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LOPEZ: This civil service interview is with David Kialain, Acting Executive Director of the Governance Commission and Senior Program Manager for the Public Service Reform Program in Liberia. The interviewer is Summer Lopez. Dr. Kialain, thank you very much for agreeing to speak with us and taking this time.

KIALAIN: *Thank you very much, and welcome to the Governance Commission.*

LOPEZ: Thank you. I'd like to begin this conversation by asking you to just describe your role in public sector reform in Liberia.

KIALAIN: *My role is to serve as the change agent, to provide the technical and administrative support to the chair of the commission, as it relates to the work that needs to be done in the public sector. As you may be aware, our government, or our country, has gone through a serious period of crisis. Those of us that have been interested in our history and our governance system know that it didn't just begin in 1990. From what we understand, it started from the inception of this country, where settlers came and ex-slaves, returning to Africa, founded what is known as Liberia, the Land of Liberty. Quite honestly, within a 150-year period, the governance system has not functioned well, because the settlers who ran away from lack of freedom, who had been denied opportunities for proper governance, they themselves engaged in practices not wholesome in terms of creating statehood.*

So Liberia, in my opinion, does not measure up to what is really a state, in the sense that Monrovia, which is the capital city, is where all of the economic activity, the political decisions, and all of the important things, in terms of our governance arrangement, are still being concentrated. Initially, it was by design that a central governance system was organized, to make sure that the rest of the country operated and did things in compliance without eminent confrontation or, let's say, not opposing the central government authority. Which is understandable from the fact that the settlers felt insecure initially, and there had been series of wars, and the last 14-year war was just the culmination of the great divide between the settlers and the Aborigines, or the indigenous people. Generally, in Liberia, we call them the Americo-Liberians, or the settlers, and the country people.

My being here is a really a mission for me. I did—when the war drove us out of here, I decided to pursue further education. I did a master's in human resource development. My dissertation was on why, in Liberia, or in Africa in general, we don't climb or we don't pursue the professional career area? By that, I mean that—or return to Liberia. Most Liberians tend to want to be administrators, to be executives, rather than pursuing the career path where they can leave some legacy, or some output, or some enduring impact on society.

I've observed, in my own career, a heavy reliance on external assistance, and to some extent it's still happening. We talk about Liberianization: How do we prepare Liberia to effectively participate in its own economic affairs and so forth? Culturally, we tend to drift toward administrative positions rather than pursuing scientific, managerial, all of the other career areas; that's generally the situation. So, my dissertation was on obstacles inhibiting managerial performance among Liberian professionals.

I realized that there were a number of reasons. One being cultural factors. One being environmental factors. In a lot of cases, some people were provided the

opportunity. Certain sections of our country were for some reason destined to be leaders or made to be leaders at the expense of others. Careers in valuing Liberian entrepreneurship had not been the practice. Our society hasn't valued entrepreneurship meaning in our governmental system. That has been a problem as well. I thought that I'd make some contribution, and when I came back, I was recruited to join the government. It was then the Government Reform Commission. I had an opportunity to begin working with international colleagues on the public sector. This is how I started as—I have been here from day one, dealing with the Public Sector Reform Initiative by the then-interim government, and then the current government.

LOPEZ: Can you talk a little bit about the role that the Governance Commission itself plays in public sector reform?

KIALAIN: *The Governance Commission was established on October 9, 2007. Before then, they operated under executive order as the Governance Reform Commission. But, because of the complexities and the intricacies of reforming an entire governance system, it was felt that after reform, we would still need to deal with governance issues. At the time the institution was being legislated, it was decided that we need a permanent commission to address public sector reform, which would deal with, generally, the ministries and agencies—how they are organized and how they should be functioning, decentralization. Like I mentioned earlier, this government is highly centralized; it operates within a scheme of command and control, and there's an overwhelming outcry amongst most Liberians, especially in the rural areas, that the governance system needs to be decentralized.*

Also, along with public sector reform, the way our governance system is is such that the acts creating each agency of government—you have to go through a legislative process. Changes that are made that require legal amendments are then processed through the system. In essence, within the Governance Commission, we have four or five mandate areas: legal and judicial reform, public sector reform, developing a national integrity system, and envisioning—dealing with the symbols and those things that are intangibles, but are very important in building a government of cohesion and of purpose, with its clear vision as a society. We are dealing with that, and we will also have the responsibility to monitor and evaluate the performance of ministries and agencies, to some extent, or I would say, including the legislative and the judiciary. Currently, we are in phase one of the public sector or public service reform, focusing mainly on the functions, streamlining the functions, and identifying areas of duplication and overlapping of functions, and defining the state—what are the core functions of the government—and making sure that we align and rationalize things in a way that works for Liberia.

