



Salikenni Scholarship Fund Annual Report November 2021

Graduation is a special moment, celebrated lavishly in many developed and wealthy countries. In The Gambia, a small, poor, West African country, it is all the more special given the challenges students and their families face as they pursue their educational dreams.

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. Since then, starting in grade 7, hundreds of students from Salikenni and the nearby villages of Dobo, Mandori, and Banni 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. Thirty of our older students now 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 six SSF students are expected to graduate from the University of The Gambia in January. Others have earned various levels of certificates and diplomas from local colleges. Their achievements have come in a year when a global pandemic disrupted education around the world. The university was locked down, and then online, students struggled with Internet outages and the cost of gigabyte packages, and the most recent semester was cut short.

In these pages are the stories of some of them. What brings them to this stage is inspiring, and we can only imagine the impact they will have in the future. We look forward to seeing them in caps and gowns!

Coming up behind these graduates are equally impressive groups of 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 a safe environment at our secondary school campus in the Kombos (the city), where they have access to more tutors, more reliable Internet, and regular meals.

Our local management team, composed entirely of former SSF students, oversees all of this. Earlier this year, Abdoulie Bah, the team's leader, described this as "the year of the girls," all of whom—for the first time in SSF history—passed the high school entrance exams. Abdoulie noted that there was a particular interest in science this year among the girls embarking on their secondary school education.

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 or would like to help. We welcome feedback on opportunities for enhancing the program's impact.

Human rights are not foreign to Africa

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

Those words from Article 1 of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights have been quoted in school books and carved in stone around the world. To Ba Alagie Conteh they are a professional calling.

Ba Alagie is the first SSF student to choose a career in law. He joined our program in grade 7 at



the government school in Salikenni, attended high school in the metropolitan area, and last year graduated from the University of The Gambia with a bachelor's degree in law. This year he completed—and passed—the bar course at Gambia Law School. He is now applying for a pupillage, to work under a veteran lawyer, before being allowed to practice.

At the university he read other words that impressed him: Martin Luther King Jr — "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." He read Malcom X and Nelson Mandela and others who he said were "so eloquent and passionately devoted to what they believed to be right."

All of this convinced him that human rights would be a major focus of his work as a lawyer. And there was another reason.

Ba Alagie attended primary school in Banni, a small village just off the paved highway at the junction with the dirt road to Salikenni. In a text interview with SSF he said there was and is in Banni a caste system in which some people were called "noble" and others "slaves." "Groups termed as slaves were downgraded, marginalized and not allowed certain rights in the village." His own family was in that category.

"We were not allowed to marry anyone from the nobles. Our deaths were not accorded certain burial rites," he said. "However when I studied law at the university, I realized that the problem of my people is most likely to be solved through advocacy as a lawyer."

Ba Alagie said many traditionally-minded Africans consider human rights as un-African or foreign. "That is one of the main concerns about human rights in Africa. Education and sensitization programs are effective ways through which human rights advocates can establish their case. Advocates should make people understand that human rights are universal and everyone is entitled to them for merely being human."

Actually, he believes, human rights are not foreign to Africa. The West codified these rights but did not entirely invent them. "Human rights exist in every society where people live together, and Africa is not excluded. People have a common understanding among themselves to protect their lives, families and properties. That's basically human rights."

Her mother gave her the courage

Jainaba Faye is graduating from the University of The Gambia with a bachelor of science degree in accounting. She's the first in her family to have a university education.



Jainaba also grew up in the village of Banni. The sprawling family compound is presided over by her mother, Fiedy Cham, a woman always busy attending to the needs of a large family.

Jainaba attributes her success mainly to her mother's support. "She gave me the courage to push my education to a higher level," Jainaba said in an interview.

Fiedy Cham wanted all her children to be educated, but for various reasons, often lack of money, most dropped out on the way. "I'm the only one who finished high school," Jainaba said, "but my little brother Sarjo is also at high school in grade 10 right now." And a number of young children in her family are going to school.

