



Salikenni Scholarship Fund Annual Report November 2022

This year marks the 26th year of the Salikenni Scholarship Fund (SSF). When Don and Alison May founded the program 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 or domestic work, but the majority have moved on to secondary school. Many 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.

As the world tries to move beyond (or at least live with) Covid-19, the pandemic's impact on education is starting to come into focus. Exam scores across The Gambia this year were the lowest since the inception of the West Africa Examination Council, which means that fewer students will progress to secondary and university programs. SSF students performed better than the average, but results were not as good as in recent years. To address this challenge, SSF's local management team, led by Abdoulie Bah, is focusing on tutoring and extra classes, as well as on evaluating the teachers who deliver these programs.

With Covid travel restrictions eased, Don decided it was time for one more trip to Africa! He was able to stay a little more than three weeks, visiting and interviewing students at our Serrekunda campus, and then on to Salikenni, where he was welcomed by the community and the parents of many current and past students. In Salikenni, Don met with current students and the school's principal, and he was also able to visit a few of the surrounding villages. A special thanks to Mustapha Ceesay, SSF's assistant manager, for assisting Don with his travels in The Gambia.

This year's report is based on a series of articles that Don wrote during his visit in October. Always the journalist, his writings capture not only the facts about SSF students' educational journeys but also insights and images of life in their part of the world.

We are very appreciative of your past support, and we once again ask you to help make a difference to these young, aspiring students so they can reach their fullest potential. Please share this report with others who may be interested in helping, and we welcome feedback on opportunities for enhancing the program's impact.

As always, we dedicate our annual report to our students' accomplishments, and we look forward to reporting them again next year!

Our Newest Students

by Don May

I first visited the Jallow compound in the village of Mandori 14 years ago to welcome a skinny youth, Ebrima Jallow, then in grade 7 at the Salikenni school, into our scholarship program.

Ebrima graduated from the University of The Gambia in 2018 with a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing and reproductive health. He now works in the emergency department at the General Hospital in Farafenni, a mid-sized market town in the rural North Bank region of The Gambia.

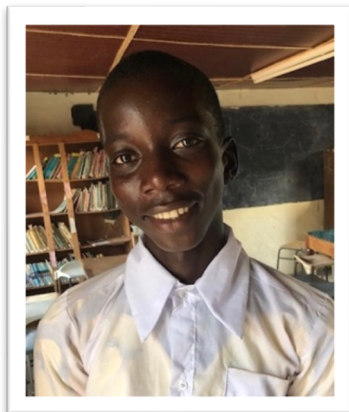
Now time has played one of its charming tricks, bringing me back to the same compound to welcome one of his cousins, Hawa Jallow (*left*), into our scholarship program in this year's grade 7 at the Salikenni School.



The compound is the same, a group of sand-colored buildings with corrugated metal roofs, surrounding an open courtyard. Welcoming Ebrima in 2008 was a big event for the village. My report at the time said, "The whole family was gathered around us, listening intently." Education was newer then. Now residents of these villages are used to seeing young people rising up in education through our program and by other means. So this visit was more low key, though there was similar gratitude.

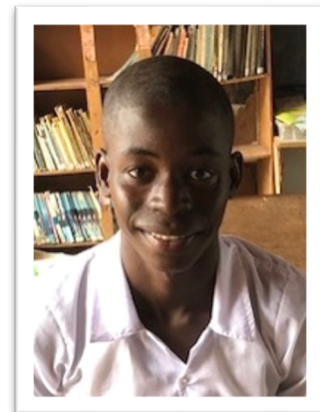
Another difference, reflecting my age, was that Lamin Fatty, vice principal of the Salikenni school at the time, and I "footed it" (to use the local phrase) 45 minutes from Salikenni to Mandori. This time, Mustapha Ceesay, deputy manager of SSF in The Gambia, and I came in a taxi.

One thing remains constant over the years: we admit 7 girls and 7 boys to the program each year, based on exams. Here are a few more of our newest students:



Momodou Panneh (*left*) is our first student from the village of Daru. He attended grades 1-6 in Dobo and is now enrolled in grade 7 in Salikenni, which makes him eligible for our program. He has a two-hour walk to school, the longest of any of our students. He said he leaves long before dawn to get to morning classes. He expects to be shifted to afternoon classes. That will mean getting home long after dark.

