

# **UK Africa Policy after Labour: Coalition, Austerity, Continuity and Change:**

## **Call for Abstracts**

Abstracts are welcomed on the broad theme of 'UK Africa Policy after Labour' for inclusion in an edited book proposal on the topic and potentially a special issue of a journal (eg *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*) on a sub-theme.

These publications will represent a key output of an ESRC Seminar Series on contemporary UK Africa Policy launched in January 2014 which has included events at the Universities of Sheffield, Birmingham and Warwick and will continue into 2016 with events at Chatham House, Oxford Brookes University, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and the British Institute in East Africa, Nairobi (<http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/bisa-africa/uk-africa-policy/>).

Submissions (up to 350 words) from participants in the Seminar Series, together with PhD students and early-career researchers, are particularly welcomed though we are keen to receive contributions from as broad a selection of scholars as possible.

## **Theme and objectives**

Under the 1997-2010 Labour Government, Africa took on an almost unprecedented significance in UK policy-making and in the public imagination. From the creation of the Department for International Development (DFID) – described in one parliamentary report as 'the Ministry for Sub-Saharan Africa' – to Robin Cook's 'ethical foreign policy', to the Commission for Africa and G8 Gleneagles Summit, the continent was embraced, prioritized and instrumentalized by a UK governing party in a manner not previously seen.

While the current Coalition Government (2010-) has placed a greater emphasis on 'prosperity' in its own approach to Africa, what is noteworthy is the degree of cross-party consensus which has existed on Britain's role and priorities on the continent in the last decade. This has seen DFID not only survive under the Coalition but also have its budget 'ring-fenced' while David Cameron – like Blair before him – has at times used his engagement with Africa as a means to symbolically 'communicate' with the electorate and shape their perceptions of his vision and that of his party.

The dawn of 'austerity Britain' has nevertheless provided a different, more challenging context for the management of UK-Africa relations. Increased scrutiny of aid budgets in the face of domestic public spending cuts has compelled policy-makers to explain and justify Britain's involvement in Africa in different ways, with the 'national interest' arguably taking the place of 'our moral duty' in government discourse. This 'Value for Money' agenda has, to some extent, circumscribed the space for agency available to African states and peoples in their engagement with the UK. The rise of the BRICS and discovery of oil in many parts of the continent has nevertheless opened-up new room for manoeuvre and raises important questions about how UK influence in Africa will fare in the future.

The aim of this project is to explore and address some of these issues and questions by publishing an overarching analysis of UK Africa policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This study will draw-upon scholarship from a range of disciplines and encompass both theoretical and empirical contributions from Northern and Southern academics.

At its heart, the project has three main areas of focus:

- changes and continuities in UK Africa policy (broadly defined) since the New Labour era (1997-2010);
- how Africa is presented, perceived and understood by UK audiences;
- the nature of UK influence in Africa, and African influence in the UK.

Contributions which link, in some way, to one or more of these themes are strongly encouraged.

Abstracts/papers might also like to consider speaking to other concerns of the Seminar Series:

- Representations of Africa in the UK and the ‘functions’ these serve for different audiences (including political parties)
- Perceptions of the UK in Africa
- International development and aid (including changes and continuities since 1997)
- Security, stability and conflict management and how far the UK’s approach to these issues on the continent have evolved since the Blair era
- Trade in UK-Africa relations
- African agency in UK-Africa policy: how much influence do African states and peoples have over UK activities which affect them
- The future of UK Africa policy: beyond 2015

Abstracts – of up to 350 words – should be submitted to **Dr Jonathan Fisher**, International Development Department, University of Birmingham by email – **[j.fisher@bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.fisher@bham.ac.uk)** - before **Monday 30 March, 2015**.

Submissions will then be reviewed and contributors contacted at the end of April.

Abstracts will be considered simultaneously for the edited book project as well as a potential linked special journal issue, depending on which themes emerge.