



Salikenni Scholarship Fund Annual Report November 2023

“Giving back” is a time-honored tradition among alumni in developed countries and a fundamental element in maintaining the financial viability of educational institutions across the world. This tradition also exists in a small village in West Africa, and thanks to the dedication and commitment of a group of individuals, it is getting stronger.

When Don and Alison May started the Salikenni Scholarship Fund (SSF) in 1996 they had a simple goal: to improve access to education for young people in the Salikenni region of The Gambia. Since then, starting in grade 7, hundreds of students from Salikenni and the nearby villages of Dobo, Mandori, and Bani have benefitted from SSF. Some have made it just a few years before family demands have drawn them back to the farm, the majority have moved on to secondary school. Twenty-five of our older students currently live in SSF’s campus in Serrekunda, a suburb of Banjul, the Gambian capital, and a growing number are pursuing studies beyond secondary school.

In this year’s report we highlight the different ways that SSF alumni are giving back to the program they credit as fundamental to their educational and professional successes. Some are able to provide financial support, some are focused on operational and other areas of support. We are thrilled to see the success these alumni have achieved and we are humbled and inspired by their efforts to give back.

We look forward to seeing our alumni ranks grow: in addition to the 25 students currently studying at university and other post-secondary programs, there is a rising cohort of equally impressive girls and boys working through the challenges of balancing school and family obligations. With the support of SSF, they receive special tutoring in their core courses and, as they move from the lower school in Salikenni to secondary schools in the Kombos (the city), a safe environment in our Serrekunda campus, where they have access to more tutors, more reliable internet, and meals. All of this is overseen by our local management team comprised 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. 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.

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-five 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.

This year we supported:	30 students in grades 7-9
	32 students in grades 10-12 *
	24 students in university or other post-secondary programs *
	<hr/> 86 total

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

Selection: Each year we bring into the program an equal number of girls and boys, in in grade 7 in Salikenni. We select them based on financial need and academic ability.

Management: 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.

U.S. Manager:	Dave May	Administrators:
		Anne May Hart, treasurer
Manager in The Gambia:	Abdoulie Bah	Libby May
Assistant Manager in The Gambia:	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

A Retrospective

by Don May, Founder, Salikenni Scholarship Fund

I will never forget the day in 2010 when Abdoulie Bah invited me for a meal in his one-room house in the village of Dobo in a rural area of The Gambia in West Africa.

The house was round, built of reddish-brown mud bricks, with a conical thatched roof — a traditional style of the Fula tribe that one seldom sees anymore. Inside there was room only for a bed, a small table and a few plastic chairs. The dirt floor had been swept smooth. This was Abdoulie's own house within his family's compound. Most of the family lived in a much larger rectangular building.



*Abdoulie in the Salikenni
schoolyard, 2010*

Abdoulie was then a student sponsored by the Salikenni Scholarship Fund. He had just finished high school in the urban area and, in a few months, would enter the University of The Gambia. Meanwhile, he was helping his family with their farming and, as a volunteer, was tutoring some of SSF's younger students in mathematics.

These tutoring classes took place weekday nights in the library that SSF maintains at the government school in Salikenni, the largest among a cluster of villages whose students we serve. During one class that I attended, under the dim light of energy-saving bulbs, Abdoulie demonstrated on the blackboard, with a piece of string and a stub of chalk, how to work with angles. Another senior student, Mariama Ceesay (see page 6) then tutored the same class in English.

One morning I and Wuyeh Keita, another SSF student, (see page 6) walked from Salikenni to Dobo, about five miles on a dirt road. The three of us sat around Abdoulie's table. Solemnly and with obvious pride, Abdoulie placed a large plastic bowl in front of us. He poured milk and ground millet into the bowl and mixed them. We ate directly from the bowl with large plastic spoons. There are many Fula families in Dobo. Traditionally they are cattle raisers and farmers. Milk and millet is one of their staple meals. We talked and laughed. What I remember most about the day is that these Gambians were sharing their culture with me.

Fast forward to October 2023. Abdoulie came to spend a weekend with my wife Ann and me at our retirement home in Hanover NH and we welcomed him to our table.

