

THE PROMISE AND PERILS OF DIASPORA PARTNERSHIPS FOR PEACE: THE CASE OF THE U.S-BASED LIBERIAN DIASPORA

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ABSTRACT

In seeking to contribute towards peace-building in Liberia, the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora is building international partnerships with its liberal minded host country, liberal institutions such as the United Nations and Non-Governmental Organizations and private and corporate entities in the host land. There is a convergence of interests between moderate diaspora groups interested in post-conflict peace-building and liberal minded countries and international institutions seeking to promote the liberal peace. The convergence of such multiple actors offers better prospects for effective building in the homeland because collectively, they serve as counter-weights to the parochial foreign policy impulses of each peace-building stakeholder that might be inimical to peace-building. While there are opportunities for the U.S-based Liberian diaspora to forge international partnerships for peace-building, there are challenges that can undermine well intentioned collaborations. These include: logistical challenges in executing transnational projects; self-seeking Diaspora members, divided leadership and poor coordination, and lack of sustainability of international partnerships.

KEYWORDS: *Liberia, Diaspora, peace-building, Civil War, Africa, Conflict.*

INTRODUCTION

The dominant discourse about the link between Diasporas and conflict has been overwhelmingly negative and this is not without foundation. A seminal work by Collier et al. (1999) at the World Bank made two conclusions. First, the external resources provided by the Diaspora can generate conflict. Second, the Diaspora poses a greater risk for renewed conflict even when conflict has abated. Focusing on the Ethiopian case, Terrence Lyons (2004) posits that Diasporas have distinct attitudes towards the homeland and typically develop solidarity networks that emphasize identity and work to keep nationalist hopes alive from afar. Such Diasporas view homeland conflict as the cornerstone of their identity (Koser 2007, 240).

In the positive realm of the debate, Shain argues that Diasporas also play crucial roles in conflict resolution by citing the case of Jewish-American groups who served as intermediaries between Israel and countries that did not have diplomatic relations with Israel during the Oslo peace process. In addition, Jewish-American groups lobbied to end the Arab boycott by offering “carrots” to Arab and Islamic states that normalized relations with Israel while encouraging other states to follow suit (Shain 2002,126).

However, a more nuanced discourse has emerged that characterizes the Diaspora as capable of being peace wreckers as well as peace makers when it is opportune as captured in an edited volume by Smith and Stares (2007), with the following cases: the Armenian Diaspora-Tölölyan (2007); Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora-Fair (2007); the Croatian Diaspora-Skrbis (2007); Cuban Diaspora- Grugel and Kippin (2007); Jewish Diaspora in the Arab-Israeli conflict- Sheffer (2007); and Eritrean Diaspora-Koser, (2007).

Exploring the positive role of the Eritrean Diaspora in post-conflict peace-building without discounting the negative role of Diaspora in conflict, Koser observed that the Eritrean

Diaspora played a positive role in the post-conflict political transition in three ways: participating in the Executive Assembly of the Constitutional Commission, extensive engagement in the drafting of the constitution and ratification of the constitutions (Koser 2007, 237). In terms of economic contributions, Koser notes that the Eritrean Diaspora is required to pay two percent of its monthly income directly to the Eritrean government (Koser 2007, 245-246).

The African Diaspora is heterogeneous and unlike other Diasporas such as the Jewish or Armenian, that dominate the Diaspora literature, it is impossible to make generalizations based on any case about the conduct of the African Diaspora towards peace or war. Hence the best way to explore the activities of the diverse African Diaspora is via single case studies of specific Diasporas. Thus I seek to enrich the discourse on African Diaspora and peace-building by exploring how the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora seeks peace-building partnerships for the homeland after supporting conflict. I argue that through a coalition with diverse international peace-building partners, the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora is able to have an ameliorative effect on peace-building in the homeland. This is because a broad coalition serves as a counterweight to potential stakeholder parochialism that may be inimical to peace-building. The Diaspora partnership falls under four categories: Alliances with liberal international organizations such as the UN; liberal states such as the host country – the United States; liberal Non-Governmental Organizations involved in advocacy and development assistance; and partnerships with private and corporate entities in the host country. These partnerships are fraught with challenges such as: logistical/communication and transportation problems in executing transnational projects; self-seeking Diaspora members who exploit Liberia's difficulties for personal gain, divided leadership and factionalism among the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora which is undermining coordination of efforts and unity of purpose and lack of sustainability of Diaspora peace-building

efforts. The effectiveness of Diaspora peace-building partnerships depends on how peace-building stakeholders manage the aforementioned challenges.

The research is organized as follows: the methodology of research, theoretical framework, the role of the U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora in the Civil War, determinants of Diaspora peace-building participation, and the challenges of Diaspora peace-building pursuit and implications for peace.

A PORTRAIT OF THE U.S-BASED LIBERIAN DIASPORA

A network of intense two-way migratory pattern has existed between the U.S. and Liberia for nearly two centuries. These strong social networks have led to the growth of the Liberian community in several metropolitan regions in the U.S. during the last twenty-five years of political turmoil in Liberia (Ellis 1996, Outram 1997). The Americo-Liberian settler community, long the privileged group in Liberia, has traditionally dominated migration to the U.S. throughout the 20th century by sending their children to the U.S to pursue higher education or business interests. From a transient and socio-economically privileged population of just a few hundred students, diplomats and business people who stayed in the U.S for a relatively short-term up to 1980, the Liberian community has now grown and diversified considerably reflecting the ethnic, economic, political and social diversity of the country (Lubkemann 2008).

