



# Videos smashing gender stereotypes go **viral** in Mali

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In Mali, women barely feature in the media. Online media outlet Sahelien.com set out to change this with a series of video profiles on women in jobs traditionally dominated by men. The videos went viral, raising awareness about gender roles in Malian society.

Since three years, Niassondi Baté works as a truck driver, transporting construction materials in the Malian capital Bamako. She is the only female driver in her company. Getting the job was not easy: it took her three years after obtaining her driving licence. “I do a job that I like and that allows me to make ends meet,” she says. She doesn’t consider herself as a role model, but says that she would be happy if other women would follow her example. “It takes a lot of courage,” she adds.

In March, Free Press Unlimited partner [Sahelien.com](http://Sahelien.com), a news website for the Sahel region, published a video profile of Niassondi. Within weeks, the video was viewed nearly 750,000 times – a record for the website, which has existed since 2014. The video gathered around 19,000 likes and 650 overwhelmingly positive comments. Messages of admiration and encouragement were posted by both men and women. It’s an unexpected success that could inspire other media outlets in Mali to make their reporting more gender sensitive.

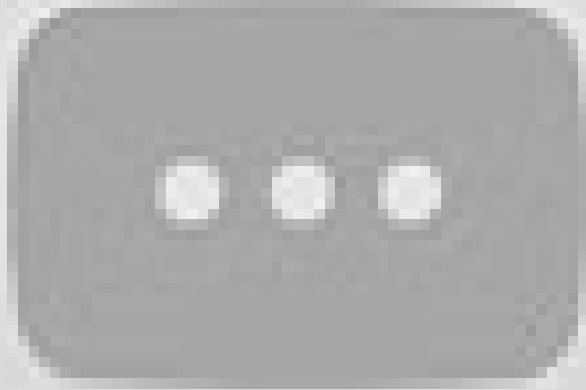
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In Mali, the workplace remains predominantly the realm of men. Women occupying positions traditionally reserved for men are often disapproved of, as they are expected to care for the family and home. A survey by Malian media development organisation Tuwindi shows that only five percent of content published online is about gender issues. Of all the people appearing in Malian media - as journalists, presenters, and experts and witness who are interviewed - only 14 percent is female.

## Training

Journalist Sory Kondo produced Baté's video portrait as part of a training supported by Free Press Unlimited. He and nine other Sahelien.com correspondents from different regions followed a module about gender issues in March. "Before this training I always gave the floor to men in my reports. I did not think too much about women and often thought that they would probably refuse to answer or have nothing to say," Kondo says. Now, he tries to include women in each of his reports: "I realised that I had prejudices before, and since I've changed my approach it has come more naturally."

Abdoul Salam Hama, editor in chief of Sahelien.com, believes that journalists are spokespersons of a society and should be on the frontline of gender equality. "Our journalists are told that women's voices should always be heard especially in remote areas because they do not see many journalists there, but we didn't focus enough on that until now," he says.

## Congratulated and encouraged

Other women who were profiled by journalists participating in the training include mason Hawa Fofana and Fatouma Wangara, a figure of resistance against the 2012 occupation by armed groups of the northeastern city of Gao.

Niassondi is "very happy and moved" by the responses she has received after the video was published. "Many people I meet in the streets or at the market congratulate me and encourage me to continue my work," she says. She hopes journalists will continue to raise the profile of women: "In Mali, we have women who deserve to be known, they do what many men cannot do. In all areas we have sisters and mothers who stand out. It's up to the journalists to go to them and make them known."

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## CONTACT DETAILS

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Weesperstraat 3

1018 DN Amsterdam

The Netherlands

T: +31 20 8000400

E: info[at]freepressunlimited.org

IBAN: NL92 INGB 000 000 7676



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