# Strengthening Professionalism and Accountability within the Ghana Police Service using Identity Norms and Narratives Podcast Transcript

**Donna Harris**

Hi, everybody. Welcome to the CSAE Research Podcasts, a series of conversations about projects taking place at the Centre for the Study of African Economies, University of Oxford. I'm Donna Harris, a researcher at the CSAE within the Department of Economics and the Director of Studies in Political Economy at the Department for Continuing Education within the University of Oxford.

Today we'll be discussing the project Strengthening Professionalism and Accountability within the Ghana Police Service using Identity Norms and Narratives. This is a project funded by Wellspring Philanthropic Fund and run in partnership between the CSAE and the Ghana Police Service.

The project focuses on improving the functioning of public organisations and as development economists we're interested in developing countries, and so this project is in Ghana. One of the important factors that drive successful organisation is the behaviour of people within that organisation. In this project, we focus on the ethical and professional behaviour of the police, and one example that you can think of in terms of an unethical behaviour is corruption. So, we use corruption as a motivation and an example (something that has long been a major obstacle to improving economic efficiency and reducing poverty in developing countries). In many places, corruption has become a norm or a way of life, something that's generally accepted as a behavioural standard. The overarching question we tackle is how do we change a corrupt norm or unethical behaviour that's become a norm? To address this question, we designed an innovative ethics training programme working with the Ghana Police Service.

Joining me today to discuss the project, what we did and the results, are my colleagues Danila Serra, Associate Professor in Economics at Texas A&M University, Oana Borcan, Associate Professor in Economics at the University of East Anglia, Bruno Schettini, Secretary for Coordination and Governance of the Heritage of the Union, the Ministry of Economy in Brazil, and Henry Telli, Country Economist at the International Growth Centre at the University of Ghana in Legon, and the London School of Economics. Welcome everybody.

I just wanted to start with a discussion around our motivations and aims. This project started off quite a long while ago, in 2017, with the first discussion between Stefan Dercon and Paul Collier. And at the time, the head civil servant of the Ghanaian government visited Oxford and we started a discussion around how we could improve public services in general. The idea of the police service came up in discussion with Stefan and Paul and with Danila and Oana, as one of the most challenging and difficult areas where there hasn't been a lot of research done so far. We wanted to investigate how we could improve the services of the police, and the head of civil service in Ghana welcomed this idea. So that was the genesis of the project. And the aim was to try to come up with

an intervention that was innovative and try to focus on behavioural change rather than structural change of resources, thinking more about attitudes and behaviour. We also started discussing who we could collaborate with who has the experience in the police service. And that's when Bruno's name came up and then we got in touch also with the International Growth Centre and I went to Ghana to visit the university, Henry and I met, and we started talking about the project.

So maybe at this point, I'll bring Henry and Bruno in to discuss how the implementation of the intervention and the design of the training developed, so I'll hand over to Henry and Bruno to talk a little bit about this.

## Henry Telli

OK, thank you. I think one of the motivations was that in Ghana the perception about police related corruption is very high compared to the perceived corruption in other public institutions. For instance, in 2019, there was an Afrobarometer survey which essentially showed that most people view the police institution as the most corrupt public institution in Ghana at that time. For instance, it showed that 42 percent of respondents paid bribes to the police to avoid having a problem with them, 39 percent paid bribes to get assistance from the police, and 57 percent of the respondents said they believed that either all or most police officers were involved in corruption. So, these statistics point to potential weaknesses in the values, ethics, and professional behaviour of police officers, and we believe that this situation, though unfortunate, provided an opportunity for a study on how to improve integrity in such an institution. So, I think at that time, the police themselves were interested in learning how they can make improvements that will lead to a change in their public image. We started working with them and we wanted to implement a randomised controlled trial to measure the impact of an ethics training programmes. But first, we had to design that programme, and that is where Bruno and a few other experts that we relied on came in.

We did a baseline survey to try to understand how the police themselves view themselves and to also assess the integrity and the professionalism within the service, but also to just look at what the original motives of the officers were at the time they were trying to join. So, all of this information from a baseline, helped us to design the training and Bruno can share a bit more about that training.

