



### Bringing back 'Faith' in discourses of African civil society: views from a convening in Nairobi

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In this issue of the ISTRAN newsletter, we bring you updates and reflections from participants in our African regional conference held in Nairobi from 11-13 July 2013. This was the fifth of the regional ISTRAN conferences. The main theme was 'faith, civil society and development in Africa,' which was agreed upon by network members during the July 2012 Siena conference as being relatively neglected, yet crucial for African civil society.

Faith has been fundamental to the historical development of modern Africa and is bound to remain so for many years to come. Indeed, some of the most prominent manifestations of civil society in Africa are Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs). FBOs have fulfilled critical functions in Africa's social development and politics manifested through service provision and policy advocacy, as well as in issues of human rights and democratisation. Despite its presence as an inescapable factor in the continent's development, faith has not been accorded adequate attention in social scientific analysis, especially among third-sector scholars. The 2013 ISTRAN regional conference was therefore an



*A group photo of some of the ISTR Africa Network conference participants.*

important corrective of this relative neglect.

This conference was a success in more ways than one. For a start, it involved a good mix of participants drawn from both the academy as well as practitioners. Such a mix is always useful for at least two reasons. Firstly, it is a feedback loop that researchers use to dialogue further with practitioners, whose work

is in most instances the object of third-sector research. Secondly, for practitioners, it is an opportunity to digest the sense made out of their work by the academics who research them. In this way, the academic-practitioner engagement can lead to co-production of ways to utilise knowledge generated by researchers for policy and advocacy.

The Nairobi convening sought to

<sup>1</sup>Following Mbiti, J., 1975, Introduction to African Religions, Heinemann, London, we use this term liberally as encompassing formally constituted religious orders with foreign and indigenous origins, as well as the pursuit of faith through spontaneous gatherings and preaching.



broadly address issues of how faith has shaped African civil society and society in general. The papers presented reflected a rich diversity of the influences of faith on Africa's development and governance trajectories.

The first theme was 'Faith, Philanthropy, Giving and Volunteerism'. The interest here was in furthering the understanding of how faith has shaped the nature of giving, volunteerism and philanthropy in Africa. Papers delivered under this theme underscored the role of faith in inspiring motivations, forms and manifestations of these practices. Specifically, they attempted to answer the following questions: What forms does volunteerism, giving and philanthropy take in Africa? What motivates these practices? Some papers showed that people give their time and/or money because they 'want to do' as opposed to something they feel they 'have to do', for example in response to policy, religious norms or social codes. As a result, motivation ranges from free will to duty and obligation. Other papers addressed volunteering in the context of social transformation with a view to examining how social class and race affect volunteering on the African continent.

The second theme, 'Political Economy of Civil Society', attracted papers dealing with the critical role of FBOs in social service provision in areas such as health and education, in influencing government policies, as well as in advocating on behalf of poor and marginalised people.

The third theme was 'Faith and Conflict'. These papers sought to answer the following questions: To

what extent has faith contributed to social cohesion and integration or been a source of conflict and divisiveness in Africa? Does it add to the suppression of the individual needs of social groups (e.g. women and immigrants) and dissenters in the public and political sphere? Here, the papers illustrated both the 'good' and 'bad' influences of faith in conflicts in Africa, many of which have religious undertones. Armed conflicts also bring to the fore fundamental issues of access, entitlement, rights in making choices about what to believe and the practising of one's faith. The pursuit of faith can induce challenges to stability, equality and development in Africa. Moreover, because faith knows no borders, there are various manifestations of cross-border religious-based terror groups that have a destabilising effect on several countries in a region. Here, groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army have exerted a destabilising impact in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR) and Southern Sudan. The Jihadist Al-Shabab in Somalia, Kenya and Uganda also come to mind. Specifically, while faith has been instrumental in mobilising resources, both human and material, for interventions aimed at solving African conflicts in places such as Northern Kenya and Uganda, faith has also been a key fuel to the emergence and sustenance of violent conflicts. In this regard, religious extremism manifested in organisational forms such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabab in Somalia, are influenced by faith. That being said, faith has also influenced interventions in

development programmes in most African countries. This theme was aptly illustrated by several papers, some of which highlighted the contradictory role of faith in Africa's development, especially as a source of humanitarian crisis in countries such as the DRC and Uganda. But as some of the papers showed, FBOs have also taken a lead in their responses in countries such as the DRC, Sudan and Kenya.

