



Salikenni Scholarship Fund Annual Report December 2020

Zoom meetings, virtual classes, and hybrid learning. Sound familiar? Welcome to The Gambia, one of 217 countries affected by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Like those in our own communities, schools across The Gambia shut down in the spring of 2020, while educators, administrators, and parents struggled to meet basic academic requirements to keep students from falling too far behind. Despite significant challenges—most notably, a lack of access to computers, reliable internet service, and suitable study environments—the hunger for education remains strong and propels the Salikenni Scholarship Fund (SSF) students forward.

When Don and Alison May started the Salikenni Scholarship Fund in 1996 they had a simple goal: to improve access to education for young people in the Salikenni region of The Gambia, in West Africa.

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, but the majority have moved on to secondary school. Twenty-four of our older students live in SSF's campus in Serrekunda, a suburb of Banjul, the Gambian capital, and a growing number are pursuing studies beyond secondary school.

This year, our local SSF management team, led by Abdoulie Bah, was forced to adjust to meet the restrictions resulting from the pandemic. Our older students formed study groups and served as tutors for the lower grades. They experimented with learning applications to find different ways to meet our students' needs. The team felt strongly that we keep the campus open because it seemed safer to keep students in this "bubble" rather than send them home and risk introducing the virus to remote villages, as well as losing the academic benefits the campus provides. We agreed and worked with the team to improve their internet access to better accommodate remote learning.



The team's hard work and dedication paid off, as the recent grade 9 results on a countrywide exam used to determine who goes on to secondary school were among the best of the last several years.

In the past, we've used our report to share the stories of students currently in the program, highlighting their backgrounds and goals. This year, we focus on some of our alumni and the impact they are having on their communities and society. When they joined our program as young girls and boys, they had dreams very similar to our current students. That those dreams became reality is an inspiration. We couldn't be prouder of them!

We are very appreciative of your past support, 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 in helping. We welcome feedback on opportunities for enhancing the program's impact.

Mariama Ceesay is a doctor working in the obstetrics and gynecology department of the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital, a major medical center in Banjul, the capital city of The Gambia.

She was the first SSF student to be accepted into the medical school of the University of The Gambia. She graduated in 2019. She and her husband, Abubacar Sanneh, an entrepreneur, live in the suburbs of Banjul with their two young children.



Mariama (*shown here in 2010*) came into our program in 2008, when she was in grade 11 in an urban area high school. Our then-manager, Fatou Janneh, recommended her as a promising student in need of financial assistance, who might also be a role model for our younger girls. SSF sponsored her in grades 11 and 12 and through her first year in the 7-year medical school. She received a government grant for the rest of her medical training.

Though her time under SSF scholarship was brief, she has been an enthusiastic supporter of the program. She was a member of the original board, composed of SSF senior students, which was formed in 2015 to manage the program day-to-day within The Gambia. She was one of two board members responsible for girls' education. In that capacity she traveled to Salikenni to tutor our students there in reading.

Mariama's first child was born while she was enrolled in the university. She apparently managed these responsibilities easily. "I put the baby on my lap, and my laptop beside me," she told us.

Mustapha K Darboe, a former SSF student, was named Journalist of the Year 2020 by the Gambian Press Union. He also won the group's awards in five separate categories of reporting: environment, human rights, legal affairs, investigative/features, and COVID-19. SSF sponsored Mustapha from grade 7 through a graduate diploma in journalism at Stratford College in The Gambia. He writes for Malagen and JusticeInfo.net, both online news agencies, and other news organizations. He is the author of *Playbook of a Tyrant*, a novel based on the autocratic rule of the country's former president, Yahya Jammeh.



Asked what advice he would give to a young person contemplating a career in journalism, he replied: "I think the greatest asset any journalist has is the passion to defend the truth, the passion to hold the powerful to account and protect your society. As a journalist, one is a sworn defender of the republic and you embody such values."

On the Front Lines of the Pandemic

The Gambia confirmed its first COVID-19 case on March 16, 2020. Numbers of new cases remained low for several months, then spiked in July and August, but since then have declined. It's not known whether this recent improvement will last, given the reluctance of most Gambians to wear masks and socially distance themselves.

