



Member Insight

by Titilope F Ajayi

I had worked in civil society for some eight years before it occurred to me that I could study it as a thematic field. This journey began during my tenure as head of research at the West Africa Civil Society Institute where I first met Ebenezer Obadare, professor of sociology at Kansas State University and longtime ISTR member. When he invited me to contribute a reflective chapter on civil society in West Africa to his edited volume, *The Handbook of Civil Society in Africa*, two things happened. I learned, in drawing on my civil society experiences, both how much I knew and how much I still had to learn about civil society. Second, and more importantly for the purpose of this insight, there birthed in me a hunger to pursue my civil society impulses that would lead me to the ISTR and remains with me to this day.

"If it takes a community to raise a child, it takes an academic network to make a scholar."

Participant at 2017 ISTR Africa Regional Network meeting

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I do not remember clearly how I first encountered ISTR, but I will not quickly forget my delight at the wealth of resources that I found when I first visited www.istr.org--it was just what I needed at that point in my trajectory as a civil society scholar. My first ISTR event was the Africa regional meeting in Accra in 2016 where I served as discussant for a paper on civil society and democracy in Nigeria, a thoroughly gratifying experience. Thereafter, I presented my work on religious philanthropy in Ghana at the 2017 Africa regional meeting, also in Accra, where I met lots of fellow civil society enthusiasts at different career stages and took part in a PhD seminar that was very enriching. At both events, the seeds were sown for networks and partnerships that are yielding fruit today and will do so for years to come.

In light of my opening quote, I have observed from interacting with other ISTR members how pivotal to their careers their relationships with other members have been. In my case, this is no different. My interactions with colleagues have helped to broaden my understanding of civil society in ways that certainly contributed to me being selected as a doctoral fellow for the 2017/8 Social Science Research Council's [Next Generation Social Sciences in Africa program](#). The SSRC program addresses the inadequate number of faculty with PhDs in universities in six African countries by supporting new thinking in peace, security, and development research from the African continent. Because ISTR has been so helpful to me, I have recommended membership in the association to many others and will continue to do so. For their interest in and support for my work, I am very thankful to Ebenezer Obadare, Oonagh Breen and ISTR executive director, Margery Daniels.

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