



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

*An initiative of  
the National Academy of Public Administration,  
and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs  
and the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice,  
Princeton University*

Oral History Program

Series: Civil Service  
Interview no.: C1

Interviewee: E M Debrah

Interviewer: Ashley McCants

Date of Interview: 19 August 2008

Location: Accra, Ghana

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MCCANTS: This is an interview with Ambassador E.M. Debrah (Ernest) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Accra, Ghana. It is August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

Thank you so much Ambassador for agreeing to participate in this interview. We have about 90 minutes to talk and I have a number of different questions to ask. If there are certain questions that you want to skip at any time, or add, please feel free to do so.

I would like to begin this conversation by talking about the role you have played in public sector reform here, as well as elsewhere if you have worked on related issues in other settings. But first, can you describe your role in public sector reform in Ghana? Have you led or managed public sector reform, or a reform program? Or did you play the role of an advisor, a facilitator, or a monitor?

DEBRAH: *You see, I have been a civil servant—well, I joined the Ghana civil service in 1954. In 1955, I was selected for the Ghana Foreign Service. In 1973, I became head of the civil service and Secretary of the Cabinet. In 1973, we had what we called a civil service week. We invited the public to have a dialogue with the civil service. As a result of that—[interruption]*

MCCANTS: We are continuing with Ambassador E.M. Debrah.

DEBRAH: *So, the public always appreciates the work of the civil service. But at the same time, they have many criticisms and have many suggestions for reforms. So, we had a civil service week. Where we exposed the civil service to the public, and invited a lot of debate. We had public debates, public lectures, and so on. At the end of it, the government appointed an Okoh Committee to look into the civil service. I think they made a number of reforms. This was 1974, and without the records I cannot - but the records are there. The Okoh Committee went to the civil service; the thing is that, to bring new ideas, particularly methods of bringing efficiency into the civil service.*

*Then, after that I went back as an ambassador, I came back to Ghana and in 2001, I was made chairman of the civil service council. This time, the government formed what they called a Ministry of Public Sector Reform. And this time, there is completely new technology. When I started in the civil service, there was nothing like all these gadgets we are talking about. But how do we adapt the new technology, especially the ICT (Information and Communication Technologies), to improve the efficiency of the civil service? Then there is also the public service sector reform, which looks into various aspects of the public service. In this regard, I believe the Ministry of Public Sector Reform or the Head of the Civil Service, Mr. Issachar, (Joseph Donkor) will be able to speak to you in greater detail about these reforms. There was also Professor Woode (S.N.) Chairman of the Public Service Commission, who has also been involved in these areas. I believe any of them would be in a position to give you those details.*

MCCANTS: How did you become involved in this work of reform? Did the government ask you for your assistance?

DEBRAH: *No, as head of the civil service, you are responsible for the efficiency of the civil service. In many cases, when it comes to public sector reforms, many people like to talk of big, big, big things. But public sector reform always means doing the little things, which will form the basis of public sector reform. One reform is, people going to work on time. You see, in our own country, there's something called "African punctuality." I always illustrate this by saying that when we were students, we invited an old man to come and chair a function at 4:00. And at 5:00*

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*he wasn't coming, 6:00, he wasn't coming. So, we formed a temporary chairman, and went through this ceremony. We finished at 8:00. Then, we find this old man turned up. He said, "I've come in, can we go ahead with the function?" I said, "We are finished." He said, "To hell with you people. How can you finish? You invited me as chairman and when I haven't come, how dare you start?" I said, "Papa, but we asked you to come at 4:00." He said, "Doesn't matter, you asked me to come, and at any time I come, that's when we begin."*

*So, and you find that in many cases, people do not move on time. Now, it isn't only mere punctuality in attendance. But, it means that when people are given work to do, they don't submit this thing on time. If they have to do research, it goes on and so on. So, at beginning with public sector reforms, you begin with this little thing of punctuality, which is the basis.*

*Then the next set of reforms is the whole question of the professional business of the officer. Very often, people just go to school, and they are appointed to the civil service. Then, he goes into one office or one institution and he learns on the job. So, the next reform from this is that you must have training and student members institutionalized and structured. So that you have to go back to the secondary school and university. Anybody at all who's coming to the civil service, it depends upon the level. If he's coming at a professional level, he should have had a university degree. Then, after a university degree, he must have what we call a professional degree, not always if you come to the civil service. He must go to the institute, to what we call GIMPA (The Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration), and he must be prepared for a period of nine months to work in the civil service, as long as he may be professionally equipped. The same way, if we have somebody who is going to be a lawyer, he goes to law school, and after that he must go to the bar. In medicine, the man goes to be a doctor and one year he must do a housemanship. Well, so the same thing, that a person must be professionally equipped to go to be in the civil service.*

*Then when he goes to that particular department, he must have specialist training to fit into that department. For example, when we set up the Foreign Service, we went to the London School of Economics, and then we did international relations, language and so on. Then after that we were attached to the British for six weeks.*

*For the last 20 odd - work that I've been doing. I've been teaching, setting up Foreign Service. I set up the Foreign Service for Zimbabwe. I set up the Foreign Service for Namibia. Since then, I've been running training courses for Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Mozambique, preparing them for this Foreign Service. The important thing is to make sure they have the professional basis to do the work they are trained to do.*

