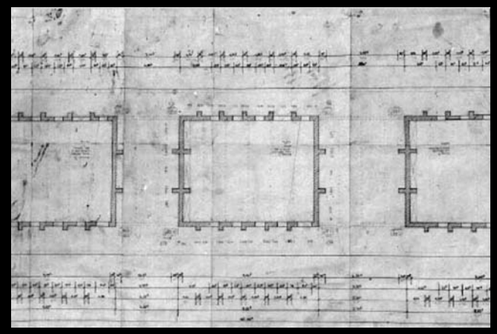
school bricks for gando

A simple 3-room school in the village of Gando, West Africa, was the realization of one man's vision to improve the quality of life in his community. Diebedo Francis Kere designed a primary school and raised the funds to build it, receiving government funding to train people to build using local materials. The school was built with the participation and solidarity of community members, and has served as the inspiration for a number of other local projects and initiatives.

school bricks for gando



Diebedo Francis Kere, who was the first person from this village to study abroad, believed that education was the cornerstone of his community's ability to improve their quality of life. As a student of architecture in Germany, Kere founded School Bricks for Gando, through which he raised enough funds to build the school. Construction began in October of 2000, with the participation of the village's men, women, and children. The school was completed in 2001.

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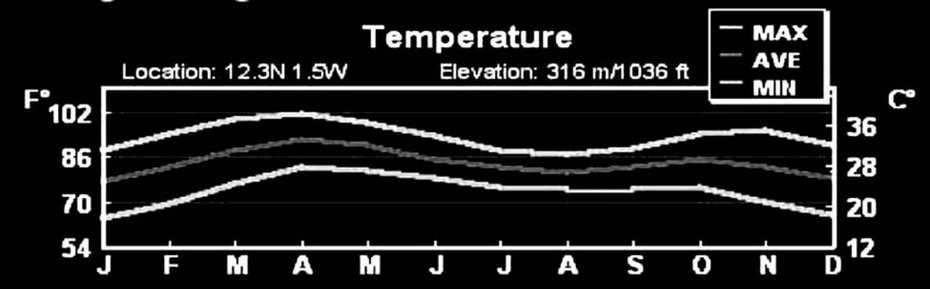
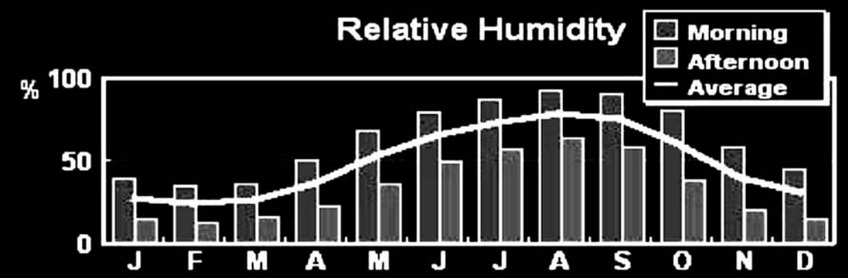
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso





Gando has a population of 3 000, and is located on the southern plains of Burkina Faso, about 200 kms from the capital city of Ougadougou.

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The project was rooted in principles of ecologically and culturally sustainable design, using locally made materials, low-cost construction techniques, and traditional strategies for climatic comfort. The project has raised awareness regarding the advantages of using local materials over more expensive imported materials such as concrete.