The theme of 'Faith and Governance' in Africa, including the role of religious institutions in the democratisation struggles of the past two decades, also attracted a variety of papers. These papers addressed several questions: How does faith affect the politics of governing in Africa? To what extent has the engagement of the Pentecostal movement in politics in countries such as Nigeria and Kenya affected the governance trajectory of these countries? Do they have a democratising effect, or are they trying to turn these countries into theocracies? FBOs feature prominently in recent African socio-economic and political history, in human rights crusades and democratisation struggles. Framing their demands on the basis of a liberation theology, for instance, FBOs played a huge role in organising and mobilising people to act against injustices in society as well as in the agitation for new constitutional order in Kenya. In some countries they have influenced electoral outcome. In short, FBOs are critical constituent elements of social development in African politics. Arguably therefore, besides ethnicity, faith is another significant variable influencing governance, conflict and the nature of the nation state in Africa.



Furthermore, the papers looked at: the contradictory and often contentious role of faith in constitutional reforms in countries such as Kenya; the role of religious leaders as public intellectuals at the forefront of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa; and, more recently, in the still-unfolding events in North Africa's Arab uprisings. It is instructive to note here that one of the highlights of the conference, the keynote address delivered by one of the constant faces in the struggles for state reforms in Kenya, the Rev. Dr. Timothy Njoya, delved into this very theme. Rev. Dr. Njoya (see his reflections in this issue) argues that a transformative mechanism exists within civil society because it acts as a centripetal force, pulling people together and steering material development to become consistent with the human spirit and divine will. His thesis is that if civil society is part of a centrifugal force, it cannot be a neutral arbiter in socio-economic-political quarrels. It has to side with the weak and oppressed. While giving credit to the ability of religious institutions to do this, he nonetheless faults religion, arguing, 'Ever since the days of the slave trade, colonialism and post-colonialism...Christianity and Islam have never become integral to Africa's own human expression but represent the interests of their foreign origins, the very foreign interests by which African market constitutes itself.'

The papers delivered at the conference underscored the duality, if not hybridity, of the role of faith in African civil society. The papers go a long way to deepen the epistemology on faith and religion, and their particular manifestations and influences on civil society,

governance and development in Africa. Some of these papers will be appearing as working papers on the ISTR website in due course. Watch this space!

But the relatively low number of participants (45) points to the fact that greater investment in network development is needed if we are to ensure harmony with the international research community by joining global conversations and not always playing catch up (see below, highlighted quotes from some of the new attendees to the conference). It is the prayer of those of us who have actively partaken in organising the network that we will get the necessary support from within and without to take the network and ISTR forward, ending ad hoc investment and research on the third sector in Africa. As highlighted in the members' meeting during the conference, the challenges, both structural and institutional, are not necessarily insurmountable. It takes determination, not unlike that of the Community Organisation Practitioners Association of Kenya (COPA-K) group we interacted with in Kibera.

The conference also involved a cultural event on the second day of the conference. It was phenomenal to see the quality of dancing by some of the participants to Kenyan tunes powerfully delivered by Nisisi Band, whose performance also illustrated the blending of indigenous African cultures and religion in Kenya.

On the last day of the conference participants were offered an opportunity to visit two civil society organisations in Kibera: COPA-K and the Muungano wa Wanavijiji Federation. The talks given by the leaderships of these organisations

illustrated a deep commitment to fighting injustice and transforming the material conditions of residents of Kibera. Deborah Simpson's reflections article 'A visit to COPA-K in Kibera' and, to a lesser degree, Jacob W. Buganga's 'The peace psychologist's experience' in this issue, highlight some of the lessons from this visit. One may ask, why spare three hours to visit Kibera when what was expected was a conference where academic jargon saturates discourse. As Simpson's article reveals, the conversations with COPA-K members gave conference participants a unique opportunity to experience how social change theory is being applied by 'community organisers who are engaging with residents to make substantial improvements to their day-to-day lives, something which wouldn't have been as apparent in the usual "poverty tours" foreigners make to Kibera.' Buganga's reflection points to this experience as offering a possible 'model for struggling societies' that shows hope and how it is realised, quite unlike the frames of poverty we have often seen in portrayals of Kibera in the media.

