



Salikenni Scholarship Fund Annual Report December 2017

The Gambia Goes Robotic

SSF's Ebrima Marong was one of five high school students who recently represented The Gambia at an international robotics competition. The robot they built—with no previous knowledge of the subject—beat both the United States and Russia.

The competition, sponsored by First Global, took place last July in Washington, DC. Ebrima, who comes from the small village of Mandori, near Salikenni, was selected by his high school, Nusrat Senior Secondary, to be part of the team.

This fall Ebrima entered the medical school at the University of The Gambia.

Here is Ebrima's account of this experience:

The human life is full of successes and setbacks. Whenever a setback occurs, a person should learn from it and move forward. We were five motivated teens representing The Gambia in the First Global robotics competition. We were chosen from leading schools nationwide: three boys (me, Alieu Bah, and Sellou Jallow) and two girls (Khadijahtou Gassama and Fatoumata Ceesay). Each of us was an important part of the team. We didn't really care about winning. The fact of participating was already an accomplishment no matter what happened. Every day was a challenge for us, and we pushed ourselves. The fact that we were all so excited and putting so much effort into it made us a better team.

Using our ingenuity, we were able to create a robot, even though we had no background knowledge of robotics. The assignment was to build a robot which would remove contaminants from water. We had been given a robot kit with many possible parts. We had to program it to perform its function.

The judges ranked all the entries with the best at the top. The Gambian entry ranked 77 out of 163 countries. The United States ranked 155. Russia ranked 149. Conference officials told us the rankings were not really important. The purpose



was to learn how young leaders can come together to solve demanding world problems.

Participating in the competition was a big opportunity for each of us in regard to our knowledge and exploration of our engineering skills. Our mentor, Mr. Muckhtarr Darboe of the Gambian Ministry of Higher Education, was always with us. He inspired our creativity and our perseverance. He knew how to engage us and encourage our self-worth. We send him our thanks. How was the team able to work successfully?

Each of us had different skills. Individually we could not put them to use. We found that by collaborating we could solve problems. We worked hard. We listened to each other's creative ideas. We always tried to make one another feel happy and we didn't usually get offended.

Our first application for U.S. visas to attend the conference was denied. The BBC and other news organizations wrote stories about this. Our second attempt was successful.

Participating in this competition was a unique opportunity for us to honor our country, to make The Gambia proud of us.

-- Ebrima Marong

What We Do

The Salikenni Scholarship Fund (SSF), established in 1996, is a non-profit 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 the seventh grade at the government school in Salikenni and continuing through high school and four years of higher education in The Gambia. This year we provided a scholarship for one student pursuing his MBA in graduate school.

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 where many of our high school students live in a supervised environment, with regular meals and access to computers and tutoring.

We currently support: 78 students in grades 7-9 in Salikenni
35 students in grades 10-12 in the urban area
18 in higher education
7 finished high school but not yet placed in further education
138 total

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

Management: 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, US manager; Anne May Hart, treasurer; Libby May, communications director; Steve May; and Don May, founder.
Managers in The Gambia: Ousman B.Y. Jarju, manager; Abdoulie Bah, assistant manager

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

For more information, please visit our website:

www.salikenni.org

Annual Report from SSF's Manager in The Gambia

It is a pleasure to be given once again the opportunity to highlight some of the successes the Salikenni Scholarship Fund registered in the year 2017.

First, we enrolled more students into grade 10 this year than in any other year. The record was 6, but in 2017 we were able to place 9 students in high schools.

On top of that, we enrolled 5 new students in the University of The Gambia this year, and two of them are women. The success of the two women may be a sign that we are beginning to find the magic key that unlocks the door for young women to achieve their full educational potential.

I also am extremely proud that Ebrima Morong—our own student, born and raised in our very area and who passed through the Salikenni Basic Cycle School—was part of the team of Gambian high school graduates that represented The Gambia in an international robotics competition in the United States. Ebrima, currently pursuing a bachelor of science degree in medicine, gave us something to smile about when the team's results were revealed.

Moreover, 2017 is the year in which—for the first time in SSF history—a student who came up through our program from the early grades flew to Europe to pursue a master's degree. Amadou Njie is studying at the Rome Business School and we all are very proud of him.

