



Kono Gnaga

# 2024 Annual Report

*Prepared by*

Zyck Baggett

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## A YEAR'S OVERVIEW

# ANNUAL SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY FESTIVALS



*Traditional dance and music are the living heritage of Mali and are vital in defining the cultural and spiritual values of communities, an important societal foundation that is rapidly disappearing. This is the motivation that keeps us moving forward.*

2024 was full of activity as we held our 6th Annual Community Festival in Mali. The Dou Ba festival, meaning "Big Family" in the Bamana language, featured children's performances from our SIX partner schools. In preparation for the festival, weekly classes took place in the schools in the first half of the school year (October 2023– January 2024) with the students working with our team of artists to learn the traditional dances and performing at the festival.

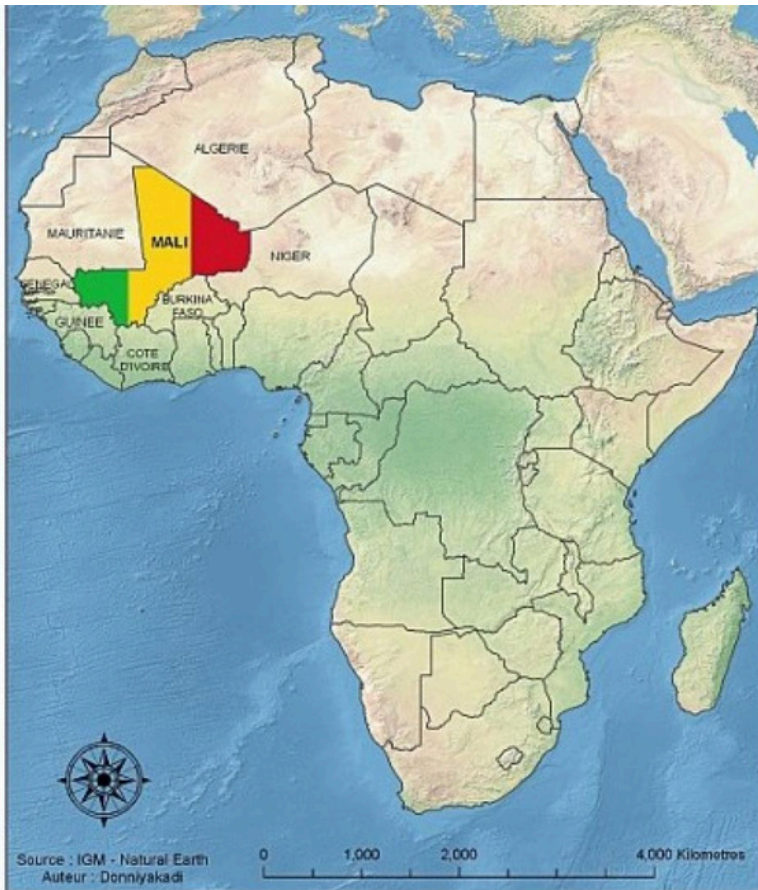
Each year, we rotate the location of the festival so that a different neighborhood has the opportunity to host. This year, the Niamakoro Quartier was selected, generating great excitement among students and residents alike. Attendance reached a record high, as people from the other participating communities came out to watch and support the students.





# PROGRAM LOCATIONS

We expanded our programming this year to rural areas by launching our pilot initiative into the Segou region of Mali. Through a partnership with the Mieruba Art Center in Segou, local artists in the region worked with students at the Lycee Abdoul Karim Camara dit Cabral of Segou teaching them traditional dance. Classes were held over the course of a few months. It was a very successful program with the students excited to learn the traditional dances of Mali.



# GIRLS PROGRAMMING

According to UNESCO, 130 million girls between the ages of 6 and 17 are out of school, including 15 million of primary-school age—half of whom live in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Mali, ranked 184th out of 189 countries on the 2019 UNDP Human Development Index, is one of the poorest countries in the world, with nearly 65% of its population under the age of 25. Girls in Mali face numerous barriers to education, including poverty, inadequate infrastructure, insecurity, and overall fragility. These challenges place girls at the center of multiple vulnerabilities, underscoring the urgent need for empowering, education-linked interventions. However, development actors often struggle to design effective strategies for engaging youth in a globalizing and digital world, especially in societies rooted in strong cultural traditions.

