



## INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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Interviewee: Fabien Majoro

Interviewer: Daniel Scher

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SCHER: This is Daniel Scher, and I'm the associate director for the Innovations for Successful Societies project. I'm here in Kigali on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2010 with Mr. Fabien Majoro. Sir, thank you very much for taking time out of your day to meet with me.

MAJORO: *Thank you.*

SCHER: Before we start talking a little bit about your work here in the Prime Minister's Office, I was wondering if you could just briefly introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about the positions you've held in government.

MAJORO: *Thank you very much. As you said, I am Fabien Majoro. I'm the director general of the Coordination Unit in the Office of the Prime Minister—the Prime Minister's Office having overall responsibility of ensuring the coordination of the implementation of government programs and policies. It is my first position in the government. Actually, I was working with an international NGO (nongovernmental organization) before coming here to the Office of the Prime Minister. I think that is enough, unless you want to know more about my career.*

SCHER: A little bit about your career would be excellent. We are always interested to find out the types of positions that people have held before.

MAJORO: *I have a law background. I did law school at the law school in Rwanda, and then I did my master's degree in international law, specifically in human rights and the law of war, at Notre Dame Law School in Indiana. In my first job, I was a lawyer at the International Committee of the Red Cross, working specifically in the promotion of the law of war. I was working with the army, police, and political authorities. My work was consisted of making sure that Rwanda ratifies some interesting treaties of the international humanitarian law, what Americans call the law of war.*

*I worked there for four years and in the meantime I was a visiting lecturer at Kigali Independent University. I was teaching property law, but also the law of war and some elements of human rights for two years. Thereafter, I went for postgraduate studies in USA. When I was doing my master's degree at Notre Dame Law School, I had a part-time job. I was a researcher on the law of war. I think those are the major assignments I had in the past, apart from the small jobs I had.*

SCHER: Excellent. As I mentioned before we started recording, I'm particularly interested in *imihigo* in Rwanda and the role of the Prime Minister's Office. I was wondering if you could just tell me a little bit about the *imihigo* system and how your job here and the Prime Minister's Office in general relate to *imihigo*.

MAJORO: *Imihigo first—the concept of imihigo. Imihigo is a kind of traditional way of emulating young people, especially those who were in the army during the pre-colonial era. It is like pledging to do things beyond the normal assignment and effectively doing them. This concept was revived, I think, sometime in the last four years, when there was the meeting of mayors. The main issue was that plans are not being implemented in due time. One of the leaders introduced the concept of imihigo to speed up the delivery of programs. The government embraced it because it was a nice idea. It has actually a component of implementation of different programs, especially political programs, but also the element of competition among local authorities—and this is very important.*

*When it occurred to people that it was a good idea, they sat down and elaborated it more and gave it shape. When it started, the imihigo was signed between the mayor, who is the head of a district, which is a local entity with administrative and financial autonomy, and the President of the Republic—the President of the Republic representing the population, because our president is elected by universal ballot. He is representing the population.*

*At the beginning, the imihigo were really focusing on small but important issues that needed just changes in attitude. For example, hand washing, putting on shoes, and things like that. The imihigo succeed on that. I can say that now in Rwanda, 99 percent put on shoes. It was really a new phenomenon in Rwanda. Even those with money, they could just walk without putting on shoes without bothering with that—and it started with those small attitude things that have a big impact in changing the minds of our population. I told you hand washing, cooking stoves that consume less wood, and things like that. And it worked, and they were very happy.*

*The first year, people were really very excited.*

SCHER: This was 2006?

MAJORO: Yes, '06. And now they are carrying it on to larger strategic issues, like fighting soil erosion, mobilizing the population for health insurance, reforestation—other programs that are strategic. But still, mayors were still setting themselves targets according to their means.

*The practice today is that, before seating the imihigo, there is a meeting with mayors where they are given terms of reference in order for them to prepare the imihigo that start being implemented in July. I don't know if you know it, but our fiscal year starts in July and ends in June of the following year.*

*It means this is the period to start preparing imihigo. Now the phase in which we are in is not mayors' setting their targets, but pledging on national and international targets, because in Rwanda we have a longer-term document, which is Vision 2020. Of course, there are MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and the EDPRS (Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy) that are medium term planning documents. Those set targets for us to follow and then there are annual action plans and other plans that guide our short-term activities. It means that now mayors are going to make their pledges on national and international targets.*

*For example, they are setting their targets concerning, let's say, safe drinking water. By now, the national target is to achieve safe drinking water by 100% in 2017. That's why Mayors are going to compare what they are doing to that national target. I think this is a very big achievement. A quality-control team is put in place to make sure that before the imihigo is signed between the president and the mayors, that element is there. But we also have to be specific, because all districts are not the same in Rwanda. We have to take into consideration the specificity of each area.*

SCHER: Sorry, this is the quality-assurance technical team?