As already noted, the journey to this successful conference started from the deliberations during the 10th ISTR global conference in Siena (July 2012), when the ISTRAN members' meeting resolved to explore the role of faith in contemporary manifestations of civil society in Africa. After that, this mandate guided the ISTRAN coordinating committee in their preparatory work. Several people and institutions played a key role in ensuring the idea came to fruition, some of whom deserve special mention. Professor Alan Fowler had managed to convince Ousainou Ngum, the Executive

Director of the Agency for Coordination of Research and Development (ACORD) – a Pan African civil society development organisation – to attend the Siena conference. Moreover, Prof. Fowler managed to charm him into the ISTRAN meeting at that conference, where Mr. Ngum tentatively committed ACORD to co-hosting the conference with a yet-to-be-identified academic institution in Nairobi. When the University of Nairobi's Institute for Development Studies (IDS) agreed to co-host the conference, ACORD devoted its staff-time to ensure that the conference took place. We are specifically grateful for the support from Kristin Seljeflot and Wilkister Oluoch. From IDS, the Director, Prof. Winnie Mitullah, was equally instrumental and we thank her most sincerely for her time and devotion. From ISTRAN, many people worked behind the scenes to develop the call for papers, review proposed paper abstracts and raise funds to support the conference. We would like to single out Richard Wamai, Dineo Seabe, Alan Fowler and Ronelle Burger. Margery Daniels at the secretariat was, as usual, a great source of support at all stages, especially in fundraising, grant management and reporting, for which we thank her. Finally, the conference would not have taken place without the financial support of Trust Africa, the Ford Foundation Eastern Africa programme office in Nairobi and the ISTR global secretariat. To both organisations, we say ahsanteni sana for yet again putting your trust in ISTRAN.

A key outcome of the conference was an undertaking by participants to turn the papers presented into Working Papers under ISTR and, if possible, a special issue of a journal. I am working towards making this happen and have already received several papers, reviews of which will commence in the coming weeks. Moreover, the conference participants also resolved to hold the next regional conference in West Africa. We are grateful that Paul Opoku-Mensah, together with Christiana Atibil and Hippolyt Pul, have agreed to steer the preparations and hosting of this in Accra, Ghana, in 2015. This is an extremely important step in maintaining the momentum of third-sector studies, as ISTR conferences have been opportunities for 'finding soul-mates' in these studies on the continent.

Once again, thank you to all participants, donors, the ISTR global secretariat and hosts who made this event a success. Following the new energy injected into the association, we look forward to the days ahead.

If you are an African academic or a practitioner interested in civil society on the continent, please join us in the network, as well as in becoming a member of ISTR. Together, we can build a strong scholarly association on the continent. For more information on how to become a member of ISTR, please contact: <http://www.istr.org/?page=Membership>.



## New attendees share their assessments of the conference

**Sholagbade Abiola:** "I believe Africans can solve the issues that affect Africa. One way to achieve this is with a coming together of African minds from different cultural backgrounds to share experiences and offer solutions. The recent ISTRAN conference in Nairobi was a perfect example of how this approach can work. The conference was much more than an academic meeting, it was a lasting experience of fun, life, and an expression of African culture."

**Hirohisa Yukawa:** "I had some important insights as a result of attending the conference. As the only Japanese attendee from a society where most people are nominal Buddhists, I found that the different cultural contexts between Africa and Japan were tremendous. I truly appreciate the amount of input I received from the participants and hope to see everyone again at the next conference."

**Benaya Niyukuri:** "I found the conference very educational and a great resource. A memorable moment was the keynote address by Rev. Njoya. It was inspiring to hear how he has stood his ground and agreed to suffer for the sake of others. Another memorable moment was our visit to Kibera. I was fascinated by the work of COPA-K and thought the market offered a good picture of African life, making it possible to witness life in Nairobi beyond the confines of our hotel."

