



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

AN INITIATIVE OF  
THE WOODROW WILSON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
AND THE BOBST CENTER FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

---

Series: Land Management

Interview no.: A 2

---

Interviewee: Elizabeth Stair

Interviewer: Maya Gainer

Date of Interview: 13 June 2016

Location: Kingston, Jamaica

---

**GAINER:** This is Maya Gainer, and I'm here with Elizabeth Stair, the CEO of Jamaica's National Land Agency. Elizabeth, thank you so much for speaking with me about the agency and how it has evolved. Could you start by giving an overview of the NLA's formation and the types of problems its creation was intended to solve.

**STAIR:** *Basically the presentation is called the Merger of four Land-Related Departments, to improve land governance in Jamaica. It tells you that in the beginning we had four separate departments, Land Titles, Estate Management, Land Valuation and Surveys and Mapping. All four were merged in April 2001 to create the agency. So the Land Valuation Department really concentrated on what we call maintaining the valuation roll that is for property tax assessments. We don't collect the tax ourselves; that is done by through the Ministry of Finance, but we do the appraisals on which the tax is assessed.*

*We also do valuations for government departments for whatever purposes, whether they want to buy, lease, whatever purpose, we will do it for them. The Office of Titles of course is the office that is responsible for issuing a certificate of title that relates to the ownership of lands. So they issue titles and they also do endorsements on titles. So if you had a mortgage or a caveat or a lease, or a change of name, that would be done as an endorsement to the certificate of title.*

*The Lands Department deals with the management of what we call crown lands, lands owned by the Government of Jamaica in the name of the Commissioner of Lands. We sell land, we lease land. When we sell the lands we have to issue titles for those lands so we have allotments that we have to constantly be maintaining until the title is issued. We earn revenue from the lands department. That money that is earned goes straight to the consolidated fund, as opposed to the money from the Office of Titles, which is the fees that we earn that come to the agency. That is what we use to support the agency.*

*The Survey Department also does mapping of areas of Jamaica. So, the maps you see on the wall would have been done by the Survey Department. We pre-check survey plans done by the private commissioned land surveyors. So if you ask a land surveyor to do a survey of your property, it doesn't become legal until it is checked and certified by the National Land Agency (NLA). They also survey government lands.*

*Prior to the NLA, the four departments reported to different ministries. We had very informal contact with each other. This is really very important because we all had to work with each other. The Land Valuation department could not prepare a notice of valuation unless it knew who the owner of the land was. So once a property was registered, it had a certificate of title, which means we had to find information at the titles office in order to do that.*

*Basically we really needed to have contact with each other. We had this contact, but it was informal. So it depended on the personalities that were working together to make sure that I could get my work done. We had separate legislation governing our operations and we still do. We had various operating procedures. This is 2001, and some of us were more computerized than others and that was an issue. We had diverse office cultures because of course there are four different heads of department. So each person had a different perspective of the culture of the organization.*

---

*We had undefined performance requirements. It meant that nobody really checked if you did anything. You knew what you were supposed to do and you kind of did it, but nobody came to say did you do 1,000 cases last year? Should you have really done 5,000? So it was there, but nobody checked. If you don't check something, then it doesn't get done.*

*We had as I said minimum level of computerization. We had unstructured customer service. We had a customer service section but it wasn't important. It was not relevant at the time because people had a view about government where they felt that since it is government, it is expected to take long; it is expected to be inefficient. There was that kind of attitude. We had limited authority over financial and human resources. All earnings went to the consolidated fund and then you had to wait on the Ministry of Finance to say what your budget would be. You might have earned more than they gave you back in terms of your budget but that is their decision.*

*Leave entitlement—and this is a big thing that affected staff—we all had 35 working days per year, which is about seven weeks, and we had 14 casual days so that is like another two weeks. You would see that when you came to the agency this was cut drastically.*

*We were told that under the executive agency status, it gave delegation of authority to the head of the agency so we could hire persons, we could dismiss persons, and we could discipline persons. We could make our own decisions about the training of staff. Prior to the agency being formed, if you wanted to hire somebody or discipline somebody or train somebody, you would have had to go to the Services Commissions for them to say yes or no.*

*With the executive agency, we make the decisions here. We have that delegated authority to say yes I will hire you, yes I will discipline you, and yes I will dismiss you. However, dismissal has other aspects to it in that the persons have the right to appeal to the Services Commissions.*

GAINER: Okay.

