

FREEDOM CHAMPIONS

STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES IN THE WAR OF IDEAS

**30 Case Studies by Intellectual Entrepreneurs
Who Champion the Cause of Freedom**

Edited by Colleen Dyble

with an Introduction and Epilogue
by Brad Lips



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* The twelve chapters marked with asterisks originally appeared in *Taming Leviathon: Waging the War of Ideas*, published by the Institute of Economic Affairs.



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Promoting Free Markets in Africa

Franklin Cudjoe
IMANI: The Center for
Policy and Education
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CHAPTER

The quest to be an intellectual entrepreneur within a climate consumed by poverty, patronage and dependency, can be a very tough one. The tools to fight these ills are non-existent in our institutions of higher learning. Discarded theories of economic development or half-baked measures mired in statism were the norm for many students of economics. Such was the cross that I had to bear when I decided to tread the path of enlightened inquiry into understanding why, despite being blessed with physical and human resources, my country and continent were poor. What were elected governments to do, I asked? Didn't we install governments to guarantee our freedom from poverty, disease and ignorance?

Even though I erroneously argued for strong government intervention in building the assets of the poor, I realized much later, that to enhance freedom from poverty, governments must ensure a reduction in risk for private investors. They should do this through stable monetary and fiscal policy, stable investment regimes and a clear and transparent business environment backed by the rule of law and decentralized decision-making processes.

My mother's ordeal in getting a loan of US\$150 as start-up capital from a moneylender seventeen years ago illustrates how a heavily regulated financial sector was a barrier to progress. My mother's business could only thrive after a decade of progressive financial liberalization when Ghana's economic books began reflecting a favorable balance of payments with a wider access to quasi venture funds.

My curiosity for unraveling other myths surrounding the government's invincibility at solving problems continued to grow. Reading recommendations from my good friend Nick Slepko, a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar whom I met at a student symposium in Switzerland, as well as Jo Kwong of the Atlas Economic Research Foundation, and Linda Whetstone and Julian Morris of the International Policy Network, helped a lot. Thomas Sowell's *Knowledge and Decisions*, and Hayek's *Use of Knowledge in Society* and *The Road to Serfdom* were significant eye-openers for me.

Thomas Sowell taught me that all human institutions needed an authentication of the knowledge process since ideas are everywhere, but true knowledge is rare. Hayek's *Use of Knowledge* taught me that the knowledge we must utilize is not the exclusive domain of any one or group, but rather 'the dispersed bits of incomplete and frequently contradictory knowledge which all the separate individuals possess.' To which the transmission of this information occurs spontaneously, enticing the individual while seeking his or her own interest and doing what is in the general interest.

My understanding of Hayek, is that economics is a dynamic discipline because the concept of scarcity, its central problem, is weakened through the use of knowledge in freely allocating resources, rather than the statist view of resource coordination by 'all-knowing' central planners to address the question of resource allocation. And by extension, I realised how fatuous an argument it was that corporations put profits before people. Apart from asking where the money should come from, I was well aware of how dysfunctional and moribund Ghana's state-owned enterprises had become, even the few of them that were recuperating after heavy doses of private capital. These topics became the platform for all my media and speaking appearances.

However, I realized how comforting and costly it could be for one to rest on defeating a few vacuous philosophies. I was emboldened by the admonition that the only way to keep liberty's foes at bay was by giving meaning to John Blundell's summary of Hayek's advice in *Waging the War of Ideas*. That is, that one should 'Keep liberal thought relevant and vibrant; recognize the importance of history; be principled and steadfast; avoid special interests; eschew politics and instead search for leverage; recognize the critical role of the intellectual; and be Utopian and believe in the power of ideas.'

This was the signal that launched the birth of my think tank, IMANI: The Center for Policy & Education. IMANI was born out of the desire to create a springboard for generating and spreading workable ideas for a free and prosperous society with a mission to stimulate public discussion. This is what transformed IMANI into one of the most influential think tanks in Africa. IMANI has undergone remarkable growth since its inception barely five years ago, and has today achieved a stature that, in many ways, is truly astounding.

