

Producing music videos in local languages

*Lessons from experience in the service
of the Gospel and Culture*



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1. Introduction

In a context where visual media and music play a significant role, the production of music videos can be an effective means of communication in the service of the Gospel. We have therefore produced videos in the Mamara language, in a village setting in Mali, with the aim of promoting the Word of God, celebrating local culture and contributing to the edification of the body of Christ.

This approach was intended to be both spiritual and community-based. The choice of the village allowed for an authentic expression of the language and culture, whilst the preparatory work (location scouting, meetings, rehearsals) fostered a climate of trust and resulted in a higher quality of production.



This article shares practical experience and presents a model that others can replicate, highlighting the importance of the local language, cultural roots and community involvement in communicating the Gospel. It also offers concrete suggestions to inspire similar initiatives in different contexts.

2. The choice of language and village

2.1 Why the Mamara language?

Language is much more than a means of communication: it carries a people's identity and expresses their deepest emotions. In Mamara villages, even though some activities take place in Bambara (the language of wider communication), the mother tongue remains the most natural channel for touching people's hearts.



Producing videos in Mamara therefore helps to communicate the Bible message more effectively, to promote the local language, and to show that God speaks to each person in their own language.

2.2 Why the village?

The choice of the village as a filming location is driven by spiritual, cultural and practical considerations.

Filming in a village offers a degree of **visual and cultural authenticity** that cannot easily be reproduced in a studio, with natural backdrops, traditional clothing and a way of life that reflect the reality of the local people. It also encourages **strong community involvement**, with the **community** actively participating in and supporting the project in a truly collective and spiritual atmosphere.

This choice also has **symbolic significance**, demonstrating that the Gospel is rooted in the local culture. Furthermore, the village offers a **calmer and safer** environment, conducive to filming, with better sound conditions and high-quality natural light.



Finally, it offers a degree of **logistical simplicity**, thanks to the proximity of the locations and the support of the community. Thus, the village becomes not merely a backdrop, but a genuine participant in the project, embodying both cultural identity and the message of the Gospel.

3. Preparation: the key to success

Preparation forms the foundation of any successful music video production. It relies on good organisation, collaboration with the community and adaptation to the local context.

From the outset, it is important **to involve the local community**, particularly through discussions with leaders, choir leaders and musicians. These discussions help to clarify the project's objectives, the choice of songs and the material and human resources required, whilst facilitating better organisation on the ground.

Logistical arrangements must also be planned in advance: organising clothing or costumes, checking which instruments are available, defining participants' roles and agreeing with the community on how long the project will take.

The **schedule** must take the local climate and weather into account. In our context, rehearsals often took place at night, whilst filming took place early in the morning or late in the day, in order to make the most of favourable conditions.

Rehearsals are essential to ensure synchronisation with the audio, help participants get used to the presence of the camera and boost their confidence. They also serve as moments of prayer, reminding us of the project's spiritual dimension.

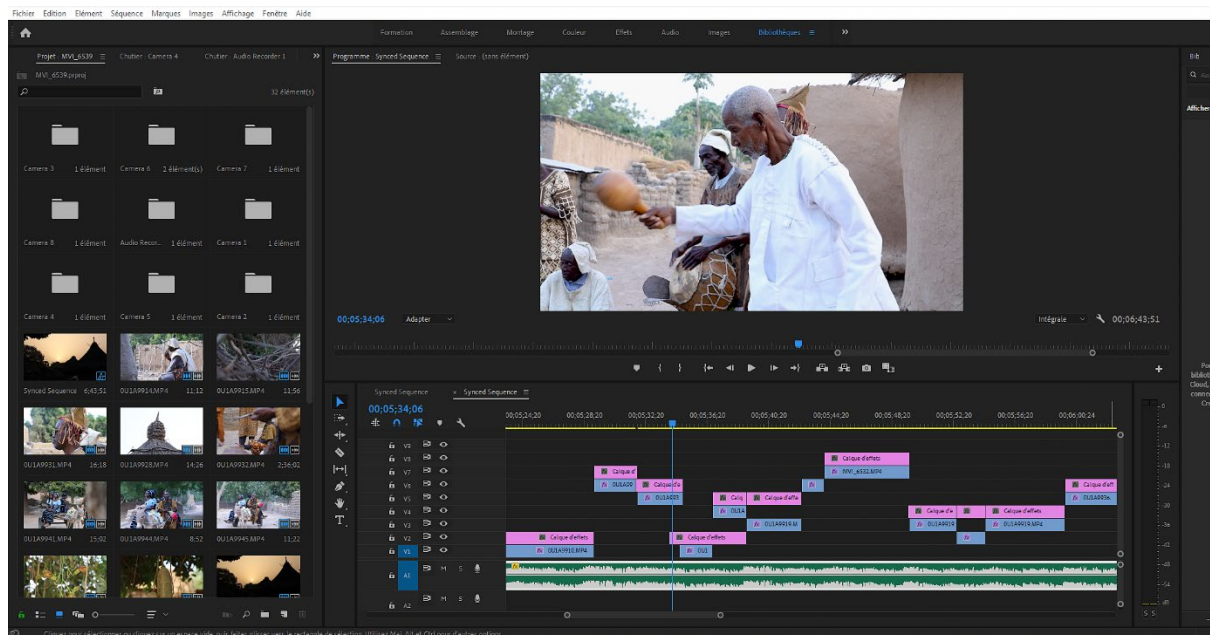


Finally, certain practical aspects must not be overlooked, such as accommodation, catering, community engagement and prayer. Thorough preparation thus helps to create an environment in which everyone moves forward together towards a shared vision.