She said this is a reflection of changing attitudes toward education in villages like Banni.

"Parents nowadays have opened their eyes. They're seeing other educated persons around the world, how they behave, how they are respected by society and above all how they are helping their nation."

Jainaba is a member of the board of former students that manages SSF in The Gambia. Her board assignment is to mentor the younger girls in the program. She's proud of the fact that SSF has several girls now studying at the university, as well as others on their way there soon. "Our girls are doing well," she said. "We have this mindset that boys are not the only ones who can do it. We girls can do it, too."

She said many families in Banni believe in educating their girls, but there are still some that push girls into early marriage.

Attending the university during the pandemic was "challenging," she said. While the university was locked down she studied the Koran. When university classes resumed online there were network outages in the middle of lectures. The final semester was shortened, making it hard for lecturers to complete the syllabus. Two of her classes, which should have ended in July, continued into September and October. The formal graduation ceremony is scheduled for January.

Jainaba began looking for a job during her third year at the university. As of October, despite pursuing countless advertisements in newspapers and on TV, she still had not found one.

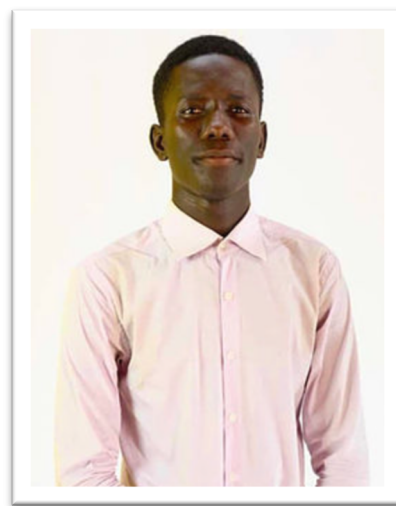
"From my own experience, and from what I have heard from other people, getting a job is really difficult in The Gambia, especially if you don't have a connection. What I mean by connection is you don't have relatives in a position to help you get a job. That's what I lack. But I hope to get a job when I am fully graduated—Insha Allah (God willing)"

"I just couldn't sit around and do nothing"

Amadou Ceesay is graduating with a bachelor's degree in political science at the University of The Gambia and plans a career as an advocate for human rights, good governance and peace.

Actually he's been doing that for several years. In 2017 he founded a group called Rise of the Young Gambia, which holds outreach programs in schools and public forums on topics including human rights, peace and conflict, fair elections, government transparency, and political inclusion of women, people with disabilities and youth.

The group has been planning a campaign against hate speech, which it sees as a threat to fair elections in The Gambia. "We intend to train activists and journalists to track hate speeches made by political leaders and deconstruct them and establish the facts," he said in a text interview with SSF. "This will ensure that Gambians get access to information as well as ensure free and fair elections." Presidential elections in The Gambia are scheduled for December 4.



The group also wants candidates to sign a peace accord before the elections to agree to the outcome of the elections as the true will of the people or use the courts for redress.

Breakenyang, a Gambian human rights organization, gave Amadou its Young Human Rights Champion 2020 award.

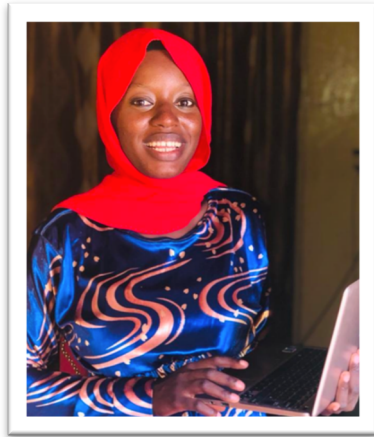
"My passion for human rights grew from the troubles I experienced while growing up," Amadou said. "I did not have access to lots of social services including education and I witnessed many young people living on the streets."

