

REPORT

OF THE

ROUNDTABLE DIALOGUE ON

REPOSITIONING THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY



HELD AT
THE CONFERENCE HALL
OF THE SAVANNAH CENTRE
FOR DIPLOMACY, DEMOCRACY
AND DEVELOPMENT (SCDDD)

ON 17 AND 18TH JANUARY, 2025

Jointly organized by the
Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD)
and the Association of Retired Career Ambassadors of Nigeria (ARCAN)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The decision to convene a closed-door roundtable dialogue to reposition the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) for effective service delivery was the outcome of a discussion between the National President of ARCAN (Association of Retired Career Ambassadors of Nigeria), Amb Joe Keshi and the Founder/Chairman of SCDDD, Professor Ibrahim A Gambari. The purpose of the roundtable discussion was to examine the State of affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the due consideration to the Tinubu Administration on the 4D Doctrine and all other related issues regarding international relations. This conference was held at Savannah Centre for Diplomacy Democracy and Development, on 17 and 18 January, 2025. Upon commencement, two groups were assigned responsibilities to analyze specific areas with a view to prescribing recommendations.

DELIBERATIONS

Group One

Nigeria Foreign Policy, Bilateral and Multilateral Relations

This group was chaired by Ambassador Brownson Dede thoroughly examined the 4D doctrine of the Tinubu administration and concluded that since the enunciation of foreign policies of Nigeria from independence, various administrations have developed their own policy thrusts. Non has deviated from the established pattern; thus the 4D doctrine was also in line. The group went further to analyze the 4D doctrine.

Development

Non appointment of ambassadors to Nigeria Diplomatic mission since the beginning of this administration has hindered cooperation. The anticipated dividends of visits of the president to the various countries have not been fully met. Thus, the need to appoint ambassadors to Nigeria Diplomatic Mission was urgent. Second, MDA's should be involved in the implementation of international MOU's and agreements. In this regard, inter ministerial and inter agency involvement on implementing MOUs and agreement were crucial

Demography

Large youth population of Nigeria is an asset. The youth must, however, be enlightened and empowered. It is therefore recommended that the Nigeria Educational System should be overhauled, a favorable domestic environment should be created for youth employment and leadership positions.

Diaspora

The group noted the challenges facing the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCoM) including underfunding, lack of database and lack of inter-agency collaboration. It thus recommended increased funding, more inter-agency collaboration and the leveraging on the resources of Nigerians abroad for national development.

Bilateral Relations with Neighboring Countries

The group recalled the concept of Nigeria's Concentric Circle that prioritized engagement with immediate neighbors. It appears less importance was being attached to this in view of the frosty relations with Niger. It recommended stronger ties with Niger by considering multi-tract diplomacy that includes retired Nigerian diplomats, defence attaches, the diaspora citizens, religious and community leaders. A Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission of senior level officials and ministerial level submits should be established and engaged in bilateral problem-solving.

Multilateral Relations

ECOWAS

The group highlighted the need to strengthen ECOWAS in view of the exist of the Republic of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. In this regard, effort should continue to be made to integrate the three members.

Community of Sahel-Sahara States (CEN-SAD)

Membership of this group should be retained after ascertaining that its core mandate of Security and Development including fighting terrorism is maintained.

The African Union

The importance on the February 2025 elections were discussed in which Nigeria's Ambassador Bankole Adeoye fielded. The meeting enjoined Nigeria to fully mobilize support of his elections as the AU Commissioner for political

Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS). It was recommended that Nigeria should continue to support Africa Agenda 2063 and the Africa We Want.

The United Nations

Nigeria seeks a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). This would however depend on its domestic environment and commitment to the UN and contribution to other international organizations. It was thus recommended that Nigeria should increase visibility at the UN, pay its dues timely and promote good governance at home. MFA should undertake periodic review of Nigeria's memberships of international organization. Repositioning MFA for Effective Service Delivery.

The Creation of a Presidential Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs

In general, it was recommended that a Presidential Advisory Council be created.

Group Two

The second group was chaired by Ambassador Martin Uhomoibhi and the discussions looked at the following areas:

Funding.