MAJORO: Yes, it is. They are from Minaloc (the Ministry for Local Administration), but also the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. Because there is a big element of planning, the Minister of Economic Planning has also a big involvement to

*make sure the targets are aligned to EDPRS (Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy), the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals), and Vision 2020. The Prime Minister's Office, as I will tell you later, also has a stake in that.*

SCHER: So there is a Prime Minister's Office representative?

MAJORO: Yes, we are consulted and if we need to, we participate.

SCHER: I see.

MAJORO: *The imihigo started between the mayors and the president, as I told you. But since 2008, the imihigo started from the family level, the household. The households or the individual, a person—any adult citizen, sign the imihigo with the head of the village. The village is the smallest administrative entity we have in Rwanda. Rwanda is divided into four provinces and Kigali city. The provinces and Kigali City are divided into districts. These are divided into sectors, then into cells and cells into villages. A village is around 50 households, depending on the concentration.*

*Imihigo at the household level is still simple, as you understand. For example, a person pledges "this year I am going to achieve this and this and that." Then the head of the village and his committee look at the imihigo of the household, and then put them together into imihigo of the village. They also consider some collective works and they sign the imihigo with the cell. The cell leaders will also sign the imihigo with the sector. But at those levels, they don't have budgets as they are not budget entities in Rwanda (only the district is). It means that they have to prepare imihigo in the limits of their means.*

*The sector consolidates the imihigo from cells and add its own and signs the performance contract with the district, and the district of course will sign with the president of the republic. Concerning the evaluation, the district evaluates the implementation of the imihigo of the sector, the sector evaluates the cell, the cell evaluates the imihigo at the village, and the village has to make sure that everything is smooth at the household level.*

*On the district level, normally we have the provinces—. Provinces normally are not part of the decentralization; they are part of the central government. Only the City of Kigali is part of decentralized entities, but the four provinces are like the delegates of the central government to monitor what is taking place at the district level. That is why they don't sign the imihigo, but they have the role of assessing the imihigo, and monitoring and evaluating the Imihigo at the district level on a daily basis.*

SCHER: Okay.

MAJORO: *Now, how the Prime Minister's Office comes into this. Now, the prime minister has the role of coordinating and making sure that all the programs are implemented. Concerning the evaluation of the imihigo, the Prime Minister represents the President of the Republic.*

*We used to have an evaluation every quarter. The provinces evaluated the districts. They would do their evaluation and have to present to the prime minister the results of that assessment. It is the prime minister who chairs that function; normally, it is done at the provincial level. The ministers from that province, or*

*those who head the constituency in that province, have to be there and also any interested minister, because it is also the opportunity to come and talk about their sector. For example, if the Minister of Agriculture has some advice to give, some orientations, he is there. The mayors are present. The government also presents the results of the competition, how they ranked. Then there are discussions where ministers also give advice. The next time, they will come again and see if districts implemented what has been given as orientation and advice.*

*This year, we want to change because time is very short. We want to give them time to implement. For example, the first quarter they didn't achieve much. When the budget is opened for implementation, it takes a month to make transfers, sometimes a month and a half, and districts don't have time to do much in that quarter of three months. That's why we said that we can give them six months to be evaluated—twice a year, in the middle of the year and at the end.*

*As I'm telling you now, there is a team in the field, headed by the Office of the Prime Minister, which is evaluating how the imihigo has been implemented in the country. They spend something like two months there. They started May 15 and they take two days in a district. They look at the paperwork, the reports and everything, and the second day they go in the field. They take at random some activities and go to see if what the mayor says in the report is reality. Of course, the Prime Minister's Office does that because their role is the coordination and they do it on behalf of the president who has the role of oversight.*

*Concerning my appreciation of Imihigo, I think Imihigo has changed a lot as far as delivery of programs is concerned, because it brings a sense of competition and accountability—mainly accountability, but also cooperation among different stakeholders. For the mayors, the imihigo not only include what they will do themselves as mayors but what will be done by others: civil society, NGOs (nongovernment organizations) and others. For that purpose there is what is called the JADF, the Joint Action Development Forum, in which the churches, NGOs, private sector, and civil society meet—a forum at a loose level. They meet and plan for their district—what they are going to do—and they share responsibilities.*

