

Championing Diplomatic Intercourse: The Gabriel L. Dennis Foreign Service Institute (FSI) at a Glance

Introduction/Background

Liberia an independent State since 1847 (Guannu, J.S; 2010) has enjoyed not only the pleasure of diplomatic immunities and rights of sovereign states (Montevideo Convention available at www.britannica.com). The country has been prominent in the formation of major organizations like the United Nations (UN), Organization of African Unity/African Union (OAU/AU), Economic Community of West African States ECOWAS and etc. (Horton, R. J; 2004).

It has elaborately been mirrored as Africa's mother of the art of diplomacy ...“ without a standing army and a police force, Liberia stood tall during the colonial period and did not cease to exist during the scramble of Africa” as elaborated by Amb. Robert Y. Lormia, II. (Amb.-at-Large, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Liberia) in a Documentary titled :”Flash Back to Liberia's Historical Foundations”.

Designed to suit the significance/taste of diplomatic training, the author signifies “LIBERIA” as an acronym that depicts “Learning, Implementing, Bargaining, Ensuring, Realistic, International, Affairs”.

Thus, the paper describes the role of the FSI by its mandate as an essential part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and unpacks the relevance of sensitive training models/modules which sharpen Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) and other actors in ensuring the enduring nature of Liberia's vital interest primarily and by extension maintain world peace and welfare.

It further espouses why training on Liberia's foreign policy agenda must essentially be driven by bright minds consistent with vigilance, fortitude, professionalism portrayed by the FSI the “Arduous Terrain “.

The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) is an integral component of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established in 1951 by an Act of Legislature during the Presidency of William V.S. Tubman(available at www.mofa.gov.lr/public2/2content_list_sub.php?main=5&related=5&pg=mprefs, retrieved December 10,2019).

The intent and spirit to ensure that Liberians themselves champion the formulation and implementation of their foreign policy were key priorities during the early stages of the State. This quest was further necessitated by a realization of the cost intensiveness of sending small teams mostly of ten persons regularly to the USA to be trained as Liberian Diplomats.(Interview with Amb. Geroge W. Wallace, former Foreign Minister of Liberia; 2019).

This was mainly done to address the issue of having foreigners in the mainstreamed conduct of Liberia's Foreign Service Operations.

After many years of closure due to the civil unrest in Liberia, the Institute was reopened and named Gabriel L. Dennis Foreign Service Institute in 2002 when Minister Mornie R. Captan served as Minister of Foreign Affairs. The naming of the school epitomizes an honor of Hon. Gabriel Lafayette Dennis one of Liberia's longest serving Secretaries of State(1944-1954)during whose era the Institute was established. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was then styled as State Department.

When Minister Olubanke King-Akerele assumed Office as Minister of Foreign Affairs, consultations were made with the Supervisory Committee of the Institute in September of 2007. That process led to a shift in the training philosophy and pedagogy of the Gabriel L. Dennis Foreign Service Institute with focus on development and economic diplomacy. It was deemed expedient considering that Liberia, as a Country emerging out of conflict and nosedived into capacity gaps was at the margin of reconstruction, and indeed needed a fashion of diplomacy well suited in that context.

The process birthed the FSI nine months intensive program which was launched by the Ministry in October 2009 having former Dean/Chair of History, Morehouse College in Atlanta Georgia USA Dr. Augustine Konneh as Director-General.

This approach remains significant to our current trend of foreign policy engagement that focuses of development of people and infrastructures. Albeit, there are still needs for expansion in program areas of trending world concerns like arguments on multilateralism which have become common placed. For example, discussions centered on multilateralism were at the core of the 19th Doha Forum convened in Qatar from the 14-15, 2019 under the theme "Reimagining Governance in A Multipolar World".

The course content is exemplary of course modules of renowned Foreign Service Institutes around the world including :

- a. Diplomacy & Diplomatic Practices
- b. Background to Liberian Society
- c. Africa in Contemporary World Politics
- d. International Political Economy
- e. Negotiation and Conflict Resolution
- f. Embassy Financial Management & Reporting
- g. Economic Diplomacy
- h. Public Diplomacy
- i. International Political Economy
- j. Law and Consular Practices
- k. Protocol, Etiquette and Ceremonies

- l. Security Awareness & Consciousness
- m. French
- n. Spanish etc.

The FSI recruits only Liberians who have earned a minimum of a Bachelor Degree. At the end of the program; successful students are awarded Post Graduate Diplomas in Diplomacy and Contemporary International Relations.

In addition, there are Short Term Courses which are periodically designed on need basis for various functionaries of the government. The short term training courses which mostly focus on thematic areas of Diplomacy, Protocol and Etiquette are relevant to shaping and modeling effective negotiation skills of officials and staff of the government of Liberia.

In order to further enhance students' knowledge, the Institute continuously organizes and promotes Traditional Ambassadorial Lecture Series usually honored by Ambassadors accredited near Monrovia, for the purpose of lecturing emerging diplomats on relevant issues in diplomacy and international relations.

By the various instruments of Memorandum of Understanding(MoUs), with elite institutions of diplomacy across the African Continent and other parts of the world like ones in Nigeria, China, Pakistan, India, Morocco, the FSI is fostering institutional collaborations and by extension State-to-State relations.

The sisterly relations with the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) Graduate School of International Studies, University of Liberia which enables transfer of credits mirrors domestic cognizance of strengthening national interest through training.

