

2023

**NARRATIVE
REPORT**

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CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	1
RESULTS AREA 1	3
RESULTS AREA 2	16
RESULTS AREA 3	23

OVERVIEW

Berlin, 15 June 2024

The past year has seen us make remarkable strides in the work we have been aiming to achieve since founding the organisation: developing and promoting new and innovative research and policy, connecting and supporting the voices of civil society from across the world on asset recovery, and building an organisation fit to respond to national, regional and international developments. As the last year of our 2020 – 2023 strategy, it also saw us look back on our achievements over the past four years and plan for the years ahead.

Under our Global Priorities results area we continued to push forward important global debates. This included continuing our work on the relationship between sanctions and asset recovery through both our Sanctions Watch platform and with the publication of new research into legislative and policy links between sanctions and asset recovery. It also saw us take this work one step further and conclude our own investigation into enforcement of Russian sanctions in three EU jurisdictions. Through this investigation we uncovered possible sanctions evasion, were able to report for the first time on the total value of sanctioned assets in Italy and Spain, and identified further learnings for how sanctions can lead to asset recovery. We also published new reports into areas little researched in the asset recovery fields: Reconciliation Agreements and Indirect Return Mechanisms – the latter of which we picked up for discussion with governments at the UNCAC Implementation Review Group meeting in Vienna and in new work that emerged to support Venezuelan civil society.

Over the year we also developed three new sets of global civil society principles, aimed at setting out minimum framework standards for asset management, anti-corruption sanctions and victims and asset recovery. These principles lay important groundwork for our and our partners' advocacy in the years ahead.

We extensively engaged on asset recovery with the African Union and regional African bodies in 2023. Alongside joint events and briefings with officials, we developed, and began piloting, a tool to assess implementation of the Common African Position on Asset Recovery. This tool, which will be finalised in 2024, will be an innovative way to advance asset recovery legislation and policy across Africa, rooting reform in African standards.



We also led global debates throughout the year. At the UNCAC Conference of States Parties (UNCAC CoSP) in Atlanta, USA, in December 2023, we co-organised several events with the StAR initiative, civil society and government partners. At the CoSP, we also advocated for transparency, accountability and participation in asset recovery through our role as co-chair of the UNCAC Coalition Asset Recovery Working Group.

Activities under our Strengthening civil society results area underscored much of this work. Partners from across our priority countries and beyond were mobilised and drove much of the work we achieved at the global and regional levels.

We continued our commitment to strengthening the expertise and supporting the voices of our civil society partners across the world. This included providing trainings and ad hoc support to partners in Venezuela, Kenya, Uzbekistan, Mozambique and Angola, as well as enabling partners to engage with government officials in regional and global forums. Among others, we provided support to NGO partners over the year to attend meetings of the African Union and of the UNCAC CoSP, where they led discussions across the range of thematic topics we work with them on.

We also continued our support to advance investigative journalism into financial crime. We carried out Investigate programmes in Madagascar, East and Southern Africa and Peru, training over 50 journalists in financial investigations and supporting them to develop and publish stories. Stories published this year by these journalists had substantial impact and journalists across the programmes were empowered to continue their work beyond our programmes end. A new set of data on cases related to Madagascar was also made available globally following our programme there.

Our international Board, newly elected during the year, saw the addition of prominent experts and activists from different areas which will further strengthen the strategic guidance we much need in the next strategy cycle ahead.

Our achievements in 2023 ended the last year of our strategy strongly. We made progress across all priority areas and did so with a solid and energised team and partners. As we go into a new year and a new strategy, it is clear that 2024 will bring new challenges as conditions and commitment to anti-corruption change globally and as new cases arise. We will, however, also rise to meet the ambition set out in our new 2024 – 2027 strategy and remain ready to take on what the future holds, working as before towards asset recovery that contributes to stronger governance and a fairer world.

The CiFAR Team

RESULTS AREA

1

GLOBAL PRIORITIES

OVERVIEW OF RESULTS AREA

While several measures aimed at preventing the theft of public assets have been in place for many years and while criminal proceedings remain the default for recovering any money hidden overseas, the past four years have seen a growth in prominence of new ways to combat illicit financial flows. This has included big pushes on beneficial ownership and generally on fighting financial secrecy, sanctions, and the use of non-conviction-based forfeiture of ill-gotten gains, alongside questions over the utility of traditional methods. Lacking in many of these discussions and policy tendencies though are solid, empirical reasons for favouring certain tools over others. These tools have also only made progress to a certain extent, with issues around transparency and accountability remaining as strong as ever.

This results area transcends country cases and represents our commitment to push the agenda on asset recovery globally – developing the evidence around and advocating for measures that really work to tackle cross-border corruption and asset recovery. These areas represent not only priorities, but also where we have added value as a specialised civil society actor focussing on asset recovery. A key part of this result area is considering both the traditional and the new tools and situating them within the challenging political contexts within which asset recovery is carried out. This result area is also about considering the interlinks between asset recovery and the bigger political issues of transparency, accountability and good governance globally and nationally.