*For example, if it is construction of schools and health centers, the Catholic Church, which owns a big number of primary and secondary schools and health centers in Rwanda, might say, "we will build these schools, these hospitals." With NGOs, they say, "We will do this and this and will support here." The private sector can do this also. That is part of the imihigo. The imihigo is not only for the public entities; it's for all people in the district. They joined together in planning and the mayor would present it on behalf of local collectivity, and even during the evaluation all of them would be there. This really has helped even to harmonize what is being done in the district. And then, as I told you, because there are different people from different institutions, the accountability of the mayor is high. He knows that there is peer control, because those people who are putting their money and their effort need to know that things are happening. The mayor knows that at a certain period of the year he will be assessed. This really has made tremendous changes.*

*We are still building it. Every hour, there are things that you can improve. That is why, as I told you, now I want to commend the imihigo with the national targets. I see some challenges. The challenges, I think, are not specific only to imihigo but they apply to other areas, especially the limited budget. For example, last year, because of the financial crisis, many different donors—NGOs from Europe, from*

*America—didn't contribute the money they promised. This really was hard because we couldn't really achieve all we had planned, but we tried.*

*There is also a problem of skills, which is general in Rwanda. There are some skills, but there is also a lack of skills in some areas where we are completely dependent on foreigners. There are areas where you don't find any person when you advertise, you don't find anybody. The few with skills just graduated from university—they don't have experience to do a lot. But I think they are trying their best. That is what I can say on Imihigo. If you have any questions, I am ready to answer them.*

SCHER: Excellent, I do have a couple of questions. My first question is—you mentioned that the evaluations or the assessments were happening on a quarterly basis and they are now not happening on a quarterly basis any more. Could you tell me a little bit about why there was that shift from quarterly evaluations to, I think, six-month evaluations?

MAJORO: *Normally, there is daily monitoring and evaluation by those organs that are supposed to be monitoring them, like the district evaluating the sector, the province evaluating the district. But the official evaluation, where people come and present all they achieved, was done on a quarterly basis. Now, a quarter is very short. A quarter is very short and it doesn't give mayors time to implement and to really give us an opportunity to see changes. People sat together and said, "How can we improve that?" At least in six months you can see progress of programs.*

*And we want this six-month evaluation to be comprehensive. With the quarterly assessment, sometimes they are rushing because there are many things to do. The midyear assessment, if it is agreed, we want the it to be done by the central government but then the end of the year assessment to be done by external people who come and do the an independent assessment with our bias from government. The government officials—I am not saying that they cannot do a good assessment, but they are biased. They are daily involved in close monitoring of these imihigo and, sometimes they want, maybe, to present things better than they are. But if you bring in independent people—not from the government—to have an external eye, I think we will add value. That is what we plan to do.*

SCHER: When you talk about external people, what sort of people do you mean?

MAJORO: *I don't mean people from other countries, but, for example, we can take people from private sector, civil society—people who are independent, who are not government officials.*

SCHER: I see.

MAJORO: *We may hire consultants. But it has pros and cons. We are also discussing that to see if it might work and give us better results.*

*But that is the way we are thinking it. There is really no big reason that made us make that shift. But also we wanted to give the districts and provinces the time to go and see what the lower entities are doing, to help them with their capacity building. And then we'll come twice a year to evaluate and tell them where to correct.*

SCHER: I see. Now please correct me if I've got this wrong, but in my understanding, in 2009 the prime minister started some quite high-profile tours of the districts where he has been going around and releasing the rankings of the districts and the provinces based upon the Imihigo competition. Is that correct—that this was a fairly recent thing where the prime minister was actually touring around the country?

MAJORO: *No, it was right from the beginning.*

SCHER: Was he doing that from 2006?

MAJORO: *Yes, the quarterly evaluation was chaired by the Prime Minister.*

SCHER: But the prime minister himself would go out four times a year?

MAJORO: *Yes. It takes him about two weeks to tour the provinces.*

SCHER: Four times a year?

MAJORO: *It means on Monday we go to Eastern Province, and he chairs the Imihigo. On Tuesday, we go to Western Province. If it is requested we take the whole week. Sometimes it can take us two weeks, because after that you have to also visit some activities around the area where the Imihigos are presented and meet the population. Then another quarter we also do that. The Prime Minister does not only go up country in provinces for the presentation of imihigo. He often goes there in the framework of coordination of the implementation of programs. Normally, he does many different visits apart from the Imihigo evaluation. Next Monday, we have a visit in Nyabihu of two days. When we go, we visit different activities and then meet the population, talk to them. We'll hear from them if they have any concerns or any messages to send to the government.*

SCHER: Okay.

MAJORO: *That is the coordination tool too we use, regular visits. Normally we plan to take 20% of his time—to be spent on the visits, in the field.*

SCHER: So he has been doing that since 2006?

