

# AFRICAN SKY



## **African Sky Strategic Plan, 2024-2029** ***Revised August 1, 2024***

### **Organizational Vision:**

African Sky creates enduring friendships between communities in the US, Mali, and Cameroon. As a community development organization, we work with individuals and communities to promote international understanding and to mutually confront some of the devastating effects of endemic poverty and inequality. Our philosophy of community development is based on the belief that humanity's physical, ecological, and spiritual well-being are rooted in universal compassion and sustainable living. African Sky projects are organized according to four thematic service programs: education, health, food security, and community arts.

### **Organizational Mission:**

Together with our friends and colleagues in Mali and Cameroon, African Sky promotes capacity building, empowers individuals through education, and develops innovative leaders for social change.

### **Core Values:**

- *Partnership.* Malian and Cameroonian communities are equal partners in all African Sky's projects. We envision, design, implement and evaluate our projects with our partners in Mali & Cameroon. Our projects focus on expressed community needs.
- *Sustainability.* African Sky projects are designed to positively impact the ecological, social, and economic foundations of our host communities.
- *Friendship.* African Sky seeks to build enduring friendships and increase understanding between communities in Mali, Cameroon, and the United States.

### **Organizational History:**

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

More recently, African Sky has adapted its operational strategy to navigate a series of transformative events including the closure of the US Peace Corps in Mali, enduring political and security crises in Mali, and the COVID pandemic and its aftermath. In 2024 the organization made two significant strategic shifts:

- Our long-term partners and partner communities in Mali develop and implement Mali-based projects with US team members contributing direct support and resources (US team

travel to Mali suspended).

- Following a series of non-African Sky projects that emerged during and after Exec. Director Lacy's Fulbright experience in Cameroon, African Sky updated its bylaws and strategic plan to bring these initiatives into our project portfolio (starting in August 2024). These projects, led by an enthusiastic and devoted group of Cameroonian volunteers, fit squarely within African Sky's mission and strategic goals.

African Sky was incorporated by Scott M. Lacy in 2004 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 and supporting small schools with Malian host communities, but since the beginning our project portfolio also includes initiatives focused on community health, food security, and community arts.

More recently, African Sky adapted its operational strategy to navigate a series of transformative international events including the closure of the US Peace Corps in Mali, enduring political and security crises in Mali, as well as the COVID pandemic and its aftermath. Ultimately the organization made two significant strategic shifts:

- 1) With unprecedented travel disruption to and within Mali, Africa Sky now relies on long-term partners and partner communities in Mali to lead and operationalize our Mali-based programs.
- 2) Following a series of successful non-African Sky projects that emerged during and after Exec. Director Scott Lacy's Fulbright experience in Cameroon, African Sky updated its by-laws and our strategic plan to bring these initiatives into our project portfolio starting in August 2024. These projects, led by an enthusiastic and devoted group of Cameroonian volunteers, fit squarely within African Sky's organizational vision and mission statements. Specifically, they develop leaders for social change, empower individuals through educational resources and programs, and they provide opportunities to sustain African Sky's core commitment to facilitating cultural exchange and relationships between students and citizens in Africa and the United States.

This document outlines our strategic goals and objectives for the five-year period starting August 2024. This plan builds on the previous strategic plan that our Board of Directors approved in January 2017.

## **Our Strategic Goals, Programs, & Initiatives**

### **Strategic Goals:**

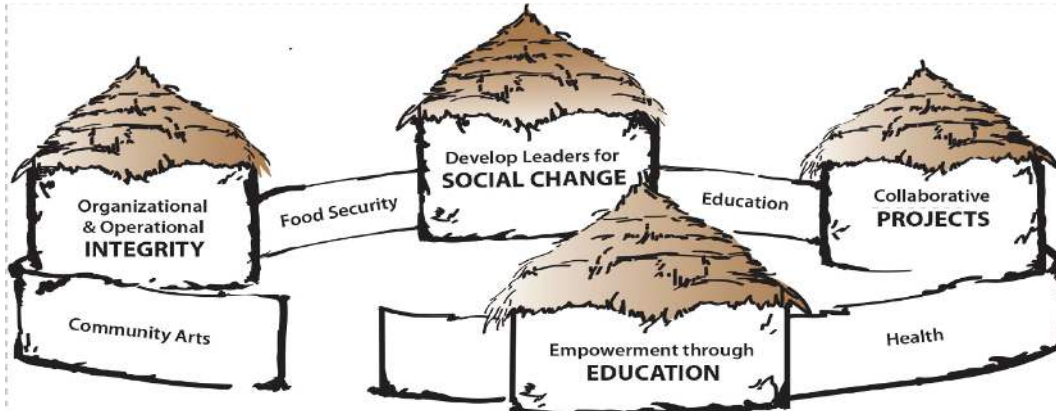
African Sky's work is designed to meet four strategic goals:

1. Address community-identified priorities by connecting Malian, Cameroonian, 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



### **African Sky's Goals and Objectives**

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 seek to accomplish over the next five years. Most of our projects will be designed to serve simultaneously multiple goals and objectives.

