CENTRE FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITY AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

LSE Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa

CPAID Centre for Public Authority and International Development

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Foreword

Academic writing on post-colonial societies has often implicitly compared reality and ideals. Researchers would compare the reality of what they find to their expectations of ideal theoretical situations and dreamy assumptions based on states in rich countries. Studies of weak states, for example, have often implicitly compared the disorder they find to the rational ideals of governance, accountability, and the rule of law found in theory, as an index of proper states' accomplishments. However, thorough empirical studies of governance in countries like, say, Denmark, routinely reveal patterns and rationalities that would not be completely alien to a scholar from Indonesia. This is not to say that the world is the same everywhere. It is simply to insist that we must investigate it properly.

It is not a plea for simple empiricism. It is rather a suggestion to think of theory and data in a particular way. Theory can roughly be divided into two. First, we have theory as an explanatory framework, a set of interrelated substantive statements about the social world. This obvious type of theory can be subjected to empirical investigation, be confirmed or falsified by evidence or at least held up against empirical findings. The second, subtler type of theoretical construct is a set of conceptual tools which, rather than telling us anything substantive about the social world, suggests ways of approaching it. The value of this second type of theory must be assessed in terms of its heuristic utility, that is, what questions are asked and how they interrogate the empirical phenomena. Theory and concepts should open up the empirics for us, not predetermine how to interpret them. This is where public authority as approach comes in.

Public authority is an inquisitive concept. It can be understood as any institution that exercises governance functions and successfully claims legitimacy, whether or not it has a formal relationship with the state. In situations of legal and institutional pluralism, it makes sense to look not only at individual institutions or single laws, but rather at the social field that produces the rules, codes, and norms about an issue. Investigating such fields, we can ask who governs and how? While statutory institutions and law are, no doubt, almost always relevant, a motley crew of organisations, institutions, groups, and gangs, powerful individuals, transient corporations, and repurposed agencies of different stripes, usually also inhabit such fields.

The researchers involved in the Centre for Public Authority and International Development (CPAID) have taken the concept of public authority as a heuristic cue rather than an established protocol for the investigation of governance with the desire to be surprised. The Centre's high-quality scholarship, its volume and variation, does not come about by the brilliance of individual researchers alone. The creation of an intellectual community has been crucial for probing, investigating, and discussing findings and ways of framing them. As much as this has been a collective effort, it is unlikely to have happened without the organisational nous of Tim Allen. A consummate scholar with significant work on Uganda, Tim was an academic entrepreneur with a clairvoyant talent for what could be built and who should be part of it to make it happen.

Over the years, CPAID has become not only a vibrant venue for ideas, discoveries and pattern identification among established researchers. It has also become a scholarly fairground for a new generation of people. They may have felt isolated in their disciplinary home department but found with Tim and CPAID an intellectual haven where hardened doctrines of their disciplines matter less than their spirited curiosity.

Christian Lund
University of Copenhagen

In memory of Professor Tim Allen

Tim was the inaugural director of the Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa (FLIA) and a Professor in Development Anthropology in the Department of International Development at LSE. A pioneer in his field, he conducted extensive ethnographic research across East Africa and published and taught on tropical diseases, epidemics, transitional justice, humanitarianism, refugees, witchcraft, and public authority.

Tim was a Principal Investigator of the Justice and Security Research Programme and the Centre for Public Authority and International Development (CPAID). These trailblazing global research consortia explored often hidden governance dynamics in overlooked places, challenged received wisdom, and shaped policy.

Tim worked closely with his wife, Professor Melissa Parker, and their influential work on neglected tropical diseases, epidemics, and pandemics interrogated received doctrine about how diseases are understood and controlled across Africa.

As a PhD supervisor, he was always on hand for students with words of advice when things seemed too much or fieldwork hit a brick wall. He took pride in the wide range of topics and students he successfully guided to completion. Tim's openness to different ways of seeing the world was inspiring for many and proved invaluable when building multidisciplinary teams able to produce research at the highest levels.

When in his company, he always made you feel he had time for you. Tim was particularly supportive of researchers with young families, and in this, he led by example. He and Melissa took their children to northern Uganda on fieldwork trips, and his infectious enthusiasm for adventure and his total commitment to family life meant that he always believed the two could be combined. This was transformative for many colleagues, particularly women, who might otherwise have felt that starting a family would mean the end of long-term fieldwork.

He was well-known and much loved in northern Uganda, where he and Melissa had worked for decades. Tim never tired of fieldwork and always prioritised it and the people he was working with. In his work, this is where he was happiest and most energised.

Tim was a polymath who wore his knowledge lightly. He had a professorial understanding of anthropology, development, and political economy. But he would regularly dazzle colleagues with his encyclopaedic knowledge of music from opera to Korean pop. He was a talented painter, loved art, and was a serial marathon runner who raised money for the Anthony Nolan leukaemia charity, which helped him through his first battle with cancer.

He taught everyone at the Institute and in CPAID to take risks, to think big, to always carry a dose of scepticism, to “speak truth to power” and to do it all with care and joy.

His legacy will be the example he left: to be bold, brave, and warm; to nurture others, to insist that nothing is impossible, and to do it all with a clear vision and a deep joyfulness of spirit. And if anyone gives us a hard time for doing so, we should tell them to “eat dirt, dingbat.”

He leaves behind his beloved wife Melissa, his three adored children and two grandchildren, his FLIA family, and the hundreds of students, researchers, and academics with whom he worked.

1. Why Public Authority

In many places, the state is not the primary actor influencing people's daily lives. Village chiefs settle disputes. Religious leaders mobilise communities. Armed groups control territory and tax populations. Customary authorities dispense justice and govern family life. Esoteric societies enforce social norms and cultural traditions. And aid agencies deliver essential services that governments cannot or will not provide. Operating alongside, beneath, and sometimes in opposition to formal state institutions, these non-state actors exercise what researchers at the Centre for Public Authority and International Development (CPAID) call ‘public authority.’

The concept emerged from the observation that conventional ways of understanding governance in much of the world were not working. For decades, international development policy had been built on assumptions derived from the historical experiences of states in Europe and North America. Good governance meant building state capacity. For fragile states and conflict-affected regions, this meant political stabilisation, liberalising markets, capacity building for the civil service, and institution-building modelled on liberal democratic norms. Yet, time after time, intervention after intervention, these approaches repeatedly failed. Development interventions stumbled. Peace agreements collapsed. State-building projects stalled or produced unintended consequences.

The problem, CPAID researchers contended, was not simply poor implementation; it was a fundamental misunderstanding of how authority actually functions in these spaces. Policymakers and many academics were, in the phrase of the social scientist James Scott, ‘seeing like a state’, viewing much of the world through the lens of what formal governance should look like rather than understanding how people are actually governed. CPAID offered a different starting point. Rather than assuming the state as the natural or inevitable order-making actor, researchers asked: who actually exercises authority in particular places? How do they claim legitimacy? What public goods do they provide, and to whom? How do populations experience, navigate, and sometimes resist these different sources of power? The answers, drawn from years of ethnographic fieldwork in overlooked places and on challenging issues, revealed a far more complex picture than conventional frameworks allowed.

Nevertheless, the public authority lens did not emerge in isolation. It was built on a long tradition of anthropological research studying chiefs, ritual specialists, lineage systems, and the persistence of customary institutions in colonial and post-colonial Africa against the backdrop of state expansion. Furthermore, it drew intellectual sustenance from legal pluralism, particularly the work of Sally Falk Moore, whose research on 'semi-autonomous social fields' showed how actors generate their own rules, compliance mechanisms, and institutions that can be as binding as state law.

By the 2000s, a substantial body of scholarship had begun to coalesce around these themes. Researchers described 'governance without government' in situations of protracted crisis, explored how 'mediated states' functioned through networks of non-state actors, and documented the 'practical norms' that shaped real governance in Africa. Among them, Christian Lund's influential 2006 theorisation argued that public authority should be understood as encompassing any institution that exercises governance functions and successfully claims legitimacy - whether or not it has any formal relationship to the state.

Researcher Spotlight – Grace Akello

Grace is a medical anthropologist at Gulu University in Northern Uganda. Her research examines the interplay between culture, health, and illness. It encompasses health policy, humanitarianism, pandemic preparedness, and how people living through complex emergencies manage everyday health complaints. She joined CPAID in 2018 as a Visiting Professor and a Ruth Glass Research Fellow.

Her earlier work explored how survivors of armed violence in northern Uganda lived alongside amnestied Lord's Resistance Army perpetrators, documenting the subtle acts of resistance through which survivors made former perpetrators' lives difficult. Using a public authority lens, she examined how power shapes everyday life and how those subject to it find ways to push back.

Grace's largest CPAID project focused on public authority and pandemic preparedness. It employed ethnographic methods to assess how local, national, and international health actors respond to emergencies. The research revealed how standardised approaches such as contact tracing, case management, surveillance and risk communication were applied across diverse contexts. Her fieldwork showed that communities rarely meaningfully engaged with the colourful posters and radio announcements that dominated well-funded risk communication efforts. Her work distinguished between position-based power, which can only enforce and coerce, and genuine authority that communities recognise and willingly follow. The insight echoed CPAID's broader finding that understanding how authority actually functions - rather than assuming formal hierarchies will be obeyed - is essential for effective interventions.

Grace's research transformed her teaching practice. As a medical trainer, she recognised how health professionals are taught to respect hierarchies, particularly WHO protocols. This sometimes creates disconnects between standardised approaches and local needs. She began encouraging students to critically reflect on intervention gaps and question whether global frameworks suit resource-poor settings.

Looking forward, Grace intends to continue exploring pandemic preparedness while centering locally conceived initiatives over standardised global frameworks. Her overarching question remains whether African states can foreground their own epistemologies and enable communities at risk to become empowered actors in managing the health emergencies that affect them.

From Research Programme to Research Centre

Established in 2017, CPAID built directly on these ideas. Under the direction of Professor Tim Allen, it brought together international researchers working across Africa, Europe, and the Middle East to explore the intersection between actually existing governance practices and pressing global issues. Many were already engaged with the idea of public authority and using its related concepts. The majority also had experience of adopting ethnographic methods to view power and politics from the perspective of people living in challenging places. CPAID provided an institutional home for them to share ideas and develop new avenues of investigation.

CPAID's founding vision was both analytical and practical. Analytically, it sought to understand the full range of actors claiming or being allocated public authority through appeals to social norms, the provision of public goods, and sometimes coercion and violence. This included those considered part of the state; village-level bureaucrats, local administrators and those seemingly removed from or standing in opposition to it: customary leaders, civil society organisations, religious authorities, and armed groups.

Practically, the Centre aimed to generate insights that could inform more effective policy. If conventional state-building approaches kept failing, understanding how authority actually operated might reveal why and point towards more developmental alternatives. This meant focusing research on who benefits and who is excluded from different actors' claims to authority, how such claims are received by rivals and by the populations they seek to govern. It also meant exploring what happens when different forms of public authority compete, cooperate, or collide.

CPAID researchers favoured approaches that allowed them to understand governance from the grassroots. Extended ethnographic fieldwork - often spanning years rather than months - enabled researchers to build the relationships and contextual knowledge necessary to grasp how authority actually functioned in particular places. This meant living in communities, learning languages, attending forums where authority is exercised, and observing the everyday negotiations through which different actors claimed and contested power. Researchers combined participant observation with in-depth interviews, oral histories, and archival research to trace how contemporary arrangements had emerged from longer historical processes.

To do this, CPAID emphasised and was designed around collaborations with African researchers who brought intimate knowledge of their own societies. This meant forging genuine intellectual partnerships in which African perspectives shaped research questions, methods, and interpretations from the outset. And it led the centre to foster and embed partnerships with a diversity of thinkers, civil society organisations and policymakers in its research projects from the beginning.

