

## Editorial

Africa is riven by conflict. Armed violence in DRC/Kivu – with Rwanda/Burundi hovering in the background – Sudan and Uganda, receive almost daily headlines and are just a few of the many ongoing conflicts in the continent. The causes and consequences of these conflicts are numerous, but they all share the same base of a problematic socio-economic divide, a fact that is exploited by ruthless politicians. The opportunism of local warlords is often challenged, but can also be supported, by economic liberalisation and global commercial and financial flows. Geopolitical strategies and rationales conflict with local/regional logic, and lead to so-called protracted crisis situations (e.g., in Somalia and the DR Congo). These crises are commonly identified with various levels of violent armed conflict, “criminal” economic violence, and ultimately state collapse. In such situations, non-state actors should or could take over from the state important tasks, such as economic redistribution and security. These practices of ‘governance without government’ can lead to important reconfigurations of political power in African crisis zones. Practices of governance and regulation change, governments loose their grip on how to manage societies, whereas non-state actors are often, and more and more, included into decision-making processes. Increasingly, the outcomes of these processes impact on peacemaking and state building projects on the continent, in particular in the context of institutional (re)construction.

This issue of Afrika Focus presents a selection of papers presented at the ‘Governance without government in Africa’s protracted crises’ conference, organized by the Ghent University Conflict Research Group together with Egmont, the Royal Institute for International Affairs. The papers discuss several key questions. First: how can “emerging” forms of non- or para-state governance in Africa’s conflict areas be detected, and what could be appropriate instruments of analysis? Second: what types of security arrangements have emerged in the non-state sphere in such crisis situations, and how do they modify the state’s theoretical monopoly on violence? Third, to what extent can we say that African governance has been re(al)located to different authority levels, and how does this process affect local and regional political orders? Fourth, how do these reconfigurations and relocalisations of political power potentially impact on projects of state and society (re) construction in Africa, and what does this tell us about the future of statehood in general? Finally, what might the role of the international community (specifically the EU and UN) be in (re)directing and influencing these processes and what are the lessons learned?

This issue of Afrika Focus is also the first that is directly made available via the Internet. Increased access offers the prospect of opening up the publication to a wider readership. Hopefully, it will also attract new articles, and new young researchers willing to share their findings with a wider and interested public. The good news is that with this latest innovation all the articles in the back catalogue of Afrika Focus and its predecessors are now available online. This opens up a wealth of knowledge that will hopefully inspire present-day research(ers).

With this issue we have also revamped the instructions for authors. They will hopefully provide ‘proper guidance’ for would-be authors, and should also facilitate the review process, and yield greater uniformity in presentation of results over disciplines.

Last but not least, we are proud to inform you that several subscribers have already taken a gift subscription. This has allowed us to present a year's subscription to several institutes in Africa that have no means to pay for such an item. We hope to be able to continue to provide this 'service' but for that we need your support. In this respect we are pleased and grateful to accept any donations offered!

Enjoy the issue!

Patrick Van Damme  
Laboratory of Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture and  
Ethnobotany, Ghent University, Belgium