



## INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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Interviewee: Muiz Banire

Interviewer: Graeme Blair

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BLAIRE: This is an interview for Innovations for Successful Societies, and we are here with the Commissioner of the Environment of Lagos State in Nigeria. Would you confirm for us that you are voluntarily agreeing to this interview?

BANIRE: *Yes, I confirm that I've voluntarily given the interview. My name is Dr. Muiz Banire, the Honorable Commissioner for the Environment, Lagos State, Nigeria.*

BLAIRE: Our program has begun a series of conversations with former heads of state, ministers, governors, who have led efforts to build government institutions or to rebuild government institutions in difficult circumstances in many countries around the world. This series is about the challenges to building political coalitions and building popular support for reform, and how to get reform done. The purpose is to help leaders and new leaders in other countries to think carefully and creatively about how to begin the process of governance reform to enable services to work for people again. It would be most helpful if the conversation is operationally detailed about the steps you took including the story of the reform efforts in your agency.

To start out, could you briefly tell us a little bit of background about how you became the commissioner and what you were doing a few years before that?

BANIRE: *Prior to my appointment as commissioner, I was teaching law at the University of Lagos in Nigeria and I was also practicing law. I became a commissioner in 1999. I was briefly a Commissioner for Special Duties in the governor's office. Then not long after that, I became the Commissioner for Transportation in this state.*

*In 2007, and I became the Commissioner for the Environment, the post which I presently occupy.*

BLAIRE: Thinking about the reform efforts that you have initiated as both Transportation Minister and Environment Minister, what would you say are the most important in terms of getting services delivered to people and widening the opening for more reforms?

BANIRE: *Well, the most important, I will say, is information—enlightenment. You see, in our own atmosphere here, you discover that so many wrongs done are the result of ignorance. So, one fundamental thing that I felt we needed to address was that of enlightening people on the rules, the rules of the game. I also discovered that it's very important to let them know what alternatives exist for them.*

*And I give you an example. When you ask people not to defecate or urinate in public places, you must be able to point out to them that there is an alternative otherwise, it'll be meaningless to ask them to change that particular habit. If I'm saying, please stop trading on the street, then I must be able to give an alternative of the right place to be, and why you should be there. I think these are very important things. That's why I would say first and foremost what you need to do is give information, get the people enlightened about your programs of reform.*

BLAIRE: What are some of the programs that you have begun, beginning with when you were Transportation Minister?

BANIRE: *Well, there are so many reforms. For example, when I was Commissioner for Special Duties, we used to have a situation where most of the court exhibits*

*littered the court surrounding. In fact, I knew a time when judges were unable to pass to their chambers without trying to squeeze themselves in between court exhibits. The first thing I did was to say, "No more of this. The Court environment will be decent enough and conducive not only for the judges and the other staff there, but for all of the practitioners and litigants, also. So, there is a need for us." Apart from that, some exhibits were going missing along the line. We needed to create a warehouse independent of where the courts are located where these materials could be taken, and properly tagged, dated, recorded, and traced. Of course, by the time the explanation got to most of them, we were able to evacuate all those exhibits to another place entirely, and we've kept them there since that period.*

*In the Ministry of Transportation, I came into an organization where because of traffic congestion in this state, we were losing, according to the World Bank, about 42 billion naira to traffic jams. So, I first found that there was a need for us to do something as a matter of urgency. One of the very first things that we did was to start informing the people about the traffic laws, the traffic rules. Then I felt that, of course, just as you study in the Bible, out of every twelve people, you find a Judas. For that reason, you need to find somebody who will catch the person being deviant. So, what I did was to put in an institution, still existing today, called Lagos State Traffic Management Authority. They are the enforcers of the law—of the traffic rules and regulations. We then concluded that, for anybody who does not abide by the rules and regulations that we have set for ourselves as a people, then that person becomes a deviant. So, the first thing we did was to say that if you drive against the traffic, against the oncoming traffic, we will send you to a psychiatric facility to be examined, first and foremost to be sure that you are okay or normal, because you won't find a normal person on the wrong side of the road.*

*That assisted greatly, because the number of people driving against the traffic dropped substantially immediately, because people were not so much afraid of paying a fine, they were much more afraid of being sent to psychiatric hospital for evaluation. It worked to a large extent.*

*That was one of the things that I was able to put in place during that period then. Of course, we have some other ones, so many other reasons, for example, with motor vehicle administration, too. We did a lot there because we had the situation where for you to register your new vehicle, it was a herculean task. There we had to set up a whole factory for the production of the number plates. And that made it available, brought in surplus for everybody, and also eliminated the area of extortion that was going on because of the dense scarcity that was going on there.*

*Then, beyond that, again, in Environment, for example, we found the situation where, when we came here, we had more than enough confusion in that area. We found a situation where more or less anything goes, and there was a need to put sanity into it. So, of course, I felt the point of call was to get my people together to say, "Look, we need for our own good an environmental aid society." And how do we arrive at that destination? What would it do for us if we did so? We need to now know that if we have an environmentally friendly society, then our income will be much safer because then we will spend less on hospital bills, our productivity will go higher than it was before.*