**Chidiebere James Onwutuebe:** "The conference was rewarding and offered multi-dimensional benefits, including deeper insights into the diverse and critical roles that religion can play, especially when politicised. I also had time to share wonderful ideas with scholars from across the globe."

# A visit to COPA-K in Kibera

Deborah Simpson



*Chairperson of COPA-K, Lawrence Apiyo, introducing members of COPA-K and explaining its work to ISTRAN participants.*



*Lena Kasyoka and Florence Juma spoke of their work in women's empowerment.*

Kibera has been variously described as 'Africa's largest slum' (Andrew Harding, BBC Africa, Friday 4 October, 2002), a 'boomtown slum' and 'Africa's biggest shanty-town' (The Economist, 22 December, 2012), and a 'microcosm of thriving poverty' (Huff Post Impact Canada, July 6, 2013). None of these descriptions conveys the strength, determination and inspiration our ISTRAN group was to encounter in meeting with the Community Organisation Practitioners Association of Kenya (COPA-K).

Thanks to Jacob Mati's contacts, on Saturday afternoon after the formal conference sessions, participants were given the option to board a bus headed to the office of COPA-K in Kibera. As a 'slum' with an estimated population of around 1 million people, Kibera was aptly described in the conference programme as 'ground zero of civil society'. The meeting with COPA-K gave conference participants a unique opportunity to move beyond the profound poverty that could be viewed from the bus windows, as the visit included a tour of a local market which COPA-K has been instrumental in keeping open. The meeting enabled us to learn

about the variety of ways in which community organisers are engaging with residents to make substantial improvements to their day-to-day lives, something which wouldn't have been as apparent in the usual 'poverty tours' foreigners make to Kibera.

We met with a range of community organisers, whose work ranges from successfully resisting government closure of a key market in Kibera, to running women's empowerment programmes, to operating HIV and AIDS education programmes. The

common thread across the various community-level programmes was how committed each individual is to improving the lives and ensuring the empowerment of those with whom they work. Meeting with this group of community organisers, who formed COPA-K to expand their network and create solidarities between different community organisations and programmes, gave added meaning to the discussions of civil society in which we had engaged for the previous three days of the ISTRAN conference.

*Chairperson of COPA-K, Lawrence Apiyo, with community organisers and COPA-K members Lena Kasyoka and Florence Juma.*



# A post-Nairobi reflection

Hagai Katz

Perhaps nowhere more than in Africa does the study of civil society carry such urgency and immediate practical implications. The multitude of social and political issues faced by the peoples and communities of the continent were never absent during the three days of the ISTR Africa Network (ISTRAN) conference in Nairobi in July 2013.

It is also not surprising that the conference was a meeting point for both seasoned and novice scholars and practitioners. I considered myself a novice at this conference, which I attended as a board representative knowing little of the realities of civil society in Africa. I came mostly to listen and learn. And I learnt a great deal.

Firstly, I discovered African camaraderie and hospitality, finding that a true understanding of *ubuntu* can be achieved only through experience. The friendliness of the organisers, hosts, staff and all the participants made everyone feel at home, right away. I also learnt what *hakuna matata* looks like during the fabulous cultural evening that we enjoyed on the first day of the conference. There I found out that age, rank and gender mean nothing when good African music, dance and Tusker (*barid*, please) mix together. And I learnt that time and order can mean very different things in different places. This didn't seem to be much of a hurdle for the conference organisers, Jacob Mati, Richard Wamai and Dineo Seabe, whose calm and cheerful organising capacity seemed like wizardry to me.

I also learnt a great deal about the importance and complexity of ISTR's outreach in countries of the global South. The members' meeting strengthened my conviction that network development is a crucial effort that requires a combination of drive at the secretariat level, along with local engagement and

initiative. I was deeply moved and encouraged by the importance participants attached to the connections and opportunities afforded to them and to civil society

**... *ubuntu* can be achieved only through experience.**

scholarship in their region through ISTR, as well as their willingness to communicate this message to their colleagues. Only a few weeks after the conference, I was informed by several attendees that they had communicated their positive experience in Nairobi to their home institutions and local networks, and that they are already preparing their abstracts for Munster.

