



## ***We are the future***

*By Mariama Jallow*

"We are the future, change and improvement, but without forgetting who we are or leaving the base, where we come from."

My name is Mariama, I have been collaborating with the **Wassu-UAB Foundation** in Barcelona for some time, raising awareness among young people of African origin or descendants. They offered me the opportunity to do that same work in the Gambia, through the NGO **Wassu Gambia Kafo** (WGK), and without a doubt my answer was yes ... So, here I am ...

This last month of August in the Gambia, it has been a learning experience, a new perspective on what culture means, and how we can abandon female genital mutilation (FGM).

When I arrived, I thought that some issues would be complicated to address, but I was really welcomed with open arms by the young people of the community. This trip has made me see that there is still work to be done, but above all, that we have already initiated the great change of understanding and knowledge. These young women and men have shown me their confidence in themselves, that in their minds is the motivation to change and move towards something better, and that they want to get away from everything that harms them.

It is true that it is not easy to raise some issues, but for them it has been a pleasure to sit and talk, to feel that they finally have a place. Somehow, we let them know that their word is also important,

since the future is in their hands, the possibility of making changes and being able, finally, to abandon FGM.



I keep what they have shown and taught me: joy, positivity, desire to continue learning, fight to preserve and make visible the good aspects of their culture and traditions. Because culture for them is their day to day, they don't want it to be something that harms them, but rather, an engine that drives them to move forward, but never forgetting the teachings of those who have left behind.

Once again, I am in the Gambia, and I remember why the name *The Smiling Coast of Africa*. However hard it may be, no matter how complicated the issues, experiences and situations are presented, there is something they do not lose ... and it is their SMILE.