

GLOBAL CORRUPTION BUSTERS

HOW DEVELOPMENT AID CAN BOOST THE UK'S FIGHT AGAINST DIRTY MONEY

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GLOBAL CORRUPTION BUSTERS

How development aid can boost the UK's fight against dirty money

Corruption costs lives in developing countries and the UK is part of the problem. Its army of 'professional enablers' (including bankers, lawyers, estate agents and accountants) help to launder and hide money stolen from developing countries, whilst UK companies hand out bribes to access lucrative resources and contracts. These actions harm the poorest people in the world, draining badly needed resources and sustaining corrupt systems. They also threaten the UK's long-term commercial and security interests by weakening trade partners and contributing to conflict and instability overseas.

At the same time, the UK aims to reduce global poverty through its international development work and aid spending. But these good intentions are undermined when UK companies and business people get away with facilitating or engaging in international corruption and allow political figures to move their corrupt assets to the UK.

This report looks at the work of the International Corruption Unit (ICU) in the National Crime

CURRENT ENFORCEMENT CAPABILITIES FALL FAR SHORT OF WHAT IS NEEDED TO DEAL WITH THE UK'S ROLE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRY CORRUPTION

Agency (NCA) which is at the heart of UK enforcement in relation to developing country corruption. This law enforcement unit's existence is an explicit and welcome recognition that the UK cannot talk about corruption in developing countries without tackling its own role in facilitating it. Uniquely, the ICU is primarily funded from the UK's aid budget.

The report lays out what aid funding for law enforcement looks like, what it has achieved – particularly the record of the ICU since it was established in 2015 – and what the lessons are so far. Overall, we find that the ICU, working with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), has delivered extremely welcome and valuable enforcement outcomes in recent years.

However, current enforcement capabilities fall far short of what is needed to deal with the UK's role in developing country corruption. To close the gap, we put forward eight specific measures to strengthen the programme and enhance aid-funded enforcement.

OVERALL FINDINGS

1. Aid funding of anti-corruption enforcement continues to be crucial and offers excellent value for money:

Aid spending on anti-corruption enforcement delivers benefits worth many times its costs, with £21 of assets frozen for every £1 spent.

Aid funding remains vital as law enforcement agencies would otherwise be unable to prioritise cases affecting developing countries.

The ICU has delivered several positive and symbolically important outcomes.

2. Current capabilities and progress only scratch the surface of the problem and fall far short of what is needed:

The vast majority of intelligence on suspected corruption cannot be investigated due to limited capacity. The ICU only has capacity to investigate 20 cases at any one time. Meanwhile, it received 600 intelligence packages in 2021/22.

The recent uptick in convictions from aid-funded enforcement (11 since 2020) is very welcome but it is not always clear how far these convictions align with the primary stated objectives of aid funding.

There has been progress on prosecuting Politically Exposed Persons (PEPs) from developing countries, but there have been some extraordinarily long delays in bringing charges and recovering stolen assets.

No medium-sized UK company has been convicted of paying bribes in a developing country as a result of ICU investigations and it is not clear that the ICU sees such cases as within its remit.

No UK professional enabler has been convicted in over a decade, with just one charged, for helping to launder and hide corrupt money.

3. Progress is hobbled by wider challenges in anti-corruption enforcement:

Chronic issues in recruiting and retaining experienced staff at the NCA, and more broadly (for instance in the CPS), lead to inefficiencies and delays in the ICU's work and limit its ability to grow.

The time and resources needed for the review and disclosure of evidence and the screening of legally privileged material weigh down progress on large cases.

Law enforcement bodies face an inequality of arms with wealthy suspects, particularly when it comes to the legal costs regime in civil recovery of corrupt assets.

4. Accountability for aid-funded enforcement is hindered by lack of transparency:

Budget and spend figures are infrequently and inconsistently updated on the government's portal for data on aid programmes.

Information provided by or relating to the NCA is absolutely exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act.

Some Freedom of Information requests and parliamentary questions about aid funded enforcement are completely blanked.

Finding public information about specific aid-funded cases is difficult and has to be pieced together through snippets in aid transparency reports, NCA press releases, press reports and court documents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) should commit to long-term sustainable funding, including a new round of multi-year funding beyond 2025 to allow for continued expansion of aid-funded enforcement and support investment in longer term capabilities.**
- 2. The FCDO should ensure that aid-funded enforcement prioritises action against UK professional enablers that facilitate the laundering and hiding of corrupt money from developing countries.**
- 3. The FCDO should work with law enforcement partners to ensure that the enforcement gap around overseas bribery by small and medium-sized businesses is addressed.**
- 4. The FCDO should consider making the demand side of bribery (passive bribery) an explicit goal of aid-funded enforcement work.**
- 5. The FCDO should work with the Home Office to ensure that the NCA adequately funds enforcement capacity to investigate international corruption in higher income countries that are ineligible for aid spending.**
- 6. The FCDO should consider increasing funding to the CPS Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate (SEOCID) to provide enhanced support to the ICU at an early stage on criminal cases.**
- 7. The FCDO should have a stronger voice in cross-departmental discussions about economic crime enforcement, and work with the Home Office and Treasury to ensure aid-funded enforcement is not undermined by wider chronic issues with recruitment and retention.**
- 8. The FCDO and NCA should ensure they provide more consistent and transparent information about aid-funded enforcement work and its impact.**

KEY STATS

89
BILLION \$

of illicit capital estimated to leave Africa each year

785
MILLION £

of suspected proceeds of corruption frozen by aid-funded law enforcement from 2015 to 2023

20

number of investigations the NCA's International Corruption Unit could undertake at a time, while it received around 600 intelligence reports in 21/22

£21

of assets frozen for every £1 of aid spent on anti-corruption enforcement from 2015 to 2023

10
YEARS

to bring corruption charges against former Nigerian oil minister Diezani Alison-Madueke

2.7%

of the Ibori loot targeted by UK prosecutors has been returned to Nigeria

ZERO

convictions of UK SMEs for bribing in developing countries since 2015

11
YEARS

years or more to confiscate stolen assets from convicted Nigerian politician James Ibori due to lengthy court battles

26%

of the funds frozen by the NCA's International Corruption Unit have been returned to the countries from which they were stolen

204
MILLION £

returned to developing countries since 2015 as a result of investigations by the NCA's International Corruption Unit

ZERO

convictions of UK professional enablers for their role in laundering dirty money from developing countries since 2015

INTRODUCTION

The UK has a split personality towards corruption in developing countries.

On one hand it recognises that corruption undermines development, destabilises societies and prevents developing states from becoming strong commercial and security partners of the UK.

On the other it is part of the problem, with the UK offering a home to dirty money stolen from some of the poorest people in the world, and UK firms and professionals providing a helping hand to corrupt politicians.

THE UK OFFERS A HOME TO DIRTY MONEY STOLEN FROM SOME OF THE POOREST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD

Not only does this tarnish the UK's reputation as a good global citizen, it also undoes the good work of UK aid spending.

The good news is that the UK has a unique arrangement where aid money funds specialised UK law enforcement capabilities – now housed in the National Crime Agency's International Corruption Unit (ICU) – dedicated to tackling the UK's corruption problem with developing countries. The aims of aid funding are for the ICU, working with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), to investigate and bring to justice:

- corrupt actors from developing countries who launder their loot through the UK;
- the UK professional enablers (bankers, solicitors, estate agents etc) who help them do it; and
- UK companies and individuals who bribe their way into business in developing countries.

The programme also aims to recover assets stolen from developing countries, so that the funds can be returned to their source.¹

The ICU's remit is broader than the aid-funded programme and includes investigation of all corruption with an international aspect, as well as serious criminal breaches of the UK financial sanctions regime.

Although the ICU is not the only UK agency that investigates corruption affecting developing countries – for example, the Serious Fraud Office is responsible for big corporate bribery cases which often impact developing countries – we have focused on the ICU because of its distinct aid funding and remit. In our review² we have looked at:

- how the ICU has performed in its vital role;
- what can be learned from its successes and challenges; and
- how the UK can get better at tackling its corruption problem with developing countries.

We also highlight where more information is needed to ensure the ICU and other agencies can be held to account for their aid-funded work.

Why fighting corruption matters for development

The UN estimates that \$89 billion leaves Africa as illicit capital flight each year – equivalent to 3.7% of the continent's GDP,³ more than its education spending⁴ and nearly twice as much as annual aid⁵ inflows. Countries with huge natural resource wealth have signed them away to foreign companies with massive discounts in opaque deals worth hundreds of millions of dollars, while the people of those countries have seen little benefit.⁶ All this means fewer resources for development – fewer schools and hospitals, and people dying when there is not enough public funding to provide adequate sanitation and health services.⁷

Corruption also undermines the rule of law and chips away at democracy to produce a vicious downward cycle.⁸ Corruption discourages foreign investment as businesses are reluctant to invest where competition is not fair or transparent, or if there are significant legal and reputational risks.⁹

In addition, corruption feeds instability and creates the conditions in which conflicts can thrive. States most affected by corruption are very often victims of deep conflict¹⁰ and corruption has been a driving force behind some of the deadliest conflicts in recent history.¹¹

What's the UK's role in corruption affecting developing countries?

The NCA estimates that hundreds of billions of pounds are laundered through the UK every year.¹² Meanwhile, 'professional enablers' within UK professional services such as banks, lawyers, trust and company service providers and estate agents, have all helped in the theft and hiding of money from developing countries. A recent Transparency International report found the UK and British Virgin Islands were among the top jurisdictions for professional enablers involved in 78 corruption cases involving 33 countries in Africa.¹³

Corrupt or allegedly corrupt money from countries like Nigeria,¹⁴ Malawi¹⁵ and Pakistan¹⁶ – which between them have 95 million people living in extreme poverty – has ended up in UK bank accounts, high-end property and luxury cars.¹⁷ In addition, major UK-based companies, such as Rolls-Royce¹⁸ and Glencore¹⁹, have paid bribes to secure business in developing countries, fuelling corruption and inequality.