Between these two meals, Abdoulie has passed many milestones: He's the manager of SSF in The Gambia, a job he has held since January 2020. He's a graduate of the University of The Gambia in accounting. His primary job is with the Gambian Ministry of Finance as an auditor.

A Retrospective *continued*

Recently he has been on leave from both jobs. In July 2023 he completed a master's degree in financial markets at a business college in Brussels. He's now working on a second master's, in financial analytics, at American University in Washington DC, after which he will return to The Gambia. He's married to Kaddijatou Bah, from Dobo. Their daughter, Fatima Zahra, was born in January 2022.

Abdoulie's visit to us was one of personal thanks. But he also brought news that could be important to the future of SSF. He told us that he and a group of SSF graduates, most of them working or studying outside the country, had met recently on Zoom to discuss how they might support and provide leadership to improve our program in some areas. As a top priority, they proposed that they themselves raise money to build a new campus for SSF's high school students. Abdoulie envisioned a five-year capital project to accomplish this. The most likely location would be somewhere out in the countryside where land would be affordable. Some form of private transportation might be needed.



Abdoulie, 2023

Most of our students enter our scholarship program when they are in grade seven at the Salikenni school. For high school they must move to the urban area. In SSF's early years our high school students usually lived with relatives who had migrated in search of urban jobs. In many cases the living conditions were not conducive to learning.

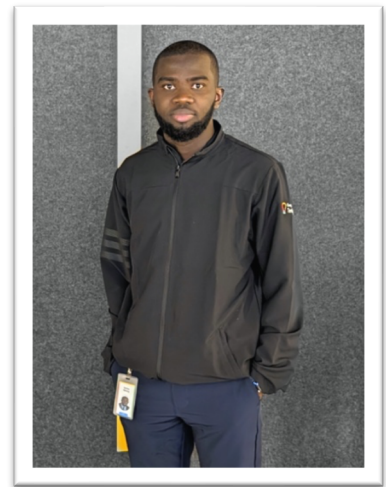
Our existing campus was opened in 2013. It's a large compound in a low-income neighborhood on the edge of the metropolitan area. Just about everyone agrees it is inadequate. About 25 people live there — mostly high school boys and girls plus a few university students who act as mentors. The students sleep two to a bed. There are not enough toilets or water taps. Because we rent the compound but do not own it, it would be unwise for us to put money into structural improvements. The group of former students planned to meet again on Zoom in January 2024.

This initiative involves more than a campus. SSF has always believed that the more Gambians themselves participate in its management the better. It's even possible that someday it might be an entirely Gambian run program. The following pages show that we are turning out graduates well qualified and motivated to accomplish this.

continued

Some of those who attended the Zoom meeting

Ebrima Marong already is giving back to SSF in a major way. He joined our program in grade seven. After high school he wanted to study engineering. But there was no engineering school in The Gambia. SSF sponsored him — with help from personal donations — to earn a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering at Minnesota State University in Mankato, MN. The university then gave him a scholarship to get a master's degree in that subject. Ebrima now works for Google in Chicago. Google has a policy of matching employee charitable contributions, which he used to make a generous contribution to SSF. As a volunteer he has taken charge of an SSF project to provide the Salikenni school with full Internet service.



Amadou Ceesay is a passionate advocate for human rights. We sponsored him through a bachelor's degree in political science at the University of The Gambia. He's now in Magdeburg, Germany in a two-year master's program on peace and conflict resolution. He is focusing his studies on the causes of conflict in African countries and transitions to democracy.

Omar Jallow is devoted to improving health in poor countries. SSF sponsored him through the four-year nursing school at the University of The Gambia. He worked as a nurse in a Gambian hospital during the worst years of the Covid pandemic. He has since completed a two-year master's program in global health at Gothenburg University in Sweden.



Ousman Jarju was SSF's manager in The Gambia from 2012 through 2019. We sponsored him through an accounting diploma at MDI, a Gambian business and technology school. He was employed by the Gambian government as an accountant. He studied on the side and got an accounting degree at the Gambian university. He's now the finance attaché at the Gambian embassy in London.

