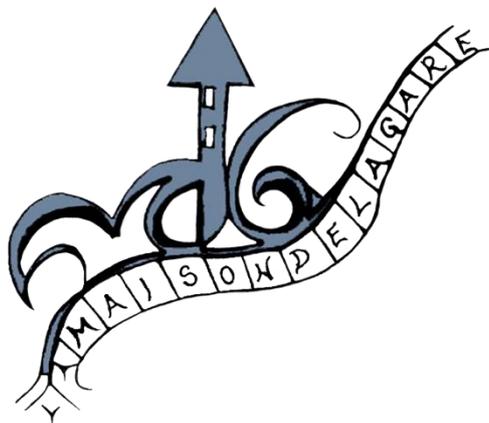


Project Proposal: Bibliothèque des Talibés

Maison de la Gare, Saint-Louis, Senegal



Project Overview and Context

In Saint-Louis, Senegal, over 14,000 young boys, many trafficked from neighbouring countries, are forced to beg on the streets every day. Known as *talibés*, they are under the control of local religious heads (*marabouts*) and recognised by both the United Nations and Human Rights Watch as modern-day slaves. Deprived of their basic human rights, these boys endure abuse, hunger and exploitation, far from their families and any sense of safety.

At Maison de la Gare (MDG), a local NGO founded to protect and educate talibé children, we provide a refuge — a place where they can eat, learn, rest and begin to rebuild their lives. Over the past six weeks, during my time volunteering at MDG, I have come to understand both the unimaginable hardship these boys face and their incredible resilience. Despite their trauma, they are eager to learn, to laugh, and to connect. What they lack is not spirit, but a safe, inspiring space to nurture their curiosity and creativity.

Currently, there are 20 children in the MDG boarding house programme, living full-time on site, and hundreds more who visit throughout the week for literacy, numeracy, football and health care. The current classrooms are crowded, resources are minimal, and there is nowhere for the children to read quietly or relax indoors. The Bibliothèque des Talibés will change that — transforming an unused room into a warm, welcoming space dedicated to reading, imagination and self-directed learning.

This library will serve as both a safe space and a learning hub: a calm refuge from the harshness of the streets, and a gateway to new worlds through books. It will be equipped with French and English storybooks, educational materials, comfortable seating and gentle lighting. Beyond learning, it will offer comfort, healing, and community.

From Talibé to teacher: Kalidou's story



One of the most inspiring examples of what access to education can achieve is Kalidou, a former talibé who grew up with Maison de la Gare. Originally from Casamance in southern Senegal, he was sent to Saint-Louis as a child to beg on the streets. At the age of 8, he discovered MDG and began attending literacy classes in the old train station. He spoke neither French nor English when he arrived.

Everything changed when he discovered the original MDG library. There, he began teaching himself to read, devouring storybooks and factual texts in both languages. Despite attending only three English lessons a week, he credits reading with transforming his life — teaching him the languages and opening his mind to a wider world.

Now, as an adult, Kalidou teaches English to younger talibés. His story is a testament to the power of access to books and safe learning spaces.

In his own words:

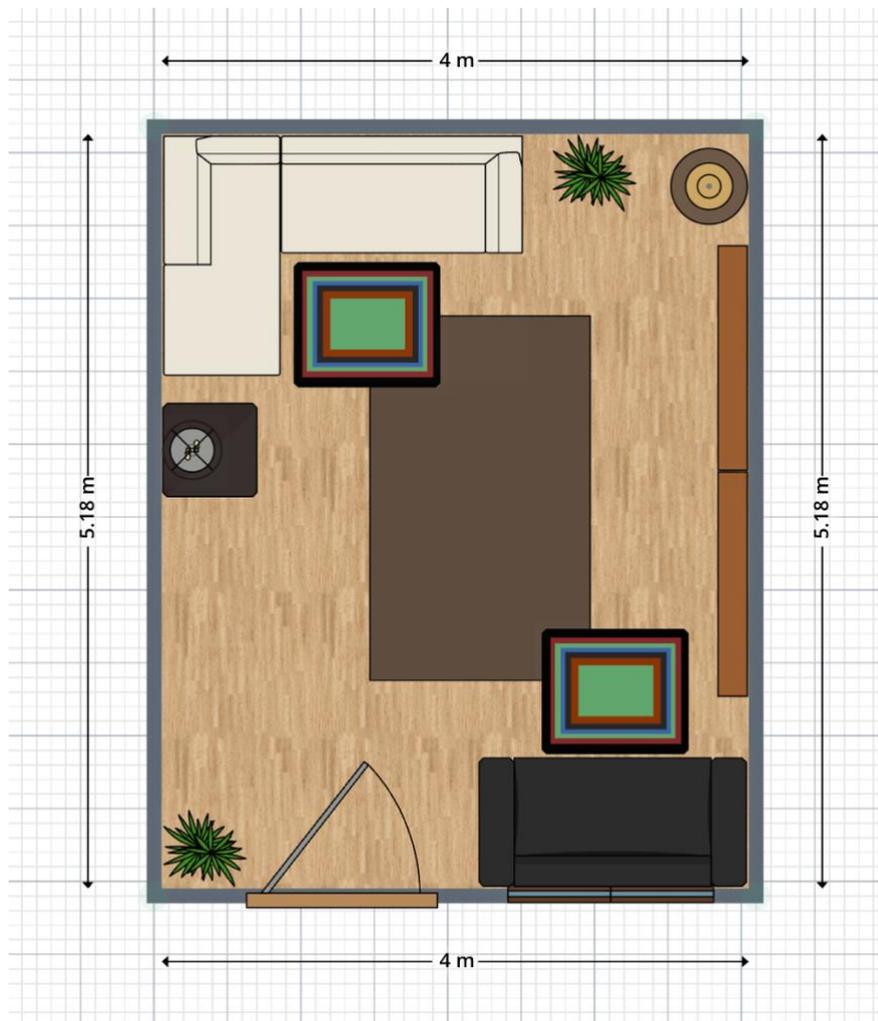
“It was good for me. It was important for all of us who came to MDG. The library taught me how to learn. The new one will mean a lot to the kids — they will come just to visit it. It will be important not only for MDG, but for the whole community.”