Developing countries affected by corruption are often also the recipients of UK aid. Whilst aid spending – amounting to £15.4 billion in 2023²⁰ – aims to support development, the UK's role in corruption undermines these good intentions. The contradictions in the UK's relationship with Nigeria are a good example of this tension.

Nigeria, the UK and international corruption

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and has significant oil reserves, with the oil and gas sector contributing about 65% of government revenues and over 85% of exports.²¹ But despite Nigeria's natural resource wealth, 71 million of its citizens (31% of the population) still live in extreme poverty.²²

Endemic corruption is one of the key challenges to Nigeria's development. It is estimated to lose between \$10 billion and \$18 billion annually due to illicit financial flows,²³ more than any other African country. Nigeria is ranked 145 out of 180 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.²⁴

The UK government sees Nigeria as one of its key partners in Africa. It aims to support a more stable, inclusive, resilient, healthy and prosperous Nigeria that sees the UK as a strategic partner for peace, climate action, trade and development. The UK's bilateral aid budget for Nigeria was £72.3 million in 2023/24, rising to an indicative budget of £120 million for 2024/25.²⁵

But there is a very different side to the UK's relationship with Nigeria. The UK has been a destination for cash from Nigeria's elite, with Nigerian-owned offshore companies investing in £350 million worth of London property.²⁶ UK law enforcement has investigated high profile Nigerian politicians who have been charged (Diezani Alison-Madueke) or convicted (James Ibori) of corruption offences.

Nigerian leaders have recognised the UK as a destination for corrupt money from their country. In 2016, after David Cameron described Nigeria as "*fantastically corrupt*",²⁷ President Buhari demanded their assets back. In 2021, Nigeria's anti-corruption tsar told Boris Johnson: "*There are thieves and there are receivers, London is the most notorious safe haven for looted funds in the world today*".²⁸

Why use aid to fund anti-corruption enforcement in the UK?

The UK's anti-corruption laws prohibiting money laundering and international bribery require robust enforcement if they are to maintain a deterrent effect. However, ensuring that international corruption cases affecting developing countries are prioritised and investigated by UK law enforcement is an uphill challenge.²⁹

As the government put it in 2021: "*Government departments and agencies have to balance a range of different priorities which can result in them prioritising cases from countries that pose the greatest risk to the UK, rather than benefitting developing countries ... Without [aid] support, the corruption cases relating to developing countries, particularly the poorest and most fragile and difficult, are unlikely to be given priority by the UK's law enforcement agencies.*"³⁰

Since 2006 the UK has provided aid funding for law enforcement resources dedicated to investigating cases affecting developing countries – it is the only donor in the world to use aid money in this way.

Under the outgoing government, support for the programme was only confirmed until March 2025. However, the government had reaffirmed its commitment to continue aid funding, with the November 2023 international development white paper stating the FCDO's intention to *“strengthen our commitment to the NCA and Crown Prosecution Service capabilities, maintaining a five-year rolling framework of support that will enable consistent and predictable planning, to ensure effective tracing and retrieving of stolen assets and to aid efforts to combat organised crime and other state and transnational threats.”*³¹

I. THE WHO, HOW AND WHAT OF UK AID FUNDING FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

The aid funding for law enforcement programme (known as “UK Action to Support Developing Countries Fighting Corruption” or UK ACT) aims to reduce incentives:

- for corrupt individuals in developing countries to use the UK to launder money; and
- for UK companies and nationals to pay bribes in developing countries.

Its specific objectives are to:

1. Investigate, prevent and disrupt the theft of significant public assets by senior foreign officials and international bribery which impacts:

- lower income and lower middle-income countries (priority)
- middle-income and upper middle-income countries (lower priority)
- and with a connection to the UK.

This includes investigation, prevention and disruption activity targeting ‘professional enablers’ (solicitors, banks, estate agents etc) who help corrupt actors.

2. Deny access to, recover and return assets stolen from developing countries.³²

Since 2015, the funding has supported the following units within the National Crime Agency and the Crown Prosecution Service:

- the ICU which investigates and progresses cases to criminal prosecution or civil recovery, and the Bribery and Corruption Intelligence Unit (BCIU) which provides strategic, tactical and new case intelligence analysis to feed into the ICU’s work – both in the NCA; and
- the Proceeds of Crime Division (POCD) in the Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate (SEOCID) of the CPS which provides prosecutorial input into restraining assets, and applying for and enforcing confiscation orders.

The ICU’s remit also goes beyond the specific aims of aid funding – its overall role is to investigate international bribery, corruption and related money-laundering offences³³ – with its wider work not limited to developing countries. However, we estimate that only around 25% of the unit is funded through the NCA’s budget for this wider work which might include international corruption in major UK trading partners.

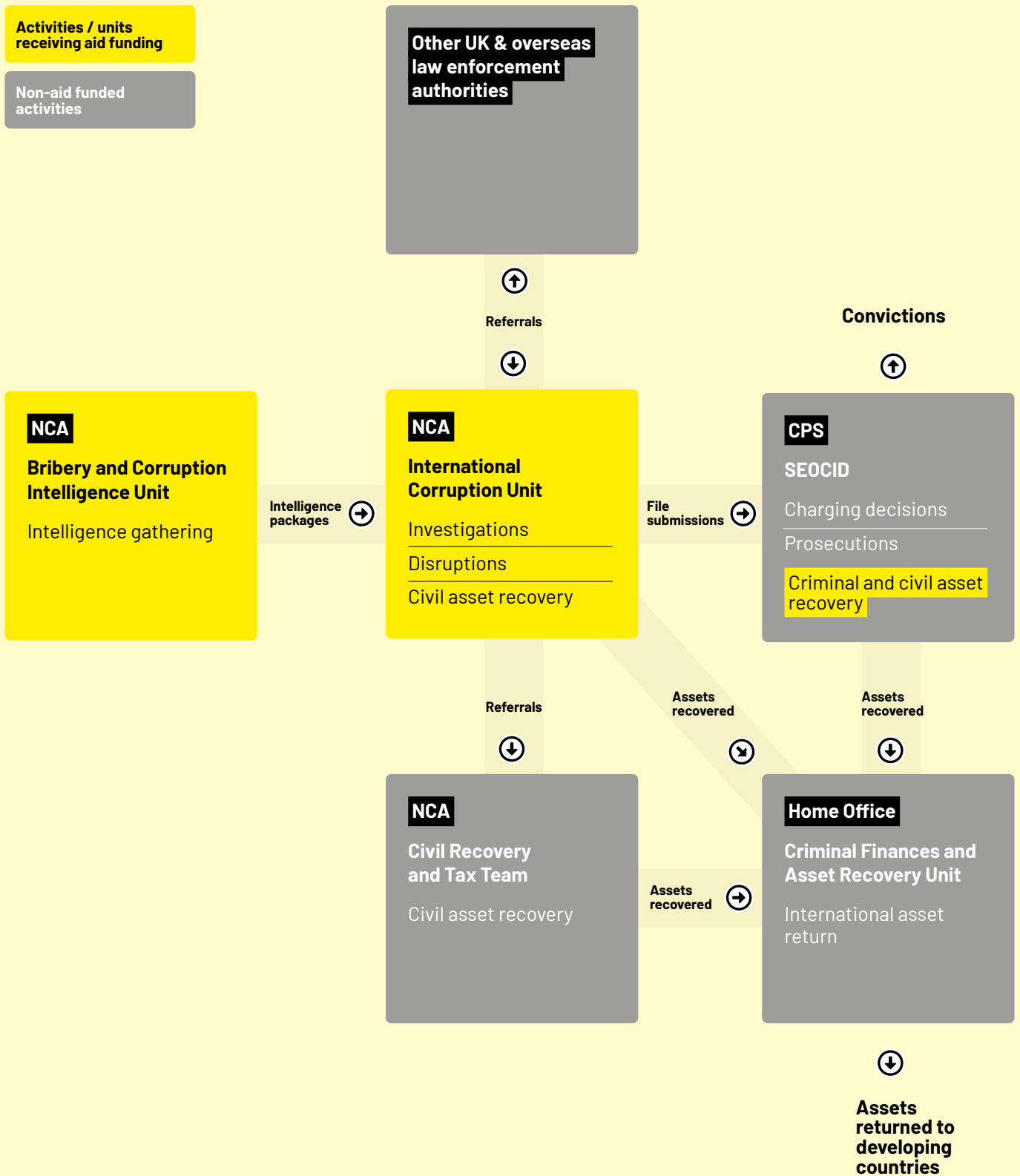
Prior to 2015, aid funding was provided to two police units, one in the Metropolitan Police (the Proceeds of Crime Unit), and one in the City of London Police (the Overseas Anti-Corruption Unit). The POCU was merged into the ICU in 2015, however the OACU staff refused to be transferred, and the aid programme continued to fund the unit to finalise legacy cases until 2021.³⁴

While the programme is funded by the FCDO, the agencies delivering the programme are operationally independent, with the ICU deciding which cases to pursue based on the evidence.³⁵

AGENCIES INVOLVED IN INTERNATIONAL CORRUPTION ENFORCEMENT, THEIR ROLES AND OUTPUTS (SIMPLIFIED)

