

My PhD seminar experience: A reflection by Knowledge Mwonzora, Zimbabwean Ph.D. student (Year 3), North-West University, South Africa

It gives me so much pleasure to write about my experience at the PhD seminar that took place at the Wits Business School in Johannesburg South Africa on 14th and 15th May 2019. It was indeed a remarkable and unforgettable episode in my academic journey. The seminar attracted diverse determined and promising scholars from around the world at different stages of their PhD journeys. This is indeed crucial to learn from each other's experiences. I found the program very useful as it shaped my analytical lens as well as methodological grounding. As such, I strongly recommend it to any PhD student who wishes to apply for this PhD seminar in future. . Special thanks to the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) for organizing such an intriguing PhD seminar where students from the Global South and Global North converged to share pertinent insights and reflect on their PhD projects.

Bringing students from all over the world was quite enriching. We were clustered into small working groups depending on our research areas and topics. The small groups enabled students to present their work to peers and two faculty members. I was so excited to be part of a team of men and women committed to influencing policies on philanthropy and to acting as change agents in development studies more broadly. Although we were all from different academic, geographical and linguistic backgrounds, we managed to work well in teams and assisted each other in methodological and conceptual analysis. The two-day PhD seminar was very intensive but worthwhile. It was indeed an intriguing process, receiving critical and constructive comments from fellow PhD students and seasoned academics like the current president of ISTR, Professor Ruth Phillips, and former presidents Professor Alan Fowler and Professor Annette Zimmer, among others.



The main clusters were corporate social responsibility and sustainability, philanthropy and civil society/social movements. But more broadly, students' research covered an array of third sector issues like volunteerism, indigenous philanthropy and emerging forms of civil society organizations, to mention but a few. Part of my research is about the role of civil society actors in Zimbabwe's transitional justice processes in the aftermath of electoral violence in 2008. As such, my participation further capacitated me precisely on the role of civil society in democracy and on how to publish as an emerging scholar.

Socially, we had fun. We spent some time during the night socializing, drinking and joking. It was all fun! I can safely say I have widened my networks and created new friends through this PhD seminar. I am grateful to all the faculty members for the insightful feedback, constructive academic criticism and suggestions. The comments will certainly go a long way in shaping and improving our research projects.

Quite a number of PhD students participated in the three minute thesis competition. This was an intriguing and thought-provoking process where competitors pitched their projects in three minutes using only one PowerPoint slide. It was indeed a tight contest. All the participants were very eloquent and elaborated on their research explicitly which made it hard for the panel to select a single winner. At last two winners were selected for the first position and one for the second position.

On 16th and 17th May, we converged into the African Philanthropy Conference. It was our time to listen to leading scholars and practitioners in the Philanthropy field from all over the world. The conference attracted high profile delegates with vast experience in philanthropy, civil society and the nonprofit sector. I really enjoyed all the panels as all panelists were very eloquent in articulating their varied experiences in the Philanthropy field. From the academic side, the academics underscored the need for further research since philanthropy is an emerging field and relatively understudied. I personally learnt a lot from this conference due to its interdisciplinary nature and more importantly on the need to give to the less privileged for humanity's sake. I am grateful to all the partners that made the Seminar and Conference a success. Hats off to the organizers of the PhD seminar and the conference, Dr Bhekinkosi Moyo and Belinda Keratilo Mogotsi. Thanks for the good work! Your level of organization made our stay in South Africa worthwhile and memorable. Special thanks to the ISTR, ACPSI and Wits Business School.