



SUCCESS STORY

Changing the mentality is the first step

Campaigns raise awareness of road harassment – putting pressure on authorities to tackle the problem



In Mali, civil society groups helped drivers and others voice their displeasure with the numerous checkpoints littering the nation's roads, roadblocks to economic development.

Raising awareness of road harassment is the first step to resolving the problem. People are increasingly seeing the problem for what it really is: A huge barrier to West Africa's economic development.

Campaigns to raise awareness of road harassment – supported by USAID's West Africa Trade Hub in four West African countries – are helping to change attitudes on the topic. And that is leading to real, even if modest, reductions in the number of checkpoints along primary trade corridors.

In September, the Government of Mali eliminated a checkpoint along the road connecting its capital, Bamako, to Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. The campaigns, implemented by civil society groups in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali and Togo, were cited as a reason.

The groups held public debates, designed and put up posters and spoke out on road harassment on newscasts and radio broadcasts, and in newspapers. They told the story of how, at numerous checkpoints along primary routes, customs, police and gendarmes, among others, extort bribes from drivers and delay trucks for what adds up to hours on trips from coastal ports to landlocked capitals and vice versa.

The campaign was welcome by transport industry stakeholders, from importers and exporters to trucking company managers.

"First you have to change the mentality," said Francois Agbagli of Trans Alloman, a trucking company in Togo with more than 100 trucks operating regionally. "When you can talk about something, then you have some hope of changing the behavior."

For Peace Adonsou's membership – she is the president of the Tomato Sellers Association of Togo – the campaigns spoke directly of a problem that effectively hurts their bottom line – and their ability to compete.

"We're selling a perishable food product," she said during an hour-long TV show that reached millions of Togolese. "So, we can't waste time at checkpoints. Sometimes, we lose three or four hours and with the sun shining, the produce gets hot and starts to spoil. By the time we get to Lome, it's a big loss."