Researcher Spotlight – Abraham Diing Akoi

Abraham is a South Sudanese researcher and alumnus of LSE, where he studied on a Programme for African Leadership scholarship supported by FLIA. After returning to South Sudan, he joined the team when CPAID established projects in his home country. For Abraham, CPAID offered a way of thinking about authority that resonated with his own experience, one that recognises how communities in protracted conflict environments legitimise authority through the everyday provision of protection and public goods.

Abraham's primary work with CPAID's Safety of Strangers project took him to the counties of Bor and Ler in South Sudan to examine how communities develop strategies to protect themselves during protracted violence. His approach was deeply ethnographic: he was embedded within a community and combined sustained observation with semi-structured interviews with chiefs, youth, elders, and women. This immersion yielded insights that more distant approaches would have missed, particularly about the micropolitics through which different actors, from local chiefs to NGO workers, build or lose standing in the eyes of those they claim to serve.

Drawing on childhood memories of humanitarian organisations providing malaria treatment in his community, Abraham came to see why people so often accord greater legitimacy to local chiefs and aid workers than to distant state officials: these are the actors who offer immediate protection, warn of impending dangers, and remain present during crises. A particularly valuable outcome was the documentation of sophisticated local protection mechanisms, including vernacular terms for safeguarding that have no equivalent in state legislation, and community practices for incorporating strangers displaced by conflict; knowledge that enriched the wider project's findings.

Through CPAID, Abraham developed substantial research and writing capabilities, gaining a firmer grasp of academic literature and its relationship to effective research communication. Looking ahead, he plans to remain in academia, turning his attention to the intersection of climate change, famine, and conflict in South Sudan.

Early Research: Conflict, Displacement, and Epidemics

CPAID's initial focus reflected its researchers' deep expertise and networks within conflict-affected regions. Projects explored the dynamics of displacement and return in Uganda and South Sudan, the operations of armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo, vigilantism and justice in northern Uganda, and the complex relationships between refugees, host communities, and the multiple authorities governing their lives. This early work generated important findings that challenged prevailing assumptions.

Tim Allen's research on northern Uganda revealed how local politicians, government officials, police, and spiritual leaders created constituencies through ‘moral populism’; by stoking panics about alleged witches and using elections to identify scapegoats. In South Sudan, Sharon Hutchinson and Naomi Pendle worked with local researchers to document how prophets and customary authorities offered alternative centres of governance, pushing back against the simplified, secularised forms of authority promoted by state elites and international actors. Work by Koen Vlassenroot, Judith Verweijen, and their colleagues in eastern DRC showed how populations navigated overlapping and competing authorities to access basic services, often relying more on informal networks than on formal entitlements.

Holly Porter's long-term ethnographic research in northern Uganda opened another dimension: the relationship between public authority and intimate life. Her work explored how different forms of authority - from the state and international organisations to customary leaders and family elders - shaped gender relations, sexual norms, and experiences of violence in the aftermath of the Lord's Resistance Army. Porter showed that what might appear to be purely private matters were in fact deeply structured by public authorities, and that maintaining ‘social harmony’ in communities recovering from war often required navigating multiple, sometimes competing, normative frameworks. This insight - that public authority extends into the most intimate aspects of life - became central to CPAID's analytical approach

Much of this research was backgrounded by the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. Declared by the UN Security Council as a threat to international peace and security, it prompted highly militarised approaches to containment. Governments deployed armies to control access to treatment centres, impose roadblocks, and enforce quarantines. Yet, Tim Allen and Melissa Parker, working with colleagues including Tommy Hansen, Ahmed Vandi, and Lawrence Sao Babawo in Sierra Leone, found that the realities on the ground were remarkably diverse. In some locations, coercive militaries dominated. In others, chiefs found their authority greatly enhanced. In still others, forms of public authority linked to secret societies and logics of 'public mutuality' enabled people to act in ways that subverted the constraints imposed upon them - using public health messages to care for sick relatives in secret places while preventing infection, and secretly burying the dead at night in ways considered morally appropriate.

These findings pointed toward something important: in moments of crisis, when normal governance arrangements are disrupted, multiple forms of public authority come into sharp relief. Understanding them is not merely an academic exercise. It can mean the difference between interventions that work with local realities and those that founder against them.

Social Harmony, Public Authority and Gender-Based Violence in Northern Uganda

A central concern of CPAID's work in northern Uganda has been understanding what happens to people after war when the institutions meant to protect them fall short. Research by Tim Allen, Grace Akello, Holly Porter and their collaborators explored these questions through sustained engagement with communities affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), producing findings with implications beyond the region.

A key thread is the ways in which public authority is exercised and legitimated at the local level, often through informal and contested channels rather than through the state. Allen and colleagues' conducted long-term follow-ups with children who returned from the LRA. Using a random sample drawn from surviving case files they traced over 230 individuals more than a decade after their return. Their findings challenged optimistic assessments of reintegration. The majority of returnees were found to be living among relatives who fear, stigmatise, and sometimes violently reject them. Paradoxically, those who held senior positions in the LRA and were not resettled with families were found to have often fared better by being able to draw on urban support networks and NGO connections.

Gender cuts across every dimension of these findings. Women who returned with children fathered by LRA commanders face multiple rejections: from their own families, from their partners' relatives, and from communities that view them and their children as carriers of ‘spiritual pollution’. Porter's book *After Rape: Violence, Justice, and Social Harmony in Uganda* built on this work. Through years of immersive ethnographic fieldwork, Porter showed that responses to sexual violence - whether perpetrated during the conflict or in peacetime - are shaped less by formal justice mechanisms than by a communal drive to restore social equilibrium. The book demonstrates two core realities of Acholi life: a profound value placed on social harmony, and a deep distrust of higher authorities to dispense justice.

Together, these studies make the case that reintegration after conflict is not a technical process that ends when someone is returned to their family. It is an ongoing negotiation over who belongs, who holds authority, and whose suffering counts.

Families and Ebola Responses in Sierra Leone

Beginning in 2014, an Ebola epidemic swept through Sierra Leone, a country where families had long served as the primary units of governance, care, and social order. Dr Jonah Lipton, an anthropologist with CPAID, was already living and conducting fieldwork in Congo Town, a busy neighbourhood of Freetown, when the outbreak began. That proximity, and his sustained relationships with residents before, during, and after the crisis, gave him an unusually grounded view of what the emergency meant for ordinary people.

Lipton's research examined family networks as a form of public authority in their own right. In Sierra Leone, families are not simply private domestic units; they organise resources, mediate disputes, and sustain social life in ways that formal state structures often cannot. The Ebola crisis did not suspend these functions; it threw them into sharp relief. Nowhere was this more visible than in the regulation of burials. Under emergency rules, all bodies, regardless of cause of death, had to be collected and interred by officials, overriding customary practices of washing, dressing, and accompanying the dead that carry deep religious and social meaning.

Lipton's research documented how people in Freetown understood this conflict through a local vocabulary of 'black' and 'white'; terms that encoded cultural differences, and Sierra Leone's long history of entanglement with Atlantic systems of trade, slavery, and colonial rule. The 'white' system of the burial teams demanded uniform, efficient, bureaucratic procedure; the 'black' system demanded recognition of status, relationship, and ritual obligation. In practice, the boundaries between the two were constantly negotiated, bent, and crossed by families seeking dignified burials through unofficial channels, by young men on burial teams who moderated official protocol where they could, and by city council representatives who brokered what were technically illegal but socially recognised alternatives.

This work directly informed Lipton's 2024 book, *In the Time of Ebola: Youth, Family, and Emergency in Sierra Leone*. Expanding on his earlier analysis, it followed young men as they navigated the epidemic's contradictory demands. Lipton shows how Ebola was understood by those living through it not simply as a disease, but as a particular moment in time, layered over longer-running struggles with inequality, precarity, and the limits of state support. The research argues that framing such moments purely as ruptures from ordinary life can lead outside actors to overlook the family-based and community forms of governance that remain central to how Sierra Leoneans live.

The Logics of Public Authority

As research accumulated, CPAID scholars developed conceptual tools to explain how public authority is claimed, accrued, and exercised. They identified several 'logics' that help illuminate how different actors appeal to social norms and provide public goods to gain legitimacy.

'Moral populism' described how leaders secure backing by creating an 'other' to blame for social ills, a dynamic that could be relatively benign or linked to violence. 'Political marketplace,' developed by Alex de Waal, captured how elites in some contexts avoid destabilising violence by buying off rivals and incorporating them into coalitions, turning to periodic displays of force to signal their value when negotiations fail. 'Social harmony' referred to efforts by populations to maintain neighbourly relations, often requiring adherence to gendered norms and age hierarchies. 'Public mutuality' - treating others as you would wish to be treated - proved more common than anticipated, with people finding ways to share and help even in extreme circumstances. Finally, 'intimate governance' explored how public authority enters private spaces and becomes bound up with family relationships.

These logics were not meant to be exhaustive or mutually exclusive. Multiple logics were found to typically operate simultaneously in any given place. Their value lay in enabling comparisons across contexts and revealing patterns that might otherwise remain hidden. Importantly, CPAID researchers never claimed these dynamics were unique to Africa. Similar processes, they argued, shape governance elsewhere. As the next section shows, this includes the Global North.

Researcher Spotlight – Anna MacDonald

Anna is an Associate Professor at the University of East Anglia (UEA). Her connection to CPAID stretches back to its project's roots. In 2011, as a PhD student at King's College London researching transitional justice in Uganda, she contacted Tim Allen and was immediately drawn into CPAID's predecessor programme. That early immersion in questions about how people in conflict-affected environments seek justice, security, and social order shaped the trajectory of her research.

Anna's primary CPAID work examined the politics of transitional justice in northern Uganda following the two-decade war between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army. Her fieldwork, spanning nearly fifteen years, incorporates the Presidential State House in Kampala and local village meetings in the Acholi region. Working with SJ Cooper-Knock and Julian Hopwood at Gulu Magistrates' Court, she explored why, in an area where corruption is widely described as the system itself and backlogs stretch for years, citizens continue to turn to the lower state courts in large numbers to solve disputes. Their research identified three distinct modes of justification - normative, pragmatic, and tactical - showing that engagement with the courts is shaped as much by structural position and the dynamics of particular disputes as by any faith in institutions. The findings echo CPAID's core insight that public authority often rests not on official mandate alone but on negotiation, perception, and the practical realities of daily life.

Anna's forthcoming book, *The Justice Trap*, captures a paradox that resonates across CPAID's work: transitional justice in Uganda 'must be done' because it has become a standardised international response to atrocity, yet 'cannot be done' because genuine implementation would threaten the authoritarian regime's survival. In tracing this dilemma, MacDonald explores the relationship between development aid, law, and authoritarianism — connecting to CPAID's wider findings about how international interventions are reshaped by existing structures of local power.
Anna credits Tim Allen's mentorship as pivotal to her development as an independent scholar, helping her progress from PhD student to LSE Research Fellow before securing her permanent position at UEA. Anna's current work examines everyday justice in the Acholi region and she is conducting a pilot project with CPAID colleague Tom Kirk in Great Yarmouth, applying the public authority lens to voting patterns, social struggle, and political disengagement in the UK.

2. Public Authority Expanded

By 2021, CPAID had established public authority as a productive lens for understanding governance in conflict-affected regions of Africa. The Centre's first phase of research had demonstrated that conventional state-centric frameworks obscured more than they revealed, and that ethnographic attention to how authority actually functions could generate insights with real implications for policy and practice. The question then became whether these findings could travel, both deeper into new domains of African governance and outward to contexts beyond the continent.

