International Journal of Scientific Research and Management (IJSRM)
||Volume||14||Issue||01||Pages||2533-2541||2026||
Website: https://ijsrm.net ISSN (e): 2321-3418
DOI: 10.18535/ijsrm/v14i01.sh01

Optimizing Asset Recovery in the Indonesian Criminal Law System: Policy Analysis and Implementation Challenges

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Abstract

Corruption is the most disruptive act in the wheels of government. Criminal acts of corruption have an impact on state finances and infrastructure. Policies designed with an adaptive legal framework are essential in finding solutions to criminal acts of corruption. This study aims to examine the implementation of asset recovery policies in addressing the issue of corruption-related criminal acts as a form of criminal law reform. Additionally, this study identifies obstacles to implementing asset recovery policies. This study uses qualitative analysis with a case study approach. Data sources used in this study include official police archive documents related to asset recovery policies. Furthermore, this study uses Indonesian regulations relevant to the focus of the asset recovery research. The results indicate that asset recovery policies in Riau Province have been implemented with a legal approach. Allegations of corruption, particularly in the procurement of goods, are the most significant problem. Furthermore, allegations of corruption, such as the implementation of road and bridge infrastructure development, are also the second most dominant in corruption crimes. Several obstacles exist to implementing asset recovery policies, including corruption crimes that employ technological approaches to conceal assets. The approach of imprisonment remains substantial compared to efforts to recover assets from the proceeds of corruption. This study is still limited in the use of secondary data. Further research is needed to evaluate asset recovery policies as a means of improving existing policies.

Keywords; Asset Recovery, Criminal Law System, Policy, Implementation, Corruption

Introduction

Corruption is a crime of extraordinary criminality that has a systemic impact on the activities of national and state life. Corruption can erode public trust in law enforcement agencies, as well as hinder national development efforts and undermine the principles of social justice (Amagnya, 2025; Mukhametov, 2024). In practice, law enforcement efforts against corruption in Indonesia have so far been primarily focused on criminalising perpetrators, but the steps to recover state losses through the return of criminal assets have not been fully optimised (Rahman & Husnul, 2024; Sianturi, 2025). With the rapid development of modes and complexity of corruption crimes, perpetrators often intend to hide assets resulting from these crimes in various forms and jurisdictions, thereby complicating the process of tracing and confiscating assets (Konovalova et al., 2023; Utama et al., 2025). Under these conditions, a criminal law policy is required that focuses on imposing sanctions on perpetrators, followed by asset recovery as the primary goal of law enforcement (Chistyakova et al., 2021). The asset recovery approach is a strategic instrument to ensure that corruption crimes do not generate economic benefits for perpetrators and to recover state losses significantly (Helfer et al., 2023; Herman & Rajagukguk, 2025).

In focusing on the development of criminal law in Indonesia, criminal law policy on asset recovery needs to be understood as an integral part of the legal system reform process, oriented towards substantive justice and effective law enforcement (Salsabila & Waluyo, 2025). The reform process includes strengthening the normative foundation, adjusting asset confiscation mechanisms, and harmonising with international legal instruments, such as the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) (Sujadmiko et al., 2025; Vu Cao & Cao, 2025). Therefore, asset recovery policy is not only a repressive tool but also a preventive and restorative measure in the process of eradicating corrupt criminal acts (Arifin et al., 2023; Brun & Sotiropoulou, 2024).

Several studies have examined criminal law policy regarding asset recovery as a novel aspect of Indonesian criminal law. Research (Sianturi, 2025) indicates that challenges in tracing and confiscating assets lead to minimal recovery compared to state losses. Corruptors register assets under the names of third parties, making asset recovery difficult (Utama et al., 2025). Other studies on existing laws require a court decision with permanent legal force before assets can be confiscated, potentially slowing the process and allowing perpetrators to conceal assets (Maulidah et al., 2025; Rahman & Husnul, 2024). Poor coordination between law enforcement agencies and the absence of a centre of excellence in asset recovery are significant obstacles (Qisa'i, 2020). Political intervention can complicate the asset recovery process (Herman & Rajagukguk, 2025). Strategies that strengthen international agreements and cooperation on mutual legal assistance can support countries in recovering assets transferred abroad (Rifai & Tisnanta, 2022). Among the numerous studies examining the legal framework for asset recovery, few address criminal law policies related to asset recovery in corruption crimes as a form of criminal law reform.

