

‘Interveners and Intervened Upon: The Missing Link in Determining Success and Failure of External Intervention’

Linnea Gelot¹ and Fredrik Söderbaum²

¹Gothenburg University, School of Global Studies (GCGD) and Nordic Africa Institute, Gothenburg, Sweden

²Gothenburg University, School of Global Studies and GCGD, Gothenburg, Sweden

linnea.bergholm@gmail.com

The paper discusses changes in interventionism in Sub-Saharan Africa, what such changes might tell us about the global security order in the post-Cold War era, and how we might improve the discussion about efficiency and success/failure of the multidimensional types of external interventions that respond to social, economic and political ‘problems’ in Sub-Saharan Africa. Outside interference in Sub-Saharan Africa is undertaken by a range of state and non-state actors and for many different purposes. These include practices known as humanitarian intervention, responsibility to protect, development intervention, governance intervention, as well as rebuilding ‘failed states’. They are often intrusive (but not always coercive) forms of interference, with varying degree of consent, or acquiescence, by the target state, or other domestic actors into domains that were traditionally considered within the domestic jurisdiction of a sovereign state. These interventions have been controversial, many of them judged as mixed or even as complete failures. In the paper, we broaden and contextualize the debate about ‘the conditions of success’ of external interventions, understood as one single yet multidimensional phenomenon. The paper demonstrates the added value of broadening the conventional parameters of success to include the intervener-intervened relationship as a central factor in assessments of success/failure. A core constructivist insight relevant to our claim is that all social relationships lead to changes in identities. This occurs not just among ‘recipients’ but also among interveners, and has effects for mandate implementation. Indeed, identity change through the intervener-intervened encounter might have implications for the self-image of both parties, and for their respective notions of truth and right. Relating this to the literature on intervention efficiency, the intervener or intervened may as a result of their encounter react to, adapt to, work with, sabotage, or acquiesce in this new social relationship. The encounter enables new political possibilities that could not have been anticipated by either of the two. This renders the notion of intention, that interveners can control the before, during and after an intervention, an impossibility. In the paper, we also illustrate our argument with references to the AU-UN response to conflict in Sudan.