The answer came through a combination of planned expansion and unforeseen circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic, arriving midway through CPAID's initial funding period, provided an unexpected opportunity to apply the public authority lens in real time across multiple settings. Researchers documented how governments militarised their pandemic responses, how communities navigated competing sources of guidance and coercion, and how trust - or its absence - shaped whether public health measures succeeded or failed. This work built directly on CPAID's earlier Ebola research, but extended it comparatively across Uganda, South Sudan, and into Europe. At the same time, CPAID researchers deepened their engagement with humanitarian settings, examining how development programmes and the ‘safety of strangers’ are governed in protracted crises where formal protection systems are weak or absent.

New work also explored African public policy and administration, moving beyond conflict to examine how public authority operates in more routine domains: courts, bureaucracies, land governance, ministries and service delivery. And in a deliberate test of the framework's broader applicability, projects explored how the logics of public authority illuminated the experiences of Roma communities in the United Kingdom, Italy, and Poland, and of Somali diaspora navigating housing systems in Birmingham. Rather than treating Africa as exceptional, this comparative turn demonstrated that similar dynamics shape governance wherever states are absent, distrusted, or inadequate to people's needs.

Pandemic as Lens

The arrival of COVID-19 midway through CPAID's second phase offered an unexpected opportunity to test the public authority framework in real time. Because CPAID researchers had spent years embedded in specific communities across Uganda, South Sudan, and the DRC, they were unusually well placed to observe not just what governments did in response to the pandemic, but how those responses were received, filtered, and reshaped by the existing structures of authority through which people actually lived their lives.

The findings that emerged cut against the grain of dominant global narratives. In Uganda, the government's response was widely praised by international observers for its speed and discipline. President Museveni framed the virus as an external threat and positioned the state as the population's protector; a textbook deployment of what CPAID researchers had identified as moral populism. Soldiers and local security networks enforced lockdowns and vaccination programmes coercively, sidelining customary and religious authorities. Yet, research by Melissa Parker and colleagues showed that the reality on the ground was considerably more complex. Communities developed their own quiet responses: purchasing false vaccination certificates, avoiding designated vaccination points, and finding ways to negotiate or subvert enforcement pressures. These were not simply acts of resistance; they were expressions of public mutuality - a familiar logic from CPAID's Ebola research in Sierra Leone - through which people find ways to care for one another even when official frameworks demand otherwise.

The epidemiological evidence told its own story. Analysis by Tessa Laing and colleagues showed that Uganda's major infection waves rose and fell regardless of government-imposed restrictions, with no clear correlation between policy and the epidemic's trajectory. Outbreaks appeared to resolve in patterns that mirrored neighbouring countries operating under very different regimes. This challenged the assumption that strict enforcement had driven Uganda's relatively low mortality figures, and pointed to the dangers of drawing lessons from selective indicators; a finding with implications well beyond the immediate crisis.

In South Sudan and the DRC, researchers documented how the pandemic revealed the limits of the states' reach and the resilience of other forms of authority. In South Sudan, where the crisis arrived amid a governance vacuum, chiefs travelled between dispersed communities to calm fears, interpret restrictions, and prevent food insecurity from spilling into violence. Their authority rested not on coercion but on trust accumulated over decades of conflict - precisely the kind of invisible relationship-based legitimacy that CPAID's earlier work had shown to be more durable than formal institutions. In the DRC, memories of the militarised Ebola response shaped how communities received official guidance, with religious leaders and customary authorities drawing on the logic of social harmony to mediate between state directives and local concerns. Where coercive enforcement overreached, forms of local self-organisation asserted themselves in its place.

However, not all of CPAID's pandemic findings pointed in the same direction. Research by Gedion Onyango and Japheth Ondiek on South Africa and Kenya documented how the crisis catalysed genuine institutional innovation: both governments accelerated the integration of digital health infrastructure, and forged new partnerships with private firms and research institutions. In these cases, the pandemic strengthened rather than exposed state capacity, reshaping relationships between public agencies and civic actors in ways that reconfigured how authority was exercised and for whom.

Taken together, these contrasting cases illustrated something central to CPAID's analytical approach: that there is no single story of how authority responds to crises. The pandemic, like the conflicts and epidemics that had preceded it, revealed the full range of logics through which public authority is claimed, contested, and sustained, and it underlined why understanding that range matters for anyone seeking to govern effectively in times of emergency.

The Safety of Strangers Project

CPAID's Safety of Strangers project investigated how humanitarian protection actually works in practice, examining how civilians experience and negotiate their own safety during armed conflict. Despite high-level global commitments and multi-billion-dollar humanitarian spending, recent wars have brutally shown that civilians are not protected. The project challenged assumptions about who provides protection, and from what.

The research spanned multiple countries and diverse issues. Tom Kirk and colleagues' fieldwork examined what three major humanitarian organisations publicly claim to do in the name of protection across Syria, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Sophie Mylan's research explored how South Sudanese refugees in the Palabek settlement, Uganda, navigated containment policies during COVID-19, showing that self-protection sometimes required circumventing official borders when legitimacy waned and food insecurity took hold. Liz Storer's contribution examined how faith leaders' authority to protect has been negotiated across two different displacement crises in Arua, northwest Uganda. She questioned humanitarians' use of generalised toolkits for integrating faith leaders into protection efforts, warning that depoliticising their roles may overlook both their potential for social healing and the ways they can feed into exclusionary visions of nation-building.

The public authority lens helped to show that normative schemes for protecting strangers are always contested and negotiated. For example, research by Kirk, Pendle and Diing in Bor and Ler, South Sudan revealed how decades of militarisation have eroded traditional authorities' capacity to govern protection, leading to ongoing struggles to reinforce rules of conduct in war and shifting norms about who deserves safety. Articles in the resulting *Global Policy* special section drew together qualitative, ethnographic and ethnomusicological research across Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda, shedding light on how the international community might better keep civilians safe while recognising that protection has always been carefully negotiated in specific local contexts.

Researcher Spotlight – Melissa Parker

Melissa is a medical anthropologist at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine whose research has long focused on public health among politically and socially marginalised populations across West, Central, and East Africa. Her path to CPAID grew from a conviction that most public health research gets its priorities wrong: by treating technological advances - vaccines, medicines, surveillance systems - as the primary lever for sustained improvements in population health, it systematically underestimates the political and social dynamics that determine whether those advances reach people or pass them by. CPAID provided both the conceptual framework and the collaborative infrastructure to make that argument rigorously.

Two projects formed the core of her CPAID work. An MRC-funded study running from 2016 to 2019 brought ethnographic methods alongside health system specialists to examine how the Ebola outbreak had actually unfolded in rural Sierra Leone - producing findings published in *Medical Anthropology* and *The Lancet* that diverged sharply from official accounts. A subsequent Wellcome Trust Collaborative Award from 2019 to 2023 scaled this approach up, examining pandemic preparedness across global, national, rural, and peri-urban settings in Sierra Leone and Uganda. The arrival of COVID-19 at the project's outset turned it into a real-time analytical exercise, with fieldwork in borderland areas of northwest and western Uganda revealing how the framing of global health security shaped both state behaviour and community responses in ways that conventional preparedness frameworks were ill-equipped to see.

The longer-term impact of Melissa's CPAID work is perhaps most visible in the Social Science in Humanitarian Action Platform, a Wellcome Trust and FCDO-funded initiative she was central to building. Its regional hubs in Central and East Africa and West Africa - led in part by CPAID researchers - apply a public authority lens to outbreaks and crises and produce policy briefs that practitioners in the field actively seek out. In this sense the platform represents a durable institutional channel through which CPAID's analytical approach continues to shape practice well beyond any individual project.

Melissa's engagement with CPAID confirmed and deepened her view that the historical and socio-political dimensions of public health emergencies are not background context but the thing most in need of explanation. In 2026, that standing was recognised when she became Co-Director of LSHTM's Centre for Epidemic Preparedness and Responses. She is also a Co-Investigator on a new £12 million FCDO-funded multi-hazard research network examining how climate change, infectious disease, and politics intersect - a project she expects will draw directly on the public authority framework her CPAID collaboration helped sharpen.

Researcher Spotlight – Kasper Hoffmann

Kasper is an Associate Professor at Roskilde University whose research focuses on governance over natural resources and conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Kasper's primary CPAID research examined urban land governance in eastern DRC, bringing the public authority lens to bear on a field dominated by the formal-informal dichotomy. He found that distinction analytically unproductive: what mattered was not whether a claim to land was technically formal or informal, but who held the capacity to formalise, and on what terms.

Public authorities were shown to derive both revenue and political standing from their ability to render land claims legible and enforceable, while those unable to pay for that recognition saw their claims correspondingly devalued.

Central to the project was a period of sustained participant observation conducted by Congolese collaborator Alice Mugoli, embedded within the Land Administration to observe how access to titles was negotiated and how officials exercised discretion in the field. Kasper's wider research on eastern Congo has found a parallel audience in diplomatic circles: he participated in multi-stakeholder briefings for Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials and diplomats stationed across Africa, Washington, DC, and Beijing - engagement that intensified when Denmark held the chair of the UN Security Council.

CPAID's impact on Kasper's career has been, in his own assessment, “foundational”. It provided funding, collaborative networks, and the institutional infrastructure that has sustained both his research and the broader Congolese research capacity he has helped build over two decades. Currently, Kasper is developing an ERC Consolidated Grant application on the relationship between war economies and the fragmentation of public authority, drawing on comparative fieldwork in eastern DRC and Myanmar. The project asks how conflict-driven incentive structures generate fragmentation at the local level, drawing ordinary actors, as well as armed groups, into resource economies that reproduce and intensify violence.

Everyday Governance

Crises proved opportune moments for CPAID's research, but the public authority framework was never designed solely for emergencies. Its real analytical power lies in what it reveals about the ordinary: the courts and customary councils through which disputes are settled, the spiritual authorities whose pronouncements shape who belongs and who does not, the bureaucratic networks through which land is claimed and contested, and the local officials who navigate the competing demands of state, community, and self-interest in their daily work. CPAID researchers confirmed that public authority was a useful lens through which to explore enduring features of African political life.

Gedion Onyango's vast body of research on Kenya's public sector offers a striking illustration of how public authority operates in administrations. Exploring anti-corruption policy, police conduct, and inter-agency collaboration, it documents a governance landscape in which formal institutions exist but are systematically hollowed out by informal networks, patron-client relationships, and what he terms 'mafia-like bureaucratic cartels.' Procurement officers award contracts to companies with no production capacity. Land registrars subdivide and transfer plots belonging to others. Traffic police extract bribes at checkpoints every ten to twenty kilometres, with proceeds flowing upward through the command hierarchy. Anti-corruption bodies investigate selectively, if at all, while whistleblowers face threats, dismissal, and isolation.

What makes Gedion's work particularly valuable for CPAID's understanding of public authority is his attention to the social processes that sustain these arrangements. Corruption is not simply an individual moral failing but a learned practice transmitted through networks, reinforced by organizational culture, and rationalized through shared ideologies. He shows how citizens, meanwhile, simultaneously suffer from and participate in reproducing dysfunctional governance: motorists pay protection fees, contractors budget for kickbacks, and survey data reveals that half of Kenyan youth do not care what means one uses to make money as long as one avoids prison. The result is what Onyango describes as 'two-level organizational corruption'; corrupt organizations populated by individuals who have come to view their practices as permissible, even inevitable. This produces governance that is simultaneously present and absent, authoritative and predatory.

Land governance also emerged as a domain for understanding how public authority is legitimated and contested. Through sustained ethnographic fieldwork in Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Kenya, CPAID researchers explored how control over land allocation, dispute resolution, and transaction authorisation serves as a foundation for political authority.