Activities / units receiving aid funding

Non-aid funded activities

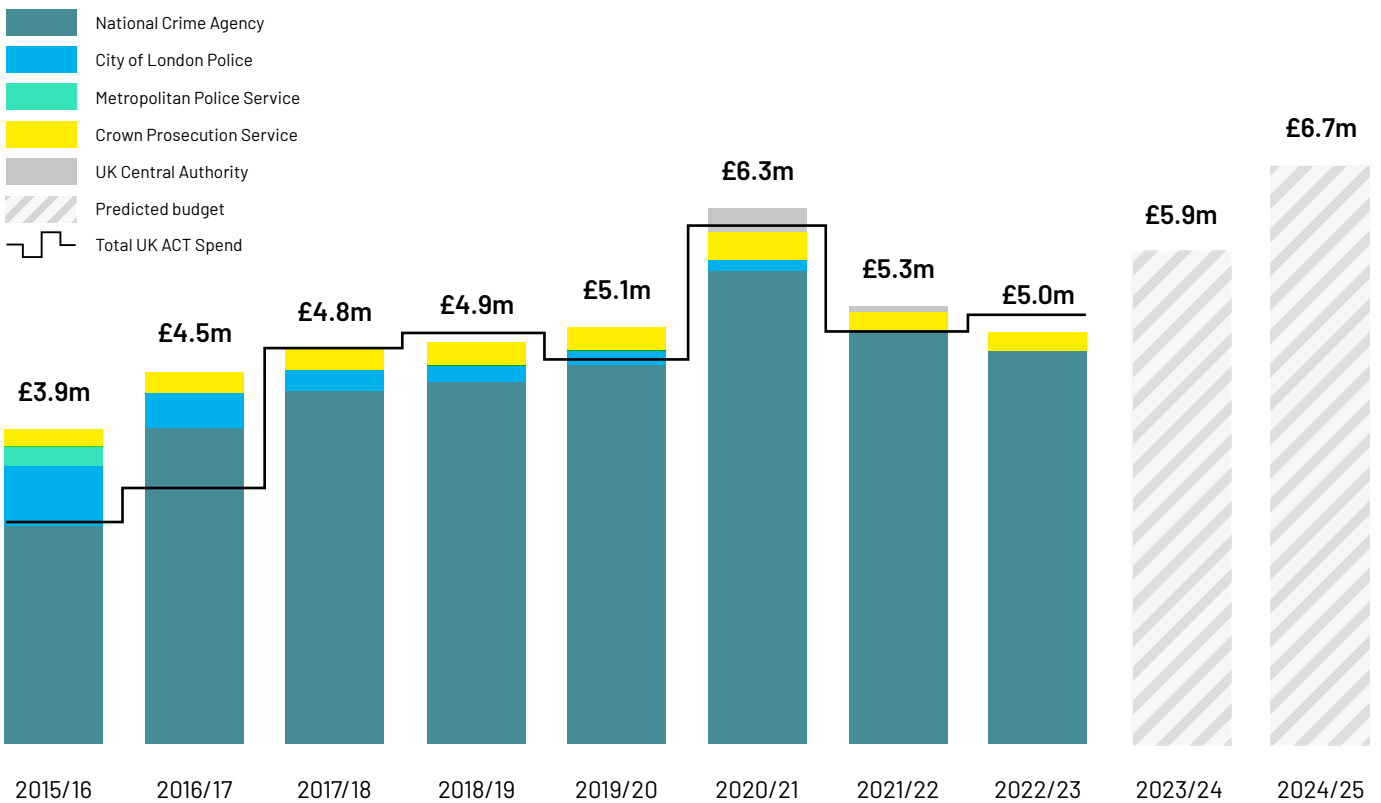


How well is anti-corruption enforcement resourced?

Total spend for the UK ACT Programme for 2015/16 to 2022/23 was £36.96 million versus a total budget of £39.86 million.³⁶ The majority of the budget (over 90%) is for the National Crime Agency, specifically the ICU and BCIU. Aid funding to the City of London Police’s Overseas Anti-Corruption Unit continued to allow it to complete legacy cases until 2021/22.

Due to the 2021 decision by the UK government to reduce its aid budget from 0.7% of gross national income to around 0.5%, an expansion of the ACT programme was shelved and its budget cut by over £1 million a year. However, the budget for the programme has recently been increased and is set to increase further. The 2023/24 budget for the UK ACT Programme was £5.92 million,³⁷ an increase of 19% from 2022/23. In 2024/25, it is set to reach £6.7 million. It represents a tiny fraction of the aid budget – just 0.04% of the UK’s total aid spend of £15.4 billion in 2023³⁸ but provides very high profile and valuable work.

UK ACT programme budget and spend 2015/16 – 2025/26³⁹



How well is anti-corruption enforcement staffed?

Aid transparency documents published in January 2021 state that the ICU had an average of 50 officers over 2018-2020, with 40 posts funded by the UK ACT programme and 10 funded by the NCA. The BCIU meanwhile had 16 officers.⁴⁰ A review by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) in 2020 however stated the ICU had 37 staff – considerably fewer than the numbers stated in the business case.⁴¹ All requests for more up to date information on staffing have been rejected because that information is considered to be operationally sensitive.⁴²

As of March 2024, the UK ACT programme funded 76% of staff in the ICU,⁴³ meaning that 24% of its staff are funded by other non-aid related grants.

The complex and sensitive nature of the ICU's work requires particular skills, including those gained through police training and experience (for example, taking witness statements, making arrests and progressing cases to court) as well as financial investigation skills.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, specific experience in anti-money laundering and anti-bribery investigations built up over time is essential for the success of the unit.

THE COMPLEX AND SENSITIVE NATURE OF THE ICU'S WORK REQUIRES PARTICULAR SKILLS, INCLUDING THOSE GAINED THROUGH POLICE TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE

Retention of staff appears to have been particularly challenging for the ICU in its earlier years. By 2019/2020, according to aid documents, staff attrition (total leavers as a percentage of total employees) had reached 37% and only 45% of permanent personnel had been on the unit for more than 12 months. This compares to an average attrition for NCA grade 4 and grade 5 staff (the typical levels of ICU staff⁴⁵) of 7.44% and 7.52% respectively in 2019/2020.⁴⁶

Staff retention has significantly improved in more recent years, with attrition reducing to 5.5% in 2021/22⁴⁷ and 2022/23. By 2023/24, 92% of permanent ICU personnel had been on the unit for more than 12 months. This could be due to an increase in NCA remuneration for more junior grades in 2020,⁴⁸ the increased attractiveness and high profile of the work, or because previous figures did not reflect an accurate picture.

However, the unit still faces staff retention challenges. For example, in 2022/23 a number of ICU staff were 'surged' to the newly created Combatting Kleptocracy Cell (CKC), which was formally established following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Staff attrition in 2022/23 is higher than 5.5% once the loss of these staff is taken into account, although the loss was temporary.⁴⁹

The ICU's recruitment and retention challenges are ultimately shaped by the wider challenges of the NCA, which pays less than the police and other comparators, with staff able to double their NCA salary by moving to the private sector or the Financial Conduct Authority.⁵⁰

ICU average years of service and staff retention⁵¹

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Average years of individual service in anti-money laundering	8.95	9.95	10.95	11.95	-	-	-	-
Average years of individual service in anti-bribery	1.5 ⁵²	2.5	3.5	4.5	-	-	-	-
ICU staff annual attrition rate ⁵³	12.9% ⁵⁴	<13.6%	22.8%	37%	9%	5.5%	5.5%	-
% of permanent ICU personnel who have been on the unit for more than 12 months	-	-	-	45%	45%	84%	86%	92%

II. WHAT HAS AID-FUNDED ENFORCEMENT DELIVERED?

Aid spending on anti-corruption enforcement delivers benefits many times its costs. From 2015 to 2023, £785 million of suspected proceeds of corruption have been frozen⁵⁵ by aid-funded law enforcement against a spend of £36.96 million⁵⁶ – meaning £21 of assets have been frozen for every pound spent on the programme. From April 2020 to March 2024 aid-funded law enforcement led to the charging of at least 15 individuals or entities and 11 successful prosecutions,⁵⁷ as well as generating over 1,000 packages of intelligence on suspected corruption.

However, the programme has delivered far more in terms of enhancing the UK’s reputation as an international actor in tackling corruption, and in terms of establishing deterrence. The ICU for instance has delivered several positive and symbolically important outcomes which have signalled that the UK is prepared to take action on international corruption. This is despite considerable upheaval with the merger of the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 2020, and the impact of COVID-19 on international enforcement efforts.

This section looks at the investigations, prosecutions and asset recovery that have resulted from aid-funded enforcement.

Investigations

The ICU receives intelligence from various sources including the Bribery and Corruption Intelligence Unit (BCIU). Although there is limited information available on specific ICU cases under investigation, the number of cases under investigation at any one time has varied from 12 to 24.⁵⁸

This level of capacity means that it does not have the resources to investigate the vast majority of intelligence provided to it. This is acknowledged in aid transparency documents which report that *“there have always been more referrals to the ICU than it can take forward ... A few matters are suitable for referral to the SFO, or FCA, or other specialist agencies; but for the most part, if a viable case relating to a developing country is not progressed by the ICU, it does not get done at all.”*⁵⁹

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of intelligence packages supplied by BCIU to ICU ⁶⁰	451	609	-
Number of cases currently under investigation ⁶¹ of which	12	20	24
Money laundering cases	6	11 ⁶²	8
Bribery cases	6	9	14

Case study:

The NCA's high-profile investigation relating to alleged corruption in Malawi

Zuneth Sattar is a Malawian-British businessman living in the UK being investigated by the ICU over allegedly corrupt contracts with the Malawian government.

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world⁶³ with around 70% of its population living in extreme poverty (having an income of less than \$2.15 dollars a day)⁶⁴ and unable to afford even the most basic meal.⁶⁵ Malawi is also highly vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather, for example suffering devastating floods and mudslides in 2023⁶⁶ at the same time as its deadliest cholera outbreak.⁶⁷ UK aid to Malawi totalled £756 million⁶⁸ over the last 10 years.

