



SUCCESS STORY

Civil society tackles road corruption

Trade Hub supported civil society campaigns are mobilizing people to demand an end to harassment on interstate roads



Lacina Pakour/Trade Hub

A police officer pockets a bribe from a driver at one of the numerous checkpoints along West African routes.

Reducing and eliminating road blocks where customs, police and gendarmes harass drivers for bribes would reduce the costs of doing business in the region. Trade Hub-supported civil society organizations are pushing authorities to act.

The video is shaky and the audio muffled, but the pictures still tell a story worth a thousand angry words: An unscrupulous agent of Ghana's customs service openly celebrates as he extorts money from travelers crossing the Ghana-Togo border at Aflao, near Lome, the capital of Togo.

The report aired on one of Ghana's largest TV networks, reaching millions, and was inspired by Trade Hub-supported awareness raising activities implemented by three civil society organizations in the country. Their efforts led to 16 newspaper articles, over two hours of reporting on radio stations and more than 30 minutes of national TV news coverage.

Given anonymity because they fear reprisals by officials, petty traders were scathing in their remarks deploring the harassment that they experience daily.

"No matter what you do, they will not let you pass unless you pay them money," one says to the reporter. "We can't do business."

"People are talking about the issue and many people have called us to say they have been victims," said Dzifa Gakpleazi of the Legal Resources Center, one of the Trade Hub's CSO grantees. "They know that now they can report the issue and that somebody is serious about it. And they appreciate it."

The media attention was equivalent to purchasing USD 80,000 worth of advertising. More importantly, more than half of Ghana's 25 million citizens were exposed to the information. In three other countries – Burkina Faso, Mali and Togo – CSOs undertook activities that exposed millions to the anti-road harassment messages, too.

Awareness of the problem is spurring transport industry stakeholders, government officials, exporters and importers and the general public to action. Ghana's National Security has opened investigations of the allegations against customs and police officers.