Carolin Dieterle's comparative research employed extensive interviews with investors, government officials, community members, chiefs, and civil society actors to trace how international governance norms interact with local land tenure regimes. Her fieldwork in Sierra Leone examined large-scale land investments, revealing striking sub-national variation in how paramount chiefs exercise authority. In some places, chiefs functioned as near-absolute gatekeepers who signed away entire territories to foreign investors without consulting landowning families; in others, they served merely as mediators while families retained decision-making power. Her parallel research in Uganda demonstrated that international guidelines for 'responsible investment' could only gain traction where land rights were already legally recognised by the state.

Julian Hopwood's long-term engagement in Acholiland, Uganda, combining formal research with years of participant observation, revealed something more fundamental: what outsiders call 'land custom' is actually how Acholi families work. Land access derives from belonging to kinship groups whose boundaries are fluid, negotiated, and resistant to the fixed categories that policy frameworks require. His findings demonstrate that external actors - from colonial administrators to contemporary UN agencies - have consistently misrepresented African landholding through what Julian terms 'hermeneutical injustice': the imposition of European legal concepts and mistranslation of key Acholi terms in ways that render local populations voiceless in policy debates.

Complimentary work by Tessa Laing and Sara Weschler's on the Apaa land conflict in Acholiland illuminates how communities facing state-driven expropriations can navigate competing authorities by strategically engaging multiple sources of public authority. They include customary leaders and international human rights bodies, whom they form temporary alliances with to fight back in what they describe as a 'radicalism of rootedness' rather than a quest for autonomy.

Across this body of research, a consistent pattern emerged: the drive to make land relations 'legible' to states and international actors through titling and codification often undermines the very practices it claims to protect, while entrenching the authority of those who control the formalisation process. For populations navigating these dynamics, therefore, land governance is not a technical matter of secure tenure but an ongoing negotiation over belonging, authority, and whose claims count.

Rebecca Tapscott's research on Uganda shifted the focus by revealing how deeply informal authority permeates the state itself, and how governance arrangements that appear fragmented or chaotic from outside often reflect a deliberate institutional logic. Uganda's ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM), which seized power through guerrilla insurgency in 1986, built order by layering rebel-created village-level Resistance Councils, with sweeping but deliberately vague mandates, on top of existing authorities including chiefs, colonial-era police, and traditional leaders. The result is a system in which multiple actors with overlapping and sometimes contradictory jurisdictions operate in parallel, and in which it remains persistently unclear which authority will apply which rules, to whom, and with what consequences. At the local level, this manifests in what Rebecca terms a ‘security assemblage’: the police, an institution rooted in colonial practices of political repression rather than crime prevention, coexist with vigilantes informally tasked with enforcing community bylaws on matters ranging from livestock management to witchcraft.

Rebecca’s survey and ethnographic research show that these public authorities are filling gaps left by an absent state. The state benefits from this arrangement as it can outsource everyday governance without conferring formal authority, thereby retaining the ability to retroactively criminalise actors who overstep, and to redistribute responsibility and blame as political circumstances require. What emerges is a conception of public authority as fundamentally distributed, provisional, and historically contingent. Public authority is claimed and exercised not through clear institutional hierarchies but through fluid negotiations among a plurality of actors whose roles owe more to colonial legacies, wartime compromises, and ongoing political expediency than to any formal legal mandate.

Rose Pinnington's research on the Budget Strengthening Initiative (BSI) in Uganda added to this picture by showing how even foreign development actors can become woven into the fabric of state authority. Over nearly two decades, the BSI's advisers built relationships so deep that Ministry of Finance officials could not distinguish between what the programme was doing and what the government was doing. Rose reveals a polycentric political system in which the BSI occupied a dual position as both insider and outsider, deriving legitimacy from its technical credibility while remaining external enough to broker between government and donors. Yet this embeddedness also constrained it. When the NRM's 2016 election pledges cut against the equity-driven budget allocation formula the BSI had designed, the programme had no choice but to accommodate it. Rose's findings expose a fundamental tension in efforts to work 'with the grain' of prevailing political economies: becoming part of the state's own means of claiming authority entails being shaped by the very political logics one seeks to shift.

Meanwhile, Claire Elder's research on Somalia pushed these questions to their most extreme conclusion.Claire shows how lead firms that survived the collapse of the Barre regime constituted alternative forms of public authority to the state, disarming militias, opening ports, running courts, and providing security and services that no national government could deliver. Over time, they became kingmakers of domestic politics, financing political transitions and holding chokepoint sovereignty over the resources on which any would-be state depended. In the process, the very instrument of state-building - the logistics contract - continually empowered actors who destabilised centralised authority. The result was what Claire terms 'interactive disorder', a system in which the logistics economy financially engineered elite fragmentation, clan conflict, and endemic political violence. Claire's findings challenge any neat separation between state and non-state, formal and informal authority, revealing a landscape in which public authority is constituted through flows of contracts, debts, and protection arrangements.

Researcher Spotlight – Gedion Onyango

Gedion joined CPAID in 2021 while based at the University of Nairobi, initially as a Co-Investigator before becoming a Research Fellow at the Institute in 2023.

The concept of public authority aligned naturally with his existing scholarship on governance in Africa, where he had long explored the interplay between informal and formal structures through what he termed 'informal-formal synergy'.

Public authority helped sharpen the idea and provided a framework he could apply across his work on public policy, conflict resolution, and transitional justice.

Gedion's primary CPAID research investigated how public authority spaces shape legislative capacity in Kenya, a country that made concerted efforts to strengthen its parliament following the 2010 Constitution. He traced how evidence, norms, and innovations in legislative processes incorporated the interplay between formal and informal actors, with particular attention to the government's commitment to public participation. The findings captured the complexities of policy communication and documented how research organisations, NGOs, and activists have built collaborative frameworks with members of parliament to enhance legislative capacity and promote evidence-informed policymaking.

The work generated both academic and practical impact. The Hellenic Parliamentary Studies Center in Greece sought collaboration based on his findings, while policymakers privately consulted him for advice. Gedion also identified an important gap: despite improving evidence-based systems, parliamentary staff face capacity constraints that threaten continued progress, lacking adequate personnel for training even with complementary NGO efforts. These insights speak directly to CPAID's broader concern with how authority is built and sustained, showing that even where formal institutions are strengthened, their effectiveness depends on the people and networks that animate them.

Exposure to research management, policy engagement, and practitioner interaction whilst with CPAID - particularly through activities in Uganda and South Africa - encouraged Gedion to think carefully about how different audiences interpret findings. He began writing with impact in mind, producing work aimed at both academic and policy communities. In the future, Onyango plans to explore how artificial intelligence can be packaged for public policy and service delivery in Africa, and he is developing a manuscript on human rights in public administration.

Water Governance in Goma

Goma, in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo's North Kivu province, is one of the world's most instructive laboratories for studying public authority in action. Swollen from around 170,000 residents in 1993 to over 1.5 million by conflict-driven displacement, the city depends for its water supply on a fragmented patchwork of providers; - state parastatal, bicycle vendors, tank owners, NGOs, and private operators. CPAID's work in Goma examined what this actually means on the ground and asked two interconnected questions: how does a development programme navigate the public authority landscape of a fragile and conflict-affected city, and what does reliable water access actually mean?

The research operated at two levels. At the governance level, drawing on interviews with actors from Kinshasa to neighbourhood water committees, CPAID traced how the IMAGINE programme run by Mercy Corps repeatedly collided with the logics animating Goma's water sector. This included leisa punda ('feeding the horse'), the system of patronage payments without which services cannot flow, and the politique de glissement through which powerful actors use procedural delay to protect entrenched interests. A central finding was that INGOs like Mercy Corps are themselves best understood as public authorities. Indeed, IMAGINE provoked backlash from every level of the sector's existing authority structures, and ultimately had to compete with them for legitimacy to govern public goods.

At the household level, the team pioneered an experimental approach combining longitudinal financial diaries with social network mapping across 24 households in three Goma neighbourhoods, each with a different primary water provider.. This would have been impossible without the Congolese research team. Samuel Muhindo served as Research Manager, whilst Papy Muzuri navigated permissions from a range of public authorities, from Chefs d'avenue to security services. The others, working in Swahili, French, and local languages, built trust with households over months of visits, attending churches, funerals, and celebrations, enabling them to gradually uncover carefully guarded financial and social lives. This approach revealed dynamics that more conventional methods would have missed: including how households that had access to consistently priced tap stands were better able to engage in financial planning and social investments.

Researcher Spotlight – Eliza Ngutuku

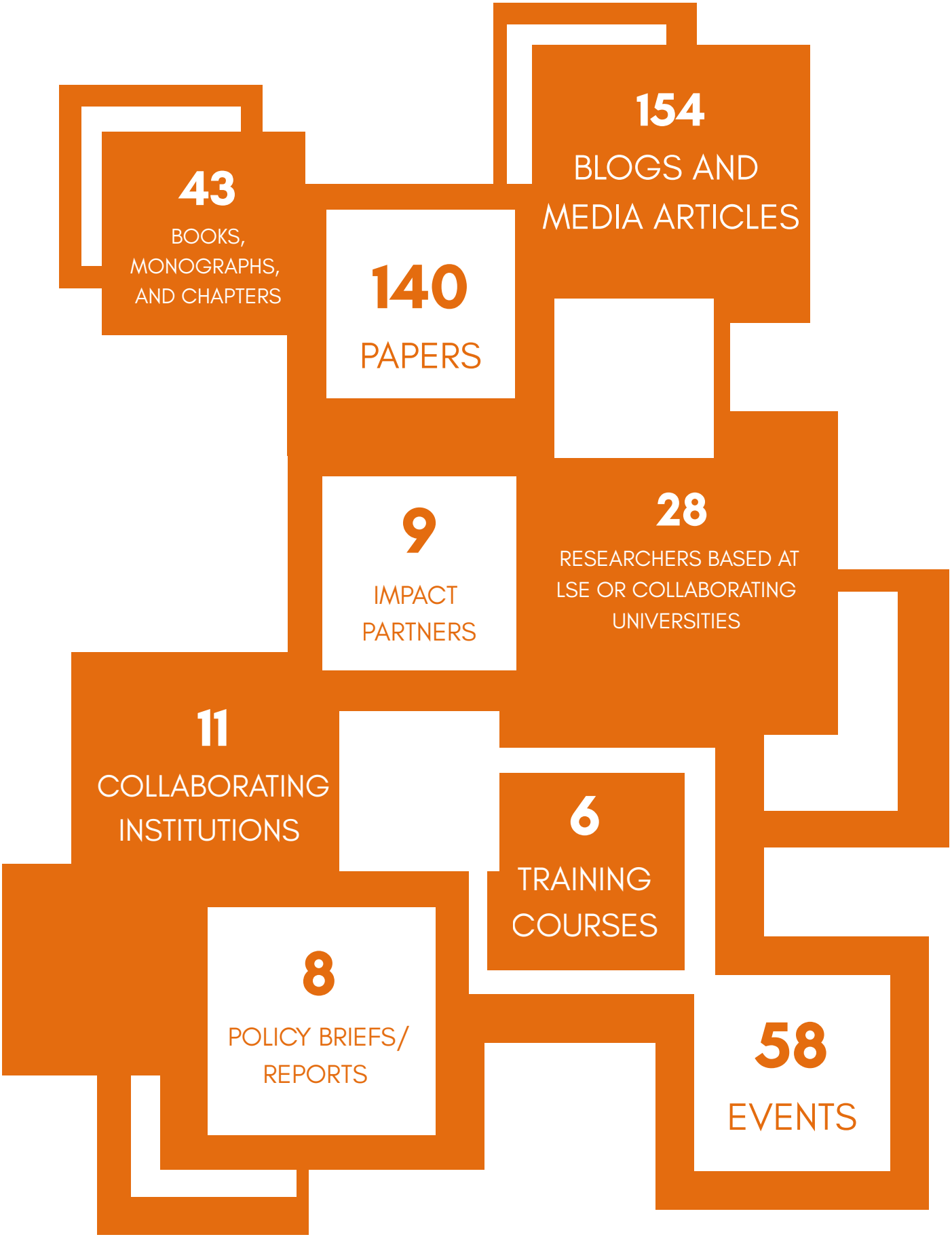
From 2020 to 2025 Eliza was a Research Fellow at CPAID. Her path to the Centre came through prior work on grassroots efforts to prevent violence against children in Kenya and Uganda and through community psychology research with health volunteers.