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Analysis:

i. Significance of the FSI

Transitional instances and millstones like the West Philia Treaty, the World Wars, Fall of the Berlin Wall, the emergence and demise of the cold war and etc. show that from the establishment of the nation states formation there have been changing dynamics. Thus, it can be argued that along with these shifts should be responsiveness in modeling training to acquire the skill sets to achieve optimal realizations in an ever competing world system.

There are many accounts of struggles for colonial rule in Africa by powerful countries like France, Great Britain, Germany and etc. (Boyd, W. ;1991). Nevertheless, amidst these struggles, Liberia maintained its statehood.

While it can be agreed that land mark successes had already been recorded by then, the need to have more Liberians conduct diplomatic services became too compelling in late 40s and 50s

with changing dynamics of the world system seeing the emergence of the Breton Wood institutions(What are the Bretton Woods Institution ?available at www.brettonwoodsproject.org) further making the case for the FSI.

Thus, the demand for more rigorous and technical training was only necessary .This rich heritage which dates far back has been incessantly sublimed by great minds which have been trained at the FSI.

Currently, there are rising debates on multilateralism. Whether or not the US has hegemony may be contested but what remain evident are the existence of great powers and the emergence of booming economies in Asia and Africa: China GDP \$ 25.27 trillion ,(Investopedia ;2019), India GDP third quarter of 2019 \$578,691 million(India GDP 2019, countryeconomy.com), South Korea \$324,833 million(South Korea GDP 2019, countryeconomy.com), Rwanda \$9.137 billion (Rwanda GDP,2017 Countryeconomy.com). These are frontiers for diplomatic bilateral engagements for growth and development in the best interests of developing countries as in the case of Liberia.

Hence, training of Liberian Diplomats and Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) at various levels must be done appropriately to address these current shifts and issue areas.

ii. Graduates of the FSI Contributions

The Institute has trained thousands of FSOs who have represented and brought pride to the Country. The current mode of training includes other Liberians who are not in the employ of the Ministry but also contribute to private sector development as well as other diplomatic Missions.

At a Knowledge sharing function organized by the Institute in March of 2019, Panelist Cyrus Momo a 2007 graduate and CEO of a leading Private Security firm (SEGAL) pointed how he has utilized negotiation skills acquired from the Institute to earn lucrative contracts through competitive bidding processes. At the same function, it was also pointed out by Mrs. Sondah Gepea Wilson, Country Representative of (SEARCH) who identified that negotiations and communications skills acquired from the Institute have significantly complemented her in managing and expanding her organization's networks as they also operate in South Sudan.

The layers of graduates have cover multi dimensions from beginners to the epic hierarchy at Home Office and Missions abroad including : Assistant Ministers , Deputy Ministers, and Ministers as well as FSOs and Ambassador Extra Ordinary and Plenipotentiary among others.

Some prominent among graduates from the Institute include: Turnur Stewart; former Colonel of the Liberia Frontier Force, Charge d'Affaires to Congo and Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea.

Jinkins Cooper, Ambassador to Congo, Bengui(CAR), Nathaniel Eastman, Asst. Minister Public Affairs, Ambassador to Germany, B.G. Freeman, III, Ambassador to Senegal, Congo and Ivory

Coast and one of Liberia's longest serving Foreign Service/policy personnel/officials who have occupied multi portfolios including, Deputy Minister for Administration, Ambassador, Advisor to the President on Foreign Affairs and Minister of Foreign Affairs ;Amb. George W. Wallace Jr. He is also an acclaimed Lecturer at the Institute.

The first female Vice President of the Republic of Liberia Hon. Jewel Howard Taylor, Valedictorian of the 2016 class has also expressed utilizing skills sets from the Institute.

Major Assumptions

It is with no doubt that we have complex realities facing our various nations in the sub-region, on the African Continent and the world at large. From climate change to trafficking of illicit goods and persons, terrorism, migrant issues, the challenges of maintaining world peace are acute. Thus, profoundly addressing capacity building through diplomatic training cannot be over emphasized.

Therefore, our Premier Institute for various areas of diplomatic training must be given the needed attention as we continue to pursue a flourishing foreign policy agenda and achievement under the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD).

The conduct of major protocol training sessions have been indicative of laudable performances in the areas of protocol but far more needs to be done in areas of etiquette, time management , public speaking to further boast protocol services which are cardinal to public functions and public diplomacy(imaging building).

Conclusion and recommendations

The paper essentially focused on the significance of the FSI. It explained the mandate and identified that the Institute was established by an Act of Legislature during the Tubman's Presidency.

It pictured how in more than a century and half of existence as a nation- state Liberia has been flowered not only by the beautiful beam of sovereignty but also arrays of representations liking it to how Liberia has utilized the art of diplomacy to maintain sovereignty. It further espoused that same must be advanced to adequately address the pressing challenges of the world and acquire increased peace and economic prosperity nationally.

It explained how the Institute has been successful in addressing the training needs to equip Liberians to exclusively occupy FSO positions against the evident danger of early years having among its FSOs foreign nationals.

Thus, to further enhance effectiveness and efficiency in areas aligned with Liberia's diplomacy, there must be a conduct of continuous multi-disciplinary course modules at the Institute while specialized training in negotiations are designed and offered for officials who attend routine

international conferences like Conference of Parties on Climate Change(COP), Maritime Meetings, United Nations General Assembly(UNGA) and etc.

Ensuring that all Foreign Service Officers get the fundamental training before going to the field is also significant.