Note: As a matter of policy SSF does not finance master's degrees in the United States or Europe. We prefer to save our money for younger students within The Gambia. The master's programs in this report were financed either by personal donations or university scholarships.

What other former students are doing now

Mariama Ceesay is a doctor, specializing in obstetrics and gynecology at the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital in Banjul. SSF sponsored her education during her last two years of high school and first year in medical school. She then got a government scholarship to complete her medical training. She lives in the suburbs of Banjul with her husband, Abubacar Sanneh, an entrepreneur, and their two children.



Wuyeh Keita graduated from the University of The Gambia's seven-year medical school in 2022. He's now in the second half of a two-year internship at the hospital in which Mariama Ceesay works. His schedule is grueling. But in what spare time he can find he is studying to take the U.S. Medical Licensing Examination in Ghana which would make him eligible to apply for residency training in the United States, after which he would return to The Gambia. "The Gambia needs more doctors," he told us. "But it needs doctors with very good training."

Buba Njie earned a bachelor's degree in political science at the University of The Gambia in 2020. Even before that he was an ardent advocate for human rights, working and writing for several Gambian rights organizations. This led to a job in public relations with the Gambian office of the International Organization for Migration. In that job he gained an insight into the migration of young Gambians across the Sahara and the Mediterranean seeking employment in Europe, a journey on which many have lost their lives.



"For me the reasons for irregular migration are twofold," he told us in an interview: "Economic hardship which blocks the opportunities of young people and disinformation, the delusional heaven-like picture that is sold to young Africans by their own brothers in Europe and in movies." The remedies are complicated, he said, but must include quality jobs for young men and women as a major core of any development plan.

Buba now has left that job and struck out on his own. He's working as a private consultant helping Gambian agencies and businesses design their public relations programs.

Ba Alagie Conteh is in China studying global development and governance in a two-year, all-expenses-paid master's degree program at the China Agricultural University in Beijing. He left The Gambia in September just as he was about to become a lawyer in The Gambia. SSF sponsored him from grade 7 through the University of The Gambia, where he studied law, and then through Gambia Law School, after which he passed the bar exam. When he completes his master's program, he plans to return to The Gambia and the law.





SSF university women persevere

Jainaba S. Bah is the first of our students to major in environmental science at the University of The Gambia. Her husband, Omar Jallow (see page 5), has completed a master's degree in global health in Sweden. Both fields are highly relevant to The Gambia, a country vulnerable to climate change and with major challenges in public health.

Jainaba has completed all requirements for a Bachelor of Science degree and will formally graduate in early 2024 when the university holds its next convocation. It wasn't easy. The university was severely disrupted by the Covid pandemic during her four years there. Classes were held online but many students had trouble connecting. When in-person classes resumed class sizes were reduced as a precaution against contagion, and some students could not sign up for the courses they needed. As a result, some students are graduating late.

On top of that the couple's son was born as Jainaba was working on her senior project paper. The paper, a study of recent flooding in parts of The Gambia, was delayed, but she finished it. She recently began a one-year internship at the Gambian Ministry of Environment.

Kasamanding Kanteh also has persisted through Covid delays, marriage and recent motherhood. She has told us she now has completed all work on her degree in economics and will formally graduate in 2024.

Two other SSF women, **Nyima Njie** and **Mariama Trawalley**, classmates of Kasamanding, each were unable to complete several courses. They are enrolled in these courses this semester, and both say they are determined to graduate.

Jainaba Faye thought she had completed all requirements for her degree in accounting in 2021. But it turned out that one lecturer had not registered her grades in one course into the university's digital system. The lecturer had temporarily left the country. So Jainaba was unable to graduate in 2022. Happily, the lecturer returned and allowed her to retake the exams for that course. She passed them and now is eligible for her cap and gown.

