment and capacity building in which states respect the fundamental human rights for those who cross geographical boundaries for certain reasons is very important.

In term of delivery for my internship, I was assigned various tasks which, I did at the best of my ability under the guidance of my supervisor Dr. Johannes John-Langba and Darren Harder, alumni of University of Calgary now working at IOM.

In all it was a positive learning journey that would help me to take in the future on more challenging issues and to participate with confidence in cross cultural and multidisciplinary team of community development projects.

Godwin Sidete Yao Dossou

"I am absolutely convinced that no wealth in the world can help humanity forward, even in the hands of the most devoted worker. The example of great and pure individuals is the only thing that can lead us to noble thoughts and deeds." (Albert, Einstein)