In yet another first, SSF volunteers have cultivated a successful crop of groundnuts just outside of Salikenni. As I write this, it is ripe for harvest. Some of the crop will be sold to help finance SSF, and some will be used in meals at our Serrekunda campus.

Putting all of these successes together, I think it is clear that 2017 has been a year to remember, and we are all very proud of what so many in SSF have achieved.

Ousman B.Y. Jarju
SSF manager in The Gambia.



Jainaba S. Bah, left, is pursuing a degree in environmental studies at the University of The Gambia this year. She has been under SSF sponsorship since grade 7. She is in the process of marrying another of our scholarship students, Omar Jallow, who recently earned a university degree in nursing and now works in a local hospital. Their plan is that she will finish her education before the final marriage ceremony. ***Amadou Njie***, right, an SSF alum, is pursuing a master's degree at the Rome Business School.

Our Newest Students

Every year SSF selects an equal number of boys and girls to start a journey in education that many of them can barely imagine. This year, based on tests in math and English language, our Gambian board selected 18 out of about 30 candidates from grade 7 at the government school in Salikenni.

In October, Ousman Jarju, our manager in The Gambia, and I interviewed the new students and their families. We started with those who live in Salikenni. We visited each of their compounds, always in the evening or night, because during the day everyone would be out on their farms. On a Saturday we went by donkey cart to Dobo, a smaller village five miles away, many of whose children attend grades 7-9 at the Salikenni school and are therefore eligible for our program.

Our new students have much in common. Most importantly, they all come from extremely poor families. You can see this in the look of their compounds, the cement block buildings with rusting corrugated metal roofs, the dilapidated fencing, the sparsity of furnishings or amenities inside.

In every compound we visited we were told that almost all the family income came from farming. Many of the women supplement this by growing vegetables on very small plots in a community garden and selling the produce at a weekly market in another village. Many families have relatives working in the urban area of the country or abroad, but the amounts they receive from them are small and unreliable.

Most Salikenni homes have electricity by which students can study at night. But it is often a single low-intensity bulb in the ceiling. Dobo has no electricity, and students there read by candle or flashlight. During our visit—more than a month in to the new school year—the government had not yet issued textbooks in any of the core subjects: English, math, science, and social and environmental studies. “In my six years at this school,” said Principal Sainey Fatajo, “I have never received from the government a single textbook in a core subject.” SSF has supplied these in past years and continues to do so.

-- Don May



Adama Manneh, far right, with her grandparents and younger brother.

Adama Manneh, 13, got the highest score among girls who took the admissions tests, and she came in second among both boys and girls.

Adama studies each night with her twin sister, Awa, who is a year behind her in school. On the veranda that runs in front of their building, the girls use a flashlight for better vision.

Two elderly grandparents preside over the compound. They are trying to put Adama, Awa, and four other children through school. Tuition in government schools is free throughout The Gambia, but there are many costs: uniforms, shoes, exercise books. Adama has one uniform, which she washes every day after school.

In their old age, Adama's grandparents have joined hands and work together to grow only rice. Their labor is the family's sole source of income. The twins' parents, who live in the urban area, contribute nothing for their education or other support.

Adama and her grandparents are firm on one thing. Their common goal is to see her graduate from the university.

Elliman Bah earned the highest combined score among all candidates in our admissions tests in English and math this year. Elliman lives in Dobo and he walks for an hour every morning along a narrow sandy road through fields of peanuts, corn, and millet to the Salikenni school. His school day is not over until he has attended special classes four days a week from 2 to 4, which we provide for our sponsored students. When he reaches home, there are farm chores to do, even though by 7 it will be quite dark. Elliman reads after dinner each night by candlelight. He wants to go to the university and become a teacher. "I want to be a teacher for Dobo," he told us. "To teach the little ones."



It was very dark when we reached the Salikenni compound of **Bubacarr Y. Drammeh**. We interviewed him sitting on the low stoop that runs along the front of the building in a narrow alley. The only illumination was a bare, low energy bulb high up on the wall of the building on the other side of the alley. Bubacarr's father, Yusupha, lives there during the farming season with his two wives and most of his 10 children. Six of these children are in school. The others are still small. Agriculture is the family's main source of income. Yusupha also has a small shop, where he sells staple foods, in the metropolitan area. Bubacarr wants to attend the university and become a teacher.