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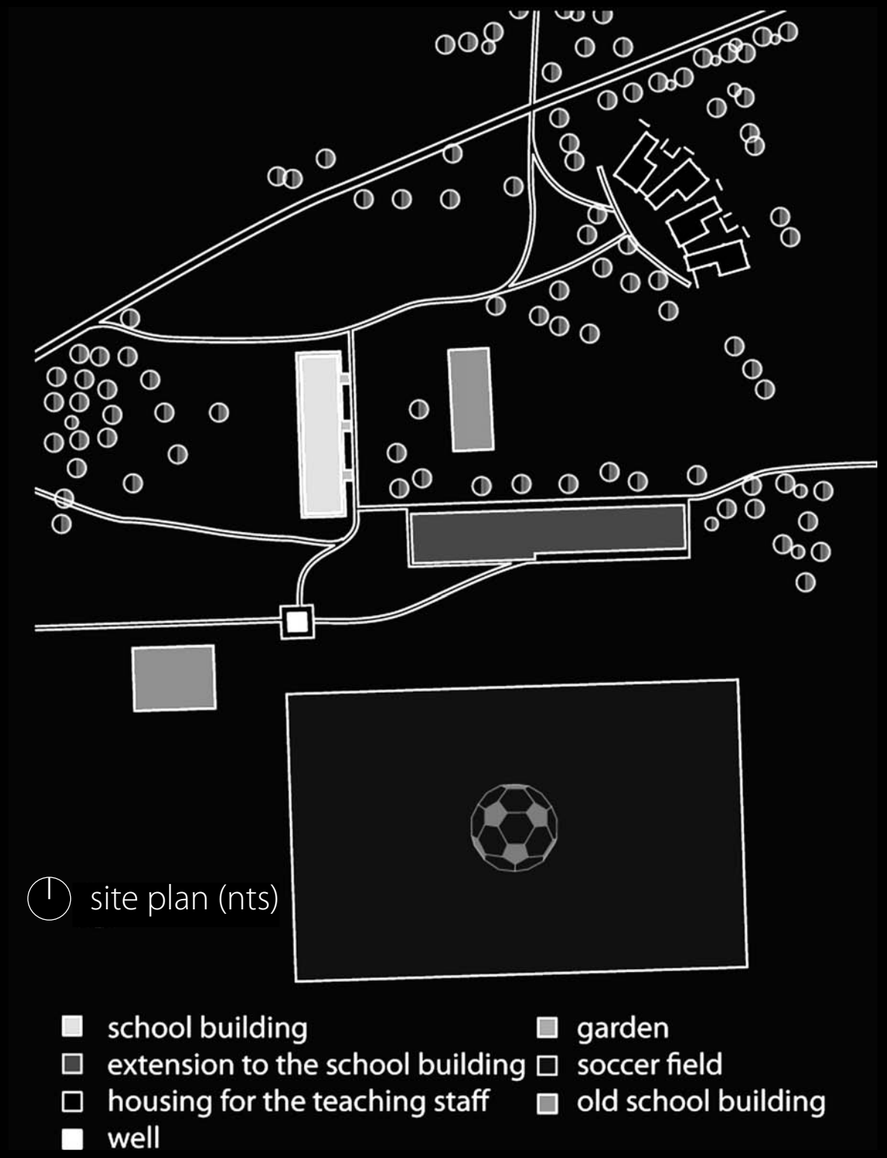
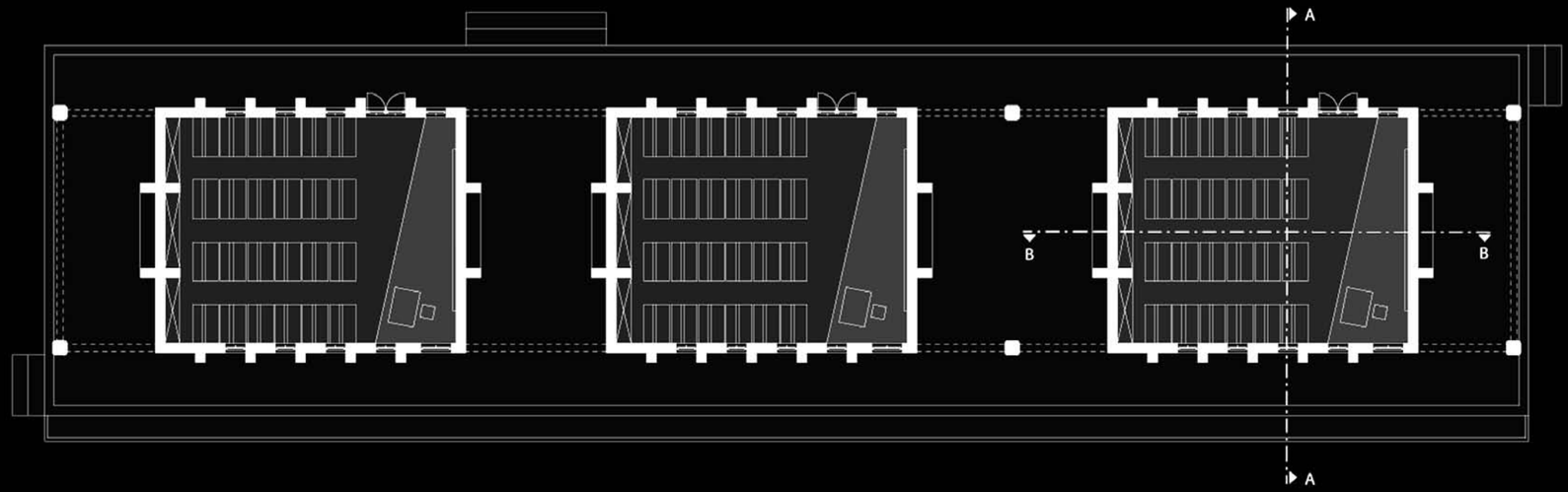
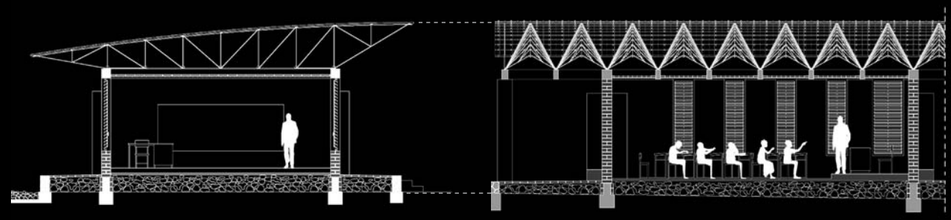