PRIORITY AREA 1: NEW TOOLS FOR ASSET RECOVERY

*Within the field of asset recovery, traditional, criminal justice approaches are frequently being replaced by calls for states to adopt and use new, non-traditional tools to make case-work more effective and faster. Our priority is to develop a **better understanding of non-traditional tools more broadly, their prevalence and effectivity** in actually combatting cross-border corruption, facilitating asset recovery and contributing to systemic change in both countries of origin and financial centres.*

Our work under this priority area has been along two lines: the use of sanctions as a tool for asset recovery, and analysis and reflection on newer legislative and policy tools that seek to make asset recovery more efficient and effective.

Sanctions continued to be a priority for us in 2023. During the year we made important strides in assessing and advocating for the effective implementation of sanctions and in making the case for the imposition of sanctions to lead to anti-corruption investigations.

PRIORITY AREA 1: NEW TOOLS FOR ASSET RECOVERY

In March we organised an event in Brussels with TI EU on the new sanctions directive (see Priority Area 3) and discussed the effectiveness of sanctions during a workshop organised by our partners RUSI in Brussels in March, along with European policymakers and experts.

In June, we launched the results of a multi-month investigation into the imposition of the Russian sanctions. The [Russian Escape](#) investigations looked into sanctions implementation and oversight in France, Spain and Italy and revealed shortcomings in how European countries are enforcing sanctions, as well as identifying total amounts of assets frozen for the first time.

In September, we took some of these discussions further by participating in a discussion on sanctions post-Russian invasion hosted by the International Republican Institute in Rome, focussing on responses to kleptocracy.

In December, we followed this up with the launch of the study [From Sanctions to Investigations](#), which looked at the intersection of sanctions and anti-corruption investigations, and highlighted the critical legal and policy frameworks that govern this process. Examining several jurisdictions, it demonstrated the need for policymakers to assess and strengthen the tools available for asset recovery in the context of sanctions.

Alongside this, we also continued to update [Sanctions Watch](#), our flagship site providing an overview of persons sanctioned for corruption worldwide and of sanctioning jurisdictions. Updated twice a year, this tool has proven to be a useful tool by our partners in civil society and the media over the years. We also had bilateral discussions with public sector actors from Moldova on specific aspects of sanction policy in the course of the year.

In addition to our sanctions work, we also expanded our work in other new tools for asset recovery during the year. Alongside our report on Indirect Returns Mechanisms (see Priority Area 2), we looked further into [Reconciliation Agreements](#) - political decisions and legal arrangements to provide amnesty from prosecution for corruption in exchange for the return of stolen assets, developing research to consider under what conditions they have been used and how they

PRIORITY AREA 1: NEW TOOLS FOR ASSET RECOVERY

could affect accountability and transparency as compared to traditional criminal and civil approaches

We picked up discussions on these topics and on other research we have done over the years at the UNCAC Conference of State Parties in December 2023. Together with the World Bank/ UNODC Stolen Asset Recovery (StAR) Initiative, the OECD, Basel Institute and RUSI, we held a Side Event looking at the possibilities foreign bribery cases and sanctions pose for facilitating asset recovery. With StAR, the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission Kenya, and CIP Mozambique, we organised a Side Event on asset management, looking at new developments and best practice. In advance of this event, we were also asked to input into a new report developed by StAR into asset management, providing expert advice across a thematic area.

In Kenya, we translated these topics to the specific context of the country. Starting in the autumn, we began research into alternative dispute resolution as a tool for asset recovery, linked to our global work on reconciliation agreements. We also picked up research into social reuse of recovered assets, drawing on international examples. For both these topics we hosted a research meeting in Nairobi in September, bringing together key government and civil society stakeholders to discuss the themes.

PRIORITY AREA 2: RETURNING ASSETS TO HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS

*A growing challenge in international asset recovery cases are **returns of stolen assets to countries where corrupt regimes are still in power** or where there is little to no possibility of citizen oversight of returned assets. This brings into tension the duty to return on the part of the states holding the assets and the duty to return responsibly. Our priority is to develop **new understandings of possibilities and creative solutions to return stolen assets to hostile environments in a way that is transparent, accountable and benefits the people from whom the assets were stolen.***

A focus under this priority area was on third-party or indirect return mechanisms - the return of stolen assets through international organisations, civil society or special purpose vehicles. While also sometimes used in situations where corrupt officials are still in power, they have most often been introduced in situations where there are fears of re-corruption of returned funds.

In March 2023 we launched a report on this thematic area - [Indirect Asset Return Through Third-Party Entities](#), which explores examples of indirect returns and provides recommendations for ensuring they adhere to international standards and best practice around transparency, accountability and participation.