LOPEZ: I'd like to begin with some general questions about civil service reform, and then we'll move on to some specific types of changes. Would you talk a little bit about capacity in the public sector in Liberia? Both when you started and if it has changed since then.

KIALAIN: *Okay, I worked as a national consultant with an international consultant funded by the British government under DFID (UK Department for International Development) as a research person, doing a situation assessment of all the ministries and agencies. As we walked in, it was very, very depressing.*

LOPEZ: When was this?

KIALAIN: *This was in 2005. It was done between 2005 and 2006, particularly 2005. Most of the ministries and agencies did not have basic office equipment. They did not have personnel. It was very, very depressing. As someone who has worked for about 15 years in government and served in some leadership positions, I was against visiting ministries that were functioning and performing. I worked for the Ministry of Planning for about 10 years, as a policy economist, and we were doing things; we were on course. If we had remained on course, we would have been, by far, better off than most African countries. But now, we have to go back and begin to learn from our colleagues.*

In terms of capacity overall: first, we had a manpower shortage situation before the coup took place, and we were trying to develop human resource capacity. That is one of my areas of interest, human resource development. We were grappling with how we could catch up with making sure that we produced enough Liberians to man our economy and industry. The war came and dissipated everything. Most of our best-trained medical doctors and administrators left the country. We have virtually stayed in the situation where others are doing very important things that we should be doing for ourselves. From that particular point until now, I feel very gratified when I walk into most of the ministries: furniture is there, computers, and what public administrators call the health factor, the hygiene factors, are being attended to. There's a working environment; a condition is created for you to perform.

The resources—we still have most of those because, for instance, at the Governance Commission—this commission, as I mentioned, was established on October 9, 2007. Up until now, besides the commissioners, I am the only professional person who has stayed on, because I have a governance mission; I think this is very, very important. If we don't do what we are doing, what the Governance Commission is doing, addressing these areas that I mentioned regarding our mandate areas; if we don't deal with constitutional issues, if we don't deal with vision issues, if we don't deal with the value system issue, if we don't create a productive work environment, work culture, integrity; if we don't deal with them and institute a system that will address problems when people misbehave, or don't know what to do.

During my time here, we've been able to prepare a number of drafts; one of them has to do with the civil service rules and procedures. We have also developed a code of conduct for public servants. In many African countries, you have two categories: one for officials and one for regular civil servants. But for our purpose, we combined both of these for the code of conduct for public servants, and it's currently before the legislature. Then, we worked on an act to establish an anti-corruption commission. I was gratified and pleased when I heard from the president last night that she signed the Anti-Corruption Act. That gives me great joy that people—government officials and people in our society—will not loot the public coffers and walk away free.

We are now to produce another. I don't want to mention the name; some of our people are now incarcerated and are being investigated because of these awful practices that have been allowed to go on for a long time. So first thing, the code of conduct is still being debated at the legislature. Then of course, the establishment of the commission itself; at some point, there was serious resistance that it wasn't for some people. They thought we were doing Civil

Service's job, or the Institute of Public Administration's job. No, the focus of this is systemic, dealing with systemic governance issues and challenges. So, in terms of where we are, what we've done, I'm really, really delighted. I've had to play a role in a number of legislations that have been formulated, that had to do with the Law Reform Commission, with the Land Commission, and then establishing a task force that will eventually do all of the work that has to do with the constitutional reform. Because decentralization and some of the issues related to the core functions of governance—to have a lean and efficient governmental system that creates a very wholesome environment for the private sector—those are very important things, and I have been privileged to be a part of them and to make some contributions. It has been personally challenging, but it's been rewarding to the last instant.

LOPEZ: Could you say a little bit about what you think are the current primary goals and objectives of the reform effort?