IMANI's competitors in Ghana are, on average, more than four times older, with extensive networks across governmental and corporate circles, which give them a pedigree born of the privilege that such access endows. It is therefore fascinating that IMANI is frequently cited in the same leagues as the most prestigious of these institutions. A weekly media citation index housed within IMANI shows that since May 2008, IMANI has been ranked number one among Ghanaian institutions for 'Web-presence' and number two when it comes to citations in the print press. Its profile in the broadcast media has also improved dramatically in recent times. Considering the resources available to these older institutions, IMANI's higher public profile constitutes a remarkable feat.

Over the course of the past four years here in Ghana, IMANI has consistently raised the level and quality of debate and discourse in the popular and specialist press. It has done this by highlighting neglected issues which touch on the four broad thematic pillars that IMANI views as the underpinnings in the development of free, stable, and prosperous societies. These themes include: 'Rule of Law,' 'Market Growth and Development,' 'Individual Rights, Human Security, and Human Dignity,' and 'Institutional Development.' Through careful and sustained marketing, these have been mainstreamed into the national discourse through IMANI's advocacy and public outreach efforts. Consequently, as indicated above, the organization has become the most consulted think tank in Ghana by such major media houses such as the BBC, the IPS (Inter Press Service),

and more recently, the CBC. It is perhaps worthy to add that the inclusion of IMANI's work in international periodicals such as *The Wall Street Journal* outstrips that of any other similar organization in West Africa.

With only six staff and eight unremunerated fellows, IMANI nevertheless maintains commitments across the above-mentioned four thematic areas at a level that very few of its larger, older competitors have shown a willingness to match. The evidence for these claims is manifest in the breadth of subject matter covered by IMANI publications, press submissions and other commentaries.

The influence and scope of the organization's views have led to the modification of anti-market tax policies, the reversal of highly restrictive food and beverage safety regulations in Ghana and beyond, and to the wide-ranging redrafting of national primary healthcare policy.

IMANI's work has been cited by ministers of state when explaining policy changes, and has been referenced during sessions in the House of Lords in the United Kingdom and the High Court in South Africa. In addition, our publications have been mentioned by the Jamestown Foundation and the Association of South East Asian Nations. It is thought that its leadership has reframed the dominant trends in scholarship on China-Africa relations, as well as reshaping the debate about the interplay of energy geopolitics and the US-Africa strategic security relationship, as evidenced by follow-on publications in the *Asia Times* and elsewhere.

Yet, IMANI's focus has not departed from its core objective of training a new corps of future visionaries and leaders who will carry the torch of liberty and blaze the trail of prosperity in the coming dawn of African renaissance. IMANI's continental seminars have catered to dozens of youth from a dozen countries in Africa, and brought needy and academically underserved students in contact with Africa's leading thinkers and doers. In our most recent residential programs, 60 speakers, comprising Army generals, CEOs, senior technocrats, and academic deans and dons, have enkindled in the bright young minds of these 40 students a strong desire to become champions of liberty, proponents of the prosperity created by strong markets and human rights, and principled advocates for the rule of law and institutional growth here in Ghana and farther afield.

One beneficiary of one of these programs wrote: 'You have fertilized my mind; all my life I will bear fresh seeds of liberty.' Yet another beneficiary wrote, 'Even though the seminar did not change my left-leaning values, I have learnt that many of the entrepreneurs, the key drivers of the economy,

are merely normal people who wish to do things for themselves. The seminar was a master piece of logistic efficiency; a testimony of the outstanding quality of a dedicated, even if rather small, staff.'

Another beneficiary of our seminar wrote, 'Events such as this are useful in raising public awareness of how knowledge properly applied could provide the tool for our societies to rise up to the challenge of eliminating poverty and for building prosperous societies for future generations of Africans.'

