Ideas for a Free Society
Progress Report – Summer 2011

We know that ideas have consequences and that many influential and inspirational advocates of a free society read just one book which had a profound impact on their understanding, leading them to dedicate their lives to the pursuit of the free society.

But unfortunately ideas that explain the relationships between individual freedom, limited government and prosperity are not available to most people in the world. This is the case in much of Africa, Asia and the Middle East particularly if you don’t have access to fast download speeds. For those who do not speak English or another European language, they are generally not available at all.

So we have produced a mini library of relevant texts on a CD called *Ideas for a Free Society*. We support the translation of texts and production of CDs, DVDs and associated books in other languages, essay competitions about these ideas, and major outreach efforts by local partners in some of the least free and poorest parts of the world. A DVD has recently been launched in Portuguese and a CD and student primer in Kyrgyz. Currently under production are CDs in Turkish, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic, and books for students in Chinese.

We originally focused on CDs because they are inexpensive to produce and distribute. Likewise CDs provide access where the books are not available or download speeds are too slow or expensive. The cost of producing the second edition of our CD Ideas for a Free Society was about 75 cents each and the average cost of shipping them 20 cents. So for under a dollar we can get over 100 of these wonderful texts on the CD to almost any country on earth.

Progress over the last 18 months has far exceeded our expectations, with achievements by our partners often being way beyond anything we could have imagined. 80% of the 100,000 CDs produced in English have been distributed to over 50 countries including Afghanistan, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

The aim of the project is to increase the number of people who share our understanding of and commitment to liberty and in their turn they will become the intellectuals in their countries who change the climate of opinion in favour of freedom.

Our Facebook page has further details of the distribution of the CD in countries world wide and a website will be available later this year.


This work has only been possible because of the belief of our donors in the creative power of freedom and their generosity to our programmes. We are enormously grateful to them for their support and hope they feel their investments are being justified.
Programmes

Sub Saharan Africa

Adedayo Thomas from Nigeria, Director of Outreach for AfricanLiberty.org, has been very active in Benin, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda and Ethiopia and in running the AfricanLiberty.org essay project, www.africanliberty.org. He has arranged seminars and events entitled ‘Pathways to Prosperity’, at over 20 universities, with some of them lasting several days. Using colourful banners he attracts audiences of students and faculty that sometimes number in the hundreds. He discusses the foundations of prosperity and introduces the texts on the CDs, also distributing books and the CDs and, where possible, starting student Liberty Clubs for further discussion. So far clubs have been formed at eight universities under the name African Liberty Students Organisation (ALSO).

A full house for Adedayo Thomas at the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Northern Nigeria, March 2010

Getting invitations to make presentations at universities is a challenge in itself and Adedayo works hard for them. It was particularly gratifying when academics from Ethiopia approached him to visit two of their universities after seeing on Facebook what he was doing in other African countries.

A banner inviting students and faculty at St Mary’s University College, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
An essay competition, open to any young African, was run in conjunction with the seminars. It was widely advertised at the relevant universities and think-tanks in Africa. 280 students submitted essays and 10 received cash prizes with three also winning a scholarship for the popular week-long course run by the Students and Young Professionals African Liberty Academy (SYPALA).

Adedayo gets many emails after his university visits such as, “The forum was truly revealing. Looking forward to dealing more with the other Libertarians in Africa once we have formed the Maseno Chapter of African Liberty”

Mahamadou Sinte of CEDAH (Le Centre des Affaires Humaines, www.cedahburkina.org) made good use of the CDS at their first conference of this sort in Ouagadougou, Burkino Faso, even though English is not their language of higher education as it is in much of Africa. A French version of the CD would be very useful in reaching the Francophone population of Africa and elsewhere.

Durra Elmaki, through the Nile Institute, distributed CDs at courses promoting democracy and entrepreneurship in Sudan. Doing such work in Sudan presently is difficult but she and her colleagues were relieved and somewhat amused that they were able to openly distribute CDs on the basis that they are not books, which are strongly censored. They were also impressed at the debate sparked by texts such as John Stuart Mills’ ‘On Individuality’, which encouraged students to see themselves as individuals rather than extensions of the tribe for the first time.

Leon Louw of the South African Free Market Foundation made a very successful presentation at University of Witwatersrand in 2010 which attracted 160 students. Another in early 2011 was disrupted because the police had been called in to control activist students (not related to the seminar) and non-activist students had been excluded. But to Leon’s surprise many faculty members turned up instead and will now distribute the CDs to their students themselves. (http://www.freemarketfoundation.com/)

At a third they were encouraged to find a Mauritian Austrian economist who was delighted to receive the CDs for his students and asked for the seminar to be made an annual event as part of the economics curriculum at the Pietermaritzburg campus. 60 MBA students attended the seminar at the Management College of SA and asked for CDs for their friends who could not attend. As a result of these activities Leon Louw has just been invited to give a lecture to the 1,200 second year economics students on Ideas for a Free Society by the Professor of Economics at Johannesburg University. Probably the biggest group we have ever been offered.