KIALAIN: *As you know, we just published the Poverty Reduction Strategy. In there, you may have been told by others that there are four pillars. They are the security sector, economic revitalization, governance, and rule of law, under which we worked. There's a chapter—I think 10 or 13—that deals with governance and rule of law, basically, and then infrastructures and social services. The current objective is first to make this place secure, the security sector. Initially, it was felt that defense—we have two ministries of national security and defense—these ministries were excluded from our exercise, but last year they were then included.*

Reforming the security sector has become part of—after the passage of this act, the president asked that we take the lead in working with those people who had responsibility for the security sector, so that all of those functions that are, of course, civilian in nature, the role that civilians have to play in securing the country and also the communities, and so forth, that we deal with those—policing, you know.

Currently, the Ministry of Justice has some of the functions dealing with supervising and making sure that the police functions very well. It has its own challenges and so forth. Right now, because of what needs to be done and the challenge of security, it's been really, really challenging for the Ministry of Justice to really focus on providing legal services, to address those legal and judiciary reform issues that need to be addressed, parallel to the reform efforts that we are undertaking. So, it's been challenging, but we are making headway. I don't know whether I addressed fully, but if I didn't, repeat the question, and I can add a little more on that.

LOPEZ: Sure, no, that's good. But to be a little bit more specific about civil service reform, what would you say are some of the top goals at the moment, within civil service reform as well?

KIALAIN: *Okay, with the civil service, first thing: I was working on revising our work program for this year, from July 1 to June 30, 2009. I can't speak for civil service itself, because it's not our mandate area; we don't have direct responsibility for that, but we have responsibility for the public sector, to reform the public sector, and of course, the civil service is part of that. They've come up, because of the challenges, as I mentioned, it took some time to get the commission off. The commission is currently working on developing a public sector reform policy. In*

fact, we planned we would get a draft to the president by the 29th of this month—a public sector reform policy and strategic framework. That document will say what it is we are trying to accomplish with our public service. What should the ministries and agencies be involved in, what are the core functions of government, what kind of holistic arrangement can we establish between the public sector and the private sector? Then, once that is clear, we move into looking at the functions.

First, let me back up. We worked with the ministries and agencies, and we've come up with the mandates, the mission, the functions, and the organizational structure. The reason is that we had to take a look at first the mission, then the mandate of the respective ministries and agencies. There are overlapping functions, and we are in the process of rationalizing our governance system—the role of the state and rationalizing what the Ministry of Planning should be doing. We have some proposals relating to a merger of certain ministries and strengthening the functions and providing more support. So some of the ministries have some key roles, but resources and logistics and human resources are not adequate.

Rationalizing the roles of the ministries and agencies, and then, once those mandates, functions, and organizational structure—let me say one or two things about the organizational structure. The way our current government is organized, some of the acts creating the ministries tell them precisely how they should be organized. Some of them are left at the discretion of the minister to determine how best they can be organized. It's not a harmonized system; there is variation in the nomenclature and the organizational arrangement. Part of our goal is to harmonize the system, so that if you are a deputy minister, it's clear what your role is, especially as it relates to the civil service. We are working to make sure that we set up a ministry within which there is a clear line between political appointees and civil servants.

We are working to put in place a civil service system that will attract and retain professionals who, in some cases, will be even paid more than ministers, so that they can be attracted and retained, and so that the mandates and functions and missions of the respective ministries and agencies are pursued, and pursued efficiently and effectively, and so that impacts are evaluated, and we engage in continuous improvement of the performance of government ministries and agencies. This would be one of our main functions for evaluating the performance of respective ministries.

As it relates to our role, we have the mandate to formulate policy recommendations as they relate to the functioning of the entire governance system. We work very closely at this during this phase, where we are focusing on the executive as the ministries and agencies work closely with the Civil Service Agency. We begin the work hopefully next year, even though the judiciary has commenced some reform, but as a neutral body, as we are dealing with the ministries. The ministries cannot reform themselves; they are not objective, they are concerned about turf, some sort of those. It is the same thing with the legislature, or the same thing with the judiciary.

We are working with the executive that constitutes two-thirds of the governance system currently in Liberia. Then from there, we will work with the judiciary and then the legislature. We are doing some work, but in an ad-hoc way and on request, with the judiciary and the legislature, to try to take care of those things

that need to be improved immediately and to address public service deliveries that are urgent, programs that are urgent and need to be implemented.

