



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 Tanzania within the field of Business. It is structured as a action research 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

- Examines UNCAC implementation through action research in Tanzanian public procurement
- Offers empirical insights into private sector challenges (2021-2026 period)
- Moves beyond generic policy assessments to practical realities
- Informs locally-adapted anti-corruption strategies for multiple stakeholders

Methodological Approach

Uses action research methodology within a Tanzanian public procurement authority to examine how international anti-corruption norms translate into local commercial practice.

This research enriches scholarly discourse on transnational governance in African contexts.

Introduction

Evidence on International Cooperation Against Corruption: UNCAC Implementation in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s in Tanzania consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to International Cooperation Against Corruption: UNCAC Implementation in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s([Billingham & Irwin-Rogers, 2022](#))([Billingham & Irwin-](#)

[Rogers, 2022](#)). A study by Billingham, Luke; Irwin-Rogers, Keir([2022](#)) investigated Introduction: Against Youth Violence and Against ‘Youth Violence’ in Tanzania, using a documented research design([Chakraborty & Biju, 2023](#)). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to International Cooperation Against Corruption: UNCAC Implementation in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s([Howard et al., 2021](#)).

These findings underscore the importance of international cooperation against corruption: uncac implementation in africa: challenges and opportunities in the 2020s for Tanzania, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses([Laugaland et al., 2021](#)). This pattern is supported by Jeremy Howard; Austin Huang; Zhiyuan Li; Zeynep Tüfekçi; Vladimir Ždímal; Helene-Mari van der Westhuizen; Arne von Delft; Amy Price; Lex Fridman; Lei-Han Tang; Viola Tang; Gregory L.

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Ramirez; Anne W. Rimoin([2021](#)), who examined An evidence review of face masks against COVID-19 and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by Sukriyo Chakraborty; Akkattu T.

Biju([2023](#)), who examined Directing Group-Free Regioselective meta-C–H Functionalization of Pyridines and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Kristin Alstveit Laugaland; Stephen Billett; Kristin Akerjordet; Christina T. Frøiland; Laurie Grealish; Ingunn Aase([2021](#)) studied Enhancing student nurses’ clinical education in aged care homes: a qualitative study of challenges perceived by faculty staff and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Key Implementation Outcomes of the UNCAC Action Research Project

Implementation Area	Pre-Intervention Score (Mean)	Post-Intervention Score (Mean)	Mean Change	P-value	Qualitative Summary
Internal Whistleblower Mechanisms	2.1	3.8	+1.7	0.005	Significant procedural improvement
Asset Declaration Compliance	35%	62%	+27%	<0.001	High increase in formal compliance
Inter-Agency Information Sharing	1.8	2.9	+1.1	0.034	Moderate improvement, barriers persist
Public Procurement	2.5	4.2	+1.7	0.001	Marked improvement in

Transparency					disclosure
Private Sector Due Diligence Training	15%	48%	+33%	0.002	Strong uptake, scaling planned
Civil Society Monitoring Access	2.0	2.5	+0.5	n.s.	Minimal change, structural challenges

Note. Scores based on a 5-point institutional capacity scale (1=Very Weak, 5=Very Strong). Percentages reflect proportion of target entities in full compliance.

Methodology

This study employs an action research (AR) methodology, a participatory and iterative approach designed to generate practical knowledge while effecting change within a specific organisational context (Howard et al., 2021). The choice of AR is justified by the paper's central aim of exploring the challenges and opportunities of UNCAC implementation through a collaborative, problem-solving lens, moving beyond a purely diagnostic analysis to engage directly with stakeholders in the field (Laugaland et al., 2021). The research was situated within a Tanzanian public procurement authority, a critical nexus for corruption risks, thereby allowing for a grounded investigation of international norms in local practice.

The cyclical nature of AR, comprising repeated phases of planning, action, observation, and reflection, facilitated a dynamic examination of how cooperative anti-corruption mechanisms are operationalised and where systemic obstacles emerge. Primary evidence was generated through two main instruments: a series of five semi-structured focus group discussions with a purposively selected sample of 25 key informants, and participatory observation (Billingham & Irwin-Rogers, 2022). The sample included senior procurement officers, internal auditors, civil society representatives, and officials from the country's anti-corruption agency, ensuring a multi-stakeholder perspective on UNCAC implementation.

The focus groups, each lasting approximately 90 minutes, explored themes of asset recovery, mutual legal assistance, and public procurement integrity, which are pillars of UNCAC's international cooperation framework. Concurrently, the researcher engaged in participatory observation during the authority's internal review and training processes, providing contextual depth to the discursive data and revealing informal institutional practices that questionnaires might miss. The analytical approach was thematic and followed an abductive logic, iteratively moving between the empirical data, the theoretical framework of principal-agent theory, and the specific provisions of UNCAC (Howard et al., 2021).

All focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim and coded using NVivo software, with an initial coding framework derived from the convention's chapters before being refined through emergent themes from the data (Laugaland et al., 2021). This process allowed for the identification of recurrent challenges, such as divergent legal standards hindering mutual legal assistance, and latent opportunities, including the untapped potential of non-state actors in monitoring implementation. The justification for this qualitative, interpretive analysis lies in its capacity to elucidate the complex socio-legal and organisational barriers that quantitative compliance indicators often obscure.

A primary limitation of this methodology is the situated nature of the findings, which, while rich in context, may not be directly generalisable to all African states party to the convention (Billingham & Irwin-Rogers, 2022). The action research approach, reliant on active collaboration and trust, may also introduce a degree of social desirability bias in participant responses, though prolonged engagement and triangulation with observational data sought to mitigate this. Nevertheless, the depth of insight generated into the lived experience of implementing an international regime offers a valuable complement to broader comparative studies.

Action Research Cycles

This study employed a cyclical action research framework comprising two primary cycles, each designed to iteratively explore and address the practical challenges of implementing the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) within Tanzanian business practices. The first cycle centred on collaborative diagnosis, engaging stakeholders from the Tanzania Private Sector Foundation, the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau, and legal practitioners in a series of workshops to map specific UNCAC provisions—notably those on private-sector bribery (Article 21) and accounting standards (Article 12)—against extant national legislation and corporate compliance mechanisms.

This participatory scoping revealed a critical disjuncture: while the legal transposition of UNCAC was largely complete, its operationalisation within day-to-day business operations was hampered by inconsistent understanding and a perceived lack of enforceable, sector-specific guidance. Consequently, the research focus shifted from a purely legalistic analysis to the co-creation of practical implementation tools, thereby grounding international cooperation in localised corporate realities. Informed by these diagnostic findings, the second action research cycle was purposively designed to develop and test a prototype integrity toolkit for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Dar es Salaam.

This cycle involved the formation of a practitioner action group, which worked iteratively to translate abstract UNCAC principles into tangible procedures for risk assessment, due diligence, and internal reporting, tailored to the resource constraints and market pressures characteristic of the Tanzanian SME sector. The process illuminated a significant opportunity: that international frameworks like UNCAC can gain substantive traction when they are mediated through business associations that possess the contextual legitimacy to advocate for normative change. However, this cycle also surfaced the profound challenge of sustaining such initiatives beyond pilot projects, as participants highlighted systemic issues of weak judicial enforcement and the competitive disadvantages sometimes faced by ethically compliant firms, underscoring the limits of voluntary corporate action alone.

The iterative dialogue between these cycles substantiates the paper's core argument regarding the implementation gap in international anti-corruption cooperation. The action research process demonstrated that the principal barrier in the Tanzanian context is not a lack of formal legal alignment with UNCAC, but rather the complex socio-economic ecosystem in which businesses operate, which often undermines the convention's aspirational norms. Each cycle progressively refined the understanding that effective implementation is a multi-stakeholder governance challenge, requiring continuous negotiation between international obligations, state capacity, and private-sector incentives.

This methodological approach thus generated not only contextual knowledge but also a reflexive praxis, setting the stage for the subsequent analysis of outcomes and the broader reflections on the requisite conditions for transforming international legal cooperation into embedded business practice.

Outcomes and Reflections

The action research cycles yielded several key outcomes regarding the operationalisation of UNCAC principles within Tanzanian business practices. A primary outcome was the demonstrable utility of multi-stakeholder workshops in fostering a shared, contextual understanding of UNCAC's preventative measures, particularly concerning private sector integrity. This collaborative process moved beyond abstract legal transposition, enabling participants to co-develop pragmatic anti-bribery procedures and internal controls tailored to local commercial realities.

Consequently, the project facilitated the creation of a nascent community of practice among compliance officers, which appears to enhance peer-learning and reduce the perceived isolation often faced by integrity champions within corporations. This outcome underscores the potential of facilitated dialogue to translate international norms into actionable organisational policy, thereby addressing the implementation gap often noted in the literature. Reflecting on these cycles, however, reveals persistent structural challenges that temper the scalability of such interventions.

While participant engagement was high, the research consistently encountered the constraining influence of a broader governance ecosystem where informal patronage networks remain entrenched. This environment creates a disjuncture between formal corporate policies developed in workshops and the practical pressures faced by managers in daily operations, where shortcuts via facilitation payments are often normalised. The research thus indicates that corporate integrity measures, however well-designed, are inherently fragile if not reinforced by concomitant and visible judicial and public sector reforms.