STAIR: *Then the second point was the focus on performance measurement meaning that we are now contracted officers at the management level. So I have about twenty managers and about eight directors. I have a staff of about 600. Of course we still have the four core divisions. So, the performance measurement—we are expected to have a corporate and business plan prepared on a three-year basis. So we are measured against that target, the targets we set in the corporate plan.*

*We are managerially autonomous agencies in that we manage our affairs and we manage our money. We can't go running to anybody if we run out of money, so we have to manage our affairs properly. Most important is we are required to have quality services, especially customer service. So now the customer service focus is a big thing. For us the customer service focus translates itself into what we call turnaround times for doing these services.*

*I'll give you an example. One of the services that we provided prior to the agency being formed was the pre-checking of survey plans where the private commissioned land surveyors send in their surveys to us, and we have to certify it before they can actually have a title on that parcel of land. Sometimes it took a year, sometimes it took two years, and sometimes it took three years. That was one of the things that we targeted because we said that the customer is getting a*

---

*bad experience from this. Now at this point in time we are probably down to about 80-85% of the plans we receive are checked within 35 days. That is a service that we provide to them.*

*In terms of customer service, if the customer comes to us and is not happy, there are now avenues. There is a Cabinet Office that they can appeal to if they are having a problem. Of course a lot of people if they are having a bad time with us they go straight to the Minister. Then the Minister calls, and you don't want your Minister calling you. So we are very careful about customer service.*

*Lori-Ann Thompson is responsible for customer service in the agency. We train everybody on the front line; they have to be trained. We don't put you on the front line if you're not trained in the customer service techniques because we recognize and we understand that the customer is key, and that is the whole purpose of us trying to do this service.*

*Now the transition. During the transition, which took about eighteen months, we had change-management sessions, staff meetings and meetings with the union because going into the executive agency means that your whole contract with the government has changed. For example, they were no longer going to be able to get 35 days of vacation leave; it was cut to 20 days. The casual leave was cut to five days. These are things that staff had to understand. It was a new era that was coming into being.*

*We tried to have these meetings to sensitize everybody, to make them understand that now you are going to be tied to a work plan, and that work plan is going to require you to do things in X days or things in a particular manner, a new way of doing things.*

*We put in place a new structure. Now of course you have four HR units and you had four finance units and now we have the merger. We needed to structure it for the new operation to take the duplications out. Of course we got the new budget. We had to prepare job descriptions for all the posts; every single post in the agency was looked at. We prepared new job descriptions, and again persons had to decide if this is what they wanted.*

GAINER: Right.

STAIR: *So we did a competitive selection process where all the posts in the agency were advertised. You had to apply for a job in the agency; there was no automatic transfer. Some people were not selected when they went through the assessment and so we re-deployed them. This means that we said to the Services Commission these persons were not successful. They said okay, we will try and fit them into other government departments. Some people chose to be retired because you can be retired on grounds of organizational structure if your post has gone. So some people chose to be retired.*

*Some people did choose not to come into the new agency. It was a major change, and some people couldn't cope with it. Some people were near retirement and so they said okay, I'll move. These are the numbers. In the survey department, 18 persons were redeployed, and two chose to retire. Office of Titles, 30 persons were redeployed, one retired. Land valuation was merged with crown lands department at the time, 48 persons chose to be redeployed and 17 retired.*