In terms of systemic reform in the judiciary, we have not begun yet. It will be done under the leadership of the chief justice, and we'll be providing some technical support for them. With the civil service itself, we are focusing on the mandates, functions, making sure that what we call establishments posts, that once their functions are approved, we will then—and while they have been approved, we are then examining what it is they are doing right now, the number of persons they have in each department, in each division, in each section, what they are doing. What are their skill levels? Where do the gaps exist, in terms of their background and skill level and experience? What type of education and training opportunity do they need to have? What skill and knowledge gaps do they need to fill to be productive on the job? This is where we are in terms of working with the ministries and the civil service agencies on that.

LOPEZ: How has that collaboration worked between the Governance Commission and the Civil Service Agency, and then working with the ministries? Has it been relatively smooth? You mentioned there may be some resistance from the ministries to some of these changes.

KIALAIN: *Well, overall, we've had some teething problems as it to how it should be done. It's the view of the commission that Liberians—and it's acknowledged that Liberians should own the process and provide leadership. It's proclaimed, acknowledged, but in practice it is not because of resource constraints. Resources have been mobilized from our international partners, and they come in with strings attached. Most of the interventions are led by external experts. These experts come for a very short period of time. They don't have a deep appreciation—they don't see things from an innate perspective. They come as outsiders who come and perform it as a job.*

But in a civil service reform process, or in a governance reform process, there are two major components: the technical aspect; you want to make it technically sound, adapt some of the best practices around the world. But, you have to adapt it to your own situation, which means it has to go through the political process. That phase of it requires negotiation, give and take, compromises, and so forth. That aspect of it, foreign experts cannot play any significant role, because we have to deal with the legislature, the ministers, and try to keep the course on a steady path with a clear-cut national perspective. The GC (Governance Commission) is perhaps one of the few commissions that has an overall systemic perspective towards governance.

Others look at it from turf—planning perspective, agricultural perspective—but we look at it—planning for what? What should be the role of the Ministry of Agriculture? Should they be involved in formulating policy and coordinating the activities, and working and ensuring that the necessary conditions are created so that the private sector, those that are the farmers, have the right conditions under which they work, they have the types of support that they need in order for them to produce food at reasonable and affordable prices, and are available, and have food security? So essentially, those are some of the challenges that we are grappling with.

LOPEZ: What are some of the ways that the commission has managed working with agencies who are trying to protect their turf?

KIALAIN: *As experienced administrators, we are privileged to have one of our former presidents serving as chair of the commission. He comes with a lot of clout, and he's highly respected in this society, so when there are problems, we discuss. He's someone who listens; he's someone who has a very balanced perspective of issues and has a very national outlook towards things.*

If I can just go back—in terms of, not much of turf per se, but because of resource limitations, resources coming in, there has been a tendency for the international partners to say “We can do this, we can do that,” and in between, you have a vacuum in terms of what needs to be done from our perspective. That in itself creates some problems. Then, in terms of working with our Liberian colleagues, no, we don't have any serious problem. Eventually, once the policies are implemented, or are formulated and approved, there will be some level of resistance. We know that from the experience of African countries. So, we are trying to build in it a mechanism that will reward those who are receptive to accepting changes and working hard to adapt and pursue the reform initiatives that have been approved and that have been put in place.

LOPEZ: Do you have a sense of what that mechanism might look like?

KIALAIN: *We intend to provide awards, certificates, national recognition, and more resource support of budgetary—national budgetary support. Those that are taking the lead in doing innovative programs and making impacts on the life of Liberian people, we intend to make a case for them to get more support, and then they'll make a path or be torchbearers for others, so that they provide examples of success stories and so forth. We are working on that. To what extent it will work, like I mentioned, we are committed to continuous improvement in the process. Where we may be going wrong, even with what is considered the best practice in other places, is not working for us. We have to look at it and make sure that we try to understand why it is not working for us. We have our own Liberian idiosyncrasies. In a society, you go there, the culture is very, very important, and it needs to be taken into consideration when policies are enunciated or new programs are envisioned, and we are managing change. So GC is working to manage change, to help ministries and agencies manage change, and managing change is not easy.*

LOPEZ: Let me touch on a few specific areas of reform, and if you feel that you would like to skip to one of the next ones, we can do that as well. One of the questions is about reducing political and social influence in recruitment and promotion. I'm wondering if you can describe any changes that have occurred to recruitment and promotion procedures to reduce political influence and increase reliance on merit.