Two recent SSF graduates are working on the front lines in The Gambia's battle against the coronavirus pandemic. Omar Jallow and Ebrima Jallow both recently completed four-year Bachelor of Science degrees in nursing at the University of The Gambia and are now working in major hospitals in the country. Though they share the same surname, they grew up in different villages and are not related — except in their common passion to heal.

Omar Jallow (*below*) comes from Dobo, one of several small villages in the area SSF serves in the rural North Bank region of The Gambia. One of ten children, he grew up helping his parents look after sheep, goats and cattle. His parents were determined to educate as many of the children as they could afford.



SSF brought Omar into its scholarship program after his father enrolled him in grade 10 at the government high school in Farafenni, a mid-size rural town. His father could pay only part of his fee. It was not the school for someone with Omar's ability. The next year SSF enrolled him in grade 11 in the science program at Masroor Senior Secondary School in the metropolitan area. When he arrived for classes there, the vice principal at the time told him, "You will waste your father's money, but you won't pass." "Whenever I think of this statement, I am tempted to do more, just to prove him wrong," Omar said. "And I did prove him wrong. I had the second-best result."

To increase his study time, he slept at the school each night from Sunday through Friday. "I only slept in my house Saturdays." (This was before SSF opened its Serrekunda campus where our high school students receive lodging, meals and access to computers.)

Omar entered the university's nursing school in 2012, while continuing to work part time in a pharmacy and help his younger sisters with their school costs. He graduated in 2016 and became a nurse at the Bundung Maternal and Child Health Hospital, in the suburbs of Banjul. In June 2020 he became head of the outpatient department there.

Despite masks and face shields, Omar said, it was "unavoidable" to come in contact with patients while treating them. During the last week of July, Omar came down with a high fever, severe joint pain, loss of appetite and fatigue. He tested positive and went into isolation in a quarantine center. He has since recovered and is back at work.

"I never regret being a nurse because of the coronavirus," he said. "I am more determined to serve my patients than ever."

After working as a nurse through the most difficult phase of COVID-19's surge, **Ebrima Jallow** was granted annual leave and returned to his home village, Mandori.

On his first morning there he went out to the fields from 6 to 9 a.m. to help his four brothers harvest coos (millet) and transport it back to the village. Then he helped milk the cows. "I cannot sit at home and do nothing," he said. "It's part of me."

Mandori is another small village whose children attend the government school in Salikenni for at least part of their education, which makes them eligible for our scholarship program.



There, in 2008, in a family compound chock-full of relatives, running children, animals and farm equipment, Ebrima, then a slender boy of 16, was informed by SSF founder Don May that he had been selected for a scholarship and was asked what he wanted to become in life. He replied in a confident voice, "I want to be a doctor."

That ambition has never left him, but he has had to compromise. He was a good student through junior and senior secondary school. But, because of one low mark, he was not accepted into the University of the Gambia's seven-year medical school, and instead chose the university's four-year school of nursing. He graduated in 2018.

He was hired as a nurse at the General Hospital in Farafenni, alternating between the outpatient department and the emergency room. The hospital was severely understaffed even before the pandemic. There are not enough doctors, and nurses routinely make crucial medical decisions.

"The government is trying," Ebrima said in an interview. "The frontline workers are trying. But the people don't believe the virus exists in The Gambia. Many say it's something the government thought up as a way to get money from Western people. This makes it very difficult to control. In my village you don't see anyone put on a mask."

There may be a surprise ending to this story. Ebrima recently received formal admission to the medical school. It's not certain he can make it work. He will have to persuade the Ministry of Health to transfer him to a hospital in the urban area. Then he would continue working as a nurse to support his family, while studying to become a doctor.

"I know it will be hectic," he said. "But I can do it."

Human Rights Advocates

In past years our high school graduates have been interested mainly in medicine, nursing, and subjects such as economics, accounting and business. Now they are moving into the social sciences. Two SSF students recently completed all work on university degrees in two subjects that break new ground for our scholarship program — law and politics. Both now plan careers in the field of human rights.

Ba Alagie Conteh is the first of our students to complete the four-year law school at the University of The Gambia. He will apply for admission to the bar and plans to become a lawyer specializing in human rights law. He said The Gambia is a country with not enough legal experts but with continuing human rights problems ranging from police interference with freedom of assembly to cultural discrimination based on ancient traditions. "I will be able to help many people both nationally and internationally if their rights are violated," he said in an interview by text messages.