---

*So we started the agency on the first of April 2001, and the four core functions were merged. Five hundred ninety-one posts were approved at the time, but we now have about 650 posts. The CEO (Chief Executive Officer) signs a performance agreement—that's me. That performance agreement is signed with the minister and the Permanent Secretary. Basically it sets out what I said I'm going to be doing for the next three years. It is renewed every three years. I pulled the items from the corporate plan and business plan and that is what goes into my performance agreement. I report directly to the Minister with responsibility for lands. So this is different because as the head of department I would have reported to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry. So although I have a relationship with the Permanent Secretary in that she does my performance evaluation, my direct report is to the Minister. The current Minister is actually the Prime Minister, but he has some Ministers without portfolio under him and I report to one of those through to him.*

*Legislation. Once the agencies were formed, and there are about 15 of them now, the Executive Agencies Act was promulgated, which gives powers to the CEO to manage the operations of the agency. The National Land Agency was one agency where it was a merger of the four departments. There was one other agency, the National Environment and Planning Agency, which was also a merger of some departments. But apart from those two, I think everybody else was a one-on-one situation where they took the Administrator General's Department, for example, and they created it into an executive agency. Or they took the Companies Office and created it. But why we were different is because there was this merger, and that itself created a lot of issues.*

*The individual legislation for the separate departments are still in place because those individual legislations support and govern their statutory responsibilities. So it gives the Registrar of Titles her powers. It gives the Commissioner of Land Valuation his powers. It gives the Director of Surveys his powers and the Commissioner of Lands his powers as well. So the Executive Agencies Act acts as an umbrella that allows the CEO to manage the HR and manage the performance framework and manage the finances because all those legislations had little bits of those things in them but this now covers everything.*

*I report to the Minister and I have an advisory board. The advisory board advises the CEO. I haven't had one for four years. The executive agencies legislation sets out how the advisory board is to be structured. One of the main things it says: the CEO nominates the person and the minister appoints them. So those are my core divisions; Land Titles, Surveys, Land Valuation and Estate Management, and support divisions are the business services, which deal with the products and services and the customers and corporate services of course because we have offices in every parish, all over the island, and corporate legal services. We do a lot of things; we enter into a lot of contracts and information and communication technology, so those are my support divisions.*

*My delegated authority is important because it goes to maybe what made the agency successful, some of these things that we're talking about. So I am allowed to recruit and appoint staff, exercise disciplinary action and training. My financial authority is that I retain 100% of the fees earned. Fees are different from—for example, when I sell land I do not keep that; I only get 5% of that as a kind of management fee. So anything I sell or lease goes straight to the consolidated fund. But the fees that are levied for you to do a title transaction or a land valuation transaction or a survey transaction, I keep those, and that is what*

---

*runs the agency. I can transfer funds between activities. I am required to prepare annual audited accounts. That again is a challenge sometimes.*

*All the management staff are on three-year employment contracts, and the leave entitlement as I said has now been reduced to 20 working days' vacation and five casual leave and that is a big problem for the staff; they do not like it.*

GAINER: And the rest of the government, do they still have—?

STAIR: *Yes, they still have it. They're trying to phase it out over a period so new staff coming into the government now will be on a similar basis but for the old staff, that is still in there—and that will take quite a bit of time for that to run out. So that anomaly does cause a little bit of problem. This is one of the main reasons why some people chose not to come into the agency—because of the leave.*

*So there is improved accountability now. We have this three-year corporate plan with performance targets which we must do, and we are required to meet at least 80% of the targets each year. We have never failed; we have usually been in the 90s.*

GAINER: What would happen if you were under 80?

STAIR: *If we are under 80, we can't pay an incentive to our staff.*

GAINER: So no bonuses for them.

STAIR: *No bonuses for that time. We are required to do quarterly performance reports to a host of people and we are required to do quarterly financial statements. When somebody comes to us for information because we have information, for example, on land ownership and so on—I mean another government agency comes to us and we say well the cost is such-and-such, they are objecting to paying. But the point is that those government departments they are on the budget. We don't get a budget. We have to earn and if we don't earn it means we have to cut something.*

*If our revenue is only a billion dollars we can't budget for more than a billion. So even if we wanted to do something great we can't, we have to stick within that. There is just no leeway. So far we have managed to survive, not wonderfully so but yes. Our major revenue is from the land titles division, and the finance person can tell you exactly how much it is, probably about 80 or 90% of the revenue.*

*We got limited support from the consolidated funds, and our earnings support the operations. You cannot depend that you are going to get it all the time. There is an area that we manage specifically for the government, so they give us some support for that. So if you wanted to put in a new elevator they would have to give it to us, that is the kind of funding we got.*

*The other things we do, we sell maps. We sell customized data. So somebody might come to us and ask us to give them information on parcels of land in the city of Montego Bay and we can prepare that data for them.*

*We have a product called eLandjamaica. You may have heard of that.*

GAINER: Yes.