MFA funding currently stands at 0.8% of the national budget which is grossly inadequate. It was recommended that at least 3% of annual budget should be allocated to MFA. Due to foreign exchange fluctuations, a special protective exchange rate for the ministry to cushion the effect of inflation and purchasing power at the missions is necessary and should be considered as a policy. In addition, a special grant should be provided MFA to offset outstanding debts.

Training/Capacity Building and Institutional Constraints.

Due to poor funding, Training Institutions like the Foreign Service Academy has broken down. Compulsory professional training has become either irregular or not conducted. Due to cost, MFA is unable to send staff to other institutions for training. It was therefore recommended that the foreign Service academy should be rehabilitated and perhaps even rebuilt. Furthermore, regular training on foreign language courses is needed. Thus, a new foreign languages academy may be built in Abuja for proximity, security and close management.

Staff Recruitment, Discipline, Promotion and Welfare

The meeting noted with concern that recruitment into MFA had not taken place in the last 7 years. This has created a huge vacuum and seniority gap. The measure taken to deploy accountants and administrative officers to take the place of professionally trained career officers violate Foreign Service Regulations. To stem these observed laps, the meeting recommended the establishment of Foreign Service Commission; government to grant immediate waiver on employment embargo; grant a headhunt to recruit from international organization and universities, cognate-experienced people into the mid-level career. Government should halt the current interim measures where pool officers are deployed to the ministry as this violates the Nigerian Foreign Service Regulations.

Conflict Between Foreign Service Regulation and Public Service Rules

The meeting observed the inexplicable replacement of the original version of the Public Service Regulation No 1 (2) of 2008 which stipulates clear distinction of service rules. This should be reversed to its original clause

Appointment of Ambassadors

Attention was drawn to the violation of Foreign Service Regulations (2008) Rule 1 (2) regarding the appointment of ambassadors to the effect that the ratio should be 25% for non-career and 75% for career appointees. This is recommended to be adopted by Mr. President. Secondly that the practice of recalling all ambassadors when there was regime change should be discouraged. Career appointees should be left to complete their tenure.

Inter-Agency Collaboration

Lack of inter-agency cooperation and collaboration at headquarters of the MFA and missions abroad is inimical to full benefit for the Nigerian Public. In this regard, government should mandate full cooperation of other agencies with the MFA and the head of mission without holding back. Authority on matters of foreign relations should rest with the MFA.

CONCLUSION

The plenary session endorsed all the group's recommendations as presented in the full report.



INTRODUCTION



The decision to convene this closed-door roundtable dialogue on repositioning the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) for effective service delivery was the outcome of a discussion between the ARCAN President, Ambassador Joe Keshi, and the Founder and Chairman of the SCDDD, Professor Ibrahim A. Gambari. Arising from their discussions, the two organizations set up a Joint Committee which organized the two-day dialogue and invited some concerned and informed Nigerian professionals and key stakeholders, to dialogue and agree on key objective, realistic and implementable advisory recommendations that would complement and enhance the Government's efforts and responses to some of the serious diplomatic challenges attracting public comments.

The main issues discussed by the participants included:

- a. The unusual delay in the appointment of substantive Heads of Nigeria's Diplomatic and Consular Missions abroad, since May 2023;
- b. The highly criticized Nigeria's and ECOWAS's responses to the undemocratic changes of government in the Republics of Burkina

- Faso, Mali, and Niger and these countries' emphatic decision to
- c. withdraw their membership from the regional organization;
 - d. The brewing diplomatic row between Nigeria and Niger;
 - e. The renewed public discussions on the need to allocate two permanent seats to Africa in the proposed review of the membership of the United Nations Security Council;
 - f. The need for a vigorous supportive campaign for Nigeria's candidature for re-election as the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) in the elections scheduled to hold next month, February 2025;
 - g. The need to rebuild the capacity and to raise the morale of the personnel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said to be at their lowest ebbs, to enviable levels; and
 - h. The challenge of perennial underfunding which has not only impacted negatively on the service delivery of the Nigerian Foreign Service, but the public image of the government.