Literature Review

Corruption as an Extraordinary Crime and the Importance of Asset Recovery

In general, corruption is viewed as a serious crime because it has significant and widespread effects on the state's financial condition, disrupting economic stability and decreasing public trust in the state. Corruption is also a transnational issue that affects the global community as a whole (Arifin et al., 2023; Maulidah et al., 2025). The criteria for corruption to be considered an extraordinary crime are based on its ability to damage the economy, destabilise the national economy, and undermine the integrity of state institutions (Yunus et al., 2021). Huge financial losses occur to state finances, with estimates of illicit cross-border financial flows reaching USD 1.1 trillion annually (Balashov et al., 2023). Consequently, state losses can hamper economic development and exacerbate poverty.

Asset recovery measures have been implemented through international cooperation agreements, such as the ASEAN Mutual Legal Assistance (AMLAT) and the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) (Brun & Sotiropoulou, 2024). Such cross-border cooperation and frameworks are essential for recovering state assets and addressing the transnational nature of corruption (Pranata et al., 2025). Efforts to confiscate assets without a criminal conviction are particularly significant in cases involving assets that have been transferred abroad (Priyatno, 2018). Seizure of assets without a criminal conviction is seen as a crucial tool for accelerating the recovery of assets obtained from corruption and combating economic crime.

Obstacles to asset recovery often stem from procedural constraints, such as the requirement for a legally binding court decision before assets can be seized (Andini et al., 2025). Such requirements can delay asset recovery efforts, allowing perpetrators to hide or transfer their illicit assets quickly. Despite various anti-corruption frameworks, asset recovery efforts often do not run optimally. For example, in Indonesia, only a small portion of stolen assets are recovered (Amrullah et al., 2021). The ineffectiveness of asset recovery efforts stems from a legal system that prioritises punishing perpetrators over recovering state finances (Rukmono et al., 2024).

Asset recovery efforts serve a significant preventive function by eliminating the financial benefits of corruption and deterring future corrupt activities (Rübenstahl, 2015). Asset recovery impacts economic stability when supported by strong international cooperation and legal innovations that address operational barriers and ensure the successful repatriation of stolen assets (Mayora Pranata et al., 2025). Asset recovery efforts are valuable tools in addressing corruption and require a robust legal framework, international cooperation, and innovative approaches to ensure their effectiveness (Agustina et al., 2025). The success of the asset recovery process significantly strengthens efforts to mitigate the impact of corruption and promote economic integrity (Bayuaji & Hadi, 2025).

The Concept of Asset Recovery in Criminal Law Theory

Asset recovery in the criminal justice system is a crucial mechanism aimed at seizing the proceeds of crime from criminal activity, thus ensuring that crime is not profitable. The concept of asset recovery for the state from acts of corruption is crucial. Asset recovery is supported by a comprehensive legal framework, including the European Convention on Human Rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and EU Directives (Esposito & Law, 2024). Such frameworks provide a legal basis for recovering assets obtained through criminal activity. This concept enables the confiscation of assets from corruption without requiring a criminal conviction, as is the case in the jurisdictions of Ireland and England and Wales (Hasibuan, 2025). A hybrid approach utilises civil and criminal law in asset recovery efforts (Priyanto et al., 2023). This approach enables asset confiscation without a criminal conviction, which is particularly beneficial in cases where assets have been transferred abroad (Wardhani et al., 2024).

Asset recovery can be lengthy and complex due to difficulties in tracing illicit financial flows and political interference. Inconsistencies in cross-border cooperation further complicate the asset recovery process (Mayora Pranata et al., 2025). Proposals to improve asset recovery include the establishment of transnational mechanisms to provide technical assistance, build capacity, and monitor the recovery of funds (Jatna et al., 2025). Furthermore, revising the legal framework can be implemented to enhance state asset recovery efforts (Latifansyah et al., 2024). State asset recovery has a deterrent effect by eliminating financial incentives for committing crimes (Santoso et al., 2025). Asset recovery aims to recoup state losses and uphold the rule of law (Lestari & Metha Dian Puspa Nasawida, 2025). Integrating asset recovery into transitional justice processes can help strengthen accountability and contribute to political justice (Atallah & Masud, 2021). Asset recovery within the framework of criminal law is a multifaceted concept encompassing various procedural and institutional legal elements (Kaniki, 2021). Continued reform and international cooperation are essential to enhance the effectiveness of asset recovery mechanisms and ensure that crime is not financially rewarding.

