

LIBERIA

PROGRAM PROFILE



History of Partnership

The House Democracy Assistance Commission approved a legislative strengthening partnership with the Liberian legislature in July 2006. The partnership program has concentrated on the development of Liberian parliamentary staff structure; legislative library setup and operations; legislative drafting; stenography, records and archives; and legislative administration. The Commission has sent a recommendation to the leaders of both chambers on how the staff structure might be reformed.

The Commission has encouraged development on these fronts through visits of Congressional Members and staff to Liberia, in addition to numerous training seminars for Liberian legislators and legislative staff. Additionally, in 2009 the Commission pledged \$250,000 towards a project to develop a modern legislative library to better serve Liberian legislators and their staff.

Accomplishments

- In cooperation with the Library of Congress offices in Nairobi and Cairo, HDP renovated, furnished, and equipped the parliamentary library, providing a functional space for legislators and staff to undertake research and for storage of legislative records.
- Included in the library is a workplace for the 26-person Legislative Information Service, whose leadership has been trained at HDP seminars.
- HDP seminars in Washington and Monrovia have trained the personal staff of committee chairs how to support the work of legislative committees, helping to overcome the absence of dedicated committee staff in the legislature.

Background

Historically based on the American model, Liberia's government consists of three equal branches of government. It has a bicameral legislature elected by a direct, popular vote. The House of Representatives has 64 members who serve six-year terms. The Senate has 30 members, two from each county, who serve nine-year terms.

Congressional Delegations

In July 2010, Representative David Price led an eight-member congressional delegation to Liberia for a two-day program of workshops. The delegation celebrated the U.S. Independence Day holiday with U.S. Embassy personnel, and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Liberian legislature pledging Commission support for a new legislative library. In addition, the Commission organized training sessions in budget analysis, legislative operations, and committee operations for more than 100 Liberian staff. The delegation also visited the town of Kataka in Margibi County to highlight the importance of constituent service and outreach, observing a town hall meeting.

Representative David Price led a delegation of six Members of Congress to meet with their Liberian counterparts in June 2008. The delegation met with Liberian House Speaker Alex Tyler, Senate President Pro Tempore Isaac Nyenabo, and approximately half of the 94 legislators. Three concurrent training seminars for Liberian legislators were held on rules of procedure and ethics, budget analysis, and committee operations. The delegation also accompanied Liberian MPs to the town of Buchanan in Grand Bassa County to focus on constituent outreach.

In June 2007, Representative David Price led a delegation of four Members of Congress to Liberia, on behalf of the Commission. The delegation conducted a full day of training for legislators, with most of Liberia's senators and representative attending. Liberian House Speaker Alex Tyler inaugurated the partnership before a plenary session in the legislature. U.S. Members of Congress emphasized the role of the legislature as an independent, co-equal branch of government, and then broke up into meetings focused on the role of staff and staff structure, the importance of legislative research and analysis, the roles and responsibilities of legislators, constituent relations, executive-legislative relations, and the role of committees and professional staff. The delegation observed a town-hall meeting in Tubmanburg, in Bomi County, to emphasize the importance of constituent outreach.

Staff Delegations

At the Commission's request, the Library of Congress sent the director of its Nairobi office and a technical expert from its Cairo office to Liberia in April 2009 to conduct a needs assessment of the library and research service and to design a modern library for the legislature. Their assessment report served as the basis of the Commission's material assistance project to Liberia.

In June 2008, a staff delegation traveled to Liberia to work in specific areas of legislative and administrative operations. Congressional staff was paired with their counterparts in the Liberian legislature by committee assignment. Staff of the Committee on Rules addressed procedural issues, staff of the Committee on the Budget discussed budget analysis, and staff from the Congressional Research Service met with research service staff. The program was structured as a day-long training seminar and generated tremendous interest, with about 150 staff attending at least one of the three sessions.

MP Seminars

Liberian MPs attended HDP seminars in Washington in October 2009 and September 2008. These week-long programs began with an overview of the Congress and its committee structure presented by the Congressional Research Service. Committee staff and former members of Congress spoke to participants about various aspects of committee operations, including the role of staff and the organization of public hearings. Roughly a dozen Members of Congress spoke to participants in each seminar, offering their personal experience about using committees to advance their own legislative and oversight priorities. Participants were briefed on the organization and conduct of committee hearings and observed a hearing.

