



## Salikenni Scholarship Fund Annual Report December 2019

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, 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. 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. Today we have 97 active students in the program, 28 of whom are enrolled in college or other post-secondary programs, including one studying electrical engineering in Minnesota!



*This year, three SSF women were admitted to the University of The Gambia:  
(from left) Kasamanding Kanteh, Nyima Njie,  
and Mama Trawalleh*

This has been a year of achievements. Nine of our grade 9 students—the largest number in our history—were admitted to high schools in the urban area. They include six boys and three girls. Three of our older students, all women, were admitted to the University of The Gambia.

This fall, Don came out of retirement to make another trip to The Gambia. While there he met with the SSF leadership team and was impressed with their continued commitment to the program's success and their ideas for the future. They and the students in our program share a hunger for education and an enthusiastic appreciation for the opportunities that SSF provides.

Once again as we read the stories of the students featured in this year's report, we can't help but notice how similar their goals are to those of kids we know—they just don't have the same chances for success. 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 achieve 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!

## An Appreciation and a Welcome

After eight highly successful years as manager of the Salikenni Scholarship Fund in The Gambia, **Ousman Jarju** is retiring from that role. As of January 1, 2020, he will be replaced by Abdoulie Bah who recently has served as assistant manager.

Ousman started in our program as a student in grade 8 at the Salikenni school. His father is a Salikenni farmer. With our financial support he attended one of the top high schools in the metropolitan area, Nusrat Senior Secondary, becoming the first in his immediate family to complete high school. We then sponsored him in a series of courses in accounting at a local college. He became, and still is, an accountant with the Gambian government. While working full time he studied nights at the University of The Gambia, where he earned a bachelor's degree in accounting.



*Ousman is married to Ndey Dahaba, who is the cook of the campus. They have three children, Sarata, Qasim and Fatoumata, called Banna.*

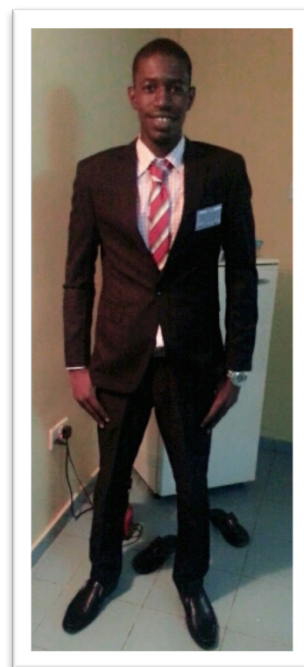
Ousman became SSF's manager in The Gambia in 2012, while continuing his government job. The years since have been a time of growth for the program, with increasing numbers of students—especially among the women—reaching the university level, graduating and getting jobs. Ousman was the driving force that led to the creation of the urban SSF campus, where many of our high school students live under the guidance of senior students and with access to computers and tutoring. He helped develop a working board of present and former students who are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the program.

Ousman told us that after eight years he feels it is time to turn management over to a new person with new ideas, and he wants to move on to other things in his career. We are extremely sorry to see him go, but we understand and accept his wishes.

**Abdoulie Bah**, our new manager, is also a former SSF student. He comes from Dobo, a smaller village near Salikenni. His father, a cattle tender, had paid his tuition through grade 10 but could do no more. We took him into the program in 2008 when he was in grade 11 at Nusrat Senior Secondary School. In 2014, under our sponsorship, he completed a bachelor of science degree in accounting at the University of The Gambia. He is now employed by the Gambian Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs as an internal auditor of the government's many ministries, departments and agencies.

While still a university student, Abdoulie showed a strong desire to give back to the program. During breaks he would travel to Salikenni to tutor our younger students in math in the SSF library. He has served as assistant manager of the program for the past three years.

We welcome Abdoulie to his new job and look forward to working with him.



*Abdoulie Bah*

## Discovering a Vibrant Intellectual Community

The streets surrounding the SSF campus are unpaved. During a visit in October, toward the end of the rainy season, they were strewn with huge lakes, through which trucks and taxis inched their way, while pedestrians walked carefully on the narrow dry edges and sometimes waded. On each side are walled residential compounds and small shops which seem to do little business. This is Serrekunda, a large crowded urban area just outside The Gambia's capital city, Banjul.

The campus itself is unpretentious. You enter through a pale blue iron gate with painted yellow stars. Inside there is a long one-story cement block building with a row of wooden doors opening onto a covered veranda. Each door leads to a two-room apartment shared by four students. A narrow strip of ground has been paved in concrete and serves as a common area, with laundry lines strung across it. There is a small kitchen shed where meals are cooked over wood fires. Students carry buckets of water to their rooms from a single outdoor tap. There is electricity in the rooms but few other modern amenities.