---

STAIR: *So all the revenue from eLandjamaica we keep. The purpose of that is that we can renew it. In fact we are going through a period now of changing it, of making it better, based on the revenue that we have.*

*Achievements. For example, pre-2001 to register endorsements on titles, if you have a mortgage or if you have a transfer you want to put on a title, before 2001, it took 15 days. Now it takes five days and we can go down as low as one to two days.*

*Pre-checking of survey plans, 26 weeks, is now down to 35 days.*

GAINER: That's a wonderful overview.

STAIR: *You can ask questions.*

GAINER: Maybe we'll get into some more details on the big issues that you touched on there.

STAIR: *Sure.*

GAINER: The first thing that I wanted to ask was a little bit about your background and how you became CEO here? How did you learn about this transition that was going to happen and decide to apply?

STAIR: *I was Commissioner of Valuations in 1998, which meant that I headed the Land Valuation Department. So my background is that I have a BSc in Estate Management. It is anything to do with land administration. I did that course.*

*I was also the head of the Lands Department at the time. What they did was to merge the departments in '95. So I was heading two departments. So in 1998 when they decided that this was to be a part of the executive agency, the National Land Agency, the process started there.*

GAINER: Had you been consulted about turning these departments into an executive agency? What was your role in coming up with the plans for that, if anything?

STAIR: *We heard about it. We called. We were told that there is a set of consultants coming in to talk to you about it. So the consultants came in. We had some Canadian consultants who came in, and they liaised with us. We worked pretty well together. They came in and they worked through the process with us to show us what they were trying to achieve.*

*So for me it was also going to be a very big change. What I realized was that this was a government decision, whether I was prepared to go that way or not. This was a decision of the government, and I felt that my role was to sell it to the staff; that is what I saw.*

GAINER: So it was going to happen anyway.

STAIR: *It was going to happen. There was nothing I could do about it. I couldn't stop it. I couldn't say no, I don't want it. But for me, I knew it was going to be a big change as well.*

GAINER: Were there things that you were kind of apprehensive about it when you first learned about it because it was such a big—?

---

STAIR: *Yes, I think so. It was just thrown at you; there was no real preparation for its coming. I guess there is no other way to do it but just to say it's happening. But the consultants actually made it easy because they listened and they worked with you and they went through the process with you. So I was okay after a while. But even though I might have had apprehensions, as I said, I had to settle the staff because the staff were agitated.*

*I remember one person said to me when we had a meeting to explain what was happening—the consultants were talking. I didn't even realize that the staff was looking at me; I didn't realize it. Somebody said at the end of the session, Mrs. Stair seems okay with this and seems comfortable with this so we are okay.*

GAINER: What do you think sort of brought you around to the idea that this could be something that would be good for the land sector and that had potential to improve things?

STAIR: *I think case studies because they discussed with us where it operated—where there were other places where this was working. Maybe not all four, but maybe two were together and I think the whole idea of things being done in a more formal basis. For example the whole performance thing where you were measuring performance and the customer service delivery because the government was really pushing the thing about how dissatisfied persons were with customer service in the government. I think I realized that it had to change*

GAINER: Were there particular examples that you found valuable that showed, that helped you figure out what you wanted to do with the agency?

STAIR: *Teranet in Ontario, and there was also New Brunswick.*

GAINER: Yes.

STAIR: *And of course New Zealand and Australia were doing some amount of mergers as well, maybe New Zealand—.*

GAINER: New Zealand especially on the executive agencies.

