

FRONT PAGE AFRICA-

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Liberians With Dual Nationalities Crucial to Liberia's Economic Development

In today's global economy, developing countries like Liberia and others in Africa must endeavor to engage their nationals in the diaspora to help with economic developments.

Other countries like Israel, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, etc., have realized the importance of the diaspora's economic role in fostering national development through its annual remittances and project oriented initiatives. Individuals in the diaspora, who enjoyed dual nationality, have become a blessing to their respective countries of origin.

The concept of dual citizenship must do with Dual nationality. Dual nationality is simply an individual being a citizen of two countries or a legal status by which a person is a citizen of two countries.

For example, if you as a Liberian relocate to the United States and become a naturalized US citizen, you have dual citizenship. Dual citizens can carry two passports and essentially live and travel freely within their native and naturalized countries (Edmund Zar-Zar Bargblor, Daily Observer, 17 August 2005).

Liberia's legislature needs to perceive the Liberian Diaspora as a national asset and not as an adversary. The engagement of citizens in the diaspora is certainly not a new phenomenon. Countries such as Israel, India, Ireland and China are constructively engaged and have led the field of reaching out to their nationals in the diaspora.

What is new, however, is the number of countries who are now realizing they have exciting possibilities if they can engage their overseas populations in innovative and creative ways. Few years ago, countries like Uganda, Indonesia and Vietnam have taken initiatives in this field.

The diaspora has become gold mines for most developing countries. Interestingly, most countries are encouraging their national residing in developed countries to obtain naturalized status of their host countries (here).

Even the publication entitled: 'The Economist', in its November 2011 issue, published an article, 'The Magic of Diasporas' in which it is outlined how migrant business networks are changing the world, especially in developing countries.

The Liberian government should now be endeavoring to identify and connect with highly skilled Liberian individuals in the diaspora and link them to national economic development projects.

And if there are laws that might have the propensity to discourage investments from the diaspora, repeal such laws if they already exist.

Organizations such as the Organization for the Promotion of Development in Liberia, ULAA and others in the diaspora continue to emphasize that dual citizenship is in Liberia's best economic interest.

Dr. George K. Kieh, Jr. seemed to be correct in his perceptions when he presented his paper at the Conference on Dual Citizenship in Washington, D.C., on December 8, 2012, when he wrote: "Importantly, there is a covert and selfish reason that is harbored by some Liberian elites, who currently have positions in the state bureaucracy.

Their concern is that the adoption of dual citizenship would create competition for their jobs. That is, dual citizenship would make those, who are currently residing abroad, eligible to hold both appointive and elected positions.

Significantly, since those in the Liberian diaspora constitute the core of the the country's intellectual and professional capital, they would therefore be well-positioned to take positions in the public sector at the expense of those who are currently occupying those positions. This masked reason is the cardinal obstacle to the adoption of dual citizenship in Liberia" (Dr. Kieh, Jr., Liberian Dialogue, 8 December 2012).

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According to USAID report "many of Liberia's educated elite either fled or were killed during the civil war. The educational system was demolished, and the country lost a generation in which to educate and train its citizens to make productive contributions to development progress.

Government, the private sector, civil society and international partners still are desperately short of qualified local talent. The existing, small cadre of highly qualified and motivated leaders struggles to have policies and decisions carried out by a low-paid workforce that often lacks basic literacy, numeracy and other critical work skills". To be frank, Liberians with dual nationalities are seemingly, Liberia's best hope when it comes to economic development (here).

The World Bank's report of 2012, relevant to global remittances, pointed out that Liberians in the Diaspora out-beat per GDP other Africans living abroad by "remitting \$378 million in 2012, an

increase of \$18 million from 2011 remittance of \$360 million, a more than 31% of global remittances and third of Liberia's GDP in 2012" (The New dispensation, 6 February 2013).

The 'USD Explorer' also, provided its statistical information relevant to the remittances received by Liberia during the period of 2011 through 2015. Liberia accordingly, received \$360 million in 2011, \$516 million in 2012, \$383 million in 2013, \$495 million in 2014, and \$693 million in 2015 as remittances from other countries (here).

These statistics demonstrate and show that Liberia as a nation has benefited economically from its nationals in the diaspora; and this includes Liberians with dual nationality status.

The pronouncement by the current Speaker of the House, Hon. J. Emmanuel Nuquay, that he would campaign for dual citizenship to be accepted, is indeed a welcome news and it is hoped that other law makers will soon see wisdom in his affirmation (Daily Observer, 1 May 2017).

If Liberia failed to accommodate her overseas nationals with dual nationality status, a generation from now, Liberia's enormous potential will remain unfulfilled, and our beloved nation within the West African sub-region will remain a place where the few thrive in wealth and the many struggle in poverty.

Let us not forget those beautiful words of Liberia's National Anthem:

In union, strong success is sure

We cannot fail!

With God above

Our rights to prove

We will o'er all prevail

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Liberia

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