Temba Nolutshungu is working with young people setting up Liberty Forums at three universities in Western Cape province. Once these forums are established the idea is to use them as models for other South African universities and the CDs would play a central role in this process.

Temba is also going to take the seminars at universities in Zambia in June.

Details of the distribution in Mozambique are in the Portuguese section.
Arabic

Since Egypt's and Tunisia's change of government the Atlas web-based Arabic platform Minbaralhurriya has been putting on events and working to set up groups to promote limited government and economic freedom in these countries. They immediately requested the English CDs to help them with the important process of educating people in the principles and practice of a free society. An Arabic version is currently a very urgent priority.

One of the most surprising things we have discovered is that virtually none of the classical liberal texts on the CD are available in Arabic. This means that if Arabic is your only language you can never have read any Smith, Mill, Locke, Bastiat, Hayek, Mises, Friedman, Rand, Simons, Bauer or any of the other great authors on the CD. In fact you will have had no access to any writings that explain and promote the principles and practice of a free society.

Not only have very few been translated but there are very few original Arabic texts that explore these issues either. Worse still there are very few people who are able to translate them appropriately because it is very difficult to do this especially if you do not understand the concepts involved.

We are working with Minbaralhurriya on a CD in Arabic and also looking into the possibility of one in Farsi and Urdu as well.

Turkey

The Turkish version of the CD is making good progress. In part because Atilla Yayla, (who previously headed the Association for Liberal Thinking in Ankara), (http://www.liberal.org.tr/engindex.php) has created and published translations of about 250 of the top classical liberal texts in Turkish over the last 20 years. Thus many are already available for inclusion on the CD. We hope the CDs will be ready in the next 2 or 3 months and they will then be distributed throughout Turkey by the active classical liberal 3H Group.

Central Asia

The Central Asian Free Market Institute, (CAFMI) has just finished the production of a CD and a student textbook in Kyrgyz, which contains a selection of the texts on the CD that they have translated. These would have been finished earlier but for the violent disturbances between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan last year which almost became civil war.

CAFMI has organised a Freedom Bus which recently started a three week tour of 29 towns, where they will meet students, give seminars, have discussions and hand out the CDs and a number of books. They will have 30 people travelling with them and expect to interact with 15,000 or so participants during the tour round Kyrgyzstan. Later they will distribute the books and CDs in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan although distribution in the two latter countries will wait until we have the Russian version of the CD as well, since Russian is the second language in these countries. If you want to see the tour of the Freedom Bus - http://www.freemarket.kg/en
And here is their Freedom Bus!

The Tajikistan Free Market Centre produced their own short CD in Russian after being shown the Ideas for a Free Society CD in English by their friends in Kyrgyzstan.

**Pakistan**

The Alternate Solutions Institute (ASI) in Lahore has produced a Pakistani version of the CD *Ideas for a Free Society* called *Ideas for a Free and Responsible Society.* [http://asinstitute.org/node/68](http://asinstitute.org/node/68)

3,000 copies are for their use and 2,000 for the use of the Friedrich Neumann Foundation in Pakistan who requested them because “my colleague from India has highly recommended your CD *Ideas for a Free Society*”. They are distributing them to the participants of their workshops and amongst those working in the government.

The ASI’s plans for seminars in Pakistani universities were delayed because of security issues and the nervousness of the university authorities to allow discussion of these subjects on their premises. Nevertheless the first was held in March at the University of the Central Punjab, one of the prominent private universities. More than 130 students participated in the event. On April 19th they had 170 students for their event at the University of Gujrat and on April 20th 110 students participated in a joint universities event in Lahore.

A colleague of the ASI is currently making presentations and distributing the CDs in the Peshawar region of Pakistan.

**India**

The Centre for Civil Society (CCS) in India is running an essay competition ‘How Free are You?’, inviting essays on perspectives on liberty – personal, political and economic. It closes in June and winners get money prizes with the best being invited to the CCS’s residential youth seminars. [http://ccs.in/essay/](http://ccs.in/essay/) Matthew Manoj has received over 2,000 registrations for the competition so they are hoping for a large number of essays. They have distributed
an additional 2,000 CDs to university students including 600 to the Delhi School of Economics.

China

The translation work for a CD and two books into Chinese is nearly complete and the CDs should be finished in late June. These CDs have the benefit that, unlike the English version, unlimited numbers can be made because we have permission from the copyright holders of the texts to make unlimited copies and excluded any texts that would have been limited by copyright. They will be distributed at the many seminars run by the Cathay Institute for Public Affairs, http://www.chinaipa.org. There are also a number of other organisations in China waiting for them.

