

**Annual Report 2023**  
Voice4Thought Foundation



[www.voice4thought.org](http://www.voice4thought.org)

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# Preface to the Annual Report

The importance of the mission of Voice4Thought is ever growing in a world that is becoming increasingly polarised, freedom of press being oppressed or at least limited. Reporters sans Frontiere shows in their [‘World Press Freedom Index’](#) that in 2023 press freedom deteriorated in many countries. In seven out of the ten countries, the environment for journalism is ‘bad’. On the African continent, ‘good’ press freedom is nowhere to be found, in 45% of the countries they observe it as ‘problematic’, and in 40 % of the countries it is ‘very difficult’. Interesting mention is that they call 2023 the year of the ‘fake content industry’ that also explains the press’ instability: "(...) This instability is the result of increased aggressiveness on the part of the authorities in many countries and growing animosity towards journalists on social media and in the physical world. The volatility is also the consequence of growth in the fake content industry, which produces and distributes disinformation and provides the tools for manufacturing it." These world wide trends show how important it is that we provide a space for diverse voices to express themselves, and that we continue to train young people to think critically.

Over the years, Voice4Thought has developed a method that bridges the gap between academics and art, allowing space for open dialogue, belonging, and critical thinking. We see that critical journalism and critical citizens are necessary to create awareness of social and economic challenges of our times. Our new collaboration with Fondation Hirondelle on *Journalisme et polycrise au Sahel*, a research project where we try to understand what the opportunities and methods are for journalism in polycrisis, is therefore very timely. As we concentrate on the situation in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, we will come forward with alternative forms of journalism that may be inspiring for other countries in our world. The polycrisis does not discriminate: all countries of the world and all citizens are confronted with it in one way or the other.

Crises are often looked at in a dominantly negative way. However, Winston Churchill gave us a different perspective: ‘Never let a good crisis go to waste’. A crisis also offers an opportunity to give renewed attention to the stumble blocks and to analyse, and it may inspire us to look critically at what can be learned from the problems we face in the world today. Consequently, we may still find the positives and highly inventive projects that are developed these days. This is exactly what we need to report in our research, journalism and arts.

*Bon Buzz*, our project in Chad, has set the agenda for V4T to develop this kind of thinking. Searching for the small stories with a big message is a style of reflecting on the world around us that has found an enthusiastic panel in Chad. In order to depolarize we need to overcome the simplification of the we/they mentality and seek for the nuances and complexities of stories. We hope to find support to spread Bon Buzz in the world via our website and social media, but especially via the people whom we work with!

Publications by the Voice4Thought Academy Mali and Bon Buzz have shown how our workshops, seminars, discussions with youth in African settings have been a departure for depolarizing storytelling. See for example [‘Traversé vers l'inconnu : Parcours des migrants](#)

*vers l'espoir depuis Tombouctou*, a video by V4T Academy reporter Randane in Tombouctou on the vulnerable and complex stories of young West African migrants passing through Tombouctou on to greener pastures. Recent blog entries by Bon Buzz participants are '[Un musulman n'habite pas chez moi](#)', a blog post by Bon Buzz participant Gérard Daliam Ketong, and '[L'obstruction des voies aux heures et jours de prière](#)' by Ndingamndôh Djasrabe.

Our partnerships with organisations spread over the world are crucial for our mission. A mission that needs to be shared, and reformulated together with our partners. Our collaboration with IHE Delft, CRASH in Chad, the Academy we are establishing in Colombia with local communities are examples of the way we co-create in knowledge production, both academic, journalistic and artistic.

Together we will continue to amplify voices in the world.

On behalf of the V4T team and the Board,  
Mirjam de Bruijn, General Director

# About Voice4Thought

*Voice4Thought: dialogue and knowledge to think critically*

## **Vision**

Voice4Thought is a nonprofit foundation that offers a platform where different voices can participate in building an inclusive debate and critical knowledge on social, political and economic issues of our time. Most of these voices are actors in long-standing, often unseen, unrecognised, silenced or forgotten social and political processes of change in their countries of origin and across borders. We believe in the power of storytelling in multiple ways. Therefore, we provide them with a digital and physical space to tell their stories through academic, artistic, and journalistic expressions, workshops and outlets, and provide a space for others to rethink the world critically.

