AFRICAN SKY

African Sky Strategic Vision: 2016-2020
September 20, 2015
Revised January 14, 2017

INTRODUCTION

Mali is a country filled with industrious, innovative, and generous individuals who work against extreme poverty and hunger as farmers, scientists, teachers, parents, and policy makers. In service and deference to these individuals African Sky presents this five-year strategic plan and our core values, mission, and vision.

Organizational Vision:
Promote peace, prosperity, and happiness through friendship between Malian and US communities.

Organizational Mission:
Together with our friends and colleagues in Mali, African Sky promotes capacity-building, empowers individuals through education, and develops innovative leaders for social change. Our philosophy of community development is based on the belief that humanity's physical, ecological, and spiritual well-being is rooted in universal compassion and sustainable living.

Core Values:
- *Partnership.* Malian communities are equal partners in all of African Sky's projects. We envision, design, implement and evaluate our projects with our Malian counterparts. Our projects focus on expressed community needs.
- *Sustainability.* African Sky projects are sustained within the community after official project timelines expire. Projects are designed to positively impact the ecological, social, and economic foundations of our host communities.
- *Friendship (Teriya).* African Sky seeks to build enduring friendships and increase understanding between American and Malian communities.

Organizational History:
African Sky was incorporated by Dr. Scott M. Lacy in August 2004. Dr. Lacy created African Sky in response to a growing number of family and friends who were partnering with him to organize and launch small projects in southern Mali. African Sky initially focused on building small schools with Malian host communities, but since the beginning our project portfolio also included initiatives focused on community health, food security, and community arts.

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In the summer of 2014, African Sky expanded its all-volunteer base by inviting new board members and program managers, many of whom were, like Dr. Lacy, former Peace Corps Volunteers in Mali. In response to this increased capacity, African Sky decided to create a comprehensive, organizational strategic plan. A strategic planning task force convened in the fall of 2014 and began the process of collecting data and input from the African Sky community, both in the United States and in Mali. This document is a result of the strategic planning process.

This strategic vision document outlines our strategic goals and objectives for the five-year period starting August 2015. Due to the unanticipated closure of Peace Corps Mali after this plan was finalized, a slightly revised version was approved by African Sky board members on January 14, 2017. If the Peace Corps resumes operations in Mali during the time period covered by this plan, African Sky will revert to its original strategic plan.

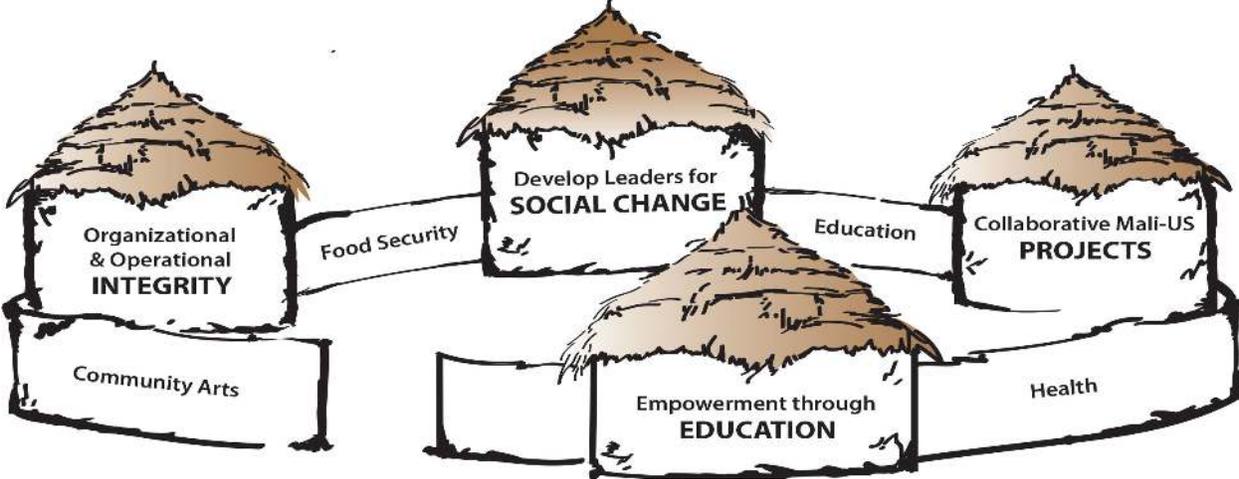## Our Strategic Goals, Programs, & Initiatives

Strategic Goals:
African Sky's work is designed to meet four strategic goals:
1. Address community-identified priorities by connecting Mali and US communities
2. Empower individuals and communities through education and knowledge sharing
3. Develop strong leaders for social change
4. Advance African Sky's organizational integrity and operational sustainability

Integrative Programs:
African Sky accomplishes our strategic goals by implementing collaborative projects across four programmatic areas:

- Community Arts
- Food Security
- Education
- Health

The image above shows our strategic goals and program areas as an image of a traditional Malian home. In Mali, multiple family units live side-by-side, their huts reinforced by supporting walls that form a protective enclosure. African Sky is organized in the same way in order to provide a salient and familiar structure to achieve our goals. Like a family sharing resources, we strive to create projects that serve multiple strategic goals and programs.