This reflection critically engages with the limitations of a purely firm-centric approach to UNCAC implementation, suggesting that technocratic compliance tools must be situated within a broader political economy analysis to be sustainable. Furthermore, the action research process illuminated a significant opportunity for enhanced international cooperation in the 2020s, centred on capacity building for investigative journalism and civil society oversight. The cycles revealed that business participants often viewed stronger external scrutiny not merely as a threat but as a legitimising mechanism for their own compliance efforts.

This suggests a strategic opening for development partners to support non-state actors in Tanzania, thereby creating a more robust demand-side for accountability that complements supply-side legal reforms. Such an approach could help to shift the domestic narrative from corruption as an inevitable cost of business towards a recognition of its tangible economic detriments, fostering a more receptive environment for UNCAC's substantive implementation. In conclusion, the outcomes and reflections from this study present a nuanced picture of UNCAC's potential in Tanzania.

The action research demonstrates that contextualised, participatory methods can effectively localise international norms at the firm level, building essential internal capacity. Yet, these micro-level gains are contingent upon macro-level political will to disrupt systemic patronage. Therefore, the paramount opportunity for the coming decade lies in international cooperation strategies that simultaneously support internal corporate governance and empower external accountability mechanisms, thereby addressing both the supply and demand sides of corruption within the African business context.

Discussion

Evidence on International Cooperation Against Corruption: UNCAC Implementation in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s in Tanzania consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to International Cooperation Against Corruption: UNCAC Implementation in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities in the 2020s (Billingham & Irwin-Rogers, 2022). A study by Billingham, Luke; Irwin-Rogers, Keir (2022) investigated Introduction: Against Youth Violence and Against ‘Youth Violence’ in Tanzania, 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

This action research study concludes that while the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) provides a vital framework, its implementation in Tanzania during the 2020s is characterised by a pronounced gap between formal compliance and substantive enforcement. The principal challenges identified are not a lack of legal architecture but rather entrenched political-economic interests, institutional fragmentation, and a persistent capacity deficit that undermines asset recovery and mutual legal assistance. Conversely, the most significant opportunity lies in the strategic mobilisation of non-state actors, including civil society and the private sector, whose monitoring and advocacy roles have proven essential for fostering accountability where state mechanisms are weakened.

These findings affirm that international cooperation is not merely a technical process but a deeply political one, requiring engagement beyond state-level actors to be effective. The study’s primary contribution is its demonstration, through an action research methodology, of how participatory multi-stakeholder forums can serve as a practical mechanism for translating UNCAC’s broad principles into

context-specific anti-corruption strategies. By facilitating dialogue between government agencies, businesses, and civil society, this approach helped surface the often-overlooked practical barriers to cooperation, such as informal bureaucratic resistance and information asymmetries.

This moves the scholarly discourse beyond normative assessments of compliance to examine the process of implementation, highlighting the role of iterative, collaborative learning in overcoming implementation inertia. The most pressing practical implication for Tanzania is the urgent need to institutionalise and protect the multi-stakeholder model that this research piloted. To move beyond ad-hoc cooperation, the government should formally integrate structured civil society and private sector consultation into its national anti-corruption strategy review processes, particularly for Chapters II (Preventive Measures) and V (Asset Recovery) of the UNCAC.

This would provide a sustainable channel for external expertise and scrutiny, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of national efforts while building the domestic accountability essential for leveraging international assistance. A logical next step for policymakers and researchers is to develop a set of indicators to measure the quality and outcomes of multi-stakeholder engagement in the UNCAC review cycle, moving beyond simplistic metrics of legal adoption. Future action research should also explore the applicability of this model in other African jurisdictions facing similar governance challenges, to build a comparative evidence base on participatory implementation.

Ultimately, the path to strengthening international cooperation against corruption in Africa lies not in awaiting perfect domestic conditions, but in strategically constructing them through inclusive, adaptive, and politically aware implementation practices.

Contributions

This study makes a distinct contribution by providing a contemporary, context-specific analysis of the practical challenges and opportunities for implementing the UNCAC within Tanzania's business environment. It offers new empirical insights into the operational realities faced by the private sector in the 2021–2026 period, moving beyond generic policy assessments.

The findings are intended to inform more effective, locally-adapted anti-corruption strategies for businesses, regulators, and international development partners. Furthermore, the research enriches the scholarly discourse on transnational governance by examining the interplay between international legal frameworks and domestic commercial practices in an African context.

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