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Qatar- GU-Q student drives the change she imagined

(MENAFN - Gulf Times) Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q) student Aleesha Suleman used to get upset, as a kid growing up in Kenya, watching television and the terrible events unfolding on the news.

Over time, and through a focus on global responsibility as a student at the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, she learned the term for what she cared about: social justice.

A Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service degree would soon lead Aleesha to a career path that combines a passion for music and the arts, and a dedication to making the world a better place.

It all began when a high school friend returned to Kenya for the summer with stories of studying interior design at Qatar

Foundation.

With an interest in a top-notch international affairs programme, Aleesha applied and was accepted at GU-Q.

The trek across continents brought her to a place that felt a lot like home.

'Both Aga Khan Academy and Georgetown share many of the same universal values, like pluralism and justice. Both challenged me to be inquisitive, principled, caring, and prepared for a life of service, she says.

As a Culture and Politics (CULP) major at GU-Q, she studied the complex relationship between culture and human development, gained analytical tools to practice problem-solving and critical analysis, and took part in activities and community engagement trips that put her in touch with some of the communities and global issues she studied in the classroom.

'What really resonated with me, she said, 'was learning how culture can empower ordinary people to be agents of change.

Back home in Kenya after graduating in 2016, a two-year fellowship at her high school alma mater put her newfound skills to good use and allowed her to gain new ones, like photography, videography, branding, and graphic design.

Inspired by the energy of young students and in trying to find her own path, she began working with activists and creative people in Nairobi's vibrant art space through a communications internship with PAWA254, a non-profit initiative that fosters creative projects for social change, then returned to Mombasa to start a local avenue for artists to network and showcase their work.

Aleesha had been working on similar projects even while she was at GU-Q, but felt that she needed to start something within her community since 'everyone

thinks you have to go to the capital to have access to life-changing opportunities, especially in the creative field.

Aleesha, herself a dedicated musician and writer, was now equipped with the hands-on skills of working in the field of communications in different sectors.

She took on the challenges of running the social media channels for the socially-conscious Norwegian urban dancing group, Quick Style, as well as planning out future projects related to community engagement through dance.

'I started thinking, I want to work more closely with these types of artists — they are trying to impact their communities and the world, bringing people together through art.

With the suggestion of Anne Nebel, the associate dean for Teaching, Learning and Assessment at GU-Q, Aleesha applied to

UCL Qatar to pursue an MA in Museum and Gallery Practice.

Dr Phoebe Musandu, associate professor of history at GU-Q, also threw in her support, along with a glowing letter of recommendation for application to the programme.

Aleesha returned to Doha, and today, is finishing her graduate degree, with plans to work in the museum and cultural heritage field in Doha before returning to Mombasa to continue the work she started, supporting local creatives.

'Because of CULP, I don't just think of art as passive, but as diplomacy, as soft power. I found myself wondering: How can art be used in communities to move away from conflict? How can cultural production become a path to political empowerment? How can we make art spaces accessible to all of society?

The path forward, she says, is now clear.'I can see all those connections and I'm working to relate it back to what I want to contribute to the world and to the communities I belong to. And that process to me is really exciting.

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