At top, from left: Jainaba S. Bah, Kasamanding Kanteh, Nyima Njie, Mariama Trawalley, Jainaba Faye

Meet our new students

Each year we select an equal number of 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: seven girls – Fatoumata M. Ceesay, Haffsatou Bah, Fatou Marenah, Fatou Jammeh, Kaddy Bah, Fatou K. Ceesay, and Isatou L. Dibba; and seven boys – Bubaccarr Fofana, Lamin Danso, Muhammed Ceesay, Ebrima Ceesay, Yankuba Sanyang, Sheriff Daffeh, Amadou Dibba.

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



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

Accounting and Banking – 8 students
Economics – 2
Medicine – 1

Business – 10
Engineering – 2
Political Science – 1

Computer Upgrades in Salikenni

Recent discussions with the principal of the government school in Salikenni, where most of our students enter our scholarship program, revealed a critical need for upgrades to the school's computer technology. The school's computer lab had an array of computers, provided by another donor. But the students could not use them to connect to the internet for individual research. Internet Technology classes provided by the school consisted mainly of learning how to operate a keyboard.

SSF graduate Ebrima Marong (see page 5), who now works for Google in the United States, stepped in as a volunteer, did some research, and came up with a detailed plan for SSF to provide the needed internet connection. At this writing, SSF was in negotiations with a local service provider for a contract. SSF also has purchased a combination printer/scanner for the computer lab.

While public education in The Gambia is now supported by the government through grade 12, there are additional costs and fees, which often are beyond the means of many students and families. In addition to covering these expenses, SSF provides tutoring and other support to students starting in grade 7. For secondary school students we rent a compound in Serrekunda, an urban setting near many of their schools. Our "campus" provides a safe, supervised facility where students who cannot afford accommodations can live in an environment conducive to learning. Students at the campus have regular meals, internet access, and receive tutoring and other support, all provided by SSF.

Post-secondary education is not subsidized by the government. This means that as we achieve our goal of enrolling more students into the university and colleges in the country our costs increase.

Your support goes a long way and is more appreciated than ever:

\$75 pays one month of our Salikenni librarian's salary.

\$100 pays three months' salary for one of our many tutors.

\$500 pays the annual room, board, and supplies for one student on our campus.

\$1,000 covers the tuition for one semester at the University of The Gambia.

In Memoriam

It is with heavy hearts that we announce the passing of SSF student Habibou Dibba, who was killed in a car accident on his way to work as a part-time carpenter in a provincial area in The Gambia.



SSF Manager Abdoulie Bah wrote that "Habibou was a young man filled with dreams, aspirations, and an unwavering commitment to his education and future. Despite facing some challenges that temporarily took him out of the SSF program, his determination and hard work shone brightly. He successfully regained his position and showed remarkable resilience by scoring five credits in his recent West African Senior School Certificate Examination. His success was a testament to his academic abilities but also to his unyielding spirit and unwavering dedication to his education."

The Salikenni Scholarship Fund
Financial Statement
November 1, 2022 through October 31, 2023

Cash available November 1, 2022	\$23,767
Income	
Contributions	45,320
Interest	354
Total Income	\$45,674
Expenses	
Tuition – high school and university ¹	\$19,708
Tutoring ²	2,675
Gambian salaries ³	2,474
Gambian campus expenses ⁴	11,285
Gambian computer expenses ⁵	480
Bank, Square® and wiring fees	622
Total Expenses	\$38,535
Currency accounting adjustment ⁶	1,291
Cash available October 31, 2023	\$30,906

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

¹ Includes tuition, books, exam fees for students in Salikenni and the metropolitan campus

² Tutoring in Salikenni; weekend classes on metropolitan campus

³ Salaries for Gambian employees: manager, assistant manager, librarian, and campus cook

⁴ Includes annual housing rent, electricity, food, fares, and supplies for 25 students in the metropolitan campus

⁵ Internet connection charges

⁶ Actual Gambian expenditures are converted from dalasis to dollars at the end of the fiscal year for the purposes of this report. Due to this year's unusually large increase in the strength of the dollar relative to the dalasi (more than a 10% increase), Gambian expenditures are understated when expressed in US dollars. This is corrected with a currency accounting adjustment.

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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

or BY CHECK payable to

**Salikenni Scholarship Fund
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7772 Waterview Lane
Chestertown, MD 21620**