In addition, while the majority of Liberians who sought asylum following the 1980 coup were Americo-Liberians, this changed dramatically after 1989 when the Liberian Diaspora in the U.S came to be dominated by indigenous Liberians following the political turbulence generated by the Civil War. Lubkemann argues that the latest Liberian refugee influx has reconstituted the

Liberian Diaspora in the U.S to reflect virtually every Liberian county and ethnic group (Lubkemann 2008).

Thus, the Liberian Diaspora in the U.S is also very heterogeneous with its composition reflecting the ever-changing political events at home such as the Civil War. For instance, successive political turbulence and violence have brought political rivals to the same shore. This created the situation whereby political victors of the 1980s became the political losers/victims of the 1990s finding themselves in exile with their victims. Ultimately, all factions, ethnicities and political interests are strongly represented in the U.S-based Diaspora with the attendant consequence of very contentious intra-Diaspora relations away from home (Lubkemann 2008).

For example in Minnesota, home to an estimated 25,000 Liberians, there have been serious tensions in the community along factional and political lines. In the heat of the second phase of the Civil War in 2003, the community became divided along supporters of the insurgent group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Charles Taylor supporters. There were accusations that some members of the community were fundraising for LURD thereby fueling the conflict in Liberia. It was widely known within the community that LURD officials often solicited funds in the Twin Cities. Those accused also argued that their accusers were only interested in preserving the status quo and that the fundraising was for humanitarian purposes such as the provision of medical supplies and food for Liberians displaced by the war. Nevertheless, there was general trepidations among the larger Liberian community in Minnesota about the possibility that people living in their midst could be underwriting the death of their relatives back home by fueling the war (Chadwick 2006).

Although members of the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora share a common aspiration towards rebuilding Liberia, they do not always speak with one voice. They are divided politically

and belong to several political parties in Liberia. The most prominent among them based on parliamentary representation are the Congress for Democratic Change, Liberty Party, Liberia Unification Party, Unity Party, United People's Party and the National Patriotic Party just to mention a few. In recognition of the political strength of the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora, most of the political parties are represented in the U.S by Liberian Diaspora representatives (Wells 2010).

Economically and socially, the Liberian Diaspora today reflects a great deal of diversity. Whereas, a majority of Liberians who came to the U.S prior to the early 1990s came from the privileged Americo-Liberian group via student visas, the recent arrivals in the turn of the millennium came as a result of persecution at home or as refugees from various West African countries. They came from significantly diverse backgrounds reflective of the Liberian society and conflict at home (Lubkemann 2008).

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on empirical evidence gathered via in-depth interviews with a diverse group of about forty Liberian and non-Liberian peace-building advocates through a snow ball process. The Liberian Diaspora interviewees included the leadership of U.S-based Liberian Diaspora organizations such as the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA) and some of its regional branches, County Associations, High School Alumni Associations, Christian and Muslim Associations, Professional Associations and returnee public office holders. The non-Liberian advocates included some of the leadership of Friends of Liberia (An Alumni group of about 3000 former Peace Corp Volunteers to Liberia), representatives of The Carter Center working on various peace-building programs in Liberia, experts from the United States Institute

of Peace and the Metro-Atlanta Chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women of America. Non-Liberian interviewees helped contain any biases from Liberian interviewees. Interviews were supplemented with participatory observation via visits to regional chapter meetings of the Union of Liberian Associations in America (ULAA) and a major U.S-based Liberian Diaspora peace conference organized by the Carter Center. This was further supplemented with the monitoring of U.S-based Liberian Diaspora list-serves to gauge attitudes towards peace-building back home. Most interviewees requested confidentiality in order not be victimized or jeopardize relationships. As such, interviewees are assigned pseudonyms in this paper.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Pioneering work on the role of the Diaspora in international relations was conducted by Esman (1986) in his contribution to Sheffer's 1986 edited volume. This has spurred Contemporary work by scholars such as Shain (2002) and Shain and Barth (2003) from which this research borrows theoretically.

In a similar study regarding the Armenian and Jewish Diaspora, Shain and Barth (2003, 457) posit a constructivist and liberal International Relations theory as constituting a "theoretical space" in which to conduct a study of how the Diaspora impacts the homeland in IR. In this regard, constructivism's emphasis on identity complements liberalism, with its focus on domestic politics. The shared "theoretical space" should not come as a surprise because the two theoretical approaches share assumptions and claims. First, the constructivist approach claims that identities as well as interests are determined by social interaction in which domestic actors are participants. Second, both constructivism and liberalism take into consideration the

preferences of states, regard states as embedded in a larger social context and recognize the relevance of a variety of non-state actors. Thus, given that Diasporas are primarily identity-driven, exert influence on homelands mainly through domestic politics, are part of the international community and are non-state actors, this shared “theoretical space” provides a sound theoretical framework for the study of the Diaspora in International Relations (Shain and Barth 2003).

