

East Africa in Transition

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Images, Institutions and Identities

Edited by
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University of Nairobi Press

First Published 2004 by
University of Nairobi Press
P.O. Box 30197
Nairobi, Kenya

E-mail: *nup@uonbi.ac.ke*
varsitypress@yahoo.com

www.uonbi.ac.ke/comps_projects/press

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Library of Congress CIP Data

East Africa in Transition: Images, Institutions and Identities/
ed. By Judith M. Bahemuka and Joseph L. Brockington
1. East Africa—Economic Development 2. Political
Anthropology—East Africa 3. Educational Evaluation—Kenya
4. Institution Care—East Africa.
HN 793 A7E27
330.9 1724

330 pp.

ISBN: 9966 846 56 5

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Preface

Over the past decade, there has been a growing awareness in sub-Saharan Africa that institutions of governance are critical to the achievement of sustainable human development. These institutions also play a crucial role in the promotion of democracy and partnerships building in all areas that are essential to the advancement of developmental goals. A plethora of recent initiatives has been put in place. The initiatives aim to tackle the various aspects of collapsing institutions and unethical identification ventures.

East Africa's position in the present world order can only be explained if the full ramifications and implications of globalization are put at center-stage. One has to see the nuances and hidden meanings behind institutional identities both at personal and collective levels, ushering them to the global identities. Furthermore, synergy has to be created between the local and the global for the survival of the institutions.

In order to have a meaningful exchange of ideas on the above issues, the International Learning Centre (ILC) at the University of Nairobi, with support from the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) and Kalamazoo College, brought together, in July 2001, leading scholars from the Universities of Dar-es-Salaam, Makerere and several Kenyan institutions. These were joined by a group of twenty scholars drawn from the collaborating universities and colleges in the United States of America.

East Africa in Transition: Images, Institutions and Identities was the theme of the 2001 Symposium. The goal was to challenge the common thinking about countries undergoing transition, to re-examine the process of change as it occurs in all areas of modern life. An examination of the process of change, however, was deemed not sufficient. As the contributions in this book show, the scholars were also concerned with the impact of transition on *images, identities* and local *institutions*. The editors hope that the

papers contained in this volume will contribute to the understanding and shaping of the process of change in East Africa.

The challenge to the scholars and policy makers against the backdrop of all the identified institutional weaknesses, convoluted identities and poor self images is to aggressively participate in global partnerships, at the same time creating an enabling environment that will nurture the emerging identities.

Several questions have been put forward in the book. Chief among these questions is what, in a holistic manner, informs and moulds the East African identity. Is it the shared colonial heritage including the legacy of artificial political borders? Is it a product of ethnicity and/or home locale? Could it be the similarity among the languages within the region? Is it the commonality of the struggle of all the peoples of East Africa to take their place in the global village? Is identity the product of self-actualization or a local response to global pressures?

These questions, and many more, were parts of the conversations held during the Nairobi Symposium. Certainly, the book does not provide all the answers to these questions. There is the need for continued study and for serious self-reflection by all of the parties and communities involved in the transition process. Likewise, there is need for communities to forge closer ties at all levels and in all areas both within the region and across the seas.

The editors hope that this volume will provide useful reading to students of humanities and social sciences. The book should also be of interest to policy makers involved in transforming the dream of East African Co-operation into a reality. It should be of use to development practitioners as well as NGOs involved in the transition of the three East Africa States.

Finally, the editors are grateful to some individuals and institutions that have supported both the International Learning Centre, the Symposium, and the production and publication of this book. The Andrew Mellon Foundation (USA) has generously funded the activities of the Global Partners. We would like to thank the Foundation most sincerely. Prof. Crispus M. Kiamba, Vice

Chancellor, University of Nairobi, provided logistical support to the symposium, while the Director for the office of International Programmes and Links, Prof. Ken M. Mavuti, extended a helping hand both during the preparations for the symposium and the eventual working on the papers for publication.

Special thanks to Dr. Jo Ellen Parker, President, Great Lakes Colleges Association for his continued guidance and support to the International Learning Centre. The University of Nairobi Press has taken the challenge to publish this volume. The Editors are grateful for the commitment of Ms. Pauline W. Mahugu and Mr. Kimaita J. Kirimania throughout the process.

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September, 2004

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