*A lot of enlightenment was brought to them first. They will now say, "I'll do it to get to our destination." They will say, "Ok, these are the rules now. These are the milestones." First and foremost, we must all agree that our refuse, for example, must be given to the proper authority for collection, and transferred to the right place; no more dumping of refuse on the road, no more dumping of refuse in the drains. Because then, again, we had to enlighten them to say that they are used to this perception that when it rains, the storm water carries the refuse from one point and runs through to the appropriate river, but that's not true. It clogs the thing, and you now have a flooded situation, and some of them lose their property or lose their life in the process.*

*All this information we brought to those there. As a result of that, it was much easier for us then to say, "This is the way to go in terms of refuse disposal."*

BLAIRE: This is as Environment Minister now?

BANIRE: *This is the way to go. These are the people to give your refuse to and those are the ones who know that the dumps are the ultimate place to bring the refuse. And we know—we are the state that collects over 85% of our refuse at the final dumpsite now. That's why today, what we are thinking and working on now, is how to start recycling as much as possible that waste. And again, we also discovered that, gone are those days when we used to have green all over our state, that there is a need for us to return the green, for several reasons.*

*Again, in an economy of this nature, you find people quite naturally resistant to these sorts of ideas for the singular reason they'll say, "Look, our standard of living is not yet up to what we want, and you are telling me to be planting trees and green all over—it's senseless to me." So, you need to now go in and say, "Come, come, come, let me explain it to you. These trees are going to save you and improve your standard of living for you." How does it do so? It will create employment for people. We have more florists today. We have a lot of horticulturists today. We have many people in the supply chain, some supplying interlocking paving stone, some supplying iron-ore and some watering flowers every day from the river.*

*Because security has improved, you can now sleep well, you can relax well, you can walk around the street well; that's number one. Your life is safe; your property is not threatened. We have succeeded in creating employment and empowerment for a lot of people in the process. We are also saying that all the open space that used to serve as a haven for miscreants, those people have no hiding place. They can't constitute a danger to you again.*

*Again, we let them know also that in the process, we are also fighting the global warming problem. If you recognize the fact that we are a coastal state, we are vulnerable to flooding as a result of climate change. The more of these trees that we plant, the better off we are so that we don't get flooded away. More trees will serve as windbreakers for us, because when it's windy some roofs are torn off. When you have several trees, it weakens the intensity of the storm coming—we need to put these trees there to save ourselves.*

*In some the rural areas where farmers are doing the cutting and planting, we call them and say, "Look, no more cutting down trees. You have to plant, man." They ask you, "Are you going to be providing me gas for cooking? Do you want to pay for my kerosene?" I say, "No, it's not that I want to pay for all this, but I tell you, in*

*the short run, it will appear to you that the amount of money you spend on firewood is cheaper than purchasing proper gas for cooking. But in the long run, it's not cheaper, because you are releasing carbon when you cook with firewood. You'll spend more money at the hospital. Your life is shortened. You have shortened the life of others in the process. And again, at the end of the day, you are causing a fuel crisis for yourself, because the more deforestation, the less arable land for planting."*

*By when you explain these things to them, they say, "Oh, we didn't know the connection between all these things". They know that they must plant more and more trees.*

BLAIRE: You've been Environmental Minister for two years now. What was your plan to begin to communicate to the people what the reforms would mean to them?

BANIRE: *Yes, in fact, communication has been the bedrock of our success so far. It's a prerequisite to any program that we do.*

BLAIRE: Do you use meetings or do you use handouts? What is the mode of communication?

BANIRE: *There are so many ways. I tell you, the most potent of all the modes is interpersonal communication, going through the various community development associations, talking to them and explaining like in a town hall meeting. That's the most potent. I'll tell you why. Right now, as I'm talking to you, if you turn to most TV stations, you see our media campaign going on. We know that does not reach a lot of people where there is no electricity for them, but those who are privileged, who have television or radio, listen to it. Most of them cannot afford newspapers. So, you'll be wasting your time if you want to go by way of newspapers.*

*So the most potent of all the modes that we've been using, is the interpersonal one; talking to them at the community level, organizing town meetings, and at times, taking our vehicles to go around with a public address system, telling them what is going on, what our policies are. Another thing we have just recently done, because we know that the larger portion of our people seem to love drama, we produce docudramas to enlighten them. These are free of charge to them, and the people take it home, they watch it and they transfer it. That is working for us also.*

*And, of course, for the elitist, we have a website where we put a lot of information for them to assess*

BLAIRE: So, the docudramas are taped or—?

BANIRE: *Yes, CD's. We do that also. In fact, one of the popular musicians is working with us now. We ask so many of them to work with us, but there is one major one that wants to wax a whole tape on the environment. That will cover his fans that listen and get the message.*

BLAIRE: Which musician?