Eliza's most significant CPAID research examined grassroots actors working to prevent violence against children in Uganda and Kenya, exploring how they interact with NGOs and address sexual and gender-based violence. Central to her analysis was the concept of 'messy agency'; the ways actors disrupt, reinvent, and redirect power relations rather than operating neatly within formal frameworks. The findings revealed that grassroots actors deploy diverse strategies to build legitimacy with governments, NGOs, and communities simultaneously - drawing on community embeddedness and indigenous knowledge while also adopting police-like language and punitive activities, positioning themselves as both patrons and brokers. While these strategies can enlarge spaces for negotiation, Eliza showed they can also entrench inequitable relations.

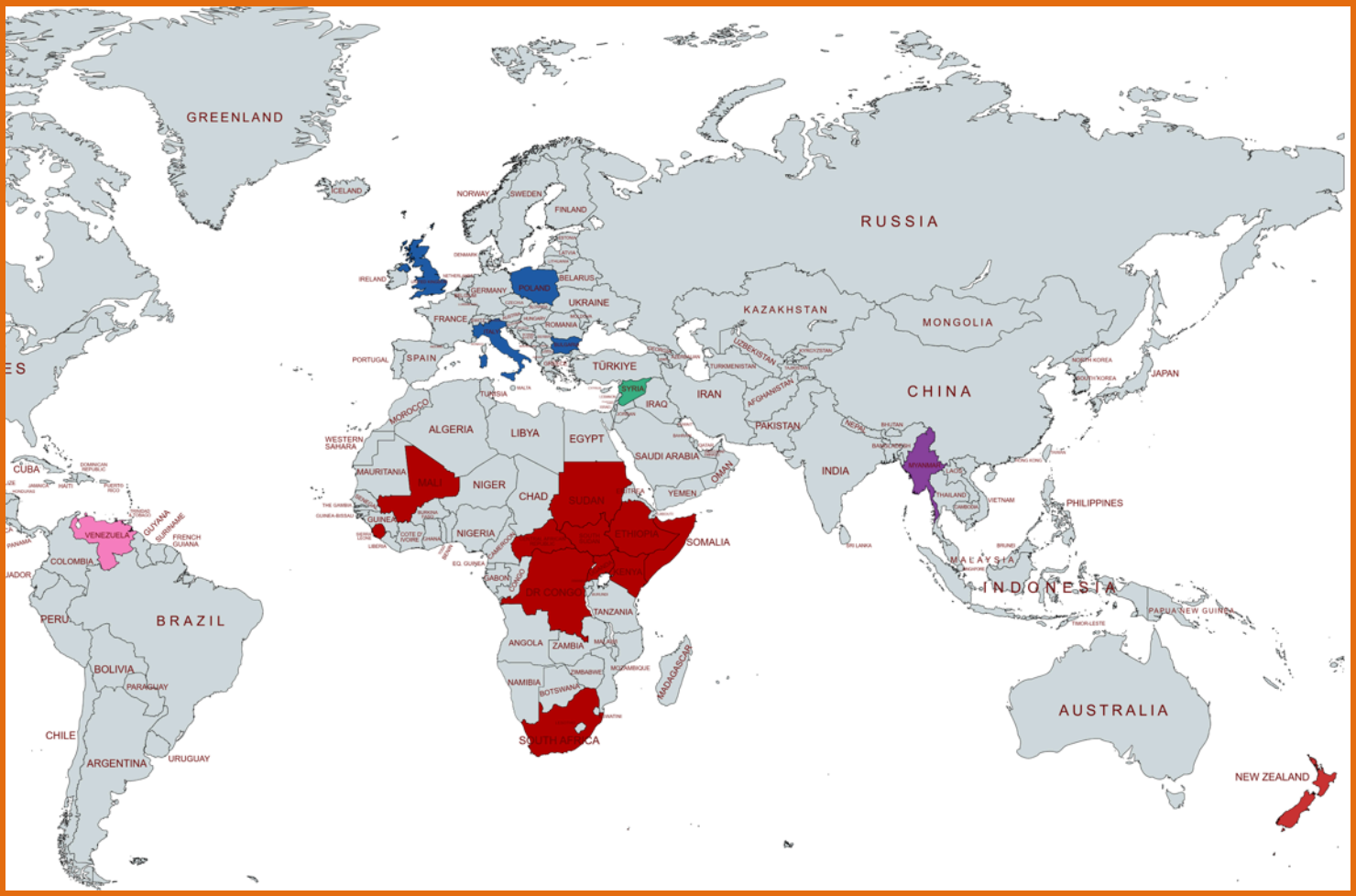
As a decolonial scholar, Eliza is committed to ensuring her research relationships were non-extractive and mutually beneficial, treating research assistants as co-investigators rather than hired hands. The results were striking: her research assistant Jackie became a co-publishing partner; Alfred pursued a PhD in India; Winnie began doctoral studies at Makerere University on a full scholarship; and others joined the United Nations or started degrees; and one interpreter, after ten years out of education, received a scholarship to study sexual health prevention.

Eliza now applies the public authority lens in her research and teaching on M.A in Education courses like Africa Studies and Education, Education and Migration, and Education and International Development at UCL. In research she is applying the concept in consultations during neighbourhood workshops in Kenya and Malawi, in an Accountability for Gender Equality in Education project. Recently appointed to the editorial board of Childhood, a leading journal of global childhood research, Eliza is pursuing an ambitious programme of future work: organising a conference on grassroots actors and care ethics, examining AI and technology as emerging forms of public authority, co-editing a volume on sexual and reproductive health contestations, and completing monographs on grassroots organising in child protection and on coming of age in colonial Kenya.

3. CPAID Outputs



CPAID Research Countries



- Uganda
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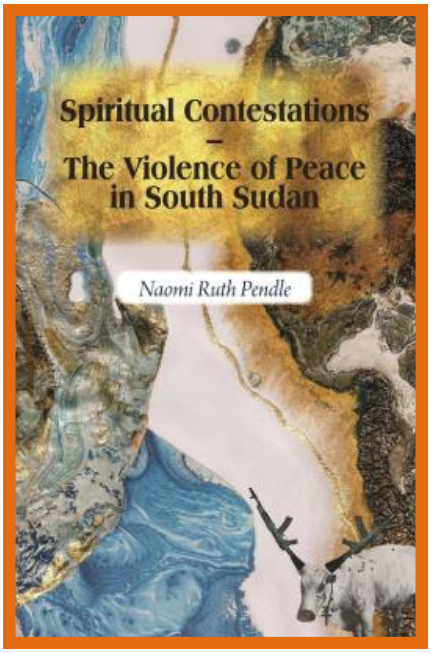
- Myanmar
- Syria


Spiritual Contestations
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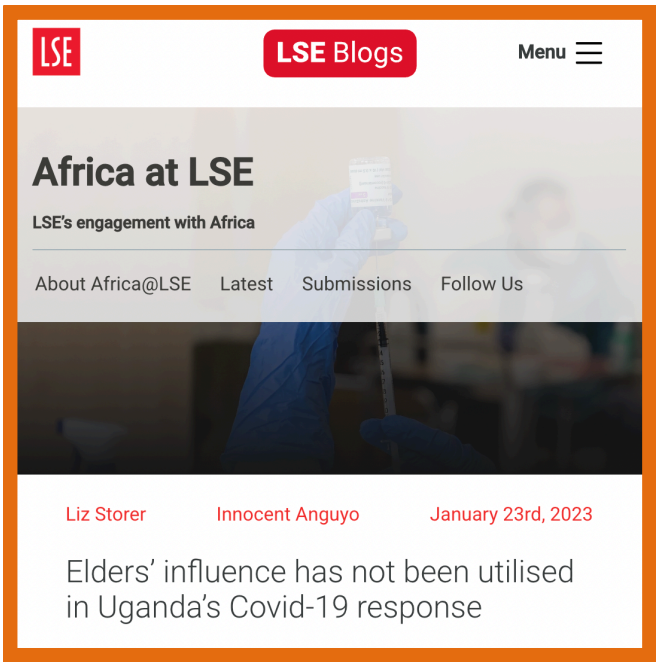
The Violence of Peace
in South Sudan
Naomi Ruth Pendle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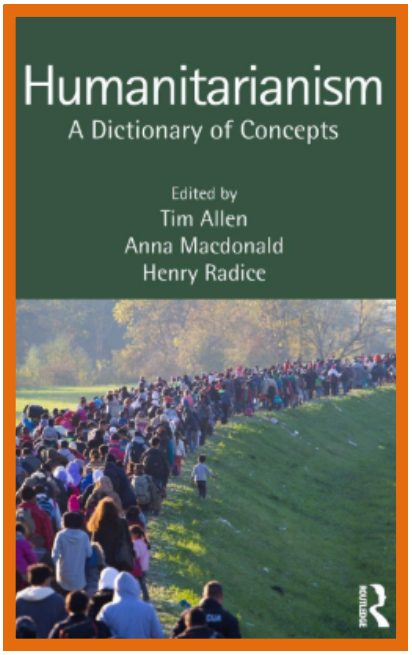
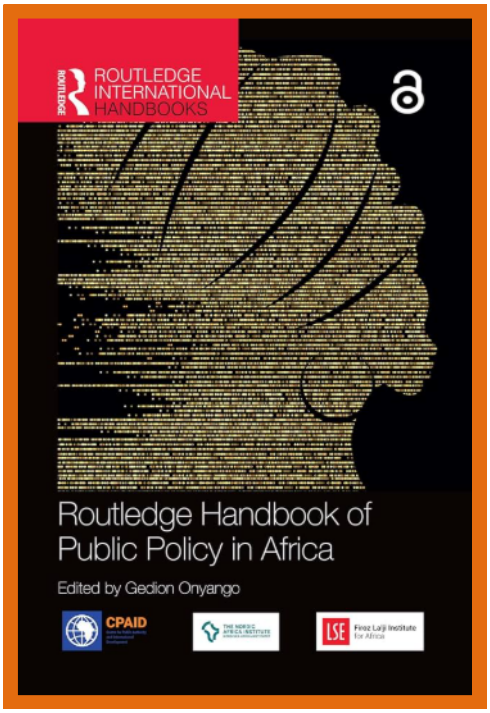
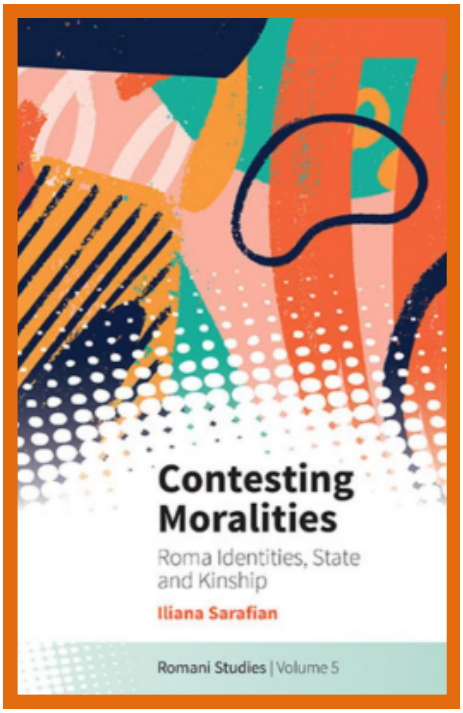