THE ROLE OF THE U.S-BASED LIBERIAN DIASPORA IN THE LIBERIAN CIVIL WAR

Two prominent and former members of the U.S- based Liberian Diaspora, Charles Taylor and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, represent the contradictory role of the Diaspora in fueling the country’s Civil War and promoting peace. While Taylor was the main architect of the War, he was initially supported by Johnson Sirleaf before the latter severed ties with him and became a champion of peace-building. The emergence of the U.S. based Taylor as the main rebel leader of the Liberian Civil War is no coincidence. This is because there is hardly any domestic political resistance in most autocratic states; chances of the government being overthrown from within are very minimal to say the least. Indeed, it takes Diaspora dissidents who are able to organize beyond the reach of the homeland regime with some help from neighboring states. Buttressing this point, Shain (1993, 300) stresses that “the struggle of overseas communities to unseat authoritarian regimes in the home-country is led by political exiles and refugees who prior to their departure were engaged in anti-regime activity at home or were regarded by the home regime as troublemakers.” One Diaspora group that played a pivotal role in mobilizing opposition against the Doe administration was the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora. Charles Taylor

was one of its pioneer leaders leading the Union of Liberia Association of the Americas (ULAA) an umbrella body of Liberian Diaspora groups.

Pharm (2004, 94) notes that “During his tenure as chairman, Taylor turned the ULAA from a service organization in to a political group.” Although prior to the outbreak of the Liberian Civil war, Liberians frequently traveled to the United States mainly for education and business purposes, the overthrow of Tolbert and the subsequent brutalities of the Doe regime swelled the ranks of the United States Liberian Diaspora. In the words of a prominent United States based Liberian dissident, Tonia King “we were moving in the shadows. A lot of people came and went” (Huband 1998, 47).

In addition, because the indigenous government led by Doe brutally targeted Americo-Liberians, Liberian dissidents in the United States were disproportionately Americo-Liberians and they mobilized themselves in order to raise the necessary resources to move against Doe. Clarence Simpson, who was the former treasurer of the True Whig Party, which had been overthrown by Doe, enthusiastically became the fundraiser-in-chief for the dissidents in the United States. At one meeting organized by the dissidents in New Jersey in 1986, an amount of \$5000 was raised to lay the groundwork for the subsequent invasion against Doe (Huband 1998, 48).

DETERMINANTS OF U.S-BASED LIBERIAN DIASPORA PEACE-BUILDING PARTICIPATION

Dramatic changes in the international political architecture in the past two decades such as the end of the Cold War and 9/11 have led the U.S to be less tolerant of dictators and non-state actors such as Diaspora groups. Coupled with a “hurting-stalemate” in the homeland, the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora was forced to channel its energies and resources towards a negotiated

settlement and post-conflict peace-building. According to Paris (2004, 22), since the end of the Cold War, many liberal institutions have become active and vocal advocates of liberal democracy and market-oriented economics. This ideological predisposition is not only confined to the United Nations and its allied special agencies, but also the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Organization of American States, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, national development agencies and several NGOs engaged in relief and development work. Thus it is safe to label the aforementioned liberal organizations and agencies as the quintessential practitioners of peace-building

Esman (1986, 336) posits three factors that influence the capacity of the Diaspora to affect international relations. These factors are: the resources and skills available to them; the opportunity structures in the host country; and their inclination or motivation to maintain their solidarity and exert group influence.

RESOURCES AND SKILLS AVAILABLE TO THE DIASPORA

The U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora is a significant asset when it comes to post-conflict reconstruction in Liberia because members tend to be disproportionately better educated and wealthier than their compatriots in other Liberian Diasporas. There are several township, clan, district, and county organizations; alumni associations; professional groups; and religious bodies from Liberia that are organized to promote the welfare of members in the United States and to support the parent organization and community at home (Sawyer 2005, 78).

In addition, contemporary advancement in communication and means of international transportation has given the Diaspora a boost in its organizational capacity, especially in an

economically advanced host-country such as the U.S where these resources are readily available and accessible. Buttressing this point, Brinkerhoff (2009, 47) indicates that the internet serves as a mobilizing tool for the numerous Diaspora organizations that it supports through the facilitation of shared identity necessary for collective action. It also serves as an organizational tool for mobilizing and communicating among individuals and groups, provides information and referrals to other actors; helps frame issues and build confidence. The output of mobilization agendas can be posted and transmitted to inspire sustainable mobilization.

Among the African Diaspora, Tettey (2009, 144) has observed that there are several websites, internet TV and radio broadcasts, and other interactive media outlets dedicated to providing news and fora for discussing developments in various African countries. These avenues serve as the major sources of information and political engagements for the African Diaspora by helping to keep them abreast of events, issues, and conditions in their home countries while at the same time serving as a platform for civil interaction.

The U.S-based Liberian Diaspora is aided by the fact that cell-phones have become an integral part of daily Liberian life. Cell phones serve as tools to combat crime through a popular radio show on Truth FM titled “Crime Watch” where crime victims call in to report crimes and look for police assistance. People have also called the FM station to request ambulance services for emergency health situations. Cell phones also provide direct economic advantages to people who charge fees or sell calling cards for usage thereby providing a source of income (Oye 2009). The widespread usage of cell phones enables easy communication between the Diaspora and the homeland.

OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE IN THE HOST COUNTRY

Because the environment that exists for civil society under liberal democratic dispensations is conducive, a democratic homeland is susceptible to Diasporas' influence, in the same way as a democratic host country. Diaspora influence is greater in the homeland if the state is poor ideologically, materially, and lacks institutional resources as is common in failed states. In weak states where the governments are not fully democratic as in Liberia¹, the state relies heavily on Diaspora support for survival and the Diaspora is capable of offering such support at a cost. In sum, weak states attract Diaspora influence regardless of whether they are democratic or not (Shain and Barth 2003, 464).