Method

This study uses a normative legal approach, focusing on the study of positive legal norms, legal principles, and criminal law doctrines and theories relevant to asset recovery policies in corruption crimes. This study is also descriptive in nature because it provides arguments and recommendations regarding the direction of criminal law policy regarding the return of assets resulting from corruption crimes. Furthermore, this study also uses a legislative approach and a case study approach. This study uses secondary data, including primary legal materials, secondary legal materials, and tertiary legal materials. The primary legal materials include laws and regulations relevant to criminal law and the eradication of corruption crimes. Meanwhile, secondary data from this study consists of research results and official publications presented by the Indonesian National Police. Several collected data are then processed and filtered for further qualitative analysis by interpreting and constructing applicable legal provisions and comparing them with the concepts and objectives of criminal law reform to obtain an overview of the effectiveness of criminal law policies in asset recovery.

Result And Discussion

Regulasi recovery Asset

Asset recovery policy is a crucial instrument in the law enforcement process, particularly in cases of corruption, which significantly impact state financial losses. The success of the asset recovery process is influenced by a policy framework that regulates technical aspects, such as tracking, freezing, confiscation, and the return of assets to the state (Ochnio, 2021). Regulations on asset recovery play a crucial role in ensuring legal certainty, protecting human rights, and ensuring cross-jurisdictional cooperation (Bayuaji & Hadi, 2025). Strengthening and harmonising asset recovery regulations is urgent in addressing the complexity of modern crime, which is increasingly organised and international in nature. Figure 1 shows the evolution of regulations relevant to asset recovery in Indonesia.

Figure 1. Evolution of Asset Recovery Regulations

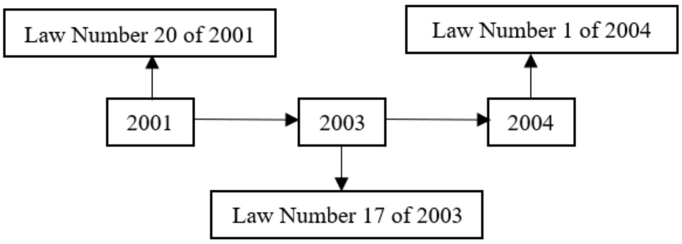

Figure 1 illustrates the development of asset recovery regulations in Indonesia, relevant to the policy of recovering assets from corruption, from 2001 to 2004, presented chronologically and systematically. The development of asset recovery regulations did not occur overnight; it involved a lengthy process of establishing legal norms that are interconnected with criminal law and state financial law. The years 2001, 2003, and 2004 represent a period of policy continuity, during which a more comprehensive legal framework for recovering state losses from corruption was built. In 2001, the Indonesian government issued a regulation in the form of Law No. 20 of 2001, amending Law No. 31 of 1999 concerning the Eradication of Corruption. Regulation No. 20 serves as the basic legal framework for criminal asset recovery policies because it substantially introduces and strengthens additional penalties in the form of asset confiscation and the payment of compensation as instruments for recovering state losses. With Law No. 20, the orientation of criminal penalties in corruption cases has shifted from solely repressing perpetrators to also focusing on efforts to recover state assets lost through corruption. In 2003, the asset recovery policy was supported by Law No. 17 of 2003 concerning State Finances. Substantively, this law provides an administrative legal framework for determining, calculating, and confirming state losses arising from the misuse of public funds. While focusing on enforcing criminal law against corruption, this regulation serves as a legal framework to support the proof of state losses and broaden the perspective of asset recovery as an effort to protect the state's financial system, beyond simply criminalisation.