4. Technical and logistical aspects

4.1 Equipment

Even with modest resources, it is possible to achieve a good result. A semi-professional camera, one or more backup smartphones, external microphones to improve sound quality and tripods for stability may be all that is needed. Free software such as Audacity (audio) and Shotcut (editing) also help to produce a satisfactory result.



4.2 Sound management

In most music videos, the vocals are recorded before filming begins. This recording is then enhanced (noise reduction, volume balancing, mixing) to achieve good sound quality.

On the day of filming, this final version of the vocals is played back through a loudspeaker. The singers and musicians sing or play along to this recording, although their own sound is not necessarily used in the final video.

This method ensures that the visuals are perfectly synchronised with professional-quality sound.

There are several production options available:

- **Option 1: Pre-recorded playback** (the most commonly used): the vocals are recorded before filming and only this recording is used in the final video.

- **Option 2: Fully live recording:** the vocals and instruments are recorded during filming. This method sounds more natural but requires more equipment and technical expertise.
- **Option 3: Hybrid approach:** certain parts are recorded live and then combined with pre-recorded tracks during editing.

However, each option presents challenges that need to be anticipated.

Option 1: Pre-recorded playback

- The singers and musicians must carefully synchronise their lip movements, gestures and instruments with the recording.
- Several takes may be needed to achieve good coordination.
- Some participants may find it difficult to express the emotions of the song naturally, as they are not actually producing the sound.

Option 2: Fully live recording

- Requires more equipment (microphones, recorders, headphones, etc.).
- Background noise (wind, vehicles, animals, conversations) may affect sound quality.
- Mixing and audio processing are more complex after filming.
- A more experienced technical team is generally required.

Option 3: Hybrid approach

- Synchronising live-recorded sound with pre-recorded tracks can be tricky.
- Editing requires more time and technical expertise.
- Differences in sound quality between the various audio sources must be corrected to achieve a consistent result.

Despite these challenges, each option can produce excellent results when tailored to the project's objectives, the resources available and the technical team's skills.

4.3 Organisation of the shoot

On the day of filming, a simple and efficient approach was adopted. The equipment was set up early in the morning to make the most of the quiet and natural light. A basic script guided the shots, i.e. a simple outline setting out what would happen at the beginning,

middle and end of the video. For example: an introduction to capture the audience's attention, the song itself, followed by a closing message to reinforce the song's impact. Alternating between wide and close-up shots enriched the visuals, whilst regular breaks allowed for adjustments to the sound, framing and performance.

4.4 Set design and staging

The staging highlighted local identity through traditional dress, the use of natural light and the incorporation of elements from everyday village life. This helped to produce authentic images that reflected the reality of the local communities.



4.5 Use of a drone

The use of a drone is not compulsory, but it can add significant value to the video. Aerial shots make it possible to show the village, the landscapes, the fields, gatherings and the general setting of the project.

Some practical tips:

- Use the drone sparingly to avoid repetition.
- Fly early in the morning or late in the afternoon to make the most of the light.

- Check the weather conditions before each flight.
- Comply with local regulations and obtain the necessary permits.
- Ensure an experienced pilot is on hand to guarantee the safety of people and equipment.

Drone footage is particularly useful for the opening, transitions and conclusion of the video.

4.6 The technical team

The size of the team depends on the project's objectives, available resources and the budget. Contrary to what one might think, it is not always necessary to have a large team to produce a high-quality music video.

In our experience, the project was carried out with just **two technicians**:

- **The lead cameraman**, responsible for filming the various scenes and ensuring the quality of the footage.
- **The technical coordinator**, who performed several roles simultaneously: organising the shoot, managing the playback, providing artistic supervision, liaising with the community, handling logistics and carrying out the final edit.

This streamlined organisation helped to keep costs down whilst remaining efficient. However, it required thorough preparation in advance, a high degree of versatility and close collaboration with the singers, musicians and local organisers.

Where the budget allows, other people may be involved in the project, such as a sound technician, a camera assistant, a drone pilot or a logistics manager. However, our experience shows that with a motivated, well-organised team and strong community involvement, it is possible to achieve satisfactory results even with a limited number of technicians.

5. Promoting the language and culture

The project aimed not only to sing in Mamara, but also to **celebrate local culture** as a vehicle for the Gospel. To this end:

- The lyrics were **carefully translated** and checked to ensure they remained faithful to the biblical text.

- Traditional instruments and rhythms were used so that the message would ‘sound familiar’.
- The costumes, dances, gestures and movements reflected the dignity and beauty of Mamara culture.