*Then after the training, the next thing is the kind of equipment you need. You'll find, for example, this one has run a course for some people, and I wanted to make 25 copies of something, immediately. We did not have a photocopy machine. The photocopy machine we had was an old type, but what we need is the kind of photocopy machine which can do 25 copies of about 30 pages each, stack everything, so I can give it to them. We should have this, but we didn't have it. So, at the nexus, the equipment, we did not talk about forms, and the care of equipment. And today, we come to the whole range of ICT. So that, that becomes basic because you are dealing with the world now, everything is online and so on. Then when we come here, we are working as in the time of Abraham, way back. So, the equipment then becomes the next thing.*

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*Then the next area of reform is the remuneration. Salaries in the civil service are so low; if you get two people from the university both of them have first class degrees, they come, one comes to the civil service, he gets salary, where the other man goes to business and gets about three or four times as much. So, we are not getting the best. The thing to do is, the next form of reform, is of remuneration and working conditions of the civil service. And then, when the civil servant retires, his pension is minimal, so small that I've seen public servants who die almost paupers, because the salaries, the pensions they get, are not good to them.*

*This is, when we talk about public service reform, first of all look at professionally equipping the people, and giving them the necessary equipment. And, paying them well, well enough for them to stay in it. But, all this is also based on doing the little things right, and I started with punctuality.*

*At times, the rooms in which people work are not conducive to working. When I was the head of the civil service, I made sure that there were eating-places where people can go and have lunch. So that, they can come to work, and have lunch provided at a reasonable cost. They can have lunch, so they have the place to come and work, and then go home.*

*Then one area we have now is transport. When you go to London, there is an underground train, or New York, there is an underground train. Nobody has to take his car to work if they don't want to because the facilities are there. Then come here and one of the problems for the civil servant is getting to work. I always insist on being time, if it's 9:00, it's 9:00, and if they want to buy a complaint, they said, "Sir, but this is transport." But frankly, if you go to a lorry station here, like my secretary now, she leaves here at 5:00, and she gets home at 8:00. If transport were regular, she would have gotten home at 6:00. So, somebody may say that this isn't important, but this is material because people are coming in late because of transport. So, all this—the generality to all this is what constitutes public sector reform from the beginning to the end.*

MCCANTS: Would you talk a little bit about capacity in the public sector in Ghana when you first began to work on reform? What was it like then? What is it like now?

DEBRAH: *First I did a university degree, and then I went to information service. I was responsible for all the news broadcasts. I was trained on the job. In fact, my first day in the office, I called around the people whom I was going to supervise. It was a job I hadn't done before. I got to the office on Monday—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and on Thursday he was transferred to Cape Coast, and I was put in charge of this office. I was responsible for editing all the news for the broadcasting. I had not done this thing before. I learned to do the job within 72 hours. Today, I wouldn't do that again. If somebody is going to do that editing, I will send him to an institution, where he will learn about journalism, he's got this degree, managing radio and everything—it is not a question of learning on the job, trial and error, but that he has a professional degree and the training to do that particular work. I find that now when I look back, what I was able to do without any of these things was excellent. And things went very well because if you were committed, you learned very quickly.*

*I remember that I took over after three days in the office. I called my office, my staff, and I said, "Look, we are working together." When a news item came, I called my subordinates, we all looked at it and they said, "No, this one's is done this way, this is done that way," that's fine. I did that for three months, at the end*

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*of three months, one day I called them in and said this was done? They said, "This was done this way," I said "no, I want it to be done this way" because I understand it. And at that point, I'd done my apprenticeship of three months from them, and I was able to give the instructions.*

*So now, before we put anybody in these positions, he must have some, either on the job training, or an institutional training, to be equipped for the job. Know that he has a professional approach and he doesn't have to learn on the job. Whatever you do in this way you learn on the job, I wouldn't say you learn on the job, you gain experience on the job and be competent at the job. But, the important thing is that you have your concept of what you are going to do. And what is more important, you say here I am now, within the next 12 months, what do I want to do? Public service reforms then teaches you about one—planning, second—setting out objectives, and then working to achieve these objectives.*

*For example, I insist that we have what you call a work program for every ministry. Every individual will put out his own program. The President gives the budget, it is delivered in November. The President gives the state message in January. The question you ask an administrator is "where do we fit in?" The ministers, the government's objective, what must we do so that you don't put your own plan. What you want to do, go to the President's plan. But are we going to do, what are our objectives? How do we monitor to make sure, to monitor our objectives, what are the problems and so on, what are the achievements? What did we achieve? Why didn't we overcome those problems, all those things? So this now, some service, a kind of reform which enables you to know the country's objectives. You know your part in that objective and what you are supposed to do.*

*Every quarter, every six months, every year, you review. Have we achieved? If we didn't achieve why didn't we achieve? Now we find also that in this country we do not have enough money for what we are trying to do. Recently, the Minister of Finance said 60% of government budget goes to pay for salaries. Now if this is the case, where do you find money? You find a lot of academics and university people saying we should go cap in hand begging. Now, I say that when you are in the university, your tuition, your boarding and your lodging was subsidized by the government. If you think we should go cap in hand begging how are we going to find the money to train people? Public sector reform must also make people realize that ultimately, we will have to pay for things ourselves. Then what we do must be cost-effective. There is a lot of waste in the public sector and therefore in many cases government money is not spent wisely.*

*President Carter, former President of the United States. The first thing he did was talk about turning off the lights when they're not being used. Now this saved a lot of money because people would see a whole building with all the lights on and everybody gone. This makes it possible for the government to save the kind of money it needs to be able to do what it wants to do, without going cap in hand. Also, if we are getting assistance from other people, we must realize it. Then I say be grateful.*