## **Mission**

We seek to bring academia to the streets and the streets to academia: we believe in knowledge as the result of a co-creative process in which we seek for new connections and opportunities to learn in order to enable dialogue between academia, decision-makers and civil society. The reciprocal process is at the core of our aim to develop new methodologies for understanding (political) change in societies, and giving a space to the unheard voices. The power of diverse Voices (V) and ways of Thinking (T) helps us to rethink our world from a critical perspective. Together we can set up new and innovative ways of creating and sharing knowledge and create an inspiring knowledge community of engaged people.

## **What we do**

The core of Voice4Thought is our digital platform where we connect all dots. Nevertheless, we are equally engaged in on-the-ground projects and events. We organise our own festivals and participate in others, we host a platform for bloggers worldwide and organise workshops, debates and cultural events. We support voices and collectives with whom we work in writing and executing projects, such as the Voice4Thought Academy in Mali. Next to this, we have a peer-reviewed and academically recognised online publication, *Bridging Humanities*.

In our work we focus on the use and integration of different media and sources: text, video, photography, audio, cartoons and multimedia. We use different and new research methodologies in an experimental framework, which involves using visuals to promote an interactive fruition of our projects. With this approach, we aim to elaborate new forms of dissemination of knowledge by collaborating with cultural organisations, universities and publishing houses to start new initiatives inspired by the V4T philosophy.

## **ANBI Status and Chamber of Commerce**

Voice4Thought Foundation is recognised by the Dutch Tax Department as a public benefit organisation. It has an ANBI status (Algemeen Nut Beogende Instelling). The RSIN fiscal number of the foundation is 856321382. We are registered with the Dutch Chamber of Commerce/Kamer van Koophandel (KvK 65930029).

More information can be found on our website: [www.voice4thought.org](http://www.voice4thought.org)

# 2023: Highlights and projects

## 1. Voice4Thought Academy Mali

The Voice4Thought Academy (V4TA) in Mali is part of [PGRL+](#) (Programme de Gouvernance Locale Redevable) for 5 years. In April 2024, we entered our fourth year. We have come to a positive balance; the V4T Academy is well established in Mali, with eight antennas in the northern, central and southern regions of the country acting as active hubs. In these regions, young men and women are trained in research and artistic expressions (watch a video on 'who we are' made by our team in Bamako, [here](#)). With the expansion of the mobile schools the V4TA was able to reach even more young people and make an impact.

During the third year of PGLR+/V4TA we experienced a change of the management team. Three of our colleagues from the Bamako office decided to embark on new adventures. We wish Didier Lalaye, Mariam Sidibé and Mamadou Sissouma all the best! We are thankful for their enthusiasm and dedication, from setting up the Academy in its pilot year in 2020 to the end of 2023. Together with them we can look back to all the times in which we as a young organisation were confronted with many responsibilities and challenges and had to develop our management skills. The Academy is as successful as it is today in part due to their efforts.

Our new management team from 2024 consists of Modibo Galy Cissé, Mamadou Togola, Tabita Goita and Aboubacar Camara. In the next two years, we are determined to create an even more permanent place in Mali and the Sahel region for the Voice4Thought Academy. Through co-creation and collaboration, we can flourish.

This year there was a special focus on studying traditional cultures in Mali. An example is the series of productions on the initiation rite of *N'domo*. Read about it in a published [article](#) and watch a [slam performance](#).

The fact that small local issues touch on larger themes is illustrated by a theater piece from Niono about an older man named Moussa, who feels threatened in his position by the initiatives of young people and takes it up with the village chief. Watch it [here](#).

Highlights of V4TA productions can be viewed on the [website](#), and regular updates on our activities on the [Facebook page](#).



**Picture:** Impressions of the mobile school in the community of Madina Kourlamini, watch the video report [here](#).

## 2. V4T Archive

Output of the research, reporting and cultural productions in the PGLR+ antennas was uploaded and shared internally through the platform [V4Tarchive.org](https://v4tarchive.org). This multimedia database continued to grow, while existing data was tagged with metadata to facilitate searches. The structure provided the blueprint for a similar platform that V4T set out to build for the PGLR+ consortium in Mali, and which is planned to be launched during 2024. Preparatory work was done towards the end of 2023 by teams in the Netherlands and Mali.

The V4T archive is used by several of the Voice4Thought projects, including V4T Académie Mali, DDMAC and *Djonya Kélé Ja Toulon* (Gamers against slavery in Mali), and the intention is to add data from future projects as well, thus building a database that can be utilised to feed into several activities and research by V4T and partners.

