



# Paving the way for **gender-sensitive reporting** through taboo issues

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In the DRC, radio is a tool that enables direct communication with the Congolese population. In Bukavu, radio is the main source of communication, as there is a high percentage of illiterate people, and not everyone has access to television and Internet. Founded in 2016, Mama Radio has rapidly become a popular radio station in and around Bukavu. Free Press Unlimited has supported AFEM with the production of media content and was especially involved in the design of the station's 'Témoins Spécial' investigative journalism show.

## Opening up to discuss taboo issues

The slogan of the show is: "Taboo issues are no longer a mystery". Through this radio show, [AFEM](#) raises awareness about gender-sensitive issues that are relevant at local and national level to improve the day to day situation of Congolese women. Women in Bukavu are now starting to open up to discuss topics that they were ashamed to talk about before. For example, a mother of a child with albinism agreed to testify in the show to break the myth about albinos: "My 9-year-old albino girl is often judged and discriminated against by classmates at school and friends in the neighborhood. But when the journalist of [Mama Radio](#) came to question me I did not hesitate because everything that people think of albinos is not real, they are just like the others."

The main challenge is to find the people who are willing to talk about taboo issues due to safety concerns. A different problem is the difficult access to places: roads are bad, sometimes nonexistent and there are some places inaccessible to cars and motorbikes. Another issue is to have all the permits and required documents in order, to avoid issues with the authorities.

In the last two years, 'Témoins Spécial' ('special witness') has been able to amplify the voice of women. The issues discussed in the show have achieved visible results. Women that have been raped or accused of witchcraft have been able to overcome these problems and are now part of the community. They are very brave and courageous and they feel safe because they have 'Témoins Spécial' to express themselves.

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# Awareness campaigns

The government has played an important role and has promised to start awareness campaigns for the population regarding various taboo issues. For example, the head of the police spread the message that people do not have the right to burn women accused of witchcraft. With these messages from the head of the police, people are starting to change. People also take the messages that come directly from the police more seriously now.

The radio show also offers an opportunity for feedback and testimonies from listeners. People have indicated that thanks to 'Témoignage Spécial' they are changing their way of thinking. This is a big success for women living in the DRC and a great example for other countries facing similar issues. AFEM is proud of the positive reactions of the listeners, the letters received and the comments on social media encouraging them to keep doing a good job for the free press.

In April 2014 twelve female journalists from AFEM have been trained in investigative journalism techniques by Free Press Unlimited. Instead of just covering events they now dig into a subject and do in-depth reporting using different sources. They also received a technical training so that they no longer have to depend on their male colleagues for the editing of their stories.

*The Association for women in media (AFEM) was created in 2003 by Congolese female journalists to facilitate the access of women to media, and improve their role in the media. This is highly relevant in a country where women lack access to media and men choose what to hear or see. AFEM is based and reports in and around Bukavu, the largest city in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).*

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