Baba Ceesay, is the first son in the family and his father says, "He is our only hope." He wants Baba to go all the way to the university. All of the family's income comes from farming, including the mother's vegetable garden. In a few years, Baba will be ready for high school in the urban area of the country and then on to college. "That will be the end of our farming," his father said.



We dedicate this year's annual report to our new students, a selection of whom we describe here. Our new students are after all our future—forerunners of a developing world. In the brief space of a decade, they will be our newest university graduates.



Saphiatou Kalleh wants to work in an office. No one in her family has held such a job. Saphiatou said she is convinced that a woman can do any job a man can do. President of the Gambia? She thought awhile. “It’s possible.”

Tida F. Tunkara wants to be a teacher. Her father, Foday, is a farmer and fisherman and also works as an orderly at the government health clinic in Salikenni. Years ago, SSF sponsored two boys from this family. “They didn’t learn,” Foday said, “They left school. I think Tida wants to learn, even up to the university. I always advise her to learn.”

Binta Tunkara wants to go to the university. She scored relatively low on our admissions tests, which may mean she will need some help to catch up with her classmates.

When **Mam Jarra Darboe** was very small her parents moved to Guinea Bissau and left her with her aunt in Salikenni. Her parents provide no support. Mam Jarra wants to be a doctor. She scored at the bottom of the students we accepted and so has a long way to go to achieve that goal.

Mariama Fatajo reads every night from 9 to 11 or 12. Until the textbooks arrive, she doesn’t have much available except the exercise books that she has copied into in class. Her mother insists that she study every evening. “I really want the girl to learn,” she told us. “I really want her to go to the university, but I don’t have the ability to send her to that level.”

Ismiala Fatajo wants to be a doctor. “I want to cure people and help people get healthy,” he told us. His older brother also wanted to become a doctor. He finished high school with what we are told were good scores, but there was no money for medical school. Ismiala’s mother wants her son to be serious in his studies. She hopes he will reach his goal.

Sarjo Keita, from Dobo, got sixth position among all candidates on our combined admissions tests in English and math. No one in her family has been to the university, and she would like to be the first. Her father supports her ambition, He wants Sarjo to be “on her own, to learn and to have a good job.” Sarjo said English is her favorite subject. She would like to become a teacher.



The Worst Place in the World

Editor's note: In last year's annual report, we described the growing and troubling trend of African migrants, including some from Salikenni, attempting to find a better life in Europe through the so-called "back way." The following is a first-hand account of one of those attempts.

Yunusa Bah remembers Libya as "the worst place in the world."

During several terrifying months there he was robbed, beaten, held prisoner for ransom, half starved, and he watched in horror as a fellow migrant was shot to death in front of him.

Libya for years has been a nightmarish way-station in a migration of young African men, fleeing poverty, who hope to cross the Mediterranean and find economic security in Europe. According to the International Organization for Migration, in the first 10 months of 2017, 111,552 migrants, many of them from African countries, landed in Italy by sea on the so-called Central Mediterranean Route, which usually starts from Libya. Another 2,639 died in the attempt.

Those who do make it to Italy face an uncertain future. Among those from Gambian families whom we know, all so far are in camps in Italy, without work permits, while European officials try to figure out what to do with them. Some have been in these camps for years.

When he left for Libya, Yunusa, now 23, seemed to have better prospects than many other young Gambians. He was in grade 11 at Nusrat Senior Secondary School, an elite Gambian high school in the suburbs of Banjul. SSF had been sponsoring his education since grade 7 and offered a clear path to a bachelor's degree at the University of The Gambia and a career. He was living in the SSF campus in Serrekunda, where he had three meals a day, access to tutoring and computers, and where university-level students were available to answer questions.

But on March 15, 2016, Yunusa vanished. He didn't tell SSF or Nusrat or his family. Why did he go?

"A lot of things were in my head," Yunusa said in an interview long after his return from Libya.