We picked up this work thematically and engaging with several country cases. This included:

- In June, we co-organised an event on the topic with the French delegation at the UNCAC Implementation Review Group meeting in Vienna, with the participation of Switzerland and the US. This event explored how and when indirect mechanisms have been used and discussed best practice around their use to delegations attending the meeting.
- Working with partners in Venezuela, we supported engagement over the year with the development of the Fondo de Protección Social, under discussion to receive Venezuelan state assets frozen in the US. As part of this work, we developed two new reports: on best practices for independent return funds, and on management and

PRIORITY AREA 2: RETURNING ASSETS TO HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS

oversight of funds, both of which will be launched in early 2024. We also provided trainings for Venezuelan civil society and parliamentarians, to support their ability to engage in discussions around the Fondo Social. This included on conceptual basics, and specific work to support communication and advocacy at the national and international levels. Related to this, 130 Venezuelan CSOs published an open letter in July requesting the establishment of a fund for returned assets following international standards, which largely included our own standards for transparent returns.

- Speaking at an international conference on human rights violations and corruption in Venezuela in Madrid in April 2023, where we discussed the concept and practice of third party returns.
- Work as part of a group of NGOs to reflect on options for the return of confiscated Obiang assets to Equatorial Guinea. As part of this working group, which we have been a part of for several years, we published a joint report in June on the [return of the Obiang assets](#). We also spoke at an event organised by the working group in Madrid in November 2023, which brought together organisations and activists from Equatorial Guinea to identify priorities for the return of recovered assets.
- Further following the development of the Uzbek Vision 2030 Fund, which was established in 2023 and liaising with partners around its activities.

PRIORITY AREA 3: ASSET RECOVERY AS LAW

*The traditional approach to recovery has focussed on criminal proceedings through strong anti-corruption laws and facilitated by solid asset recovery laws. Our priority in this area is to **work with our partner organisations to evaluate, design and advocate for strong laws** that both prevent public asset theft and ensure transparent and accountable returns. We also aim to lead and support **investigations** by investigative journalists and CSOs into compliance with existing laws, including in particular sanctions.*

Within this priority area, we led and supported reform at the international and regional levels, with a particular emphasis on the African and European Unions, and nationally, on reforms in Kenya.

At the international level, we prioritised engagement with the UNCAC CoSP, which took place in Atlanta in December. Our aim with the conference was to focus on promoting three new sets of CSO principles, developed over the last year: on asset management, sanctions and victims, on engaging with States Parties to promote transparent, accountable and participatory asset recovery, and in building connections to begin advocacy for an asset recovery resolution at the next CoSP. As part of this, we co-organised three Side Events at the CoSP, on asset management, sanctions and African regional mechanisms, all of which took place as part of the StAR Asset Recovery Day programme. We also submitted the three sets of Principles as official documents of the conference and made a statement to the plenary on the importance of transparent, accountable and participatory asset recovery.



Image: Jackson Oldfield, Statement to CoSP Plenary

PRIORITY AREA 3: ASSET RECOVERY AS LAW

To strengthen civil society engagement with the African Union's Common African Position on Asset Recovery (CAPAR), we supported the establishment and provided the secretariat for the [CAPAR CSO Network](#), which aims to conduct joint civil society-led advocacy for the CAPAR and coordinated monitoring of national level implementation of the CAPAR. In relation to this work, we developed and began piloting a civil society assessment tool to monitor the implementation of the CAPAR during the year. The tool evaluates national implementation of the CAPAR through establishing indicators for CAPAR commitments and is being piloted in six countries across each sub-region of Africa. The results of the pilots and the final tool will be completed in 2024.

On this topic and beyond, over the year we had sustained and productive engagement with the African Union, particularly working closely with the African Union Advisory Board Against Corruption (AU-ABC). Through this cooperation, we were invited to present the CAPAR assessment tool at a virtual Board Meeting of the AU-ABC on 15 September, where we collected feedback on improving and promoting the tools methodology. The initiative was met with high interest from members of the Board.

We were also invited by the AU-ABC, along with one other representative of the CAPAR CSO network from Kenya, to attend the Continental Symposium on the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPPC) celebrating the 20th anniversary of the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption implementation. This event brought together key stakeholders, including government officials, Anti-Corruption Agencies, CSOs, and international partners. The event was an important opportunity for CIFAR and the CAPAR CSO network to present the CAPAR initiative and discuss urgent asset recovery issues with key policymakers and political figures. During a high level panel, we delivered a presentation highlighting the crucial role of civil society organizations in asset recovery and introduced the CAPAR CSO network along with its assessment tool. The panel, attended by approximately 100 delegates, consisted of

PRIORITY AREA 3: ASSET RECOVERY AS LAW

government ministers, state anti-corruption agencies, development partners, and anti-corruption civil society organizations. To further facilitate interactions, CiFAR set up an information booth, which attracted government officials and other stakeholders. A highlight was a visit to our booth by Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of Tanzania. During these engagements, CiFAR shared a public statement developed by the CAPAR CSOs network.