## 3. Tchadoblog and Bon Buzz: depolarizing journalism

After a start with [Tchadoblog](#), which resulted in the website of Chadian bloggers, and which allowed us to enroll our ideas on depolarizing journalism, we took up the challenge to improve the project and were really happy to have found continuation in funding from the EU in Chad, the Dutch Embassy to develop the second phase: [Bon Buzz](#).

In the beginning of [November 2023](#), 23 young and motivated participants (bloggers, journalists, and influencers) came together in N'Djamena to join Voice4Thought's 7-day workshop – the first one in a series of two – on writing depolarising stories in the context of

Chadian cultures and politics. Two main themes stood out: what is polarisation, and consequently, how can we depolarise? and how to tell an engaging and convincing story? As we speak, the participants are researching and writing their stories with some online guidance. In early 2024 we will hold the second workshop to discuss the stories and train some more. Bon Buzz is supported by the Dutch Embassy and the European Commission in Chad and executed in partnership with CRASH, a local academic research institute.

As this being a successful start, we hope to also develop projects on depolarizing journalism in Mali and in Europe.

## 4. DDMAC

[Decoding Digital Media in African Conflicts](#) (DDMAC) is a project funded by the Norwegian Research Council, in which the Voice4Thought Academy is responsible for the research in Mali. The leading researcher of V4TA is Modibo Cissé. Mirjam de Bruijn leads the project with Bruce Mutsvairo and Kristin Ogoreth. A [workshop](#) with Malian digital media experts was held in March 2023 in the capital Bamako. The outcomes of this workshop are part of research publications of the project. Modibo Cissé worked on understanding the growing presence of WhatsApp groups during the war in central Mali waged since 2015. Simultaneously, the V4T team started to work on understanding the activities and influence of the local Bamako radio stations in times of crisis. The reports on both activities will be published in 2024.

## 5. VozPa'Colombia

VozPa'Colombia (Voice4Colombia), the V4T Academy in Colombia, has been under development this year. While looking for funding for the pilot phase of the project, the [VozPa'Colombia page](#) has been set up on our website, where all content is also published in Spanish. Here, you find an introductory text as well as blogs.

To collaborate with local artists, a project logo has been created with the Colombian artist Kali, see below, depicting two women representing the two communities we work with (the indigenous community in Sibaté and afro descendants in Palenque), telling their own stories in their own ways.



Picture: Logo VozPa'Colombia.



## 6. CASP

[CASP](#) (Coupe d’Afrique de Slam Poésie), the biggest organisation on slam art in Africa, is an official partner of Voice4Thought. At the end of 2023, from 27 November until 3 December, CASP held its competition finals in Bamako, Mali, and had a special collaboration with Voice4Thought Academy Mali. The Bamako finals included debates, workshops, and network events. The V4T Academy office organised and conducted a workshop on its premises on the topics of ‘Deep fakes and the manipulation of information and the legal aspects of disinformation and health’. V4T Academy Mali also contributed to the technical organisation of the festival.

Senegal was this year’s champion, followed by Nigeria and Guinea Conakry.



**Picture from left to right:** Artists together with V4TA members in front of the office in Bamako, the CASP winners, the audience, and a contestant.

## 7. Collaboration with Bridging Humanities

[Bridging Humanities](#) is V4T’s open access, peer reviewed, interdisciplinary, multi-area and academic platform, that allows a working place to publish digital projects in innovative formats. Bridging Humanities includes original research from the Humanities intended as an open field that is connected with other disciplines in co-creation with others.

In 2022 we worked together intensively with the IHE Delft (Institute for Water Education) in preparation of the publication called [Nile Pop](#). This publication is based on a conference at the Rijksmuseum of Oudheden in Leiden bearing the same name and reveals the river Nile and its cultural perceptions in essays, poetry, music, film and photography. On 22 February 2023, International Nile Day, the [launch](#) of this Bridging Humanities special crossmedia issue

[‘Nile Pop’](#) took place in Delft. International students and staff, including the director of IHE, were present.

## 8. Microgrants

Through microgrants, Voice4Thought supports individuals in developing themselves and build a sustainable future. This can be in the form of education, through the Study Fund or the Education Cameroon programme (a specific programme for schoolchildren in northwest Cameroon), but we also provide nonprofit wages for individuals to help them take a step further towards financial stability in a context of, amongst others, conflict, oppression, marginalisation. See below the fund for displaced herdsman in Mali.

