

Economics & Development

Sarah Michael. *Undermining Development: The Absence of Power among Local NGOs in Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press/Oxford: James Currey, 2005. xi + 206 pp. Table. Bibliography. Index. \$22.95. Paper.

For those concerned about power and dependency in Africa, Sarah Michael's book gives a welcome new perspective about the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Power, in her view, is the "ability of local NGOs to set their own priorities, define their own agendas and exert their influence on the international development community, even in the face of opposition from government, donors, international NGOs, and other development actors" (18). She points out that in Asia and in Latin America, there are powerful NGOs: "The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, SEWA in India and Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina possess brand names that are as recognizable in their countries as those of Microsoft and Manchester United" (7). Why, then, are African NGOs not powerful, too?

She analyzes NGO power in terms of four criteria: space or niche, financial independence, international links, and access to political structures. She describes space as "gaining a level of skills, training, experience and contacts in the field that no other agency could match." Financial independence comes from multiple donors, contracts that adequately cover overhead costs, and local sources of income. International links include other African NGOs as well as Northern NGO donors and international media who can communicate its reputation. Finally, power "would allow African NGOs to criticise or engage with their government without jeopardy" (42–47).

In separate chapters Michaels discusses the experiences of local NGOs in differing circumstances in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Senegal, and shows that while NGOs in each have made progress on some of the above criteria of power, they have not achieved all of them. Interesting as they are, these case studies also challenge researchers to examine other African countries to see if more powerful NGOs exist elsewhere.

In a chapter entitled "Why Power Is Crucial to NGOs," Michaels points out that since African NGOs have local bases, they can mobilize local populations on issues such as gender or democratization and engage in politics without being beholden to foreign agendas. At the same time, however, their power is limited by Northern NGOs, African governments, and the paucity of local donors. Rather than competing with other actors, the existence of strong African NGOs would increase the power of African governments and contributors. As for sustainability, Michaels points out that powerful NGOs are the most sustainable: "With power NGOs can strive to undertake innovative and creative programming, to invest in research that can build their long-term organisational capacity and to take risks and experiment with new activities and approaches. With power NGOs can

themselves define the terms on which they will be judged and determine when their work is providing lasting benefits to their clients" (143–44).

In the final chapter, the author suggests ways to help African NGOs achieve power. Besides enacting internal reforms, African NGOs should network with other African development actors, pursue stronger links with Northern NGOs and private sector organizations, and participate in international development conferences. Donors should designate funds for African NGOs, provide support to cover overhead costs, and influence governments to provide more space. The international media should increase coverage of NGO activities. The up-to-date twenty-two-page bibliography underscores Sarah Michael's contention that Africa's NGOs are relatively powerless, since only one-quarter of the works cited are by African authors. Again, there is a challenge to write more about African NGOs in order to raise their visibility.

This reviewer is heartened to find a sound comparative study of African NGOs and hopes it will be followed by more. Very useful are the distinctions between local NGOs, coordinating councils of NGOs with varying degrees of government influence, community-based organizations that may not have formal government recognition, and international NGOs. A weakness of Sarah Michael's treatment, however, is that it does not situate religious organizations in Africa, which are often community-based, national, and international. Indeed, one might well expect African researchers to challenge her distinction between secular and religious services to their populations.

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Emmanuel Nnadozie. *African Economic Development*. London: Oxford University Press, 2003. 662 pp. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. \$99.95. Cloth.

Emmanuel Nnadozie has produced an excellent comprehensive textbook on economic growth and development in Africa. The book draws on the experience of an impressive group of twenty-five African and non-African scholars from academia and development agencies. By reviewing multiple development theories and controversies related to these theories, identifying policy prescriptions that stem from them, and then examining these within the context of different African countries, this book fills a gap in the literature. Furthermore, it is written for a wide audience, including academics, policymakers, and students, both graduate and undergraduate.

African Economic Development consists of twenty-three chapters divided into six parts. Part I is an introduction to Africa, including the reasons for studying African economic development, the diversity within Africa, and