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**Statement submitted by the African Center for Governance,
Asset Recovery and Sustainable Development, a non-
governmental organization not in consultative status with
the Economic and Social Council***

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30TH APRIL, 2026

**WRITTEN SUBMISSION ON ENHANCING ASSET RECOVERY EFFECTIVENESS
THROUGH DIGITAL INNOVATION AND INCLUSIVE OVERSIGHT**

BY

**AFRICAN CENTER FOR GOVERNANCE, ASSET RECOVERY AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**

INTRODUCTION

Asset recovery remains one of the most visible tests of whether anti-corruption commitments translate into real outcomes. It is where law meets impact, where stolen public resources are returned and redirected toward development. Yet, despite the framework established under Chapter V of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC),¹ results continue to fall short. Asset recovery remains limited in practice, with the total value of returned assets remaining low compared to the scale of illicit financial flows.²

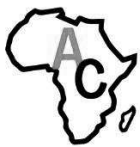
At the eleventh session of the Conference of State Parties (CoSP 11) of the UNCAC in Doha, States Parties emphasized practical solutions, including Resolution 11/1, which highlights the role of digital tools in improving cooperation, and Resolution 11/4, which reinforces transparency and participation. Together, they point to a clear direction - asset recovery must become faster, more coordinated, and more transparent.

Resolution 11/1 and 11/4

While most States parties have established the necessary legislative frameworks to implement the UNCAC, significant challenges persist in practice. The UNCAC Implementation Review Mechanism notes that “most States parties have established the necessary legislative frameworks to implement the

¹United Nations (2003) United Nations Convention against Corruption. New York: United Nations.

² World Bank and UNODC (2014) Few and Far: The Hard Facts on Stolen Asset Recovery. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2014/09/few-and-far_g1g49230/9789264222311-en.pdf.



provisions of the Convention.”³ Nevertheless, asset recovery outcomes remain limited, with the total value of returned assets remaining low compared to the scale of illicit financial flows.⁴ This suggests that the principal challenge in asset recovery is no longer primarily legal, but lies in effective implementation, including institutional capacity. Fragmented information systems and limited access to financial data often delay investigations. Mutual legal assistance processes remain slow. Even when assets are recovered, the use of those assets is not always transparent. Nigeria’s experience reflects this reality. The recovery of Abacha-related assets demonstrates that cross-border cooperation can work. However, it has also exposed gaps in transparency and consistency. Where monitoring frameworks involving civil society were included, credibility improved. Where they were not, public confidence weakened -the issue is therefore not the absence of rules, but the absence of systems that make those rules effective.

Improving How Assets Are Found and Recovered

Better outcomes depend on improving how assets are identified and traced. This is where digital systems are already changing practice. Financial intelligence now relies on data systems that allow investigators to detect suspicious transactions, trace ownership, and map financial relationships⁵, improving both speed and coordination. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has increasingly integrated such tools into financial investigation training and technical assistance.⁶ International cooperation is also improving through structured networks such as the Egmont Group and asset recovery networks, which facilitate faster information exchange. These developments reflect a shift toward more coordinated and data-informed investigations.

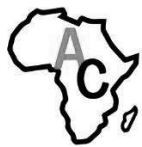
Although artificial intelligence (AI) raises legal and ethical issues and demands stronger frameworks and international cooperation, emerging research shows that AI-driven tools can significantly enhance asset recovery by accelerating investigations, improving risk-based targeting, and uncovering complex

³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2015) State of Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption. Vienna: UNODC. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNCAC/COSP/session6/15-03457_ebook.pdf.

⁴ Ibid, n 2

⁵ Financial Action Task Force (FATF) (n.d.) Digital Transformation [Executive Summary]. Paris: FATF. Available at: <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/content/dam/fatf-gafi/guidance/Digital-Transformation-executive-summary.pdf> (Accessed: 22 April, 2026).

⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2026) AI and OSINT for financial investigations and asset recovery. UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/roca/en/NEWS/2026/ai-and-osint-for-financial-investigations-and-asset-recovery.html> (Accessed: 22 April, 2026).



financial relationships across jurisdictions.⁷ Nigeria has begun to apply similar approaches. At CoSP 11, the country presented reforms, including a National Central Database on Forfeited Assets and digital systems for tracking asset recovery processes.⁸ However, access to these tools remains uneven. Many countries most affected by illicit financial flows lack the infrastructure and capacity to use them effectively. Bridging this gap is essential.