The President of ARCAN, Ambassador Joe Keshi welcomed participants and thanked them for honouring the invitation, in spite of their very tight schedules. He appreciated the presence of Professor Gambari and thanked the Savannah Centre for availing the meeting of the services of its staff and conducive facilities.

He explained that the dialogue was mainly about Nigeria's Foreign Policy and the State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He reminded participants that the problems did not start today but long ago which led to the establishment of various Committees from the Patrick Bolokor Committee of 1981 to the latest one of 2023 Chaired by Ambassador Uhomoibhi, with a number of others in between, on the shelves.

He explained that the meeting was informed by the wide complaints about the lull or low voice of Nigeria on topical international issues of interest to Nigeria, especially the unusual delay in appointing Ambassadors to Nigeria's Missions abroad, the widely criticized handling of the Nigeria/Niger diplomatic row, and the need for improved neighbourhood diplomacy, as well as the public outcry about apparent neglect of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by successive Administrations, manifesting in underfunding and understaffing, and poor management of staff deployment at Headquarters and to Missions abroad.

He expressed courage of hope and optimism that despite the disappointing response of the successive Administrations to Committees' Reports and advice by Relevant Stakeholders, he urged participants not to turn their backs on MFA.

OPENING SESSION

OPENING ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR IBRAHIM GAMBARI

Professor Gambari welcomed all participants in his capacity as the Founder and Chairman of SCDDD and as Co-Convener. He thanked all for accepting the invitation to this constructive engagement on repositioning the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for more effective service delivery. He expressed deep appreciation that their impressive turnout was a mark of their collective patriotic commitment to the service of their common patrimony- the Nigerian Foreign Service to which all, himself inclusive, had committed the greatest part of their lives.

He said that he felt happy and proud to stand before all participants, most of whom he had personal relations with over 40 years and pledged his willingness to continue to offer the best of his knowledge to speak for Nigeria at every given opportunity.

He reiterated that the impressive attendance signified the acceptance by all that the Foreign Service had serious problems and demonstrated the willingness of all to find workable solutions. He expressed the optimism that it was never too late to put things right and return Nigeria to its rightful place of leadership in Africa.

Professor Gambari explained that the meeting came up as a result of some conversation between him and the ARCAN President, Ambassador Joe Keshi on the urgent need for concerned professionals and stakeholders to examine and offer realistic and implementable recommendations, without sounding critical, to the Government on some of the topical diplomatic challenges in the public domain. He summarized the main issues for discussion as follows:

- a. Unusual delay in appointing Ambassadors;
- b. Highly criticized Government's and ECOWAS's responses to the undemocratic changes of Governments in the Republics of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger;
- c. Gross underfunding of the Ministry;
- d. The need for vigorous supportive campaign for the reelection of Ambassador Bankole Adeoye as AU Commissioner for Political Affairs,

Peace and Security in February 2025;

- e. Renewed public discussion on the need for Nigeria to occupy one of the two Permanent Seats of the UN SC for Africa; and
- f. The Need to restore training and capacity-building for Foreign Service Officers and supporting staff of MFA.

Professor Gambari called for more reflective discussion on the need to ensure the reelection of Ambassador Bankole, stressing the need for Nigeria to ensure that the country's candidature scored nothing less than the 100% votes it got four years back and that the Nigerian Government should bear in mind that the UNSC seat was not to be given. He advised that Nigeria must be prepared for a keen contest.

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The chairman concluded his remarks by reiterating the maxim that Foreign Policy defined a country, so Nigeria had to include Foreign Policy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs among its priorities and urged participants to think of the Channel and the Vehicle to deliver the recommendations of the dialogue to its highest destination.



BRIEFING BY AMBASSADOR UHOMOIBHI

To encourage resilience and persistency of purpose, Ambassador Martin Uhomoibhi was invited to comment on the latest Presidential Committee on the Reform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under his chairmanship. It was set up by former President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR; at the tail end of his second tenure in 2023. He informed that the voluminous and comprehensive Report with 116 implementable recommendations, was duly presented to the incoming Administration of President Ahmed Bola Tinubu, GCFR; but yet to be opened and acted upon.