Core motive of granting the microgrant is creating the opportunity for letting their voices and stories be heard. The recipients are responsible, in co-creation with Voice4Thought, for giving this shape.

Microgrants are funded by donations.

### 8.1 Study Fund

The [Study Fund](#) gives out scholarships to motivated students who want to personally grow and increase their knowledge but do not have the means to realise their ambition. This year we funded another student in Cameroon, Khalid, finishing his masters degree in Environmental and Sustainable Development Engineering. We hope to expand the scholarship fund next year by finding sponsors, using previous success stories to inspire them.

### 8.2 Education Cameroon

With the [Education Cameroon](#) project, we support young people in the English-speaking part of Cameroon who otherwise do not have the financial means to go to school. At this moment, we are monitoring 45 pupils. Most of them are based in Bamenda, some in Douala, Limbe and Baba.

The pupils were previously part of an orphanage project in the Baba region (read more about [how the project came to us](#)). Due to the conflict that broke out in Anglophone Cameroon in 2016, the orphanage was destroyed and the children were displaced across the region. V4T managed to localize the children and maintain personal contact with them. Through (private) donations, we have been able to support the children in their educational efforts, also again in 2023. We paid school fees for 34 children: 10 children for their primary school in Ndop, 16 for their secondary school in Bamenda, 6 in Douala, 2 for their university fees in Bamenda.

We are happy to have Salle Godwill now as our coordinator for this project. He supervises the payments to the schools and keeps us informed about the children's progress.

### **8.3 Fund displaced Herdsmen Bamako**

Since 2015, central Mali has become unsafe for its population. Many people are fleeing violence from various armed groups: the army, the Russians (Wagner group), the Dozo (a militia composed of traditional hunters), and groups of Jihadists. There are also small other armed groups defending their own villages.

The Fulani pastoralists are in between all the groups. They live in the Sahel region and are known there as specialists in raising livestock (goats, cattle, camels), developing a semi-nomadic lifestyle. The Fulani herdsmen are considered an important pillar of Jihad. Some of these nomads have joined the Jihadist armed groups in the region. With the image of Fulani as Jihadist, and terrorist, they are perceived as violent. Consequently, they are targeted by all the other armed front groups mentioned above. However, very many Fulani nomads are not affiliated with one camp, and therefore live in a situation of constant insecurity. As a result, many Fulani flee the area, often arriving in Bamako via dangerous routes.

In order to help a group of herdsmen and cattle traders in Bamako a fund has been established for them. The fund works like a loan, without profit motive, which will be repaid by them. However, equally important is the aim of this project to give the shepherds and cattle traders a voice in the context of the conflicts in their country. We aim to record their stories.

Hamma, a family member of one of the herdsmen of the group we support currently, who will lead the project, also has ambitions to make the shepherds' voices more heard at a local level, for example in the administration of the neighborhood where they live in Bamako.

To learn more about the herdsmen, please read the blogpost 'Stories from a war zone in the Sahel: A nomad's unlike travel' by Mirjam de Bruijn, [here](#).



Picture: Photos of a group interview with the herdsmen and their living environment, Bamako, May 2023.

## Website and Facebook statistics

### 1. Website statistics

#### Voice4thought.org

The total number of visitors in 2023 to Voice4Thought.org was 5400 (calculated from 9th April when a new analytics tool was installed). About 60% of visitors arrived through searches such as Google, 30% via direct visits (bookmarks, typing in the url, etc). The top 5 countries of origin: Chad, Netherlands, Mali, USA, Cameroon and France, and the most popular cities are N'djamena (Chad) and Bamako (Mali).

Apart from the homepage, the Projects overview page is also a popular section of the site. Two of the most successful articles in 2023 (each over 1500 reads) are from previous years: [‘Perceptions des jeunes sur le chômage au Mali’](#) and [‘Tchad : des individus plus riches que l’Etat’](#). This suggests that some of the content V4T posts remains relevant even years later. The most popular recent article was [‘Lettre au pétrole tchadien’](#) by Mahmoud Sabir, followed by the blog post [‘Exit Venezuela’](#) bij Jasmijn Peeters.

#### V4tademie.org

The V4T academy website in Mali received a total of 1900 visits. About 60% of these visitors were from Mali, others from a number of other countries, including the USA, Netherlands and France. As in previous years, the majority of online engagement from Mali took place in apps and through social media rather than on the V4TA website.