African Sky's Goals and Objectives, 2015-2019

We seek to sustain our work by effectively sharing and transmitting knowledge and resources, with Malian partners to address critical issues within our communities. African Sky's engaged, long-term presence and relationships with our host communities encourage community members to become true partners and leaders in our work.

The objectives listed below give an outline of what we collectively seek to accomplish in the next five years. However, our organization's unique value comes from the fact that our work is driven by the needs of our host communities; we seek to respond to those needs in a dynamic and organic way. Thus, individual objectives may evolve during the five-year period. Moreover, our projects will simultaneously serve multiple goals and objectives.

Strategic Goal 1
Address community-identified priorities by connecting Mali and US communities.

A distinguishing characteristic of African Sky projects is that they directly connect people in the US and Mali through partnerships that include fundraising, cultural exchange, and community building initiatives based on our four program areas: education, food security, health, and community arts.

Objective 1.1: Create and manage collaborative Mali-based programming with Malian communities and community leaders

Our project portfolio in Mali is driven by community-identified needs and priorities in order to foster improvements in health, education, community arts and food security through integrative programming. Our Program Directors work collaboratively with Malian partners and directors to develop, manage, monitor, and assess projects that contribute to their individual program areas. Our four Program Directors each develop project portfolios and timelines based on annual budgets.

Objective 1.2: Provide a continuum of support to the Mali Peace Corps community

African Sky has strong roots in the Peace Corps Mali program. Many of our current leaders are returned Peace Corps Volunteers, and African Sky's initiatives are closely aligned with the Peace Corps model of grassroots community development. Although the Peace Corps Mali program closed its doors in the summer of 2016, African Sky will continue its engagement with the Peace Corps community by collaborating with returned Volunteers, former Peace Corps Mali staff, as well as the communities where Volunteers have served.

Providing a "support network" and resources for the Peace Corps community has the following potential benefits:
- identify future African Sky leaders (Returned Peace Corps Volunteers who want to stay connected with Mali by partnering with African Sky)
- develop a support base for African Sky stateside (fulfilling philanthropic and awareness-building goals)
- assist Malian communities that once hosted Volunteers (building on the groundwork laid by Volunteers, particularly in sites where projects were left incomplete due to the unexpected closure)
- provide professional opportunities for former Peace Corps staff in Mali (potential to utilize their linguistic and technical expertise in African Sky projects)

Objective 1.3: Create and manage US-based programming, working with US-based schools, universities, community groups, and NGO's to promote cultural exchange and understanding.

Malians and Americans can learn much from one another. To further our core value of friendship ("teriya") between these two countries, we seek to implement a partner school program that will serve to increase understanding and awareness between students in both countries. Malian African Sky leaders will serve as partners in this project, identifying Malian schools with an interest in the program. Likewise, African Sky volunteers will identify US-based classrooms. These partner schools will engage in cultural exchanges by sharing letters, artwork, photographs, or web conferencing.

In addition, African Sky will develop curricula that will help us introduce the rich Malian culture to American schools, clubs, and other organizations. These presentations will provide an active role for our volunteers as African Sky "ambassadors," and will serve to identify potential partners for African Sky projects. These presentations will also allow us to enhance a major goal of Peace Corps: "to promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans." This can be further expanded to universities, community groups, and NGOs.

Strategic Goal 2
Empower individuals and communities through education and knowledge sharing

African Sky's flagship project during its formative years was the building of schools followed by adult literacy programs in Mali. In the next phase of African Sky, we seek to

build on this programming by focusing on expanded educational opportunities in all of our programmatic areas, and by increasing knowledge of Malian and American culture in our two countries.

Objective 2.1: Increase access to education through building and supporting schools

We will continue to support school construction projects in Mali, partnering with our Malian colleagues who oversee the building process. In addition to primary schools, we will facilitate construction efforts related to other buildings that support educational initiatives, including adult literacy training and community centers. After we partner with communities to build a school or literacy center, African Sky provides support for these schools through technical/professional exchange (objective 2.3), our US-Mali sister schools and cultural exchange program (objective 1.3), and direct, collaborative initiatives with Malian teachers and students (objective 1.1).

Objective 2.2: Promote community development and empowerment through adult literacy programs

African Sky will support—both financially and programmatically—adult literacy initiatives, which teach basic reading, writing, and math skills to adults and children who have not had the opportunity to benefit from an education, particularly women and young girls who have unequal access to education in Mali in their childhood. We will also explore expanded educational programming that covers the array of our programmatic areas: promoting health, increasing agricultural knowledge, and supporting artistic initiatives as well as entrepreneurial and microfinance activities and development.