He described Nigeria as an enigma because of the difficulty to explain why Nigerian leaders hardly act on findings of Committees, including the ones they set up and why Nigeria was still together, despite decades of divisive banter. He invited participants to note that although most of the conclusions to be arrived at this meeting were not going to be different from the content of his Committee's Report and many others shelved before it, they should join him in sharing the unwavering optimism of Nigerians not to give up but keep on fighting till the recommendations were taken by this Government or any other of the day, sooner than later.

He expressed the reservation that not much would be achieved by any government in its foreign relations if its Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not adequately empowered to perform its constitutional role as the main Channel for conducting its Foreign Policy. He observed that because reciprocity was the game in diplomacy, the government would not gain much from the international system without Ambassadors at its Missions abroad.

BREAK OUT SESSIONS



To deliberate on all the issues raised in the concept note and reiterated by Professor Gambari, Ambassadors Keshi and Uhomoibhi in their pre-dialogue observations, the participants were divided into two Break-Out Sessions: Group I to discuss Nigeria's Foreign Policy and the 4Ds Doctrine under President Tinubu and Group II to discuss the strategies for repositioning the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for effective service delivery in line with the Administration's 4Ds Doctrine.

After the two-days exhaustive deliberations, the observations and recommendations of the two groups were presented and endorsed by the plenary with amendments as follows:

**GROUP I: NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY, BILATERAL
AND MULTILATERAL RELATIONS,
Chaired by Ambassador Brownson Dede.**

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Brownson Dede, welcomed participants to the session and recapped that the Group's mandate, as outlined in the Concept Note, was to:

- a. examine Nigeria's Foreign Policy under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu;
- b. analyze the 4Ds Doctrine of the Tinubu Administration;
- c. analyze Nigeria's bilateral relations with its contiguous neighbors namely, the Republics of Benin Republic, Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, and Niger;
- d. examine Nigeria's multilateral relations, especially with ECOWAS, Commonwealth, Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), CEN-SAD, the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN).

He stated that participants were already familiar with the 4Ds Doctrine of the present administration as it was the topic of the 2024 ARCAN Annual Public Lecture on Foreign Policy delivered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Yusuf Tuggar. The Chairman recalled that the idea of Nigeria's leadership of Africa emanated partly from its demography as the most populous country on the continent. He reiterated that Africa had remained the nucleus of Nigeria's foreign policy on accounts of its geo-political location.

Ambassador Dede cautioned that in promoting democracy and its ideals in West Africa and the continent, Nigeria should not be perceived as imposing any model as each country should be allowed to nurture its democratic system without prejudice to the universally accepted fundamental principles. He underlined the need for discussions to focus more on Nigeria's bilateral relations with its neighbors and appealed for brief remarks to give adequate time for recommendations.



CONSIDERATION OF THE SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

Nigeria's Foreign Policy and the 4Ds Doctrine

It was generally agreed that the tenets of Nigeria's foreign policy since independence, as enunciated by the Late Prime Minister, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa in his address to the United Nations General Assembly on admission of the country as the 99th member had not changed. However, successive administrations developed areas of priority, all anchored on the foreign policy principles established at independence. The Tinubu Administration, including its 4Ds Doctrine had followed that pattern. (The four Ds stand for: Democracy, Development, Demography, and Diaspora).

DEVELOPMENT

The meeting noted the numerous official visits undertaken by the President to other countries to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and MOUs signed to strengthen cooperation with them appeared to have yielded some dividends. However, it pointed out that the non-appointment of Ambassadors for the Nigerian diplomatic missions

abroad who should follow up on the implementation of the various agreements and MOUs remained a major hindrance to the realization of the full benefits of those visits. Moreover, participants noted that the prolonged delay in appointing substantive Heads of Missions is not in accordance with the cardinal principles of reciprocity that governs diplomatic relations.

Recommendations

- a. The President is invited to urgently consider the appointment of Ambassadors/ High Commissioners to head Nigeria's Diplomatic Missions abroad and fill the gaps created by their absence for almost two years;
- b. The relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) should be involved in the follow-up of the implementation of the MOUs and Agreements that are outcomes of the official visits. In this regard it is imperative to ensure interministerial and inter-agency coordination to ensure proper implementation of the MOUs and agreements.

