



Institute DRIVE
A think-do tank, DRIVING Africa forward

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Institute DRIVE is a pan-African think-do tank. Institute DRIVE (or DRIVE for short), has been registered in Ghana as a non-profit company.

DRIVE will meet the urgent need for a think-tank devoted to addressing Africa's production and productivity crisis through ideas-shaping and intervention in the policy process, based on ideas that break decisively from the status quo of the past three decades.

The vision of DRIVE is to be an inspiration for creative and alternative ideas and actions that help African civic, political and business leaders (old and young) to actively address the productivity and employment crisis that fuelling the continent's enduring poverty and poor democratic governance.

The purpose of DRIVE is to provide the tools to achieve these in the form of multiple spaces for conversations and ideas exchange; targeted research and training, and creative communication in order to educate and to mobilise.

The energy, conceptual and programmatic directions of DRIVE have their roots in the analysis and activities of accomplished alternative and progressive thinkers, and networks and institutions from many parts of the world north and south.

The key individual behind DRIVE is Charles Abugre, is a well known pan-Africanist, development economist, academic and NGO activist. He has an extensive record of creating, managing and sustaining institutions in Africa and an equally extensive experience in development management.

THE CONTEXT

Policy and structural reforms, aggressively promoted through aid and trade arrangements in Africa (and much of the developing world) over the past three decades focused overwhelmingly on down-sizing and reforming the state through liberalisation (of trade and finance), privatization, and deregulation. Fiscal and monetary policies prioritised low inflation and debt servicing compliance over investment, creativity and employment creation.

These were based on the belief that laissez-faire and a lean "enabling" state in a low-inflation environment will promote the efficient use of resources, stimulate private sector investment and thereby bring about economic growth and prosperity. Over time, the additional ingredient of good governance – emphasising competitive politics, civic and political rights, strong property rights protection, low corruption and sweeping incentives for foreign investors – was superimposed upon the laissez-faire framework.

After three decades of these reforms, the average African state is neither leaner nor efficient, but undoubtedly weaker in terms of the capacity to govern the process of transforming economies to provide productive employment, generate adequate tax revenues to finance essential services such as health and education, and protect the poor.

Liberalisation has not brought about the growth and diversified productive capacities envisaged. Instead, the productive sectors are severely stifled. Productivity in the food sub-sector has declined, reversing earlier progress made to achieve food sovereignty. Africa is the only continent to have been systematically denied the opportunities to build manufacturing or value-added service industries and to use science, technology and creativity to expand and diversify productive capacities. Early efforts to do so in the post-independence decade were brought to a crushing halt by structural adjustment decades, beginning in the early 1980s.

Where economic growth has occurred, especially in the past five years or so, it has produced few remunerative jobs and has resulted largely in higher commodity prices and increased aid flows rather than productivity growth. However, this fragile growth is now severely threatened by the combined effects of the global economic downturn, triggered by the financial meltdown, climate fragilities and persistently high food prices.

But crisis offers opportunity, not least to change track in development thinking. Urgent among these opportunities is the need to rethink the role of the state and its relationship with the productive economy. There is a yearning in the continent to refocus the discourse on Africa's development from the dominant themes of aid, trade and markets, to a frontal attack on its production and productivity crisis; from false dichotomies of 'state bad, private sector good', to one that recognises symbioses and complexity, and from the dominance of short-term thinking to realistic strategic planning.

Global Campaigns that challenge the neo-liberal model: Debt, Trade, Tax, Climate

DRIVE founders – along with many others – have played a key role in the growth of the north/ south global campaign effort to draw attention to and force change on the neo-liberal policies that have all too often proved wanting. Campaigns like the call for debt cancellation; for trade justice; for tax justice; indeed environmental/climate justice - have mobilised hundreds of thousands around the world.

DRIVE considers the relevance of these demands in terms of how they practically translate into enabling Africans to produce and provide employment - whether that be an impact on agriculture, industry or public service. Trade policy cannot stand on its own but be a part of industrial policy, i.e. how trade supports farmers and local entrepreneurs to add value. In many cases, this translates into strategies to support local producers including some level of trade protection. Similarly, tax is essential as the means to generate the resources for redistribution as well as for investment in productive capacity. For DRIVE, climate change is an issue to address in the sense of not just the stress effects on the livelihoods and the productive sectors but the need to think of climate-resilient and low carbon technology and production methods.

As 'entry points' for appreciating the structural issues that underpin why it is that so many African nations have not developed as they should have, these campaigns have effectively brought an international awareness and focus to the economic inequity in the global system. It is how these components are effectively integrated into the wider debate and policy implementation around employment and economic growth that is of interest to DRIVE.

LOOKING FORWARD: DRIVE's ROLE

DRIVE will support a new focus on production and innovation in the 21st century that will, by necessity, take into full consideration the implications of climate change and a low-carbon economy. This has implications for the type of agriculture and technology policy. Also, in the context of a global financial crisis, a renewed drive on productivity must also address the question of alternative, reliable and predictable resources for financing development. This bring to the fore the issue of taxation, capital flight and natural resource revenue management. In all of these, the state is central, not simply as 'watchman' but as an active player in the productive process, learning to avoid over-protection (in the case of Africa) and autocracy (in the case of the East Asian experience).

DRIVE will work with others to use formal and informal means, forums and platforms, to expose African leaders to the 'other canon' (heterodox) thinking and to provide support to creative ideas that may not immediately gain favour with donors and orthodox advisors.

DRIVE will engage with African academics and institutions, including those dominated by orthodox thinkers, in a healthy exchange of ideas. This is the heart of the 'do' part of DRIVE's character as a 'think-do tank'.

DRIVE aims to harness the creativity, drive and momentum of the social enterprise revolution to focus on value added production, including the creative economy that creates remunerative jobs and empowers the poor. It will focus particularly on young entrepreneurs.

DRIVE will embrace alternative culture, communications and the moving image. The traditional way in which the intellectual and policy community communicate is through the medium of the written word – as journals, books and commentary – which are increasingly disseminated via the web. Yet, the fine arts, music, poetry and moving image may often be more powerful in conveying messages and maximising the potential for communication of ideas.

DRIVE will be launched on the themes of 'change' and 'renewal'. It will be launched at a time that has a strong symbolism with the theme of change. There will be two main sets of activities; a high-level technical conference, and a set of artistic events, reflecting its essential character. The symbolic moment will be based on Harold MacMillan's speech 'Wind of change' speech that heralded decolonisation across the continent and ignited one of the most brutal phases of the anti-apartheid struggle. DRIVE believes, in this 21st century, a new 'wind of change' for the continent is long overdue.

The time is opportune for this new initiative and there is considerable energy and commitment behind it on the part of its founders. The need for DRIVE and all it can bring to the debate on Africa's economic progress is urgent.

For more Information on DRIVE contact:-

Charles Abugre - Cabugre2000@yahoo.com (UK, Ghana)

Deborah Burton - Deborah@tippingpointfilmfund.com (UK)

John Jones - Jones@networkers.org (Norway)