Image: Lewis Kundai, Continental Symposium on the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption

In early November 2023, we were further invited to a meeting in Arusha, Tanzania, organised by the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) - Committee on Accounts, along with the African Parliamentarians Network Against Corruption (APNAC) and Transparency International Kenya. During the event, as part of our role with the CAPAR CSO Network, we committed to various collaborations with EALA and APNAC, including: to contribute in the creation of an APNAC Regional Chapter in the region and strengthening its asset recovery component; to feed into the draft EALA protocol on anti-corruption, supporting asset recovery provisions and how they can be improved before possible adoption; and to welcome EALA members and officials to events organised by CiFAR.

Along with our partner CIAG Kenya from the CAPAR Network, we were also invited to the Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network for Eastern Africa (ARIN-EA) Steering Group Meeting in November. This was the follow-up to an introductory online meeting we also held in 2023 and aiming at

PRIORITY AREA 3: ASSET RECOVERY AS LAW

building partnership on asset recovery initiatives with ARIN-EA. We presented to member countries on the CAPAR, CiFAR's work in the region and our work around transparency in asset recovery. We also introduced the CSO Network and the CAPAR assessment tool. As an outcome, we agreed to prepare a draft Memorandum of Understanding with ARIN-EA, describing commitments of both sides in collaborating on asset recovery and CSO dialogue, including joint trainings, participation in relevant events and promoting CAPAR.

At the UNCAC CoSP, we picked up these discussions, organising a Side Event together with StAR, the AUABC, Malawi, Nigeria governments and the Pan African Lawyers Union on the CAPAR and regional developments in Africa around asset recovery. The CAPAR CSO Network also released a [statement at the CoSP](#) highlighting the progress made with the CAPAR and the need for further steps to be taken to ensure it is implemented across the continent.

Overall, our efforts in Africa allowed us to not only convey important messages around transparency and accountability in asset recovery, but also to convince key regional actors and governments of the importance of involving civil society asset recovery processes, and to position ourselves increasingly as a credible expert and leading organisation on these topics in the continent. It will be key to capitalise on this momentum in our new strategy in the coming years.

Our engagement at the European Union level saw important successes. We focused on the development of two new Directives under discussion during 2023: the asset recovery and sanctions directives. In January 2023, we collaborated with Transparency International EU to provide comments on the draft asset recovery directive to the European Parliament LIBE and JURI committees. Then in March 2023 we held a [joint event in Brussels](#) to discuss the development of the directives with policy makers. With speakers and attendees from all three EU institutions, we were able to advance discussions around key areas for reform. We followed this with feedback into the development of the directives directly with institutions, in May being invited to comment on the sanctions directive by

PRIORITY AREA 3: ASSET RECOVERY AS LAW

Saskia Bricmont, lead for the LIBE Committee. In a separate, but also important area, we also worked with other civil society to push for open access to public beneficial ownership information in Europe in May through an open letter.

In Kenya, we were involved in several discussions about reforms to the asset recovery framework. In August 2023, for example, CiFAR jointly submitted with partner CSOs a memorandum to the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee of Parliament on the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating of Terrorism Financing Laws (Amendment) bill, now an Act. Part of the general submissions in the memoranda was for consideration of recommendations made in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Kenya Mutual Evaluation Review Report 2022 regarding the management of recovered assets in subsequent amendments or reforms to the framework.

PRIORITY AREA 4: MAKING ASSET RECOVERY MORE VISIBLE

*Despite increased attention over the past four years, citizens and **civil society are still largely in the dark** about asset recovery in almost all countries. This ranges from the status of ongoing cases around the world, to the processes being used to reclaim stolen assets, and the numbers and actors involved in cases. Our priority in this area is to **identify and publicise more information** on asset recovery cases in a way that is accessible for everyone.*

As highlighted throughout the previous section, we continued in 2023 to engage in key public conferences and events across the globe. This included the UNCAC CoSP, an international conference on the Venezuela case, meetings of the AU, East African Legislative Assembly and regional asset recovery interagency networks. It included our own organisation of a conference in Brussels, and of Side Events at both the UNCAC IRG meeting and CoSP. It also included holding an open meeting on alternative dispute resolution and social reuse in Kenya, and participating in events on public debt, open governance and anti-corruption reform in Nairobi. We also spoke at anti-corruption events on asset recovery in Angola and Mexico.

