The University of Birmingham is hosting an invitation-only ESRC funded seminar on 7 April 2011, focusing on ‘African Agency in International Relations: Peace Conflict and Intervention.’ This is part of an ESRC-funded Seminar Series (6 seminars in total) awarded to the Africa and International Studies Working Group of the British International Studies Association. The purpose of the series is to overturn the conventional approach to understanding Africa in international relations, which asks how external actors and events impact upon the continent, by asking instead how rising African activism in international politics impacts upon the international system including the policies and decision-making processes of western powers and international institutions.

Narratives on peace and conflict in Africa frequently depict the continent as the at best helpless and passive, or at worst violently resistant, subject of international intervention. However this vision overlooks the importance of inter-African security dynamics and fails to recognise the impacts of new and resurgent African security institutions in recent years, particularly through the revitalised African Union. This seminar will explore the role of African agency in shaping both African and international responses to conflict and insecurity on the continent. At a national level, such discussion is apt given the growing focus by states such as the UK on security sector reform, signalling new approaches to African security institutions at state level with potential implications for Africa’s involvement in regional and international security. The seminar will address the growth of these continental and regional security institutions and peace support capacities within Africa, exploring how they are being integrated into global systems and re-defining norms of intervention.

Seminar Programme

9.00 Welcome from Professor Mark Webber, Head of School of Government and Society, University of Birmingham
9.15 Introduction to the Seminar (Dr Danielle Beswick, IDD, University of Birmingham)
9.30 Session 1 ‘African peace and security institutions: Lessons from their development and implications for conflict management.’
   Speaker 1: Brig Gen. Frank Rusagara (Rwandan Defence Attache) ‘Military Integration: The Rwanda case study’
   Speaker 2: Dr Thomas Kwasi Tieku (Univ. of Toronto) ‘Lessons learned from Conflict Management: The Case of Burundi’
11.00 Break
11.15 Session 2 ‘African agency in peace and conflict: Implications for UK policy.’
   Speaker 1: DFID/Chase Representative on UK policy (TBC)
12.45 Lunch
13.30 Session 3 ‘Regional security approaches in Africa: Challenges of co-operation and future potential.’
   Speaker 1: Ecoma Alaga (WIPSEN/Reading University) ‘The Emerging Regional Policy Frameworks for SSR/G in Africa: Prospects and Opportunities for the AU and ECOWAS’
   Speaker 2: John Kabia (Survivors for Peace) ‘Regional Approaches to Peacebuilding: The ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture’
15.00 Break
15.15 Session 4 ‘African Agency in Peace Conflict and Intervention-Future directions and challenges for research and policy’
16.30 Close
18.30 Dinner