Humanitarianism
A Dictionary of Concepts
Edited by
Tim Allen
Anna Macdonald
Henry Radice


ROUTLEDGE
INTERNATIONAL
HANDBOOKS
Routledge Handbook of
Public Policy in Africa
Edited by Gedion Onyango
CPAID


Contesting
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Roma Identities, State
and Kinship
Iliana Sarafian
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Special Issue:
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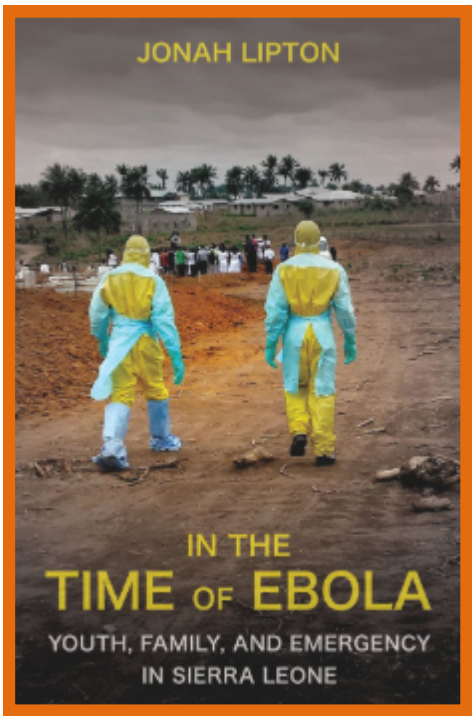
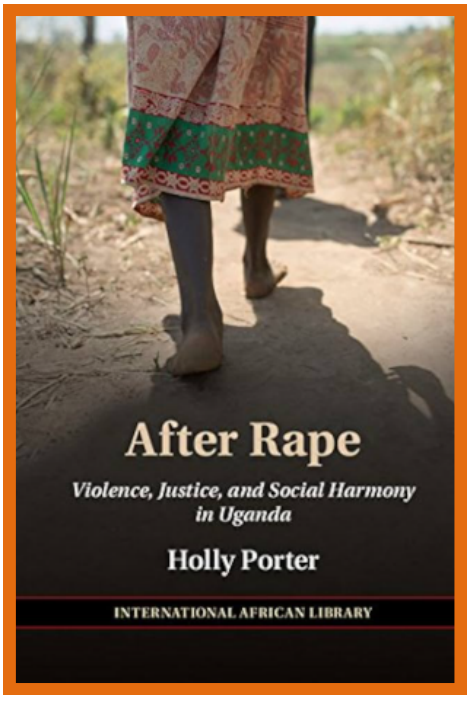

JONAH LIPTON
IN THE
TIME OF EBOLA
YOUTH, FAMILY, AND EMERGENCY
IN SIERRA LEONE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Violence, Justice, and Social Harmony
in Uganda
Holly Porter
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4. Knowledge Exchange, Engagement and Impact

CPAID was founded on the conviction that understanding how authority actually functions, rather than how it is supposed to function, cannot merely be an academic exercise. From its earliest years, the Centre pursued knowledge exchange alongside research, ensuring that its findings reached practitioners, policymakers, and courts. The narrative that follows traces that ambition across research projects and related activities, from a landmark criminal trial to training courses for frontline humanitarians, activists and civil servants.

The ICC

The most consequential early impact of CPAID's research came through the International Criminal Court's prosecution of Dominic Ongwen, a former Lord's Resistance Army commander. Ahead of the trial in 2015, Tim Allen, Holly Porter, and Anna Macdonald were invited to brief the ICC's prosecutorial team, drawing directly on their research into how public authority shapes sexual violence and accountability in northern Uganda. Their core insight - that Acholi understandings of consent, marriage, and sexual transgression differ fundamentally from those embedded in international law, while nonetheless aligning with that law's assessment of what constitutes rape and coercion - provided the analytical foundation the prosecution needed.

Porter's confidential expert report helped expand the charge sheet from seven counts to seventy, including forced marriage, sexual slavery, and enslavement, making Ongwen the first person convicted by an international court for the crime of forced marriage. Allen acted as the prosecution's expert witness, spending two days in cross-examination in The Hague in January 2017; the first fourteen paragraphs of the February 2021 judgement are drawn directly from his testimony. The case also set a procedural precedent: CPAID's expert report was central to a successful proposal allowing victims to give testimony from Uganda before the trial commenced, reducing risk to witnesses and preserving evidence. The International Criminal Law Review has since described this as a milestone for the prosecution of sexual crimes internationally

Advising SAGE

When the COVID-19 pandemic transformed public health into a question of governance and authority, CPAID's analytical framework proved directly applicable. Between 2020 and 2022, Melissa Parker contributed to the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Behaviours (SPI-B) and its ethnicity subgroup, both of which advised SAGE; a body providing scientific guidance to the UK government. Parker's expertise on how communities engage with formal health authorities, built through years of ethnographic research on epidemic response in Africa, brought a distinctively relational and institutional analysis to deliberations about compliance, communication, and the distribution of risk. CPAID's broader research on the logics of public authority during the Ebola epidemic, including Grace Akello's work on how standardised international protocols fail when disconnected from local realities, informed the understanding Parker brought to national-level policy advice.

Researcher Spotlight – Naomi Pendle

Naomi joined CPAID at its inception while completing her PhD. Her interests lay in authorities beyond the state: in how governance actually operated in people's everyday lives, and how power and legitimacy manifested in contexts defined by protracted conflict. Naomi's primary CPAID research examined the politics of peace in South Sudan from high-level negotiations involving the UN, South Sudan's Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and Western governments, to settlements conducted under village trees.

She asked whether peace agreements actually reduced violence, and how communities renegotiated authority through them. A central finding was the extraordinary significance of spiritual authorities, particularly spear masters (Beny Bith in Dinka), whose capacity to bless and to curse commanded as much fear and respect as army commanders. These figures were not peripheral to peacemaking; they were constitutive of it.

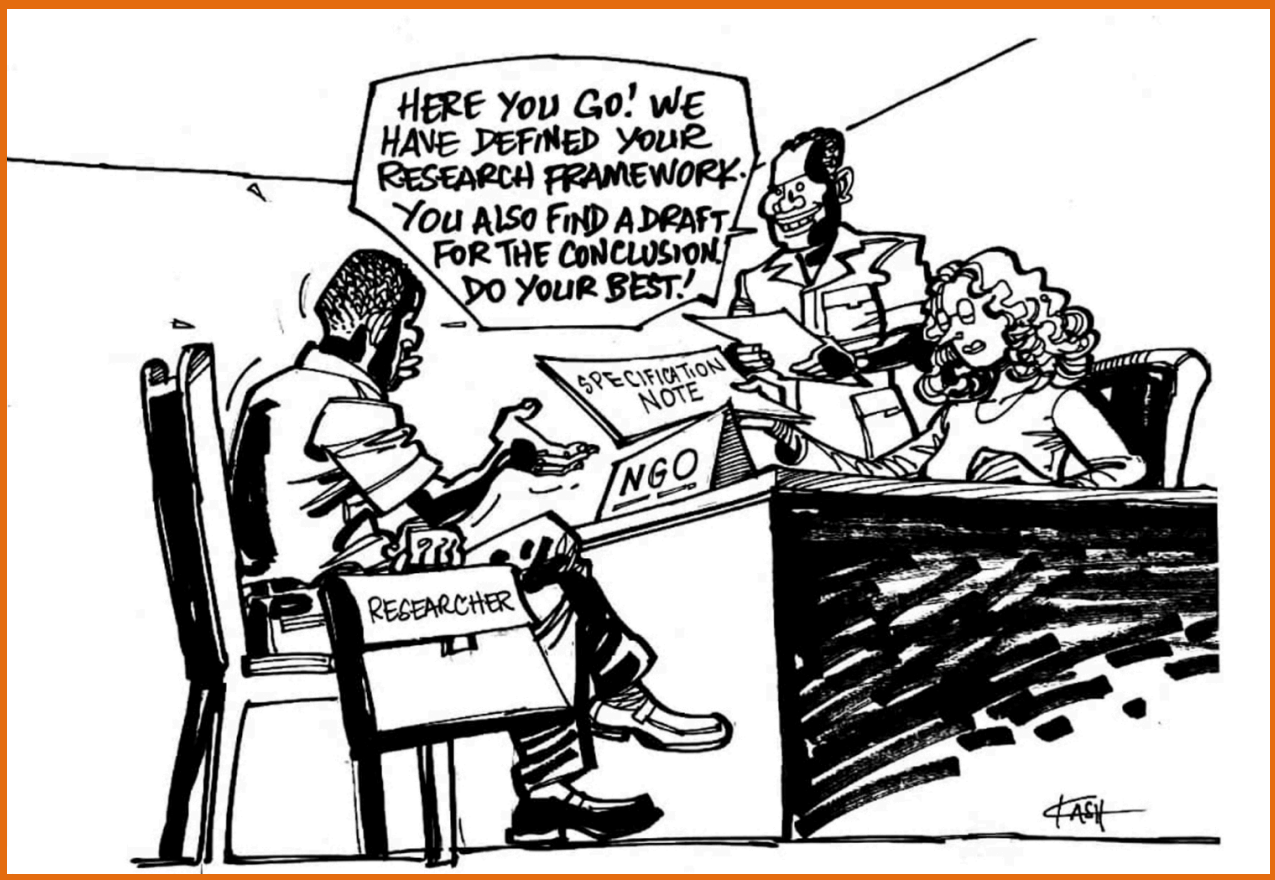
The research produced significant policy impact. Following the 2018 peace agreement, Naomi and colleagues worked with the UN Mission to South Sudan (UNMISS) to develop a methodology called 'Measuring Safety and Security', which prioritised community perspectives over distant statistics to assess whether stability had genuinely been achieved. It was subsequently adopted by UNMISS, the World Food Programme, IOM, and World Relief.

CPAID proved foundational for Naomi's career, legitimising her collaborative approach, enabling lasting partnerships with South Sudanese scholars, and giving rise to many of her early publications, including Naomi's first book, *Spiritual Contestations: The Violence of Peace in South Sudan.* Naomi is now turning the public authority framework toward a new project on famine in South Sudan, examining which actors exercise dominant authority in the politics of hunger as it is lived on the ground.

The Bukavu Series

CPAID's commitment to equitable research partnership found its most visible expression in the Bukavu Series, which grew directly from the long-term collaborative infrastructure that Koen Vlassenroot and his colleagues had built with scholars based in eastern DRC. Over many years, that collaboration had established joint agenda-setting, shared analysis, and co-publication as working norms rather than aspirations. The Bukavu Series gave those norms a public form: a collection of short reflective pieces by Congolese and Central African researchers - published through an online exhibition in English, French, and Swahili - examining what international research collaboration looks like from the inside.

Contributors wrote with unusual candour about conducting fieldwork under insecurity, navigating the power dynamics of northern academic institutions, and resisting the extractive logics through which partnership is too often defined. The series generated substantial interest among aid donors and research institutions and was subsequently published as a book, with Congolese cartoonist Kash Tembo illustrating its themes for an online exhibition. A second wave of contributions, prompted by the M23 military occupation of Goma and Bukavu, has turned that reflection toward the immediate realities of scholarship under armed occupation. They provide a reminder that the questions CPAID's researchers have always asked about public authority are, for some of them, questions lived daily.



By cartoonist Kash Tembo

Conservation in Eastern DRC

Conventional analyses of the conflict landscape in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo's focuses on armed groups, state actors, and humanitarian organisations as the primary authorities shaping civilian life. Esther Marijnen's CPAID-funded research asked a less obvious question: what role do conservation organisations play in this patchwork of authority, and how are nature-society relations shaped by, and constitutive of, political order in a region defined by protracted violence? Working with a team of Congolese and European researchers, the project pursued two interconnected inquiries: how commodity chains around charcoal, electricity, and fish mediate structures of authority and reshape nature-society relations across the region; research on conservation organisations as distinct public authority actors.