As there is no high school in Salikenni, students seeking further education must move to the urban areas (or "kombos") to continue their studies. They often live with relatives or friends, and often in less than ideal environments. For a number of years, the SSF campus has served as a safe place for several dozen of our high school and higher education students to live, eat, and study. But now something very interesting is happening. An intellectual community is taking shape. The students who live here are smart. They are curious and politically aware. They have opinions on everything and are not shy about expressing them.

Accounting used to be considered the best path to a job, but now SSF has students studying political science, law, environmental science, medicine, and nursing. This diversity has added to the dialogue.



While visiting this fall, I held three meetings with small groups of students in the campus, during which we discussed politics.

In 2016 The Gambia voted out a vicious and tyrannical president, who had ruled for 22 years. The new president, Adama Barrow, promised to stay only for a 3-year transition period, and then hold elections. That deadline comes in December. But Barrow changed his mind and vowed to stay for a total of 5 years, which is the normal presidential term under the constitution.

Some of our students said Barrow should honor his promise. Others said he should follow the letter of the constitution. Several expressed fear that if he did not step down in December there would be mass protests in the streets possibly leading to violence.

One student, Ebrima, a high school senior, said: "Barrow should fulfill his promise to step down." Nyima, one of three young SSF women who entered the University of The Gambia this year, said: "He should complete five years."

Several of our students said the Barrow government has not produced the full measure of democratic and human rights that Gambians hoped for when he took over. Despite the new government's policy of full freedom of expression, they said there still are press reports of arrests without proper cause and mistreatment of people involved in demonstrations. Others said the government is not doing enough to meet basic needs of people, such as creating jobs and reducing poverty. Several criticized the government for failing to support farmers.

I asked the new university students a question: "If you were president of The Gambia, what changes would you try to make?" Their answers covered a broad range of topics: One said "I would emphasize gender equality and promote girls' education." Another said "I would bring in good people and build infrastructure, build schools and universities."

At a mention of gender equality, I asked, at what level? The responses came quickly: "In education," "business," "top management," "government ministers," "PRESIDENT!"

Jainaba, who is studying environmental science at the university, talked about climate change. "The climate of The Gambia is changing rapidly," she said. "Most of the forests have been destroyed. We are getting less rain. Farmers are producing less. This is affecting the entire country."

While many of these conversations are held around meals, or other down times, we are talking about "Gen Z-ers" here, and the students have built their own WhatsApp group to discuss ideas at any time! In a recent posting, a political science student said fifty copies of a booklet on human rights had been donated to the group. After I left for home he organized a meeting in the campus library in which each student recorded a ten-second video stating one human right, or one comment such as, "No one can take away your human rights." He and other students plan an educational workshop on human rights at the Salikenni school, plus more discussions of key issues in the campus.

In recent years there has been an outpouring of books and articles by education scholars urging that Africa and other poor areas of the world need to adopt education reforms to get away from rote learning and to teach young people to think — to prepare them for the world economy of the future. Well, something like that is taking place spontaneously in our campus. Looking back on these conversations with students one thing seems clear: You don't have to be in a fancy think tank to think.

by Don May

**Your support goes a long way:**

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

**\$25** pays for 11 high school literature books

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

**\$500** pays the salary for our Gambian administrator for 4 months

**\$1000** more than covers the tuition for one semester at the University of The Gambia



## Meet Some of our Students

Every year we admit an equal number of boys and girls into our program in grade 7 at the Salikenni school. They are selected based on exams in English language, math and reading skill. Here are some of our 14 new grade 7 scholars admitted to the program this academic year.



Nine SSF students from last year's grade 9 in Salikenni this year made it into grade 10 in high schools in the metropolitan area, the largest group to make this transition in any past year of our program.

Six of the new high school students are boys, three are girls. To earn a spot in high school they had to score well on a nationwide exam given every year near the end of grade 9.



Samboujang Kalleh (left) grew up with his sister and mother in a small compound in Salikenni. His father is no longer living. The family grows rice for its own consumption, but it is not enough. They depend on help from relatives. Samboujang wants to become a doctor "and go back to my place and help the people."

Habbibo Dibba (right) comes from a large Salikenni family. His father, Momodou Bintou Dibba, is a fisherman. An elder sister, Isatou M. Dibba, is also sponsored by SSF, studying banking and finance at a Gambian business college. Two other siblings have been in our program. Habbibo wants to be a lawyer and maybe go into politics.

Both Adama Barry (left) and Mariama Kassama (middle) are from Salikenni. They are attending Kotu Senior Secondary School. Adama would like to become an accountant, Mariama a banker.

Awa Keita (right) is from Dobo and attends Masroor Senior Secondary School. She aspires to be a business manager.

Away from home for the first time, all three are living in the Serrekunda campus, where, they said, they are free from the disproportionate burden of domestic work assigned to girls back home in the village and therefore able to concentrate on their studies.



## A Nurse's Story

By Don May

Ebrima Jallow has wanted to be a healer since he was young. When he was selected to join SSF, he was a slender boy attending grade 7 in Salikenni, because his home village, Mandori, had no school. He walked to classes daily, 45 minutes each way.

