

Build a School in Africa 2025 Annual Report

Last year was an active one for our small, all-volunteer organization, during which we helped build **three new schools!** These were all primary schools in southern Mali, each consisting of three classrooms, a teacher's office and storeroom, and a block of girls' and boys' latrines. The schools are located in the villages of Dintiola, Tionso, and Koro N'Tossoni. On our website, you can view a map of the 36 schools that we have built since 2005.



The bright new classrooms in Koro N'Tossoni

Planning for the Future

Our next school will be in the village of Denguena. Our volunteers in Mali, Abou Coulibaly and Salifou Bengaly, prepare a "Community Profile" document for each future project. They travel to the village and meet with village elders and parents, guide them in the creation of a School Management Committee, and coordinate with the local government.



The old schoolrooms in Koro N'Tossoni, in a mud brick building built by the community

The village of Denguena already has a modern school building, built around 15 years ago. However, it is overcrowded. Its 3 classrooms are not enough to support 1st through 6th grade. The school is practicing "double division," where a single classroom hosts two grade levels at the same time. This is not ideal for learning! In total, Denguena has 516 students enrolled (300 girls and 216 boys). In addition, there are 87 families who have volunteered to accommodate children coming from the surrounding hamlets.

School-building in Denguena can begin as soon as we raise enough funds. We need \$25,000 to build 3 classrooms, a teacher's office/storeroom, and latrines. Building costs have gone up, but we are able to keep them relatively low thanks to the contributions from the community, who provide raw materials like sand, gravel,



Welding the I-beams for the corrugated metal roof of the school in Tionso, July 2025.

water for the concrete blocks, and plenty of labor. We provide for materials like concrete, steel roofing, windows, and doors, and we hire the mason and skilled artisans. **Every school is truly a partnership!**

Focusing on Good Management

Build a School in Africa has always been a small operation, without any paid staff and very little overhead or administrative expenses. On the US side, it was largely run by just one person, retired teacher Judy Lorimer. Since her passing in 2023, we have focused on putting the organization on a sound footing. This has meant catching up on some filings with state government and following good nonprofit management practices.

The Board of Directors now meets quarterly. We've adopted bylaws and put in place policies related to conflict of interest, sound investments, and other governance matters. In brief, we're doing all of the things that

nonprofits are required to do or that experts recommend. Our volunteers are also responsible for filing tax forms with the IRS and various forms with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, where we are incorporated.

Finances

In 2024, we crossed the threshold where we were required to submit the long nonprofit tax filing (Form 990) to the IRS. For the sake of openness and transparency, we have posted our tax forms, along with an annual financial report on our website under *About > Finances*.

In 2025, 96% of our expenses went directly toward building schools, with only 4% of our expenses for administration and finance. Last year, inflation had a big impact on our school-building program. The cost of building a school rose from \$21,000 to \$25,236, a 20% increase. The root cause, besides inflation, was an increase in the price of cement and gasoline due to geopolitical factors outside of our control.



Our dedicated Malian volunteers Salifou Bengaly and Abou Coulibaly

Last year, we began paying honoraria to our Mali volunteers of \$500 for each school. This is just a token amount, and a tiny fraction of what we would pay a professional for all the time they put into the project. We felt this was important because Abou Coulibaly had lost his job due to the United States' unfortunate decision to shut down the international development agency USAID.

He also took on an apprentice, Salifou Bengaly, who is a teacher and runs a private school for lower-income residents of Bamako. Our former collaborator, Madou Traore, became mayor of his commune, which occupies his time. We felt it was important to grow the team, so we are not relying on just one person. As the Bambara proverb says, "One finger cannot lift a stone."



Musicians play at the jubilant "transfer of keys" ceremony in Koro N'Tossoni

Video Celebrations

We were delighted to share video of the school opening ceremonies for the first time. The community gathers for the all-important "transfer of keys." In 2025, these events were covered by Andal Media, a web TV producer in Mali. They've given us permission to post

these videos on our website and Youtube. Videos are in the local language Bambara, with subtitles in English and French. Thanks to Coleman Donaldson of *An Ka Taa* and our volunteer Salifou Bengaly for translation and subtitling. Find links to these videos and more on our website, buildaschoolinafrica.org.



Still from the video of the school opening in M'Pessoba, April 2025

Watching these videos, I'm overcome by the gratitude expressed by everyone involved. The mayor of the commune, the village chief, the parents, the teachers, and even the children—they are all so thankful for help. I'm also struck by how proud everyone is of their new school. And they should be. Every school is far from being a gift given by outsiders.

Beforehand, the community must organize and demonstrate their commitment by forming a School Management Committee (imagine a PTA, but one that is also partly responsible for maintenance and paying teacher salaries). Also, villagers provide a great deal of the raw materials and labor that goes into building the school.

Solar Lighting

We launched a new initiative in 2025 to install solar lighting systems at our schools. These systems allow the school to stay open in the evenings for tutoring, exam preparation, and for community meetings. Two of our donors solicited donations from friends and family to support this "extra," enabling us to install lights at two schools. The solar lighting initiative fits well with our mission to build schools, and it is something we hope to expand and continue. If it is something you wish to support, we can install a complete system for \$700.



“We used to work in mud-brick schoolrooms, but [Build a School in Africa] provided permanent buildings made of concrete. I am overjoyed!”

– **Djourou Coulibaly, teacher in Koro N'Tossoni**

In general, the spread of cell phones has been a big plus for us. In Koro N'Tossoni, the school principal took plenty of photos and videos of the construction, and shared them with us via WhatsApp. Nowadays, many Malians have inexpensive smartphones. Still,

transferring all this data can burn through credits fast. Abou regularly sends a few credits to keep the flow of photos coming – very easy to do with Malitel or Orange. Most Malians with a cell phone have "dual-SIM" phones so they can take advantage of the two main networks.

All in all, this was a big year for our small nonprofit. Thanks to our donors and their generosity, we were able to impact the lives of around 600 children by providing clean, modern new schoolrooms in which to learn. In the words of a teacher at one of our new schools:

Thank you for being part of the Build a School in Africa family!

Your donation can help us build the next school! Build a School in Africa is a registered nonprofit organization, so donations are tax-deductible. We've been incredibly fortunate to receive donations from schools, churches and some very creative individuals. Fund-raising ideas have ranged from spaghetti suppers to a young woman who ran a marathon and raised \$1,000 in pledges.

Consider hosting a bake sale, car wash, cocktail party... If you'd like to host an event, or share information with others, please be in touch! We can send brochures, photos, music, and we're working on a slide presentation that should be ready soon!

In solidarity,

Abou, Alice, Heather, Kyla, Matt, and Salifou