



## Salikenni Scholarship Fund Annual Report December 2025

In the 1990's, Don May was a freelance journalist focused on economic development in Africa. Working with the World Bank, he took a trip to The Gambia, a poor country in West Africa, which had adopted the Bank's policies for economic reform. Following a lead from an American aid worker, Don rented a Jeep and traveled from the capital city of Banjul to the remote village of Salikenni. This was the first of several visits, and on a subsequent trip, while taking an early morning walk, a young girl joined him and asked: "Can you pay my school fees?"

At the time, families had to pay for the privilege of attending public school, and children were dropping out when families couldn't afford it. Many of the students never got beyond a primary school education. When Don returned from this trip, he and Alison May discussed his experience and the Salikenni Scholarship Fund (SSF) was formed. The first group of scholarship students started in the fall of 1996.

This coming year marks our thirtieth year of supporting the academic efforts of worthy students in the region. What started as a program focused on middle-school children in the village of Salikenni has grown into a program that supports students from multiple villages through secondary school, college and professional and post-graduate programs with scholarships, tutoring, and room and board at a supervised campus. Not all our students have been successful, but we now have an alumni group that includes doctors, lawyers, nurses, journalists, bankers, accountants, engineers and economists. The program is now managed locally by a dedicated group of former SSF students led by Abdoulie Bah and Mustapha Ceesay.

None of these successes would have been possible without the generosity of your past support. We are very appreciative of this and once again ask you to help make a difference to these young, aspiring students so they can achieve their full potential. As you can see from this report, your donations go a very long way in The Gambia.

Please share this report with others who may be interested or would like to help. We welcome feedback on opportunities for enhancing the program's impact.



*The first SSF report*

## What We Do

The Salikenni Scholarship Fund (SSF), established in 1996, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing opportunity for education in the village of Salikenni and several nearby villages in the rural North Bank region of The Gambia in West Africa.

### We provide:

<i>Scholarships</i>	Starting in grade 7 at the government school in Salikenni and continuing through high school and four years of higher education in The Gambia.
<i>Tutoring</i>	For our students in the village and those attending high schools in the metropolitan area.
<i>Library</i>	At the Salikenni school, designed to promote a culture of reading, with many books by African authors. We pay the salary of the librarian.
<i>Housing</i>	We rent a large compound in Serrekunda in the metropolitan area because there is no high school in the village of Salikenni. Twenty-eight of our high school and university-level students live at this campus in a supervised environment, with regular meals and access to computers and tutoring.

<b>This year we supported:</b>	42 students in grades 7-9
	37 students in grades 10-12 *
	<u>26</u> students in university or other post-secondary programs *
	105 total

\* 28 of these students live and are supported in our urban campus

<b>Selection:</b>	Each year we aim to bring into the program an equal number of girls and boys, in grade 7 in Salikenni. We select them based on financial need and academic ability.
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<b>Management:</b>	With oversight by the administrators, SSF is managed within The Gambia by a volunteer board comprised entirely of our higher education students and alumni, all of whom have been educated under the program.
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<b>U.S. Manager:</b>	Dave May	<b>Administrators:</b>
		Anne May Hart, treasurer
<b>Manager in The Gambia:</b>	Abdoulie Bah	Libby May
<b>Assistant Manager in The Gambia:</b>	Mustapha Ceesay	Steve May
		Don May, founder

*The program is financed through contributions from individuals.*

*Salikenni Scholarship Fund is a 501(c)(3) organization.*

*Contributions to it are tax deductible to the maximum extent allowed by law.*

For more information, please visit our website: [www.salikenni.org](http://www.salikenni.org)

## Full Circle: From Salikenni to Google Chicago and Back

By Ebrima Marong, Hardware Engineer, Google

Every year, I take a moment to reflect on the people and the program that lifted me up during my journey. Today, as I work as a Hardware Engineer at Google in the United States, solving complex technical problems, I am acutely aware that the foundation of my career was built miles away: in the classrooms of Salikenni Basic Cycle School and the dormitories of the SSF campus in Serrekunda.

I returned to The Gambia earlier this year in May, not just to visit family, but to reconnect with the program that shaped me. Walking through the Salikenni school grounds and visiting the campus—where I lived during high school from 2014 to 2017—was a powerful experience. It was a joy to see the new generation of students, but it was also a reality check. When I looked at them, I saw myself. I was once in that exact situation, navigating the challenges of rural education with limited resources but unlimited ambition. I am deeply grateful to SSF for standing beside us and supporting us during those pivotal years.