MAJORO: *He does it regularly.*

SCHER: If I go up on the Primature website right now, I can pull a lot of the articles, your news releases, about the rankings of the districts in each province. You can see Rulindo is number one in Northern Province. You can get all of that information. That's great for me, but what if you're a citizen, a farmer in one of the districts? How do they have access to this information?

MAJORO: *Well, normally the imihigo of the district are at the Minaloc website. We would put that—maybe it is the way people feel about our websites. Maybe there is room to improve. Normally, they put it as an event, where the prime minister chaired imihigo in this province and this is how this is ranked. That is like the event that happened. But the substance of the imihigo, the imihigo of each district, is on the website of Minaloc, like other relevant documents such as the districts development plans.*

SCHER: I'm sorry. I don't think was making myself clear. If you don't have access to the Internet—if you're just a farmer in one of the districts, how do you know how your district is doing? Are there information campaigns? Is it on the radio? Is it on the television? How do you transfer all this information that you're getting about district performance so the citizen knows how their representatives are doing.

MAJORO: *I think they know because many Rwandans, I think maybe 80%, hear from the radio. The radio is the means of mass communication for Rwandans. This is how it is communicated. Fortunately, now we have many FM stations that do that. But also, many districts have their small newspapers. They go out maybe once a month or so. The imihigo, before the prime minister attends the imihigo, has maybe two weeks' of evaluation because it started from the village chief will go to evaluate his households. That's where he will learn in the two or three weeks there will be, maybe, the evaluation. Then it goes until it reaches the district.*

*But there is something to note, Rwanda is very small and informal communication in Rwanda is very easy. Even if I tell you something now without using the telephone, in two hours it is in the Northern Province. In Rwanda, we communicate especially orally. I know it is efficient. But our official means of communication that reaches the masses is the radio.*

SCHER: It is the radio, okay. So now, the Prime Minister's Office plays this critical role in evaluation. What happens if a district mayor is not achieving his imihigo and is just not doing the things that he has committed himself to do?

MAJORO: *Well, that is an interesting and difficult question to answer. Normally, even a mayor—any person who is not performing—should leave the post to others who are able to do it. Now, how to do that? Maybe that is the question you are asking. The way our entities are built, a mayor cannot be removed by the central government; it is not possible. A mayor is removed by the council—it is called, I don't know—.*

SCHER: The district council?

MAJORO: *The district council; it is like a kind of legislative assembly. If their mayor is not performing—and I think that has happened sometimes—and a district ranks like last three or four times, they are not happy. They have to take measures. That is the way it is done. But I think most of them have taken good advice and improved. As I told you, it is not the mayor who is implementing the imihigo alone; they work as a team, with civil society and with the private sector.*

*One can be the last because it is underprivileged. There are some villages that are well placed; at least they have good resources compared to others. They have access, they have markets, they have infrastructure—they have everything. They can contribute, while the other depends completely on the central government transfers. Those can lag behind and you cannot say the mayor is not performing, because he did his best.*

SCHER: I see.

MAJORO: *But in the experience we have, the underprivileged want to perform better. If you look at Rulindo, a mountainous district, they don't really have infrastructure, markets and whatever, but they are doing well. Because when you are not blessed by all those things, you work hard because of competition.*

SCHER: That's very interesting—that the underprivileged districts are proving to be the ones that are very high placed.

MAJORO: *When we are evaluating, we look at four pillars of the program, of our government: the economy, the governance, social welfare and justice.*

*Normally, the economy is given more weight, because our orientation is to both the social and economic development. But you find that where there is improvement in governance, the economy and social welfare are doing well. My experience is that those underprivileged districts tend to be well governed. And when they are well governed, they can also perform along with the rest.*

SCHER: OK. I think that's about all the questions I had regarding the role of the Prime Minister's office in the imihigo process. Are there any things that I haven't asked you, or any bits of information about this, that you think it is important that I learn? Or have we covered more or less the main parts?

MAJORO: *I think we've covered everything. Maybe what I should add is that it is a long way. We are trying to invent different ways of making sure that we move our country, because the way is very long. We have lost many opportunities in the past—in divisionism and other things that are not really helping our population. Now we are trying to use sometimes unconventional methods that are not found elsewhere to make sure things are moving and giving good results.*

*Now what we are trying to do is—when you look at the budget for next year, we are emphasizing empowering the local entities in order to make sure whatever we do is achieved, because 80% of our programs are implemented at the local level. As I told you, there are challenges. But as our president likes to say, I think we are the first to find solutions to our problems; others can only assist. They can only assist—that is why we struggle to make sure that we can be creative and find some ways of doing things. If our population finds it is useful, then that is fine.*

SCHER: Excellent. I'd like to thank you very much for your time, it has been very helpful.

MAJORO: *Thank you too.*