**BANIRE:** *Kwam 1. They did one for us on waste management already. Most of the people who are really [affected by] environmental problems are the downtrodden people mainly, and they listen more to the musicians' cassettes.*

**BLAIRE:** So, when you go out to do meetings, who goes? Do you go, or you send—?

**BANIRE:** *All of us, all of us, or my ministry officials. I lead, we move from one place to the other.*

**BLAIRE:** How large is your staff?

**BANIRE:** *Well, I think we are, in totality, in the neighborhood of around 75 at the management level.*

**BLAIRE:** Could we back up to the point where you began to think about a strategic plan for the work you would do as Environment Minister in those first days after the election? What was the process like to come up with the plan for what you would do, and what you would tackle first?

**BANIRE:** *It was really challenging. Because, you know, in my own background, I'm not a strict environmentalist. In terms of my background, I'm a lawyer. But I do know that you can use law to order a lot of things. I look at the legal framework, do you have legal framework for this, this, this? Street trading, is there any legal framework? There is? Ok. Waste management, is there any? There is.*

*But what I found out also in the process was that we have numerous legislations—some of them conflicting, some complex, some unintelligible. There was a need to quickly review them, which we set out to do immediately. And as we were doing that, I also recognized the fact that we needed to take them in bits. The problem was humongous, including addressing all of the elements simultaneously. The first area to face, because we came in during the rainy season, was flood. We had to move quickly to be sure nobody would wash away. In the last two years nobody has been washed away by flood. That was a major area for the first eight months.*

*Then I brought in the Greening Program, because we needed the rain for that. I was pulling that one along. So, that was how we started. We gave full attention to those two.*

*Then, after we got our act together with those two, we were now afraid that we had many illegal structures all over the whole place. We needed to clean up, so we started the Clean-up Program, and that made progress also. Those we are trying bit by bit. We have areas that we've zoned, a zero-tolerance area where no form of environmental nuisance must go on. In fact, our ambition in the ministry is that out of our 20 main local governments, in a four year period, we attempt to sanitize 10 of those local 20. Now we are on the fourth one.*

**BLAIRE:** What are the steps that you take in the sanitization? What are the things that are dealt with?

**BANIRE:** *In the local government areas, I set up a mini-office, and I put staff, enforcers and enlightenment procedures.*

**BLAIRE:** About how many people are in the office?

**BANIRE:** *For enforcers, we have 100 each. Then for the administrative people, we have about 15-20. So, what they do is to move around street by street, looking for environmental nuisances, and to correct them or enforce where it is needed. We also put a cop there to take violators to be charged in court.*

**BLAIRE:** That was a new institution?

**BANIRE:** *Yes. We call them Zero-tolerance Offices. So, we are on the fourth one now. Like I told a journalist in Nigeria, it's not a must that I finish then in four years. If it's five and I do it well, it's enough. Whoever takes over should move on from there.*

*Now, aside from that, we now realize that we need to be an active participant in the fight against global warming. So, I set up a whole department for that. I believe, in the whole of West Africa, we are leading now in terms of the programs we have accomplished on fighting climate change. We have done so much there that our people are educated now. We have climate change clubs in all our schools. They do programs from time to time. They have their own docudramas done by the people, themselves. They have their own books, too, that they have developed.*

*Then we convened the first international summit, I believe, in West Africa on climate change. It took place in March for three days; a lot of speakers were from different parts of the world. They were assembled here so then we were able to spread the gospel. And that summit was unique in the sense that it was a training summit. We gathered major leaders at the grassroots level to be there, so that they could become educated. They had a mandate to convene a smaller summit in the local dialect, applicable to their areas of jurisdiction, to communicate the issues of climate change, to educate the people about why they should not cut trees, why they should not burn refuse, why they should conserve energy, conserve water.*

*In terms of complexities of solar depletion, people at the grassroots don't know that. All you need to tell them is that if these trees come down, then tomorrow you will see serious rain that will wash away your house. You will have a food crisis if that tree does not survive.*

*So, those are the messages that we are sending so that they will know what climate change is all about. And I've worked on that in terms of publicity and education. Now we face larger issues. We are having another major summit that will address mitigation and adaptation measures of climate change in order to inform people about the various mitigation steps, or adaptation strategies to put in place to combat climate change. So, that is also something we are working on, too.*

*We are able to account for our refuse generation now, so we are working also on integration of a waste recycling facility. Our ambition is to make sure that we convert or recycle no less than 80% of our waste. So, we are working on that also, that's our ambition.*

**BLAIRE:** So, you're the first state to account for the refuse, is that what you said?

**BANIRE:** *I can say that categorically. In fact, in the whole West Africa, we are the first state to have a transfer loading station for refuse management.*

BLAIRE: So, why do you think you have been successful where other states have not?