*At the same time ask for the kind of help that will enable you to build up your own resources. Now, this country for example, when you travel upcountry, you see plenty of land not being used. When I was Secretary to the Cabinet we tried to arrange with a group called Hawaiian Agronomics. We have the Kaiser people since 1962, we had the Volta River Project and we were able to have the project because the World Bank and the Americans were able to convince Kaiser to*

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*come to this country and set up a smelter, VALCO (Volta Aluminum Company). An institution we use the electricity and therefore this would become economical.*

*But Kaiser got these things very cheap. Later there were complaints that Kaiser got us cheap; Kaiser did not get us cheap. But without Kaiser we would not have got the Volta project and all of its electricity. But later on, Kaiser decided let me do something to help Ghana. So they said, Kaiser approached what is called Hawaiian Agronomics for them to put - have you travelled outside Accra? Have you gone to Bole? You start up there its a vast stretch of lands and they said they will put this thing all under rice. We were pushing this. So Kaiser was going to put that all in rice.*

*When they came to this country they wanted an airstrip so they can, like New Zealand grow plants by dispensing fertilizer by air. We can't do it with a tractor, so let's do it by air. They wanted a large strip of land. They were not successful in being given this permission so they pulled out. Now if we had done that thing there, all that strip today would have been a rice contribution. A lot of money would have come from it, a lot of money. One aspect of reform is to be realistic enough to see what is really needed in the country and not talk merely of nationalism. This is our country; this is this thing here because at the end of the day we said let's move one step back to move two steps forward. This means let's give up this point in order to have the kind of improvement that we need in order to move forward.*

*So public service reform ought to be a certain attitudinal reform to be realistic. Don't think of yourself or the sovereignty and equality of states- all states are not equal. But a state which is realistic sees its own limitations and plans accordingly to overcome them. The public service is leading, this government, the private sector is the engine of growth but it has to be led and it is the public service which is leading these people. The correct attitude for the civil service sees their country as it is and then plans to improve the country, to move a step forward. Public service reform must have an objective. The objective is to improve the system of the country to deal with; do we depend a lot on outsiders for help? The public service sector is supposed to lead the country, to make it self-serving.*

*Now we look at issue. We became independent on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1957. Malaysia became independent 30<sup>th</sup> August 1957. Today we are not much further than Malaysia. Today, Malaysia makes plenty of oil to export. We still have no factory in this country making oil. We still import oil. We have had cocoa for many, many years, we are now making chocolate, not the same as Hershey or Cadbury. Public sector reforms need the kind of attitude people will have to make sure that this cocoa will be made and is then exported. We have the cocoa basis, but we can add to it and send the chocolate, make the cocoa drink, and so on. So we are not having the public sector to do something to make sure that there is tremendous change. The government is talking about being a middle-income country by 2015, that is about seven years from now.*

*Now the public service part of it is to make sure that it does its work in such a way that it will bring this about. When you talk of public service reform it must be related to something, to progress. Therefore there must be clear milestones and at the end of 2015, we would have done this much in order to do this. Public service reform does not mean people are able to do these things when they sit in their office no, but what they are doing must reflect the totality of the community so that the community will be changed, that is the objective of public sector reform.*

*If you live in America and it snows, it doesn't stop anybody. Your car has snow tires, has chains. Snow doesn't stop anybody. In Africa when it rains half of the people don't want to go to work because it is raining. Now with public service sector reform, every public sector officer, rain or no rain, work must go on. In fact, you must do something about the workers that do go home.*

*During the dry season there is no water. During the rainy season there is plenty of water. Public sector reform for those people in the Minister of Water. How do you change this so that there is water in the rainy season but there is also water in the dry season? Now public sector reform has to have the kind of thinking that will change the country. People leave this country and go to America, go for green pastures. When the Americans started it was not like that. They worked hard. That's what they've got to do.*

*If you look at the natural resources we have in Africa, we can turn this around. Public service reform needs to prepare us to bring this about. Public sector reform is not getting more and more certificates. Every year you can point out, this is what we have been able to achieve. When I sit on interview boards and ask, you have done so-and-so and want me to promote it, can you tell me what you have done in your area to merit promotion, apart from writing nice memos? So this is one of the public key points. Unless we see this change, we have not succeeded.*

MCCANTS: What groups or individuals have driven the reform process?

DEBRAH: *We have now a Minister of Public Sector Reform who is in charge of public sector reform. Normally they are something like overlords. But within every ministry they must set out what they want to achieve, their contribution to the improvement. They can set the objective of being a middle-income country by 2015, and ask, "What are you doing? We have this millennium challenge and what is your ministry doing to bring this about?"*

MCCANTS: So is the demand for reform coming from the government? Is it coming from donors? Is it coming from the public?

DEBRAH: *The demand for reform is coming from us. For the government, we have to look at our roads for an example. When it rains, the roads have plenty of potholes. In 1957 during independence I was posted to Liberia. There was a firm called that made the roads. When they make the public road and for five years, ten years, the road was good. I came back to Ghana. I sat in the cabinet and every year the road was being repaired. Public sector reform for the road people is to evolve that kind of road system which will not be subject to this kind of repair. They must look at the kind of traffic we have, the kind of weather we have and evolve that kind of road, which will stand up to it. You go back to the Apian Way in time of Julius Caesar and those roads lasted for centuries. We build a road and within three years there is nothing. Public sector reform, the roads will be built. Some of them have been coming for interviews and I said, "Why did the Liberians build a road it lasts for ten years, but when you build a road in five years the road has completely disappeared?"*