The 2005 election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a former U.S.-based Diaspora member has created a conducive environment for the U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora to get actively involved in the peace-building process in Liberia. They feel welcome compared to the illiberal regime of Charles Taylor who viewed the Diaspora with suspicion. In addition, because many top members of the Sirleaf administration are former members of the U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora who actively supported the President's 2005 election, there is little ideological difference between the two that could potentially generate conflict. Furthermore, Liberia needs invaluable Diaspora remittances and expertise needed to build crumbled institutions. According to estimates by Lubkemann, Liberian Diaspora remittances back home to family members in 2004, in the aftermath of the war, were between 19 million and 23 million USD in cash. An additional 10 to 13 million USD was sent to Liberian refugees living in neighboring countries. In order to put the significant contributions of the Liberian Diaspora into perspective, it is important to point out that while Liberia's 2002 national GDP was estimated at 562 million USD (\$168 per capita), the annual budget of the government which is the largest employer was only

¹ The Liberia example is mine and is used in place of Armenia.

\$80 million. Thus financial contributions by the Liberian Diaspora are vital for the survival of Liberia's economy (Lubkemann 2008).

One of the advantages that any Diaspora in the United States has is the geographic proximity to the numerous international organizations that are headquartered in the United States: the United Nations and its agencies in New York and the World Bank, the IMF, USAID, The National Endowment for Democracy and a number of other important peace-building agencies in Washington D.C. and a plethora of known and little-known non-profit organizations. The proximity of the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora to these liberal-leaning institutions provides the opportunity and access for mutual collaboration on peace-building.

In addition, many U.S-based Liberian refugees who fled the civil war benefited from a relatively favorable immigration designation by their host country as thousands were granted Temporary Protective Status (TPS) pending the resolution of the conflict. Many took advantage of this status to seek gainful employment and also to pursue education, which was made easier by the fact that Liberians are English speaking. This increased their financial capacity to assist the homeland after the end of the war. However, thousands of Liberian refugees on TPS face a legal limbo as their immigration status is subject to uncertain periodic review by the U.S government which no longer views Liberia as an unstable country.

MOTIVATION TO MAINTAIN THEIR SOLIDARITY AND EXERT GROUP INFLUENCE

Using a term that has gained currency among the Liberian Diaspora in the U.S., Lubkemann notes that a majority of the Diaspora are interested in living the life of "the house with two rooms" (one in the U.S and one in Liberia). According to survey results of 136 Liberians households in Minneapolis, only 26% indicated that they had no plans to re-establish

residency in the homeland. Interestingly, 84% of those who had plans to re-establish residency back home also planned to maintain a residence in the U.S. Even among those who had no plans to establish residency in the U.S after establishing a home in Liberia, 61% plan to maintain a savings account or maintain some form of economic investment in the U.S (Lubkemann 2008). The concept of the “house with two rooms” can be seen as a rational pragmatic approach of survival without abandoning commitments to the homeland. The Liberian Diaspora fits into what Lubkemann has labeled as “diasporic transnationals” because “they plot life-strategies and see their social, political and economic future as one that involves investment and activity in two countries simultaneously” (Lubkemann 2008).

HOW THE U.S-BASED LIBERIAN DIASPORA DEVELOPS PEACE-BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

The U.S-based Liberian Diaspora seeks international peace-building partnerships with the following: liberal international organizations such as the UN; liberal states such as the host country - United States; liberal Non-Governmental Organizations involved in advocacy and development; and private and corporate entities.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Diaspora is emerging as a very important political actor in peace-building by providing expertise to all groups and factions and functioning as a bridge to the international community (Auten 2006, 17). The U.S-based Liberian Diaspora serves as a bridge between the international community and the homeland government in securing much needed reconstruction assistance. Then board Chairman of the Union of Liberian Association in the Americas (ULAA), Anthony Kesselly attended a February 2004 UN hosted reconstruction conference for Liberia.

Kesselly shared the Diaspora's perspective on the peace-building agenda being discussed for Liberia with both Liberian government officials and representatives from donor countries.

“Many individuals residing out of their country of region in a political Diaspora, regardless of whether they left voluntarily or involuntarily, are able to answer questions about the geography, culture and social infrastructure of their former homeland. They can interpret the nuances, infighting and splintering of their home country's political landscape” (Auten 2006, 332).

ULAA also serves as third party mediators in collaboration with international mediators. Auten (2006, 16) observes that the Diaspora is able to play a crucial role in homeland conflicts because it hails from the country of conflict and understands the nature of the conflict better than foreign mediators. In addition, Diasporas are able to provide better insights on how to sustain long-term dialogue between warring factions long after the conclusion of a formal mediation process. Citing Cochrane, Auten (2006) posits that “Being from outside the conflict zone but having a connection to it might provide Diaspora groups with specific abilities as third party actors in pre-negotiations or even formal talks over a political settlement” (17). ULAA was fully represented at the 2003 Accra Peace Conference where the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Liberia (GOL) and rebel factions was signed on August 18, 2003. At this conference, it played an important role by forcefully leaning on wavering warlords to compromise on their entrenched positions for the sake of peace. ULAA representatives were able to play a constructive role because they knew many of the leaders of the warring factions such as Charles Taylor who was a former leader of ULAA in the 80s before launching his armed rebellion in 1989.