Our culturally grounded programs provide safe, relevant spaces that foster girls' empowerment and personal development. More than 80% of participants in our programs are girls—without us having to specifically target them. Few initiatives attract such high levels of voluntary participation from girls.



Engaging youth in cultural expression is a powerful tool for development, especially for girls, who are often marginalized. Participation in extracurricular activities like dance has been shown to build confidence, empower girls, and re-engage adolescents who are frequently excluded from formal education. Dance, in particular, is a highly effective way to cultivate self-confidence, an essential factor in keeping girls in school, preventing child marriage, and encouraging informed life choices such as delaying pregnancy.

Our programs also strengthen ties with local schools, contributing to improved student retention—a critical need in regions with high illiteracy rates. This impact highlights the vital role our programming plays in advancing education outcomes.

In response to growing interest and need, we recently formalized a partnership with a girls' school and ensured that the lead instructor was a woman. Including women in leadership roles not only promotes gender equality in the professional arts sector but also supports women's income generation and broader social empowerment.



# 2024- 2025 SCHOOL PROGRAM

Work began in October for the 2024-2025 school year. It marked the successful expansion of our program to the more rural area of Ségou,. Partnering again with the Mieruba Art Center and expanding to two local schools in Segou, we brought arts education to new communities and engaged local artists to work directly with students. This exciting expansion culminated in a vibrant community festival in Ségou, the first of its kind for the area.

To better understand our impact, we welcomed a monitoring and evaluation specialist who conducted focus groups with students, parents, and community members. The results were inspiring: parents noted their children were more motivated to attend school, and many girls reported increased confidence. One student shared, "I've become a better student. Before, I didn't ask questions when I didn't understand. Now, I ask my teacher without feeling ashamed."

With girls making up 80% of our participants, it's clear that Kono Gnaga is helping to break down barriers to education for girls and empower the next generation.







## TESTIMONIALS

"I've become a better student. Before, I didn't ask questions when I didn't understand. Now, I ask my teacher without feeling ashamed." -  
*Female Student*

Parents say they have seen an increased motivation of children to come to school because of this traditional dance activity. According to them, dance opens their minds and they become creative.



# PARTNERSHIPS

Kono Gnaga Inc and Kono Gnaga Association were honored to continue and expand our partnerships this year both in Mali and the United States.



- In Mali, our partnership with the **Mieruba Center** allows us to expand deeper into the communities and artist networks in the Segou region so that our work can have a greater impact. Our annual festival this year also included the **Compagnie Nama Marionnettes** in order to include another aspect of heritage. We also received a grant from the Malian based **African Culture Fund** in order to support our work this school year.
- In the US we continued our great partnership with **The Filling Station** of Eastern North Carolina, where Solo taught a week-long children's camp, teaching about the living heritage of Mali. Solo also continues to engage with **Atlantic Dance Theatre** also of Eastern North Carolina teaching school residencies and workshops. All these programs gives us the opportunity to share with children and their communities in the US and in Mali the traditions of the dance and music.
- We are also grateful for the generous support of the **Lifepius Foundation**, whose mission aligns closely with our own. Their funding helps ensure that young people, especially girls, gain access to one of life's most essential resources: the confidence and opportunity needed for healthy, empowered living.
- **and...OF COURSE we are also deeply thankful for our community of individual donors, whose continued support year after year makes our work possible.**