The new Bibliothèque des Enfants Talibés aims to create many more stories like Kalidou's — offering every child who walks through its doors the chance to learn, dream and grow.



Design and Vision

The library will transform an underused classroom within the MDG centre into a bright, welcoming, and functional space that embodies comfort, creativity and Senegalese identity.



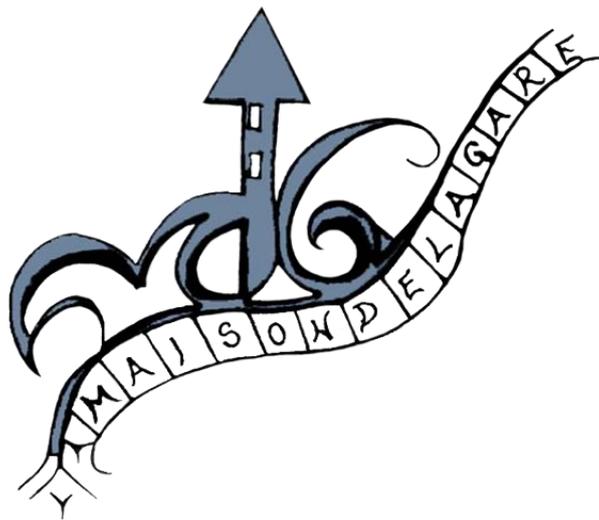
Key Design Features:

- Warm, calm aesthetic: Soft cream walls and warm lighting, creating a peaceful indoor refuge from the heat outside.
- Comfortable seating: An *L-shaped sofa* along the front and left walls, complemented by a smaller sofa and several beanbags for flexible, informal reading areas.
- Educational functionality: Three large bookshelves along the right wall, filled with a mix of French and English books — storybooks, factual works, and illustrated texts suitable for all reading levels.
- Cultural expression: A mural painted collaboratively by local artists and children, celebrating Saint-Louis' culture and the iconic Faidherbe Bridge. A world map on the left wall will remind children of the world beyond their current boundaries.
- Lighting and atmosphere: Updated ceiling fan with warm bulb, beam spotlights, floor and table lamps, and optional fairy lights for an intimate evening ambience.

- Textiles and décor: Large area rugs layered with colourful smaller ones, curtains for the front window, framed Senegalese artwork, local wooden carvings and potted plants to bring warmth and life to the space.
- Technology and engagement: A small educational screen displaying rotating visual slides — geography, nature, world news — to spark curiosity even in moments of rest.



This design blends comfort and function, offering a setting where children can feel safe, inspired and valued.



Budget Summary

Category	Total (£)	Total (CFA)
Renovation	180	140,400
Lighting	280	218,400
Furniture	1,135	885,300
Educational Features	645	503,100
TOTAL ESTIMATE	£2,240	1,747,200 CFA

This budget ensures a high-quality, sustainable renovation without extravagance. Every contribution will directly fund materials, furnishings, books and resources for the children who use the library.

Closing Message and Call to Action

The talibé children of Saint-Louis have endured unimaginable hardship, yet their determination to learn remains unbroken. The Bibliothèque des Talibés will offer them not only books, but belonging — a space to imagine, to heal, and to believe in their futures.

Your support can turn this vision into reality.

Every pound raised will help build a library that gives hundreds of children the chance to read, learn and dream freely — something that every child deserves.

“Even one book can change a life. This library will change many.”