The results of our [Russian Escape](#) investigations looking into sanctions implementation and oversight in France, Spain and Italy were an important moment for making asset recovery more visible. The investigations resulted in 14 stories being published across three renowned media outlets - Mediapart in France, InfoLibre in Spain, and Domani in Italy. Following publication, in Italy, the list of Russian assets was relayed by other media ([Open](#), [QuiFinanza](#)) and its publication prompted a public reaction from Mr. Usmanov, one of the sanctioned individuals. In France, a [local newspaper](#) mentioned the article published by Mediapart and took an inventory of frozen goods in the region. The investigation has also been quoted by a Polish newspaper, [Sadeczanin](#) and was [published](#) on the European-wide investigative journalism network and co-supporter of the project IJ4EU, as well as [by the partner EIC](#). OCCRP was our partner throughout the project and provided vital information to journalists undertaking investigations. In total, more than 176,241 Twitter impressions of the stories across all partners' tweets about them were recorded,

PRIORITY AREA 4: MAKING ASSET RECOVERY MORE VISIBLE

including CiFAR's tweets. The stories had over 25,000 views across publishing media platforms. We also discussed the results of the investigation during the Data Harvest conference in Mechelen in May with fellow journalists and partners.

Within our work with investigative journalists, we also organised a poster exhibition at the German Development Agency (GIZ) Headquarters in November, featuring some of the stories we supported in our previous training programmes. This helped us to make our journalism work and challenges in corruption and asset recovery more visible to German public sector officials.

We also developed a tool to assist Kenyans to engage in asset recovery. The [Citizen Guide to Asset Recovery in Kenya](#) lays out how asset recovery works in Kenya, areas where improvement could strengthen the system and opportunities for citizen engagement. This tool was published during the year and circulated widely. It offers a further opportunity, building on our previous guides, to produce documents that have the longer term goal of demonstrating that asset recovery is not only a technical topic, but one that citizens can and should be involved in.

As part of efforts to make asset recovery clearer and more understandable, we also published [13 blogs](#) in 2023. These ranged from country and case topics, including a discussion on the [Glencore Scandal](#) and on the [return from Jersey to Kenya](#), to blogs on the importance of moving from [financial investigations to sanctions](#), and on the availability of [data on asset recovery](#). We also continued or social media engagement promoting asset recovery information and our initiatives globally (see Priority Area 8).



The Glencore Scandal: A Deep Dive into Asset Recovery and Global Justice

Posted on 19/10/2023

Written by Andi Shehu, CiFAR. Introduction Glencore, a giant in the world of multinational commodities trading and mining, has found itself at the epicentre of one of the biggest corporate scandals in recent history. Allegations of widespread bribery and corruption have not only tarnished the company's reputation, but also raised urgent questions about the ethical [...]



The Jersey Return: Public Participation and Transparency Lessons

Posted on 03/08/2023

The announcement of the Jersey return of GBP 3 million – the latest cross border return to Kenya – was welcomed with pomp and gladness by Kenyans in general, because these had been a long coming return! The signing and announcement of the Agreement for the recovery, transfer, repatriation, disposition and management of recovered asset [...]

RESULTS AREA

2

Strengthening civil society

OVERVIEW OF RESULTS AREA

Despite the emergence of more civil society actors in the field of asset recovery, gaps still exist in civil society knowledge and experience. Even where an understanding of the process of asset recovery is strong, organisations that work on this topic as a part of broader anti-corruption, democracy or human rights work are still likely to need support to understand where and when certain actions should be taken and in developing advocacy and campaigning strategies that build on asset recovery for systemic transparency and accountability reforms. Further, the nature of case-based asset recovery work means that for many civic actors, they will only start working on asset recovery for the first time when a major case breaks, meaning they will also need support to build connections in other countries.

This results area directly builds on the work of our 2016-2019 strategy and aims to ensure an even stronger, more connected and diverse range of civil society actors engaged on the issue of asset recovery globally, with a particular emphasis on the Global South. We also strive to further strengthen the recognition of civil society as a key actor in the asset recovery process, both at the local and international levels. Activities within this results area focus on capacity and strategy building, networking and on the inclusion of more diverse voices from civil society in global debates.

PRIORITY AREA 5: CAPACITY BUILDING AND STRATEGIZING

Lack of capacity is still the major issue for greater involvement of civil society in engaging on asset recovery, particularly those from the Global South for whom a major case may be the first time they work on the topic. Our priority in this area is to carry out more capacity building in the Global South for NGOs that need it, continue to work to train investigative journalists to work on asset recovery, and support cross-border strategizing, advocacy and campaigns on cases and on our Global Priorities.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Our capacity building work with civil society organizations continued to focus on partners in Angola, Brazil, Kenya, Moldova, and Mozambique in 2023.

