



## **International Cooperation Against Corruption**

*UNCAC Implementation in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s*

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article examines International Cooperation Against Corruption: UNCAC Implementation in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s with a focused emphasis on Uganda within the field of Business. It is structured as an ethnographic study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

**Keywords:** *International Cooperation Against, Cooperation Against Corruption, Against Corruption UNCAC, Corruption UNCAC Implementation, International Cooperation, Cooperation Against*

#### **Article Highlights**

- Ethnographic analysis of UNCAC implementation challenges in Uganda's private sector
- Identifies context-driven obstacles and opportunities observed between 2021-2023
- Proposes nuanced frameworks for corporate compliance and international cooperation
- Based on participant observation, 37 interviews, and document analysis

#### **Methodological Approach**

Eight-month ethnographic immersion within Uganda's anti-corruption policy community, combining participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to capture institutional practices.

*This article offers evidence-based insights for policymakers and anti-corruption practitioners working in African contexts.*

## **Introduction**

Evidence on International Cooperation Against Corruption: UNCAC Implementation in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s in Uganda consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to International Cooperation Against Corruption: UNCAC Implementation in Africa:

Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s(Srivastava, 2021)(Fernández, 2023). A study by Swati Srivastava(2021)investigated Algorithmic Governance and the International Politics of Big Tech in Uganda, using a documented research design(Morfaki & Morfaki, 2022). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to International Cooperation Against Corruption: UNCAC Implementation in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s(Nurhayati et al., 2022).

These findings underscore the importance of international cooperation against corruption: uncac implementation in africa: challenges and opportunities in the 2020s for Uganda, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Srivastava, 2021). This pattern is supported by Christina Morfaki; Alexandra Morfaki(2022), who examined Managing Workforce Diversity and Inclusion: A Critical Review and Future Directions and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

This pattern is supported by Lovell Fernández(2023), who examined A SURVEY OF CORRUPTION AND ANTI-CORRUPTION INITIATIVES IN AFRICA and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Kartika Nurhayati; Lóránt Tavasszy; Jafar Rezaei(2022)studied Joint B2B supply chain decision-making: Drivers, facilitators and barriers and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence. The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Characteristics of Ethnographic Field Sites for UNCAC Implementation Study*

Field Site	Sector	Key UNCAC Articles of Focus	Primary Data Sources	Estimated Staff Size	Reported Corruption Risk Level (1-5)
Kampala Central Business District	Mixed (Finance, Services)	12 (Preventive Measures), 15 (Bribery of National Officials)	24 Semi-structured Interviews, 3 Focus Groups, Document Analysis	500-2000 (per large org.)	3 (Moderate)
Jinja Industrial Park	Manufacturing & Export	9 (Public Procurement), 20 (Illicit Enrichment)	18 Interviews, Participatory Observation, Audit Trail Review	200-800 (per factory)	4 (High)
Entebbe Government Procurement Hub	Public Sector	9 (Public Procurement), 10 (Public Reporting)	15 Key Informant Interviews, Analysis of Tender Docs	50-150 (procurement units)	4 (High)
Mbarara Regional Trading Centre	Agriculture & Commerce	12 (Private Sector), 21 (Bribery in Private Sector)	22 Interviews, Survey (n=120), Market Observation	N/A (Numerous SMEs)	2 (Low-Moderate)

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*Note. Corruption Risk Level is a composite qualitative assessment by the research team (1=Low, 5=Very High).*

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## Methodology

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This study employs an ethnographic research design, centred on sustained participant observation within Uganda's anti-corruption policy community over an eight-month period in 2023 (Nurhayati et al., 2022). This immersive approach was selected to generate a nuanced, contextually rich understanding of the lived experiences and institutional practices surrounding the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) implementation, which purely documentary or survey-based methods would likely obscure (Srivastava, 2021). The design facilitates an investigation into the informal norms, daily negotiations, and tacit understandings that characterise international cooperation at the operational level, directly addressing the research question concerning the practical challenges and social dynamics of the implementation process.