The members' meeting and the conference provided me with a few important points to carry

**I came mostly to listen and learn. And I learnt a great deal.**

forward to the ISTR board meeting in Seoul in October 2013. One was the importance of a local focal institution for the stability of regional networks, preferably a university. The offer by our Ghanaian colleagues Paul Opoku-Mensah, Christiana Atibil and Hippolyt Pul to hold the next conference at the University of Ghana in Accra was a perfect

example of this commitment. Another was the importance of active rather than passive networking to achieve meaningful outreach. These points require, and deserve, in my opinion, additional investment and a new, improved strategy. Just as we did with the international conferences, we must look forward beyond a two-year cycle in the regional context too; and reach out to local forces, as we did so effectively with ACORD this year.

Finally, I learnt several important conceptual and methodological lessons. I learnt about the problem inherent in our use of dichotomies such as 'developed/developing', 'formal/informal', 'faith-based/secular', 'private/public', 'colonial/postcolonial', 'indigenous/foreign', and so on. While clearly instrumental to theory building, the research presented at the conference also highlighted the perils – methodological, practical and conceptual – of their misuse. I learnt an important lesson about the importance of context and history, the lingering effects of colonialism, slavery, autocracy and other historical factors on the current state and practices of civil society actors. I hope that I also learnt some humility in the face of the work done by our African colleagues in an effort to understand and promote the third sector and civil society in Africa. Given the challenges and the limited infrastructure and resources that they face, their achievements shine even brighter.

# The peace psychologist's experience

Jacob W. Buganga

When I received notification from the ISTRAN secretariat that I would be travelling to Nairobi to present a paper under the theme: 'Faith, Civil Society and Development' I was very excited, as this was one of a handful of opportunities I have had to present papers in and outside Africa.

It was great to meet delegates from different backgrounds in terms of their varying personal, academic and professional experiences. At certain moments I saw the personal coming through in the presentations, especially on the matter of conceptualisation of faith, religion and the individual in relation to the socioeconomic and the political. As the meeting went on, I noted that another group of participants had personal experiences that were negative towards faith and religion, either as victims or observers of grave abuse by some religions. I liked the debate that those different experiences created. Once I became aware of the sensitivity of faith and religion, not only within the conference room but also in the

communities where we live, I decided to expand my presentation to address those elements; to contribute to the interplay between faith, religion, the person, society, and politics. I was happy that my presentation hinted at each of those issues.

A contentious question surfaced during the course of the conference: the nostalgic matter of inviting elders in the academy, such as Professor Mamdani of Makerere Institute of Social Research (Uganda) and Columbia University (USA), to the conference to 'give [it] meaning'. This question had several implications, one of which was that it tried to undermine the credibility of the conference. In the future, conference organisers should probably consider such minority issues if resources allow.

Of course, I cannot forget the trip to Kibera. It is similar to the Makerere Kivulu and Katanga Slums in Kampala. There is resilience in the struggle by the people there and I liked the fact that the civil society organisations associated with the area are not giving up. The community organisers showed a lot

of courage when they spoke about their plans to seek parliamentary seats in order to take the Kibera struggles further into the Kenyan legislative arena, despite the challenges. The Kibera experience can be a model for struggling societies elsewhere in Africa, if not in the rest of the world. For them, life is the greatest gift and investment capital an engine with which to achieve their goals.

At the social event, the band played lots of music and there was plenty of dancing. Firstly, Richard Wamai led everyone to the dance floor and danced so vigorously that I wondered if he had any bones. Many others also danced their hearts out, including Hagai, Dineo and Belisa. I also joined in. Around 10:00 pm we retired to bed, exhausted but thankful for such a stress-relieving and relaxing activity.

I thank the organisers and sponsors of the ISTRAN conference for being very thoughtful about the theme: 'Faith, Civil Society, and Development' and making it the matter of discussion. I look forward to the next ISTRAN conference and interacting more on other themes.

