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CHIME THROUGH THE YEARS

## **“A VISION FOR BLIND SOCCER” BY CATHERINE CABROL**

*CHIME FOR CHANGE Through the Years: The Female Fabric is a series curated by CHIME Managing Editor Mariane Pearl featuring stories from the CHIME journalism platform archives by women around the world.*



In Bamako, Mali, I stand by a gated field, the earth is red, and I am holding my camera. Around here, they know me as the toubab (the whitey) who is always taking photographs of blind children running around. How did I get here?

It's been a long photographic journey that brought me to this very field. I have worked with France's biggest athletes from Zidane to tennis champion Yannick Noah. I took pictures of famous architects, movie directors, sports athletes, of women wounded by domestic violence. I also produced a series on road accidents and more, all before I came to enter the world of female sports.

My social work came as a result of meeting people who led me to associate with causes such as providing Karate training to rape victims or promoting sports for the handicaps.

But the main encounter in my life is my daughter Jeanne whom I adopted in Mali. A country I loved from the start. On our way to pick her up, her father and I came across a school for blind children with 250 residents who are partially or totally blind. **The love for my daughter and her country, the encounter with kids who give it all without seeing anything or expecting any type of rewards in return, all of this gave me the inspiration to bring photography and blindness together.**

In 2012, we built a soccer field adapted to blind people, a vegetable garden and a house. **Since then 120 children of all ages, girls and boys, practice soccer at least four times a week plus the training workshops. We created the Mali national blind soccer team, took part in two Africa cups, and we are the first country from sub-Saharan Africa to be selected for blind soccer world championship.**

I am writing this from my little room in Bamako, in a building where blind people's families go for support and advice. The ceiling fan allows for some fresh air.

would like to share with you a most unexpected recognition: I have been made a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur\* for my work as a photographer. Me, the invisible woman who pictures life. The loner who looks at the collective... I wish my parents were here, I owe this medal to the quality education I received and that allowed me to maintain noble ideals throughout hardships.

As a photographer in a man's world, I was able to develop my own sensitivity, to look at what it is that makes us human and extract the dazzling dignity that is to be found in these stories.

