

Just Justice? Civil Society, International Justice and the Search for Accountability in Africa International Refugee Rights Initiative 9 January 2012

Africa has become a testing ground for international justice and international *criminal* justice in particular. In the last decade and a half, the continent has been the site of numerous efforts to promote criminal accountability (...)

(...) serious questions about the impact and efficacy of international justice endeavours are now being asked. How have international justice activities affected the social, political and economic contexts on the ground? Who has a voice in determining what kind of justice is being delivered and for whom?

One component of answering these questions is the question of who is driving the process. Certainly, the international justice effort in Africa has been part of a broader global endeavour to promote accountability and combat impunity for serious crimes as part of the evolution of the universal human rights movement. (...)

However, acceptance of international justice as the default position for addressing the high level of impunity for serious crimes which exists across the continent has also been the subject of significant concern. Some view the intervention of international justice mechanisms in Africa as just another form of neo-colonialism deployed with questionable intent. Others express reservations about the potential detrimental impact on domestic peace and political processes, citing a lack of understanding of local contexts. Others have criticised engagements for failing to effectively address the needs of victim communities and to adequately protect those who assist in this quest for justice. (...)

How do local actors and groups – defined as much by their heterogeneity as by their similarities – view this international justice activity? Is it seen to resonate with their understandings of the local context and what is needed to achieve sustainable transformation? Or is it discordant? How have these expectations and understandings of international justice changed over time? What voices are driving, or capable of influencing, the course of international justice strategy in response to these insights? What forums are available for discussion and debate? Where concerns exist, how can they be expressed and taken into account?

The International Refugee Rights (IRRI)'s experience over the last seven years is that in the enthusiasm to embrace the *promise* of international justice there has often been inadequate space for honest reflection on the *practice and reality* of international justice, particularly from the perspective of local advocates and local communities in Africa. This lack of debate has, not least, stunted assessment of how the objectives of international justice might be more effectively pursued.²

In response, IRRI is launching a discussion paper series entitled *Just Justice? Civil society, international justice and the search for accountability in Africa*. The series will reflect local perspectives on international justice as it is being experienced in Africa. It aims to deepen the debate around a series of key questions and controversies facing the realisation of international justice, anchored in reflections from the ground, including local, national, regional and continental civil society. The target audience includes civil society, policymakers, practitioners and donors across the globe working on issues related to international criminal justice. (...)

See full

[discussion paper](#)