

# Burden of Dreams

The life of the young Burkina Faso architect, **Diébédo Francis Kéré**, has been as remarkable as it has been unusual. Encompassing his first student days project Gando school, to the opening this year of the Opera Village in his home country, Kéré today stands on the cusp of redefining the reach of sustainable architecture across Sub-Saharan Africa

**LEAF THROUGH** your average Western architecture magazine and the chances are that the magazine focuses on projects from the cultural north. The contrast would become even more stark if visualised as cloud data. Global cities, drawn mainly from the urbanised North would dominate as centres of attention, contorting and concertina-ing the resulting world map into a new shape; much of the global, particularly rural, south, would disappear, or be all but invisible. Two main exceptions, the oil rich Middle East, – Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and UEA – and the BRIC countries – particularly seaboard China – with their urbanising global cities for the twenty-first century lighting up. Outside these urban magnets many countries would not, in effect, exist, across swathes of Asia, South America and particularly, sub-Saharan Africa.

By contrast, a notable aspect of the recent wave of humanitarian architectural projects is how they have put otherwise wholly unheard of parts of the world onto the profession's, and indeed the wider cultural map. Rudrapur, the village in north Bangladesh is known or heard of by young architects, because Anna Heringer's METI school went viral over the net. The same has happened with Li Xiadong's Bridge School in Xiashi, Fujian province, south China which also received barrel-loads of publicity. There is a growing, widespread network of others. But of all the villages now caught up in this unlikely architectural embrace, it's Gando, a village of 3000 inhabitants on the edge of the Sahel, 125 miles from Burkina Faso's Francophone African capital, Ouagadougou, which is, perhaps, the most surprising recipient of architectural attention. The reason for this is Diébédo Francis Kéré, the eldest son of Gando's village chief or headman, whose story is as unusual as it is remarkable. The story has so far taken



Caption

the forty-eight year Burkinabe on a journey far away from home, while underlining his umbilical connection to his birthplace. Born in 1965 Kéré was the first child from his village to attend school in the neighbouring town of Tenkodogo. He went on to study carpentry in Ouagadougou, the Burkina Faso capital, before winning a carpentry and development work scholarship in Berlin, Germany. There, Kéré put himself through night school and was awarded another scholarship in 1990, which enabled him to take the German national

university exam, the Abitur, and from there to apply to architecture school.

After beginning his study at the internationally respected Habitat Unit course at Berlin Technical University, Kéré began to think about designing a school for his home village. Working with fellow students and tutors he carefully researched sustainable approaches, and then designed a school building for his home village. At the same time he set up a charity, raised funding, returned to Gando in 2001, and with

his fellow villagers built the school from his design, while also completing the course in Berlin in 2002. Two years later the school building won the influential Aga Khan award, propelling him onto the international architecture circuit. Kéré became a sought after speaker, while further schools and other community infrastructure projects he has designed have gone on to win a string of further awards.

Today, three years into the century's second decade, Kéré is recognised as an influential figure within a new