This aspect of our work has resonated so well with independent observers that, thus far, IMANI is the only think tank in Africa to have won an Atlas Economic Research Foundation Templeton Freedom Prize twice (beating 180 other think tanks across the globe). IMANI has since crowned this achievement by being awarded an Antony and Dorian Fisher Award from the Atlas Economic Research Foundation. Such recognition is clearly consistent with the notion expressed above that IMANI embodies a unique formula for success. That formula was recently noticed by the prestigious *Foreign Policy Magazine*, which ranked IMANI as the sixth most influential think tank in Africa, listed behind four think tanks based in South Africa and one in Senegal.

One Atlas Economic Research Foundation Templeton Freedom Prize judge remarked: 'I give them [IMANI] the highest points for being most specific and rigorous in applying free market solutions to an array of complex social problems. Their submission shows the importance of using rigorously derived, quantifiable research outputs to gain credibility in shaping the policy debate. Crisp, clear, compelling data is the most useful tool to provide to any media outlet, and it's easy for the media to use, without interpretation.'

It is without doubt always a testament to the viability of an organization if its members show excellence both within and outside. IMANI's principals have received awards ranging from the YAN Global Fellowship through Marie Curie Scholarships to St. Gallen Accreditation, as well as invitations to share panels with international leaders such as Bill Gates Senior, Mark Goldring, Anwar Ibrahim, Martin Wolf, and Maat Laar (the former President of Estonia).

And yet how much more, and how much better, could we have done? What greater developmental impact might we have made and what greater heights in scholarship would we have reached, had the support been more forthcoming? While we revel in our achievements, we are also well aware of our challenges.

In the context of the above-mentioned four thematic areas, we have initiated three major projects that constitute the strategic bedrock of our medium-term vision. Over the next five years, we aim to become the foremost authority in the world on the unfolding Sino-African relationship, through our Sino-African Virtual Institute (sinoafrica.org), and the leading developer of research methodology and practice guidelines for corporate social responsibility in West Africa through our upcoming ISBIX project. We are also aiming to be one of the three most prolific research houses in Africa working in the area of human security as a function of market institutionalization, through our upcoming “Big Debates” project.

Across these frameworks, public outreach will be consolidated through AfricanLiberty.org, the publication/syndication project run jointly with the Cato Institute, and the launch of Ghana’s first Research Journalist Corps. Each element in this vision, upon critical analysis, reveal cracks in the current IMANI structure. Lack of adequate remuneration for adjunct and research fellows is increasingly limiting the organization’s ability to carry out original research. The adjunct fellowship model has proved immensely useful in the past, and two of our current full-time staff began their relationship with us in this way. This model brings into the fold talented individuals who prefer the freedom of multiple affiliations in order to nurture interdisciplinary excellence, and helps to foster useful and potentially synergistic links between our institution and others.

Likewise, corporate governance would also most likely improve if IMANI were able to provide sitting allowances for board members. The present situation of strict pro bono conditions of service clearly limits the ability of management to draw on the vast experience of some board members.

IMANI would also prefer to be able to encourage a certain degree of specialization, in correspondence with the aforementioned themes and projects, amongst staff using customized training and core-competence augmentation. However, the unavailability of long-term core budget support has interfered with these longstanding plans.

IMANI enjoys healthy partnerships with a number of organizations in Africa and beyond, including the Cato Institute (United States), the International Policy Network (United Kingdom), the Initiative for Public Policy Analysis (Nigeria) and the Liberty Institute (India). The next level in organizational planning would be to enter into specialized partnerships with other institutions around strictly specified objectives. These kinds of

relationship-based initiatives will clearly provide IMANI with an enhanced ability to define and monitor strategically shared goals and visions.

Five years from now, IMANI should be the most influential think tank in Africa. We know that this goal is achievable and we are happy to welcome donors and partners who identify with the vehicles for this strategic vision. However, interim funding will prove crucial to the sound development of these projects.