## The need for research to undergird African development

Rev. Shalom Muwanguzi Nyenje

Thank you for the opportunity to give feedback about the ISTRAN conference in Nairobi, Kenya. We appreciate the opportunity we were given to make presentations on the role of faith and religion in conflict resolution and violent extremism in Africa, as well as the tackling of crime and violence among the youth.

Altogether, the conference was enriching, with various presenters offering ideas that gave us many options in dealing with the divergent challenges we face in Africa. We have misused our resources and religion, in particular, for destructive purposes to fulfil our selfish and individualistic desires, both for the leaders and individuals in our society.

In all, this meeting was very informative and highlighted the need for more funds to be allocated to research in the African region. The information we gain will help us to plan appropriate strategies to address the issues in our society. Without research (as has been the situation in Africa), we strategise incorrectly because our plans tend to be based on assumptions rather than empirical facts.

We therefore give credit to ISTRAN for the direction we have taken in advancing social research on our continent. This will open the way for us to explore technological and scientific methods for research that can be accessible to many, for the

good of the majority of the rural people in Africa, who are immersed in abject and chronic poverty.

We recommend that more institutions and corporate bodies be brought on board, and also that research be ingrained in our way of doing things by incorporating it in school curricula at secondary level to allow young people to realise its relevancy and problem-solving capacity.

We also suggest that all the presentations made at the conference, including photographs, be sent to all attendees. It is our humble prayer that we be invited to all ISTRAN conferences in the future.

# Thoughts on my keynote address to the ISTRAN conference

Rev. Dr. Timothy M. Nyoya

From a casual look, civil society the world over is losing its identity as the original and conscious social organisation. I pointed this out at the conference by saying that civil society is primarily the collective conscience of society, and this conscience pre-existed governments and markets as a simple and religious form of social cohesiveness. As such, and even without having to be tagged as non-governmental, civil society has its own intrinsic value in societal governance. Ideally, apart from those interests of the people, civil society does not have self-interests.

By relying fully on the government and the market, it is impossible for people to become a cohesive society because these sectors have their own independent interests that may run parallel, or counter to, those of mainstream society. Governments carry some partisan, class or group self-interests that are, at best, similar to those of their society and, at worst, dictatorial and lethal. The fact that civil society must protect the people from the extremes of state dictatorial tendencies and the merciless market is what makes civil society believe that it would not exist without governments and markets. Ultimately, civil society is what brought the market and the state into existence to govern social energies and material resources for the common good.

In order to keep some equilibrium between the various contrary and opposing forces, it is important that civil society maintains a minimum balance of freedom and sovereignty. It is unfortunate that in certain countries civil society cannot keep this equilibrium because governments have deprived it of access to resources, denied it freedom of association and curtailed its freedom to raise funds. In some cases, civil society lacks intellectual capacity or is subject to donor manipulation. The activities of faith-based civil society organisations may also be hampered when they compromise with an oppressive political class instead of following their calling to serve society.

As I said in my keynote address,

civil society ought to work for a just socio-economic order (oikos nomos), where people of different social and material interests can uphold each other's wellbeing and dignity without the need for external force. If properly conducted, religion, as a basic element of civil society, ought to hold together the Hausas, Igbos and Yoruba. In the absence of such internally induced togetherness, governments and their opponents resort to subjection, subordination and slavery to maintain society, to their own detriment.

The fact that people do not like each other does not mean that they have stopped needing each other and living together. Emotions, religion, ethnicity and other historical and external factors can bring people together. African tribes were brought together by western European imperialism. African states were created by historical necessity, beyond the will and capacity of European western imperialism to reverse. Even an externally forced marriage develops its own internal dynamics. The religious, legal and practical constraints that are now at work in Africa are not those that brought African tribes together, but have evolved out of the environmental conditions that make it necessary for living organisms to interact, mix, intermarry and cross-pollinate. As such, civil society exists to guide these necessary environmental conditions to make Africa the best society in the world. Left to their own devices, some socio-environmental conditions can only produce dominant classes and subordinate castes. It is up to African civil society to transform the African baseline social environment to produce humane, just, equitable material and social relationships amongst the people.

My thesis is that in a natural arena organised into a viable civil society, people are capable of finding a balance, equilibrium or consensus despite their different interests. My contention is that without civil society to act as the centripetal force, pulling people together, there is only the

centrifugal force of the government and the market to pull them apart. This begs the question whether religion is a centripetal force or centrifugal force.