Approximately the same material will then be divided up and put into two books with the more introductory texts in one book for undergraduate students and laymen, and those that require a higher understanding of the subject in another book for academics. They will hopefully be published by commercial publishers later this year.

Malaysia and Indonesia

Wan Saiful of the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs, (IDEAS) (www.ideas.org.my), has undertaken an energetic programme to promote the ideas on the CD with 5 seminars in Malaysia, attended by a total of 787 students, and a similar programme in Indonesia. IDEAS have also been innovative in promoting the principles and practice of a free society through the use of the CD at other events such as a major student gathering where politicians were the main speakers but discussion in the breakout sessions focused on the texts on the CDs.

This second approach was taken in Indonesia where, rather than organising events specifically under this funding, they combined funding with that from Atlas and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation. This enabled them to organise 21 events in Indonesia, attended by 1,285 participants.

5,000 CDs have been distributed in this way in about 14 months.

Wan says the CD has been very popular, and not only amongst economics students. The literature they contain is not available any where else in the region, and the format means they can access a large number of texts without having to buy and handle bulky books.
Russia, Ukraine and Belarus

A CD is currently being created in Russian by Alexander Kouryaev, of the publishing house Sotsium. Some texts are being translated specifically for it but others that were already translated will also be included.

Russian is the second language in both Ukraine and Belarus so outreach in these countries will wait until the Russian CD is available. As with the Chinese CDs there will be no material on the Russian CD which would limit the number of copies that can be made. This means that people will be free to make a copy for a friend, or teachers to make copies for their entire class.

Eastern Europe, Lithuania and Latvia

A large number of CDs have been distributed at summer camps and seminars in Eastern Europe by colleagues who have requested them from us. Virgis Daukas is arranging seminars at universities in Lithuania and Latvia

Brazil, Portugal and Mozambique

A DVD has been produced in collaboration with Atlas’ web-based Portuguese platform, OrdemLivre.org, who fortunately had the rights to Milton Friedman’s television series Free to Choose in Portuguese. The Ideas for a Free Society DVD in Portuguese also includes relevant texts some of which have been translated into Portuguese specifically for this project.

The DVDs have been distributed at three Brazilian universities already and in April were distributed at the largest classical liberal event in the country, the Forum de Liberdade in Porto Allegre which is attended by 4,000 visitors.

Henriques Viola of Melimo, a liberal student movement in Mozambique, has distributed the Portuguese DVD and the CD in English and is setting up student groups for further discussion. It took him 17 hours on a bus to cover the 1,200 kms to Chimoio in the centre of the country for his first seminar. He then went onto Quelimane city where they were expecting 80 students but 110 arrived! Their Facebook page is full of details about the CD and comments on them, if you read Portuguese!

www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_182968681720509
The DVD enables students in distant countries, where virtually no one can access texts about limited government or individual freedom, to learn from no less than Milton Friedman as he explains the value of choice.

Milton Friedman ‘teaching’ students in Chimoio, Mozambique. Henrique Viola of MELIMO is showing them the DVD of the Friedman’s great book Free to Choose with subtitles in Portuguese.

Henriques has since told us that his aim is to distribute 20,000 of the CDs in English and 30,000 of the Portuguese DVDs in the next 12 months!

In February Bruno Garschagen of OrdemLivre.org presented the DVD in Lisbon, Portugal, to a selected group of professors, journalists and public intellectuals. They were also distributed to students at the Catholic University and University of Aveiro.
An evaluation of the project so far

This phase of the Ideas for a Free Society CD project has shown that the ideas and values we espouse can be distributed remarkably cheaply and conveniently to many people in a large number of places throughout the world.

The CD is undoubtedly cost effective and popular:-

- It provides access to publications that are often not available to people in many countries.
- It provides access to those whose download speeds are too slow or too expensive or have no access at all to the internet.
- It is cheap to produce and cheap and relatively easy to transport.
- It contains a range and choice of texts on one easily handled small piece of plastic.
- It can provide access to texts which are not on the internet for copyright reasons.
- It provides access to significant numbers of students in less developed countries, with relatively little cost, because universities have proved willing to accept someone with a valuable resource to give to their students when they would not otherwise provide them with the time and space for a seminar.
- For those with fast internet connections it is a more efficient way to systemise content as an introduction to pro-market philosophy than browsing on-line, and to reach an audience which might not be motivated to look for such content or indeed even know that it existed.
- It seems to provide a discreet way of distributing ideas in a country where books are strongly censored.
- We have had no problems getting them through customs in countries were ideas are routinely censored.
- Having the texts available on the CDs has encouraged a number of people to create a student primer of the most appropriate texts for their particular purpose. This has happened in Bulgaria and is currently happening in Kyrgyzstan and China.
- The CD has encouraged others to run essay contests to interest students in the ideas.