Corruption remains a major problem in Malawi. Following the 2013 "Cashgate" scandal, in which the government lost up to \$250 million through fraudulent payments, Malawi took steps to improve its anti-corruption efforts, partly supported by UK assistance to the Malawi Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB).⁶⁹ However, further corruption scandals have implicated prominent officials, including the late Vice-President, the Inspector General of Police and the President's Chief of Staff.⁷⁰ Transparency International puts Malawi towards the bottom end of their Corruption Perceptions Index, ranking it 115 out of 180 countries.⁷¹

Born in Malawi, Zuneth Sattar has close relationships with high-ranking officials in the Malawian government and has long benefitted from high-value public contracts. A UK aid-funded audit into the Cashgate scandal raised concerns about payments to Sattar's companies under lucrative government contracts which lacked supporting documentation and were based on vastly inflated prices.⁷²

After the Cashgate scandal broke in 2014, Sattar moved to the UK⁷³ and was able to purchase numerous UK properties using UK solicitors and estate agents. His lavish lifestyle, including a fleet of luxury cars, stands in stark contrast to the poverty of millions in Malawi.

The NCA launched an anti-corruption probe to investigate allegations that Sattar and his associates conspired to bribe Malawian officials and politicians to secure contracts for the supply of armoured personnel carriers, food rations and water cannons, and laundered the proceeds in the UK.⁷⁴

Sattar was arrested in the UK in October 2021 and the NCA obtained freezing orders against 19 of his properties.⁷⁵ The CPS have not charged anyone in relation to the NCA's investigation and Sattar denies the allegations against him.

Prosecutions

Successful prosecutions are key to the programme’s objectives to deter corrupt actors using the UK to launder money, or UK companies and nationals paying bribes in developing countries.

Aid transparency documents show that up to 2020, only three individuals or entities had been successfully prosecuted as a result of aid-funded enforcement by the ICU and one of its predecessors, the Metropolitan Police’s Proceeds of Crime Unit (POCU). The highest profile of these convictions was that of former Nigerian state governor James Ibori in 2012,⁷⁶ following an investigation by the POCU. Transparency documents do not explicitly report convictions resulting from enforcement actions by the Overseas Anti-Corruption Unit (OACU), but do show that by 2018 there had been 28 bribery related convictions of individuals and corporations including deferred prosecution agreements, largely as a result of OACU investigations.⁷⁷

	Total 2006 to 2019/20	2020/21 progress	2021/2022 progress	2022/23 progress	Total 2020/21 to 2022/23
Cases concluded (including those with no further action), of which	123	14	7	12	33
Money laundering	44	5	3	8	16
Bribery	79	9	4	4	17
File submissions to CPS, of which	2	4	18	6	28
Money laundering	1	4	17	5	26
Bribery	1	0	1	1	2
Number of individuals / entities charged with offences (from POCU / ICU case disposals)	4	6	4	3	13
Number of individuals / entities successfully prosecuted (from POCU / ICU case disposals)	3	0	9	0	9

However, since 2020, there has been a significant uptick in conviction numbers with nine between April 2020 and March 2023. This is likely to reflect long-running cases initiated when the ICU was established that are now coming to fruition. In addition, since March 2023 two more individuals (Romy Andrianarisoa and Philippe Tabuteau) were convicted of seeking bribes from a UK company, and two other individuals (Diezani Alison-Madueke and Adetunji Fadahunsi-Jones) were charged. Further case files have been submitted to the CPS which could result in additional charges being laid.

Case study:

Former Chief of Staff to Madagascan President convicted of bribery

Madagascar, an island state off the coast of Africa, has considerable natural resources and unparalleled biodiversity. Despite this natural wealth, the majority of its population live in extreme poverty (80.7% of the population are estimated to live on \$2.15 or less per day) and its unique biodiversity is under threat.⁷⁸ The country grapples with systemic corruption and weak rule of law, with prevalent political corruption in the natural resources sector and widespread impunity for officeholders who break the law.⁷⁹

Madagascar is known for its gems and is the main source of sapphires for Swiss jewellery and watch brands.⁸⁰ The UK-based gem company Gemfields (which owns the Fabergé luxury brand) had an interest in mining gems there. In 2023, Romy Andrianarisoa, then Chief of Staff to the President Rajoelina of Madagascar, and her associate Philippe Tabuteau, approached Gemfields to discuss potential mining contracts. When Gemfields became suspicious of their intentions they reported corruption concerns to the NCA.⁸¹

The NCA launched an investigation, sending an undercover officer to pose as a consultant for Gemfields to negotiate with Tabuteau and Andrianarisoa. The officer secretly recorded meetings where they requested substantial sums of money in exchange for help securing an exclusive mining joint venture with the government of Madagascar. On 10 August 2023, the pair were arrested by NCA officers at the Sofitel hotel in London. Andrianarisoa was found guilty of requesting a bribe by a jury at Southwark Crown Court on 20 February 2024. Her associate Philippe Tabuteau pleaded guilty to the same charge in September 2023.

There has also been a welcome increase in the number of files submitted to the CPS by the ICU. Between 2006 and 2020, the ICU only submitted one case to the CPS for every 60 cases it concluded (concluded cases include those that are closed with no further action),⁸² reflecting comments from a former ICU investigator who was interviewed for this report that many cases were closed without action. From 2020 to 2023, the number of submissions to CPS nearly matched the number of cases concluded,⁸³ suggesting the ICU has become much better at targeting and progressing cases.

Case study: Corruption charges brought against Diezani Alison-Madueke, Nigeria's former oil minister

Diezani Alison-Madueke was Minister for Petroleum Resources in the Nigerian government from 2010 to 2015 and served as the first female president of the oil exporters group Opec. She has lived in London since 2015.

The NCA arrested Alison-Madueke and four other individuals in October 2015 as part of an investigation into suspected bribery and money laundering that began in 2013,⁸⁴ and charged her with bribery offences in August 2023,⁸⁵ 10 years after the investigation started. The NCA suspects Alison-Madueke accepted bribes during her time as Minister for Petroleum Resources, in exchange for awarding multi-million pound oil and gas contracts. She is alleged to have benefitted from at least £100,000 in cash, chauffeur driven cars, flights on private jets, luxury holidays for her family, and the use of multiple London properties. Her trial is provisionally set to start in November 2025.⁸⁶

According to US court documents, two Nigerian businessmen and others conspired to purchase £11.5 million pounds worth of London property for Alison-Madueke's benefit. UK estate agent Daniel Ford & Co, is named as having "assisted in the purchase" of three of the properties – two bought with Seychelles firms and another bought with a company incorporated in the British Virgin Islands.⁸⁷

Asset recovery and return

In the UK, stolen assets (including property as well as cash) can be recovered through a criminal process following a conviction, or through a civil process without a conviction, or through a negotiated settlement.

A unique feature of aid-funded recovery work is that all recovered assets need to be returned to the country from which they originated, in contrast to other cases where the law enforcement body can keep some of the proceeds to recover their costs or the money is returned to the Exchequer.

Criminal recovery of assets

A total of £785 million of assets have been restrained under the programme from 2015 to 2023.

	Cumulative total	Annual change			Cumulative total
	2015/16 to 2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2015/16 to 2022/23
£m of assets subject to restraint	370	+90	+39	+286	785
£m of assets confiscated (value of confiscation orders)	14	-7	0	0	7
£m enforced (value of funds received)	5	+1.98	0	0	6.98

Up to March 2023, only £7 million of stolen assets had been confiscated following criminal conviction under the aid-funded programme. The largest criminal confiscations relating to a developing country corruption came in July 2023, when James Ibori, the corrupt former governor of Nigeria’s Delta State, and his former solicitor were ordered to pay a total of £130 million.⁸⁸ This confiscation process started before the ICU was established and has faced huge challenges and delays over the last 10 years.

Case study:

James Ibori – Confiscating and returning the corrupt assets of a Nigerian Governor

James Ibori, Governor of Nigeria’s oil rich Delta State from 1999 to 2007, was convicted in the UK courts in 2012 after pleading guilty to money laundering and conspiracy to defraud the Nigerian state.⁸⁹ Despite his modest official income, Ibori enjoyed a lavish lifestyle, laundering his corrupt cash through a network of associates and family members. Ibori’s wealth included six properties in London, a Jaguar and a Bentley and he was buying a £20 million private jet when arrested.⁹⁰

However, the recovery and return of assets stolen from Nigeria has faced over a decade of disruption and delay. So far only £4.2 million – less than 3% of the total amount of the Ibori loot targeted by UK prosecutors – has actually been returned to Nigeria,⁹¹ despite the UK government signing an agreement with Nigeria in 2016 on returning stolen criminal assets.⁹² Even this return has been very controversial in Nigeria, because the money is being spent on infrastructure projects outside of Delta State from where the money was stolen by Ibori.⁹³

In July 2023, the court ordered the confiscation of more than £101 million from Ibori and more than £28 million from his former solicitor Bhadrash Gohil.⁹⁴ Whilst this progress is welcome, it will mean little for people in Nigeria’s Delta state if there are further delays in returning these funds.⁹⁵

Civil recovery of assets

The NCA has powers to seek court approval for the freezing and seizing of assets which are, on the balance of probabilities, proven to have been acquired through unlawful conduct without a criminal conviction.