Esther's fieldwork in and around Virunga National Park demonstrated how the park's management had come to function as a 'state within a state': collecting revenues through tourism fees, deploying armed rangers, negotiating with rebel groups, and directing European Commission development aid to extend its territorial control. This form of green militarisation was the product of a long colonial history in which the park was established through the dispossession of local populations and sustained through a narrative that framed those populations as threats to nature. The research contributed to a broader literature on the counterinsurgency-conservation nexus, demonstrating how conservation objectives and counterinsurgency operations reinforce one another.

The project generated a substantial body of outputs. Esther, Lotje de Vries, and Rosaleen Duffy co-edited a special issue of *Political Geography* on 'Conservation in Violent Environments' (2021). A policy report on conflicts around Virunga, co-produced with Congolese researchers including Sdney Kubuya, Edmond Mahamba, Joseph Murairi, and Chrispin Mvano also helped channel the project's findings towards practitioners and policymakers in the region. Lastly, the project also produced accessible visual outputs, including an illustrated report designed to reach audiences in eastern DRC and beyond; a commitment to communication that ran through CPAID's broader approach to research design.

Translating Research into Change

Throughout, CPAID researchers engaged with a wide range of international organisations and processes in ways directly shaped by the public authority lens. Naomi Pendle's research on chief-run Hunger Courts in South Sudan - local institutions that redistribute food during famine, and that registered shortages months before humanitarian agencies - led the World Food Programme and the REACH initiative to incorporate questions about these courts into their large-scale biannual surveys, directly informing UN early warning discussions. Claire Elder's research on Somalia's aid architecture, revealing how development contracting had funded monopolies and cartels that contributed to conflict rather than peace, prompted the World Bank to abandon the diaspora component of its Capacity Injection Programme and led to an internal review by Somalia's Aid Coordination Unit. Claire has since advised an International Organization for Migration working group drafting Somalia's national diaspora policy. While findings of the DRC based team examining water governance in Goma led Mercy Corps to substantially change how a multimillion dollars programme seeks to engage local public authorities.

CPAID researchers also seized opportunities to disseminate their research in closed settings with policymakers. Early in the programme, CPAID researchers participated in a two-day workshop with the OECD to challenge the assumptions guiding donor peacebuilding strategy, arguing against blanket reliance on governments, civil society, and the private sector in contexts where these actors may undermine rather than consolidate peace. Rebecca Tapscott contributed to Freedom House's 2023 Uganda report as an expert on authoritarianism and electoral dynamics. Eliza Ngutuku ran a practitioner engagement workshop in Uganda on grassroots child protection and was an invited panellist at the 2023 Biennial Conference on Equity and Social Justice in Child Welfare. Gedion Onyango attended a closed Wilton Park workshop in March 2024, drawing on his expertise in East African public authority before an audience of FCDO and diplomatic actors from the US, EU, Germany, and Norway.

Researcher Spotlight – Jackline Atingo

Jackie joined CPAID as a Master's student, bringing with her substantial field experience from northern Uganda, where she had worked with Tim Allen on displacement and the reintegration of ex-combatants. Her academic background in political economy, development studies, and conflict-affected societies attuned her to a central reality that CPAID's framework helped her articulate: that in conflict-affected contexts, authority extends far beyond the state.

Jackie's primary CPAID research examined the long-term reintegration of former child soldiers in northern Uganda, specifically those affected by the Lord's Resistance Army's abduction of over 20,000 children across two decades of conflict. The longitudinal approach made visible forms of chronic harm - stigma, exclusion, ongoing abuse - that shorter studies, and the policy frameworks they informed, had consistently missed.

This work fundamentally reordered how Jackie understood reintegration. She had begun with the assumption, widely shared in policy circles, that reunification and return to ancestral land constituted successful and culturally appropriate outcomes. The evidence showed otherwise: reunification marked the beginning of a process shaped by the intersection of conflict, land, and kinship across the full life cycle, not its resolution. The findings circulated beyond academia. The team shared results with practitioners in Nigeria to inform their own reintegration challenges, engaged NGOs and policymakers on child protection programming, and influenced reception centre practices. Concrete interventions followed, including the establishment of savings cooperatives for returnees and tracking mechanisms for children born from rape.

CPAID proved formative for Jackie's development as a researcher, providing training in academic writing, co-authorship, and policy engagement, and deepening her commitment to patient, context-sensitive research conducted in genuine partnership with communities rather than extracted from them. She is now completing her PhD at Ghent University, where she is extending the longitudinal comparative approach into new terrain by examining how childhood friendships survived displacement and comparing economic trajectories between internally displaced residents and returnees in post-conflict northern Uganda.

Trainings and Facilitation

Over 2024-25, CPAID translated its research into direct practitioner training, running two-day workshops in Juba, Kampala and Johannesburg alongside an eight-week online programme. The course brought together humanitarian and development professionals, including staff from UNMISS, international NGOs, and civil society organisations, to explore how a public authority lens could be applied in practice. Sessions covered grassroots protection, epidemics, armed groups, transitional justice, and the emerging role of AI in anticipatory humanitarian action. The course was designed explicitly around peer-to-peer learning, with participants' field experience treated as a resource equal to CPAID's accumulated research. Participants were asked to conclude by writing a policy essay applying the framework to their own work.

This was not an isolated initiative but part of a wider pattern of training informed by CPAID's research. The longest-running example is the 'Influencing for Senior Leaders' programme delivered with the Global Executive Leadership Initiative (GELI), which Tom Kirk and Duncan Green designed and have run over twelve iterations since 2003, reaching senior humanitarian and development leaders - including members of Humanitarian Country Teams and United Nations Country Teams - across regional hubs in Nairobi, Dakar, Amman, Bangkok, and Panama City. The course draws on CPAID's understanding of how authority, legitimacy, and power actually function in the contexts where practitioners work, using this to sharpen participants' ability to analyse political systems and design effective influencing strategies.

A related programme is the Certificate in Influencing and Political Acumen (CIPA), co-designed and facilitated by Kirk and Green in partnership with the Asfari Foundation and American University in Beirut for civil society organisations and activists across Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, and Tunisia. Now in its third iteration, it explicitly draws on the public authority framework to help activists map the systems - state, non-state, and international - through which change must be negotiated. Most recently, Kirk designed a Contemporary African Politics programme for the UK’s Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office and wider government staff, with CPAID researchers including Gedion Onyango contributing as academic leads. Its first cohort completed the course in 2025; a second is due to begin this year. Taken together, these programmes represent CPAID's most direct channel for translating its analytical framework into the working practice of diplomats, aid professionals, and civil society leaders.

Researcher Spotlight – Flora McCrone

Flora is a conflict researcher specialising in the Horn of Africa, and is currently completing her PhD at LSE. CPAID's active research programme offered a natural institutional home for work already oriented by many of the same questions. Accordingly, the Centre supported it with three small grants that together funded fieldwork in Kenya and South Sudan examining the relationship between political decentralisation and pastoralist conflict.

Flora's research is counterintuitive: decentralisation - whether Kenya's 2013 devolution or federalist experiments in Somalia, Ethiopia, and South Sudan - is typically designed as a conflict mitigation tool, yet it tends to coincide with a marked increase in pastoralist conflict, often deadlier than other forms of violence in the region. Her research traces how changes in governance structures ripple downward to reshape the public authority arrangements through which communities had previously regulated territorial access and inter-group relations. The public authority concept runs as a cross-cutting theme through her entire PhD.

Methodologically, Flora describes herself as a political ethnographer who also draws on conflict datasets, and draws from both anthropology and political science. One of the most significant insights to emerge from this approach concerns pastoralist agency. Conventional framings position these communities as passive and peripheral. Flora's fieldwork repeatedly challenged that assumption: for instance, among Samburu communities in northern Kenya, she encountered young men, many illiterate, actively engaged in political mobilisation through phones and WhatsApp networks. Governance changes, her research argues, are not simply imposed upon pastoralist communities, but actively engaged with and negotiated by actors whose political sophistication is routinely underestimated.

Following her thesis submission, Flora plans to develop policy briefs on election violence and peace processes for the policy audiences she has long engaged through parallel consultancy work. Looking back on CPAID's contribution, she emphasises the analytical openness the public authority lens fosters: a commitment to looking beyond formal institutions toward the people who animate, contest, and remake them.

5. Beyond Africa

CPAID researchers had always argued that the logics of public authority were not peculiarities of African governance but patterns that emerged wherever states were absent, distrusted, or inadequate to people's needs. The Centre's latter years put this argument to the test, producing a substantial body of research outside the continent that demonstrated its analytical purchase in contexts as different as an Italian Alpine village, a housing estate in Birmingham, and a Roma community in post-Brexit Britain.

Iliana Sarafian's sustained research with Roma communities in Bulgaria, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom represents CPAID's deepest and most developed body of comparative work outside Africa. Roma populations offered a particularly pointed test case for CPAID's framework. As Europe's largest ethnic minority, numbering approximately 12 million people, Roma have been simultaneously positioned outside formal state structures - surveilled, evicted, blamed - while organising dense networks of kinship-based mutual support and communal authority. These dynamics were strikingly familiar from CPAID's African fieldwork: the state is simultaneously present in its coercive functions and absent as a reliable provider of protection or goods.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought these dynamics into sharp relief. Across Bulgaria and Italy, public health measures targeted Roma settlements as spaces of contagion, reinforcing long-established patterns of securitisation; collective quarantine imposed on whole settlements, evictions continuing through lockdown, military presence increasing in Roma camps. Sarafian traced what this meant for the kinship-based rituals through which Roma communities sustain their own governance: the communal mourning practices that consolidate belonging, distribute care, and maintain social authority in the absence of adequate state support. When pandemic restrictions severed these rituals they did not simply disrupt cultural practice. They dismantled one of the principal mechanisms through which Roma communities reproduce what CPAID would recognise as public mutuality: the logic through which people care for one another, and through which communal authority sustains itself, precisely where formal institutions fail or actively harm.

Research conducted with Elizabeth Storer and colleagues across Roma communities in Rome, Milan, and Catania examined vaccination politics. Many Roma participants had accepted COVID-19 vaccines; but not as an expression of trust in public health. Italy's Green Pass tied vaccination to the right to work, meaning that communities in precarious informal employment faced a coercive calculation rather than a civic choice. One research participant put it directly: 'I either die of COVID-19 or of hunger.' In one Roma village, eviction orders from the police arrived at the same moment as vaccination teams from public health authorities. The findings - that vaccination campaigns can themselves be generative of mistrust, including among the vaccinated - challenged the dominant epidemiological framing of hesitancy as cultural resistance or misinformation. From a public authority perspective: a state that simultaneously protects and punishes, and whose rhetoric of recovery actively excludes those at the margins, does not produce trust through vaccine uptake. It deepens beliefs that the state's authority rests on coercion rather than legitimacy

Research conducted by Elizabeth and colleagues on UK COVID-19 policy extended this argument into national governance. Through policy documents it traced how 'trust' functioned across health compliance, community funding, digital surveillance, and policing as a concept that simultaneously measured, moralised, and legitimated the expansion of state monitoring. What the authors term 'securitized trust' describes a discursive formation in which the language of trust-building rationalises interventions that extend surveillance and displace responsibility for systemic inequality onto those most harmed by pandemic policies.