Ebrima Trawalley (*right*), is the nephew of Omar Samateh, our 5th year medical student (see page 7). Six of his siblings went to Europe via the "back way" in recent years. Their remittances help support the Trawalley family.

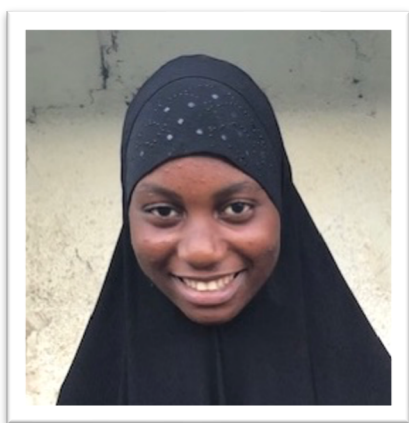
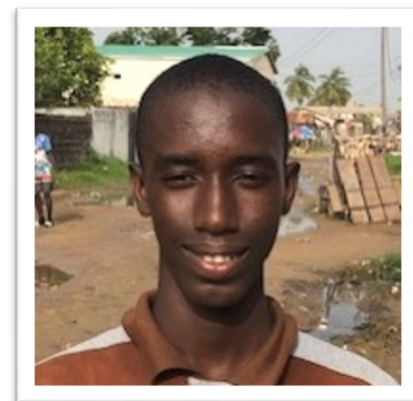


Our Older Students Have a Wide Range of Interests



Awa Keita is starting her first year at the University of The Gambia, majoring in development studies. Few of our students have chosen that specialty despite the development needs of The Gambia. "The country needs development," she said. "In our education system, our political system, our health system, and so much more." Awa is a daughter of Dobo farmers.

Ebrima Bah is starting grade 12 at Gambia Senior Secondary. He hopes to study engineering in university and become a civil engineer. There is no engineering school in The Gambia, although the University of The Gambia has announced plans to build one. Meanwhile, he will search for an opportunity to study engineering in the United States. Ebrima comes from Dobo and is a younger brother of Abdoulie Bah, the SSF manager in The Gambia.



Awa Hydara is in grade 11 in the science program at Gambia Senior Secondary. She's studying biology, physics, and chemistry. "I want to be a medical doctor," she told us. Her parents are farmers in Salikenni.

Bubacarr Drammeh is in grade 12 at Bakoteh Senior Secondary. His father is a tailor in Salikenni who makes uniforms for school children and clothing for everyone in the village. "When I finish," Bubacarr said, "I will try for the university. I would like to be an accountant at a bank."



Abdoulie Dibba is in grade 11 at Kotu Senior Secondary School. He lives in the SSF campus, sleeping two to a bed. "I like it a lot," he said. "It helps me a lot. We help each other. We work with each other. Every evening we study in the library." He said this has been a difficult year for his Salikenni farming family, mainly because of high prices for fertilizer due to the Russian war in Ukraine. Since they had to cut back on fertilizer, they expect crop yields to decline.

Future Diplomat?

by Don May

Bubacarr Fatajo is starting his fourth year at the University of The Gambia, majoring in Political Science. He has set a high goal for himself when he graduates. He wants to work for the Gambian Foreign Ministry as a diplomat.



"I am very interested in international affairs," he said in an interview, "Because the only way you can bring countries that have their own interests together is through diplomacy. It's like a puzzle. These are people who are able to implement visions."

Bubacarr is the son of Salikenni farmers. When he was young he spent a lot of time farming with others in the family. He believes some of the lessons he learned as a farmer will help him as a diplomat.

"I think the biggest thing I learned from farming is patience" he said. "You sow your crop. You have to weed your crop. And then you have to wait. And you harvest and you have to have a market for it. The market must produce for you to get anything out of it. So the main thing I learned from farming is patience, and patience is also useful in the global scene. If you are always in a rush, what you want to achieve you cannot get it."

Bubacarr is outspoken on Gambian politics. Our interview took place in the SSF campus in Serrekunda, part of the vast urban outskirts of Banjul, the capital city. On the tail end of the annual rainy season, which had lasted longer than usual, many of the dirt side streets were almost impassable with standing water and rubble. And the paved main thoroughfare was jammed with slow-moving traffic most of the day.

I asked him why at least some Gambian politicians apparently do not care what the roads are like.

"The Gambia is a very funny country," he replied, "a very unserious country. People do not care what level of education you have attained. To some extent people do not want to know what qualifications you have. What they do expect is for you to be of the same tribe. That is the main thing. People do not want qualifications. People want tribalism."

