



THE AFRICAN CAPACITY  
BUILDING FOUNDATION

FONDATION POUR LE RENFORCEMENT  
DES CAPACITES EN AFRIQUE

# The Political Impact of Think Tanks in Africa: Some Insights from ACBF-Supported Think Tanks

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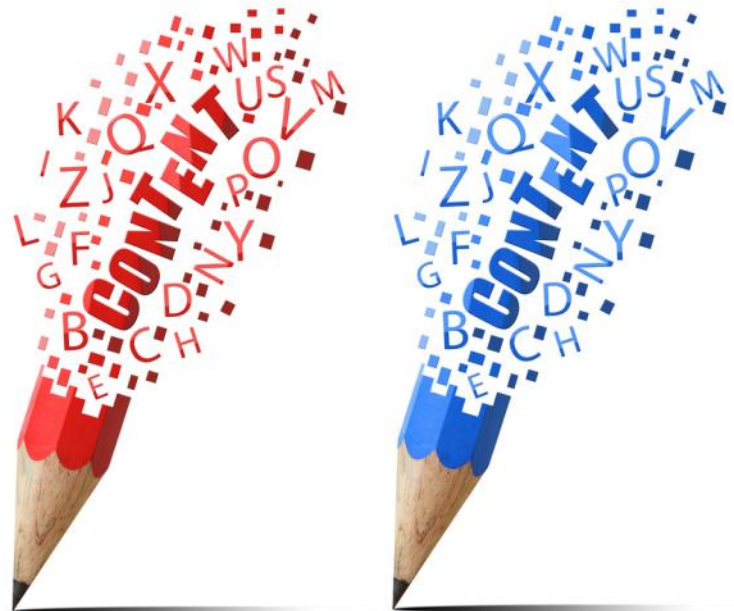
ACBF

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# Outline

- The background information
- The methodology
- The driving questions
- Some results
- Provisional conclusions



# A Preliminary Study in a More Ambitious Project

- The project  $\Rightarrow$  knowledge-power interface
- A first step: 7 think tanks/policy institutes
- The methodology: literature review, questionnaires and exchanges  $\Rightarrow$  qualitative data



# The Case Studies

- Centre d'Etudes et de Renforcement des Capacités d'Analyse et de Playdoyer (CERCAP): **Mali**
- Centre Mauritanien d'Analyses de **Politiques** (CMAP): **Mauritania**
- Centre de Recherche, d'Etude et d'Appuis à l'Analyse **Economique** à Madagascar (CREAM): **Madagascar**
- **Economic** and Social Research Foundation (ESRF): **Tanzania**
- Institut de Développement **Economique** (IDEC): **Burundi**
- Institute for **Democratic Governance** (IDEG): **Ghana**
- Zimbabwe **Economic** Policy Analysis and Research Unit (ZEPARU): **Zimbabwe**



# Think Tanks/Policy Institutes? Definitions

- Focus on politico-institutional links with parties, state, civil society ⇒ structural organization
- Emphasis on the main function (e.g. research, policy advice, advocacy) ⇒ functions
- **Many do not fit neatly into particular categories, but share attributes of several types of organizations (interest groups, consultancy firms, university institutes, ...)**
- **Organizations that produce knowledge products that inform decision making at various levels and seek to influence policy content**

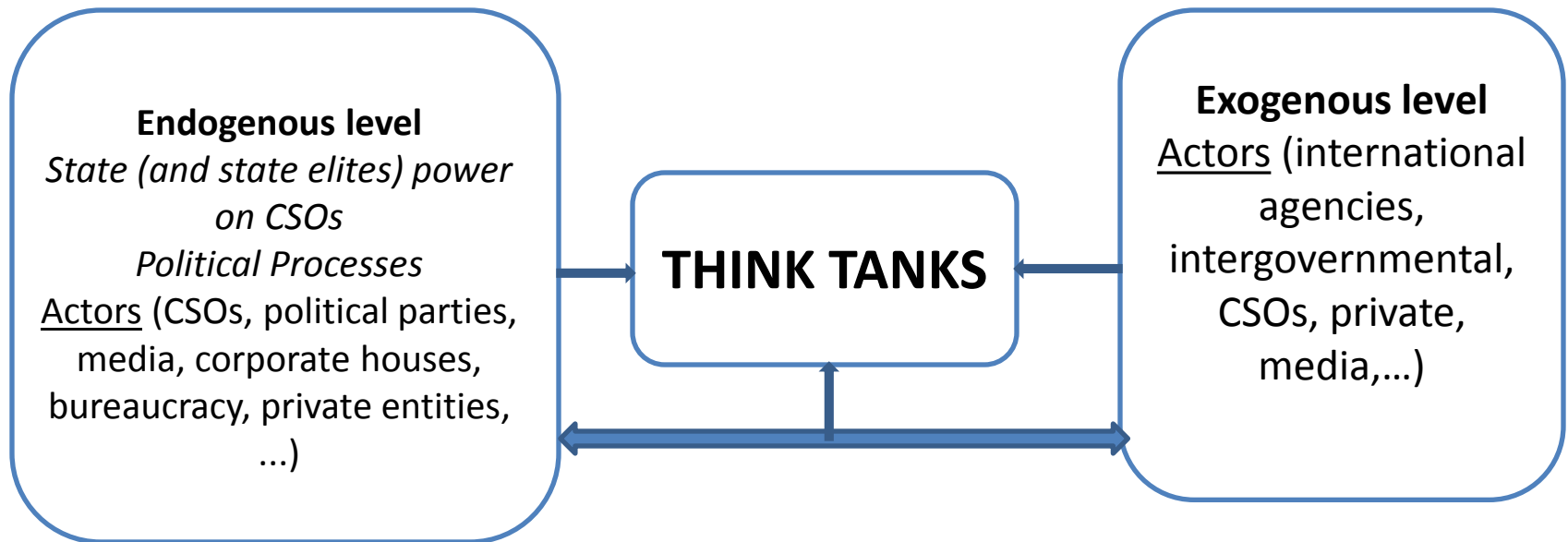


# Knowledge-Power Interface

- Think tanks as a site reflecting the knowledge-power nexus borne out of the complex interplay between endogenous and exogenous political processes and actors
- Two levels of constraining influences