As a result, the village recognised itself in the final product and embraced it as its own.

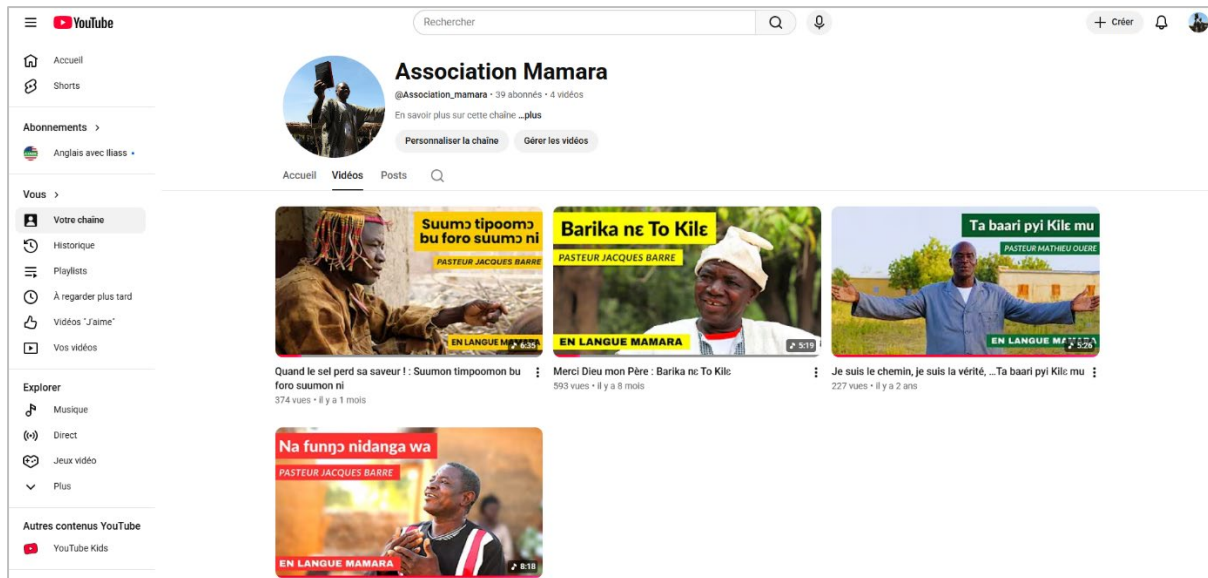


6. Distribution and impact

6.1 Distribution methods

Distribution is a key step in maximising the impact of the videos and should form an integral part of the overall ministry strategy.

We set up an **official YouTube channel for the Association** as a central platform for publishing and archiving videos. After each video is published, the links are shared via **WhatsApp** with individuals, groups and church networks, facilitating rapid dissemination and encouraging people to subscribe.



https://www.youtube.com/@Association_mamara

In addition, social media platforms such as Facebook boost visibility, whilst **community screenings** enable the videos to be viewed collectively. The videos are also used as **evangelism tools** during visits or teaching sessions.

6.2 Observed impact

The results are significant on several levels.

Spiritually, the videos strengthen faith and help people understand the message.

Culturally, they promote the local language and inspire a great sense of pride.

At a **community** level, they encourage participation and unity.

7. Challenges encountered and solutions found

Implementing the project revealed several challenges linked to the rural context, which were overcome through practical adjustments and collaboration with the community.

The **singers and musicians**, unaccustomed to being on camera, initially appeared shy and uncomfortable. Rehearsals helped to build their confidence. **Synchronising with the audio** also required several takes to ensure the singing and gestures were well coordinated.

Time constraints due to the heat meant that filming had to be organised accordingly: early in the morning and late in the day. Furthermore, coordinating the participants – who came from different localities and had various occupations – made it difficult to choose the right

times (month, week, duration). Flexible planning and good communication enabled compromises to be reached.



The **financial challenge** was overcome through collective effort, whilst **electricity-related** constraints were managed by better organising the use and recharging of equipment.

As such, these challenges strengthened the team's ability to adapt and contributed to a more realistic and collaborative approach.

8. Tips for replicating the model

To ensure the success of this type of project, a few key principles should be borne in mind.

It is recommended **to arrive at least one day before filming** to carry out location scouting, rehearsals and to build participants' confidence. **Involving the local community from the outset** is also crucial to ensure buy-in and effective organisation.

It is also advisable to **draw up a distribution plan from the outset**, in order to guide the production effectively. Furthermore, the **quality of the biblical message** must always take precedence over artistic performance.



Finally, **training local representatives** helps to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the project after the team has left.

9. Conclusion

The production of music videos in the Mamara language has shown that it is possible to combine **modern technology, local culture and the message of the Bible**. It is a powerful tool for evangelism and edification. Moreover, it is a sign that God values every people and every language.

Our prayer is that this model will encourage other colleagues to invest in their own language and culture to proclaim the Gospel. As Paul writes: 'Let all things be done for building up.' (1 Corinthians 14:26).



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This article is available in French and English at <https://www.scripture-engagement.org>