BANIRE: *Passion. The leadership. The "can-do" spirit. We believe we can do everything. There is nothing that is impossible as far we are concerned. That is the spirit we are using to forge ahead. We can get anywhere. We can do everything. And I think that's one of the reform things that leaders must believe in. People must have that conviction that you can carry out the reform. You are capable. You have to have, yourself, that self-confidence that I can do it. We can get there. Once you are convinced that you can do it, I think the rest is history. You have the ability to carry your people along easily, let them know your destination and why we must go that way.*

BLAIRE: That's a really big challenge for a lot of new reformers who come in, changing the attitudes of their staff. You have a large ministry that is used to a certain way of doing things. What are the strategies you use to get people on board, on working toward your goals?

BANIRE: *I think I agree with you, it's a big challenge. We've had to use all manner of ways, incentives, force, the two, moving together. We add inducements. When you need a hard touch to get your result, you apply it.*

BLAIRE: What sort of inducements? What kind of?

BANIRE: *I'll give you an example. I'm going on a working visit to Dubai next week to study the Dubai Parks Authority, because that is a desert area, and it blossoms around that time, in terms of greening. We want to study it and see how we can sustain our own. Now, I didn't say, "Management, follow me." I went for the grassroots people, the gardeners, saying, "Let's go, come and see how life should be." That's an inducement. We will be able to talk to others who will say, "No, we must all work harder." Others hope that it could be his turn, if he does his work right. So, that is another inducement.*

*Where we have a sense of cooperation, we send some of them around the world to see what is going on there. I took my guys on climate change to Singapore. I saw Singapore and said, "Oh, I understand now why you have patronage. I think I need to double my efforts." You need to do this for them and you need to celebrate their successes. When they do well, commend them, not condemn. In fact, I hardly ever condemn them. I encourage them, even where they are failing, so they still have the capacity to do better. "Just try it, don't worry. There's nothing wrong in making a mistake." So, you need all those encouragements from time to time.*

*But when some of them are hard to crack, you apply an official stance. I give you a program of action. I need results by this or so date. If you fail, I ask you to explain why this many measures are necessary for you to know that I mean business, and I'm not here to play.*

*I also have discovered that I need to constantly teach them, because some of them don't even know what they are doing. A driver or a cleaner does not know that they are important. They don't know until you show them how important they are. I convened a workshop for all the drivers, and I was there myself. I spoke to them, I said, "Look, you don't know how important you are. You are more important than even us, because a lot of other people's lives are entrusted to*

*you. So, people must respect you more than they respect me. And by the same manner, you must recognize yourself as a very important man in the course of events."*

*Same thing for the cleaner, if they don't clean this place, we can't sit down. Motivational talks too, we hold regularly. We just finished a workshop for middle management staff. From time to time, I tell them, "Look, these are the expectations. This is who you are." We have to show them who they are and let them know that they have a level of dignity.*

*You also need to also teach them how to survive. When I met with the drivers, I told them, "We give you a government vehicle to drive. If you are able to manage it well and treat the vehicle well, for four or five months this year, we'll give a further four months to you. So, it's a takeaway, because you have preserved it well. We have derived value as the government from the usage. The rest you can take and do what you like with it. These are some of the things you need to put in place to get them to see this is my asset. And that is way all of them are seeing it.*

*And in my own ministry, we also tell them that every staff there is first and foremost an environmentalist. You must be concerned about the environment anywhere you are, anything you see. Don't say, "I'm not the director. I'm not in that department." Anything you see that you know will endanger the environment, you must address.*

*We went on stage during the last environment celebration with a scheme. I told them that we needed to appoint some people that are sensitive to the environment, and are passionate about the environment to categories, some of them are Environment Ambassadors, some of them are Environment Ambassadors Emeritus. We gave an award, a tag, a plaque, and the title to be the face of the campaign in their various domains. I promised myself that every year we must have a minimum of 20 people that will be decorated; ten for the Ambassador, some for Emeritus.*

BLAIRE: These are employees or are these citizens?

BANIRE: *They are not employees, they are citizens that we know one way or the other, have taken part in, and have the capacity to impact positively, on the environment.*

BLAIRE: At the beginning of your term as Commissioner, one of the challenges you had was to find the right people in your senior staff, perhaps, to get the job done and begin to motivate the rest of the people. How did you go about finding the right talents?

BANIRE: *Yes, another difficult challenge. What I did foremost was to give everybody equal access, equal opportunity, regardless of rank. Whether you are a director or you are a low officer, I don't care. I wanted to give everyone an assignment for the environment to see who are actually responsive. There are some directors that are not that responsive, and when we find that they are not responsive, we look for the junior officers underneath them that are responsible enough to give the assignment to do. So, it took some time observing them.*

BLAIRE: When you came in, what were some of the talents or needs that you had for your staff to help you begin to write your strategic plan, and come up with the program of action?

BANIRE: *To be candid, what I found was that in terms of the mission, the strategy, and all those things, they were bereft of ideas. So now it was up to me to sharpen that aspect. To say, "This is where we are going. This is the route I'm thinking about. What do you think? Do you think we should modify it? You have better ideas? You don't have? Please, let's roll. Let's set forth".*

*One thing I saw is that our staff needed a benchmark. That's very important. "Look, between the first and so of the year, we must get this project completed. If after four years, you are still on it, maybe we negotiate". If you can put it that way, if we all sit down and say, "Okay, how do we go? What do we do? This is a problem. This is the one, what is the whole solution? Let's move".*

BLAIRE: How do you make sure that you don't take on a project that's too large? How do you set feasible thresholds?