In addition, the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora serve as cultural ambassadors by bridging any cultural divide between the foreign donors and their homeland counterparts. This is an

important role because well-meaning international donors and supporters of Liberia's peace and reconstruction efforts could find their assistance doing more harm than good or being under-utilized because of a lack of cultural understanding of their aid recipients. For example, when a well-meaning international donor donated mosquito nets to help combat malaria in Liberia, many Liberians were not using it because of the local belief that the white nets were like shrouds used to bury the dead. To solve this problem, some members of the Liberian Diaspora suggested the donation of colored nets instead of white nets, thereby boosting patronage. Narrating attempts at bridging the cultural divide, a U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora member whom I call "Ben" said the following:

You know, for example, they gave out mosquito nets and some people just didn't want to use it. They thought when they put it over their head; they will look like a dead person. So we have to tell them the importance of using their nets and suggested different colors. We taught them about the importance of the environment, keeping water clean by working along with them as brothers and sisters and not as someone from the United States who couldn't relate to them (Taped interview 2009).

However, some members of the U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora expressed frustration with certain aspects of international collaboration. They decried the practice of the UN in relying too much on expatriate staff to implement projects on the ground instead of employing equally qualified Liberians from the Diaspora who know their country better. The use of committed Liberian members from the Diaspora has the advantage of transferring knowledge to citizens of

war-torn countries and can also make projects more sustainable long after the mandate of the UN for a particular project has expired. In the words of one Diaspora member, “some of these expatriates are just airport anthropologists who don’t know what they are talking about because they don’t spend enough time in the country to interact with the people and get a better appreciation of their problems, yet are quick to prescribe solutions” (Taped interview 2009).

PARTNERSHIP WITH HOST STATE AND OTHER LIBERAL WESTERN STATES

According to Baser and Swain (2008, 14), Diaspora organizations lobby host governments, in order to shape policies that are favorable to, or against, a homeland government. They also influence their homeland’s policies through their support or opposition to the governments. Such influence is demonstrated through financial support of political parties, social movements, and civil society organizations.

The U.S-based Liberian Diaspora in partnership with the Liberian government has lobbied international organizations and Western creditors of Liberia to cancel most of the country’s external debts. Debt cancellation can provide a major boost to peace-building for a post-war country such as Liberia as badly-needed money is freed from the vicious cycle of debt-servicing for peace-building programs such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, institutional building etc. “For Liberia - like other African countries emerging from war - debt relief can provide a vital financial boost, enabling a shift of scarce revenues from debt payments to reconstruction and combating poverty. Eliminating a high debt burden can also encourage domestic and foreign investors to finance new ventures” (Harsch 2009, 3).

Efforts at seeking debt cancellation and post-war reconstruction assistance are a national cause that has attracted the support of all Liberians including the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora. The leadership of the Liberian Diaspora in collaboration with Liberian government officials has made representations to international organizations such as the UN and Bretton Woods institutions seeking post-war reconstruction assistance. Such unity of purpose has the potential to strengthen the case for whatever assistance Liberia seeks from an international community, eager to see countries reach national consensus on vital issues of national interest. This national consensus was demonstrated at the 2004 International Reconstruction Conference on Liberia organized by the United Nations and the U.S. government in New York. In attendance were Gyude C. Bryant then Chairman of the Liberian National Transitional Government and then Board Chairman of The Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA), Anthony Kesselly. At this conference, the international community pledged \$500 million towards Liberia's reconstruction efforts. In securing such international assistance towards post-war reconstruction, members of the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora have been a valuable resource by providing access and expert advice to the Liberian government in areas where the government lacked the expertise or the contact.

The leadership of some U.S-based Liberian Diaspora organizations holding U.S citizenship has also been using this privileged status to successfully lobby top U.S policy makers for major policy adjustments in favor of Liberia. For example, through the leadership of some U.S-based Liberian Diaspora members, Liberia was added as a beneficiary of the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI). This was introduced by former President G.W. Bush to assist a selected group of African countries to combat malaria. Liberia was initially excluded as a beneficiary

after not meeting the original criteria for the aid. A top U.S-based Liberian Diaspora leader described the successful lobbying efforts as follows:

... they had given all kinds of excuses that Liberia could not guarantee but then...we made phone calls and talked to so many people. We gave teaching studies and the educational aspect of it, as a result, the United States was able to make Liberia part of the President's Malaria Initiative (Taped interview 2009).

In addition, the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora continuously fosters relationships between Liberian government officials and their U.S counterparts at the state and local levels for the development of Liberia and thereby making peace a viable option to violence. During an official meeting between Mayor Daley and the Mayor of Monrovia, Hoff Saytumah in 2005, the former was touched by the latter's request for assistance which led Mayor Daley to announce a package of assistance for the City of Monrovia which included the following: two garbage trucks; 15,000 garbage containers; two containers of school supplies including books and computers; training of Monrovia's firefighters at Chicago's Fire Academy and of Monrovia's Policemen/women at Chicago's Police Academy; and medical supplies (TLC Africa 2005). The role of the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora in getting the City of Chicago to assist in the training of Liberian fighter fighters and policemen/women represents a major contribution towards peace-building. A well-trained law enforcement team is necessary to maintain law and order and to reduce the culture of impunity that is still rife in post-war Liberia. The U.S-based Liberian Diaspora also maintains strong relationships with powerful African-American leaders such as The Reverend Jesse Jackson, founder of Operation/PUSH Coalition. As a result of these relationships, the U.S-based

Liberian Diaspora is able to strategically arrange visits for Liberian government officials and connect them to the former for assistance and mutual collaboration. One of the highlights of Hoff Saytumah's 2005 visit to Chicago was her invitation to speak at the close of Operation/PUSH Coalition's Annual Convention. In her speech, which was broadcasted live to 27 million viewers, she strongly advocated for assistance for Liberia's peace-building and post-war reconstruction efforts (TLC Africa 2009). Such a huge media audience raises the awareness level of Liberia's post-conflict needs among the American populace. A high American public awareness of the plight of post-war Liberians makes it easier for American politicians to financially support peace-building efforts in Liberia.

