

Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project Highlights

April 2017

Scholar Program 9

ANYONE CAN BE A MENTOR: ONE EXPERIENCE OF A VISITING SCHOLAR AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

I am a Spring 2017 Visiting Scholar to Michigan State University under the Feed the Future Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project. This is my first experience leaving my home in Nigeria for other continent, thousands of miles away. With my luggage, lots of love and good wishes from family and friends my journey on a new adventure started. The first few weeks were quite challenging as I came to Michigan in January, deep in winter. Braving the cold was a major hurdle and the isolation of a new student was another. Gradually, I started meeting people and making friends. I was so happy when a friend invited me to a join a discussion of African ladies. I was excited and looked forward to meeting some “familiar faces” in a group I expected to be 5-7 African colleagues.

I arrived at the venue late because as a “New Arrival” I got lost several times on my way there. To my great surprise, the room was filled with more than 30 ladies. I just could not hide my excitement! The forum was that of the African Female Students Empowerment Project (AFSEP) and the theme of the meeting was **“MENTORING”**. The coach was Ms. Susan Combs who emphasized the need to have mentors in life. Mentors are especially impactful when they are on the academic or personal path you are interested in, but can be equally so even if they are not.

From the presentation and exchanges, I got a better appreciation of the differences between a mentor, a counsellor and a coach. Mentoring involves building a support system and providing support when the emotional roller coaster sets in and when the encouragement is needed. So I realized **“anyone can become a mentor”**. A mentor need not be someone who is in your line of work or your discipline. A support system involves sharing your experience with

individuals and making a change no matter how little, in their lives. My vision of a mentor was widened.



EXPERIENCING BUS RIDING IN THE MICHIGAN SNOW.

It was clear that a mentor does not have to give you a certificate; also as a mentee, you should not rely on your mentor for everything. As a mentee, one should have both short and long-term goals to ease the challenges of the mentor in providing a system of guidance and support. The experience from this forum was invaluable as it reoriented me on the concept of mentoring and I realized I too could play many roles as a change maker in my society. My life growing up in

Nigeria provides me with experiences I can share to help others. Even with my experience coming to the USA for just a few months, I have so much to share. This includes my academic training but extends beyond that. I have a lot to share about adjusting to new circumstances, reaching out of your comfort zone and daring to believe that I can be much better... We all have experiences and thus we all can be mentors to others!!!

By Aisha Lawal, Ibrahim



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