## Bruno Schettini

Thank you, my friend. I believe that when we looked at the baseline data that you just talked about, looking at how the officers perceived themselves as police officers, we got an interesting view of a distance that might have developed between how they were currently seeing themselves and why they decided to join the police in the first place. So that's where we started our approach.

We had a very interesting experience in Brazil that we applied at the Federal Highway Police Department, where over the last 20 years we were able to overcome the corruption problem, although many police departments in Brazil still face it as an epidemic. So not too far from what we've discovered from the data in Ghana. Brazil and Africa have a lot of similarities in this field. So

what we decided to do in terms of implementing the training programme was to do something different, to step away from discussing corruption. We avoided talking about the problem itself in order not to encourage it or to just focus on the problem. We wanted to do something different to show the officers that there is a distance between why they decided to join and how they see themselves today in and ask why did this happen? What got lost in the middle of the way? And what can they do about it? How powerful a police officer can be if motivated in the right direction. How powerful they can be if they work as a group in structures such as the military and police departments. People are unlikely to go forward to approach certain problems, what they do is they shut down and they just follow protocol. And when protocol is corruption, then the problem just keeps growing and growing. So we tried to show them that some of them, maybe even most of them, don't like the system, most of them want to do something different, and if we showed them a way to do it, if we showed them that there are other benefits instead of just the easy pocket money that they get from an act of corruption, that there are other forms of, let's say, payment, that would benefit them much more.

So, the approach was getting the officers to understand that if they get back to the identity that they wanted in the first place, to work as a team, if they get some sort of payback from this group behaviour, things will change a lot. This was the basic approach that we tried to apply to the training.

**Donna Harris**

Right, thank you, Henry and Bruno. So, the motivation we had in terms of economic theory was based around this idea of identity and intrinsic motivation. We were trying to understand what was the first intrinsic motivation that motivated them to join the police in the first place, and can we reactivate that motivation? Maybe you can talk a little bit about the actual curriculum that we did, that would be really nice, what went on during the training? So, Bruno, back to you.

**Bruno Schettini**

We divided the course into two days spread over two weeks, and that was crucial to the strategy because if we wanted to do collective action, we needed time for them to interact about what they learnt on day one. It was really important for them to go back to their jobs, to their normal lives, go back home and have some time for that knowledge, for that discussion to grow and the knowledge to sink in. So, this was part of the strategy.

On the first day we addressed the identity part individually. Why did you join? Trying to get them to talk about why they decided to become a police officer and we got a lot of good feedback, and from that we told them about the perception of the public and about what our research had brought us, showing that they were off track as a team. We started to discuss values. Let's get back to it. Why did you choose it? What makes you strong? Is it good for you to get home and your kids to see you in that uniform? Do you feel proud about it? When someone that is using the same uniform as you does something wrong, does it affect you? Can you look the other way when someone is threatening everything that this uniform represents? We moved that feeling around the room a lot

with different kinds of exercises and putting them to work together and we got them to rank the best values that they had not only individually but as a team. We went to day two where we wanted to show them how to communicate their values and how to use a team strength. We used the image of a group working together a lot. We got them to do exercises together where only one part of the team could see, only another part of the team could hear, only another part could use their hands, so they couldn't do what they could individually, alone. They needed to do it as a team. They were also really focused on team building, team effort and how to communicate that, and in the very end, constructing an idea that can help them to deliver change.

To wrap up the course, we put them in groups to think about what they could do differently as a group and individually. They wrote some sort of commitment to individually keep in a letter that they could look at in the future and see if they had reached that goal. A commitment to themselves that they can proceed with that change.

**Donna Harris**

Thank you, Bruno. You know, listening to you again, even though we did all this together, I feel inspired again. Just to finish off, six months later or a little bit more, we also had a ceremony to present a lapel pin to the 'agents of change', that's what we called them at the very end. It was almost like a graduation ceremony. Maybe, Henry, can you talk a little bit about the graduation ceremony and from your perspective, as a Ghanaian, how you think it went?