"My family was suffering. Food problems. They would call and say the rice was finished. School costs for the younger children. Many things. I am the oldest son. I had to do something to help them. There was no one else to help. If I stayed and went to the university it might be five years before I could help them."

Yunusa comes from Dobo, a small, very poor village about five miles from Salikenni. His parents, Demba and Fatou Bah, are farmers, and



Yunusa Bah, photographed in the SSF campus after his return from Libya.

their labor is the only source of income for the family. There are four younger children, all in school. While tuition is free in government schools in The Gambia, poor families struggle with other education costs such as uniforms and exercise books.

Yunusa left with 1,000 Gambian dalasis (about \$23) in his pocket. To get that money he had sold his mobile phone. He took the ferry across the Gambia River, then a series of commercial passenger vehicles to the town of Mbour on the coast of Senegal. "I slept on the beach there for three nights," he said. "Then this fisherman noticed me and gave me a job going with him in his boat. He gave me a small place, sort of like a stall, to sleep in. I stayed there almost two months."

With the money he earned fishing, he traveled to Bamako in Mali. "Things were hard there," he said. "No food to eat, No work. There was no place to sleep. I was sleeping in the garage [an open air

parking lot for passenger vans.] I called a friend in The Gambia, and he sent me 2,500 dalasis (\$57)."

"With that money, I went to Algeria. Very hot. Mountains. I found work there." There, and at other stopping places on his journey, he would go to a market and sometimes people would hire him to carry bundles of goods. He helped clean a restaurant. He earned enough to repay his Gambian friend the 2,500 dalasis and also to send a small amount to his family. These money transfers were made through an informal system that seems to work. To send money home, for example, he would give it to a Gambian intermediary, who would send it through one of several networks to his own family in The Gambia. Yusupha's family would pick it up from them.

When he got to Libya, trouble started almost immediately. He was in a vehicle with about 35 other migrants headed for Tripoli. They were stopped by an armed militia group.

"They ordered us to get out. They took everything we had—money, a ring, food. They took everything. Then they took us to a prison in the desert, a small building way out in the desert. They handed us a phone and said to call home and ask our families to send a certain amount of money. 'If you don't get it we shoot you.' I said 'I have no one to call.' They beat me with the butt of a gun." When the militiamen realized they would get no more from the group they let them go.

In Tripoli Yunusa found work for two weeks. Then he was arrested by another militia and had to give up his earnings for his freedom. On another occasion in Tripoli he was riding in a van with other migrants when the van was stopped by criminals. "They shot one of our friends," Yunusa said. "He was dead. We carried him back to the house where he was staying. He was Nigerian."

On the Libyan coast Yunusa met a smuggler who was organizing boatloads of migrants to cross the Mediterranean to Italy. "I know how to drive a boat," he told the smuggler and asked for free passage in exchange. "The man said no problem." On the beach was a large inflatable boat with an outboard engine. At three in the morning it was put into water and loaded with 125 people.

"I started the engine. We went out for almost 1.5 kilometers. Then we saw a Libyan police boat in front of us. It ordered us to go back to shore.

When we landed, Libyan police were there. They put us on a bus. They took us to a camp in Tripoli. They called it a deportation camp. They said they were going to deport us. We stayed there five months. Things were hard there. The food was terrible. There was no toilet. You had to do it into a plastic bag and urinate into a bottle.

"One day they said, 'You're going back to The Gambia.' They put us on a bus. They took us to the airport. The police were there with guns. They put us on the plane. The pilot announced, 'This is a direct flight, Tripoli to Gambia, 5 hours and 35 minutes.'"

* * * * *

They landed at Banjul International Airport on April 3, 2017. Each was given 2,500 dalasis.

"I used 500 dalasis to go back to Dobo," Yunusa said. "I gave 1,500 to my dad and 500 to my mom. My dad welcomed me home. My mom was crying. The first thing my dad said is 'go back to school.'"

Yunusa said he would never advise a young person to go on the same journey. "I would say 'Stay here and be patient. Stay with your families, see their suffering. Stay with your education.'" He plans to go back to school, and SSF will help him do so.