DEMOGRAPHY

The meeting observed that a large population like that of Nigeria with a preponderance of youths has its opportunities and challenges. An enlightened and empowered youth are great assets for sustainable development.

Recommendations

- c. Government at all levels should overhaul Nigerian Educational system; create favorable domestic environment that would empower the youths for employment and key leadership positions;

DIASPORA

The deliberation on the Diaspora component was enriched by the

participation of the Chairman/CEO, Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCoM), Mrs. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, who highlighted a number of challenges hindering a more effective performance of the Commission's functions. These included underfunding, lack of a data base for the Nigerians in diaspora and lack of inter-agency collaboration.

The meeting noted the ongoing legislative efforts towards enabling Nigerians in diaspora to vote during elections in Nigeria. It acknowledged the complexity of the entire process but stressed the need for continued engagements with all the stakeholders to achieve the desired results.

Recommendations

The Federal Government should:

- d. increase funding support for NIDCoM to enable it to operate more efficiently;
- e. encourage inter-agency collaboration, especially with the Nigerian High Commission for Refugees, NAPTIP and other relevant Departments;
- f. leverage on the resources of Nigerians abroad for national development;

BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

Participants recalled that good neighborliness had remained a key component of Nigeria's foreign policy since independence. The concept of Concentric Circle that prioritized engagements with neighbors in Nigeria's foreign policy pursuit was also developed. The meeting observed that it appeared that Nigeria no longer paid much attention to them as there had been inadequate exchange of visits between Nigerian leaders and their counterparts in other Countries. The events in the West African sub-region especially the frosty relations with Niger Republic called for a critical reassessment of the status of Nigeria's

ties with its neighbors. The reassessment would identify the peculiarities of bilateral relations with each country and fill any identified gaps therein.

Recommendations

The Federal Government should:

- g. learn from the experience and lessons of the country's three-years civil war and develop a strategic country-by-country template that would serve as a guide to Nigeria's bilateral engagements with its neighbors on the principles of good neighbourhood diplomacy adopted at independence;
- h. consider multi-track diplomacy involving relevant stakeholders, including retired Nigerian diplomats and Military Attaches, friends of Nigeria abroad as well as non-state actors such as influential business persons, religious and community leaders, towards normalizing relations with Niger Republic, in particular and the other members of the Association of Sahelian States;
- i. request for the convening of the Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission at Senior Officials level in the first instance, to be followed by Ministerial and Summit engagements.
- j. evolve better border management than border closures, given its effects on bilateral relations, trade and security;
- k. reintroduce country-desk specialization or develop a country-by-country template, especially for improved relations with immediate neighbouring countries;
- l. Government should reactivate the Presidential Advisory Council on Foreign Relations;

MULTILATERAL RELATIONS

ECOWAS

The deliberations on Nigeria's relations with ECOWAS dwelt principally on how to strengthen the sub-regional organization in which Nigeria

was a founding member and a key pillar to better serve as an important instrument of its foreign policy and also become more effective in discharging its functions.

The meeting highlighted, among others, the exits of the Republics of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger arising from the military coups in the three countries in violation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and their failure to restore constitutional order as demanded by the organization. Sanctions were subsequently imposed on them resulting in their exits and formation of a confederation of Sahelian States in protest.

Participants acknowledged the efforts by the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government to bring Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger back to the organization, including the six months extension granted them to reconsider their position that had not yielded any positive result. The foregoing notwithstanding, the meeting agreed that the diplomatic efforts should continue.

