



The Atkins Family

Jason, Emily, Savannah,
Nathaniel, and Miriam

Serving in Guinea-Bissau with



West African
Vocational Schools

February 2017

Three generations of
Atkins in Africa!

Mixin' It Up *by Jason*

The drinking water filter factory has made steady progress forward in the last two years, but is still far from the intended full production rate needed to satisfy the anticipated demand once the filters are available for sale to the public. The factory workers



Above: The original mixer.

Below: Our new filter material mixing specialist!



the paddles would roll it around, like a ball of dough in a bakery mixer.

It required a lot of patient design and fabrication, but it worked! The modified mixer has now been in service for long enough to declare it a complete success. Now, rather than the exhaustion of hand mixing the material for only one filter in 10 minutes, the machine is mixing batches of three filters at a time in less than 5 minutes. Mixing is no longer a production bottleneck, and it's not wearing out the workers!

In the end, the actual physical changes to the mixer were relatively small (same drum, same motor, same gears), however the effect on the project will be huge. Projects like this, in places like this, have been abandoned over less. Thank you for the support that allows us to be here, walking alongside projects like the drinking water filter factory day in and day out, ready to help when necessary to keep things running smoothly!



The corrected mixer in action as the crew forms filters.
some difficult circumstances.

One of the issues that was holding back the production rate is a mixing machine that wasn't working properly. We sent over a standard construction mortar mixer on the advice of the Canadian potters who use a similar one in their lab. Though the machine is running fine, it doesn't work for mixing the thick clay/sawdust/water mixture from which the filters are made, so the mixing for the last two years has been done by gloved hands in a bucket, making one filter's worth of material at a time. It's really hard work that, in addition to being slow, is tiring the workers out which further slows everything else down.

Because this was the mixer that the potters recommended, we spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to rework the transmission or gear down the paddles, but none of our solutions would have lasted long.

Fortunately, after studying some video clips from other filter factories' mixers, as well as poring over photos of commercial clay-mixing solutions (called pug mills), we began to suspect that the problem was in the way the mixer was moving the clay around inside the pan. I set out to change the mixing geometry so that rather than trying to cut through the mixture,



Home schol with Nana.

Our First Family Visit *by Emily*

This year started off with a real treat—Jason's parents, Paul and Marilee, came out to Guinea-Bissau. This was the first time anyone from our family has been able to visit. They arrived very early in the morning on a Sunday, and after a few hour's rest, they went to church with us. As we took our seats and joined in the singing I realized how amazing it was that there were three generations of Atkins worshipping God together in a little village church in Guinea-Bissau! They spent 10 days with us, being part of our daily life here in Canchungo, checking out the water filter factory and the Youth Center in the capital where we lived for 8 years, and spending an adventurous weekend out on the islands. They enjoyed seeing our life and work, but I think the highlight for them was all of the fun they had with their silly grandkids.



Buying a few veggies at a market table on the islands.

God's Presence In Heartache *by Emily*

Being present with someone who is suffering is the one of the hardest things for me personally, and these past few months God has invited me into that terribly uncomfortable space again and again. I've had several deep conversations with a man who recently got saved, was subsequently kicked out of his home, and is now estranged from his entire family including his wife and infant. I've spent hours by the bedside of a dying Muslim neighbor. Last month, our neighborhood was flooded with refugees from the Gambia as the political situation there deteriorated and people feared civil war. And, in a million other large and small ways, I've been daily confronted with the pain of people around me.

Watching suffering, my American mind searches for solutions; and my American hands long to jump in to fix, to comfort and calm, to do anything besides sit and feel helpless. We Americans are not great at being present without doing anything. Most of the time I find myself just sitting in solidarity, listening to stories, holding hands and crying, looking into someone's eyes as they talk about their pain, and showing them by my presence and compassion that God is present and compassionate to us all.

I have been able to do some things—making extra food and sharing it, lending money to help with medical bills, speaking encouraging words—but mostly I've just been present. For me that's harder. Walking over to my neighbor's house knowing I'm going to see her in pain, I'm going to hug her four children and encourage her mother, and then I'm going to leave—without fixing anything—is hard. But God often shows Himself faithful through the faithfulness of His people; so I've been looking to Him to give me the courage to continue to demonstrate His faithfulness in the lives of the people he puts in my path.

Through it all, I am growing. I have been discovering yet again that when I put myself in situations that I can't fix, my eyes are more open to God's solutions. When I don't have nice clichés to fall back on, I pray continually that God will give me the words I need. When my heart aches and my compassion is tired, I rely on God and His wonderful people to encourage and strengthen me.



The Gambia is an English-speaking country, so our kids loved playing with all of the Gambian kids who came to stay with their Guinean relatives in our neighborhood during Gambia's political crisis earlier this year.



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