As an effort to strengthen the legal framework mentioned above, Law Number 1 of 2004 concerning the State Treasury was also issued. This regulation functions substantively in the execution and management aspects of recovered assets, regulating the responsibilities of officials and state treasurers for state losses, as well as the mechanism for recovering assets to the state treasury. Asset recovery is not limited to court decisions, but rather to the administrative stage as an effort to concretely restore state rights. There has been a paradigm shift in criminal law policy from an approach focused on individual perpetrators, commonly referred to as an "offender-oriented" approach, to one focused on assets (Sakinah & Benny Sumardiana, 2025). The integrated system between the law on the eradication of criminal acts of corruption, state finance laws, and state treasury laws suggests that asset recovery is the primary orientation in law enforcement against criminal acts of corruption (Santoso et al., 2025). Within the framework of reforming Indonesian criminal law, regulatory developments emphasise that the recovery of state losses is a manifestation of substantive justice and a serious pillar of the modern criminal law system.

Implementation of state loss recovery policy

The implementation of the policy on state loss recovery is an integrated system of law enforcement and state financial governance efforts that focuses on justice and accountability. The asset recovery policy aims to deter perpetrators of crimes that cause state financial losses and ensure that state losses are recovered to the maximum extent for the benefit of the public interest. In its implementation, the state loss recovery policy faces various obstacles, including institutional constraints, coordination issues, and existing legal instruments.

Table 1. Asset tracking and asset recovery

No	Institution	Case Type	Nominal
1	Sub-Directorate III of the Directorate of Special Criminal	Procurement of multi-content educational devices and applications in 2013	Rp. 818.955.750 Rp. 923.555.000

	Investigation		
2	Sub-Directorate III of the Directorate of Special Criminal Investigation	Construction of the Riau Provincial Education Office project in 2017	Rp. 134.497.685
3	Sub-Directorate III of the Directorate of Special Criminal Investigation	Abuse of authority in office regarding the installation of paving blocks in 2018	Rp. 48.632.312
4	Sub-Directorate III of the Directorate of Special Criminal Investigation	Abuse of authority in office regarding the construction of the Sub-district Office building in 2017	Rp. 71.799.502
5	Sub-Directorate III of the Directorate of Special Criminal Investigation	Abuse of authority in office during the 2015 Market development activities	Rp. 27.643.228
6	Sub-Directorate III of the Directorate of Special Criminal Investigation	Abuse of authority in office during the 2013 Market development activities	Rp 15.109.466
7	Sub-Directorate III of the Directorate of Special Criminal Investigation	Abuse of authority in office in activities to resolve server pay issues in 2018	Rp 5.000.000
8	Pelalawan Police Station	Allegations of corruption in the management of village funds in 2018	Rp. 413.468.000
9	Bengkalis Police Station	Allegations of corruption in the construction of the operating room at the Regional General Hospital in 2018	Rp.120.929.400
10	Siak Police Station	Abuse of authority in the financial management of Regional Companies (BUMD) in 2018	Rp. 235.900.000
Total			Rp 2.815.490.349

Source: Sub-Directorate III of the Riau Regional Police's Special Criminal Investigation Directorate

Table 1 presents empirical data on the implementation of asset recovery policies during the handling of corruption crimes at the law enforcement level, specifically implemented by Sub-Directorate III of the Special Criminal Investigation Directorate and several police resorts in the Riau Region. The data in the table demonstrates that the asset tracing (ATR) and asset recovery (ARC) systems have been implemented seriously, utilizing an approach that involves tracing, calculating, and returning state financial losses to the regional treasury. The total value of assets or state losses successfully recovered amounted to Rp 2,815,490,349. This figure illustrates the seriousness with which law enforcement enforces corruption laws.

In the alleged corruption case of procurement of multi-content educational devices and applications at the Rokan Hilir Regency Education Office in the 2013 fiscal year, the state loss, initially audited at Rp 1,742,510,750, was gradually returned to the regional treasury. Technically, the funds were returned to the regional treasury in two periods: in 2017 and January 2018. The total amount recovered is divided into

Rp818,955,750 and Rp923,555,000. This gradual mechanism demonstrates that asset recovery is not always returned all at once, but can be gradually restored through law enforcement processes and coordination with various institutions, such as regional inspectorates and regional banks. Generally, corruption cases are associated with development projects and the procurement of goods/services sourced from the regional budget (APBD). Development projects include the construction of Rumbai Vocational School, the installation of paving blocks and village gates, as well as the construction of markets and public facilities. The focus of these cases is the return of excess payments or state losses by contractors and related institutions to regional treasury accounts. Therefore, these efforts represent a commitment to the policy of recovering state losses that does not always wait for a final and binding criminal decision, but can be carried out through administrative mechanisms and internal state supervision, as long as audit results indicate losses or overpayments.

