



The Atkins Family

Jason, Emily, Savannah,
Nathaniel, and Miriam

Serving in Guinea-Bissau,
West Africa

September 2022

One month before we fly
back, we are in full
container packing mode!

New Member of the Team! *by Jason*

We are enjoying moving around the U.S. and seeing so many of you during our 4-month trip. It's been a big blessing for us. With that said, the work going on in Guinea-Bissau and the projects waiting for us when we return in early November are always on our minds. Our gratitude for the work that has already been done at the new site is balanced by the realization that we have several more years of construction in front of us before we reach the end. While we'll obviously be continuing to do other work during that time to support other organizations in their missions to help in various ways in Guinea-Bissau, a significant road lies before us as well.

However, we recently received a giant boost which will be a significant force multiplier in our project (and many others after)! A dear friend who has been significantly involved in our ministry for more than a decade (and donated our very first welder!) approached us with an idea. Watching our progress and being involved in many construction projects himself, he said, "you know, what you guys really need to move things along over there is a skid steer." Of course, that would be wonderful, but with a sticker price like a nice SUV, we didn't have the budget for one. He shocked us by saying, "go find a good one and I'll make it happen."

After lots of advice from a childhood friend who is in the heavy equipment world, a big search for just the right thing, and negotiations over the phone, I made the drive down to Indianapolis to buy a very capable Caterpillar 239D tracked compact loader! I brought it back to my parents' house the same day, and we've been putting it through its paces in the back yard to make sure there are no nagging maintenance issues that we need to take care of before sending it over in the shipping container in October.

A machine like this will be useful for a lot of different tasks. Here are a few jobs we're looking forward to letting it take over:

Loading gravel - Currently when we buy a load of gravel for cement, we drive our trailer to wherever the gravel is collected in a pile on the ground for sale. It takes three guys the better part of a morning to use shovels to fling the approximately 4 yards of gravel into the trailer. Eight bucketfuls with the loader will finish a whole load!

Loading sand - For the first time in our experience in Guinea-Bissau, the rainy season is a big benefit. In previous houses which have all leaked, it's been a pain, but at the land, because of the slope of the land, we've been able to set up settling pools so that some of the sand that the monsoon-type rains wash past us out to the river can be captured. The guys are adding the harvested sand to sheltered piles nearby, and we'll use it to make cement. Similar to the gravel, the skid steer will be able to load the sand into the trailer to be brought to the cement mixer much more quickly and easily than by hand with shovels!

Mining clay - We purchased two half-parcels of land behind our base in order to dig the significant amount of red clay dirt we'll need to make all of the compressed adobe blocks which we'll use to build all of the buildings. Currently that dirt is all being (cont'd)



The kids all enjoyed taking turns moving a pile of dirt around the yard while we got to know the machine.

New Member of the Team (cont'd) *by Jason*



[...] dug by hand. The guys work hard, but even so are generally digging about 1.5 days for each half day of the block machine actually forming blocks—first digging the dirt and throwing it up onto a step, moving up to the step and flinging it onto the surface, then throwing it from there into the trailer we use to measure it. With the loader, we'll construct a ramp down into the mine pit so that the loader can drive down, pick up a bucketful of dirt, drive it back up the ramp, and drop it straight into the trailer. It's going to save a ton of time and lot of tired muscles!

Moving block - On the other end of the same process, the blocks that come out of the block machine (which is set up by the mine) are stacked by hand on the ground in piles. When we're ready to build with them, the guys load the blocks into the trailer one at a time (across a roller table), we tow the trailer to the building we're working on, and then the blocks are unloaded one at a time into piles for the masons to use. From now on, the blocks will

be stacked onto pallets as they come out of the machine, and from there we'll use the forks on the loader to move the pallets around, never handling them again individually until the masons grab them to lay them on a wall! The blocks weigh about 25 pounds each, so this will also save a lot of sore arms!

Lifting heavy machinery and stock - We have a small electric walk-behind forklift for use inside the workshop (eventually), but it is limited to only very smooth, level concrete. The skid steer will be invaluable for lifting and lowering heavy things that can't be brought to the concrete. When the new shop is done and the day arrives to move all of the equipment from the current shop to the new one, the loader is going to not only tremendously speed up the machine loading and unloading, but also allow us to do it much more safely.

We continue to be humbled by the generosity of God's people. Please pray with us that this huge gift will be able to be useful in Guinea-Bissau, that we'll be able to operate it safely, and take good care of such a big responsibility.



Above: Moving blocks one at a time will be a thing of the past!

Left: The unit came with older tracks and a new set on a pallet. Though I had hoped to run the old set for a few years before switching to the new, they were too worn. One of them tore while we were working in the yard. Fortunately the repair was made easier by my dad's tractor helping lift!



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