BANIRE: *Again, that's a function of leadership. You must know what you have capacity to deliver. You don't dare to do the humungous. For example, it would be stupid of me to say I want to line all the channels in Lagos with concrete. It's not doable. Even if we would have the money, the capacity is not there to do it. So, we must look at the crucial ones, and make them priority. "Let's fix this one. We're finished? Oh, good. Let's take the next layer." So, it's like a pyramid, building it bit by bit.*

*So, it's the leader that has the vision and prepares the roadmap to know which project one ought to take now, which ones we see clearly. Inevitably, after you have addressed what we consider to be the low fruit on the tree, you now look for the higher ones.*

BLAIRE: There were some talents that you needed, some things that you needed to get done, how did you begin to build the capacity of the staff that you had to have the skills that you needed?

BANIRE: *Normally I give them ideas of the way things should be done, and what we must do, then I scale it up at a point to get people outside to come and talk to them. Then, I organize seminars, workshops, retreats, so we are all together.*

BLAIRE: How did you begin to get the Zero-tolerance program and the Greening Programs through? Were there discussions? What were the discussions like at the executive meetings where this became one of the biggest priorities of the Governor's term?

BANIRE: *At the Governor's level, even with the nonsense of the whole place, we are like advisors to the Governor. We give our advice to him, which he's at liberty to accept or reject. What I did was to get with him, and to say, "Look, this is what I have. From my experience, if you want to do everything simultaneously, we will fail. So, this is my program. This is the way I believe I can achieve my target." And he looked at it and said, "Great, good, roll on."*

BLAIRE: So, when you began to think about how to get the Greening Program done, how to get targeted cleanup areas, was this something that originated in the Ministry with you?

BANIRE: *Yes, you see, what was happening was that the Greening Program was not at the scale we are operating on now. So, just as in any other program, you can plan. With our plan, with five people to help, you can do it. But in this administration, all we had done was set the pace, to say that we would do it, show the people how things should be, then they can join us. And they are joining, people are joining, everybody is joining.*

BLAIRE: What have been some of the challenges to getting it done? You're working in local government areas. You're working with local governments, what have been some of the challenges to getting these done?

BANIRE: *Ok, there are usually a lot of challenges. The very first challenge is the usual so called miscreants who were extorting money from contractors. You give work to somebody and he says that you must pay him before he does that job. So, we needed to take stern measure on those ones. Educate them. Say that if you want to work, we'll create a job for you. And I'll tell you what, more than 60% of them chose that route. They joined those contractors to deliver the projects. And they now are living a good life, too; moving, with contracts, from one place to the other now that have worked for us.*

*And, of course, we also have—the major challenge we've been having not with—we don't have any big challenge with the local government, because they bought into the mission easily, that plan to the vision. But the major challenge we have, mainly in our own regard, is usually the issue of power. Some of it, say, we have wanted to deliver. Say, where there are so many strategic areas, why we should have water fountains there today where there is no electricity to power? So, we couldn't do most of them. So, that's a major constraint.*

BLAIRE: How do you begin going about convincing local governments to come on board? Was that an easy process, or did you have to go and have a lot of meetings?

BANIRE: *We are lucky, because the administrators of those local governments belonged to the same party with us. So, it was easy to convene before a meeting, and tell them what the picture is, and why they must buy into it also, and why we must all work as a team.*

BLAIRE: Is this a joint program? Who provides funding? Is it jointly between Lagos State and the local government?

BANIRE: *No, no, Lagos State.*

BLAIRE: Lagos State, ok. And is there any involvement with the Federal government?

BANIRE: *No.*

BLAIRE: This is only Lagos State's, so for local governments it's a pretty good deal. You provide the funds and the people just have to give the ok for you to come in?

BANIRE: *No, they have their own program. They have their own funding, I believe, to complement what we are doing. For example, I couldn't have been able to plant*

*one million trees in two years. So, what we normally do, every three planting days, all the local governments plant. So, we only get the statistics from them. How many did you plant in your local element? Then we add it to the ones we are planting at the state level, to arrive at the big figure.*

BLAIRE: Once you move on to the next local government area, are the offices that you've made in the four previous government areas self-functioning once you set them up?

BANIRE: *No, they report to the Ministry from time to time. They are semi-autonomous. They still get funding from the Ministry, and they get other directives from the Ministry.*

BLAIRE: I'm interested in how you created this program where there were these local offices that did not exist before. You've created a ministry that is nimble enough to be able to re-deploy itself to a new challenge, a new area it hasn't been in, get staff on this new project that they are not familiar with. How did you build these new little institutions that did not exist before?

