

Imagining 'Traditional' Authorities in Africa: The Case of Ker Kwaro Acholi, Northern Uganda.

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How 'traditional' authorities are perceived internationally affects overarching views of Africa and its ability to govern. Significantly, ideas and images of 'traditional' authorities have shifted within the discourse of development over the past two decades. At independence 'tradition' and 'traditional' leaders in Africa were viewed as archaic and a hindrance to newly forming and modernising states. However, with the failure of overly statist as well as overly market-led development strategies, 'traditional' authorities have become viewed with increasing favour. Now imagined primarily as gatekeepers of 'the local', 'traditional' authorities are viewed as potential partners in the pursuit of good governance and sustainable development.

In this paper I will offer a case study of the 'traditional' institution, *Ker Kwaro Acholi*, in northern Uganda, to illustrate how ideas and images of African 'traditional' authorities are created, reproduced and serve the agenda of international development. I will demonstrate that this process has involved a complex encounter between development and 'traditional' authorities in northern Uganda: an encounter in which the agency of local Africans has been both enabled and constrained in particular ways by the discourse of development. I will show that those who have been able to create and define images and ideas of 'traditional' authorities have been those who can speak the language of development, which problematically has excluded many of the more parochial and arguably legitimate traditional leaders in northern Uganda.