Aid transparency reports show that £176 million of assets have been forfeited or settled following Account Freezing Orders (AFOs) and cash seizures as a result of aid-funded enforcement since 2015.⁹⁶

	Cumulative total	Annual change			Cumulative total
	2015/16 to 2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2015/16 to 2022/23
Account Freezing Orders (AFOs)					
£m of assets frozen under account freezing orders (AFO)	0.75	+5.79	+0.52	+2.91	9.97
£m of assets forfeited or settled further to AFO	139	0	0	+36	175
Cash detention					
£m of assets detained under cash detention order	0.0	+0.8	+0.6	-0.6	0.9
£m of assets forfeited as a result of seized cash proceedings.	0.1	+0.3	0.0	+0.9	1.3

A planned expansion of the programme to fund additional lawyers and investigators in the NCA's Civil Recovery and Tax team (CRT) to pursue civil recovery of corrupt proceeds and Unexplained Wealth Orders (UWOs) was cancelled when the aid budget was cut in 2020.⁹⁷ In the meantime, UWOs have disappointed as an investigative tool, and have barely been used by law enforcement agencies for foreign Politically Exposed Persons after an initial high profile order.⁹⁸

Asset return to developing countries

Since 2015, a total of £204 million has been returned to developing countries under the aid-funded programme as a result of ICU investigations. According to our analysis, this means 26% of the funds frozen by the ICU (£785 million) have been returned to the countries from which they were stolen. This does not include £57.7 million returned in 2018 as a result of an investigation by the Metropolitan Police's POCU.

Year	Value of return	Description
2018	£1.2m	No details available. ⁹⁹
2020	£199m	Returned to Pakistan in a civil settlement. ¹⁰⁰ The settlement, which included a UK property, 1 Hyde Park Place valued at approximately £50 million, was the result of an investigation by the NCA into Malik Riaz Hussain. ¹⁰¹
2021	£4.2m	Returned to Nigeria following the recovery of proceeds of crime from associates of James Ibori and his associates (see box above).

Under principles set out by the Global Forum on Asset Recovery (GFAR), which the UK itself helped to develop in 2016, returned funds should benefit the people of the country harmed by the underlying corrupt conduct, and not be “re-corrupted” or used to benefit offenders.¹⁰²

Concerns raised with two recent returns have highlighted the importance of these principles and the need for transparency and accountability in the return process:

- The return of £4.2 million to Nigeria relating to funds stolen from Delta State by former governor James Ibori which were spent on infrastructure projects outside of Delta State. Following the confiscation of a further £130 million from Ibori and his associates in 2023, a coalition of UK and Nigerian civil society organisations wrote to UK ministers to urge the government to ensure the prompt, transparent and accountable return of these funds in a manner that benefits the people of Delta State.¹⁰³
- The return of £199 million (the vast majority returned under the programme so far) to Pakistan in 2020 following a civil settlement resulting from an investigation into business tycoon Malik Riaz Hussain. The details of the settlement remained private despite calls for greater transparency¹⁰⁴ and the funds were reported to have been used to pay for fines Mr Riaz faced in Pakistan, rather than to benefit the citizens of Pakistan, in clear breach of the GFAR principles.¹⁰⁵

In 2022, following criticism of the return of funds to Pakistan, the government published a welcome policy on transparent and accountable asset return building on the GFAR principles.¹⁰⁶

Cooperation and disruptions

In addition to prosecutions and asset recovery, the NCA’s ICU undertakes other important enforcement activity. These include:

Cooperation with overseas authorities or other UK authorities

The ICU may provide support for investigations initiated by overseas authorities or other UK agencies.

One example reported is ICU “collaboration with an African Government, leading to the sacking of numerous ministers for taking bribes from a dual UK national. As a result, the President formed a new government.”¹⁰⁷

	Total 2015/16 to 2019/20	2020/21 progress	2021/2022 progress	2022/23 progress	Total 2020/21 to 2022/23
Instances where other law enforcement agencies in the UK or overseas have taken on new work or broadened the scope of existing activity due to referrals, engagement, advice or support from ICU/BCIU	10	10	18	5	33

Disruptions to criminal activity

The ICU may also provide suggestions and evidence to support sanctions designations, denial of visas, or tax investigations.

	Total 2006 to 2019/20	2020/21 progress	2021/2022 progress	2022/23 progress	Total 2020/21 to 2022/23
Number of alternative disposals / disruptions / other significant outcomes (incl asset recovery and Deferred Prosecution Agreements) resulting from POCU / ICU case disposals	2	0	11	0	11

Reported numbers show a significant increase in both cooperation with other agencies and disruptions over the last three years. It is difficult to assess from the numbers alone what impact these have had given the wide interpretation of, and lack of information about, disruptions.

III. HOW COULD AID-FUNDED ENFORCEMENT WORK BETTER?

Addressing the gaps

Our research has found several crucial gaps in aid-funded enforcement that need to be addressed. These include:

Lack of capacity means the vast majority of intelligence on corruption in developing countries goes uninvestigated

According to aid transparency reports, the Bribery and Corruption Intelligence Unit (BCIU) supplied 609 intelligence packages to the ICU in 2021/22, ranging from a simple Suspicious Activity Report to complex referrals.¹⁰⁸ However, we estimate the ICU only had capacity to investigate 20 cases at any one time. Other than a small number of referrals going to the FCA or SFO, no other law enforcement agency is likely to investigate cases involving developing countries. This means that most intelligence on suspected corruption affecting developing countries will not get fully investigated at all, risking impunity for egregious corruption.

MOST INTELLIGENCE ON SUSPECTED CORRUPTION AFFECTING DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IS NOT INVESTIGATED AT ALL

The recent welcome uptick in conviction numbers may not align with the primary objectives of the aid programme

A 2019 evaluation of the aid-funded programme noted that more convictions were crucial to long-term success.¹⁰⁹ It identified that convictions in the following areas would have the biggest positive impact on the programme's objectives:

- developing country PEPs who have laundered corrupt money through the UK;
- UK professional enablers for their role in laundering and hiding dirty money from developing countries; and
- UK companies or nationals for bribing in developing countries.

The recent uptick in conviction numbers is welcome, with 11 convictions since 2020 and an significant increase in files submitted to the CPS. However, it is not clear how far these translate into progress on the programme's objectives. For example, nine convictions relate to laundering the proceeds of (UK) crime through developing countries, which differs to the programme's main aim of tackling corrupt money from developing countries being laundered through the UK.

It is possible that some apparently unrelated convictions do support aid objectives if they target corrupt parties and have the effect of disrupting corruption. However, there is also a risk that the ICU's location within the NCA, whose statutory remit is tackling serious and organised

crime, may skew its objectives away from those set by aid priorities. Unfortunately it is often impossible to tell based on information that is publicly released.

Progress has been very slow particularly in prosecuting Politically Exposed Persons (PEPs) from developing countries and returning assets

The 2019 evaluation found that arrests and prosecutions of developing country PEPs were key drivers of behaviour change. In particular, the conviction of James Ibori in 2012 led to Nigerian PEPs changing their perception of the risk of being caught and prosecuted for money laundering offences.

**DEVELOPING COUNTRIES
FACE A VERY LONG WAIT
TO SEE STOLEN ASSETS
RETURNED**

The recent charging of Alison-Madueke in 2023 was also symbolically important. But the 10-year delay since her arrest, and the small amount currently targeted by the NCA, dilutes its impact and creates a sense that grand corruption can be pursued with impunity. More promising was the fast-paced investigation of Tabuteau and Andrianarisoa, which may provide lessons for future cases.

In addition, developing countries face a very long wait to see stolen assets returned. The tortuous, decade-long process to make a substantial confiscation in the Ibori case shows how challenging it is to recover the proceeds of corruption in the UK. The UK has returned funds to Nigeria and Pakistan, but in both cases there has been controversy over who ultimately benefited from the funds, again highlighting the importance of transparency and civil society engagement in asset return processes.

There are ongoing enforcement gaps in delivery of the programme objectives – in particular in relation to medium-sized UK companies, and professional enablers

The 2019 evaluation found that just one successful case against a medium-sized UK company paying bribes in a developing country “*would be highly impactful.*” However, in the eight years since the ICU was established, it has not delivered any convictions against UK companies or nationals for paying bribes in developing countries (although in May 2024 it charged one company for paying bribes in a high income country). Recently publicised cases (e.g. Andrianarisoa / Tabuteau and Alison-Madueke) relate to bribery or suspected bribery by developing country PEPs.

In addition, the number of bribery case files submitted to the CPS by the ICU between 2020/2021 and 2022/2023 (two) is far lower than the number of money laundering case files (26), suggesting that this is not a priority for the unit.

Meanwhile, the UK’s professional enablers play a crucial role in facilitating international corruption, whether wittingly or unwittingly, and are rightly a key objective for enforcement activity. The 2019 evaluation was critical of the limited action taken against professional enablers to date and recommended increased enforcement against them. It also found that greater use of new ‘tricks’ to launder money into the UK, “including the use of shell companies and routing funds via third countries” had made UK professional enablers “a more important actor” in laundering Nigerian money into the UK.

To date only one enabler of alleged corruption has been charged – and none convicted – as a result of an ICU investigation, despite targeting professional enablers being a significant objective of the programme. Adetunji Fadahunsi-Jones, a former Director of Corporate Banking at First Bank of Nigeria (UK), was charged in December 2023 with accepting kickbacks in return for “*overlooking*” suspicious activity by a “*prominent businessman*” in the Nigerian oil industry.¹¹⁰

ONLY ONE ENABLER OF ALLEGED CORRUPTION HAS BEEN CHARGED – AND NONE CONVICTED – AS A RESULT OF AN ICU INVESTIGATION

Meanwhile, court documents raise serious questions about the role played by some professional enablers. For instance, one estate agent, Daniel Ford & Co, reportedly provided services to two Nigerian PEPs. According to US court documents the firm “*assisted in the purchase*” of three London properties which are alleged to have been used to bribe Diezani Alison-Madueke.¹¹¹ In another case, Nigerian Senator and former Minister of Aviation Stella Oduah reportedly transferred \$71,973 to Daniel Ford & Co via one of her Nigerian companies, one month before purchasing a £5.6 million London property.¹¹²

In addition, Zuneth Sattar, the businessman believed to be linked to corruption in Malawi has claimed to own 100 homes across the UK, relying on the services of UK solicitors and estate agents.¹¹³

The conviction of one or more professional enablers and medium-sized UK companies would act as a major deterrent, and have a significant positive impact on the programme’s objectives.

