

Research impact: making a difference

Promoting justice and security in Central Africa

LSE research into local people's experiences in Central Africa has influenced national and international efforts to restore peace and security

What was the problem?

In Central Africa the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has disrupted lives in Uganda, Sudan and elsewhere for many years.

Armed conflict has enveloped western Sudan's Darfur region since 2003, while newly independent South Sudan topped the 2014 index of fragile states compiled by the Fund for Peace, a non-governmental research organisation based in Washington D.C.

In politically fragile states such as these – especially those disrupted by armed conflict – little is known about the experiences of local people. Global organisations from the World Bank to the International Criminal Court and the UK Department for International Development have acknowledged this lack of evidence.

But the question begs to be asked: how can national and international policy interventions hope to improve people's lives without inside knowledge of their day-to-day realities and experiences?

What did we do?

Activities in Central Africa under the auspices of the LSE Justice and Security Research Programme (JSRP) have drawn upon the research of its three co-directors: Professor of Development Anthropology Tim Allen; Research Consortium Director Mareike Schomerus, and Alex de Waal, Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation and advisor to the African Union.

Fieldwork in northern Uganda began in 2004, based on Tim Allen's earlier work in the region. War with the Lord's Resistance Army was ongoing and more than a million people were living in displacement camps. Research among the displaced population centred on large-scale child abductions and other atrocities and on the role of the International Criminal Court.

After Mareike Schomerus joined Allen in 2005, the research focus shifted to people returning home from time spent with the LRA. This work led to contact with the LRA's high command and involvement in the Juba peace talks of 2006–8 between the Government of Uganda and the LRA. Schomerus was the only researcher to conduct primary research with the rebels during the talks and to secure a filmed interview with their leader, Joseph Kony.

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Subsequent research in northern Uganda focused on issues affecting people's daily lives, such as land disputes, responses to rape, transitional justice, and the provision of basic services like health. Similar concerns were evident in southern Sudan, where their work concentrated on dispute settlement, situations of continuing violence, north/south border conflicts, voting patterns, health care and attempts to establish new systems of governance after decades of war.

Research in northern Sudan built upon Alex de Waal's close involvement with the African Union and its political engagement in Darfur, and upon the part he played in negotiations between Sudan and the emerging South Sudan. A key research output was a new analysis of the war in Darfur and the logic underlying political bargaining during peace negotiations, using datasets compiled by UNAMID, the African Union – United Nations Mission in Darfur.

The independent Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre named the researchers' key report on South Sudan as one of two 'notable exceptions to the general silence on contemporary statebuilding in South Sudan'.

Research in Uganda, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo was funded in part by a £5 million research grant from the UK's Department for International Development covering the years 2011–17. The LSE's Justice and Security Research Programme was also linked to the World Bank's conflict research divisions based in Nairobi, and was broadening into other regions, including Asia.

What happened?

LSE's research fed directly into policies developed by African and donor-nation governments and by international agencies. Dissemination was via three main channels:

- direct engagement in high-level briefings with donor governments, policymakers and international agencies
- written publications in peer-reviewed journals, books and reports
- press and broadcast media and public appearances by the researchers.

Social media were also playing an increasing role. Since 2007, Alex de Waal's *Making Sense of Sudan* had become an authoritative, go-to blog for people seeking high-quality analysis of developments in Sudan.

For over a decade, Allen's work on justice and security has been acknowledged as helping to shift perceptions of both the International Criminal Court and local accountability mechanisms. In 2010, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office invited him to chair a meeting in Whitehall to brief the UK delegation attending a review conference held in Kampala to take stock of the Court's impact.

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At the conference itself, he represented northern Ugandan civil society, and was the only non-African asked to speak on a panel organised by the Kenyan delegation, sharing the platform with Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangeri Maathai. Invitations followed to address the European Parliament in Brussels and an audience of some 70 British Members of Parliament and peers.