*So the public reform, we are asking each organization, if we are to get to this place, to clearly indicate what is their role. If you take food for example, this is not a country where food is plentiful. I was in Cairo, I was posted in Egypt. For two years it rained only 30 minutes in Cairo, 30 minutes, that was all the rain I had.*

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*But every garden in Egypt is green. Vegetables are plentiful. Why? The Nile, they put the Nile into canals and so on. They have industries and your land is here, the river is here. They are able to bring the water to the people. Through hard work they have been able to do this. They've been using the same system for the last 2000 years. Now it is modernized, they are bringing pumps and so on. But if with that kind of weather they are able to do these things—. Look at the Israelis. They don't have that much land and they didn't have -. But they grow oranges and exported oranges and we are buying oranges when we can grow oranges. In the back of anybody's house they can grow all their food. So this country should not import food.*

*We are importing rice from Thailand. We can grow rice here. I was in Liberia and they eat a little rice, but they don't want to grow it. Public sector reform there, as here, is to be sure that we are self sufficient in food. The program that the Minister of Agriculture must lead is a complete agricultural revolution. Until that comes, public sector reform means nothing. And this is what we're really trying to present. It is not enough to put on a tie and do this thing: these people are walking in the street many of them can't get jobs. You see, a lot of people have been crossing the Sahara to go abroad and look for jobs. Now Spain and those countries are keeping people out. A lot of Ghanaians are going to Libya and suffering miserably. Why should they go? There is land here. Our Ambassador in Washington has seen Ghanaians come to America to do all kinds of menial jobs. They can be employed here in agriculture. How is the government organizing public service? Public sector reform means making it possible for these people not to go to Libya but to stay here and work.*

*So unless we can show these concrete steps, public sector reform means nothing. We have the EU and the rest of them, whenever there is any problem we have to go outside for help to solve the problem. Ivory Coast was doing very well, and then what happened when Houphouët-Boigny died? The country divided into North and South. There was a lot of killing and so on. It put the country back many years. Now if your public sector reform does not prevent this kind of thing, if we cannot find the means to solve these things, then public sector reform is useless. In many cases public sector reform becomes very academic but we must make public sector reform orientated to solving the problems of the country and making the country better than it is.*

*One of the achievements of this country I can say is in the field of education. I set up the foreign service for Namibia; I set up the foreign service for Zimbabwe. By 1985, I had trained 2000 diplomats in the Commonwealth. In Botswana the Professor of Mathematics, his father taught me my first grade in 1984. In the field of education we have assisted many African countries. Public sector reform in that respect has trained many people who have helped many other African countries, excellent. But when it comes to food production, public sector reform must make it possible for the production of food.*

*If you take, say money goes to China for example. So public sector reform in those professional areas must be oriented toward making life in this country better. Producing people with the initiative or the brains to improve our circumstances. It is not only to get a certificate and so on. Now we have this government objective millennium goes. Now we can say that until this has been achieved public service sector means nothing.*

*You take education today, the government says every child should go to school—and the government has realized that in many cases the children do not even have food to eat. So now we have a school-feeding program. It is the*

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*government policy to make sure every child goes to school. There is an objective. They need many teachers to teach these people. So the reform means producing the instruments which would remove the disabilities of the country.*

MCCANTS: I'd like to talk to you about some of the specific reform efforts that you've been involved in.

DEBRAH: Good.

MCCANTS: The first thing I'm interested in is the recruitment of new talent and improving the attractiveness of civil service employment. Improving the attractiveness of the civil service as a career option is often an important objective. Some times reform leaders decide that the best way to create an effective civil service that is attractive to talented people is to create an elite corps or a senior executive service. Other places create feeder schools that feed into the civil service. Some like Singapore and Botswana offer scholarships in return for commitment to a certain number of years of civil service employment.

DEBRAH: Yes.

MCCANTS: Can you talk about the options entertained here in Ghana for attracting talented people to the civil service and for retaining people?

DEBRAH: *The French have the senior service corps or something like that and some people have advocated it here. I don't support it. Why? Because if I sit here I must make sure that the work that comes to me here is done by people who are equally trained. So, it's not a question of creating an elite system, but having training at every point.*

*I was just having something for secretaries and I said if you have a secretary and she types a letter and there should be not— is either unsettled or removed. You get a completely different picture. Very often those of us at the top when we are reading something, you read what is in your mind, not what is there. So unless those below are very effective on this thing here, you would not—when it gets to the top to become—they have no time to grow. All the ministers who write to the President must not be more than four inches long. The President is not a desk officer.*

*Why? Before something gets to the President it has gone through so many things and so it gets to him only because of a constitutional requirement or a requirement of discretion. So I do not believe in the corps section they have. I believe that giving at every point the kind of training to make them efficient. I was once head of this ministry here and somebody wrote me and said "your directions please." I said "Sorry, I have no directions to give you." At your level down there you must indicate what the options are and you must put to your superior what options you recommend. That goes up. When the President is going to give a speech, the President writes a speech. The particular subject originates somewhere and it goes up. So if you do not have a system where everybody does their proper part at his level. Then you are going to have a bottleneck at the top.*

*I find that when a person is working for you is trained, he knows what he should do. I had a friend, he's dead now, who was one of the leading sculptors in this country and he said, "You see this sculptor, I did not start from this thing here. I have people who carve out the woods and all those things, I put in the finishing touches here." I said yes. It's the same thing. Somebody was talking about*

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*Winston Churchill's speeches and books. Somebody writes it, and he puts in the finishing touches.*