If civil society is part of a centrifugal force, it cannot be a neutral arbiter in socio-economic-political quarrels. For where centripetal force is people's own human expression, selfish interests are the centrifugal force. Ever since the days of the slave trade, colonialism and post-colonialism, Africa has never been governed, but only dominated and exploited by, centrifugal forces. Africa has never been able to outweigh and counterbalance external interests. As such, even Christianity and Islam have never become integral to Africa's own human expression but represent the interests of their foreign origins, the very foreign interests by which the African market constitutes itself.

Kwame Nkrumah stated the roadmap for Pan-Africanism as 'Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added unto you.' My road map is, seek first the sovereignty, identity and ideology of civil society in order for the African people, their governments and market to stop orbiting around material interests that, in the first place, should revolve around the wellbeing of the people. Civil society is not about itself, the market or the state, but for the betterment of all.

The greatest African environmentalist, Wangari Maathai, would have said that no betterment or wellbeing is possible if development is not harmonious with the universe. St. Augustine would have added that neither development, nor betterment, nor wellbeing, is capable of satisfying the human spirit without having harmonious relationships with God.

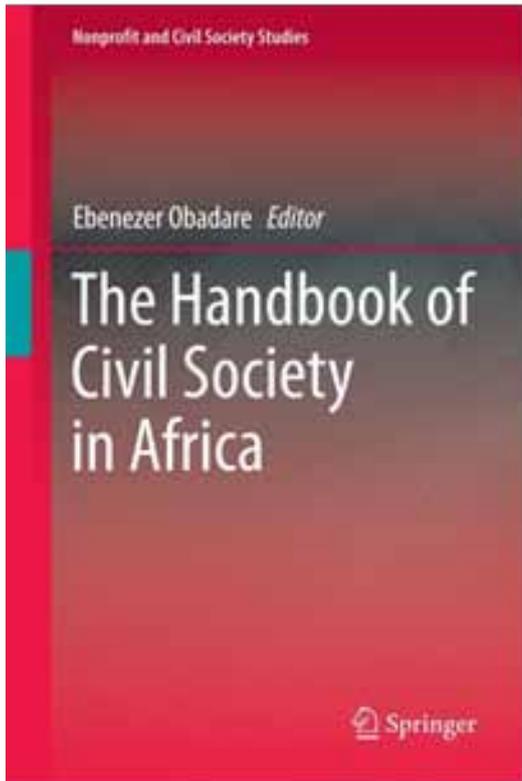
I therefore wish that you think of civil society as a transformative mechanism that steers material development to become consistent with the human spirit and divine will. This can only happen where all people respect each other as human, sovereign and equal beings, rather than as things.

# The Handbook of Civil Society in Africa

E. Obadare (Ed.)

Series: Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies, Vol. 20

The Handbook of Civil Society in Africa (2013) is the newest book edited by one of the ISTRAN member Prof. Ebenezer Obadare.



- One of the first to aggregate current scholarly thinking on civil society in Africa from a variety of viewpoints
- Discusses core themes, regional case studies, and development of civil society in Africa
- Focuses on an idea that enjoys widespread currency in both academic and non-academic (including international development) circles

This volume brings together the most up to date analyses of civil society in Africa from the best scholars and researchers working on the subject. Being the first of its kind, it casts a panoramic look at the African continent, drawing out persisting, if often under-communicated, variations in regional discourses. In a majority of notionally 'global' studies, Africa has received marginal attention, a marginality often highlighted by the usual token chapter. Filling a critical hiatus, the Handbook of Civil Society in Africa takes Africa, African developments, and African perspectives very seriously and worthy of academic interrogation in their own right. It offers a critical, clear-sighted perspective on civil society in Africa, and positions African discourses within the framework of important regional and global debates. It promises to be an invaluable reference work for researchers and practitioners working in the fields of civil society, nonprofit studies, development studies, volunteerism, civic service, and African studies.

## Endorsements

"This volume signposts a critical turning point in the renewed engagement with the theory and practice of civil society in Africa.

