“Peace Through Leadership Training (PTLT)”

Ahmed Khadim Amar                                                                 June 7th - August 11th 2021
Bennington College                                                                    Touba, Senegal

Introduction:

I come from a high-density Senegalese township community called Darou Khoudoss which is located in the holy city of Touba, the second-largest city in Senegal. A typical day in this community starts with differently aged children rushing to their respective primary and secondary schools while the infants are accompanied to their day nursery schools (I was also among the adults who would wake up early to accompany an infant – my five-year-old sister, Yaye Die – to a nearby Quranic crèche). On the other hand, we have young girls and mothers scrambling to any nearby community to fetch water as there are general water shortages in our community. The few employed adults hurry to their workplaces with hopes to earn a living for the largely unemployed population that remains at home with hopes that, one day, they may find the light at the end of their lives’ tunnels.

I attended primary and middle school in that same township community where only 32 of the 56 students in my class were able to join high school and only 4 qualified to join Senegalese public universities. With a scholarship, I was able to attend the African Leadership Academy in South Africa. At this institution, I came to realize that most of the young people in my community are failing to continue their education because parents continue to believe that educational institutions have a tendency of changing people’s minds and beliefs about Islam. The result is that many young people with very limited education drop out of the system in Touba. This has been the trend for more than a decade and might not be addressed in the near future.

Youths constrained with few options, due to lack of knowledge and a motivation to confront life’s vicissitudes, run away from the consequential social and economic discomforts. Therefore, witnessing such a life in a Senegalese society has unraveled to me a problem which, I believe, requires our attention; poverty has resulted in so many talented Senegalese youths receiving no or meager education, in turn thus retarding Senegal’s development.

My idea:

My idea is to provide a supporting foundation and network for this young population of unemployed Senegalese to enable them to start small-scale businesses from which they earn income, thus promoting peace through leadership training. The PTLT Project is about establishing an entrepreneurship learning camp that will start by promoting the uptake of small businesses among the youth of Touba and offering hands-on, one on one coaching from experienced business people. Training will be done in workshops at the camp. The project aims at being supportive by inclusion, in that participants, individually or in small groups and with support from the African Leadership Academy(ALA) alumni based in Dakar, will start their own ventures, and get continual field support from the alumni community in obtaining resources they need to grow their respective businesses. I have decided to focus on 25 students from the Sokhna Diarra Institute in Touba. This is an NGO that tries to train professionally high school dropout students so they can be useful to society later. This is a great initiative as these high school dropout students would have been limited with very few career options in the future,
however, I believe it is fundamental to teach these young people how to use the skills they already have. And based on my experience, a leadership training program would facilitate the emancipation of these young people in society.

**Timing:**

The Camp will run from 7th June 2021 to 11th August 2021 in Sokhna Diarra Center, in Darou Khoudoss, Touba, and will be organized into two phases that will run concurrently, for a total of 8 weeks. Most of the sessions will be held in the afternoons, about 4 times a week, and in the Wolof language since it is the most common form of communication among the participants. I have already contacted the Sokhna Diarra Institute and we have partnered for the camp to take place in their institution this summer while taking some great Covid-19 precautions.

The first phase (first 4 weeks): training the participants on the BUILD (Believe, Understand, Invent, Learn, and Deliver) model. Also in this phase, there will be the establishment of teams who are passionate to start a business in the same field. The BUILD model will avail them basic entrepreneurial skills such as starting a business, maintaining the business, making sales, keeping accounts, profitability, and savings. These classes will be taught by the ALA alumni who are experienced in running leadership camps in Senegal.

The second phase (from week 5): at this point in time, I expect that the participants will have applicable knowledgebase and understand the BUILD model, and they will start their small business projects based on the BUILD curriculum. During this period, mentors from ALA will facilitate field support by inviting different business owners to give feedback and recommendation on the progress of the participants’ projects. Most of the time will be invested in participants’ projects in the field, with providing necessary business implements. Meeting sessions will be reduced to three per week where we will discuss our observations, challenges, and provide recommendations on the next steps. In addition, participants will receive extensive help in setting up savings accounts, preferably on the popular mobile money platform, Orange Money as it would be the most convenient. With enough information, the participants will be able to manage their different small businesses and be eligible to apply for funding from local governments to expand their businesses.

**Conclusion:**

I hope that at the end of the project, the participants will be equipped to use their skills to establish and maintain small businesses and be in a position to tap into the resources that the local government and the greater government of Senegal are availing to such enterprises that promote peace through self-employment. Hopefully, beyond the scope of the project, a few of the trained participants will receive further training to train more youths, thus ensuring that the project will be sustainable. If successful, the project will morph into a community-based NGO at the end of its scope to continue offering support to new and existing youth enterprises. If the project takes root, I plan to invest more time and invite more volunteers and sponsors to keep the project running, especially alumni from ALA and existing NGOs in Senegal.