Tackling the wider challenges

At the same time our research has found that the aid-funded enforcement programme is clearly heavily impacted by wider issues with law enforcement and the criminal justice system. This includes:

Chronic issues in recruiting and retaining experienced staff at the NCA, and more broadly (for instance in the CPS), lead to inefficiencies and delays in the ICU’s work and limit its ability to grow

A former ICU investigator we interviewed gave several examples of inefficiencies resulting from staff not having the right skills and/or experience. Retention of experienced staff is also an issue. We were told senior investigators on cases can change fairly frequently and it can take 6-12 months for a new investigator to get up to speed on a case,¹¹⁴ setting back already long-running cases even further.

In addition, a lack of experienced investigators in general is likely to limit expansion of the ICU. Aid transparency documents in 2021 reported that “*the initial intention was to add three further teams, but as there is only a small pool of experienced investigators available, this level of scale up is not currently possible*”.¹¹⁵

The time and resources needed for the review and disclosure of evidence and the screening of legally privileged material weigh down progress on large cases

The cases that the ICU investigates can generate immense amounts of data and correspondence. Huge efforts, sometimes spanning several years, are needed for lawyers to filter out legally privileged information and for disclosure officers to identify information to be disclosed to defence lawyers. Bribery cases involving large companies can be particularly document heavy. In one case multiple digital devices were seized containing around 50 million pieces of information, of which about 10,000 were used for the case. Five years were spent dealing with the disclosure requirements.¹¹⁶

MULTIPLE DIGITAL DEVICES WERE SEIZED CONTAINING AROUND 50 MILLION PIECES OF INFORMATION, OF WHICH ABOUT 10,000 WERE USED FOR THE CASE. FIVE YEARS WERE SPENT DEALING WITH THE DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

Current funding for the ICU means that it is not possible to make major, long lasting investment in technology to help manage huge volumes of information. The funding they receive is on an annual basis for staff, but at present nothing is set aside for investment in systems.¹¹⁷

The NCA faces a serious inequality of arms when it goes against wealthy suspects who challenge every step, leading to delays and higher costs for law enforcement

The cases investigated under the aid-funded law enforcement programme often involve particularly deep-pocketed suspects who can afford to challenge and delay at every step. This costs time, effort and money in defending each of these steps. For example, the confiscation of assets from James Ibori has faced multiple appeals which have contributed to the process spanning more than a decade.¹¹⁸ The current UK costs regime which exposes law enforcement to significant costs in civil recovery cases meanwhile acts as a downward pressure on risk appetite.¹¹⁹

Ensuring greater transparency for stronger accountability

Sufficient transparency of anti-corruption enforcement work is critical to ensure performance can be scrutinised and to get the best value from aid spending. Aid transparency documents, and in particular annual reports on the programme published by the FCDO, provide critical data and commentary which have been essential in the preparation of this report. The reports offer greater transparency on the ICU's work than the NCA provides on other activities.

However, in our research we encountered gaps in basic information and barriers to information access which have hindered understanding of the programme and what it has delivered:

Budget and spend figures had not been updated for several years on the government's portal for data on aid programmes

Some budget and spend data for the aid-funded enforcement programme since 2020 were only updated in July 2024, whilst spend data for 2020/21 and 2021/22 is still missing.¹²⁰ This appears to

have been a wider issue as the Aid Transparency Index found that aid transparency had declined in 2022 under the FCDO compared to the Department for International Development prior to 2020, but had shown improvement by 2024.¹²¹

Information provided by or relating to the NCA is absolutely exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act

The NCA is only required to publish transparency information in accordance with the Annex to the NCA Framework Document.¹²² As a result, it has not been possible to obtain additional information beyond that which the NCA chooses to release.

Some Freedom of Information requests and parliamentary questions about aid funded enforcement are completely blanked

The FCDO took over six months to respond to FOI requests for up to date budget, spend and headcount data. The response given contained less information than was subsequently provided in answers to Parliamentary Questions on the same topics.

The CPS were unable to answer FOI requests for statistical information about cases they had received from the NCA's ICU in financial years 2021/2022 and 2022/23, even though this information had previously been provided for earlier years. CPS cited limitations with their systems and data migration following a merger of divisions, such that answering the requests would require a manual, and prohibitively costly, review of a large number of records.¹²³

THE CPS WERE UNABLE TO ANSWER FOI REQUESTS FOR STATISTICAL INFORMATION ... CITING LIMITATIONS WITH THEIR SYSTEMS AND DATA MIGRATION

Parliamentary Questions and FOI requests for the ICU's current headcount were refused as the information is considered 'operationally sensitive'¹²⁴ even though older headcount numbers have been previously published by ICAI and in the UK ACT business case.

Finding public information about specific aid-funded cases is difficult and has to be pieced together through snippets in aid transparency reports, NCA press releases, press reports and court documents

For example, according to the 2023 aid transparency document, the ICU had "*nine successful prosecutions of individuals involved in laundering the proceeds of crime through developing countries including Malawi, Nigeria, DRC, and Ghana.*"¹²⁵ It also successfully obtained "*forfeiture of over US\$500,000 accumulated from unregulated financial services, suspected to be the proceeds of money laundering of stolen Nigerian assets.*"¹²⁶ But no further detail is provided in these reports. Where the NCA do issue press releases on cases these are often later removed from their website. Reporting restrictions and limits on open justice also impact upon the ability to find details of these cases.

And finally, the limited information about ICU disruptions – highlighted in aid documents as crucial for interrupting corrupt activity – makes it almost impossible to assess the impact this kind of enforcement has on the programme’s objectives.

Overall, we find that these transparency gaps limit the impact of the programme and undermine its crucial deterrent effect. Previous programme reviews have recommended that more is done to communicate outcomes, anonymising where necessary, for exactly this reason.¹²⁷

IV. WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NOW

Aid-funded enforcement is critical to maintaining the UK's international reputation as a country that is serious about tackling corruption and recognises its role in exacerbating corruption in developing countries.

To ensure that this programme can create even greater success going forward, we recommend that:

1. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) should commit to long-term sustainable funding, including a new round of multi-year funding beyond 2025 to allow for continued expansion of aid-funded enforcement and support investment in longer term capabilities

While the aid-funded law enforcement programme budget has recovered to the level planned pre-Covid, there is still further to go if the UK is to be a global leader on tackling corruption in developing countries. Long-term commitments to provide stability and continuity are essential. Where possible, expansion of the programme must be seriously considered given that even under its existing funding, the ICU can only investigate a fraction of the intelligence referred to it. Additional funding to support longer term investments in capabilities such as technology and training and development to create the necessary pipeline of specialist staff must also be considered.

THERE IS STILL FURTHER TO GO IF THE UK IS TO BE A GLOBAL LEADER ON TACKLING CORRUPTION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

2. The FCDO should ensure that aid-funded enforcement prioritises action against UK professional enablers that facilitate the laundering and hiding of corrupt money from developing countries

The new government has made a welcome pre-election commitment to take a global leadership role in tackling the enablers of kleptocracy.¹²⁸ Ensuring there is robust enforcement against professional enablers is essential to this task – through bringing criminal charges under the Money Laundering Regulations, as well as pursuing failure to report suspicious activity and substantive money laundering investigations under the Proceeds of Crime Act.

This requires specialist and particularly legal expertise and a high risk appetite. Real consideration should be given to creating this specialist expertise within the ICU itself, to support money laundering supervisors to bring criminal prosecutions and to undertake proactive, intelligence-led investigations into enabling behaviour.

3. The FCDO should work with law enforcement partners to ensure that the enforcement gap around overseas bribery by small and medium-sized businesses is addressed

The conviction of a smaller UK company would considerably reduce the incentives for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to bribe overseas but there have been no successful prosecutions

of SMEs for bribery in developing countries as a result of ICU investigations. However, it is not clear to what extent the ICU regards bribery by SMEs as either a priority or even as within its remit.

To address this enforcement gap, and ensure more consistent enforcement of overseas bribery across UK businesses, the FCDO should explore with the National Economic Crime Centre which agency may be best placed to hold the specific remit of investigating bribery by SMEs in other jurisdictions. It is possible that additional aid-enforcement funding for the Serious Fraud Office, which already has responsibility for tackling international bribery by large corporates, could help ensure that this enforcement gap is closed.

4. The FCDO should consider making the demand side of bribery (passive bribery) an explicit goal of aid-funded enforcement work

There is growing international recognition, for example from the OECD¹²⁹ and US,¹³⁰ that tackling the 'demand side' of bribery (PEPs seeking bribes from foreign companies) needs to complement supply side enforcement (targeting companies paying bribes overseas). UK bribery laws prohibit both sides of bribery, but the stated objectives of the aid-funded law enforcement programme currently focus on the supply side of bribery to reduce incentives for UK companies to bribe in developing countries. Nonetheless, in an ambitious and welcome enforcement action, the CPS recently convicted two individuals of requesting bribes from a UK company following an ICU investigation.

In considering the priority of demand side bribery enforcement, the FCDO may want to balance this with its work to strengthen anti-corruption agencies in developing countries,¹³¹ so that they have the capacity to pursue anti-bribery enforcement of PEPs in their own country. In addition, to be credible in demand side enforcement, it is essential that the UK is proactive about tackling supply side bribery robustly at all levels of business size.

5. The FCDO should work with the Home Office to ensure that the NCA adequately funds enforcement capacity to investigate international corruption in higher income countries that are ineligible for aid spending

The ICU's remit to tackle international corruption is huge. While the aid-funded enforcement programme prioritises corruption in low income and lower middle-income countries, the ICU will be frequently called on to tackle cross-border corruption wherever it takes place. That means that serious consideration should be given to providing more non-aid funding to the unit, rather than funding around 25% of the unit at present. This would both bolster its capacity to take on cases with a UK connection related to any other jurisdictions and ensure that the ICU builds the specialist expertise to tackle all international corruption wherever it occurs.