Recommendations

The meeting recommended that:

- a. ECOWAS should accommodate the Association of Sahelian States in the context of its treaty as an organization within the sub-region;
- b. The Nigerian President should consider the re-establishment of the Presidential Advisory Council on International Relations composed of senior retired career ambassadors and others with international relations experience to assist him in decision-making on foreign policy issues;
- c. Nigeria should undertake a periodic review of Nigeria's relations with ECOWAS, its Agencies and Institutions;

COMMUNITY OF SAHEL-SAHARAN STATES (CEN-SAD)

The meeting underlined the need to ascertain the status of the organization and its main objectives, and recommended that:

- a. Nigeria should retain its membership if the organization has not shifted from its core mandate of security and development, including fighting terrorism;

THE AFRICAN UNION (AU)

The meeting discussed extensively the forthcoming elections for high-level positions in the African Union Commission (AUC) in which Nigeria is presenting Ambassador Bankole Adeoye for re-election as Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security in February 2025. It was recalled that a well-structured and organized campaign involving Aso Villa, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and experienced retired career ambassadors was instrumental to his successful election for the first term. Participants agreed that similar efforts which gave Nigeria 100% votes, (54/54) should be made for his re-election.

Recommendations

- b. The President should authorize immediate comprehensive arrangements for the campaign in support of Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, Nigeria's candidate for re-election as the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) in Addis Ababa in February 2025;
- c. Nigeria should, in this connection, continue to support the AU in the actualization of the Global Agenda 2030 and AU's Agenda 2063 on the Africa we Want;
- d. Nigeria must ensure that it is up to-date in the payment of its Assessed Annual Contribution to the AU;
- e. Nigeria should support the candidature and vote for the election of Kenya's Hon. Raila Odinga, a former Prime Minister, a long time

influential African person, and a close friend of Nigeria, who towers above the other two candidates, as the Chairperson of the AUC. (The other two candidates are Mahamoud Ali Youssof, a long serving Foreign Minister from Djibouti, and Richard Randriamandrato, a former Foreign Minister from Madagascar, all from the East African sub-region);

- f. Nigeria should be more proactive in its engagements with the AU and other international organizations of which it is a member;

The United Nations (UN) and other International Organizations

The success of Nigeria's quest for a permanent seat in a reformed United Nations Security Council (UNSC) would largely depend on its domestic environment.

Recommendations

- a. Nigeria should, therefore, increase its visibility in the UN; grow its economy; strengthen internal security; ensure timely payment of its assessed annual contributions to international organizations to which it is a member, and promote good governance in order to improve its chances of getting one of the two slots to be allocated to Africa;
- b. MFA, in collaboration with home MDAs, should undertake a periodic review of Nigeria's membership of international organizations to determine the relevance or otherwise, of its stay in such organizations;



GROUP II: REPOSITIONING MFA FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY Chaired by Ambassador Martin Uhomoibhi

Introduction

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Uhomoibhi noted that the Foreign Service was established as a separate Service of the Nigerian Government for the purpose of providing staff for MFA at Headquarters and the Nigerian Diplomatic and Consular Missions abroad, hence the need to discuss its matters in the context of its uniqueness and specialized posture.

The group focused on identifying the challenges confronting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and proposing actionable recommendations for repositioning the Ministry to deliver on its mandate effectively. The participants deliberated and identified the following as the major challenges hampering the Ministry's effective service delivery: Gross Underfunding; Acute Shortage of Staff; Irregular

Recruitment, Training and Capacity-Building; as well as Administrative and Institutional Constraints:

Gross Underfunding

Participants observed, with consternation, that the MFA's operations across board, under successive Administrations over the years, were being hampered by inadequate budgetary allocation, to the unprecedented condition that officers were being made to pay their passages and sundry expenses abroad and later submit claims for refund thereafter. That the meagre allocations had always been eroded substantially by multiple and fluctuating foreign exchange rates. Comparatively, while Nigeria's annual allocation to MFA had hardly reached 1% (0.8%) of the National Annual Budget, Egypt allocates 3%, and South Africa's is slightly higher.