BANIRE: *Yes, you see, it's a question of education, information, enlightenment of the operators, first and foremost. Once they know your mission and your vision, and you say, "Now, with this, I want to challenge you to move with these people to this area and implement those things for me".*

BLAIRE: You mean the director of the office?

BANIRE: *Yes, the director. They are just the implementers. The policy's already there at the Ministry. Just go and implement.*

BLAIRE: Do you have certain directors that go to the local government areas, and then they do the hiring there? Or do you just take all the people—?

BANIRE: *No, we second people from the Ministry.*

BLAIRE: Ok. And they are staying there now?

BANIRE: *They stay with them there, they report there. They are under the control of the man.*

BLAIRE: And what about the court, the little courts that you have in these offices, how do they interact with the judiciary of Lagos State?

BANIRE: *You know the judiciary is independent. So what we do is we go there to present our case to the judges and the magistrate. If the court feels that we are right, they fine them, keeping in mind the tenement orders. And where we are wrong, we identify and correct the problem.*

BLAIRE: Are the judicial branches that you've set up part of the state's administration or are they separate?

BANIRE: *It's a third arm, on it's own.*

BLAIRE: Ok. But you have worked with the judiciary to get these little courts into your offices?

**BANIRE:** *Yes, we work with them. They increase their capacity because they know that we are acting with them now.*

**BLAIRE:** Ok. How did you negotiate that with them? It was not a problem?

**BANIRE:** *Like I said, we all have our lanes. That's their lane, to ensure justice.*

**BLAIRE:** But you had to convince them to bring a little court to that office.

**BANIRE:** *Oh, all we need to do is to say that we have a program going on in this area. We suspect that we are likely to be apprehending a lot of people that will fight with us. We need to arraign them before the court, because we cannot judge them.*

**BLAIRE:** So, they go to an existing court building?

**BANIRE:** *They have, in some instances, an existing court building. In some other instances, they ask us to go and provide infrastructure.*

**BLAIRE:** So, they send their judges or their magistrates.

**BANIRE:** Yes, yes, yes.

**BLAIRE:** Ok. You spoke a little bit about rewriting the laws that existed when you came in. What were some examples of the conflicting legal structures that existed that you needed to rewrite and redo?

**BANIRE:** *When I came in there were many legislations for different purposes, but I thought that they were too numerous, that we needed to not only upgrade, review them, we needed to bring them into a compendium-like structure. We had to get a consultant to do that for us. Although I am a lawyer, I knew I wouldn't have the time to start reviewing one by one. So, we had to get some people to start looking at them, and review them with us, as their proposal.*

**BLAIRE:** Contractors?

**BANIRE:** *Contractors.*

**BLAIRE:** And then you had to work with the legislature to get them passed?

**BANIRE:** *Yes, definitely. Without that we can't survive.*

**BLAIRE:** Right. What's an example of one of the problems that you had with the legislature?

**BANIRE:** *Well, we've not really been having problem with them, because—.*

**BLAIRE:** Oh, I meant what was an example of the legislation that you had to rewrite, the conflicting legislations that you had mentioned?

**BANIRE:** *There are so many of them that come in from time to time. For example, we felt that the Greening Program we are doing must have an institutional backup, so that whether we are there or not, it continues. It was decided that we must have legislation to create an agency that is called Lagos State Parks, our garden*

*agency. So, we had to send a bill to them. It's in the final stage at the House of Assembly now. Once it passes through this final stage, it goes to the Governor for assent and becomes law to be carried out.*

*We have one on waste management. We have the environmental sanitation law that gives the "dos and don'ts". There are so many legislations like that they have been able to sort out for us.*

BLAIRE: Do you have a good working relationship with the legislative leadership?

BANIRE: *I must confess to you that we have. We do, because practically everything we do we carry them along, because we work in their various constituencies. For example, if I'm going to initiate programs there, I notify the members of the Congress from those areas. They follow us to those places. They not only supervise, they watch and monitor and assist us in the delivery of the project.*

BLAIRE: For the judicial authorities that you created in the LGAs (Local Government Areas), did you need any legislation to carry that out?

BANIRE: *No, no, no. Like I said, the judiciary has its own laws that cover that asset.*

BLAIRE: Yes. So you just wanted to create an infrastructure to handle—?

BANIRE: *In some, they have their infrastructure. In some, they do not and in those they request help saying, "Look, we do not mind sending our personnel there, but you have to provide the infrastructure where the waste is collected".*

BLAIRE: So, do these courts only attend to matters that have to do with the environmental?

BANIRE: *Well, some of them squarely deal with matters relating to the environment. There are some that deal with other businesses.*

BLAIRE: Ok, so it wasn't specifically only environment?

BANIRE: *No, there are some that deal squarely with environmental matters.*

BLAIRE: Oh, there are? But you didn't need any legislation to—?

BANIRE: *No, no, no. We don't need any. The legislation is there.*

BLAIRE: Yes. Tell me about the process for the waste management law, and the reforms that you've done for waste management?