Buba Njie is the first SSF student to finish four years of study for a bachelor's degree in political science. He has been a vocal advocate for human rights in recent years. He already has started two jobs: one as political director for a media company, the other as a researcher and policy strategist for the Centre for Research and Policy Development, a Gambian think tank that is focusing on the country's transition to democracy.



We have to wonder, what fields of study will these young scholars pursue in their futures?



*Grade 10 students with SSF math tutor
Mr. Samuel Dawda Koidi*



Students in the Salikenni Library

Fatoumata M. Fatty has journeyed far — in ways both academic and geographic.

Fatoumata grew up in the village of Salikenni, living with her grandmother. Her parents had moved to the Banjul area to find work. Now she has earned a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree in Azerbaijan, an oil-rich country on the Caspian Sea, on the cusp between Europe and Asia.

Fatoumata joined SSF when she was in grade 7 at the government school in Salikenni. We sponsored her through middle and high school. With a Gambian government scholarship she completed a bachelor's degree in accountancy at the University of The Gambia in 2015.

She worked as an assistant accountant at the Gambian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Banjul. She was selected for a scholarship, funded by the government of Azerbaijan, at the Azerbaijan State University of Economics in Baku on the Caspian Sea. She formally received her MBA in September 2020.

Fatoumata said she was not affected by the war that was going on between Azerbaijan and Armenia because Baku was far from the combat. Her trip back to The Gambia was delayed because of COVID-19, but she was able to reach home on Nov. 8.

"I am very grateful for the efforts that SSF has provided for me because they set a foundation for my life and career," she said in a recent email.



Public education in The Gambia is now basically free through grade 12, although there are extra costs that we cover. Post-secondary education is not subsidized by the government. This means that as we achieve our goal to enroll more students into the university and colleges in the country our costs increase.

Your support now is more appreciated than ever.



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:

Scholarships Starting in grade 7 at the government school in Salikenni and continuing through high school and four years of higher education in The Gambia. Provided a scholarship for one student completing an undergraduate engineering degree at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Tutoring For our students in the village and those attending high schools in the metropolitan area.

Library At the Salikenni school, designed to promote a culture of reading, with many books by African authors. We pay the salary of the librarian.

Housing We rent a large compound in Serrekunda in the metropolitan area. Many of our high school students live at this SSF campus in a supervised environment, with regular meals and access to computers and tutoring.

This year we supported: 66 students in grades 7-12
26 students in university or other post-secondary programs
1 student studying outside The Gambia
93 total

24 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 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.

Administrators: Dave May, U.S. manager Anne May Hart, treasurer
Libby May, communications Steve May, administrator
Don May, founder

Manager in The Gambia: Abdoulie Bah

The program is financed through contributions from individuals.

Salikenni Scholarship Fund is a 501(c)(3) organization. Contributions to it are tax deductible.

For more information, please visit our website: www.salikenni.org

The Salikenni Scholarship Fund
Financial Statement
November 1, 2019 through October 31, 2020

Cash available November 1, 2019 **\$11,854**

Income

Contributions	41,114
Interest	8
Total Income	\$41,122

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

Expenses

Tuition – high school and university students in The Gambia ¹	\$9,945
Tuition and housing – university in US	12,390
Tutoring in The Gambia ²	1,615
Gambian salaries ³	2,800
Gambian campus expenses ⁴	11,083
Gambian computer expenses ⁵	494
Bank, PayPal and international wire fees	709
Website hosting	259
Loss due to currency conversion ⁶	1,192
Total Expenses	\$40,487

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 managers, librarian, and the campus cook

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

⁵ Internet connection charges

⁶ Actual Gambian expenditures are converted from dalasis to dollars for the purpose of this report. Due to the decline of the dalasi against the dollar, Gambian expenditures are understated when expressed in US dollars.

Assumes \$1 = 52 dalasis.

Cash available October 31, 2020 **\$12,489**

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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.
The Tax ID number is 03-035-3911.

DONATE ON-LINE at

www.salikenni.org

or BY CHECK payable to

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