During my visit, I met with current students to discuss how we can bridge the gap between potential

and opportunity. We discussed practical steps, such as utilizing the new internet service provided by SSF for educational goals rather than social media. I specifically encouraged students to use the GABECE website to review examiner feedback, a crucial resource that will help them excel in their exams and successfully transition to high school.



I also spent time with the high school students at the campus to discuss their immediate needs. It is clear that SSF has come a long way; the standard of the program is rising, and students today have access to more resources than I did during my time, thanks to the continuous support of generous donors.

Witnessing the students' dedication firsthand inspired me to take immediate action. I am thrilled to give back with a \$1,200 donation this year to continue being part of the SSF donor family and help meet these essential needs.

However, financial support is just one part of the equation. My visit reinforced that presence and mentorship matter just as much. Whether it is advising students on exam preparation or simply listening to their needs regarding textbooks and food, staying connected is vital.

I am eternally grateful to the Salikenni Scholarship Fund for significantly supporting my journey and many others. It is a reminder to me—and hopefully to all of us—that when we succeed, we have a duty to reach back and help others up. It is a privilege to remain grateful and give back in any way we can to keep the circle of support ongoing.



From our 2014 report



## Former SSF Student Wins Awards

There were clues along the way that Mustapha Darboe was going somewhere. One was when a group of SSF high school students were asked to write essays about how they spent a major holiday. Most of the answers were bare bones: "I went home, greeted my family, took bath..." Mustapha wrote: "I wake up at 7:30 a.m., the brighter sky smiling in the east, the sky in its lovely look, blue like an ocean water, the air blowing sweeter than soul." We knew then that we had recruited a poet. He sent Don and Alison a letter in longhand: "My goal is seeing myself a world class journalist." At the end of high school he didn't go to the university but instead



*From our 2012 report*



took a series of college courses in journalism. He worked as an investigative reporter for several news organizations. In 2024 he founded the Republic, a Gambian online investigative news agency, of which he is editor-in-chief. This year on December 7 he won the Gambia Press Union's award for Journalist of the Year. He has won that annual award five times since 2019. The Republic itself won the top Press Union awards in these categories: agriculture, environment, taxation, business and finance, children's rights,

migrant rights, and investigative journalism. Earlier in 2025, The African Investigative Journalism Conference, based in Johannesburg, South Africa, chose a Republic article on alleged mishandling of the sale of assets of the former Gambian president Yahya Jammeh as the best investigative piece of the year in Africa.

## One, Two, Three!

On the night of July 24, 2025, Ebrima Jallow delivered a rare and joyful arrival at Farafenni General Hospital: three healthy baby boys, all born within seven minutes. The hospital announced the triplets arrival on its Facebook page the next day, congratulating the maternity team for the successful delivery.



Ebrima was head of the Maternity Unit at the time. "I was the only trained midwife on the ground," he explained later. "I was with two students and two auxiliary nurses." Since joining the unit in 2023, he has delivered "lots of babies," he said with a smile. "I am always delighted after successfully delivering a baby."

Ebrima joined SSF in

2008 in the seventh grade. He attended Gambia High School in Banjul and graduated from the University of The Gambia in 2018 with a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing and reproductive health.



*From our 2018 report*



## Creating Jobs for Young Gambians

Since graduating from the University of The Gambia in 2020, Buba Njie has worked as a human rights advocate, international civil servant, and entrepreneur. Each role reflects the deeply ingrained humanitarian values he strengthened during his years with SSF.

Buba grew up in a farming family in Salikenni village. SSF welcomed him into the program in grade 7 and supported his education through university, where he earned a bachelor's degree in political science.

His freshman year coincided with a historic transition. In December 2016, a coalition of political parties voted out long-time dictator Yahya Jammeh, ending 22 years of authoritarian rule. As The Gambia began its slow journey toward democracy, Buba immersed himself in the politics of the moment, volunteering with organizations advocating for civil rights, with a particular focus on the freedom to peacefully protest. His interest in civic participation led him to study Salikenni's specific political history. He discovered a "deep sense of political consciousness" in the village and learned of its key role in forming the United Democratic Party, the backbone of the 2016 coalition.