Given the ICU's location within the NCA and the NCA's remit to tackle serious and organised crime, it will be important to ensure that this money is ringfenced for enforcing offences covered by the UN Convention Against Corruption with a specific focus on bribery and misappropriation of public assets. It will also be important to ensure that there is no mission-creep for the ICU to tackle

corruption involving serious and organised crime which should be being dealt with by other parts of the NCA.

6. The FCDO should consider increasing funding to the CPS Serious Economic, Organised Crime and International Directorate (SEOCID) to provide enhanced support to the ICU at an early stage on criminal cases

The FCDO programme already funds lawyers in the CPS Proceeds of Crime team within SEOCID to undertake asset recovery linked to ICU investigations. Additional funding could be provided to the criminal division in SEOCID to ensure that there is capacity to provide enhanced support to the ICU from an early stage of a case. This would help to strengthen ICU investigations and reduce the risk of delays.

7. The FCDO should have a stronger voice in cross-departmental discussions about economic crime enforcement, and work with the Home Office and Treasury to ensure aid-funded enforcement is not undermined by wider chronic issues with recruitment and retention

The FCDO aid-funded law enforcement programme makes a significant contribution towards wider UK government goals such as tackling kleptocracy, illicit finance and economic crime. The FCDO should therefore have a stronger voice in discussions with the Home Office and with HMT when strategy and policy around law enforcement and the criminal justice system in relation to these areas is being discussed.

**THE FCDO AID-FUNDED
LAW ENFORCEMENT
PROGRAMME MAKES
A SIGNIFICANT
CONTRIBUTION
TOWARDS WIDER UK
GOVERNMENT GOALS**

That means an FCDO minister should attend the Economic Crime Steering Board and should regularly feed in lessons from the aid-funded law enforcement programme into wider discussions around enforcement. The FCDO should press the Home Office to tackle chronic wider pay structure issues at the National Crime Agency which limit the ability of the units it funds to recruit and retain specialist staff.

8. The FCDO and NCA should ensure they provide more consistent and transparent information about aid-funded enforcement work and its impact

Greater transparency is needed to support greater accountability for the programme's work and for the use of aid money. Whilst the programme produces some invaluable reports, some basic information can be unnecessarily hard or impossible to obtain or interpret. We recommend:

- FCDO keeps Devtracker information up to date, so that essential information on the UK ACT programme budget and spend can be easily accessed without FOI requests or Parliamentary Questions;
- FCDO refines the programme's metrics, so that they more clearly show whether progress is being made on the outcomes (eg, prosecution of professional enablers) that matter most;

- NCA and FCDO ensure greater proactive communication of the programme's impact, to support its deterrent effect as well as to provide greater accountability, as recommended by previous internal reviews;
- NCA maintains a simple published list of all cases that are in the public domain, providing a summary of their current status and/or outcome (as the SFO does¹³²); and
- CPS ensures its Case Management System allows specific data on aid-funded enforcement to be collated and published.

ENDNOTES

1. We have summarised the key outputs of the aid-funded “UK Action to Support Developing Countries Fighting Corruption” (UK ACT) programme, as set out in its annual reports: FCDO DevTracker, [UK Action to Support Developing Countries Fighting Corruption – UK ACT](#)
2. To inform our study we have reviewed published UK ACT annual reports; interviewed current and former staff of the agencies funded by aid; asked parliamentarians to seek additional information through Parliamentary Questions, and submitted Freedom of Information requests.
3. UN Trade and Development, (28 September 2020), [Africa could gain \\$89 billion annually by curbing illicit financial flows, UN says](#)
4. Government spending on education as % GDP in Sub-Saharan Africa was 3.4% in 2022. See World Bank, [Government expenditure on education, total \(% of GDP\) – Sub-Saharan Africa](#)
5. We refer to ‘aid’ as a shorthand for Official Development Assistance (ODA) throughout our report.
6. For example, see Spotlight on Corruption, Resource Matters and ANEEJ, (12 December 2023), [The harms of Glencore’s corruption in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria](#). Glencore, the world’s largest commodity trader, managed to opaquely negotiate a \$440 million discount on its signing bonus to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) state-owned mining company Gécamines. As a result, Glencore ended up paying just \$140 million, instead of \$585 million. All the money that Glencore did not pay can and should be calculated as a loss for the DRC.
7. Frank Vogl, (21 July 2023), [Corruption’s impact on the world’s poor can be deadly](#)
8. Transparency International, (29 January 2019), [How corruption weakens democracy](#)
9. UN Information Service Vienna, (13 December 2023), [Corruption and the Sustainable Development Goals: Urgent global commitment needed to safeguard sustainable development from corruption](#)
10. Transparency International UK, (September 2017), [The Fifth Column: Understanding the relationship between corruption and conflict](#)
11. Transparency International UK, [Why corruption matters](#). See also U4, (24 August 2016), [How could anti-corruption interventions tackling global corruption benefit the UK?](#) p.11, which gives Yemen as an example of corruption-creating conditions in which conflict is likely to occur: “Yemen, which was the fifth largest source of illicit capital from the developing world between 1990 and 2008, during which time about US\$12 billion was looted from the country (Hill et al. 2013). Constant capital flight from the country, both from public funds and through tax evasion, contributed to the years of economic stagnation that culminated in the 2011 uprising against the government.”
12. NCA, [Money laundering and illicit finance](#)
13. Transparency International, (5 December 2023), [Loophole Masters: How enablers facilitate illicit financial flows from Africa](#)
14. For example, UK authorities targeted a total of £157.8 million in assets looted by former the former Nigerian governor James Ibori: Spotlight on Corruption, (11 March 2021), [£4.2 million returned to Nigeria by UK is only 2.7% of Ibori loot sought by prosecutors](#). So far, UK authorities have secured the confiscation of over £144 million from Ibori and his associates: see Spotlight on Corruption, (21 July 2023), [£101 million of Ibori loot confiscated a decade after conviction](#). Nigerian officials have previously claimed that around \$37 billion (£25.6 billion) in stolen money from Nigeria has been routed through London: Guardian, (11 May 2016), [Nigeria not seeking a Cameron apology, but ‘wants its assets back’](#)
15. See our case study on Zuneth Sattar in this report.
16. 1 Hyde Park Place, a London property valued at approximately £50 million, was part of the settlement resulting from the investigation by the NCA into Malik Riaz Hussain, a Pakistani property developer: NCA, (archived 3 December 2019), [NCA agrees £190m settlement after frozen funds investigation](#)
17. World Data Lab, (accessed June 2024), [World Poverty Clock](#) records that 70.9 million people in Nigeria (31% of population), 16.8 million people in Malawi (73% of population), 7.5 million people in Pakistan (3% of population), together totalling 95.2 million people, live on less than \$2.15 per day.
18. Guardian, (16 January 2017), [Rolls-Royce to pay £671m over bribery claims](#)
19. Glencore is listed on the London Stock Exchange and its UK subsidiary oversees most of its oil and gas operations. In May 2022, Glencore admitted to paying over \$100 million in bribes to government officials in several resource rich developing countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria: Spotlight on Corruption, Resource Matters and ANEEJ, (12 December 2023), [The harms of Glencore’s corruption in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria](#)
20. FCDO, (April 2024), [Statistics on International Development: Provisional UK aid spend 2023](#)
21. EITI, Nigeria: [Overview and role of the EITI](#)
22. Population estimated to be living on less than international poverty line, currently defined as \$2.15 a day: World Data Lab, (accessed June 2024), [World Poverty Clock](#)
23. Uche Igwe, LSE blog, (6 April 2021), [Tracking illicit financial flows could support Nigeria’s post-pandemic recovery](#) references estimated losses of about \$10 billion according to the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and a report released by the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) putting the figure as \$15 billion to \$18 billion annually.
24. Transparency International, (2023), [Corruption Perceptions Index: Nigeria](#)
25. FCDO policy paper, (17 July 2023), [UK-Nigeria development partnership summary](#)
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32. Summary of UK ACT programme outcome and specific outputs from FCDO DevTracker, [UK Action to Support Developing Countries Fighting Corruption – UK ACT](#)
33. NCA, [Bribery, corruption and sanctions evasion](#)
34. HM Government, (May 2017), [UK ACT Annual Review 2016](#)
35. HM Government, (January 2021), [UK ACT Business Case and Summary](#)
36. Spotlight on Corruption calculations based on Andrew Mitchell MP response to Written Question from Margaret Hodge MP, (8 February 2024), [Corruption](#)
37. Andrew Mitchell MP response to Written Question from Margaret Hodge MP, (15 April 2024), [Corruption](#)
38. FCDO, (10 April 2024), [Statistics on International Development: Provisional UK aid spend 2023](#)
39. Andrew Mitchell MP response to Written Question from Margaret Hodge MP, (15 April 2024), [Corruption](#); Andrew Mitchell MP response to Written Question from Margaret Hodge MP, (8 February 2024), [Corruption](#). A breakdown of budget by agency was provided for 2015/16-2022/23. For 2023/24 and 2024/25, no breakdown was provided, only a total budget figure for the UK ACT programme.
40. HM Government, (January 2021), [UK ACT Business Case and Summary](#)
41. Independent Commission for Aid Impact information note, (March 2020), [Mapping the UK’s approach to tackling corruption and illicit financial flows](#), p.27
42. Tom Tugendhat MP response to Written Question from Margaret Hodge MP, (19 March 2024), [International Corruption Unit: Staff](#)
43. Tom Tugendhat MP response to Written Question from Margaret Hodge MP, (19 March 2024), [International Corruption Unit: Staff](#)
44. Based on interviews with current and previous ICU staff
45. The 2020 UK ACT business case gives the breakdown of existing teams as: 4 x G3 Operations Manager; 19 x G4 Senior Op’s Officers; 15 x G5 Investigative Officers; 1 x G6 Admin Officer. See HM Government, (January 2021), [UK ACT Business Case and Summary](#), p.16
46. NCA, (October 2023), [Evidence to the NCA Remuneration Review Body \(NCARRB\)](#), table 51

