

liberalised forex. As a result, the private sector, which had in previous decades gone underground in response to overregulation, came to life (pp. 40–2). Marketing boards were dismantled, giving smallholder farmers an incentive to produce (p. 243), although a similar attempt with parastatals was less successful; although the parastatal sector ceased to be such a burden on the economy, the reforms failed to generate broad ownership among Ugandan businessmen (p. 370). Finally, the Ugandan government tried to broaden its tax base (and hence secure legitimacy) by introducing VAT and income tax, and by founding an independent revenue authority to facilitate tax collection. Significantly, although each of these measures met with fierce popular opposition, even leading to several strikes, the revenue percentage of GDP almost doubled during the 1990s (p. 111).

In conclusion, the general message that the authors of this book convey is one of hope. They claim that economic reforms driven by administrators with sincere motives have structurally transformed Uganda's economy, pushing it back on track. However, there is a growing consensus among observers of Uganda's political economy that after the golden years of the 1990s it is now waning. Such commentators identify the introduction of policies associated with a previous era: the dissipation of productive resources into political networks, *dirigiste* measures that have no popular support, and a failure to focus on the fulfilment of broader social goals. The question therefore remains whether the 1990s indeed marked a structural transformation of the economy, as the authors of *Uganda's Economic Reforms* claim, or whether there has in reality been a continuation of earlier political practices under the guise of economic transformation. To appreciate this more fully, students of economic reforms in Uganda, and indeed elsewhere on the continent, should keep this insightful book close at hand.

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**Human Rights NGOs in East Africa: political and normative tensions** edited by MAKAI MUTUA

Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. Pp. 390, £79.95 (hbk).  
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Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are thought to be central to the social, economic and political advancements recently experienced by many African countries. Makau Mutua's edited volume contributes to a deeper understanding of these organisations by discussing the human rights issues for which NGOs advocate, the range of strategies they deploy in doing so, and the opportunities and challenges that they face. Pointing out that that human rights NGOs have been indispensable in the process of democratisation and 'are now a permanent feature of the political landscape' (p. 4), Mutua moves the debate on from the question of whether civil society can be said to exist in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, to a richer discussion of such themes as the ability of NGOs to address complex cultural, social and economic issues outside the traditional mandates of human rights organisations; their relationships

upwards to donors and downwards to their often poor and rural grass-roots constituents; and the possibility that such bodies can retain intellectual and fiscal independence from the state and international human rights organisations.

For those seeking to understand the processes of advocacy for social change, the volume usefully illustrates the range of areas to which human rights NGOs have made a contribution. Successes have ranged from the leadership of men in the fight for gender equality within organisations, engaging in what Willy Mutunga calls 'feminist masculinity' (p. 112), to economic rights advocacy where, in one instance, the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) teamed up with marginalised populations working for Del Monte, a global food conglomerate, to launch a campaign that 'shook the multinational corporation' into negotiating over labour rights. In the process, the KHRC was transformed from patronising "saviours" of the masses to partners in the struggle' for human dignity (p. 170).

The volume also describes a number of critical weaknesses among human rights NGOs. Key among them is the structure of the NGOs themselves: most have poorly developed bureaucracies and depend on the executive director for policy and direction, lack financial independence, and are seen to have 'rather blindly copied the models of AI [Amnesty International] and HRW [Human Rights Watch]' (p. 19) when choosing their causes and approaches, despite their unique political contexts. In a serious indictment of the sector, Mutua concludes that the 'high public visibility of the few vocal NGOs deceptively gives an impression of a well-established . . . and formidable human rights movement. Nothing could be further from the truth' (p. 28). This is a charge that deserves serious reflection.

A key strength of the volume is that it brings together the voices of the activists at the forefront of the human rights movement: those without whose views any assessment of the human rights project in East Africa would be incomplete. As present or past directors of leading organisations in the region, they have been engaged on a daily basis in securing finance for their organisations, negotiating partnerships with international NGOs, and crafting strategies for state relations. Significantly, they have first-hand experience, among other things, of attempted cooptation by the state, careerism among their fellow NGO actors, and mimicry of successful international advocacy approaches by their peer organisations. However, this strength is also perhaps one of the weaknesses of the volume: many leading activists are not scholars. The result is that the quality of the analysis varies across the chapters that comprise the volume. Some chapters read like advocacy presentations, where concepts are used rather broadly and their meanings taken to be commonly understood, while others present a range of opinions but lack a unifying thesis.

The volume could also have benefited from a broader range of contributors. While the text seeks to address NGOs in East Africa, there is only one paper that focuses specifically on Tanzania. The bulk of the papers are about Kenya, and as seven of the fourteen contributors are affiliated with the KHRC, there is overlap in the issues they describe and examples they use. A more diverse network would have ensured a richer discussion that could have drawn lessons from other important human rights struggles such as internally displaced persons and land rights.

Finally, the volume lists many ways to address the current challenges, without further analysis of what these different approaches would entail or whether they are even feasible. For instance, a number of authors argue that the organisations that will thrive and continue to make a difference will be those that embrace innovative approaches, provide intellectual leadership when responding to the needs of their constituents, cultivate accountability, and generate independent funding by harnessing technology and volunteerism – reaching out to the diaspora or engaging in profitable activities in order to liberate themselves from donor agendas. Yet it remains unclear exactly what each of these approaches would mean in practice. Nonetheless, this volume forms a good starting point for a discussion that many human rights organisations must take seriously, and provides a useful resource for those who wish to know what challenges lie ahead in the quest to increase human dignity.

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**The Politics of Post-War Demobilisation and Reintegration in Nigeria** by  
OLOKUNLE OJELEYE

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The Nigerian civil war, which ended in 1970, has remained a major reference point in public discourse on power-sharing and the political equation in Nigeria. While the war itself is seen as the outcome of the zero-sum political game among the three major ethnic groups, the partial way the crisis was resolved is said to have marginalised the interests of a section of the country and rendered the goal of national integration more difficult to achieve. This new book authored by Olukunle Ojeleye offers Nigerians another opportunity to engage with this significant aspect of their national past.

The first two chapters discuss the background to the Nigerian civil war, the course of the war and the composition of the armed forces. Chapter 3 focuses on the socio-economic and humanitarian dimensions of reintegration. Chapter 4 explores the politics of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. The final chapter examines the role of the international community in the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Two cardinal principles seem to underline the author's historical interpretation. The first is the desire to avoid the Whig error of interpreting the past with the eyes of the present. Hence, quite early in the book the author reminds the reader that the civil war and the post-war policy of rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration took place at least a decade before Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) policies and practices began to attract international attention. The second principle is a clear understanding of the philosophy behind the implementation of rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration [the 3Rs], namely that it was designed to show that the entire country was the victim of the civil war, and that care was taken to demonstrate that secession did not pay dividends.

The logical explanation of the author that the whole process of demobilisation was aimed at reducing the bloated size of the Armed Forces takes the wind