*Now if this is going to happen. You must have a system where there is an elite corps not because they are elite, but they are part of a system where everybody does his work. Everybody is so trained that each one puts in his work. When I was Secretary to the Cabinet. The President was going to give a speech somewhere. The Minister concerned prepared everything, and they bring it to us. I look at it. I put in certain sentences where I like it and I go to head of state. He puts in a little bit here, a little bit here, a little bit here. Everybody at his level contributes. When you come to do the speech at the OAU, the final draft, we all sat around with him and the speech started way down, and we went through until we got the final speech.*

*The elite corps is not a beginning; an elite corps is part of a system at the top. But that system must work in such a way that down there, everybody is part of it. Here we have something called the Chief Director. The Chief Director is head of the Ministry. Then the government when I came said, we want these people to be politically appointed—I said no. If you bring the top man there like this, when he comes he has only short-term concept about what he is going to do while he is there. If he is to manage as part of a system he looks at the whole system, he makes sure that his influence permeates down and that the people here can look up to his being there because they have got the experience and the particular professional training and all along each one gets the training and keeps on adding, adding, adding. So when he gets there he is very well trained and is able to do it.*

*When you go to the army, everybody who comes says Chief of Defense staff for America, of this thing here. It is someone who has been in the army. He came out of the US as an officer, second lieutenant, and then he went from lieutenant, to major, to colonel, colonel to brigadier to major general, lieutenant general, general. So this is the thing. I want a service, and this is what I am advocating here, that at every level you get professional training. And there is opportunity for you to move to the next level.*

*We have a lot of ladies here, when I was in Egypt, 1960, my secretary ended up as Acting High Commissioner in Zimbabwe. He was able to improve himself in the system, take the necessary courses, to move from secretary to administrative class and he ended up at this thing here. If we did not have this kind of system he would never have been there, he would have ended up Secretary there because he did not get this -. But we had the system, we know what we want, qualified people. Everybody is a qualified person at his level. The man who is sweeping this room must be an expert at sweeping this room. We have a hymn, which says who sweeps the room acts with their laws make that in the action plan.*

*When I come to sit in this room, I have a room properly prepared for me to do my work. The man who did that is an expert. When we come to give national honors, we don't give national honors only to people at the top, we give national honors to someone who has been the watchman for the last 25 years and there has been no burglar in this place. We all honor him. So I prefer a service where there is appropriate training at every level and where there is opportunity for you to rise. In other words, if you want to go to a profession, you start at the university and you get your training. If you go to this one you must have this—but if you are this one and you want to jump to a higher one, you must go through the same procedure.*

*There was a man who was bursar at a motor school. He started at the motor school as a messenger. Very low education. But he spent his evenings going to night classes and so on and moved to one grade. Then the next grade. He ended up as a bursar. He could have gone to the university and gone to the accounting department. He didn't, but he improved himself. You cannot move from one to the other except to pass the exam normally. The facilities are there. So here you have a civil service school. You have some here, we have some at [Indecipherable], and then we have GIMPA, we have the university, so you can go there, and what also worries me about this the elite business that I see-*

*I come from a tradition which says the greatest amongst you should be your servant. Those who are leading are the people Kwame Nkrumah became President and he went as a politician, sleeping with the people on their verandahs they called themselves "verandah boys." He identified with the people, was able to move them, motivate them, and became prime minister, then president. So I want the kind of service where there is—there is a general where-but you are the one, you are the general, but you merit it. The people are willing to follow you because you've been with them.*

*We have the head of civil service now; he has been a civil servant all his life. He has been through the grades. The last one wasn't, he had come from a consultancy and omitted this thing. And I was chairman of this thing and there was a lot of disagreement. This new one has been a civil servant. Because when we talk about civil service matters, he has been down there. So he appreciates the problems here. He appreciates where we are going and therefore he is part of the system and he knows the country's objectives. You see the people say he is an inspiration. They can do that too if they work hard.*

**MCCANTS:** Can you talk briefly, can you describe the steps that have been taken here to retain or attract new talent?

**DEBRAH:** *The first thing we are doing is we are improving the remuneration of the civil service. When I joined the civil service the civil service had a lot of perks you can have money to loan to buy a car. You can have government housing. So this was attractive. All these things are gone. But others are also doing the same thing but the salary is so low that whenever- especially at these banks they are paying so well that the best want to go into private sector. But the government says the private sector is doing you no good, but then you have to be directed. So you must make sure that the civil service attracts the best. Some time ago the civil service attracted the best, today it doesn't, because the salaries have fallen way low. Then we have the pensions group making sure that the pensions are also improved. Then there are a lot for examples. The lawyer, in private practice can make so much. The Attorney General's office cannot attract the best lawyers. What we have done, we have raised the salaries in the Attorney General's office. The good lawyers will go there too. Then the bench, what we have done, we have improved the remuneration of the bench, that in many cases the top people can retire on their salaries. So you go to the bench, you work hard, like the Supreme Court and when you retire you'll still be almost on your salary. Therefore the best people will go and they have nothing to worry.*

*So the conditions of service, and we have got all kinds of commissions to improve the salaries of these people so they can attract the best. Then we are also seeing that the best some come with a third class degree and you get it. Now the minimum we are taking is second class lower upper and first class. We will get good people, then pay them well. Then next, we are going to give them*

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*additional training and so on to improve their circumstances. In many cases we take the doctors and so on. After so many years they get the opportunity to go for higher training, same with the lawyers, same with the civil service.*

*You earmark an area in which you specialize and you make sure that after so many years we are giving the opportunity to go abroad to train. So, one, we improve the remuneration; two, we give you facilities to improve your circumstances. Then when you retire at 60, you're almost young now at 60, you can continue to work.*

MCCANTS: Are the remuneration reforms and the pension reforms are they ongoing reforms?