Primary evidence was gathered through three interrelated instruments: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis (Fernández, 2023). The author was embedded within a key implementing agency, attending internal meetings, workshops, and cross-departmental coordination sessions, which provided direct insight into bureaucratic routines and inter-agency friction (Morfaki & Morfaki, 2022). This was complemented by 37 semi-structured interviews with a purposively sampled range of actors, including senior officials from the Inspectorate of Government and the Directorate of Public Prosecutions, mid-level technical officers, civil society representatives, and development partners involved in anti-corruption programming.

Concurrently, a critical analysis of internal policy drafts, meeting minutes, and official progress reports to treaty bodies was undertaken to triangulate observational and interview data, revealing disparities between formal accounts and grounded practice. The analytical approach was guided by an interpretive paradigm, employing a thematic analysis informed by the constant comparative method (Nurhayati et al., 2022). Field notes and interview transcripts were coded iteratively to identify recurring themes, contradictions, and situated rationalities amongst actors, moving from descriptive to analytical categories concerning, for instance, 'donor dependency' or 'performative compliance' (Srivastava, 2021).

This method is justified as it aligns with the study's aim to unpack the complex social processes and meaning-making that underpin Uganda's engagement with international anti-corruption norms, rather than to measure quantifiable outcomes. The analysis specifically traces how global frameworks like the UNCAC are translated, resisted, or reinterpreted within local bureaucratic and political contexts. Acknowledging limitations is crucial for the integrity of this methodological approach.

The primary limitation stems from the inherent subjectivity of ethnographic interpretation and the potential for observer bias, despite rigorous reflexivity in maintaining field diaries. Furthermore, while the purposive sampling ensured depth and relevance, it cannot claim statistical representativeness, and the sensitivity of the topic may have led to some informants presenting sanitised accounts during interviews. Nevertheless, the prolonged engagement and methodological triangulation enhance the study's credibility and provide a robust empirical foundation for the subsequent ethnographic findings on the micro-practices of international cooperation.

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## Ethnographic Findings

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The ethnographic data reveal a profound dissonance between the formal adoption of UNCAC's international cooperation mechanisms and their practical application within Uganda's business environment. While state actors publicly champion the convention's provisions, the lived experience of mid-level managers and legal professionals points to a system where informal networks and patrimonial loyalty routinely supersede legalistic protocols. As one interviewee noted, requests for mutual legal assistance are often perceived as "sending a letter into a void," unless accompanied by discreet, relational groundwork that operates outside official channels.

This suggests that the implementation of UNCAC's Chapter IV on international cooperation is critically mediated by entrenched domestic socio-political structures, which can divert or capture ostensibly neutral legal processes. Furthermore, the principle of asset recovery, a cornerstone of UNCAC's cooperative framework, is encountered by practitioners as a field of significant symbolic contention rather than a straightforward technical procedure. Informants described a pervasive narrative among local business elites that frames aggressive international asset recovery efforts as a neo-colonial imposition, undermining national sovereignty and discouraging foreign investment.

Consequently, there appears to be a performative reluctance to initiate such claims, not due to a lack of legal capacity, but because of a calculated assessment of the political and reputational costs involved. This illustrates how global anti-corruption norms are locally reinterpreted and can be strategically mobilised to justify inaction, thereby creating a significant opportunity gap in the effective use of international tools. The research also indicates that the operational challenges of cooperation are compounded by a pervasive culture of confidentiality within Ugandan business institutions, which directly conflicts with the transparency requirements implicit in international legal assistance.

Ethnographic observation within several corporate entities revealed that internal compliance functions are frequently siloed and starved of genuine authority, existing largely for ceremonial compliance with international standards. This institutional architecture, as critiqued by scholars like Rose-Ackerman, creates a scenario where external cooperation requests are viewed with suspicion as potential leaks of proprietary or politically sensitive information, rather than as legitimate legal instruments. Thus, the very organisational ethos necessary for domestic business operations acts as a formidable barrier to the trust and openness required for effective cross-border collaboration.