plan for gandо school (nts)

The building's form and materials were determined primarily from local climatic considerations. The building parti is that of three indoor classrooms separated by covered outdoor spaces. The structure uses load-bearing walls with concrete beams spanning the width of the ceiling. The metal roof is raised on lightweight steel trusses to allow air to cool the classrooms.



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school bricks for gando

Kere obtained funding from LOCOMAT, a government agency in Burkina Faso, to train local bricklayers in working with compressed, stabilized earth. Although clay earth is the most readily and freely available material, a lack of demand has meant that local innovations aimed at improving its stability had declined. LOCOMAT funding has been used to introduce technology for making bricks out of stabilized clay earth, reducing the risks traditionally associated with earth brick building.

school bricks for gando

Bricks made from the stabilized compressed earth were used to make the bearing walls, as well as the ceiling of the primary school. Buttresses serve a structural function, but also help to cool the building by casting shadows on the facade and reducing the amount of direct sunlight. The mass of the brick also helps to delay the penetration of the sun's rays into the classrooms. Following the completion of the school, earth bricks have been used in a number of local initiatives.

school bricks for gando

Because of the difficulty of transporting and lifting large elements into place, the trusses were made using common steel reinforcing bars, for which locals needed only handsaws and small welding machines. The lightweight trusses support a corrugated metal roof which is raised from the walls and ceiling of the classrooms to allow for ventilation. The roof has a large overhang, covering outdoor spaces and protecting them from the harsh sun and driving rain.

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All those involved in the coordination and participation of the project were native to Gando. The way in which the community organized itself for this project has served to inspire 2 nearby villages to build their own schools using locally avaialable materials.

In 2004 the primary school in Gando won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. The jury presenting the award commended it for demonstrating an elegant architectonic clarity achieved with the humblest of means. The jury also commented on the project's grace, sophistication, and sympathy with the local culture and climate. The school was recognized for its transformative quality as well, which has inspired pride and instilled hope, laying a foundation for the future of Gando.

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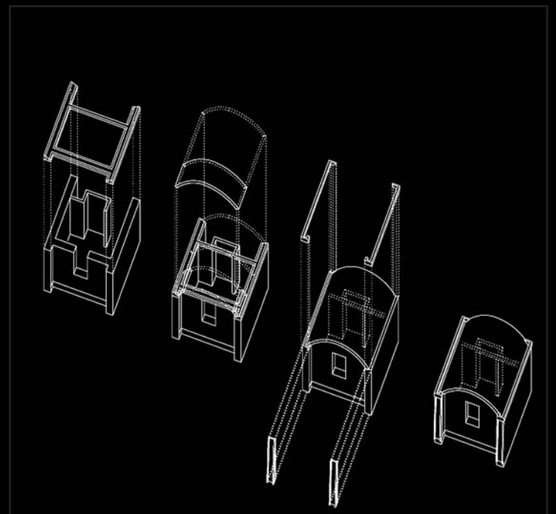

Following the completion of the school, School Bricks for Gando launched a teacher's housing project aimed at luring state-subsidized teaching staff to the countryside. The teacher's accomodations are made of compressed earth brick with high vaults to faciltate ventilation. Since their completion Gando has been able to attract enough teachers to keep the school busy mornings and evenings.