DEBRAH: *We have set up a salaries commission, there is a lot of disparity in the civil service so we set up commissions, we have the pensions commission, the Bediako commission to make sure that these projects are revised and brought up to date?*

MCCANTS: Who is driving that?

DEBRAH: *The government. The government set it up. The public sector reform, the government set up this commission and then it is the commission that does it. The Bediako commission looked into the pensions and is making pension reforms. So if you have the chance to talk to them. Look at it, pension reform. After twenty, thirty years somebody's pension is around 150 dollars. This makes life very difficult. This is being improved. But at the end of the day, I tell my own people in this country that government's ability to pay all these things depends upon productivity.*

*So what we have to do is make sure that the public revenue can be improved as a result of your own activities, not only by new areas but also by cutting waste. There is too much waste in the public sector. It has even got to the roads this revenue collection. People throw rubbish all over the place so a lot of money has to be spent to collect the rubbish. If this were done properly, we would cut down the waste of public funds by doing the right thing.*

*Then there can be new ideas. In Botswana they polish their own diamonds and they sell their own diamonds. I've been in Botswana. I went to the diamond mines. Here you take things like fruits, we could can the fruits. If we take cocoa, we can do something about it. Timber, we have plenty—we send all the logs abroad. Bringing industries built on what we have here will bring in more money and government will be able to improve the public service. We have fortunately got some oil now and so in the next three years oil will be in production so government revenue will increase. But it is not getting government revenue to pay people more money, but to pay people who make it possible for government to get more money or for government to cut down waste, for government to bring in new initiatives. Then you can do that.*

MCCANTS: Many countries may have large numbers of low-skilled employees on their payroll and in order to boost pay levels and recruit talent, it may be important to retrench large numbers of people. This process is never easy but can be even harder after a conflict or some other transition. I have questions about this process if it is an area that you have experience in.

DEBRAH: *You see, I am always not in favor of retrenchment. Why? Because democracy has a lot of difficulties. When you retrench people, they vote against you. So you*

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*find that—you have to be very careful whom you employ, because when you employ make sure that the work is available. Don't forget he has the vote. Then number two when they are retrenched, they are the fodder for troublemaking. So once you employ people make sure that they are employed. This whole question of retrenchment, you have to be very careful of retrenchment. So what we do that instead of retrenching people we retrain them for something else.*

*A few days ago somebody was saying—we retire at 60. Somebody was advocating 65. I have thought of it on many occasions but I would not so that the people who retire at 60 they can go into something else. That is what I am telling civil servants, while you are in the civil service think of another career after 60. Some time ago my father died at 72. I was 80 two weeks ago and I'm still working. So by the grace of God, I will be working still longer. So being in the civil service train yourself, do work, so that after 60 you can do something else.*

*So after 60 you have enough to go on your own so we can take you off and bring more people while at the same time we want to make sure that when we put somebody in at the beginning it is the sort of person we are going to train and re-train. I would not retrench, but I would hire the kind of person I can put here or there. I say that when it comes to the government we have a cast of ministries. You can be in this cluster of ministries so you can move from here to there. Then there is another cluster of ministries. So if something goes wrong there the people in it can be put in here and are all right. So I would very reluctantly retrench, I would always make sure that I can train them, or retrain them, or I can re-tool them for something else.*

MCCANTS: Has Ghana ever implemented a retrenchment process?

DEBRAH: *Oh yes. Retrenchment process caused a lot of trouble. It goes back to Nkrumah's time when a lot of people were retrenched. Then more on the retrenchment, it is not done on a wide scale. You find some business goes and they retrench people, both in the private sector. But in the government sector we retrench not on a massive scale, we haven't done massive scale retrenchment here.*

MCCANTS: Were the retrenched workers given severance payments or other compensation?

DEBRAH: *Oh yes. For example, some of these companies—when there is retrenchment you are given certain compensation. Retrenchment salaries; you will not be asked to just go. They give you so many months salary for so many years worked when you go. Normally on the business side which retrenches.*

MCCANTS: Was the retrenchment program a voluntary program or non-voluntary.

DEBRAH: *The retrenchment program was, for example, I sit on a board. They want to retrench but first of all it is voluntary. Now we find out that at times the people who take the voluntary are good. They take the voluntary retrenchment because they can get a job next door. Let's take the banks. The last few years quite a large number of banks have come in. So in the older banks when you ask for retrenchment, the good ones want to leave because there are vacancies they can go to. So we say that now retrenchment will not be voluntary. We will ask you to go, we will give you a good handshake. We will remove those we don't want or those who are not as productive as they should be. But it will not be voluntary because when you make it voluntary the good people they will leave because there are opportunities are good.*

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*When Zimbabwe became independent I went there and set up the new Foreign Office Service. We didn't want certain people so we gave them a good handshake. The handshake was so good that they couldn't refuse it, so they took it. They saw an opportunity to get a lump sum of money to go into something else. So when we have retrenchment it is always desirable not to make it voluntary but retrench certain people so that your good people wouldn't leave. If you look at retrenchment in terms of numbers only, you get yourself in trouble because you can reduce it to—. Let's say you are at a 100 and you want to reduce the number to 60 and now the 60 you've got are no good; the better ones are gone. So you want to reduce to 60, you go through and say you, you, you go, good handshake.*

MCCANTS: With regard to government entrenchment efforts, who has helped you oversee those efforts? Has it come mainly from civil service leaders or politicians?

