



Civil
Forum for
Asset Recovery
Strategy
2016 - 2019

Civil Forum for Asset Recovery

www.cifar.eu

2016

CiFAR e.V. is a registered association in Germany.

What is CiFAR?

Founded in 2015, the Civil Forum for Asset Recovery is a global civil society organisation fighting the theft of state assets. We provide civil society with the skills, knowledge and network to advocate, inform, campaign and investigate cases where public and private officials are complicit in the illicit removal of public goods to private accounts and private ownership across

national borders. We also ensure that civil society can be an active voice in the transparent and accountable return of confiscated stolen assets and that civil society acts together globally against the systems that allow public assets to be stolen by those in power.

CiFAR's mission is to act as the voice for civil society worldwide on public stolen assets, to support civil society across the globe to be a strong and effective actor on stolen assets and to close the gap missing in global civil society asset recovery work.

We campaign against individuals and the structures that enable asset theft, we support cross-border civil society cooperation on asset recovery and we develop the expertise of civil society to be strong voices across the globe on asset theft.

Our 2016-2019 Strategy sets out how we will go about achieving our mission in the coming three years. Our mission is tough, and we are a new civil society organisation, but we are driven by the belief that what we are trying to do needs to be done and needs to be done now. Despite growing publicity on asset theft following the 2011 revolutions in North Africa and the 2014 Ukrainian revolution, and the mansions, cars and money found across Europe and North America, little action has been taken by governments to return the assets, to close the loopholes allowing assets to be stolen, and citizen oversight remains non-existent.

It is time to change that.



Problems we're facing in 2016

Millions of Euros in State assets are still being stolen by public officials and persons in power. These assets are still able to be and are still being illicitly removed from the country of origin and moved through offshore accounts and shell companies to be deposited as money in foreign accounts or used to buy yachts, mansions and sports cars.

Awareness of public asset theft is growing among all sectors of society. Governments – being the main actor capable of closing down the ways corrupt officials use to steal public assets – remain however lacking in political will, lacking in expertise, or lacking in power. Moreover those governments that are destinations for stolen assets, while making the right noises, have yet to take action against the systems and continue to benefit from the proceeds of corruption.

Certain financial institutions on the other hand, as well as law firms are continuing to accept money without asking questions and facilitating the establishment of shell companies.

Recovering stolen assets is a complex and long process that requires continued and serious inter-governmental cooperation. In the cases where assets were returned, governments have often been opaque and unaccountable in how the returned public money would be used. Increasingly questions of conditionality are also coming into play.

NGOs and investigative journalists are putting pressure on governments to act and financial and legal institutions to change. Civil society is also taking action and bringing cases to court to make it harder for officials and those in power to hide stolen assets abroad. Investigative journalists worldwide are increasingly exposing the ways the corrupt move public assets, following complex financial routes, revealing shell companies and offshore accounts and describing how assets are being hidden in tax havens.

However and unfortunately outside of a few exceptions, civil society is still weak at fighting against asset theft and this is particularly the case for civil society based in countries of origin. In particular, civil society organisations lack the knowledge needed to fully hold governments to account of what is a complex topic and the networks needed to work on a topic that is by its nature multi-jurisdictional. Investigative journalists have been at the forefront of stolen asset investigations in some cases, but in many other cases this is still a new topic and in some countries investigative journalism itself is weak.

CiFAR's approach to fighting the theft of state assets: Our strategy 2016-2019

CiFAR's objective is to end the theft of State assets and ensure that stolen assets are returned transparently and accountably to the rightful owners. To achieve this, we work through the following, three results areas:

1: Developing the expertise, knowledge and skills of non-state actors to play an effective role in the asset recovery process

2: Enabling stronger cross-border cooperation of non-state actors to fight against State asset theft and for asset recovery

3: Building multi-country campaigns against individual impunity for the theft of state assets, against the structures in place that facilitate asset theft and for the accountable and transparent return of stolen assets.

Between 2016-2019, our focus will therefore be on laying the foundations for strong, global work to prevent State asset theft and to ensure its accountable and transparent return across all three results areas.

Results area 1: Developing the expertise, knowledge and skills of non-state actors to play an effective role in the asset recovery process

This results area is designed to address the lack of expertise and/or knowledge in non-state actors, in particular civil society organisations and investigative journalists, in the complexities of the State asset theft and recovery process. Through developing the expertise of non-state actors, this results area is also designed to strengthen the expertise of governments in preventing asset theft and in the recovery of stolen assets, through enabling civil society to provide the blueprints for reform and to provide informed and constructive advice to government officials.

Between 2016-2019, CiFAR plans to contribute to achieving this result through three areas:

a) Civil society capacity building

At current, a few experienced and influential civil society organisations are operating on this topic. The majority of civil society organisations working on this topic however either have a certain level of experience in parts of the process, but need support to get to the next level or are enthusiastic about working on the area but lack the fundamentals needed to make an impact.