Schomerus's many briefings were the key channel for feeding her research into policy and practice. A prominent critic of US approaches to ending the war with the Lord's Resistance Army, she addressed 200 US army officers in 2009 on the impact on civilians of the US-supported military intervention in Central Africa. The following year she gave briefings on the emergence of South Sudan to the German government, to the British ambassador in Sudan, and to an expert meeting convened by the US State Department and the UK Ministry of Defense.

From 2010–11, Schomerus was Political Analyst to the Carter Center Observation Mission for the Sudanese elections and the referendum on South Sudan's independence, briefing former US President Jimmy Carter, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the US Special Envoy to Sudan, and other high-level national and international dignitaries. More briefings and training sessions followed for staff of the UN, non-governmental organisations and the World Bank. On International Women's Day 2013, she gave a keynote address on the role of women in conflict to the International Council for Human Rights in Geneva.

Alex de Waal's long involvement in Sudan led to his 2008 appointment as advisor to the African Union (AU) Panel on Darfur. From 2009 to 2012 he advised the AU's High Level Implementation Panel for Sudan, helping to shape the Panel's agenda, strategy and public diplomacy. At the African Union, he had principal responsibility for the files on north-south security arrangements and on the southern Sudanese states subject to continuing armed conflict or special administrative status (Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei).

A 2010 report by the researchers, *Southern Sudan at Odds with Itself*, was especially influential. The UN Mission provided copies to each new ambassador appointed to South Sudan. Among its many traceable impacts, the report was credited as having influenced the South Sudan Development Plan, which referenced its findings on the factors driving conflict in the region. Aid agencies in South Sudan also credited the report with shifting peace and development efforts away from convening peace conferences towards strengthening political and administrative structures.

European governments, international agencies, armed forces and aid agencies all requested policy briefings, and the value of LSE's Justice and Security Research Programme was recognised by grants and commissions from the World Bank, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the Asia Foundation, in addition to the UK Department for International Development.

Tim Allen is Professor in Development Anthropology and Head of the Department of International Development at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He has carried out long-term field research in several African counties, mostly in East Africa. His publications include the bestselling

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textbook, *Poverty and Development* (Oxford University Press 2000), as well as books and articles on ethnic conflict in Europe, media coverage of wars, links between culture and development issues, mass forced displacement, and global health issues. His latest books have been *Trial Justice: The International Criminal Court and the Lord's Resistance Army* (2006), and *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality* (2010). In recent years his research has focused on justice and accountability in African war zones, and social aspects of Neglected Tropical Disease control.

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Alex de Waal is Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation and a Research Professor at The Fletcher School at Tufts University. Considered one of the foremost experts on Sudan and the Horn of Africa, his scholarship and practice has also probed humanitarian crisis and response, human rights, HIV/AIDS and governance in Africa, and conflict and peacebuilding. He worked for several Africa-focused human rights organizations, focusing on the Horn of Africa, and especially on avenues to peaceful resolution of the second Sudanese Civil War. He also researched the intersection of HIV/AIDS, poverty and governance, and initiated the Commission on HIV/AIDS and Governance in Africa. De Waal was a fellow at the Global Equity Initiative at Harvard (2004-2006), and Program Director at the Social Science Research Council. He was a member of the African Union mediation team for Darfur (2005-2006) and senior adviser to the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan (2009-2012). He was on the list of Foreign Policy's 100 most influential public intellectuals in 2008 and Atlantic Monthly's 27 "brave thinkers" in 2009.

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Mareike Schomerus served as Research Consortium Director for the LSE Justice and Security Research Programme in the Department of International Development until 2015, at which time she left to join the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) as a Research Fellow in Politics and Governance. She has worked on the resolution of violent conflict, civilian-military relations, use of information technology, media and evidence in situations of conflict and political contestation, provisions of civilian security and articulations of justice and security by actors in situations of violent conflict. She has consulted for a vast range of organisations in research, policy and practice and has worked in Africa and Asia.

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LSE gratefully acknowledges the following for support of this research:

Asia Foundation
Department for International Development (DfID)
Heinrich Böll Foundation
World Bank

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