# Knowledge-Power Interface in SSA



# Peculiar African Context for the Birth and Development of Think Tanks

- The nature of a country's political system
  - Related to the wave of political liberalization and democratization in SSA (1980s-1990s)
- The role of external influence
  - Dependence on international donors
  - International conventions/initiatives/commitments (gender equality, environmental sustainability, etc.)



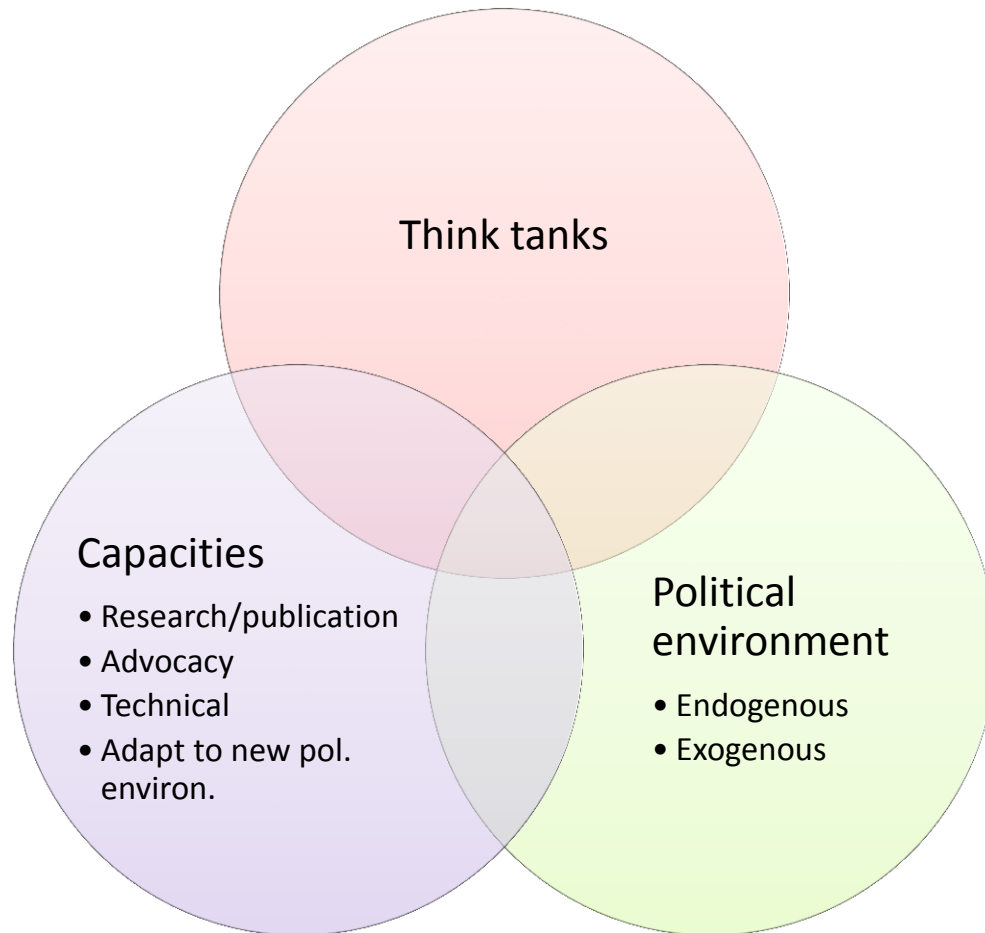


# The Main Questions

- How are think tanks influenced by the political environment?
- How think tanks' capacity gaps reduce their political impact?
- Are think tanks temporary survival strategies filling a gap, due to weak institutional and political capacities of African states and academic institution in crisis?
- Can they gain a more important and sustainable role if they enhance their capacities?



# The Main Goal



# Think Tanks Strongly Influenced by the Political Environment

- Budget (i.e. state policies of budgetary austerity)
- Enhancing or deteriorating the enabling environment in which they work
- Political environments generally polarized and partisan: efforts to safeguard and strengthen organizational autonomy and impartiality operationally
- Activities crafted along the priorities of the development agenda approved by parliaments
- Influence on the use of research results



# Think Tanks and Political Leadership

- Think tanks have a key role because the capacities of political institutions are weak
  - Complementary capacities
- These think tanks are not part of the survival strategy of political leaders, but **continuous struggle to remain independent**
- Influence on policy making
- Indirect and difficult influence on political leadership: difficult access



# Other Insights from the Research

- Regional impact and even Africa-wide initiatives
- External influence: difficult to assess
  - Some seem to refuse partnerships to try to avoid it
  - Some received external funding and admit to be influenced
- Self-evaluation of capacities (research, advocacy, technical, to adapt to new political environments)
  - Mostly excellent (or good)
  - A gap: staff insufficient for research or not adapted to the needs



# Concluding Remarks and Questions

- Think tanks are more influenced by the political environment than they are able to influence it
- They fill the gap of weak institutional and political capacities of African states
- They seem to need more funding for research (and other activities) than for enhancing their internal capacities
- **Should ACBF focus its support at:**
  - **Enhancing their capacities to influence political leadership in their countries?**
  - **Improve their capacity to effectively dialogue with international donors?**