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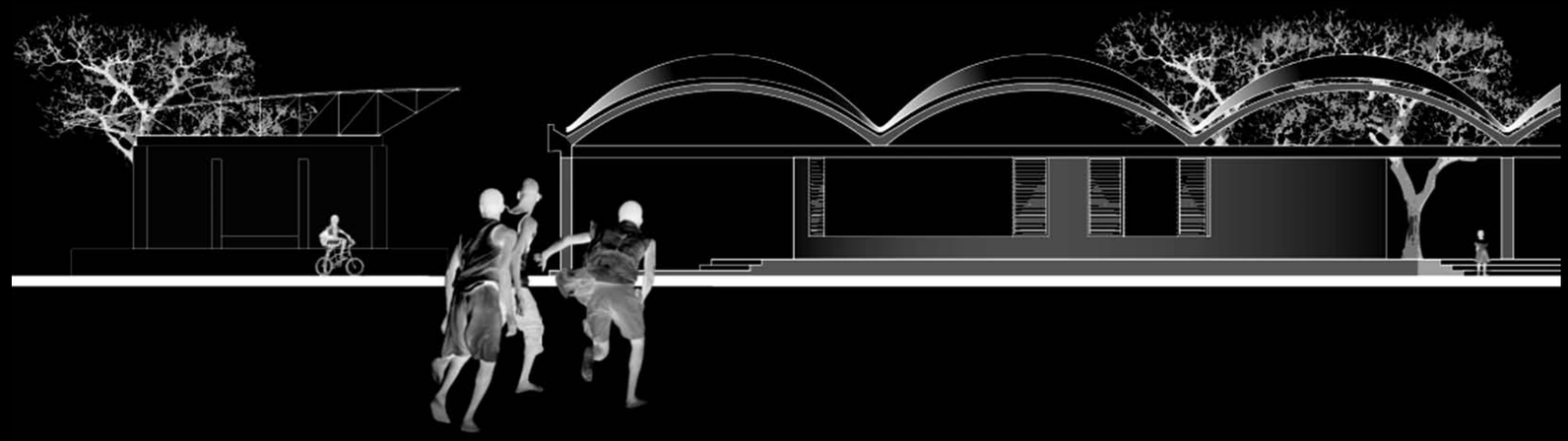

While planning the teacher's housing project, School Bricks for Gando has also been designing an addition to the school, using similar earth brick vaults. The addition is currently being constrcuted by the local team that built the primary school, and is scheduled for completion next fall. the addition includes indoor + outdoor classrooms, a library, a kitchen, and a soccer pitch.

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School Bricks for Gando is currently working with the community to re-think a number of ways in which the village functions. One of these is the approach to housing. Traditional mud and thatch huts have been considered less desirable than new concrete and corrugated metal homes, and are therefore being lost. The new housing initiative is seeking durable low-cost alternatives that reflect local culture and building practices.

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Another new initiative is the Gando afforestation project, which is seeking solutions to desertification. This project teaches villagers about the importance of reforestation, and involves community members educating each other about better practices for the planting and harvesting of treest.

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In conjunction with the afforestation project, the clay oven project helps villagers construct simple, inexpensive ovens which use up to 80% less wood to heat water and cook meals. These high-efficiency ovens will help to reduce the amount of time in which women must forage for wood, while reducing the need to harvest trees.

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School Bricks for Gando has also introduced a new project for constructing latrines in the community. The new latrines are more hygienic than the previous ones, and are low-cost and easy to produce.

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The status of women is another issue which is being addressed by the community. School Bricks for Gando is currently fundraising for a women's center, and has been helping to organize a women's cooperative in the village. The goal of this initiative is to help reduce the burden on women, while helping them to have greater autonomy and more diverse sources of income.

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The last major initiative for which the community is fundraising is the construction of a health clinic. Currently there are no health services available in the village of Gando. School Bricks for Gando is planning to design and build a new health clinic to be staffed by nurses and visited by a rotation of doctors, so that villagers will have improved access to both preventative and curative health services. No date for construction has been attached to this project as yet.

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What began as a conversation over coffee in Berlin has become an inspiration to both the people of Gando as well as those who are part of the worlwide movement to improve the lives of those living on the margins. The example of School Bricks for Gando serves as an important reminder of what is possible, and shows us how a simple, well designed project - no matter how small - can change people's lives and become a catalyst for even greater change to come.

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