STAIR: *Right. So the New Zealand one was a big thing. What was exciting about the New Zealand one was the whole matter of how they got the data because they actually re-did everything, moving from a paper-based to totally digital-based. I think that was exciting. They saw the opportunities, the possibilities of the agency.*

GAINER: What was the sort of application process like as you were—?

STAIR: *For the job?*

GAINER: Trying to become CEO. I understand it was a pretty thorough process.

STAIR: *It was very thorough. They advertised the job in about a year before the agency actually came into being. I was qualified. I don't know if you ever heard of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)?*

GAINER: Yes.

---

STAIR: *I was also a fellow of the RICS at that point. So I was fairly well qualified. Anyway, we had the interview process, and the interview process was made up of written assessment, several presentations, group work, so I had to interact with other applicants in a group setting where they looked at how they operated in a group.*

GAINER: Yes.

STAIR: *There was a formal interview and I also had to eat lunch with them. You were nervous but you had to eat lunch. So we went through that. I think there were three or four applicants for the post. That was it.*

GAINER: Once you got the job, there were already ideas in place about what the new agency was going to look like and what it was supposed to do, but what was your vision? What were your goals coming in? What were the big problems you wanted to solve?

STAIR: *When I got the job, I got it six months before the agency started. I was appointed the CEO of the agency, so I had that six-month lead time to do a lot of stuff with the consultants. For me, I loved the idea of the customer service being given priority treatment. We were to put in a customer service section that was relevant to the agency. We had to do some amount of computerization because not all the divisions were computerized. We had to fight with the HR issues because the staff were really unsettled. So you had to be making sure that they were continuing to do their work while we were doing these changes.*

*What it meant was that we advertised the posts in the agency as I mentioned and for all those posts, we received applications from outside and inside. So we had to be interviewing seven days a week for months. But the more work you did, even trying to put a structure together, the more things that sort of fall in place and one started to feel excited about this new way of doing things. So while I was being excited, I also had to be cautious because the staff was not all there; some of them were very resentful. They felt that they were being pushed out of their jobs because they were advertised. But I had to advertise because there were some persons who did not have the qualifications to move forward into certain jobs.*

*Whereas they might have been suitable for other jobs, some of the jobs that they were doing we wanted to move the bar and therefore they couldn't move without some basic amount of qualifications. We did a lot of training to try and get some people ready.*

GAINER: This was all before the agency—?

STAIR: *In the first year of the agency, in that first year 2001-2002, we did a lot of trying to put people in the right posts, or the right people in the posts and training them as well, as we go along, because—one of the areas was really in the titles office where we had to do a lot of training. We tried to give people some basic legal training, paralegal stuff, to make them better able to do their jobs. Because we believe that in order to serve the customer better, the persons doing the work had to be trained to a level where they could do the work, and computer training was also a big thing.*

---

GAINER: So managing staffers was one of the biggest challenges up front. So what strategies did you find worked best to handle that? What things maybe in retrospect weren't a great idea? How did you handle that issue?

STAIR: *One of the things we had to do was keep the unions on our side. So we worked very closely with the unions and we had a lot of staff meetings and we had a lot of divisional staff meetings. So everybody had a chance to vent and very early on we had to do some—we did what we called a sports day. Now you bring in people from four areas who have never seen each other and now need to work with each other to create this great performance entity so we had a sports day and we mixed them up. So we had houses and we had people from the four core areas and put them in different houses. We mixed up everybody, and they had to work together as a team. So it really was a team-building exercise that we stressed on. It worked a little bit, but you had to keep at it; you had to keep at it. You can't just do one and stop. So we had a lot of those kinds of things.*

*We had a Friday evening, we said come, we're going to have some food and some entertainment, and everybody kind of comes together. It is something that has improved but it is something that you have to constantly do. So we still have general staff meeting with 600 people every two years. When we don't have a staff meeting that year, we have a sports day. So everybody comes from all over the island. It is constant.*

GAINER: It is interesting that it is still kind of challenging because people had to reapply voluntarily; they had to choose that this was something that they were going to sign on to even if they weren't crazy about it. They did have off ramps. Now as people come into the agency since it has been established they know what they're getting into.

