

Civil Society and Philanthropy in Africa: Contexts, Contradictions, Possibilities

ISTR Africa Network (ISTRAN) Conference

Date: June 21 - 23, 2017, Accra, Ghana

Venue/Hosts: West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI)

Call for Papers

The conjoining of civil society and philanthropy automatically invokes an eclectic mix of analytic and philosophic questions. For example: how can civil society organizations promote a culture of giving? Does charitable giving boost or enervate the civic impulse? How and under what conditions do agents traverse the civic and philanthropic terrains, and what forms of collaborations are possible between the two? What, in a deliberate amplification of the canvas, are the proper limits of collaboration between the state and charities, and who gets to draw them? Last but not least, how have the histories of civil society and philanthropic organizations been entangled in Africa, and what are the possibilities for the transformation of the nongovernmental space on the continent?

Until now, these and other important research and policy questions have been more or less glossed over in the relevant scholarship. For one thing, not only is interest in civil society of recent vintage, its intellectual obsessions are radically different. For another, academic interest in the philanthropic sector in Africa remains, a recent surge notwithstanding, episodic, not least because giving, being deeply enfolded into the ample fabric of everyday African informality, is not generally seen as worthy of systematic analysis or theorizing.

The broad aim of this conference is to kick-start the process of taking seriously these and other critical questions occupying the civil society-philanthropy interface. To this end, we invite theoretical, philosophical and empirical submissions drawing on the best investigative traditions and approaches from the entire spectrum of the social sciences, including, but not necessarily limited to, economics, history, psychology, cultural studies, philosophy, sociology, political science, and anthropology. Papers may be ethnographic, comparative, statistical, regional, national, or strictly theoretical in their approaches. Whilst submitters are encouraged to take issue with and pursue the implications of the foregoing questions from their respective intellectual standpoints, it is also important that they see them (i.e. the questions) as mere provocations to thought, and not limits or constraints that the conference organizers seek to impose.

As such, we would be delighted to receive papers that trouble the consensus around the 'goodness' of charity, say, or propose to take us to the so-called dark side of philanthropy, with critical detours at the intersection of international aid and donor dependence. Other issues upon which researchers are invited to reflect are: the role of religion and spirituality in civic mobilization and charitable giving; the fundamentals, possibilities, and contradictions of corporate philanthropy; conditions of partnership among civil society organizations, charitable bodies, and the state; the relationship between formal and informal giving in Africa, and the distinctions between philanthropy in Africa and African philanthropy; time, temporalities and geographies of giving; the ways in which both civil society and philanthropic organizations can advance an intellectual and policy agenda to tackle the pressing challenges of our time, especially terrorism, climate change, and

persistent gender inequalities; and finally, and within a strictly philosophic register, the ways in which charitable and civil society organizations can work towards the reshaping of the African political imagination.

Abstracts for papers that speak to these issues should be submitted to Dineo Seabe (dineo.seabe@vub.ac.be) by **February 28, 2017**. Authors of accepted abstracts will then be invited to submit completed papers by **May 15, 2017** at the latest.

A limited number of scholarships is available for graduate students in African institutions and will be awarded solely on the basis of need. Submitters of abstracts should indicate interest at the time of submission.

About ISTR

The International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) is a global membership association of scholars, researchers, and practitioners with the goal of keeping them abreast of changes and participate in a dialogue with on matters related to civil society, philanthropy and the non--profit sector, otherwise known as Third Sector (after Government and Business). Founded in 1992, ISTR is recognized and valued for its special role as a convener of scholars and policy makers on third sector issues from around the world. ISTR's role is in advancing scholarship and research on civil society. It has active regional network hubs in Africa, Asia and Latin America who hold regional research conferences every two years. The ISTR Africa Regional Network specifically supports emerging African scholarship in civil society by holding conferences and professional development workshops once every two years. It is a community of over 120 scholars both working and living in African countries, but also includes members of the African diaspora in other parts of the world. ISTR Africa Regional Network remains true to the global network's core mission, which is to increase, share, and apply knowledge about the third sector in all countries of the world. The specific goals and objectives of the African Network are to develop a critical mass of African scholars dedicated to the field of third sector research.