BANIRE: *For example we used to have a common depot before. People would dump trash in this particular place and we'd go there and use something to shovel it out into a truck. During the last administration, they introduced the culture of bagging. You bag your refuse and put it somewhere, but people were putting it on the road. When this administration came in, we engaged private operators to complement our capacity, and paid them monthly. But most of them were using rickety vehicles.*

*So, one of the very first things I said to them is that, "Look, you want to do this business, you got to use the right equipment, refuse compactors." And I gave a*

*deadline. And I told the managing director of waste management, I told him, "You've got to get these people to do it." And today, I tell you, virtually all of them have complied. So, that's the major one we have done.*

*And the TLS (transfer loading station) is another thing we're approaching. Now, not all of them need to go to the landfill. At the transfer loading station, we transfer overnight. Those are some of the new innovations that we have passed. Now our roads are swept in the evening around the clock. Those are on our all over the whole place also.*

BLAIRE: Were there difficulties in getting these things done? This is a pretty big change from the system that existed?

BANIRE: *Well, there was a bit of resistance there in terms of the private operator, because they said to me, for example, "Where do we get the funds from? We don't have the money." I said, "Look, get a loan."*

BLAIRE: To buy the new trucks?

BANIRE: *Yes, "So, get a loan." And we encouraged a lot of people to come into the business. Before we knew it, there was a swell of people rushing in to quickly re-fleet.*

BLAIRE: How did you get past that problem?

BANIRE: *Like I told you, we put a deadline to each and we threw it open to everybody. Some new people were threatening to take over the business, so everybody started running for their dear life to quickly re-fleet before being thrown out.*

BLAIRE: I don't know whether this is a problem in your ministry, but in many places in West Africa, there is a problem with patronage and people that come in to jobs from family ties or from group ties. Has this been a problem for you as you came into the Environment Ministry or Transportation?

BANIRE: *It is a problem to a certain extent, because in as much as you want a colleague to be hired in any form whatsoever, we are very, very strict when it comes to their capacity to deliver, and that's where they run into an issue with us. If you don't have the capacity to deliver and can't convince us, we don't give out the job to you. So, at that, if we want to be a bit sympathetic, we align him with a competent person and say, "Ok, join this man." We can survive on that. But it's generally a problem of underdevelopment. These days we are just getting out of it. People used to see government as the only industry available. That's why I said to you that we are creating a lot of new economies. Like, how many florists were in Lagos? Then there were only about seventy-something. Today, florists are in excess of 500. That's just to show you that there are new economies now, not only government. I know how many people I give a contract for planting trees all over the whole place, too. If anyone thought about it, with six months intensive training, he could become a good gardener, take a job and say he would maintain an area. You don't need to come to government.*

*So, new economies are coming out. Before there was none, that was why everybody thought that the only industry to survive in was government, but now we've opened up everything. So, I foresee in the next few years, people will be taking jobs to say they want to have their own job.*

BLAIRE: When you came into the Transportation Ministry in 1999, there must have been many people in your ministry that had gotten there through patronage? What were the strategies that you used to deal with people that perhaps didn't have the capacities that you needed?

BANIRE: *Usually what we did there was to create some unskilled jobs that you don't need job scanning skill for. I say, "Look, these ones, don't worry." And then we took some people and trained them in the skills for the work "We create, we give you the skills." Take the Traffic Management Authority. We did serious training for those who wanted to be traffic officers. They didn't have it before, but we trained them, both internally and abroad, and some of them became skilled.*

*But some people, for example, I said, "Look, I give you bulb. You no have the right bulb, you say yes. I give you bulb for my traffic lights. They will teach you how to change bulb. The goal is once you see that bulb is off, unscrew, put another one, go away. Put in another one". So many like that.*

BLAIRE: So, nobody was pushed out, you found something for them to do, or your trained them?

BANIRE: *I managed them effectively, effectively. That was how we never had a crisis. Otherwise, we would have serious riots. We created some jobs. I said, "Your old job was to do monitoring of electric power. Your new job, you got to report it, photograph, and bring it back to me, because I can't be everywhere". That's a job already for the man.*

BLAIRE: Do you have any other advice for your counterparts in other situations coming into a job like that?

BANIRE: *Yes, I always say, I don't believe anybody is useless. I believe that I'll just create a responsibility for them. For example, because I didn't want my trees or my flowers to be trampled upon and be killed, I said, "Look, I know you have no skill at all. All that you need to do for me, from that place to that place, where the trees are planted, just look after them. Be sure nobody tramples on them. Just do that, that's your job."*

*For a woman, rather than the water tank truck disrupting traffic, I said, "Your job is here. I put the tank here and I put water for the week. Just go there, take water and water the plants for me. That's your job". So, everybody can be meaningfully engaged.*

BLAIRE: I don't know whether this is a problem here, but one of the things we're asking people about this summer, is this problem that we call brokerage, where you are selling positions in ministries, where you can pay to get a better job, pay to find a job that has fewer responsibilities.