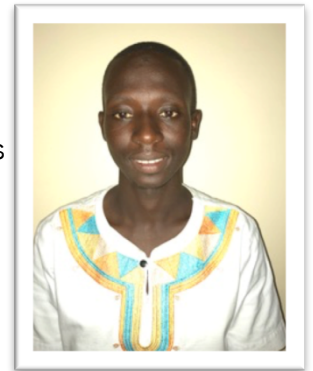
I remember making the same walk, under a hot sun, on a dirt road through fields and scrub brush, to officially inform Ebrima and his family that he had been accepted into the program. Family and neighbors gathered to congratulate him. Ebrima said he wanted to become a doctor.

That hasn't quite worked out. Ebrima went through grades 7-9 in Salikenni. He attended Gambia High School in Banjul, followed by four years at the University of The Gambia, where he earned a bachelor's degree in nursing.

Ebrima is now a nurse at the General Hospital in Farafeni, a mid-sized town to the east of Salikenni in the rural North Bank region of the country. His duties alternate between the outpatient department and the emergency room. He rotates through a schedule of 12-hour shifts at night, shorter shifts by day, working seven days a week straight with seven days off each month.

He has plunged into a kind of rural tropical medicine that few American health workers experience. Sometimes he treats 70 patients a day. The hospital is severely understaffed. That means that nurses often have to make decisions ideally made by a doctor. Many of the other nurses are untrained. Sometimes he's the only trained staff in sight when an emergency comes up.

But Ebrima obviously loves the work and feels it fulfills his ambition to be a healer. He still thinks about possibly becoming a full doctor. Someday, after more experience as a nurse, he may apply for medical school.



## A New Constitution!

*"To educate critically sound students that would bring about positive changes in their respective family and communities in The Gambia."*

This simple yet powerful statement forms the opening of a new "constitution" for managing the SSF at the local level. This new constitution lays out a framework for overall governance, management, conflict resolution, and a number of other topics typically needed to run an organization effectively. It was adopted at a board meeting held in October at the SSF campus.

What's most unique about this document is that it was developed *entirely* by a group of committed senior and SSF alumni students who manage and run the program on a day-to-day basis. The thought, and debate, that went into creating each "article" demonstrates that the program has accomplished one of its original goals: to improve access to education for young people in the Salikenni region. It also demonstrates that, as the program matures, access to education has created a new generation of leaders, something we are thrilled to see.

## 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 pursuing 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.

*A 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:**  
69 students in grades 7-12  
27 students in university or other post-secondary programs  
1 student studying outside of The Gambia  
97 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 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

**Contributions:** The program is financed through contributions from individuals. Salikenni Scholarship Fund is a 501(c)(3) organization. Contributions to it are tax deductible. Please see last page for contribution details.

**For more information, please visit our website:**

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

**The Salikenni Scholarship Fund**  
Financial Statement  
November 1, 2018 through October 31, 2019

<b>Cash available November 1, 2018</b>	<b>\$19,136</b>	
<b>Income</b>		
Contributions	\$38,830	
Interest	90	
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$38,920</b>	
<b>Expenses</b>		
Tuition – high school and university students in The Gambia <sup>1</sup>	\$11,864	
Tuition and housing – university in US	15,603	
Tutoring in The Gambia <sup>2</sup>	1,716	
Gambian salaries <sup>3</sup>	3,355	
Gambian campus expenses <sup>4</sup>	10,192	
Gambian computer expenses <sup>5</sup>	581	
Bank, PayPal and international wire fees	720	
Website hosting	253	
Loss due to currency conversion <sup>8</sup>	1,918	
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$46,202</b>	
<b>Cash available October 31, 2019</b>	<b>\$11,854</b>	

Because tuition in Gambian government schools is now free through high school, the cost of adding new students is relatively small. But our costs for tuition and related campus housing will continue to rise as an increasing number of students move into higher education in The Gambia. This means your support is more appreciated than ever.

<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 managers, librarian, and the campus cook

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

<sup>5</sup> Internet connection charges

<sup>8</sup> 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 = 51 dalasis.

Please note that the cost of Don May’s travel to The Gambia and the cost of production and mailing of this annual report are paid by administrators and not by the Salikenni Scholarship Fund.

**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.

**TO DONATE**

**Checks should be made payable to:**

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

**or donate online at:  
[www.salikenni.org](http://www.salikenni.org)**

**CONTACT US**

**Manager in The Gambia**

Abdoulie Bah                      babdoulie39@gmail.com

**Administrators**

Dave May, General Manager	Solstand40@gmail.com	617-571-1604
Anne May Hart, Treasurer	anne@salikenni.org	703-216-8677
Libby May, Communications	libby@salikenni.org	
Don May, Founder	donmay349@gmail.com	603-266-9615