The U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora also invites U.S government officials to fact-finding missions in Liberia to get first-hand experience on the peace-building and developmental needs of the country. For example, Torlu Kruah, the head of Universal Human Rights International, a refugee assistance NGO, was able to get Massachusetts State Representative, Benjamin Swan to visit rural Liberia in December 2008. "After returning from Liberia, Representative Ben Swan initiated a series of meetings with citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to educate them about the problems he witnessed firsthand and how ordinary Americans can help Liberia" (Liberiawebs 2009). In response to this direct appeal, Pastor Miles T. Crawford Jr. of the Zion Community Baptist Church made a donation of \$3,500 to the visiting Mayor of Tappita City, Nimba County, Liberia, Sarah Mendoabor on August 2, 2009 as the congregation's contribution towards the construction of a bridge in Tappita (Liberiawebs 2009).

From the above, it is evident that the U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora group serves as interlocutors between their homeland and their adopted country. In the above cases, the U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora was more effective in altering U.S policy towards Liberia, than the

Liberian government itself. This is because apart from relying on the relationships that the U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora may have cultivated over the years with top U.S policy makers, they also know how to effectively advocate for a policy change compared to a Liberian diplomat who is limited by diplomatic protocols. By virtue of their U.S citizenship, the Liberian Diaspora has more access to a wide range of policy makers who are obligated to be responsive to the views and needs of fellow citizens. This is in contrast to the use of expensive lobbyists that foreign countries have to hire in order to shape U.S foreign policy towards a desirable outcome.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

Diasporas use their location to connect local NGOs and civil society to organizations and institutions in the host countries. This enables local peace advocates to gain access to influential and powerful international civil-society networks, which would otherwise have been difficult to access. Furthermore, partnership with global networks elevates the profile of local peace groups and organizations. It also improves their access to information, resources, and external partners that could boost their domestic standing vis-à-vis other local actors (Mohamoud 1999, 8).

The U.S-based Liberian Diaspora collaborates with pro-democracy NGOs such as the Carter Center to promote peace-building in Liberia. For example, a brainstorming conference was hosted by the Carter Center on June 9, 2007 and attracted a diverse group of legal scholars, religious leaders, human rights activists and Liberian Diaspora members from the Metro-Atlanta area. The theme of the conference was “Reconciliation and the Law in Post-Conflict Liberia: Between Law, Society and Healing.” The views and contributions made at the conference enriched the Carter Center’s rule of law project in Liberia.

In addition, in the course of collaboration with NGOs, some qualified members of the U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora are hired and sent to Liberia to assist in on-going projects. For example, a U.S.-based and trained Liberian Lawyer, Johannes Zlahn, was recruited by the Carter Center and seconded to the Ministry of Justice of Liberia to provide technical assistance in the day-to-day operations of the ministry. In a country where the lack of qualified legal personnel is a major hindrance in the administration of justice, the services of qualified Diaspora lawyers is a boost to the administration of justice.

Similarly, a former U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora member, Saah N'Tow served as the national coordinator of the field research team of the United States Institute of Peace and George Washington University, on a rule of law project in Liberia. This culminated in a joint authorship of a 2009 report titled "Looking for Justice: Liberian Experiences with and Perceptions of Local Justice Options". This report is "intended to provide the Liberian government and other stakeholders in the country with more robust evidence than has hitherto been available on how both formal and customary justice systems are perceived and utilized by Liberians. It also addresses what implications this evidence has for policy options regarding justice sector reform" (United States Institute for Peace 2009).

The building of effective institutions for good governance and peaceful resolution of conflicts is a central component of any peace-building program. This depends on the availability of quality human resource well trained in judicial processes and public administration in general. Unfortunately, years of Civil War have devastated Liberia's once vibrant civil service via brain drain with some of the highly qualified people moving to the United States. To ameliorate this trend, qualified Liberian Diaspora members have been actively offering their services via the Senior Executive Service Program. This program was instituted and funded by the United

Nations in collaboration with the World Bank and Western donors as part of efforts to build the capacity of Liberia's weak civil and public institutions.

Other internationally-sponsored Liberian human resource capacity-building programs funded by smaller NGOs and think-tanks are patronized by the U.S-based Liberia Diaspora. These programs offer Diaspora members generous financial rewards thereby making the programs highly attractive and competitive. For example, the Center for Global Development administers the Scott Family Liberia Fellowship which assigns "fellows to work for one year in Liberia as "special assistants" to senior Liberian government officials, primarily cabinet officials, in a wide range of areas and activities. The fellows are funded through the generosity of the family of CGD Board Chairman, Edward W. Scott, Jr." (Center for Global Development 2007).

As part of efforts to restore a modicum of social and economic normalcy to post-war Liberia, some U.S-based Liberian Diaspora members are collaborating with former American Peace Corps volunteers to Liberia under the umbrella of Friends of Liberia to execute various peace-building projects. Liberia is a pioneer recipient of U.S Peace Corps Volunteers in Africa and currently has about 3,000 Peace Corps Alumni. This group represents a valuable human resource that has continuously been engaged with Liberia throughout the turbulent war times and is currently seeking opportunities to assist in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction.