"People do not respect their work," he continued. "You have a job and you're supposed to be at work by 8 o'clock. The people who come to see you, they have been waiting since 8. But you come by 10. This is the biggest problem we have. The country will never move forward until we change the attitude people have about their work and their leaders."

Alimatou Bah

Alimatou Bah has come a long way since 2008 when she joined SSF as a new student from the village of Dobo in grade 7 at the government school in Salikenni. Her parents, farmers in Dobo, were not satisfied with the quality of teaching at the Salikenni school, so they sent her to live with an older sister, who is the bursar at the Yundum Upper Basic School near the capital city, Banjul.

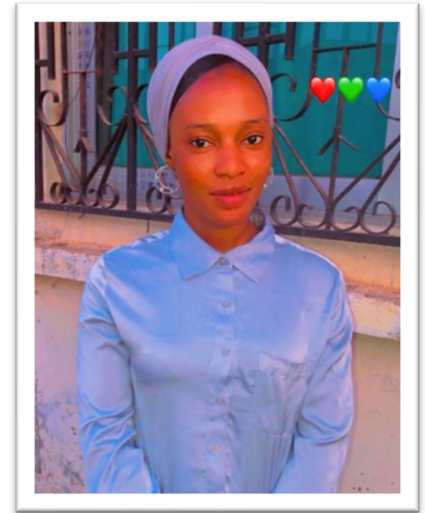
Alimatu thrived in that school and finished grade 9 with one of the best overall scores in the history of our program. We then sponsored her through Masroor Senior Secondary School and then at the Management Development Institute, a Gambian business college, where she earned an advanced diploma in banking and finance in June 2017.

After graduation she married Fabakary B. Ceesay, a journalist and managing editor of *The Trumpet*, a Gambian newspaper. They have a son, Momodou, now three years old. They live in Ceesay's family compound in the Serrekunda area of the Banjul suburbs.

Alimatou now has started her own career, working as a cashier at the Saho Kunda branch of Trust Bank Gambia, within walking distance of their home.

Many of our graduates have a hard time finding a job in The Gambia's economy for which they were trained. This was true for Alimatou. "It took me two years searching for a job, applying to banks," she told us. She likes banking work and hopes at some point to get further training at the University of The Gambia.

Alimatou said that in The Gambia it is not very unusual for young married couples to each continue their careers. "Though there are many households where only the man works," she said, "ours is not like that. We both work to support each other."



2011 visit



As in all his previous trips, Don's travel expenses to The Gambia were paid by him personally. No SSF funds were used.



2015 visit

Dr. Wuyeh Keita

When Wuyeh Keita, from the village of Dobo, took the Hippocratic Oath to become a doctor on June 22, 2022, the event was a milestone in a long personal journey. For the next two years he is working in The Gambia as a doctor in training, treating patients under supervision.



At the same time, Wuyeh (pronounced WEE) is studying to take and pass the U.S. Medical Licensing Examination, which would allow him to apply for a medical residency in the United States for further training and then return to practice in The Gambia.

The June ceremony marked his completion of the seven-year medical school of the University of The Gambia, although because Covid disrupted the university schedule, this actually took almost eight years.

"It is my intention to come back to this country to practice after further training in the West," Wuyeh wrote us. "We very much need doctors here, but most importantly we need better trained doctors." He will seek a residency in internal medicine. There are residency opportunities in The Gambia, he said, but these do not provide the level of training available abroad. The Gambia's main teaching hospital is not accredited to offer residencies in his field of choice, internal medicine.

Wuyeh's formal education began at the primary school in the nearby village of Banni. When he was in grade 2, his father, a Dobo farmer, died. The family was destitute, and he had to leave school for several years. In 2005, when he was 14, his mother, Omie, enrolled him again in grade 2 in Banni. He completed grades 2-4 there, skipped grade 5, after reading its syllabus, and enrolled in grade 6 in the village of Salikenni. He joined SSF in 2008, when he was in grade 7, and we sponsored him through middle school, high school, and medical school.

When he was admitted to the science program at Masroor Senior Secondary School in the suburbs of Banjul, his family had no relatives in the area whom he could ask for lodging. Our then-manager Fatou Janneh allowed him to live in a shed outside her house in Sukuta and provided him with food and money to travel to and from school. Later he lived in the campus that SSF opened in 2013 to house its high school and college level students.