In **Angola**, building on our training programme and scoping in 2022, we continued to work with civil society partners to build their strategies around anti-corruption and asset recovery. In particular, we supported the building of a nation-wide anti-corruption coalition, providing advice on their strategic document and attending a national civil society workshop in April. We also led on an initiative to support Angolan civil society in advocating against a draft law which would significantly curtail the freedom of association and NGO

PRIORITY AREA 5: CAPACITY BUILDING AND STRATEGIZING

work in the country. Related to this, we published an open letter organised with Transparency Portugal which was signed by over 100 CSOs globally. The letter was picked up by international and Angolan media in at least 8 media articles and over 7.000 Twitter impressions, and was also shared with key international stakeholders in the country.

In **Mexico**, following our scoping visit in 2022, we used the contacts built to strengthen our partnerships with local investigative journalism organisations and supported them to connect with peers in Europe to investigate cross-border stories on Mexican cases. We were also invited to virtually present at an anti-corruption feminist school by a partner, attended by over 80 students, where we introduced asset recovery and action civil society can take. We also supported the strategy building of CSOs through identifying entry points to create new political momentum on asset recovery and connecting CSOs to their international counterparts.

In **Kenya**, we worked with partners on several domestic reform processes. This included engaging civil society, policymakers and relevant government institutions on developments in the management of recovered assets and engaging in discussions on the Criminal Assets Recovery Fund (CARF). We also jointly engaged in with other stakeholders in contributing to the Open Government Partnership (OGP)'s fifth action plan for Kenya, particularly on the Beneficial Ownership sections. We developed a Citizen Guide to Asset Recovery in Kenya and began research into social reuse and alternative dispute resolution as tools for asset recovery, which saw increased civil society awareness and engagement in asset recovery issues. We also continued to engage with institutions, attending the launch of the Assets Recovery Agency's new strategy and having an ongoing dialogue with the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission.

In **Moldova**, we followed developments that have been taking place in the country, discussing these developments with partner CSOs and officials involved. As part of this, we developed ideas for collaborative work to renew interest in the Billion Dollar Bank fraud case and use this as a catalyst for change within and outside Moldova. We also continued our work to strengthen the links between our partner organisations, supporting CPR Moldova to attend the UNCAC CoSP and present on the impact of sanctions to the Moldovan case.

PRIORITY AREA 5: CAPACITY BUILDING AND STRATEGIZING

A new focus for our work this year was supporting **Venezuelan** civil society to engage in the debate around the potential establishment of a social fund to return frozen state assets. As discussed above under Priority Area 2, our aim here was to draw on lessons from similar funds established to return the proceeds of corruption and included several training sessions where we brought together experts from other asset recovery cases. We organised a 1-day workshop in April in Madrid, aiming to build the long-term strategy of Venezuelan civil society, focusing on the engagement around the "Fondo Social" case, but also around potential strategic litigation in Europe on Venezuelan cases, and a 2-day event in Caracas in November, focusing on developing a communication strategy around asset recovery at the national level. The training programme had significant impact on the engagement of CSO partners in the country and abroad, including publication through open letters, meetings with key international actors and building CSO partnerships abroad. As part of this, we also began research into best practices and principles around this kind of funds that would be useful for the Venezuelan context. Finally and related to this, we provided a training session to policymakers in Venezuela, in particular a parliamentary group tasked to monitor the asset recovery process in Venezuela in a 2-day workshop in Madrid in September.

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

We carried out three investigative journalism programmes over the course of 2023, training over 50 journalists in skills to investigate financial crime and providing them with mentoring and grant support to carry out investigations – several of which moved to publication.

Investigate Madagascar, supported by GIZ, aimed to support the MALINA network of investigative journalists in Madagascar. An online training and an in-person workshop in Antananarivo took place in early 2023, with journalists supported to carry out investigations through mentoring and small grants into the middle of the year. Several stories were pitched thanks to this, with a plan to publish them in 2024. One of the unexpected outcomes of the project was also the collection of a large dataset of Madagascar PEPs, which was used in one of the stories and was later published by our partners at OCCRP.

We also continued our Investigate East and Southern Africa programme throughout the year. This supported

PRIORITY AREA 5: CAPACITY BUILDING AND STRATEGIZING

15 journalists from across East and Southern Africa to become financial investigation experts. Having an online and in person component, which took place in Nairobi, journalists were here too supported following the training through mentoring and a grant scheme. Here too several cross-border stories were developed, with two stories ready to be published in early 2024.

In the autumn, we added an additional Peru programme. This second, country-specific programme, brought 15 journalists from across Peru to an in-person training in Lima and saw them supported through mentoring into the new year. Several articles resulted from this initiative and will be published in 2024. As our first capacity building programme for journalists in Latin America, this was also an important moment for CiFAR's network building and experience in the region.