STAIR: *Yes they do.*

GAINER: So why do you think there is still kind of this difficulty in accepting the performance culture and all of that?

STAIR: *I don't know because the cultures were so diverse. They still need to break it down a little bit, but it is getting better. But the other thing we do is that if we're having some kind of project in the agency, we make sure that we have representatives from every single core, all of the divisions on it so that everybody knows, everybody feels involved, everybody has a say in the agency. So we will never have a steering committee or some kind of committee that only has one or two of the divisions. It is like a rule; every single division must be represented. I think that helps. Some things are just so entrenched. People are accustomed to doing things a certain way, and you just have to keep wearing them down.*

GAINER: Yes.

STAIR: *Sympathize, and keep at it.*

GAINER: So aside from that, what did you see as the other big challenges that you had to deal with in order for the agency to function as you wanted, especially something like coordination between the departments and how you were going to formalize that?

STAIR: *The coordination between the departments, we had directors meetings at least once every month. We have meetings with all the directors and the managers;*

---

*we try for a meeting at least twice a year. We recognize that everybody has to carry a bit of it; the CEO can't take everything. I don't see the staff as often as their director sees them. They will see me at the functions, and sometimes I go out into the parish offices and see them or they come into Kingston and they see me. But you have to have a team that supports the common goal of the agency that can carry the CEO message out. I think that has helped.*

*The team has been fairly stable. We have had maybe about two or three of the directors have left and their managers were successful, and again we go through another interview process. Their managers have been successfully moving up to the director level, so they are already a part of the NLA home team.*

*The other problem was that when we did these advertisements and some of the people decided they wanted to leave, it meant that we had to bring in new staff, some of them totally new to the government and because we had additional posts there were also new staff coming in and these persons came from other government departments, but some of them came from the private sector; they had never worked in the government before. It was new for them. They also had to be assimilated with the existing government persons. That created a problem.*

GAINER: What kind?

STAIR: *There are different cultures. The private sector operates with the view that government was inefficient and lazy and not doing the work, etcetera and the private sector was always felt to be good performers and different level of culture. In the government you can't fire anybody without a real long, drawn out process. In the private sector, somebody could just come to you and say your job is gone, here is your redundancy, go. So the concepts are different; you look at things differently.*

*They know that it is very hard for me to fire them, so they stretch you out. That caused a little bit of problems as well. So I had to also have the directors merge with each other and bring their cultures together. So that was also a problem but it worked in the end. They are still with me now, most of them.*

GAINER: In terms of the kinds of problems that customers would run into, what did you think were the main things that needed to be improved?

STAIR: *Turnaround times processing matters. That was a big thing. Now lawyers are generally happy about how fast they get them back. Generally we don't have too much of a problem with them—the lawyers and surveyors. The difficulty of getting information was another one. That is really how eLandjamaica came out in that you can access it on a computer, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year at your leisure, from your home and print your title—a copy of a title if needs be. Yes, the difficulty of getting information was one.*

*Remember that government, all government, we operate on what we call the Official Secrets Act. So government offices are accustomed to being very tight with information. They don't really know what to do. But with the opening of things like to information, it has opened it up a little bit more. With eLand, you can't search by name. So you can't put in Elizabeth Stair's name and see all the properties I own. Sometimes people quarrel about that but they can get anything else out of the computer.*

---

*The other thing that they quarreled about was when the things come into the office—they don't know when they're going to get it back so we put in place a program which allows them to query how long their documents will take, the estimated time in the agency. We have done other things. There was a very high rejection rate, especially at the land titles division for documents. What we have done is put in place some forms and put extensive information, online, on our website, so that if you wanted to do for example a notation of death on your title, if you went on to the website and looked for the information on the titles, it would tell you how to do it. It would tell you what we require.*

*So along with the forms and along with those notes, or that information, we have found that the rejection rate has gone down, has reduced drastically.*

GAINER: In that initial period when you and your team were kind of formalizing all this and the business plan how did you decide—what would be the first priorities of things to implement and what would be the targets?