Objective 2.3: Promote knowledge sharing between technical experts, both within Mali and between Mali and the US.

African Sky will serve as a clearinghouse of knowledge sharing and transmission in order to facilitate projects within our partner communities. We recognize and respect the depth of knowledge that our Malian partners hold, and we seek to make connections between Malian communities and individual practitioners and organizations such as Engineers Without Borders in order to share this knowledge. We also seek to partner with technical experts in America who can provide targeted consultation on specific African Sky initiatives.

Strategic Goal 3
Develop strong leaders for social change

African Sky's unique approach to development comes from the fact that we work closely, over an extended period of time, with our Malian partner communities. In addition to furthering community development goals, this model also serves to empower

strong leaders within those communities. As our partnerships evolve and mature, individuals have the opportunity to take on project management roles with increasing responsibilities. While leadership development has been an implicit element within our programmatic activities, we now seek to formalize this goal of providing technical and administrative training to our Malian counterparts, and providing professional development opportunities for our American leaders.

Objective 3.1 Build the project portfolios and capacity of Malian African Sky country directors and project leaders

African Sky projects based in Mali have a Malian project leader who serves as a liaison to African Sky leadership and who oversees the day-to-day project implementation. This person maintains active community participation and feedback throughout the project. African Sky will ensure that these project managers receive appropriate technical and administrative training to not only help them appropriately implement the project, but also give them critical skills that will further their own professional goals. .

Objective 3.2 Foster professional development of African Sky leaders

African Sky provides a diverse array of leadership opportunities in its organizational structure. Although these positions are voluntary, they help African Sky's leaders further develop leadership, project, and organizational skills that aid in their professional development. In the next five years, African Sky will further strive to develop these individuals through hands-on experience, peer mentoring, and collaborative learning opportunities such as program assessment and the creation and implementation of this document.

Strategic Goal 4
Advance African Sky's organizational integrity and operational sustainability

We recognize that African Sky's work cannot be accomplished without equal attention paid to our internal operations and management. By promoting efficient and effective organizational processes, we will further advance African Sky's development as a structured, non-profit organization. We consider organizational "integrity" to be any initiatives that promote organizational self-evaluation, transparency, and internal management practices. We define organizational "viability" as those processes that enhance our volunteer workforce, increase our revenue streams, and improve our communications processes.

Objective 4.1: Institutionalize a monitoring, learning, and evaluation (MLE) system for AS programs

African Sky has already initiated a project planning and evaluation template and formed a Monitoring & Evaluation Committee, which will continue to promote project

evaluation initiatives. Every African Sky project will have defined goals, objectives, and metrics in line with the goals and objectives of our strategic vision. We will use the information gathered in our monitoring and evaluation to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our projects.

Objective 4.2: Increase and diversify fundraising efforts

Under the direction of our development director, we will promote African Sky fundraising initiatives. Our organization relies heavily on donations from individuals, and, in this next phase of African Sky, we will explore new sources of funding, including grants, event revenue (separate from our annual banquet and auction), and corporate and/or governmental awards and sponsorships.

Objective 4.3: Increase organizational transparency with internal and external stakeholders

Our volunteers, leaders, and board members will be able to access key internal documents, including meeting minutes, operating procedures, and policies. We will also continue to promote external transparency. Our IRS filings, annual reports, board minutes, and other relevant documents will be available via our website to the public. We will also maintain our registration and reporting with non-profit monitoring sites like Guidestar.

Objective 4.4: Ensure accurate financial accounting and reporting

An important aspect of African Sky's operations involves its financial accounting. We will work with our Malian partners to increase monitoring of our project funds within Mali, and we will improve our internal processes under the leadership of a financial director and a financial investment board of advisors.

Objective 4.5: Maintain a robust and committed support structure of African Sky volunteers

Our organizational structure currently relies on an all-volunteer base to accomplish our work. We recognize that as African Sky grows in size and complexity, this model may need to be re-evaluated. However, for the near future, we envision that our volunteer workforce will continue to drive the work of African Sky. To that end, we will engage current, former, and future volunteers in the mission of African Sky. We will recognize our volunteers' time and commitment to our organization and provide opportunities for professional development. We will also seek to improve our leadership handbook to formalize the duties and responsibilities of each volunteer position.

We also seek to increase our volunteer base. We will do so by actively cultivating partnerships with Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, promoting communications

strategies with diverse groups of stakeholders (see Objective 4.6), and building connections with schools and organizations.

<u>Objective 4.6: Increase African Sky's communications initiatives</u>
African Sky has a professional website, an e-newsletter, as well as presence on social media outlets. We recognize that our organization's communication strategies are key to increasing the number of our supporters, donors, and volunteers. In this next phase of our organization, we seek to develop and implement a communications strategy that utilizes our existing communications outlets and new ones to increase awareness of African Sky's work including a social media plan. A donor, volunteer, and friends database will also be redeveloped, expanded, and sustained.