



SNAPSHOT

USAID helps build capacity and create bonds between community groups to advocate for the end of the illegal use of public land by private individuals in Bouaké



Photo – Intervention of the President of *SECOURS MUTUEL*, the women’s market association during the meeting

Photo by Patricia Kouassi

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Coming Together to Advocate for the End of the Illegal Use of Public Land in Bouaké’

January 2014 - The illegal use of public land for private use is a continuing source of tension throughout Cote d’Ivoire. It contributes to perceptions of public officials as using their office for personal gain at the expense of the public with impunity. In the summer of 2013, USAID began dialogue in Bouaké between state and non-state actors. The specific issue of the illegal construction of private residences on parcels of land reserved for a market square and a public primary school was raised. As a result of this dialogue, a new women’s trader association formed to continue advocacy. Also, a parents’ association signed a petition to reclaim the space reserved for a public school.

Simultaneously, USAID provided support to the Bouaké traders association, training them on lobbying and providing them with information on the legal and regulatory framework for commerce to help them fight corruption. The traders used these new skills and knowledge to lobby the authorities for public market places. In the process, they realized that the absence of formal market places in Bouaké was due to the illegal sale and occupation of public lands by high ranking officials.

The Bouaké Traders Association decided to join forces with the women and parents associations involved in reclaiming public lands for the use of the community. Together, they held a press conference to raise awareness both locally and nationally on the issue since local authorities seemed powerless – or unwilling – to address it. The press conference turned into a spontaneous demonstration with over 2000 participants supporting efforts to reclaim the land. As the president of the neighborhood youth association stated during the demonstration: *“we are going to fight on your side until you get the market land back, justice will be done and those who sold these lands are going to be brought to justice. We are proud of your mobilization, this is just the beginning”*.

Public pressure continued to mount as newspapers reported on the issue. Finally, the Bouaké Prefect issued a decree this January stopping illegal occupation and building of private residences on the land reserved for a public market in the Air France III neighborhood. This marks the first concrete action taken by a government official against the impunity of powerful individuals to illegally use land for their own private purposes.

*Contact: Lauren Lewis, Côte d’Ivoire Program Manager
llewis@usaid.gov (202) 712-5188*