Several stories were published out of our previous training programmes in 2023. In addition to these, 2023 also saw a story published by a CiFAR staff member and a former trainee, who took up the work they carried out under our first Investigate programme to publish a new story on post-Arab Spring asset recovery: [Freezing Mubarak and Ben Ali's Assets: Many Violations, Few Results](#). This story was supported by a [grant](#) from Journalism Fund Europe, demonstrating longer term impact for journalists supported under our programmes.



>> [HOW THE RUSH FOR THE "GREEN" MINERAL IMPACTS THE RURAL COMMUNITIES IN WEST AFRICA](#)

May 2023

Lithium is a material on the up. Used in everyday electronic devices (laptops, telephones) and considered essential to the ecological transition (through electric cars, for example), it is increasingly in demand. But this success is putting more and more pressure on the countries that produce this mineral, particularly in rural areas.

Alix Smidman, Jack Wolf, two participants of CiFAR's Investigate West Africa programme, have partnered with Noel Konan, an investigative journalist based in Côte d'Ivoire, and investigated how the drive for lithium was causing conflict and crop destruction in rural communities across West Africa. They have collected the doubts, anger and concerns of local residents, some of whom are beginning to lose belief in the benefits of these operations for the region.

Supported by the Journalism Fund, and mentored by Raf Custer, this investigation is available in English on openDemocracy, on Africa Briefing, and in French on Enquête Media.

PRIORITY AREA 6: NETWORKING AND INCLUSION

*Civil society organisations have come together since the Global Forum for Asset Recovery in 2017 and other international conferences and events, as well as part of case-specific advocacy groups. Despite this, there are still **barriers to cooperation**, particularly between civil society organisations, where there is still a big **over-representation of civil society from financial centres** in events and in coordination groups. There are also still too often **civil society organisations working on the same case from two different jurisdictions without cooperating** with each other, potentially undermining any gains they could make by acting cooperatively. Our priority is to continue our work to **convene civil society across borders on asset recovery**, including through supporting civil society actors to build their networks through meetings and events and through expanding our databases of engaged actors and individuals.*

Our networking and inclusion activities in the past year focussed on our ongoing role as co-chair of the UNCAC Coalition Asset Recovery Working Group, thematic and case-based CSO working groups we are part of, and ad hoc networking support we provide to civil society and journalism partners.

As co-chair of the UNCAC Coalition Asset Recovery Working Group with Transparency International France, we organised several meetings throughout the year to bring together asset recovery focussed CSOs to discuss developments nationally and at the regional and global levels. We developed a work plan for the group and facilitated preparations for the UNCAC CoSP. This included convening several online meetings of the working group and hosting an in-person meeting at the CoSP, where we also brought in a speaker from StAR to explain the coming days and how civil society could be involved in asset recovery related activities.

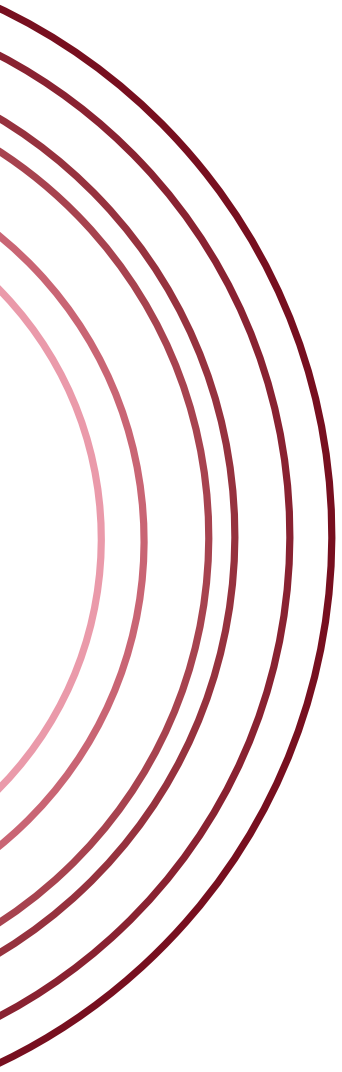
We continued coordinating the Sanctions Working Group, an informal grouping of civil society organisations working on sanctions and anti-corruption as a thematic issue, organising four online meetings throughout the year. Out of this working group, we were able to organise several bilateral discussions and coordinate common action around anti-corruption sanctions.

PRIORITY AREA 6: NETWORKING AND INCLUSION

We also began discussions with partners around the establishment of an Enablers Working Group, with tentative ideas to take it forward in 2024 and further continued our work as part of the Equatorial Guinea working group. For the latter, this included regular updates on the case and potentials for civil society engagement, as well as the Madrid meeting, discussed above.

A large focus of our work this year was on providing secretarial support to the CAPAR CSO network. The network expanded over the year beyond the establishing partners to include 16 members from 10 countries. As part of this, we regularly held meetings to discuss developments and plan interventions. The network prepared a statement for the UNCAC CoSP and held several meetings with officials, alongside developing the pilot assessment tool.