One of the major components of the reconciliation process is the rehabilitation of psychologically traumatized people as a consequence of the violent conflict and human rights abuses. For example, the members of the Sierra Leonean Diaspora living in the United Kingdom have established the Sierra Leone War Trust for Children (SLWT) (Bercovitch 2007, 35). Members of the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora have collaborated with U.S. NGOs to address war-time human rights abuses of women in the form of sexual violence that has led to health

problems such as vaginal fistula. For example, the Metro-Atlanta Chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women of America have secured \$220,000 and have been able to provide 115 complimentary airline tickets to support both U.S and Liberian Diaspora doctors, nurses and friends of Liberia on 10 medical and trade missions, in an effort to help rebuild Liberia. The Metropolitan Atlanta Chapter has also partnered with Dr. James Sirleaf, who is Chairman of the board of a U.S Liberian Diaspora humanitarian NGO, HEARTT, Inc. and son of the president of Liberia to help support their efforts at the JFK Hospital (The National Coalition of 100 Black Women 2009).

PARTNERSHIPS WITH PRIVATE/CORPORATE ENTITIES

Financial remittances play an important role in the post-conflict phase. In addition, by contributing towards economic recovery, the Diaspora community is also consolidating the foundations of peace. Furthermore, post-conflict rebuilding offers a great opportunity for a Diaspora community to invest heavily in its homeland. Any type of economic investment can revive business confidence and boost the economy. This will ultimately aid reconstruction and recovery and the long-term goal of a durable peace (Bercovitch 2007, 34).

Some members of the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora solicit financial and material support from private individuals, corporations and other institution towards reconstruction and peace-building efforts in Liberia. Most solicitations begin at the work places of Diaspora members or contacting foreign individuals they meet in formal and informal forums. For example, a Diaspora leader working for the *New York Post* sought permission from management to post an appeal for assistance on the company's web page after making a presentation about the Liberian conflict.

Some U.S.-based Liberian Diaspora members operate NGOs focused on peace-building activities and post-conflict reconstruction. They have been successful in seeking assistance from U.S.-based corporations, private foundations, individual wealthy Americans and celebrities for the purpose of peace-building. For example, Kimmie Weeks, a Liberian Diaspora activist and founder of Youth Action International has initiated peace-building programs focused on the youth in Liberia which include: the Former Child Soldiers Reintegration Health Project, the FCS Agricultural Project for Peace and the FCS Survey and Video Project. The Former Child Soldiers Reintegration Health Project recruits former child-soldiers and trains them to implement health care awareness programs and to promote reconciliation between former child-soldiers and the community. The FCS Agricultural Project for Peace seeks to provide a source of employment to former child-soldiers by training and assisting them to embark on Agricultural ventures. The FCS Survey and Video Project, seeks to chronicle the war-time experiences of former child-soldiers as part of a healing process and to identify their needs in order to effectively reintegrate them into society (Youth Action International 2009).

CHALLENGES OF DIASPORA-INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR PEACE-BUILDING

LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES: TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION

The poor transportation network in Liberia limits the quantity of relief items that Diaspora members can accept from willing international donors. Diaspora members complained about the lack of government assistance such as tax exemptions for items imported into the country to support post-war reconstruction efforts. There is also rampant harassment at the points of entries i.e. airports and ports. In an archetypical case, the transitional government of Liberia under Gyude Bryant failed to pay for the cost of the importation of twelve buses donated, by the

City of Dayton to the city of Monrovia via a sister-city initiative and the collaboration of ULAA.

In a scathing criticism of the government's inaction ULAA issued a press statement regretting the government's behavior:

... As our people struggle daily for affordable transportation, Mr. Bryant (transitional president) is very comfortable buying bullet-proof Mercedes Benzes while at the same time refusing to transport free buses to ease the suffering of the people. The Liberian people are now about to lose the buses due to the failure of the government to transport them to Liberia (ULAA 2005).

Such inaction by the government stifles the initiative of the Diaspora in seeking international collaboration that can assist in peace-building in Liberia. In addition, it sends a signal to potential donors who have competing demands on their resources that a country is not serious about being helped.

SELF-INTEREST AT THE EXPENSE OF SACRIFICE

There are also self-seeking Diaspora leaders and members who use all the right words expected by international partners, always interested in working with moderates. Instead, these double-speaking Diaspora leaders and members act contrary to what is expected of them when they acquire assistance. Although respondents admitted knowledge of instances of corruption, there was near unanimous hesitation to name offending organizations and their leaders mainly out of concern for washing the Diaspora community's dirty laundry in public and jeopardizing existing relationships with donors.

Some Diaspora leaders lack dedication towards working on behalf of Liberia and seek leadership for narrow parochial interests. One of the criticisms often leveled against the leadership of the Union of Liberian Associations in Americas (ULAA) is that some of them have been too cozy with the government in power in Liberia to the point of trading their advocacy for political appointments. The leadership of U.S-based Diaspora organizations enjoy high-profile and respectable status in Liberia. As such, some in the Diaspora seek leadership as a spring board towards future political careers at the expense of much needed peace-building.

While admitting the aforementioned weaknesses in the operations of U.S-based Liberian Diaspora organizations, Siahyonkron Nyanseor, a founding member of the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas, argues that “ULAA as any other organization will have members and leaders who will have their own “HIDDEN AGENDA” other than that of the goals and objectives of the organization. What can be done about it? Nothing, since they are hidden” (Nyanseor 2006, 8).