47. HM Government, (January 2023), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2022](#), p.13 stated that "The ICU have lost only three staff over this reporting period, one on promotion and two to the private sector".
48. HM Government, (January 2021), [UK ACT Business Case and Summary](#), p.14 mentions "an increase in NCA remuneration for more junior grades which means there is a greater chance of attracting junior investigators to ICU roles".
49. HM Government, (February 2024), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2023](#), p.10 indicates that the 2022/23 attrition rate was only met "if you discount staff surged to the CKC and only count normal attrition reasons".
50. Interviews with current and former ICU staff
51. HM Government, [UK ACT 2020 Project Completion Report](#); HM Government, (June 2019), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2018](#); HM Government, (January 2023), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2022](#); and HM Government, (February 2024), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2023](#); Tom Tugendhat MP response to Written Question from Margaret Hodge MP, (19 March 2024), [International Corruption Unit: Labour turnover](#); Chris Philp MP response to Written Question from Margaret Hodge MP, (1 May 2024), [International Corruption Unit: Staff](#). No data on years of service is available for later years.
52. HM Government, (July 2018) [Annual Review of UK ACT 2017](#), p.18 states that "No OACU officers joined ICU and there is no one on the unit who has previously worked explicitly on anti-bribery".
53. Measured as total leavers (including retirements, dismissals and resignations) as a percentage of total employees.
54. HM Government, (July 2018), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2017](#), p.18 states that there were "seven leavers during 2016 ... One left on promotion, one took up a private sector job, two took career breaks and three ended their secondments and returned to the MPS."
55. HM Government, (February 2024), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2023](#)
56. HM Government, (February 2024), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2023](#), p.14 reports a spend of "approximately £30 million". However, our calculations based on a more recent response to a Parliamentary Question yield a higher figure of £36.96 million: see Andrew Mitchell MP response to Written Question from Margaret Hodge MP, (8 February 2024), [Corruption](#).
57. Charging figures comprise 13 individuals / entities in relation to charges from April 2020 to March 2023 according to UK ACT annual reports, plus media reports of the charging of Diezani Alison-Madueke in August 2023 and Adetunji Fadahunsi-Jones in December 2023. Conviction figures comprise nine individuals / entities convicted from April 2020 to March 2023 according to UK ACT annual reports, plus the convictions of Philippe Tabuteau in September 2023 and Romy Andrianarisoa in February 2024. There may have been additional charges or convictions between April 2023 and March 2024 which have not been publicly reported.
58. Indicators 1.1(b) and 1.2(b) in UK ACT annual reports.
59. HM Government, (January 2021), [UK ACT Business Case and Summary](#)
60. Indicator 4.1 in HM Government, (March 2021), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2021](#) and HM Government, (January 2023), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2022](#) is defined as "number and quality of intelligence packages supplied by the Bribery and Corruption Intelligence Unit (BCIU) to ICU to initiate and support AML-related or bribery-related asset recovery, as well as disruption and prevention activity, in low income countries, lower and middle income countries and upper middle income countries, and to generate case work. This should include intelligence supplied to support: investigations by other UK enforcement authorities; prosecutions by overseas jurisdictions; prosecutions for separate but related crimes; and instances where the scope of other investigations is widened." The indicator was discontinued in 2023.
61. Indicators 1.1(b) and 1.2(b) in UK ACT annual reports
62. HM Government, (January 2023), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2022](#) reports the number of money laundering investigations in 2021/22 as 11, but it is reported as eight in HM Government, (February 2024), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2023](#).
63. The average GDP per capita in Malawi in 2022 was \$645: see World Bank, [GDP per capita \(current US\\$\) – Malawi](#)
64. World Data Lab, (accessed June 2024), [World Poverty Clock](#)
65. Frontiers, (13 July 2023), [Recalibration of benchmarks is necessary: even the most basic meal was not affordable for Malawi's poor between 2017 and 2021](#)
66. Malawi is the fifth most affected country in terms of extreme weather events. GermanWatch, (2021), [Global Climate Risk Index](#)
67. Relief Web, (31 March 2023), [Malawi Cholera & Floods Flash Appeal 2023](#)
68. Our calculations are based on 2013-2022 bilateral aid data from FCDO, (14 September 2023), [Statistics on International Development: Final UK aid spend 2022](#)
69. FCDO, [Tackling Serious and Organised Corruption in Malawi provides £10 million over 2016-2026 to help Malawi tackle corruption](#)
70. U4, (15 December 2022), [Overview of corruption and anti-corruption efforts in Malawi](#)
71. Transparency International, [Work in Malawi](#)
72. Africa Confidential, (3 February 2022), [Fraud furore engulfs Chakwere](#)
73. Financial Times, (26 May 2022), [British businessman investigated over alleged Malawi corruption](#)
74. The Times, (27 June 2022), [Bribery storm engulfs arms dealer](#)
75. Ibid
76. Guardian, (17 April 2012), [Former Nigeria state governor James Ibori receives 13-year sentence](#)
77. HM Government, (June 2019), [UK ACT Annual Review 2018](#)
78. World Bank, [Madagascar Overview](#)
79. U4, (9 March 2021), [Madagascar: Overview of corruption and anti-corruption](#)
80. Public Eye, (16 January 2024), [Madagascar sapphires: a blessing for Swiss jewellers, but a curse for miners](#)
81. NCA, (20 February 2024), [Former Chief of Staff to Madagascan President convicted of bribery](#)
82. 123 cases (44 money laundering and 79 bribery) were concluded 2006-2020; compared to just two file submissions to CPS (one money laundering and one bribery), so 61 cases concluded for every file submission to CPS.
83. 2020-2023: 33 cases concluded (16 money laundering and 17 bribery); and 28 file submissions (26 money laundering and two bribery) to CPS. So just over one case concluded for every file submission to CPS.
84. BBC, (2 October 2015), [Nigeria's ex-oil minister 'arrested in London'](#)
85. NCA, (22 August 2023), [Ex-Nigerian politician charged in corruption case](#)
86. The Cable, (30 October 2023), [UK court adjourns hearing on Diezani's case to 2025](#)
87. US v The M/Y Galactica Star et al [civil forfeiture complaint](#), (14 July 2017), paragraphs 50-72
88. The work for the most recent Ibori confiscation was done by another branch in the NCA, not the ICU (NCA comment at annual briefing for civil society, 3 October 2023)
89. Reuters, (27 February 2012), [Nigerian politician owns up to corruption in UK court](#)
90. BBC, (27 February 2012), [Nigeria ex-Delta state governor James Ibori guilty plea](#)
91. Spotlight on Corruption, (11 March 2021), [£4.2 million returned to Nigeria by UK is only 2.7% of Ibori loot sought by prosecutors](#)
92. British High Commission Abuja, (1 September 2016), [Immigration Minister signs agreement with Nigeria on returning stolen criminal assets](#)
93. Spotlight on Corruption and others, (20 April 2021), [Open letter to the UK government on the return of Chief Ibori loot to Nigeria](#)
94. Spotlight on Corruption, (21 July 2023), [£101 million of Ibori loot confiscated a decade after conviction](#)
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97. HM Government, (March 2021), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2021](#)
98. CityAM, (11 April 2024), [Why the 'McMafia' law failed to root out kleptocrats' ill-gotten gains](#)
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105. Dawn, (17 April 2021), [Malik Riaz and the Art of the Deal](#)
106. Home Office, (13 January 2022), [Framework for transparent and accountable asset return](#)
107. HM Government, (February 2024), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2023](#)
108. HM Government, (January 2023), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2022](#)
109. Sue Hawley, University of Sussex blog, (4 December 2019), [Are UK aid-funded enforcement efforts to end the UK's role in corruption working?](#)
110. moneylaundering.com, (18 December 2013), [UK Banker Charged With Bribery](#)
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112. Premium Times, (6 October 2021), [How Stella Oduah Secretly Bought N5 billion London Properties with Cash](#)
113. The Times, (27 June 2022), [Bribery storm engulfs arms dealer](#)
114. Interview with former or current ICU staff
115. HM Government, (January 2021), [UK ACT Business Case and Summary](#)
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117. Interview with former or current ICU staff
118. Spotlight on Corruption, (25 March 2021), [James Ibori: Confiscating the corrupt assets of a Nigerian Governor](#)
119. Spotlight on Corruption, (13 July 2023), [Costs protection for law enforcement is vital if we're to take on corrupt elites](#)
120. <https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk> is the government's portal on which data on all UK aid programmes is published. In May 2024 the portal indicated that there had been a general pause in publishing Development Tracker updates November 2022 to May 2023 relating to the integration of new systems.
121. Publish What You Fund Index, (2022, 2024), [2022 FCDO profile](#) and [2024 FCDO profile](#); see also Independent Commission for Aid Impact, (6 October 2022), [FCDO must maintain a clear commitment to aid transparency](#)
122. Home Office and NCA, (May 2015), [Revised Framework document for the National Crime Agency](#)
123. Email from CPS Information Access Team on 1 August 2023
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125. HM Government, (January 2023), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2022](#)
126. HM Government, (February 2024), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2023](#)
127. HM Government, (January 2023), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2022](#) and HM Government, (February 2024), [Annual Review of UK ACT 2023](#) both identify "Lack of communication on impact of programme reduces deterrent impact" as a risk and recommended that this could be mitigated if the "FCDO, with NCA, develops a new communications strategy for the Programme".
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132. Serious Fraud Office, [Our Cases](#)

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