But he still feels acutely the dilemma that sent him to Libya. "The poverty of my family is my main problem," he said. In recent months, he has tried to earn money to help them. He worked as a mason. With that money he bought some bottles of perfume spray and started selling them in one of the smaller markets. He now has a tiny stall there from which he sells food items.

He knows he will never make enough this way to give his family significant help. He knows he can do that only through education. But education requires an investment of time, and meanwhile his family has no one to help them. He broke down in tears as that thought came to him.

Yunusa is home but he's also back at the beginning, one bit of humanity who was caught up in the great currents of migration that swirl over our world.

--Don May

The Stem of the Pumpkin

Ansumana Fatty, 30, is an especially important member of the volunteer team that manages SSF in The Gambia. We sponsored his education from grade 7 through high school and two years of computer studies. He then enrolled at government expense in the teacher training program at Gambia College. He's now a sixth-grade teacher at the Salikenni Primary School.

He also is the member of the SSF board in The Gambia responsible for Salikenni student affairs. He is our eyes and ears at the village school where our students begin their education. He travels to attend board meetings in our Serrekunda campus. We asked him to write a short essay on his work, and we publish it below.



My name is Ansumana Fatty, a native of Salikenni village. I came to know SSF during my junior secondary and was brought under its sponsorship. I received my Primary Teacher's Certificate (PTC) from Gambia College. After teaching for a few years at my home village, Salikenni, I was called by SSF to be a member of the board. I was chosen to be the manager of student affairs in Salikenni. I found this very humbling, because I am to take responsibility for a program which put me through all I am enjoying.

I live in Salikenni with my family, wife, and daughter. Salikenni is a fraternal community where everyone is related in one way or the other. Our people call it Jenjulu Kilin, which means 'one stem of a pumpkin.' No matter how big the pumpkin, we all come from one stem. Our people have a strong desire for education, but many drop out because of lack of a sponsor. We, the Salikenni people, like Mr. Don May and all SSF sponsors at large.

Thank you.

SUPPORT SSF ON AMAZON SMILE!

Did you know you can support SSF while shopping on Amazon? To sign up, just go to <http://smile.amazon.com/>. Enter **The Salikenni Scholarship Fund** in the "Pick your Own Charity" box. Once you designate SSF, Amazon will donate a portion of your purchases to our foundation.

The Salikenni Scholarship Fund
Financial Statement
November 1, 2016 through October 31, 2017

Cash available November 1, 2017 \$25,467

FY 2017

Unrestricted Contributions \$32,965

Restricted Contribution for
Graduate Scholarship 23,000

US Expenditures (218)

Gambian Expenditures (*itemized below*) (30,147)

Graduate Scholarship Distribution (12,466)

Currency adjustment (2,320)

October 31, 2017 US Checking Balance \$24,500

October 31, 2017 Graduate Scholarship
Balance 10,408

October 31, 2017 Gambian Bank Balance 497

Cash available October 31, 2017 \$36,281

Total Expenditures

Tuition¹ \$11,034

Tutoring² 2,700

Gambian Salaries³ 2,696

Campus⁴ 9,828

Computers⁵ 3,599

Administrative Costs⁶ 290

Total Expenditures \$30,147

¹ Includes tuition, books, exam fees

² Tutoring in Salikenni; weekend classes on metropolitan campus

³ Salaries for Gambian managers, librarian, and campus cook

⁴ Includes annual rent, electricity, food, fares, furniture, supplies

⁵ Replacement and maintenance of campus library computers

⁶ Website hosting

Actual Gambian expenditures are converted from dalasis to US dollars for the purpose of this report. Due to decline of the dalasi against the dollar of approximately 12% over the year, Gambian expenditures are understated when expressed in US dollars. Assumes \$1 = 47 dalasis.

The SSF board has admitted 18 new Grade 7 students into the program for the 2017-18 school year.

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 supplying textbooks and other necessities are rising. They will rise even more as students move into higher education. This means your support is more appreciated than ever.

*Please note that Don's travel costs to The Gambia **are not** paid out of SSF funds. Nor are the costs of producing this report.*

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.

**Checks should be made
payable to:**

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

OR donate online at:

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