DIVIDED LEADERSHIP AND POOR COORDINATION

For the Diaspora to be capable of influencing the foreign policy of the homeland, it must be united in its position on an issue. Although it is expected that different segments of a Diaspora community might hold divergent views on the appropriate foreign policy to be taken by the homeland, a fractiously divided Diaspora is bound to have less influence on the homeland. By contrast, if the Diaspora is united on an issue and the homeland seeks help then the influence of the former over the latter is bound to be great (Shain and Barth 2003, 465).

Serious divisions in the leadership of the Union of Liberian Associations of the Americas (ULAA) is one of the main challenges facing the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora and threatens

effective collaboration with international partners for peace-building. Since 2004, ULAA has been divided into two factions after a bitter electoral dispute between the then President and Board Chairman. This division has evolved along factional, political and tribal lines and all attempts to resolve it have failed. Currently there is an impending lawsuit from one faction against the other while ULAA is splintered into two groups with one led by Anthony Kesselly and the other by Dr. Mario Seton.

Such divisions make it difficult for effective Diaspora representation before potential international partners capable of supporting peace-building in Liberia. Potential international partners will be hesitant about engaging any of the factions for fear of being entangled in the ongoing legal saga. Also, they may have concerns about which faction to hold accountable for any financial assistance aimed at supporting peace-building projects. In the words of Abraham Lincoln, “a house divided cannot stand.”

The effort of building peace-building partnerships is also hampered by a lack of coordination among the numerous Liberian Diaspora organizations. This leads to duplication of efforts as several Diaspora organizations keep going to the same international organizations making the same requests for assistance on behalf of Liberia. A top Diaspora leader pointed out that it will be better for Diaspora groups to focus on specific issue areas such as human rights, education, health, gender rights, economic development or refugee assistance.

LACK OF SUSTAINABILITY

International donor assistance is not sustainable and can lead to a vicious cycle of dependency which undermines local capacity building. Acknowledging Liberia’s weak capacity at a 2009 World Bank roundtable discussion, Liberia’s Minister of Planning and Economic

Affairs, Amana Konneh pointed out that the Civil War “wiped out what little capacity there was.” He advocated for a phased approach to capacity development while stressing the need for long-term approaches that are part of “a national capacity-building plan that focuses on the public, private, and civil society together.” The minister, while acknowledging the importance of Liberia’s Diaspora involvement in the early stages of post-conflict reconstruction, also observed that in the long-term, it is not a sustainable solution. He wants the focus to be on “developing a sustainable approach to capacity development” (World Bank 2009).

Liberian Diaspora respondents complained that even though they held similar qualifications and sometimes better qualifications than their Western counterparts, they were less likely to be hired by international organizations and NGOs for top management jobs with decision-making on major peace-building projects. They are also paid far less than their foreign counterparts. The hiring of nationals from the country recovering from conflict ensures that long after the expatriates are gone, the nationals will remain to run the programs. In addition, the active engagement of nationals of a country in the decision-making of peace-building project ensures that some of the cultural mistakes and insensitivity often associated with foreign projects in Africa are avoided. Furthermore, the hiring of qualified Diaspora members by international partners ensures that very qualified Liberians are given the opportunity to serve thereby limiting the conflict that normally arises when a disproportionate number of Diaspora returnees are seen as occupying higher government positions.

Some Liberian Diaspora members who work for international organizations sometimes find themselves in a dilemma because their motives are always under the microscope whenever they offer certain suggestions to their expatriate colleagues and bosses. This is because even though they may conduct themselves as professionals, their bosses are cognizant of the fact that

they have religious, ethnic or political ties to the country in which they are serving. Describing this sentiment, a Liberian Diaspora leader working for a U.S-based advocacy NGO made the following statement:

You have to be careful, you have to really convince them and explain and justify why you think that is the right thing. Because of course you are a professional but they know you came from a constituency – right from a particular ethnic group and you’re from a particular religion, part of the country and they know that the African context are based upon those loyalties and you can’t come and claim that, no I’m not like that even though, I may not be (Taped Interview 2009).

NORMATIVE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF DIASPORA PEACE-BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

The ability of the U.S-based Liberian Diaspora to build multiple partnerships with stakeholders of the liberal peace enhances the prospects of Diaspora effectiveness in peace-building in the homeland in a number of ways. First, a broader coalition of liberal minded partners serves as a check and balance mechanism against the potential pursuit of a hidden foreign policy agenda by any of the stakeholders. Second, Diaspora economic advocacy rather than excessive Diaspora involvement in partisan politics minimizes the negative consequences of contentious Diaspora engagement in domestic politics in the homeland. Third, successful Diaspora political and economic advocacy can generate a peace-dividend whereby refugees, the internally displaced and former combatants can return to normalcy. Fourth, the ability of the Diaspora to deliver the bacon without any strings attached can increase the patriotism profile of the Diaspora among their often skeptical homeland counterparts thereby improving the relations

between the two. Fifth, a diverse coalition of liberal minded groups sends a powerful message to will-be domestic provocateurs about the resolve of the international community towards the peace-building of Liberia. Finally, for all the above normative benefits to materialize, it is imperative for all Liberia's peace-building stakeholders to address the challenges to Diaspora peace-building partnerships identified in this research by coming up with the necessary ameliorative policies.

BIOGRAPHY

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