**Henry Telli**

Yes. I think with this environment of a hierarchical organisation, we had to think through the best way to get the junior ranks to be able to also contribute to making change. Because of the hierarchical system, it was very difficult for junior ranks to make any improvements. There are 33 police districts in the Greater Accra Region, which is the capital of Ghana, where our research was focused. We randomly selected 21 out of the 33 districts and targeted the training at most of the officers in these districts. It was groups of people from the districts who got the training. So that change between the senior and junior ranks was similar, they all had the same template to start with. And when we went to the awards ceremony, this was a while after the training, you could see that they were really proud to be part of the training, and they shared a few testimonies of how this was the beginning of change, not just the way they looked at what they were doing, their work, but also how they related to their senior officers. So, I think it was very useful. At the ceremony itself, we had senior police officers putting a lapel pin on the officers to distinguish them from the other police officers, and they really appreciated that.

**Donna Harris**

Thank you, Henry. And Bruno just wants to add…

**Bruno Schettini**

Yes. If you will allow me, another sensitive part of it was that police officers do not normally accept influence. We don't like other people telling us how to do our jobs. I mean, this is something human beings are all like, but especially law enforcement people. They know how to do it. And you need to go to them and make an approach like we did, to be very sensitive, and I think that this was very well thought through in the delivery of the process, of bringing another police officer from a different environment, but still an environment that had a close connection to Africa. This allowed us to do it in a softer way.

**Donna Harris**

Yeah, that's a great point. And nicely leads us to the challenges, and I think you're right, we were trying to bring that sense that the person who was delivering the course was someone they could identify with, another police officer. And you made a good point about the fact that it's not going to work as well if it is a researcher, for example. And it seemed, when I was observing, that they completely listened and then they completely connected with you and your examples. But there were some questions around Brazil, that things are not the same in Ghana. Maybe we can discuss a little bit about how we dealt with that. Culturally it is very different. So how did we deal with that? Maybe you want to come in?

**Bruno Schettini**

I think that one of the approaches that we tried first was to reinforce where we are similar, before going to the points that might have the sort of reaction that you have just said, so we mentioned football, that we're both from the South Hemisphere, things about food, things about being happy and carnival and full of colours etc. Trying to show them that we are a lot alike. This was the first point.

Brazil was perceived by Ghanaians as a very developed country. We tried to show them that we are in some parts of the country, but in others we are way, way worse than most African countries. We are a very big and diverse country with a lack of infrastructure and money and education etc. in some parts of the country. So, this was the main way that we showed them that 'we are just like you', but we are 15 years ahead, so we have already walked the path. So, it's easier for you to walk now. So that's what we are trying to show you guys, if you do this, you will walk this path at a faster pace. This is how we tried to break down that distance.

**Donna Harris**

Henry, would you like to come in?

**Henry Telli**

I was just going to add that, in the end, they could really relate to the examples that Bruno was using in the training. And you know what, I think the other thing that also reduced the focus on Brazil and Ghana was focusing on the goals and the intrinsic values they have to control. It was not that Bruno was bringing those values from Brazil. It felt like, OK, this is what the majority of us are saying, and this is what we want to achieve. So, they were able to own the goals or the vision and by the end, it didn't matter too much or at all whether Bruno was from Brazil or anywhere else.

## Donna Harris

Now we're going to move on. We've discussed delivering a training and the randomisation that Henry mentioned, and we've got the results, we also did an end-line survey a bit later on with a phone survey (we were going to do the face to face interview, which is what we did in the baseline, but we had to change to phones due to COVID). I want to invite Oana and Danila to talk about the main results, maybe Oana first on the statistical analysis. We did the experiment as part of the baseline and end-line interviews. So, I will then invite Danila to talk more about those results and maybe the overall outcomes and the highlights of what we found from our training.

## Oana Borcan

Thank you, Donna. I thought I might start by just saying thank you for this wonderful discussion. It's so interesting to hear, and I'm thoroughly impressed by the teamwork you've all put together. And it's lovely to just hear Bruno's and Henry's impressions about how the training went. And it was clearly very impactful, and we saw that in the reactions of the officers and in the aftermath of the training. But we also saw some of the footage, and that was just really impressive for us as a team. How do you follow in their footsteps in telling the story?