**Buba Njie, 22, is the son of a Salikenni farmer. Buba finished high school in 2013 and spent two years studying accounting at a business college. At the same time, he took a remedial course in his weak subject, math, re-sat the exam and qualified for the university, where he's studying political science. He strongly argues the case that education is a better choice than the dangerous "back way" to Europe. "If you finish your education in The Gambia, you can fly all over Europe," he says. "You can attend a conference. Going the back way is really pointless."**



*From our 2016 report*

In 2020, Buba and other SSF alumni organized a human rights workshop in Salikenni, where residents drafted the 27-point *Salikenni Declaration 2020*, echoing the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Its first recommendation called for "youth participation in decision-making on issues concerning human rights," alongside commitments to education, economic opportunity, access to health care, justice, freedom of expression and assembly, women's political participation, and environmental protection.

After university, Buba joined the International Organization for Migration as a communications assistant. There he witnessed the human cost of the "back way"—the dangerous journey many young Gambians take to Europe in the hope of finding jobs and sending money home to their families. He came to understand there were two forces driving this migration: the country's limited job prospects for youth and widespread disinformation that sold a "delusional heaven-like picture" of life abroad. "Most of the young people I talked to throughout Europe felt that it was not their dreamland," he observed. This reinforced a conviction formed during his earlier work: "Youth empowerment is the only way out." He came to see it as imperative for the future stability of the young democracy to address the "needs, interests, and vulnerabilities that forc[e] young people to migrate."

In April 2024, Buba set out to do just that, launching the motorcycle delivery service, Taf Taf Delivery. In just its first four days, the company received 62 job applications—a stark indicator of youth unemployment. Buba was able to hire 14 employees to start. At the same time, he has worked

*(continued)*

to expand two other entrepreneurial ventures, BoblingBrand, which imports textiles from Austria and employs young Gambians to produce clothing, and BSN Services, a procurement company serving government offices, private institutions, and businesses.

All three companies have grown successfully. Buba prioritizes social media marketing, reaching clients worldwide, and now operates under an umbrella he calls BoblingGroup, with plans to open his first international office in Dubai. "What inspired me to set up my delivery service company is to help create employment opportunities, reduce poverty, and improve the standard of living of young people in The Gambia," Buba explained.



Despite this success, Buba describes the challenges young entrepreneurs face: high-interest bank loans, limited access to capital, and insufficient support for small businesses. "The government should prioritize grants and soft loans for youth," he said. "Starting and maintaining a mid-size business in The Gambia can be challenging."

Buba has reported high-level interest in his work. "I had a sit-down with the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Communications," he wrote. "They're buying and using my products." He added that he hopes to meet with the president to discuss youth entrepreneurship and job creation.

Buba's entrepreneurial spirit is rooted in, and driven by, a determination to improve life in The Gambia for the next generation. For SSF, his story reflects the transformative impact of investing deeply in young leaders. For the country, it offers a vision of what youth-led, sustainable, and self-driven development can look like.

## Campus Update

When our scholarship students finish ninth grade at the Salikenni School, they must move to the Kombos (city) to attend one of several high schools. While only 50 or so kilometers away, it's a day's journey. Typically, students will live with relatives or friends, in what are often less than ideal situations.

Since 2013, SSF has leased a compound in Serrekunda, a suburb of the capital city of Banjul, to serve as a "campus" for some of our students attending area secondary schools and universities. The campus provides a safe living area, meals, and a conducive environment for learning.



Our local team is now in the process of evaluating options for a new campus, as we have outgrown the current compound, and it is in need of necessary repairs. They have applied to the Ministry of Lands and Local Government for an allocation of land and are currently working through the process.

As noted on our financial page, earlier this year we received a generous donation earmarked for the campus project. We look forward to providing updates in the future.

## Meet our new students

Each year we select girls and boys to join our program in seventh grade at the Salikenni school. We select them by two criteria: financial need and academic ability.

This year 14 students were admitted, eight girls and six boys. We recently asked them about their favorite and least favorite subjects and what they thought they would like to be when they grew up. English was overwhelmingly their favorite subject. Home Economics the least popular. Like many American children we know, they want to be teachers, nurses, doctors and soldiers.