#### **Strategic Goal 1**

***Address community-identified priorities by connecting communities in Mali, Cameroon, and the United States.***

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

Objective 1.1: Create and manage collaborative programming and initiatives with community leaders in Mali, Cameroon, and the United States

Our project portfolio 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 Malian and Cameroonian Country Directors work collaboratively with community partners to develop, manage, monitor, and assess projects.

Objective 1.2: Create and manage US-based programming, working with US-based schools, universities, community groups, and NGO's to promote cultural exchange and understanding

To further our core value of friendship between Mali, Cameroon, and the United States, we seek to implement cultural exchange programs that increase understanding and awareness

between students and citizens in the US and Africa. African Sky Country Directors will serve as partners in this project, identifying schools to engage in cultural exchanges by sharing letters, artwork, photographs, and web conferencing.

## **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 and resources relevant to our four programmatic areas.

#### Objective 2.1: Increase access to education through educational programming and by building and supporting schools

When opportunities arise to do so, 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/may contribute to construction efforts related to other buildings that support educational initiatives, including adult literacy training.

After we partner with communities to build a school or literacy center, African Sky provides support for these schools through technical/professional exchange (objective 2.2), our cultural exchange program (objective 1.2), and direct, collaborative initiatives with teachers and students (objective 1.1).

#### Objective 2.2: Promote knowledge sharing between technical experts within Mali and Cameroon, and between Mali, Cameroon, and the US

African Sky will facilitate knowledge sharing to facilitate projects within our partner communities. We recognize and respect the depth of knowledge that our project partners hold, and we seek to make connections between project communities and individual practitioners, specialists, and organizations in Mali, Cameroon, and the United States.

## **Strategic Goal 3**

### ***Develop strong leaders for social change***

African Sky's approach to development comes from the fact that we work closely, over an extended period of time, with our partner communities. In addition to furthering community development goals, this model aspires to empower strong leaders within those communities. As our partnerships evolve and mature, individuals have the opportunity to take on project administrative roles with increasing responsibilities. While leadership development has been an implicit element within our project portfolio, we now seek to formalize this goal of providing professional development opportunities within our project communities and for our leadership team.

#### Objective 3.1 Build community-engaged research skills and experience with and for partner communities, project beneficiaries, and African Sky Directors

Through our project portfolio and administrative operations African Sky provides a diverse array of community-engaged leadership opportunities for our partners, project beneficiaries, and Directors. These opportunities help African Sky pursue our strategic goals and objectives, and we collaborate on our initiatives in ways that help develop leadership, project management, and organizational skills for individual professional development and well-being. Similarly, working with African Sky provides opportunities for our partners, project beneficiaries, and Directors to share and teach their individual talents and leadership skills.

#### **Strategic Goal 4**

##### ***Advance African Sky's organizational integrity and operational sustainability***

By promoting efficient and effective administrative processes, we build on African Sky's evolution as a 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 revenue streams, and improve internal and external communications.

##### Objective 4.1: Institutionalize a monitoring, learning, and evaluation (MLE) system for AS projects through project planning and reporting processes

All African Sky projects will have defined goals, objectives, and metrics with direct links to the goals and objectives of our strategic plan. All projects will report on their outcomes and lessons learned, and 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, and corporate gifts/sponsorships.

##### Objective 4.3: Exercise organizational transparency with internal and external stakeholders

Our volunteers, leaders, and board members may access key internal documents, including meeting minutes, by-laws, and annual financial reports. We will also continue to promote external transparency via our website. Our IRS filings, annual reports, board minutes, and other relevant documents will continue to be available on our public facing website. We will also maintain our platinum certification and reporting with GuideStar (reputable non-profit monitoring site).

##### Objective 4.4: Annual Board Review of Strategic Plan, Goals, and Objectives

The Board of Directors will focus our annual meeting agenda on reviewing the organization's progress on the goals and objectives articulated in this strategic plan document. The Board will document our progress and challenges in meeting minutes, and they will amend or revise the strategic plan if/when they deem revisions necessary.