Perhaps I can talk a little bit about the challenges in measuring the impact of such a training, and maybe I should talk about the main thing, which is the measurement? How do you measure the impact of the training in the long run? So obviously it had a great reaction at the time of the training, but is the impact long lasting? And that is very important for us as academics to be able to identify and measure that. And so, what we were trying to capture here was, first of all, subtle changes in the attitudes and beliefs of the officers about what is ethical or unethical and what their mission is. And you may think of these as rather intangible things to try to assess, but it turns out that surveys and well-designed questions can definitely capture a shift in the mindset towards integrity. And so, the team worked really hard on designing that comprehensive questionnaire at baseline and also on adjusting that questionnaire for the phone survey 20 months after the training. But we also wanted to capture the actual behaviour of officers in a situation that can simulate the reality of being put in front of a decision to be ethical or not. So, if I can just go back a little bit to the survey, I wanted to highlight that we asked a set of questions not only on their values, values can subsume many things: what is important for them in their role as officers, whether or not organisational norms can change, whether they believe that education can make that change and their original motivation for joining the police force. But we also wanted to know a little bit about whether they would or did report unethical behaviour that they've witnessed

amongst colleagues within the organisation and whether they monitored their officers well (for those who were team leaders at the time of the survey). We also asked a little bit about their perceptions about the overall level of corruption in the police and in the district where they were stationed. And we also wanted to know about their relationship with the citizens.

These are some of the questions that we asked and that we used and aggregated the answers to in order to obtain some of our indexes which measure these attitudes and beliefs. In terms of the actual behaviour, and this is quite common in experimental economics and now in experiments in the field, we used a situation or a scenario which is practically a game but is a game where there are real incentives to behave in a certain way. The game was inspired by a design in a paper by Abeler, J., A. Becker, and A. Falk (2014) in the Journal of Public Economics. In this particular game, the officers had to toss a coin four times, and that was under the assumption that everyone has a coin lying around somewhere in their house or wherever they were sitting at the time of the survey, and so tossing a coin four times, they would have to tell us how many times they got tails. So, the number of tails is the outcome we were interested in here, primarily. The more tales they reported, the more money they would actually earn at the end of the survey with us. So, there was some money at stake and so there was an incentive here to cheat because you cannot be observed, you're doing this coin toss in private, so your behaviour cannot really be seen by the enumerator or by the researcher. Second, the more you misrepresent the truth, the more you're likely to earn. So obviously for us as researchers, we could not observe individual behaviour, and that's why we cannot say that one officer or another lied. And that is actually an attractive feature of the design because it allows us to create that situation where the officer is comfortable expressing themselves as they wish. The nice feature here is that we can still observe aggregate cheating behaviour because we know that theoretically, only about 25 percent of the officers should tell that they had three tails, this is just a part of the theoretical probability distribution. And so, if we observe that more than that proportion of officers report three or four tails, then we know that a little bit of cheating has actually happened. So that's a little bit on the side of how we measured the outcomes. This was all very feasible for the phone survey, which actually didn't take too long to carry out.

And then the second challenge was, once we had these measures which were fairly accurate representations of the attitudes and behaviour of officers, we then had to ask, how do we use these measures in order to attribute the change in these measures or the results that these measures give us to the training and not to something else or some intrinsic characteristics of the officers? So, the point here is how do you identify the impact of the training using these measures? And this is where the randomised controlled trial design comes in, where only a part of the officers were allocated to receive the training and that part was determined randomly. We had, I believe, about 21 districts who received the offer to take the training and 11 districts were left as control districts and they didn't receive an offer for the training. From the 21 districts, only about half of the officers who were stationed in those districts took the training. Obviously, not everyone could take the training because they were on a duty rota, and so they also had to manage the traffic at the time that the training took place. The officers who took the training were also randomly determined according to that duty roster that the police had. From that we know that those who took the training, so the treated ones, were very similar in terms of their underlying characteristics to those who didn't take the training or were not offered the training. And that is critical because when we look at our measures and compare our measures, our value indexes and reporting

monitoring relationship indexes across officers who took the training and those who didn't, and we know that the difference, if there is a difference, is only due to the training and not something else. And it might be that this is a good place for me to hand over to Danila to talk a little bit about what we found or if she wanted to add anything on the design itself.