But can/will the CDs have the desired effect of changing the climate of opinion or is there a better way of doing it?

In terms of total student numbers relatively few are reached by the CDs, and we cannot know how many will read them, or if they do cannot be certain that this will change anything.

However we do have precedents. The Institute of Economic Affairs in London worked for 25 years to change the climate of public opinion by spreading ideas, with minimal apparent success until other factors came into play. Its work then became very influential in the political changes that took place in the UK under Margaret Thatcher. These rescued the UK from the crippling effects of state intervention and set an example to the rest of the world.

Many people and organisations took books behind the Iron Curtain for years with no appreciable changes in the Communist regimes - but impetus was in fact gradually building and then change came. The existence of groups of people who supported these ideas was crucial in the societies that eventually emerged. In these instances ideas did have consequences.
The people experiencing the results of socialism and communism first hand then hoped that ideas would have consequences. They saw no alternative to this drip, drip, unglamorous long-term effort to change one mind at a time and did it as an act of faith. We have their example and know this approach can work. As the one or two minds multiply and become academics, journalists and politicians they set in motion a multiplier effect that can change public opinion and with it the entire political scene paving the way for government reforms.

With the recent changes in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, we now regret that we have not already been more active in getting these texts translated into Arabic. Even though educated Egyptians may know something of the institutions that enabled the West to succeed the great majority will not understand the institutions that underpin free societies.

If spreading ideas is our best option for a future characterised by freedom are there better ways of doing it than the CD and the existing projects based on it?

Promoting them through radio or television might reach more people, but it would be difficult to put such programmes on without local intellectuals who already understood and supported the ideas. This chicken and egg situation needs resolving first.

Although books have benefits over CDs and studying on a screen, they have other drawbacks, such as being much more expensive to produce and expensive and difficult to distribute. But primers for students based on some of the texts on the CDs in other languages than English can provide a few of the shorter more important texts in hard copy.

Use of the CD in combination with other related projects and continued over a number of years would undoubtedly increase the chances of success. The first phase being distribution of the CDs at seminars to introduce the idea of a free society, plus the formation and nurturing of Liberty Clubs. The second being essay contests to identify the most interested and motivated student and the third being week long residential courses for those students, during which they would be exposed to more in depth discussion within a peer group.

Such a process would increase the likelihood of confirming the students in their beliefs and that they, in their turn, would promote them to new groups and the next generations as they became the teachers, academics, journalists, politicians and other intellectuals of the future. Once someone has reached this stage of understanding further support and nurturing is provided for them by other organisations such as the Atlas Network and the Institute for Humane Studies.

When everyone has access to cheap, fast speed downloads, the CD will be out of date. But that is some way off in many countries, so we may have another ten years when the CD is the best value option.

Regardless of the future of the CDs, translation of the relevant texts into Arabic, Farsi, Urdu and other languages should be a very high priority for philanthropist and others who believe that prosperity and peace only flourish where individuals are free and government limited. Such translations would have an important part to play in perpetuity and without them large parts of the world and millions of people will be excluded from the benefits of the creative power of freedom.

It may be somewhat of an act of faith to undertake this work but, given the political, economic and cultural circumstances of the countries that are the focus of this project, we seem to have identified a strategy which could yield much fruit over the coming years.
The Way Forward

Taking note of the comments of those involved in the project we believe that long term, systematic exposure to these ideas and explanation of them is our best chance of improving understanding of the principles and practise of a free society in the areas where they, and the benefits that freedom brings, are so much needed and so little understood.

We will therefore support:-

• Regular educational events to distribute the CDs and explain the concepts and values of free societies in English and other languages in those areas where they are currently not accessible.

• The creation of student primers based on the texts on the CD in other languages than English.

• The formation and nurturing of Liberty Clubs in universities to encourage continued exploration of these ideas.

• Annual regional essay contests, which would be undertaken in conjunction with the seminars but open to all students in the region, to identify the most interested and talented students.

• Annual week long Liberty Camps in each country or area for the further education of those identified through the essay competitions. These events would bring people together in seminar format to enable in-depth presentations and discussion, with a view to shaping the opinions of future academics, journalists and other intellectuals who would then explain and promote the concepts to their peers and future generations.

• Undertaking a major programme of further translations particularly into Arabic, Farsi and Urdu with a view to making all the great economists and philosophers who have explained and promoted freedom available to a much wider audience.

Network for a Free Society is a registered UK Charity No 262982. Previously known as International Policy Network UK it is still working closely with International Policy Network US which has 501c3 status in the US.

Our mission is to encourage opportunity and prosperity by promoting understanding of the principles of a free and responsible society and the foundations on which it is based: limited government, the rule of law, the protection of private property, free markets and free speech.

A website will be available later in the summer. www.ideasforafreesociety.org

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