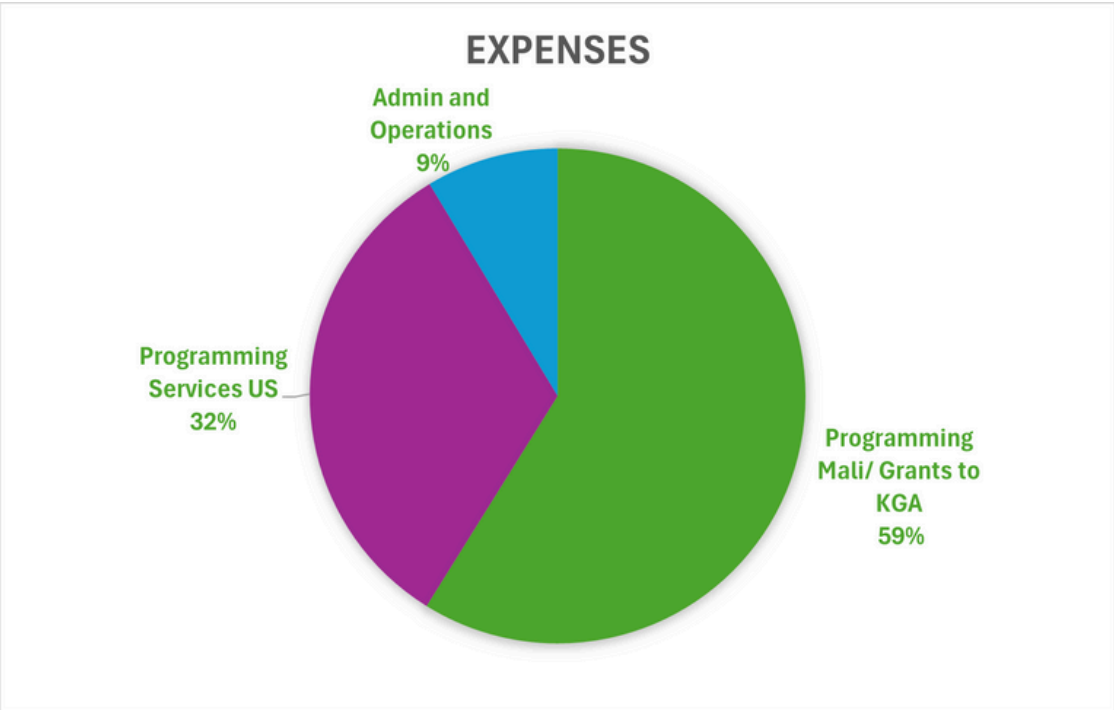
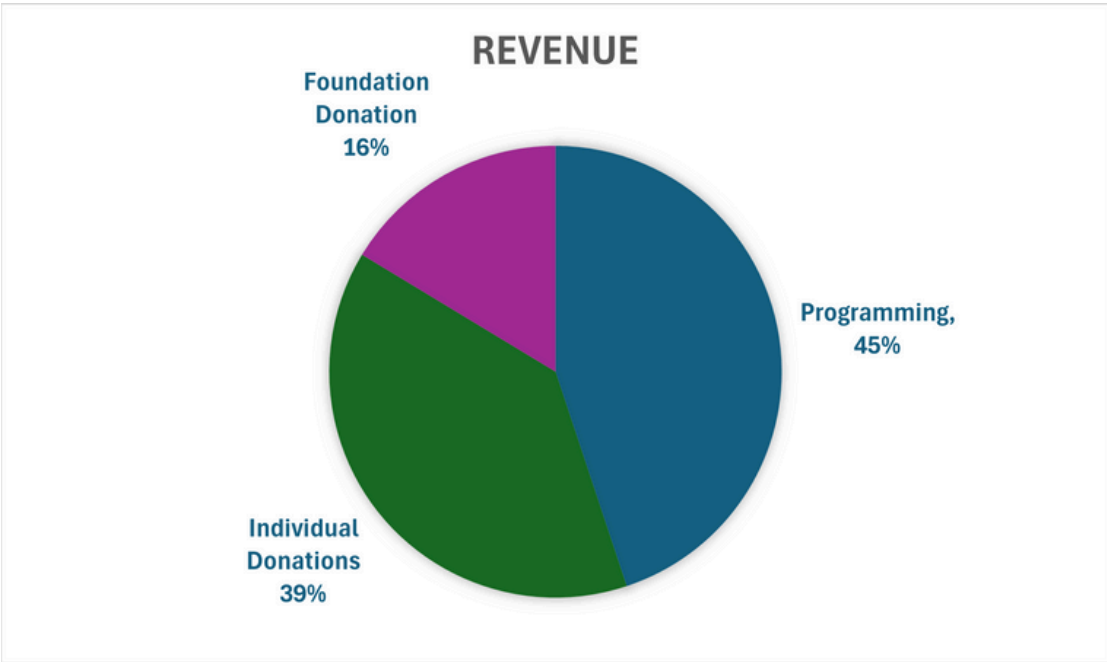




*A Year's Overview*

# FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

2024 Total  
Budget \$17,222







## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

**Kono Gnaga, Inc. Board of Directors:**

Senah Andrews

Zyck Baggett

Julie Bata

Di Andree Dukes

Souleymane Sana

Jamaica White

**Kono Gnaga Association, Mali:**

Souleymane Sana

Djeneba Seck

Aliou Seck

Fanta Kante

Zyck Baggett

**Executive/Artistic Director: Souleymane  
Sana**

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