Recommendations

To put the Ministry on a global competitive footing, the Group recommended that:

- a. Government should increase MFA's annual allocation from 0.8% to, at least, 3% of the National Annual Budget;
- b. Among other things, the Ministry should seek the collaborative support of the National Assembly (NASS) to secure a first-line charge in the disbursement of funds to it (MFA) as conveyed in the Presidential Approval in the document Reference Number PRES//65.I/COS/3/672 OF 6th March, 2020, titled: Actions Required for Effective Delivery of Government Priorities: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019-2023); Priority Projects and Measures for Effective Foreign Policy Delivery.
- c. Government should approve a special protective exchange rate for the Ministry in line with the provisions of the Nigeria Foreign Service Regulations (2008); Foreign Service Allowance No.9 (5b) stating that, "**At all times, there shall be the protection of the**

Foreign Service Allowance against erosion caused by currency fluctuations, to minimize inflationary impact on the purchasing power of officers" and the Missions;

- d. Government should grant a Presidential Approval for a special allocation to enable the Ministry offset its outstanding debts, particularly abroad to avoid litigations by its creditor and to bring back officers who are still stranded at post due to lack of funds;

Training/Capacity-Building and Institutional Constraints

The Group underscored the imperatives of regular training and capacity-building for officers, especially in a specialized institutions like the Foreign Service operating in a dynamic and competitive world. It was, however, informed that due to the perennial underfunding, routine professional training and capacity-building programmes, including the compulsory Foreign Service Academy for new intakes, had been disappointingly, irregular or never conducted at all. The information added that facilities and the structure of the Foreign Service Academy in Lagos had been vandalized, making it completely unsuitable for occupation and conduct of training programmes. Thirdly, that due to the astronomical rise in cost of services and paucity of funds today, the Ministry could no longer afford the huge cost of training its staff at the alternative Federal Civil Service Institute, Abuja.

Recommendations

To enable the Ministry to embark on regular training and capacity-building locally and abroad, for all cadres of officers, as required statutorily and to meet the aspirational global best practices, the Group made the following recommendations, contingent upon approving recommendations (a) and (b) above:

- e. As in © above, government should grant a Presidential Approval for a special allocation of funds to the Ministry, specifically to

rehabilitate the dilapidated Foreign Service Academy with all its facilities in Lagos, or preferably, to build and equip a new one for the regular training of officers in diplomacy and foreign language courses in Abuja, for proximity, security and close management;

Staff Recruitment, Discipline, Promotion and Welfare

The Group expressed great concern about the information that due to the subsisting embargo on regular recruitment of staff, MFA had not recruited new officers in the last seven years or more, in addition to normal attrition in numbers through retirements. That this had caused the acute shortage of staff, currently numbering slightly above 1900, both at Headquarters and at Missions abroad.

The Group observed that in addition to the widening seniority gap, there would be the frustrating challenge of deploying the number and staff with cognate experience and appropriate seniority to strategic Departments at Headquarters and Missions abroad. Expressing the fear of negative consequences in future, the group noted with great concern the interim measures of deploying Accountants and Administrative Officers from the pool to fill up the manning gaps in the Ministry as a violation of the Foreign Service Regulations establishing the uniqueness and professionalism of the Foreign Service.

Recommendations

To enable the MFA attain the required number, bridge the widening seniority gap, minimize future administrative frictions in the deployment of pool officers, and to ensure an uninterrupted staff succession regime, in line with global best practices, the Group recommended that:

- f. Government should approve the establishment of the Foreign Service Commission as the panacea for the resolution of the challenges of staff recruitment, professionalism, career progression and succession regime, discipline and welfare in the Foreign Service;

- g. In the interim, Government should grant immediate waiver on the employment embargo to enable MFA recruit new officers to address the manning level at appropriate levels;
- h. The Ministry should relaunch the "36+1" talent promotion programme and reestablish a structured framework for sustainability of this and other relevant training programmes within and outside the country;
- i. Government should grant special approval to the Ministry to 'headhunt' or recruit and train suitably qualified officers from international organizations and universities with cognate experience to the mid-career level, in addition to the ad hoc conversion of suitably qualified in-house executive staff to the Officer Cadre at the junior level;
- j. Government should stop the current interim measure of deploying pool officers to the Ministry because it negates the principles of professionalism and specialization and in total violation of the provisions of the Nigerian Foreign Service Regulations which stipulates that in matters of conflicting interest between the Foreign Service Rules and the Public Service Rules, the former supersedes the latter (Foreign Service Regulations (2008), Regulation No. 1 General (2)).