Elizabeth and Constanza Torre's ethnographic research on the Italian-French Alpine border demonstrates how the public authority framework illuminates governance at the European margins. Conducted in the Susa Valley in late 2021, the research examined what happens when solidarity networks - the only actors with meaningful access to migrants attempting the dangerous mountain crossing into France - were effectively conscripted to deliver state vaccination mandates. The valley's solidarity infrastructure had grown out of decades of anti-state struggle, and volunteer doctors found themselves unable to openly advertise vaccine provision because doing so would identify them with the state whose coercive power their colleagues had long resisted. What the public authority lens made visible, and what the dominant epidemiological framing of 'hesitancy' obscured entirely, was that assistance is never a neutral service but an arena shaped by the politics of those who provide it.

This work resonated directly with CPAID's history of ethnographic research exploring how minoritised communities experience state outreach as simultaneously caring and coercive - an ambivalence the public authority lens shows can be constitutive of how states govern at their margins. That Whitehall policy analysis and Alpine ethnography could converge on the same analytical insight further confirmed that the logics of public authority are not African peculiarities; rather, they shape governance wherever legitimacy is contested and coercion and care come from the same hand.

The comparative turn continued through a cluster of shorter individual studies that applied the public authority lens in South Asia and the Middle East. Among them, Tom Kirk's ethnographic research on a UK-funded social accountability programme in Pakistan's Punjab province explored what happens when governance is treated as a technical problem rather than a political one. It documented the programme's appropriation by locally powerful intermediaries - union presidents, biraderi association leaders, men with deep relationships to politicians - able to outwardly perform civic participation, while conducting their actual advocacy privately, through the patron-client networks. These actors operated through recognisable logics: public mutuality in the sense that intermediaries carried genuine obligations to their communities, and the political marketplace in the sense that access to public goods was negotiated through personal allegiance rather than secured as a citizen's right. Yet, these logics pre-existed the programme, outlasted it, and quietly undermined its intended democratic outcomes throughout.

Anu Joshi and colleagues extended this analysis across Pakistan, Mozambique, and Myanmar through what they called 'governance diaries' - repeated interviews with the same households and intermediaries tracked over months. This methodological investment revealed a picture of public authority as fundamentally networked rather than institutional. Poor households rarely engaged directly with any authority; they navigated governance through intermediaries who were not simply brokers in a neutral sense, but nodes of dense personal networks that were themselves a form of public authority, capable of mobilising resources, enforcing decisions, and defining the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. In Pakistan, biraderi and caste networks shaped who received preferential access; in Mozambique, Frelimo party-state affiliation determined which claims were heard; in Myanmar, the relevant authority in a given village could shift with the season. Across all three contexts, the locus of power moved fluidly within and between networks, making authority not a fixed property of any actor but an emergent quality of relationships continuously built, tested, and used up.

Dolf Te Lintelo and Tim Liptrot turned the lens onto donors themselves, asking how international aid agencies understood and responded to actual governance in the urban settings of Jordan and Lebanon. The terrain was familiar from CPAID's African fieldwork: low-income urban neighbourhoods where municipal authority was weak and tribal networks and sectarian political parties strong. Donors had moved significantly towards empirical approaches to legitimacy, acknowledging that authority can be exercised by actors beyond the formal state. In practice, however, their interventions remained reliant on assumptions - that stronger service delivery would enhance legitimacy, that participatory mechanisms would build trust - that commissioned evidence could not convincingly support. This effectively excluded some of the most deprived communities from programming, inadvertently reinforcing the standing of the very actors donors sought to marginalise. The research suggested that although how public authority actually works was understood, the foreign policy imperatives governing who could be legitimately supported had not changed.

Overviewing the body of research using CPAID's lens, William Ferguson's conceptual stock-take foregrounded power as the explicit foundation of public authority and provided a set of analytical tools that are by definition context-independent. His identification of seven formats through which actors claim and exercise authority, from mediating disputes between third parties to disrupting others' relationships to extract benefit, described strategic logics that are universal rather than regionally specific. Equally important was his insistence that public authority is a relational property, cultivated through networks rather than held by discrete actors. These moves definitively stripped the concept of any implicit African exceptionalism: if authority everywhere is assembled from available materials, contested through recognisable power formats, and dependent on the continuous management of relationships across scales, then the concept could travel without modification to an Alpine safehouse, a Birmingham housing estate, or a donor programme in Beirut.

Researcher Spotlight – Iliana Sarafian

Iliana is a medical anthropologist whose research focuses on health inequalities among minority groups in Europe and the UK. Her intellectual starting point is the observation that health outcomes cannot be understood purely through the lens of services or knowledge. Instead, they are shaped by how people experience institutions and authority in their daily lives.

CPAID gave Iliana a framework to articulate what she was already observing ethnographically: that public authority operates not only through formal state power but through employers, healthcare systems, migration rules, and the everyday fear of being recognised, judged, or reported.

Iliana's primary CPAID project examined how Bulgarian Roma migrants in the UK navigated healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic, conducting fieldwork in London and Leicester. A defining methodological choice was the integration of citizen scientists - Roma community members - as active members of research teams. Working alongside citizen scientists enabled the team to address language barriers, build genuine trust, and co-interpret participants' experiences in ways that a more conventional research design would have foreclosed.

The findings reframed how Iliana understood non-engagement with healthcare. Many participants actively concealed their Roma identity to avoid discrimination from employers, neighbours, or health professionals - leading to delayed care-seeking, avoidance of GP registration, reliance on shared medicines, or travelling to home countries for treatment. These were not expressions of ignorance or cultural resistance but rational responses to lived histories of exclusion. Silence, avoidance, and invisibility, she argued, are meaningful social practices; non-engagement is often strategic. The research challenged deficit-based narratives about Roma communities in policy conversations and demonstrated that research accessibility is relational rather than cultural; a finding that has shaped how she now trains future doctors and anthropology students at City St George's University of London about health inequalities and care.

Researcher Spotlight – Koen Vlassenroot

Koen is Professor at Ghent University and a founding member of its Conflict Research Group, a multidisciplinary centre focused on conflict in its many forms across Africa and Asia. His path to CPAID grew directly out of two decades of research on military fragmentation and armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

A consistent finding of that earlier work, developed in part through prior collaboration with LSE colleagues, was that armed groups could not be understood purely as military actors. They are embedded in social environments and claim voice and position in the provision of public goods: justice, dispute resolution, taxation, security.

Koen's contributions to CPAID spanned several interconnected research programmes. His work on armed groups in eastern DRC deepened the argument that these organisations are best understood as social actors embedded in community life, bound to the populations around them by relationships of mutual dependency: armed groups require social support to function, while communities come to depend on them for access to land, dispute resolution, and everyday governance.

From this came the concept of 'circular return', which challenged the assumption that disarmament and demobilisation closes the chapter on combatant involvement in violence. In reality, many former fighters move repeatedly between armed groups and civilian life, a pattern of mobility that has since been taken up in policy circles concerned with the limits of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programming.

Looking ahead, Koen sees the most important frontier for CPAID-informed research as the international and regional dimensions that local-level studies have tended to leave underexplored. The realities he has spent decades documenting in eastern Congo are no longer intelligible as local phenomena alone; they are increasingly shaped by forces operating at regional and global scale. Koen is also committed to the comparative ambition that CPAID helped foster - that there is no African exceptionalism in the dynamics of public authority, and that the analytical frameworks developed through fieldwork in Bukavu or Goma can and should travel. He regards that comparative instinct, and the collaborative infrastructure built to sustain it, as CPAID's most durable legacy.

Future Directions

CPAID's closing years witnessed the maturation of its wider scholarly programme. This included the publication of some of its most significant books: Naomi Pendle's *Spiritual Contestations: The Violence of Peace in South Sudan* and Jonah Lipton's *In the Time of Ebola: Youth, Family, and Emergency in Sierra Leone*, and the drafting of Anna MacDonald's forthcoming *The Justice Trap*. Taken together with a special section on protection and full special issue on public authority in *Global Policy* journal, these works represent the consolidation of a sustained investment in ethnographic fieldwork and conceptual development.

Two further projects illustrate the breadth of questions CPAID's framework continued to generate in its final phase: Laura Mann and Muez Ali extended their earlier research on post-revolutionary Sudan by examining neighbourhood resistance committees as a new and understudied form of public authority. They sought to trace how their priorities and activities compared with those of domestic policymakers whose international education had progressively widened the gap between professional elite orientations and popular demands. By asking not only who exercises authority but through what networks and professional histories they have come to understand legitimate governance, Mann and Ali revealed a form of misalignment that conventional policy analysis, focused on institutions rather than on the people who animate them, would have missed.

Similarly, Anna Macdonald, Arthur Owor, and Rebecca Tapscott's analysis of Uganda's 2021 elections demonstrated that the anticipated youth wave behind Bobi Wine failed to materialise not from apathy but from the NRM's historically embedded strategies for co-opting, fragmenting, and depoliticising youth as a constituency. The finding resonates directly with CPAID's broader argument that public authority shapes political possibilities not through visible coercion alone but through the quiet structuring of allegiance, patronage, and belonging.

The pilot projects now underway indicate where CPAID-informed research is heading. The Great Yarmouth project, led by Anna MacDonald and Tom Kirk, applies the public authority framework to political disengagement and social struggle in one of England's most economically marginalised coastal communities - a deliberate test of whether concepts refined in Africa can illuminate voting behaviour, disinvestment, and the erosion of trust in formal politics in a very different setting. Naomi Pendle and Abraham Diing Akoi are independently turning the public authority lens toward famine in South Sudan, attending to everyday hunger as a political phenomenon shaped by competing authorities rather than as a technical failure of supply chains. Eliza Ngutuku and Gedion Onyango have each identified Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an emerging and underexplored domain of public authority, raising questions about how algorithmic systems claim legitimacy, distribute public goods, and reshape relationships between states, intermediaries, and the populations they govern. And in eastern DRC, the Bukavu Series - through which Congolese researchers have long reflected on international research partnerships, and are now turning toward the realities of scholarship under M23 occupation - continues to model a practice of knowledge production that is genuinely collaborative and genuinely comparative.

These trajectories suggest that the public authority framework has not reached the limits of its usefulness. The logics it identified - moral populism, public mutuality, social harmony, intimate governance - were always intended as analytical tools rather than fixed categories, and their application has proven correspondingly flexible. What began as an attempt to understand governance in places where state authority was absent or contested has shown, through a widening series of comparative studies, that they can illuminate the gap between formal mandates and lived realities. That gap, as CPAID researchers have consistently argued, is found far more widely than conventional frameworks tend to assume. The work ahead will amplify the perspective even further, whilst the work already completed has shown that the journey is worthwhile.

Researcher Spotlight – Charlotte Brown

Charlotte's career has been shaped from the outset by CPAID. Having completed her PhD through LSE's International Development Department, she first engaged with CPAID as a Master's student, contributing to the Trajectories of Return project in northern Uganda. That early fieldwork in and around the Gulu research community proved formative. Her core intellectual interest lies in the governance of displacement: how humanitarian systems shape the choices, constraints, and possibilities of people living with protracted displacement.

The most significant and urgent of Charlotte's projects under CPAID responds to the rapid collapse of humanitarian aid across Uganda and Kenya, and the ways this process renders already marginalised populations even more invisible. The research examined prioritisation exercises unfolding across Uganda's formal displacement infrastructures, and explored how formalised and informalised systems interact - and how displaced people, particularly around food access and food security, navigate them. The work produced a policy brief co-authored with Costanza Torre, and The Forgotten Faces; a collaborative creative output developed with poet Peter Kidi and political cartoonist Victor Ndula.

Charlotte is currently involved in Remitting for Resilience at Queen Mary University of London, a large multi-partner project examining migration, remittances, food security, climate change, and gender across multiple migration corridors. In the medium to longer term, she is developing a project that would bring together historical archives and present-day testimonies to examine how food insecurity, climatic pressures, and humanitarian governance have intersected over time in Uganda and Zambia. The intellectual foundation, methodological commitments, and research relationships that CPAID gave her run through all of it.

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