**Danila Serra**

Thank you, Oana. I think in this remaining time I'm going to mention the results which are very exciting. As Oana mentioned, we have five survey measures of outcomes, a value index that measures our primary outcome of interest, it's an index that aggregates officers' identity as service providers, their beliefs about organisational norms, the possibility of changing organisational norms, their attitudes. And then another crucial outcome was that this index measured attitudes toward citizens and relationships with citizens. And these were outcomes that were targeted in the training, as Henry, Donna and Bruno explained very carefully, they were targeted in a number of modules in the training and we did see that the trained officers in the treatment districts scored significantly higher both in the value index and the relationship index and those are both, as Oana explained, generated by this survey. Moreover, we saw a significant impact on our measure of willingness to engage in unethical behaviour as measured by the incentivised game, the cheating game that Oana mentioned. And there we can, first of all, compare the empirical distribution of reported coin flips with a theoretical distribution and we see that for the trained officers there's evidence of the two being more similar to each other, compared to their control districts, where we see much more evidence of cheating, but also in the regression analysis we see that the likelihood of reporting a high number of tails during the coin toss game was lower. The probability or the likelihood of reporting more than two tails or three tails was much, much lower, significantly lower, for the officers who were trained. We do not see a similar impact on the untrained officers in treatment districts, meaning that really there was no spill-over of the training on the untrained officers in the treatment districts. And to us, this is evidence that you really had to be at the training, you had to be discussing these issues and participating in all these activities led by Bruno in order to be affected by them, so participation is crucial here.

Another set of results that I would briefly like to mention has to do with mechanism because, as Oana said, Bruno and Henry have done this amazing job explaining the training and all the work that went into considering and implementing the training, but another mechanism that we thought would be at play here is identity. The intrinsic motivation to serve the public that officers may have had when they first joined the police, may have been lost over time. And one of the purposes of the training was to reactivate these intrinsic motivations, prime this identity of service provider that officers may have lost. And one of the things that we do with the data is also to check whether there are heterogenous effects of the training on initial intrinsic motivations to serve the public felt when the officers join the police. And we have this measure from the baseline survey. We asked officers why they joined the police in the first place and about 60 percent of them across the board in all districts said that they joined to serve the community. And so when we look at treatment effects by that variable, we see that the impact of the training is really coming primarily from officers that were intrinsically motivated when they joined the police. The officers that were never intrinsically motivated and never had this identity of a service provider, they were not really

impacted by the training. And so, this really consolidated the main mechanism to which the training worked, this identity that Donna mentioned at the very beginning. This is what we wanted to activate, what we wanted to prime, and we also wanted to create this new group identity, a group of 'agents of change'. And I think from the data, we see that all of those worked pretty well together, and they ended up impacting the officers even more than we thought would be possible in such a short time.

I would also like to mention the relationship with citizen index results because this is an outcome variable that was also strongly affected by the training. We see that the trained officers score much higher on this index, suggesting that their relationship with citizens had improved as a result of the training. And for this outcome, we also see that the impact is strong for officers that were not intrinsically motivated when they joined the police, so this is kind of a silver lining for us because, even though on the one hand, we found that being intrinsically motivated to serve the public when you first join the police was important to really be affected by the training, there are some modules of the training, in particular, those communication techniques that Bruno was talking about, that actually are also very effective for officers that do not have this identity of service provider, or at least they did not have it at the very beginning. And so, their relationship with citizens in general could be really impacted through these training models that we discussed here.


**Donna Harris**

Thanks, Oana and Danila, that was very concise and brought out all the highlights of our key findings. One thing to add is that when we did the end-line survey, it was about 20 months afterwards. So I just wanted to point out that we feel that this wasn't an experiment-demand effect because we did the survey such a long time after the training and it seemed to have lasted. I think Oana alluded to the long-lasting effect of this type of training. And it seems like, even 20 months later, the officers still remembered the training and their behaviour actually did change as a result.

We are in discussion with the Ghana police in terms of the next steps, this experiment seems to have worked and so let's see where we go next from here. I want to thank everybody for joining us, Danila, Oana, Bruno and Henry. This has been a long-term project which started in 2017 and it's so nice to see the paper coming out soon and we're going to present it at the CSAE conference.

And finally, I want to thank the Ghana Police Service and especially Dr Sasu-Mensah, Jerome Kanyog and all the officers that we worked with. And last but not least, our team of amazing enumerators in Ghana led by Sami, who sadly we lost along the way, and Wisdom who took over and has done an amazing job, and the rest of the team of 15 enumerators who have done an amazing job. Thank you CSAE for organising this and we hope you'll join us again next time. Thank you.