KIALAIN: *Okay, this is what I was referring to earlier. We have a draft here that we've been working on. Once the mandates are clear, the functions are delineated, and responsibility for the various ministries is clear, the civil service will have the authority to recruit people, and they will be recruited on the basis of merit. It has commenced. Currently, the other ministries and agencies have been engaged in right-sizing or downsizing, and making sure that those that are due for retirement are retiring, and those that have been brought in due to the changes—our system has been modeled after that of the United States, where new government leaders bring in aides. In the American system, as they bring in their aides and as they leave, they leave with those who they came up with. But in our own case,*

as government leaders came in, as they left, they left the people whom they brought in.

We plan to address those that really don't have the requisite skills for what they are doing, and then give them the opportunity to go to school and make sure that—and this is one thing I must commend: the government has been liberal to the extent that they allow college students to work full-time and go to school. That is helping to build capacity for the government, and as we bring in some interventions, like the TOKTEN (Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals), some specialized executive arrangement to bring in Liberians with talents from around the world. We have the Senior Executive Service. Those are temporary interventions, along with what the government is currently doing by sending people away for further studies. Changes are on the way. We are trying to put systems in place, and then these systems will then be used and there will be an objective basis for recruitment and a competitive process of recruitment, and the best people will be selected and rewarded for what they do. Quality service is what the civil service, or the public service, is trying to move toward. The end goal is to have an efficient, effective public service or civil service that treats people, the public—and they are rendering quality service to the public that they are there to serve, rather than seeking their own interest. Those changes are on the way, and they are being pursued vigorously by most of the ministers and led by the president.

LOPEZ: What have been some of the challenges to these changes so far?

KIALAIN: *Again, the issue of capacity. In most of the places where the innovative interventions have been introduced, we bring in external experts, like I mentioned earlier. If I can just go back—when we left college, before 1980, experts were brought in, and we had a temporary relationship. I've had to work with a number of international experts, ranging from Indians, Americans, Germans, most around the world. I learned, and I was mentored in the process. We need to have this kind of long-term relationship where people learn on the job, in very live situations, when you are in a situation where you have to deliver public goods and services, and the services are being demanded, they are urgent. You don't have the time or the luxury of sending people abroad for two years or 18 months, and then come, and then, you know.*

So the Liberians with a background and who have a capacity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed, as they engage with international partners—it has been difficult because of the severe shortage of manpower, the human resource that we have right now. Also, the overall environment, the compensation for Liberian professionals is low. Though we have some Liberians who are capable, most of them work for NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and the UN system. You go to meetings: few of us who take the leadership on the other side... 10 to 15 people in a meeting work for the UN, and few capable Liberians are in the government system itself. So, it's really, really challenging. To deliver without the human input in the whole process is a challenge.

Also logistics—talking about GC—we have a serious logistics problem. We are trying to overcome that with the support of our international partners and also with our own government resource. Those are two major challenges: logistics and low-level human resource capacity. Even with the few Liberians that are currently in the country, there is a challenge of motivation. Because of long years of war and hopelessness, most of us have some degree, some element—

psychosocial effect. The war has caused some changes in our minds, in our brain system, and we learn, we hear from the psychosociologists that some of those changes are permanent, and it's reflected in our attitude. You hear of conflicts, both inside and outside of the city, on land issues. People are very impatient. People get over-sensitive; they feel neglected for a long time. The level of motivation and new skills that are needed—attitude and work culture—all of those were affected during those long years of civil strife.

LOPEZ: What are some of the ways that the government or the GC or whoever, has found to address some of these challenges? Or are there ways that you think these challenges could be addressed that they haven't been?