The most popular article from 2023 on V4Tademie.org was '[La place de la parenté à plaisanterie 'Sanankouya' dans la gestion des conflits à Tombouctou](#)', followed by '[Ma case se déplace](#)'. [Les déplacés internes dans la commune urbaine de Gao](#)'.

## 2. Facebook statistics

In 2023 Voice4Thought reached a total of 6300 users through the [facebook.com/voice4thought](https://facebook.com/voice4thought) page. The total reach of the V4T Académie Mali posts at [facebook.com/v4tademie](https://facebook.com/v4tademie) was 303,000 users, which translated into 5500 page visits.

## Organisation in 2023

The Voice4Thought team consists of an enthusiastic group of people who aim to connect different worlds, in collaboration with others. In 2023, the team consisted of:

Vera Bakker, photographer & (visual) editor  
Mirjam de Bruijn, director  
Maartje van den Eijnden, operational manager  
Deuhb Eladjé Emmanuel, author  
Thomas Gesthuizen, webmaster & coordinator V4T archive  
Molton Lagardy, translator  
Didier Lalaye, coordinator slam  
Laurens Nijzink, editor & coordinator Bridging Humanities  
Jasmijn Peters, coordinator Voz'Pa Colombia  
Margriet Reinders, administration & operation manager  
Sjoerd Sijsma, audio visual coordinator  
Catherina Wilson, researcher & writer

## 1. New team members

The strength of V4T is our multidisciplinary team. We believe that a better future is possible when the youth, especially those who are often forgotten or not heard, are entirely involved. We work together, train and create spaces so they can tell their stories through academic, artistic and journalistic expressions, workshops and events. By doing so they give space to others to rethink their and our world critically.

We are delighted to have new members on board!

Pelle Yntema, research coordinator  
Bruno Allahisse, dissertation at Leiden University, represents Tchad within V4T  
Salle Godwill, coordinator Education Cameroon

## **Team Voice4Thought Academy Mali**

Modibo Cisse, Director/Chef de projet

## **2. Board and Advisory Board**

### **Supervisory Board**

Andrew Makkinga  
Maarten Mous  
Daphne Pit  
Affoh Guenneguez  
Fiona Dragstra

### **Advisory Board**

Balt Leenman  
Kitty Zijlmans  
Freek Stoopendaal

Our Supervisory Board and Board of Advisors are not remunerated for their contributions to the organisation.

## **3. Collaboration and funding**

### **Active Partnerships in 2023**

Bridging Humanities, the Netherlands  
Chad+, Chad  
Coup d’Afrique Slam de Poésie (CASP), Cameroon/Chad  
CRASH, Chad  
Eyeses, the Netherlands  
Five Stars, Chad  
ICCO/CORDAID, the Netherlands/Mali  
Leiden Global, the Netherlands  
Ndjiam s’enflamme en slam, Chad  
Oxfam, the Netherlands/Mali  
Slameroun, Cameroon  
SNV, the Netherlands/Mali

### **Funding partners and donors in 2023**

Dutch Embassy, Bamako

Chad+, Chad  
Gemeente Zoersel, Belgium  
IHE Delft, Netherlands  
Oslomet University, Norway  
European Union, Chad  
Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, the Netherlands  
Leiden University, the Netherlands  
University of Wisconsin, United States

We have also received private donations for the Cameroon Education programme and the Study Fund. And a special thanks to all private donations done for the surgery for the daughter of our V4T Academy Mali colleague Sissouma.

## Looking forward to 2024

- We are looking for new voices who can bring us their thoughts and invite them for new collaborations! Next year, we will actively seek for people who can contribute to our platform.
- Bon Buzz 2 will start in the first half of 2024. We are excited to start a second round of depolarising storytelling in N'djamena.
- *Journalisme et polycrise au Sahel*, the project with Fondation Hironnelle, will also take shape in 2024, when we will start with the first phase. We will ascertain the funds for the second and third phase.
- Voice4Thought is an Impact Partner in *TiaSauti@Lab*, a project exploring aurality through digital contents for the international Swahili online community. A series of online multimedia readings of Swahili booklets from the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be produced between September 2024 and April 2025 with teams in Tanzania and Kenya.
- V4T Academy Mali's autonomisation will continue to be one of our preoccupations. We continue efforts in search of funds and find financially sustainable ways for the Academy to continue independently.
- Together with local partners, the VozPa'Colombia project will be developed and funding will be sought to launch in autumn 2025.