Over the coming three years, we plan to initiate a capacity building programme for civil society to address these gaps. Starting on two levels - for less and for more experienced organisations - and teaming up with experts from the non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations, as well as governments, we aim to increase the capacity of both to work more effectively and to make contacts between each other.

b) Support to investigative journalists

Investigative journalists are key to ending the theft of stolen assets and helping to track down those assets already stolen. Investigative journalism on stolen assets has seen some notable successes, especially in tracking down assets in destination countries and exposing the practices that allow corrupt officials to move money into destination countries.

Over the coming three years, we plan to develop the expertise of aspiring investigative journalists,

particularly young journalists and those from countries outside of Europe and North America, and to assist experienced investigative journalists new to the asset recovery field to build stories from multiple perspectives, in order to help create a new cohort of journalists able to work on tracking stolen assets and critiquing the systems that allow assets to be stolen.

c) Country-level research

At present, information on what countries have done to reform their laws to prevent the exit of State assets or to prevent corrupt officials moving assets through or to their country is scattered across many places and not easily accessible to citizens and civil society.

Over the next three years, CiFAR will develop and pilot country level assessments of measures put in place to prevent assets being moved through or ending up in a jurisdiction, as well as mechanisms to assist the return of assets, and make these accessible to civil society and the public, so that citizens can understand the steps their governments are taking to prevent state asset theft.

Results area 2: Enabling stronger cross-border cooperation of non-state actors to fight against State asset theft and for asset recovery

This results area is designed to address the difficulties civil society, investigative journalists and other non-state actors face in working on asset recovery outside their national context. While State asset theft is a global issue, networks and advocacy to end this practice tends not to be. Through expanding networks against asset theft,, this results area is designed to lay the groundwork for increasing cross-border collaboration.

Between 2016-2019, CiFAR plans to contribute to achieving this result through the following areas:

a) Civil society networking

Civil society tends to be extremely under-networked on asset recovery. While some North American and European NGOs collaborate with civil society in asset sending states, this collaboration tends to be limited to specific parts of the asset recovery chain and ad hoc, with even less collaboration possible for new organisations. This situation is exactly the opposite of what should be happening – civil society should be well connected and able to collaborate across

borders to play an effective role in preventing state asset theft.

Over the coming three years, we aim to facilitate civil society networking and collaboration on cases and on systematic challenges within asset theft and asset recovery. In particular, we aim to hold at least one global civil society forum on asset recovery, to enable civil society to network, exchange and learn from each other on current issues and cases and to build those first connections.

b) Support cross-border investigative journalism

Cross-border investigative journalism is already taking place on cases of asset recovery. This is often driven by investigative journalists from the North which, while important, only reflects part of the picture and can tend to focus on the problems within Northern countries with regards to prevention of asset entry.

Between 2016-2019 through our work with aspiring investigative journalists from source and transit countries for asset theft, CiFAR will seek to support investigative journalism from alternative viewpoints on asset recovery and facilitate cross-border investigative reports.

Results area 3: Building multi-country campaigns against individual impunity for the theft of state assets, against the structures in place that facilitate asset theft and for the accountable and transparent return of stolen assets.

This results area is designed to bring together and amplify the voices of non-state actors to challenge the foundations of asset theft and to hold accountable those who are involved. We will seek to push governments to take action against the asset theft chain, to make it more difficult for private institutions to facilitate and accept stolen assets and to empower those who support our cause.

Between 2016-2019, CiFAR plans to contribute to achieving this result through the following areas:

a) Advocating our country-level research

Not only is there a lack of a clear understanding of what countries are doing and should do to prevent State asset theft, but there is also a lack of engagement by the general public in many countries on this topic – in part due to the complexity of the topic.

In the coming three years, we will aim not only to start to assess the situation in transit and receiving states, but also to take this information and make it publicly understandable and accessible through global campaigns in cooperation with partners. We will also directly engage interested parties and work to convince them of the need for reform.

b) Public activism

Increased public understanding of, support for and engagement in the fight against the theft of public money is key to address this issue effectively. The topic of asset recovery in general is one that is full of legal complexity and inaccessible language. It is also one that is subject to substantive media speculation and sensational stories about the size of stolen assets, leading in some cases to unreasonable expectations on the likelihood and amount of assets to be returned.

It is essential that the general public has a strong understanding of asset recovery and how they can speak up against it to hold those responsible to account. Over the coming three years, we will focus on locally driven youth activities to engage the public in becoming active on asset recovery. Projects within this area will include activities such as summer schools, youth camps, integrity clubs at schools or universities, cultural events and workshops for bloggers.

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