Amadou joined SSF in 2012 when he was in grade 8 in Salikenni. That was during the years long dictatorship of former President Yahya Jammeh. "What the country witnessed for a period of 22 years was great political turmoil and I just couldn't sit and do nothing about changing the status quo," Amadou said.

As a political scientist Amadou has closely watched efforts in The Gambia for a transition to democracy after Jammeh's rule. For his views on that see our website: www.salikenni.org/news.

Another First

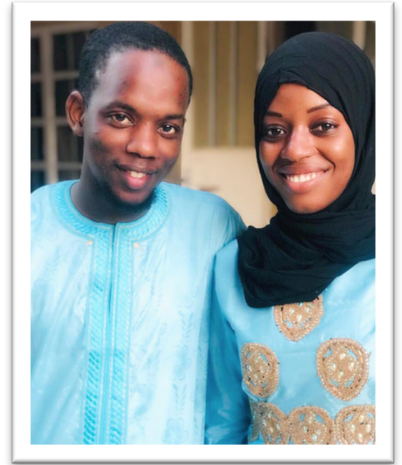
Jainaba S. Bah is graduating from the University of The Gambia with a bachelor's degree in environmental science. She is the first in our program to choose that field of study.



Her achievement is all the more notable because, in addition to the disruptions of a global pandemic, she has been rather busy with a newborn son, Abubacar, born May 3.

Jainaba is married to Omar Jallow (*right*). Omar graduated from the university with a degree in nursing in 2016, worked in a

hospital, and since September of this year has been in Sweden studying for a master's degree in global health (not financed by SSF.)



Jainaba plans a career working on environmental problems. She said these include a rapidly changing climate, land degradation, deforestation and pollution. Her senior term paper is on flooding in urban areas and the need for public understanding of the causes and better planning to prevent it.

Isatou's Story

"Hello, I am Isatou M. Dibba, a young girl from Salikenni village. I attended primary school in Salikenni. It was not easy for me and my family to afford my school costs including uniform and stationaries together with my siblings."

So begins Isatou's story, which she wrote herself. She's now grown, working as a cashier for a financial services company in the Banjul metropolitan area while studying banking and finance at a Gambian business college.

"I was struggling, along with my parents, going to the rice field and from there to the school. Sometimes I go to school without lunch or even small money to buy [a snack]. I used to be there looking at my mates whose parents can give that to them."



"During that struggle the Salikenni Scholarship Fund came, and they gave us an exam and an interview, which God helped me to get through and I got a scholarship. They have paid for my schooling since then and now."

"My people focused on feeding the family"

Mustapha Ceesay and Ansumana Kassama both grew up in farming families whose main concern was providing three meals a day, not educating children.

Mustapha (*below left*) is completing a bachelor of science degree in nursing at the University of The Gambia. He also is SSF's assistant manager in The Gambia. Ansumana (*below right*) finished



a bachelor's degree in accounting at the university in December 2020, and is working at the Gambian Ministry of Finance as a senior procurement clerk.

Both are the first in their families to earn a university degree. In separate interviews with SSF both blame the fact that so many in their families didn't get a full education on one thing — poverty.



"My people focused more on how to feed the family than on going to school," Ansumana said. When he was a young schoolboy he felt his family sometimes did not take his needs and career plans seriously. "I don't blame them," he said, "because they focused on a bigger problem, feeding the family. It even made me feel strong and see my problems as minor things that I should learn to live with."

Mustapha agrees. His story is similar but in one sense more poignant. His brother Essa dropped out of school in 2015 and made the dangerous journey that Gambians call the "back way"—across the Sahara and the Mediterranean to Italy.

"Personally, I think some of the main reasons youths of this country embark on the back way journey to Europe, are extreme poverty, lack of job opportunity, and even lack of hope of many youths to make a meaningful life for themselves and their families in this country," Mustapha said.

One widely used definition of poverty is a person living on less than \$3.20 a day—about 30 percent of Gambians were under that threshold in 2019. Some economists prefer to define poverty by the things people can NOT afford.