Conflict Between Foreign Service Regulations and Public Service Rules

In trying to affirm the uniqueness and specialization of the Foreign Service, as provided for in the Public Service Rules, the Group observed that for some inexplicable reasons, the provision of the Foreign Service Rules referred to in recommendation (j) above had been expunged in the 2021 Revised Version of the Public Service Rules, which read thus, **“Rules of the Public Service of Nigeria apply to members of Foreign Service in respect of matters not specifically covered by Foreign Service Regulations.”** Secondly, it was observed that the 2021 Revised Version of

the Foreign Service Regulations, confused 'Conversion' for 'Transfer of Service' as reflected in Regulation No.2, paragraph 6 (h),

Recommendations

- a. Government should restore Regulation No.1 (2) as it was in the 2008 Version to read thus, ***Rules of the Public Service of Nigeria apply to members of Foreign Service in respect of matters not specifically covered by Foreign Service Regulations. However, the Foreign Service Regulations will supersede the Public Service Rules where the two are in conflict,***
- b. Government should expunge Regulation No.2, paragraph 6 (h) which reads thus: ***“Officers seeking conversion from outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs into Foreign Affairs Cadre must, in addition to acquiring first degree in relevant fields, possess post-graduate degree in areas relevant to International Relations.”*** This should be done because we do not 'convert' but 'transfer' service from one department to the other. Conversion as practiced in Foreign Affairs is an in-house exercise.

Appointment of Ambassadors

The Group noted, with due respect, the sole responsibility and prerogative of the President and Commander-in- Chief to appoint Ambassadors to Nigerian Missions abroad. It however, observed that in doing so, Mr. President should consider the factors of morale boosting and aspirational career progressions to the top as obtained in similar specialized professions, like the Military, Academia, Engineering and Medical Services.

Recommendations

The Group recommended, as clearly stipulated in the Foreign Service Regulations, that:

- m. in in order to uphold the uniqueness, specialization and professionalism of the Foreign Service and the need to promote

aspirational career progression (in the service), as obtained in other specialized professions in the country, the President should, in keeping with his good offices, honour the provisions of the Foreign Service Regulations (2008), Rule No. 1 (2) General) and appoint Ambassadors to the ratio of 25% for None Career and 75% in favour of the Career Appointees, as it is done in many other countries of comparative status with Nigeria;

- n. The policy of blanket recall of Ambassadors at the end of the tenure of the sending Head of State and Government, should be reconsidered to exclude career officers appointed at the same time with Non-Career Ambassadors;

Language Proficiency:

- o. Government should support and fund the reestablishment of a dedicated language school to enhance linguistic capabilities for effective international engagements;

Inter-Agency Collaboration

The group observed that due to poor or lack of interagency cooperation and collaboration both at Headquarters and abroad, the Nigerian public enjoy limited or very low-quality inter-agency services. It, therefore, recommended that:

- p. Government should ensure that all relevant departments and agencies charged to render services to the public through MFA page 05abroad should submit to the authority of the head of Mission without holdbacks.

Conclusion

The Group concluded that the art of repositioning the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for effective service delivery and the sustenance of its unique professional and specialized status in a competitive and dynamic world, required a holistic approach, hence the imperative for the establishment of the Foreign Service Commission which will take full charge of the immediate and long term challenges of the Ministry and place it (MFA) in proper comparative footing for the running of the Nigerian diplomatic service, in line with global best practices. It therefore, urged the Ministry to liaise closely with friends of the Foreign Service in the NASS for the realization of this critical Foreign Service Commission.

NB: The observations and recommendations of the two groups were presented to the Plenary and endorsed with amendments as reflected in the Report.



CLOSING REMARKS

Ambassador Joe Keshi, in his closing remarks, thanked all participants for their very useful contributions which will go a long way in enhancing the Ministry's effective Service delivery. He gave the assurance that the recommendations would be delivered to the appropriate authorities for necessary action. He further assured the MFA officers that the concerted efforts were for their interest. He once again, expressed ARCAN's gratitude to the Founder, Prof Ibrahim Gambari and Staff of SCDD for availing the meeting of their facilities and the very warm hospitality. Similarly, he thanked Members of ARCAN present for their commitment to the progress of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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