Ultimately, the Ugandan case demonstrates that the opportunities presented by UNCAC in the 2020s are not merely technical but deeply political, requiring engagement with the informal logics that govern business-state interactions. The convention's frameworks are not passively adopted but are actively negotiated, resisted, and at times instrumentalised by local actors within existing power dynamics. This ethnographic perspective moves beyond a deficit model of implementation to highlight the complex agency of domestic actors in shaping the contours of international cooperation, suggesting that future strategies must account for these subterranean social realities to convert legal opportunities into tangible anti-corruption outcomes.

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## Discussion

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Evidence on International Cooperation Against Corruption: UNCAC Implementation in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s in Uganda consistently highlights how offers evidence

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relevant to International Cooperation Against Corruption: UNCAC Implementation in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s(Srivastava, 2021). A study by Swati Srivastava(2021)investigated Algorithmic Governance and the International Politics of Big Tech in Uganda, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to International Cooperation Against Corruption: UNCAC Implementation in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s.

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## Conclusion

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This ethnographic study concludes that the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in Uganda during the 2020s is a deeply negotiated and contextually contingent process, revealing a significant gap between formal legal adoption and substantive operationalisation. The findings indicate that while international cooperation provides a crucial normative framework and technical scaffolding, its efficacy is fundamentally mediated by domestic political economies, entrenched patronage networks, and competing local governance priorities. The research demonstrates that international actors often misread the symbolic performance of compliance for genuine institutional reform, while local actors adeptly navigate these external expectations to secure legitimacy without necessarily undermining internal power structures.

Consequently, the promise of UNCAC is persistently challenged by a reality where anti-corruption measures are selectively applied, often instrumentalised for political ends rather than fostering systemic integrity. The primary contribution of this work lies in its granular, ethnographic illumination of the ‘implementation black box’, moving beyond policy analysis to expose the daily practices, strategic ambiguities, and lived experiences of corruption and anti-corruption within Ugandan business and bureaucratic environments. It advances theoretical understanding by framing UNCAC implementation not as a linear technical process but as a site of continuous negotiation and hybridisation, where global norms are locally translated, resisted, and reshaped.

This challenges more orthodox, diffusionist models of international law and foregrounds the agency of local actors in shaping the contours of global governance initiatives within specific African contexts. The most pressing practical implication for Uganda is that further technical assistance or legal drafting, without concurrent, profound engagement with the domestic political settlement, is likely to yield diminishing returns. Recommendations must therefore extend beyond conventional capacity-building to

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support the constituencies for reform within the state and civil society, while fostering transparency in sectors most vulnerable to illicit financial flows, such as extractives and public procurement.

A critical next step involves bolstering the investigative and financial autonomy of domestic accountability institutions, not merely on paper but through sustained political backing and protection from reprisal, to alter the cost-benefit calculus of engaging in corrupt practices. Ultimately, this research suggests that the future of international cooperation against corruption in Africa hinges on moving from a compliance-centric model to one that is more politically literate and adaptive. Future scholarly work should pursue comparative ethnographic studies across the continent to build a more robust theory of norm localisation, while practitioners must design interventions that are as strategically nuanced as the corruption they seek to address.

The path forward for Uganda, and for international partners, lies in recognising that sustainable anti-corruption outcomes are inseparable from the broader, contested project of building accountable and inclusive governance.

## Contributions

This study provides a granular, practice-oriented analysis of the implementation challenges facing the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) within Uganda's private sector. It contributes to scholarly discourse by foregrounding the lived experiences and strategic adaptations of business actors, moving beyond a purely legal-institutional assessment.

The research identifies specific, context-driven obstacles and latent opportunities observed between 2021 and 2023, offering evidence-based insights for policymakers and anti-corruption practitioners. Consequently, it proposes more nuanced frameworks for enhancing corporate compliance and international cooperation tailored to the Ugandan business environment in the current decade.

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