Furthermore, the asset recovery policy was also implemented in the case of the financial management of a Regionally-Owned Enterprise (PT. Kawasan Industri Tanjung Buton) regarding alleged embezzlement of regional capital participation from 2014 to 2017, followed by the return of Rp. 235,900,000 to the regional company's account. This alleged embezzlement case demonstrates that the asset recovery policy not only focuses on corruption in the physical project sector but also applies to corruption crimes in the corporate sector owned by the regional government (Latifansyah et al., 2024). Paradigmatically, the criminal law policy on asset recovery focuses not only on punishing the perpetrator but also on recovering state losses (Rumahorbo et al., 2022). The process of recovering state losses before or outside of a criminal court decision demonstrates the integration of criminal law, state administrative law, and state financial law. The asset recovery policy has become a strategic instrument for achieving substantive justice and eradicating corruption.

Challenges in Implementing Asset Recovery

The process of implementing asset recovery policies in handling corruption in Indonesia faces several challenges, including normative, institutional, technical, and cultural ones. Normatively, the most significant challenge lies in the lack of an integrated and comprehensive asset recovery legal system (Lestari & Metha Dian Puspa Nasawida, 2025). Regulations on asset confiscation and the restitution of state losses are scattered across various laws and regulations, including the Corruption Eradication Law, the State Finance Law, and the State Treasury Law. This fragmentation of regulations creates normative fragmentation, and law enforcement often faces difficulties in determining the most relevant legal basis for asset confiscation without criminal prosecution, which has not yet been comprehensively regulated within Indonesia's positive legal system (Prasetyo et al., 2025). Institutionally, challenges arise from weak coordination between law enforcement institutions and state financial management institutions (Lestari & Metha Dian Puspa Nasawida, 2025). The implementation of asset tracing and asset recovery involves multiple agencies, including the police, prosecutors, courts, inspectorates, the Supreme Audit Agency, and banking institutions. Challenges such as the lack of an integrated coordination system and ineffective data exchange often hinder the rapid and accurate tracing of assets, particularly for those that have been transferred, disguised, or held in the name of third parties, which can impact the recovery of state losses.

Technical and operational constraints also contribute to the suboptimal asset recovery process, such as a lack of capacity and resources in law enforcement, particularly in asset tracking (Sianturi, 2025). In practice, tracing assets resulting from corruption requires specialised expertise in finance, forensic accounting, information technology, and financial transaction analysis (Ayu et al., 2025). Limited human resources with reliable capacity result in a suboptimal asset recovery process, making it challenging to recover complex and hidden assets (Zinkernagel, 2014). Other conditions, such as increasingly sophisticated and cross-jurisdictional corruption practices (Judijanto & Apriyanto, 2025).

Cultural challenges and the law enforcement paradigm also continue to significantly influence the asset recovery process (Arsad, 2023). Law enforcement still tends to focus on imposing sanctions on perpetrators, so punishment, such as imprisonment, is often viewed as the primary objective, while recovering state losses is a secondary objective (Ayu et al., 2025). This paradigm leads to the suboptimal use of legal frameworks focused on asset recovery, including monetary penalties and asset confiscation.

Conclusion

Criminal law policy on asset recovery in corruption cases has undergone significant development, leading to more progressive criminal law reform. The legal framework established in the Corruption Eradication Law, the State Finance Law, and the State Treasury Law has demonstrated a shift in the focus of criminal punishment from punishing perpetrators to restoring state financial losses as the primary objective of criminal law enforcement. Law enforcement agencies have demonstrably implemented asset recovery policies by returning losses to state and regional treasuries. State losses from corruption have been recovered through infrastructure development, village fund management, financial management of regionally owned enterprises, and the procurement of goods and services. The success of asset recovery with significant value demonstrates that asset recovery is not merely a normative concept but has become a strategic instrument in the practice of law enforcement against corruption. Asset recovery policies in corruption crimes are interpreted as an integral part of the reform of Indonesian criminal law, which focuses on substantive justice and the protection of state financial interests. This reform requires strengthening more comprehensive regulations on asset confiscation, as well as improving coordination and institutional capacity.

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