In August 2007, six members of the Liberian parliament visited Washington for a week-long program concentrated on legislative operations and constituent relations. The program began with an overview of the Congress by the Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives and the Congressional Research Service. Participants were then divided into three workshops; one on the role of politics in the legislature, one on the importance of a legislative research service, and one on budget analysis, and

oversight. The Liberian delegation also visited the Arkansas district of Representative John Boozman, where they learned about constituent outreach and local-federal relations.

Staff Seminars

In June 2010, two staff members of the Liberian legislature traveled to Warsaw, Poland, to attend the 20th anniversary of the Frost-Solomon Commission, which was the predecessor to the House Democracy Assistance Commission. They were joined by 22 staff members from 11 partnership countries, along with MPs and research staff from former partners of the Frost-Solomon Commission. While they were in Warsaw, current and former staff of the Congressional Research Service worked with the Liberian staff to help them further develop their parliamentary research service through workshops, peer-to-peer discussions, and open forums. Speakers underlined the importance of reliable, impartial, timely, and accurate research to the work of democratic legislatures. They also shared tips on how to engage legislators and help them see the value of research, which was a concern shared by a number of participants.

The Commission arranged for staff of the Liberian legislature to travel to Nairobi, Kenya, for a weeklong seminar in November 2009. The seminar presented the opportunity for the Liberians to learn from U.S. and Kenyan counterparts the importance of an independent budget review and oversight process. The program included hands-on workshops and presentations on budgetary modeling, macroeconomic forecasting, and the role of civil society organizations in complementing the legislative oversight function of a parliament.

Staff from the Liberian legislature have also participated in all seven Legislative Staff Institutes organized by the Commission since 2007. Most recently, in December 2010, Liberian staff took part in a staff institute focused on committee operations, where they held meetings with CRS, staff from several House committees, and the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Commission. In addition, committee staff from the Republic of Macedonia shared their experience in developing procedures to begin using oversight hearings as an element of the work of their parliamentary committees.

In October 2010, staff from the Liberian legislature participated in a staff institute that focused on strengthening legislative budget analysis capacity. Twenty-one staff from 11 partner countries participated in the program, which included meetings with or presentations by officials from the Congressional Budget Office, CRS, and staff from the House Committees on Budget, Appropriations, and the Joint Committee on Taxation. Additionally, budget analysts from the Kenyan National Assembly shared their experience in establishing and developing a parliamentary budget office.

The fifth staff institute was held in December 2009 and was organized in conjunction with CRS. The institute hosted 27 participants from 12 partner countries, who were mostly officials and analysts of their respective parliament's research services. The program focused on the role of a research service in providing independent information and analysis to members of parliament and their staff.

In November 2009, Liberian legislative staff participated in a staff institute centered on the third annual World E-Parliament Conference, which specifically addressed the manner in which information and communications technology can help improve legislative representation, transparency, accountability, openness, and effectiveness.

Liberian legislative staff joined 28 parliamentary staffers from 10 partnership countries in Washington in December 2008 for a staff institute focused on strengthening committee operations. Participants gained an understanding of committee operations in the U.S. Congress and explored topics such as staff roles and responsibilities, legislative analysis, drafting and research, legislative-executive relations, and media relations.

A staff institute in October 2008 that centered on congressional oversight and budgeting included staff from the Liberian legislature. Participants were given an overview of the budget process in the U.S. and the structure, organization, and services provided by the Congressional Budget Office. The program dealt with transparency, revenue estimation, and key budgetary policy issues such as health, defense, agriculture, infrastructure, and education.

Liberian legislative staff were present for the inaugural staff institute in December 2007. The Institute offered a two-track program, one for senior parliamentary administrators and the other on research and analysis services for the legislature. The program included a three-day overview of the U.S. Congress, a one-day visit to the Maryland Legislature to learn about state and local government, and a five-day series of meetings and workshops with current and retired Congressional research and administrative staff.

Material Assistance

In late April 2009, senior staff from Library of Congress offices in Nairobi and Cairo conducted a needs assessment of the library and research service used by the Liberian legislature. Based on their observations, they drafted a plan for a modern legislative library to better serve parliamentary members and staff. The library includes a common work space, archives to provide for orderly, climate-controlled storage of key legislative materials, and office space for the House and Senate research departments with access to printers, basic office equipment, and the internet. HDP provided \$250,000 in funding for this project, which was inaugurated during the July 2010 congressional delegation.