KIALAIN: *They have been addressed. We are working with our international partners and our own government—under the Peace Building Scheme Program with UN assistance—to deal with the psychosocial issues, and it has been partly addressed with the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) hearings, where people—if you've been in the country for the last two weeks, some of the revelations, some of the issues that we will be dealing with as we formulate a national vision for this country, have been addressed—fundamental issues of justice and so forth.*

Then, the issue of remuneration. Over the last two years, the government has steadily worked to increase working conditions and compensation for both ministers and civil servants; that in itself is helping to contribute to that.

Also, the anti-corruption legislation, which I mentioned earlier. It has provisions there that want to tackle corruption on three angles: prevention, education and legislative action. With education, we are going to deal with that by informing people about corruption. Most people in Liberia, or around the world, are corrupt to some extent. They are engaged in dishonest practices, but the degree in our own country is a little too high. So, both the public and private sector people, the churches, the mosques, the NGOs, international community, we are all involved to some degree. There is some evidence that we are all involved in some corruption.

How do we address that? Through education, making sure what the facts are, who is doing what, then what do we need to do about that. So, in the commission, we have a whole division dealing with civic education, informing people and working with people to come up with measures to address this. To begin with, an example of some of the immediate innovative processes that have been introduced is the adoption of the Extractive Industries Transparency International. In our own case, because of the significant role of the forestry industry in the country, we added forestry as one of those components. As I talk to you, the executive director of the LTI (Liberian Transitional Initiative) Secretariat is currently engaged in informing people they've just completed—I mean today, they are completing a two-day sensitization of the people who are in the diamond-mining and gold-mining areas.

In my conversations with those who have participated, the extent to which the people have been left out of the natural resources that are taken out of their community, and they don't benefit at all is very overwhelming. Now this LEITI (Liberian Extractive Industries Transparency International) work is engaged in some innovative ways to address people as it relates to corruption, both at the private sector—big companies and so forth—and getting the local people to be

aware and sensitive and be proactive in making sure that even their own leaders do not take government resources, cut the development fund and convert it into their own, use that. A system of justice is being enhanced. It's there, but it's being enhanced, and they show to serve the interests of the Liberian people. We have begun the process. We still have a long way to go, but we've begun, and it's clear where we need to go as a government.

LOPEZ: Can I just ask you a couple of final questions?

KIALAIN: Okay.

LOPEZ: First of all, let me just ask you—you've touched on donor relations. Let me just ask you that if you had the chance to write a handbook for people who were managing civil-service reform or public-sector reform in challenging environments, what are some of the topics that you would consider most important? And what would make a handbook like this useful to you?

KIALAIN: For civil service?

LOPEZ: Sure, yes.

KIALAIN: *Oh, okay. Promoting proper work culture, work ethics. Somehow developing a training program that will teach people all—certain things you can't teach; some programs that will enable them to realize that you need to be sure of what it is you are interested in. If you are going to work in public service, is it an education that you have a calling for? Then, make sure that the individuals in there are clear on their career goals. If their career goals match with the mandate or the mission of that institution, then that's good. If it is not, then it needs to be addressed, because the organization itself needs to be developed, you know, the institution, along with the people. If the people are clear and interested in their job, really, really interested in a job so that they get up in the morning and look forward to going to work and doing something worthwhile, and at the end of the day, they complete a task with some degree of satisfaction. This is not currently the case in our country.*

People are, as we in human resource or compensation say, only after the extrinsic benefit, one that has to do with only the money. It's not the job; it's not what you are trying to accomplish—you are not driven by a mission or a personal goal that you want to accomplish. So, in that handbook, I'd like to make that clear: that work ethics, and the institution should create a work culture where it's a team, where the right hygiene, health factor—I mean things like proper working conditions, resources are provided, and that people who are managers do work planning. Do work planning and make sure that by the end of the day, you examine what it is we are able to do, and you indicate what is required for the next day, those activities.

We need those types of skills and practices being employed, so that the quality of service can be improved. So first, the work culture and work ethics. Then, matching the organization's mission with the career interests of those who are working in that institution. Then, a commensurate compensation scheme where you have some benefits and security. Right now, in Liberia, our pension scheme is not as good as we want it to be. As a result, people want to stay as long as they can, working for government. There is no desire to retire. Retirement

schemes and pension schemes are issues that we need to address and build into our public service scheme.

LOPEZ: Thank you very much Dr. Kialain, I appreciate it.

KIALAIN: *Oh, don't mention it.*