"When we talk about poverty in a village like Salikenni," Mustapha said, "we are talking about people not able to afford good quality three square meals a day, people not able to send their children to school, people not able to afford quality and accessible healthcare services, people not able to afford basic social amenities like stable electricity and quality water supply, youths unable to access skill training and recreational centers in our communities."

Ansumana said African countries need to put a higher priority on the continent's youth. "Until and unless we change the status quo and governments pay much more attention to the younger generation, by educating them, training them vocationally and providing them with opportunities to excel in life, economic development will not be fully realized anytime soon in Africa."

“A passion for engineering”

In May 2021, Ebrima graduated *magna cum laude* with a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering from Minnesota State University, Mankato, becoming the first SSF student to reach that level in a school in the United States. With a full scholarship from the university and a teaching assistant position, he began a master’s degree program in August while also working 10 – 12 hours a week at an electrical engineering firm in Mankato.



As an SSF student, Ebrima attended Nusrat, one of The Gambia’s best secondary schools. It was there that he began to study and love science. “I was more into the physics aspect and the mathematic aspect, and that gave me motivation to explore engineering, and develop a passion for engineering.”

In 2017, his final year at Nusrat, Ebrima was chosen to be one of five Gambian high school students to represent the country in an international robotics competition held in Washington, D.C. With no previous knowledge of the subject, the team spent three months in The Gambia doing research on the Internet and building a robot designed to demonstrate a way to remove impurities from water. When they took it to the competition arena in Washington, their entry won 77th position among 163 countries, beating high school students from the United States and Russia.

“It was an amazing experience,” he recalls. “It gave me the chance to explore the world, to meet people from China, Nepal, Tunisia, England. And I still know some of those people from other parts of the world. We are friends on social media. So it was a life-changing experience.”

For more on Ebrima’s journey from Salikenni to Mankato, visit www.salikenni.org/news

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

Accounting and Banking – 14 students
Agriculture – 2
Biology – 1
Economics – 1
Engineering – 1
Environmental Science – 2

Law School – 1
Management - 2
Medicine – 2
Nursing – 1
Political Science – 3

The next generation of scholars



Left: SSF secondary students at the campus in Serrekunda

Right: 7th grade students recently admitted to the SSF program, with our head of student affairs in Salikenni, Ansumana Fatty



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.

\$60 pays one month of our Salikenni librarian's salary.

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

\$450 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.

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. Provided a scholarship for one student who completed an undergraduate engineering degree at Minnesota State University, Mankato this year.
<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. Thirty of our high school and university level students live at this SSF campus in a supervised environment, with regular meals and access to computers and tutoring.

This year we supported:	28	students in grades 7-9
	42	students in grades 10-12 *
	31	students in university or other post-secondary programs *
	1	student studying in the US
	<hr/> 102	total

* 30 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.

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, 2020 through October 31, 2021

Cash available November 1, 2020 **\$12,489**

Income

Contributions 40,819

Interest 3

Total Income \$40,822

*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 Gambia¹ **\$15,376**

Tuition and housing – university in US 7,196

Tutoring in The Gambia² 1,587

Gambian salaries³ 2,000

Gambian campus expenses⁴ 13,313

Gambian computer expenses⁵ 578

Bank, PayPal and international wire fees 854

Website hosting (paid in 2020) 0

Loss due to currency conversion⁶ 1,202

Total Expenses \$42,106

Cash available October 31, 2021 **\$11,205**

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 manager, librarian, and the campus cook

⁴ Includes annual housing rent, electricity, food, fares, and supplies for 30 students 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 fluctuation of the dalasi against the dollar throughout the year, Gambian expenditures are understated when expressed in US dollars. Assumes \$1 = 52 dalasis at time of this report.

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Libby May, communications libbymay@gmail.com

Don May, founder donmay349@gmail.com 603-266-9615

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**