DEBRAH: *It is a combination of both. The government says we can't provide the money. Then the organizations like these will make a program and in consultation with the Minister of Finance, they will let people go. So it is the government, the politicians on top in consultation with the civil service make the decision and that is supplemented by the civil service or the public service.*

MCCANTS: How did sitting civil servants react to the introduction of a retrenchment program? Did they object or did they think the program was acceptable?

DEBRAH: *In a retrenchment program it is only the few who are affected who object. But because of the payment they are getting they accept it. There is no alternative. In many cases that institution is being closed down. In the government sector some time ago in Nkrumah's time there were a lot of factories. Most of them were losing money so they had to close down. So you take the retrenchment money because if you don't take it there will be nothing.*

MCCANTS: Sometimes countries need to build the skills of civil servants very rapidly. Has the creation of a specialized training institute or training program for civil servants specifically has this been something tried in Ghana?

DEBRAH: *Yes, we have got GIMPA, that is where we send groups of people. For example last year we sent a program for all the key directors. So they go to GIMPA and every year GIMPA holds a number of courses so that if your department with this training program, capacity development program, they are sending people who are needing training, they go to GIMPA and GIMPA mounts courses to improve the capacity of people in the public service.*

*The public service, if you look at Article 192 of the Constitution it has the army, the police, immigration, health, all this in the public service mission and each of them, GIMPA runs courses for them so that you have immigration for this one to send, they go to GIMPA. They have a program that takes place at GIMPA at a certain time and all officers will go for training in GIMPA. So we have constant training for improvement at GIMPA.*

MCCANTS: Can you describe who pushed for the creation of the training programs?

DEBRAH: *This was done by the government years ago, years ago. Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration that was set up in Nkrumah's time.*

MCCANTS: For those who set it up, what key skills do you think that they were trying to support?

**DEBRAH:** *First of all, professional skills weren't for civil service. You take customs. There are leadership skills, management skills you need. The custom person is fortunate, he has an institution to teach him technically the techniques of the post but you need to be a leader, you need management skills. In some cases certain accounting skills. So all these things are taught at GIMPA. Then we have the business school to teach business. So at every point there is an institution for you. If you take telecommunications, they have set up a telecommunications university. People go there. Then we have the University of Technology. Things like ICT and all kinds of modern technology advancement are taught there. There are so many universities coming up in this country. The government institutions we have Cape Coast, we have technology, set up an institution for the minds and so on. There is a branch of the University of Manchester. So you have these institutions. If you have a program, every institution like this one has a program, a training program. So before they go from one grade to the other, they should have gone to this institution, in some cases three months, in some cases you have to go about six months. You go for three weeks, come back to work and so on. This will prepare you for the next upgrade.*

*So you have leadership and management skills. Also they can improve their professional skills, like say accounting, people that monitor things and then there banking colleges, for those who want to go into banking. There are many institutions now for capacity building.*

**MCCANTS:** Can you describe some of the training programs here that you have helped to design or manage?

**DEBRAH:** *Design no, those institutions like GIMPA, we tell them what we want and they design. If you can go to GIMPA and ask for Professor (Stephen) Adei, he is the head, or Mr. (Ben C.) Eghan. Mention my name. Tell them Ambassador Debrah asked me to talk to them. They will show you the program they have designed for the civil service. They can talk about what it is they design because they have been doing this, they will tell you about the nature of the program and designing everything about it.*

**MCCANTS:** Another common problem in many countries is that civil servants may be paid unreliably. People who work for the government may receive their paychecks irregularly or unpredictably.

**DEBRAH:** *No, here we have the Accountant General and we are paid monthly. I was in Liberia. People hadn't received their salary for nine months; it doesn't happen here. Occasionally there are problems with teachers, but by and large, civil servants receive their salaries on a regular basis.*

**MCCANTS:** Can you briefly tell me your own brief description about the history of public sector reform here, its goals and its current objectives?

**DEBRAH:** *Public service sector reform originally was for salary reform. Then in 1974, after we had set up the Civil Service commission, and then we set up the Okoh Commission. And since the Okoh commission there has been—can I recommend somebody for you?*

**MCCANTS:** Yes, at the end of the interview you can make some recommendations.

**DEBRAH:** *I think if you can talk to Professor Woode, I can call him and set it up for you, he can talk about public sector reform because he was actually involved in it. I have*

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*been more involved in Foreign Service operations. Public sector reform, he would be very good.*

MCCANTS: Thank you for the time and thought you have invested in this conversation.

DEBRAH: *Go ahead.*

MCCANTS: About relationships between host countries and donors. Sometimes relationships within international organizations or between donors affect the ability of people working on reform to do their jobs well. Sometimes foreign assistance can create its own problems. I would like to speak to you about this subject and hear any advice you might want to pass along to others to help improve donor – host country relationships.