Making Asset Recovery Transparent and Accountable

Improving recovery without improving accountability risks reinforcing opacity. Transparency and oversight are therefore central to effectiveness. UNCAC requires States to promote the active participation of civil society and other non-state actors in preventing and combating corruption⁹. In practice, however, civil society is rarely given a structured role in asset recovery processes. Information on return agreements and asset use is often limited. Where more transparent approaches have been used, the results are instructive. In some Abacha asset return arrangements, monitoring frameworks involving civil society and international partners improved accountability and public trust. International experience supports the approach of strengthening civil society's role in promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusive asset recovery processes.¹⁰ The lesson is clear: transparency must be built into the system, not added after the fact.

Connecting Recovery to Impact

The purpose of asset recovery extends beyond the return of stolen funds to ensuring that those resources deliver tangible public benefit.¹¹ This requires a stronger connection between recovery processes and

⁷ Zehra, S.M. (2026) AI-driven asset tracing in stolen asset recovery. IACA Research Paper Series No. 16. Laxenburg: International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA). Available at: https://www.iaca.int/media/attachments/2026/02/02/iacare_final.pdf.

⁸United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (n.d.) Nigeria showcases innovative anti-corruption reforms and global cooperation at the 11th Conference of State Parties (COSP) to UNCAC. UNODC Country Office in Nigeria. Available at: <https://www.unodc.org/conig/en/stories/nigeria-showcases-innovative-anti-corruption-reforms-and-global-cooperation-at-the-11th-conference-of-state-parties-cosp-to-uncac.html> (Accessed: 22 April, 2026).

⁹ Article 13 UNCAC

¹⁰ Civil Society for Inclusive Asset Recovery (CIFAR) (2026a). Empowering civil society for transparent and inclusive asset recovery in West Africa. 2 April. Available at: <https://cifar.eu/news/empowering-civil-society-for-transparent-and-inclusive-asset-recovery-in-west-africa> (Accessed: 23 April 2026).

¹¹ Civil Society for Inclusive Asset Recovery (CIFAR) (2026b) Launching the Monitoring Returned Assets: A Toolkit for Civil Society Organisations. Available at: <https://cifar.eu/news/launching-the-monitoring-returned-assets-a-toolkit-for-civil-society-organisations> (Accessed: 23 April 2026).



the ultimate use of returned assets. Recovered funds should be traceable from confiscation through to allocation and final expenditure.

Digital tools can support this process by tracking assets across the recovery lifecycle, improving transparency, and reducing opportunities for diversion or re-corruption. At the same time, oversight mechanisms, particularly those involving civil society, play a critical role in verifying information, enhancing credibility, and strengthening accountability. By linking recovery to measurable outcomes, States can demonstrate not only that assets have been recovered, but how they are used and what impact they generate for affected communities. Without this, asset recovery risks remaining largely symbolic, demonstrating legal success without delivering meaningful social or economic impact. Asset recovery achieves its purpose only when returned assets are transparently tracked, effectively used, and demonstrably deliver public benefit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following actions aim to improve asset recovery outcomes through stronger systems, transparency, and oversight.

1. States Parties should establish integrated digital systems and use secure, standardized communication channels to enable timely information sharing, real-time case and asset tracking, and faster international cooperation, thereby improving coordination, reducing delays, and preventing the movement or loss of assets
2. States Parties should ensure that asset return agreements are transparent, publicly accessible, and supported by structured oversight mechanisms that enable civil society to monitor asset recovery and the use of returned funds, with access to relevant information.

CONCLUSION

Asset recovery remains one of the most powerful tools available under UNCAC, but its potential is not yet fully realised. The challenge is no longer about establishing rules, but about making those rules work in practice. Improving effectiveness requires faster and more coordinated recovery processes, supported by better use of data and information. It also requires transparency and oversight to ensure that recovered assets deliver real benefits.

Digital systems and inclusive oversight are often discussed separately, but they are most effective when combined. One improves how assets are recovered; the other ensures that recovery leads to meaningful



outcomes. The direction set by recent CoSP discussions reflects this understanding. The next step is implementation, building systems that are not only efficient but also transparent, accountable, and trusted. If achieved, asset recovery can move beyond symbolic success and become a reliable instrument for restoring public resources and strengthening governance.

For more information on our work and ongoing initiatives, please visit:

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