

STAAC in Ghana

Strengthening Action Against Corruption is a DFID funded project over three years (2017-2020), aimed at strengthening and making more effective the Institutions which seek to reduce or prevent the damaging impact on the people and businesses of the country through corruption.

The impact of corruption on the poor is there for all to see; whether it is the need to pay bribes to see a Doctor or to gain a place in a school or to avoid confrontation with the Police. It's impact on business is no less significant in that it tends to pervert free and honest competition and acts as a powerful disincentive to those considering investment or business there.

With the current debate on whether in straightened times aid should be curtailed it is right that those engaged in such projects should explain and justify why the interventions and influence inherent in what we do in Ghana can be seen as worthwhile and of benefit both to Ghana and also to the U.K.

The STAAC team, are a group of professionals predominantly from the U.K. who are directly engaged in rendering more effective those institutions in Ghana which together are endeavoring to curtail corruption. These institutions comprise financial intelligence, detection and investigation, prosecution and adjudication, enforcement, asset tracing, asset recovery and public information through civil society organisations.

My remit has been to strengthen through training and mentoring the capabilities of the Judiciary and rendering the management of criminal trials more effective. Many serious criminal cases take 6 or 7 years to complete if indeed if they ever are; this is not only unconstitutional and scandalous it provides little by way of deterrent to those tempted to cheat. My background as Barrister, QC and Judge both in the U.K. and the Isle of Man gave me precious little idea of how we take for granted traditions and conventions which when absent renders a Judicial and Court system wholly unfit for purpose.

So I am now engaged in training both with individual Judges and in workshops with larger numbers. There is a huge appetite for this as most Judges are determined to prove themselves of professional ability and as persons of integrity. The Judiciary were exposed to adverse publicity 2 years ago when an investigative journalist acting undercover showed that Judges were prepared to take bribes to influence the outcome of a case. In the result no fewer than 34 Judges were suspended.

Within the project other professionals are working with the Auditor General to expose and deal with financial irregularities within the Public sector and a Prosecution Expert is engaged in tightening up the regime for the seizure of unlawfully acquired assets.

It is to be hoped that measures such as these coupled with the new Governments stated determination to stamp out corruption particularly within the procurement arm of Government will enhance the confidence of those minded to engage in business in Ghana.

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