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Op-Ed: Why Celebrate Africa's Anti-Corruption Day?

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In July 2021, Africa marked her fifth Anti-Corruption Day. The idea is that on 11 July every year, concerned Africans pause to reflect on anti-corruption progress in their communities, what is working, what is not, and what remains to be tried. July 11 marks the day when the African Union (AU) adopted the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption (AUCPCC) 18 years ago.

The common view is that Africa has a very big corruption problem. From research analysis to media reports, the headlines paint a grim picture across the continent. Senior African journalist Charles Onyango Obbo published an opinion piece last week under the title, "[Corruption in Uganda is too big to fail. Discuss](#)". Not too long ago, Michela Wrong published a report in *Foreign Policy* titled, "[Everyone Is Corrupt in Kenya, Even Grandmothers](#)". Former UK Prime Minister once referred to Nigeria as a [fantastically corrupt](#) country.

Africa loses more than US\$50 billion annually through [illicit financial outflows](#). This is a recent estimate from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Going back several centuries, Africa has been continuously losing valuable assets through illicit outflows of not only her natural resources, but also treasured artefacts of Africa societies, and various proceeds of crime.

These outflows directly impact the quality of life in Africa. They curtail Africa's efforts to lift all her people out of poverty, feed and educate her children, and provide other basic services to her citizens. They prevent Africa from keeping steady on a sustainable path to achieve the African Agenda 2063 and the global Sustainable Development Goals.

The African Anti-Corruption Day provides an opportunity to reflect on the role of corruption in all this. For African resources to illicitly wind up in foreign banks, many people will have played a role. Equally, schemes to extract Africa's mineral resources while leaving little value to the host country typically involve a network of people and companies, both in and outside Africa. This also means that existing anti-corruption

safeguards failed to prevent the outflows. Where are the loopholes? What needs changing? Who is not yet on board?

The Anti-Corruption Day also helps Africa's anti-corruption fighters share good lessons and practices. Asset recovery efforts in Angola are paying off. Angolan Attorney General reported recently that their office has [recovered more than US\\$5bn in assets](#) in just about one year. That is no small amount. Several other countries report progress in their asset recovery efforts, including Nigeria, Sierra Leone, among others.

There might not be a lot of evidence so far that corruption in Africa is reducing. There is however strong evidence that the efforts are growing, with stronger continental coordination. Following some dedicated efforts, the last few years have seen some more countries ratify the AUCPCC. In cooperation with the African Union Advisory Board on Corruption, more countries are sharing reports of their implementation of the AUCPCC.

The African Union has also recently carefully negotiated and agreed on a Common African Position on Assets Recovery. This piece of work provides a great framework for African countries to follow in handling recovered assets, and to speak with a common voice with international partners regarding a transparent timetable for the recovery and return of illicitly acquired African assets.

For the African community facing an uphill task, the African Anti-Corruption Day provides that necessary pause to assess any gains made so far, the viability of existing tools, the potential of new ideas, the success of colleagues, and partnerships that need strengthening.

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For more information, visit - <https://au.int/en/african-anti-corruption-day-2021>

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