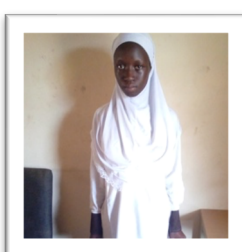
We look forward to sharing their progress with you over the coming years.



*Musa Dibba*



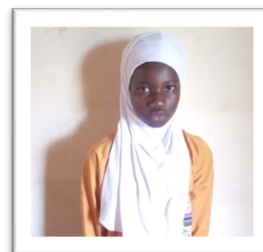
*Ebrima Sabally*



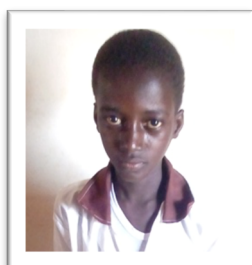
*Aja Binta Kassama*



*Binta Hydera*



*Fatima Touray*



*Ousman Bah*



*Jankey Samateh*



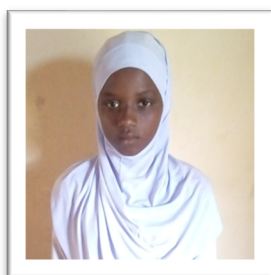
*Isatou Susso*



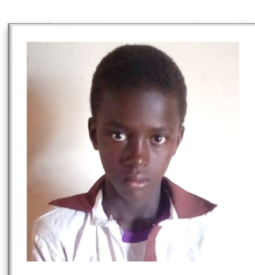
*Sulayman Bah*



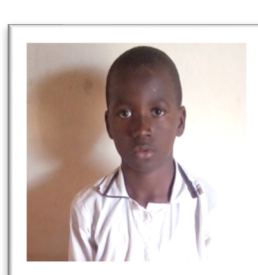
*Bakary Keita*



*Sarjo Bah*



*Omar Bah*



*Sanna Dibba*



*Mariama Trawalleh*

### **Courses of study being pursued by this year's university and other post-secondary students**

Accounting – 6 students  
Banking – 1  
Business – 3

Civil Engineering – 1  
Development Studies – 4  
Economic – 3

Information Technology – 2  
International Relations – 1  
Political Science – 1



# The Salikenni Scholarship Fund

## Financial Statement November 1, 2024 through October 31, 2025

Cash available November 1, 2024	\$52,069
<b>Income</b>	
Contributions	59,551
Earmarked Campus Project Donation	15,000
Interest	80
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$74,631</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Tuition – high school and university <sup>1</sup>	\$11,820
Tutoring <sup>2</sup>	1,635
Gambian salaries <sup>3</sup>	2,425
Gambian campus expenses <sup>4</sup>	15,016
Gambian computer expenses <sup>5</sup>	409
Website hosting	29
Bank, Square® and wiring fees	737
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$32,071</b>
Currency accounting adjustment <sup>6</sup>	920
Cash available October 31, 2025	<b>\$93,709</b>

*Please note that the costs of production and mailing of this annual report are paid by the administrators personally and are not by the Salikenni Scholarship Fund.*

<sup>1</sup> Includes tuition, books, exam fees for students in Salikenni and the metropolitan campus

<sup>2</sup> Tutoring in Salikenni; weekend classes on metropolitan campus

<sup>3</sup> Salaries for Gambian employees: manager, assistant manager, librarian, and campus cook

<sup>4</sup> Includes annual housing rent, electricity, food, fares, and supplies for 28 students in the metropolitan campus

<sup>5</sup> Internet connection charges

<sup>6</sup> Actual Gambian expenditures are converted from dalasis to dollars at the end of the fiscal year for the purposes of this report. Due to the continued increase in the strength of the dollar relative to the dalasi (more than a 2.4% increase this year), Gambian expenditures are understated when expressed in US dollars. This is corrected with a currency accounting adjustment.

### CONTACT US:

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Libby May	libbymay@gmail.com	310-800-5862

**We are grateful to our past supporters and welcome new ones!**  
**Your support will make it possible for SSF to continue giving financial aid to our students.**

The Salikenni Scholarship Fund is a 501(c)3 organization.  
All contributions are tax deductible to the maximum extent allowed by law.  
The Tax ID number is 03-035-3911.

DONATE ON-LINE at

[www.salikenni.org](http://www.salikenni.org)

or BY CHECK payable to

**Salikenni Scholarship Fund**  
**c/o Anne May Hart**  
**7772 Waterview Lane**  
**Chestertown, MD 21620**