BANIRE: *I don't think it's obtainable. You know, I tend to believe you mean by that, what is called facilitation. It's not popular here.*

BLAIRE: Not popular.

BANIRE: *It's not popular. The only one that is possibly popular, it still might be applicable now, is that if you get a job from the Ministry, but you don't have the competence,*

*you sell it to a competent person. That used to be the situation. But right now, too, because it's open competition although it's tough to get the job and not accept directly. What you can do at the beginning is tie yourself to a competent person and say, "We are a consortium." Even though you know next to nothing, you bring in a competent person and say you are a consortium.*

BLAIRE: Reflecting on your time in the last two years of working for Governor (Babatunde) Fashola, what do you think are the keys to the rest of successes that you've had when the last five or six governments had not been able to make progress?

BANIRE: *Well, the question is difficult to answer because of the fact that during the last administration, we had a lot of aberrations. What I mean aberrations is that we had a situation where we had a federal government that was irresponsible then. I'll give you an example. Some of the areas that we've succeeded in 'greening' for example, today are beautiful all over the whole place. In the past, the federal government would never have allowed it. It was towards the end of the last administration that I was able to do the BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) that we are doing today. We started the planning for the BRT in 2003, but the federal government would not allow us to use the road. So, we had many challenges during that administration.*

BLAIRE: And now in the (Umaru Musa) Yar'Adua administration you have better cooperation?

BANIRE: *So far, so good. In the last two years, no problem, they were very cooperative. But last week now, suddenly they woke up and said, "Look, you've got to cancel some of the local government initiatives." It's in all the newspapers if you are reading them now. There is a face-off between "us and them". They usually start distracting you from your mission, your focus.*

BLAIRE: But so far it has been a good relationship?

BANIRE: Yes.

BLAIRE: What do you think accounts for that?

BANIRE: *Well, I believe initially, and I still want to believe too, that President (Olusegun) Obasanjo meant well in terms of saying that he was seeing beyond politics. Because our own position is that during an electoral campaign, you can still fire. But once that is over, what must be paramount to everybody is the welfare of the people, regardless of party affiliation. And we thought that it had been. All through that period, President Obasanjo was not looking at things from the perception of party or political affiliation. But now, with the new development, we are getting a bit uncomfortable. We don't know what's happening.*

BLAIRE: With this local government business?

BANIRE: Yes.

BLAIRE: Yes. People have said that reformers coming in have to have a vision for what they want to see changed in their term. What has been your big picture vision?

BANIRE: *My big picture is to be able to transform this, our state, in terms of the environment, to a first class city comparable to any other city in the world. In fact,*

*by my own standard now, nothing's stopping us from ranking on par with Singapore. And that is what my own vision is, and I believe it's doable.*

BLAIRE: Do you have advice to other people coming in on how to build a vision and a strategy?

BANIRE: *Yes, think about how we can get there, and how it can better all of us together as a people.*

BLAIRE: One problem lots of leaders face coming in to office is where to get information about other contexts, other successful strategies that people have used to get things done. Where did you get your advice and information about this? I know you said you sent people to other places, to Singapore, to see how they do things. What are some of the other—?

BANIRE: *Well, to a large extent, I will say exposure. I've traveled widely, so I've seen it all, in a lot of areas. And I've seen that we have the capacity, and I think that defines our vision. It should be to say we have a vision of where things work, and you believe the same thing must work here. There's no reason why things should not work here. So, that informs your formulation of your own vision to say that I want to transform my own center into what is obtainable in those jurisdictions where things work.*

BLAIRE: Do you have any mentors? Perhaps people who have done this before, who have advice for you on how to at least build this vision? Seeing is one thing, but actually putting it to action—.

BANIRE: *You see I have training. I have formal training as a lawyer.*

BLAIRE: Ok. So, you knew what to do when you came in?

BANIRE: Yes.

BLAIRE: You saw the problems.

BANIRE: *Even if you told me we had the information, I would want the complete information. And know how to transplant, and how to modify things to the extent of considering the peculiarities of my people here.*

BLAIRE: Are there any particular examples? I'm trying to solidify this idea of why the relationship with the federal government has been important. Are there particular examples where they have been helpful, or have not obstructed your path in the last two years?

BANIRE: *Yes, for example, in some of the areas that we are greening, the last administration of Obasanjo used to harass us over such developments.*

BLAIRE: Because their people were being kicked out of the areas? Was that their complaint? And they said you couldn't do it?

BANIRE: *It was purely political, because we knew that we didn't belong to the same party. Nothing more than that. Same thing with traffic management, the BRT, the Bus Rapid Transit we are operating. What is the essence of a road when it's not*

*meant for the people? You say, "It's my road, don't go there." Is the road not meant to improve the welfare of the people? So, it's purely political.*

BLAIRE: Well, I think we have taken up an hour of your time. It sounds like you need to go, so thank you very much for your time, I really appreciate it.

BANIRE: *No problem, you're welcome, it's my pleasure.*

BLAIRE: Thank you.