His family has encouraged Wuyeh's medical education. "They are happy to see me become the first doctor, not only in the family, but in the entire village," Wuyeh said. "This I think could serve as encouragement to the young ones that if I can do it, they can do it better."

Wuyeh is very grateful for SSF's support, and so was his mother, Omie, who died in September. Shortly before he took the Hippocratic Oath Wuyeh told us: "When I visited her last week she asked me to extend her gratitude to you and the SSF for your support to me."

Omar Samateh

by Don May

I would often pass the compound of Kalilu Samateh on my walks in Salikenni during the early years of SSF. On most days Kalilu would be sitting just inside the opening to the compound, facing the dirt street, reading silently to himself from a huge Qu'ran open on a table before him.



That image came back to me last October when I met Kalilu's youngest son, Omar Samateh, now in his fifth year in the seven-year medical school at the University of The Gambia.

Kalilu had three wives and 18 children. "I am the last from him," Omar said in an interview. Some of his siblings have also been in our program, at least briefly.

Omar said his mother, Serefunding Camara, was the prime motivator helping him to get to where he is now. As he finished grade 6, she asked him a question that determines the life course of every farm boy or girl in The Gambia, but which is seldom asked:

"Do you want to do agriculture (meaning work on the family farm) or education?"

"I replied education," Omar said. "Then go and be educated," said his mother.

The family enrolled Omar in grade 7 in the Salikenni school, which in those days meant paying a substantial fee. The government now pays tuition in its public schools through grade 12.

"I cannot express how my mother motivated me to work hard in school," Omar said. She made sure his farm work was reduced to give him time to study. For the rest of his education, "I worked so hard to please her," Omar said.

In grade 7 Omar took SSF's entry exam, earned a good score, and was accepted into our program. We have sponsored his education since. After grade 9 in Salikenni, Omar went through Nusrat High School's science program. He was accepted into medical school in 2018. Now in his fifth year he has begun clinical rotations to learn how to diagnose patients.

Like Wuyeh Keita, after graduation Omar would like to train further in the United States and then return to practice in The Gambia.

First a Student, Now a Donor

After graduating from Minnesota State University at Mankato with a Master of Science in Electrical Engineering degree, in June 2022 Ebrima joined the Google Hardware Pixel Device



team in their Chicago branch as a hardware engineer. In that position he works with Google's artificial intelligence, software, and hardware to create global smartphones and other advancements. As enthusiastic as ever, Ebrima said "It is going to be another great learning experience which I am looking forward to exploring."

Ebrima was admitted to SSF in grade 7. We supported his education through Nusrat High School and his Minnesota State University undergraduate program. He was awarded a grant from the university for his full graduate degree tuition.

Ebrima recently made a generous donation to SSF, matched by Google's Holiday Giving Campaign. In his accompanying note he wrote, "I am eternally grateful to the SSF program. I have made a promise to give back to SSF now and in the future. This will go a long way in supporting our program and the next

generation of students with similar backgrounds as me. With Gratitude!"

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

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.

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 as there is no high school in the village of Salikenni. Twenty-six 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:	42	students in grades 7-9
	36	students in grades 10-12 *
	22	students in university or other post-secondary programs *
	<hr/> 100	total

* 26 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
Manager in The Gambia: Abdoulie Bah

Administrators:
Anne May Hart, treasurer
Libby May, communications
Steve May, administrator
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

The Salikenni Scholarship Fund
Financial Statement
November 1, 2021 through October 31, 2022

Cash available November 1, 2021	\$11,205
Income	
Contributions	49,854
Interest	18
Total Income	\$49,872
Expenses	
Tuition – high school and university ¹	\$12,605
Tutoring ²	1,447
Gambian salaries ³	2,473
Gambian campus expenses ⁴	15,482
Gambian computer expenses ⁵	517
Bank, Square® and wiring fees	805
Website hosting	292
Total Expenses	\$33,621
Currency accounting adjustment ⁶	3,689
Cash available October 31, 2022	\$23,767

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 manager, librarian, and the campus cook

⁴ Includes annual housing rent, electricity, food, fares, and supplies for 26 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.

CONTACT US:

Manager in The Gambia	Abdoulie Bah	babdoulie39@gmail.com
Administrators		
Dave May, U.S. manager	solstand40@gmail.com	617-571-1604
Anne May Hart, treasurer	annemayhart@gmail.com	703-216-8677
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 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
c/o Anne May Hart
7772 Waterview Lane
Chestertown, MD 21620**