DEBRAH: *Usually when the donor countries want to make you in their own image. This was in Namibia where the Swedish designed the educational system; the Swedish wanted them to remodel their system in accordance with the Swedish system. There was a lot of resentment. In many cases donors for example, I don't recommend people to go to diplomatic courses run by schools by some countries because when they go they want to make you think like them. But donors who come in want to help this person, discuss with the person what his needs are. Look at his own culture, his background and give him the kind of improvement which will improve what he is doing.*

*They are setting areas, which are international and everybody should know, bring them in. But don't get them to think like Frenchmen, they are not Frenchmen. In many cases the problems come in—for example when we had the university here, where there is nothing you can—the donor can build something in his own image, fine, but where there is something improve their system. Bring in new ideas which will fit in that system. But basically let him become somebody—let him become his own. Look at the Japanese. You see the Japanese they got all these help from people but they remained basically Japanese, so have the Chinese. They have adopted all the—but they have remained Chinese, when the Communist—their system, they blew it. They did not throw away the Chinese system and adopt the western system. No, they kept the Chinese but brought in a lot of western technology and western ideas to improve it. So this is my advice to these donors—where there is nothing, put something in it. Where there is something, improve it. Become a partner who is going to continue to dialogue. In Germany for example, the Marshall Plan assisted the Germans to become Germany and now Germany is a sound partner. But they remained German. The Americans beat the Germans, but they didn't make them Americans, they're still Germans. They continue to have close relations, working relations.*

*In fact, when you assist me I see you as a friend and I want to continue to have relations with you. I contribute to what you are doing, you contribute to what I am doing. In certain areas I need help, in certain areas you can help. You make it possible for me to join the group. But don't let me join the group by being you, let me join the group by being me and improve me.*

MCCANTS: If you could offer your successors here or elsewhere some advice about how to work effectively with donors, what recommendations would you make?

DEBRAH: *I want the donors to give the help here on the massive scale. You said you want to have leadership training for senior civil servants. One donor said, "Take them to Galilee University in Israel," we said "No, bring us the experts to help us here. "When I was working for the commonwealth I want to Papua New Guinea in the*

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*Pacific. I went there and I was able to teach many people. How many you can take outside? I want to serve in Africa and I ran these courses. So in many cases bring the experts down there and bring their skills. Then you have to take a few of the leaders out to go and train and come back. Whatever you do, try to make them their own people. Improve there. Because they are able to let you—they are able to give something back.*

*There was a time, the Portuguese in Angola for example, said to be civilized you must be Portuguese, you must have this much money and know Portuguese to be civilized. That's civilization. That kind of thing is gone. There are many things where they need help, technology and so on. Bring all this help in, train as many of their own people but make them work within their own cultural thing. When you do that they appreciate it better and you as well enjoy this here.*

*Once we had a Mr. Rogers (William Pearce), who was then the American Secretary of State came to this country, there was going to be a dinner for him. The chief of protocol said, an American, we have to give them an American dinner. We had Brussels sprouts, all those things, a roast turkey, and the dinner was a flop. Everything was not done properly. There was an attempt to do something to please Mr. Rogers but it turned wrong. They could have sent in the local cuisine and Mr. Rogers would have enjoyed it. He would have been exposed to something new. But trying to give him an American dinner caused a problem. You couldn't compete with the American; you cannot be more American than the American. What they did was suppose you are American and it was a flop the chief of protocol apologized profusely to Mr. Rogers. So that is the thing, bring the expertise but let them be themselves, let them improve what they have. They you find that you have something to offer. What is interesting about the entire world is that you have something to contribute.*

*Now when you look at Roman, Greek civilization and western civilization and so on, you have the origins there and gradually they built on it. When you try to make a new creature it will not work well and very often it will end with a lot of resentment.*

**MCCANTS:** If you had a chance to write a handbook for people who have to manage civil service reform in other places, what kinds of topics would you consider most important?

**DEBRAH:** *Number one, basic training. That is training before you get in. I want to make sure that everybody who comes to civil service gets basic training. Then next when they come in there must be an induction course depending upon three months, four months, six months, maybe a year, two years, depending on the job. That is before they get the job. Then next is to have a capacity building program, leadership to the top. So that's professional training.*

*Then the next one is I would put in a code of conduct. Recently, there was a gentleman, he was a civil servant outside of here, and he wanted to be the Vice President. So he started in politics, adorning and sitting on platforms and we called him to resign. If you are a civil servant you must conduct yourself in a manner that whoever comes into government will trust you as somebody they can work with. You must have a full code of contact. Then you must have promotion programs. See, when politicians come in, they want to bring in their own people. Why? Because they don't trust the people who are in it.*

*They want to make sure that the people who are at the top are good because they worked with them and they made—. I would look at the whole remuneration*

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*of the public services. The remuneration would commensurate with the work they are doing. Then, the pensions. Then I would have a code of conduct for ministers, for politicians, in relation to the public services. When the ministers come in, many have never had to work with the public service. So when they come in they want to impose their own ideas in public service. You can bring improvements but make sure that the public service is not there to serve your political group; they are there to serve any political group that comes in. So in many cases they come in and say I want this person I don't want this person. No. Recruitment should be done by an independent board, like the public service commission. So that you'll have a public service marked by politicians who have the right code of conduct who are ready to serve you.*

*Then, discipline and promotion. The discipline code should be quite clear. There is a code of conduct and the code of conduct is in many cases what to do and what not to do, but discipline is when you do the wrong thing how you are punished or how you are corrected. That must be made very clear. So when you have this, you have a public service that sees predictability. If I do this wrong this is the punishment; if I do this right this is the right thing. When I work through I get this.*

*There have been a lot of public service awards in this country. Two years ago I was given the honor of the Star of Ghana membership, which is the highest in the system. Public servants who work well should be decorated by the state at the end of it. The Americans they don't have honors but the British have it and we have it here. If you have done well we have the Star of Ghana companion officer member, then the other is the Star of the Volta companion officer member, they have Grand Medal. These are the stars of Ghana. Public servants who work well are given the appropriate honor.*

MCCANTS: Thank you very much Ambassador.