We also provided ad hoc support in several instances. This included providing a training session to Tanzanian CSOs and journalists on asset recovery in a virtual workshop in October; connecting investigative journalists from Mexico and Italy to explore potential collaborations, and advising CSOs in Kazakhstan and Sri Lanka about their engagement in asset recovery cases.



CiFAR as a strong actor

OVERVIEW OF RESULTS AREA

Since 2016, CiFAR has grown from founding to an organisation well-respected within the asset recovery and anti-corruption fields and able to secure funding to implement projects that fulfil our strategy and mission. In 2020, we professionalised several of our internal systems and developed policies and procedures for the implementation of our work that meet international best practice. Nevertheless, we still face challenges in securing longer term funding and in supporting our core work and have work to do to strengthen our internal governance system as we continue to grow. We also need to understand better how we can respond dynamically to changing conditions and progressing case situations within the framework of project-based work and improve the visibility of our research and tools so that they better reach those who can use the.

As such, our focus over the next four years also is to strengthen CiFAR's ability to be an expert, agile actor able to engage sustainably on asset recovery and to respond to the needs of others working on cases on the ground.

PRIORITY AREA 7: STRUCTURES

Over the course of our first strategy and in establishing CiFAR, we founded our board and created an advisory board made up of five international experts from the civil society, government and academic fields. We also set up an office and built up the structure of the internal organisation, establishing policies on procurement, staff, hiring, conflict of interest and travel.

*Many of these policies and procedures are solid but will need reflection and possible revision during the lifetime of this strategy. In particular, we will carry out a **review of internal governance system**, focussing on the roles of the Board and Advisory Board, with a view to **increasing independence and accountability** within the structures of CiFAR and in our interactions with the outside world. We will also seek to make **as many of our processes and procedures as public as possible**, as well as our funding, to continue to ensure that we are **as transparent ourselves as we demand from others**.*

2023 was another important year for our growth as an organisation. As our team grew in 2022, we restructured our internal organisation into two sub-teams – Research and Policy and Programmes and Investigations – to provide for more collaboration amongst staff members and more focussed discussions. 2023 also saw the first full year of a full-time Administration and Project Officer, who is attached to the Investigative

PRIORITY AREA 7: STRUCTURES

Journalism projects, but who also supported the general work and functioning of CiFAR. During the year we brought on a further three staff members: a Research Officer, a Policy and Network Coordinator and a Capacity Building Coordinator. We also finalised our registration in Kenya as a company limited by guarantee in August, giving us a stable presence in Nairobi and laying the grounds for our strengthened engagement in East Africa. We will now proceed to secure funding for our presence in Kenya and engage with authorities on the basis of the new structure.

An important element during the year of our organisational development was the conclusion of a new strategy. The process for this began in the Spring and involved several rounds of consultation with CiFAR staff members and the Board, to identify priorities for the coming year and to reflect on achievements made under our previous strategy.

May of this year also saw the end of the term of our first, interim board, established under our new governance framework of 2021. This was an important milestone for us and saw us move into a regular governance structure. Two of our board members ended their mandate at this point and two new board members were identified and appointed. These new board members, alongside reappointed existing board members, will sit for a term of three years – until May 2026. These additions were important as they brought new expertise and experiences to our Board, including on investigative journalism and asset management monitoring, among others.

PRIORITY AREA 8: VISIBILITY AND FUNDING

Our **funding** has grown over the past four years and we have a base of donors with whom we have now cooperated with on several projects. Further, we have built visibility for ourselves and the issues we work on through speaking at prominent international conferences, our website, press releases and news stories about us. Our priorities in this area is to ensure that we are growing sustainably through **building our base of donors** and increasing our funding levels to be able to cover all our work areas effectively, including by increasing our **staffing capacity** and seeking longer-term and non-project based funding. We are also working to improve our visibility through developing our **communications strategy**, with a focus on reaching relevant audiences with our messages and on being seen more often as a focal point for our area of expertise.

In 2023 we had increased financial growth from the previous year, which translated into increasing our staffing levels and our activities. Our total available budget for 2023 was €378,000, with € 371,000 spent. This is compared to € 324,000 and €254,000 in 2022. While this was in large part thanks to our main donors – GIZ and NED – we also continued to expand our donor base, with contributions this year also from NDI and IJ4EU.

Our staffing closed with eight persons employed as staff or long-term consultants at the year end, which was also an increase from six in 2022.

In 2023, we increased our focus on our online and social media presence, focusing on building our audiences across our website, Twitter (now X), and LinkedIn.

By the end of 2023 year we had:

- Over 20,000 visitors across our websites, up from 13,000 in 2022.
- 703 X (Twitter) followers, up from 559 at the end of 2022 and 25,000 impressions, up from 22,000 impressions in 2022.
- 451 LinkedIn followers and almost 8000 impressions.



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