STAIR: *It actually went back to what were the core functions of every division because the core functions are basically set out in the law. So land titles are supposed to do this; this is what the law says. Land valuation is supposed to do X. Estate management is supposed to do Y, Surveys is supposed to do Z. We brought all those together. We used it in our business plan as well. So we treated those with priority because we know that those are the things that the customers wanted. Those would be what we would call our key performance indicators. That is what is in our corporate plan.*

*We set the turnaround times. We looked generally at what the turnaround time was and then in speaking to the directors we said, "OK how can we get these turnaround times down?" Everybody had input into it. I didn't just say to them: "I want 48 hours on this." They had to say to me, "I can do it in five days instead of fifteen."*

*Why can you do it in five days? How can you do it in five days? If I get computerization on this, if I get ABC, I will be able to do it in five days. If I don't get it, it will have to be fifteen days. So in the interim we started and over the years, we might have started at fifteen and we went down to ten and we went down to eight and we took it down slowly as we implemented different things, and computerization was the main thing that helped us and the training of persons in the area.*

GAINER: The technology is one thing we're quite interested in. How did you decide what kinds of functions you needed to computerize and what sort of software you would need?

STAIR: *Well, we had the help of the consultants on that. Of course the persons in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) division at the time were excellent. They were able to talk us through what was available out there. So if you said you wanted to do something, they were able to say okay, this is one option you could use. We were well assisted by the consultants and the staff at the time, the ICT staff at the time. That was probably the biggest thing because we had persons in the agency who had never touched a computer. So that is why we had to do extensive computer training.*

*That phasing in of the turnaround time, over the past fifteen years, is not something that is going to take place in a year. You really have to give things a*

---

*chance to be phased in properly. But I think the basic thing—it was the technology. Remember that the consultants who came to us as well, they were aware of, for example, what Teranet had and what New Brunswick had. So they were able to give advice as to what we could look at as an option.*

GAINER: Were there certain things that you had to customize to be particular to the way things were done here in Jamaica?

STAIR: *We did. We set up a steering committee with members of all the divisions and we created our land registration system which is what Peter Rabley had started working with us on. So Peter Rabley was a big deal for us in those days because of course he had that extensive land administration experience.*

*We set up the steering committee and we went through—a project committee I should say. We created our land registration system, which is really the backbone of the land titles division. Of course they were primary because that is where the revenue comes from—where the main earnings come from. So that was important for us.*

GAINER: What would be the interaction between that project committee and people like Peter Rabley, like the software design people?

STAIR: *It was an everyday matter for many years. They had staff who sat with us daily and worked on that project for probably about two years.*

GAINER: One of the things that we're interested in for this whole series is the interaction between technology and improving procedures. You can't just—

STAIR: *It had computerized—versus manual—right.*

GAINER: You have to change the way that steps work.

STAIR: *There were a lot of business process reviews going on; you are very correct. In all the divisions you had to do business process reviews. You had to find—yes, you used to do it this way. Why did you do it this way? What if you cut out a step? I think that's maybe what brought our turnaround times down because sometimes the steps were laborious and unnecessary. All the directors were charged with looking at business processes in their divisions dealing with the core functions to see if there was an easier way to do it. The land titles and land registration system that was created, it created a whole new business process, a new way of doing things and cutting out certain steps to get there.*

*One of the big things we had though is security.*

GAINER: Yes, also very important.

STAIR: *We recognized that security was an issue in the land titles division especially. So we just had to find our way around it. So the land registration system again was one way because now things are computerized. So we were scanning documents coming in and scanning documents going out. I don't think we scan coming in any more because sometimes it adds too much, but we certainly scan going out so we can recreate documents if necessary.*

GAINER: I read that there were a number of cases early on of people manipulating titles. How did you identify those problems because often it is hard to do?

- STAIR: *They were identified when somebody comes to you and says—they have a copy of their title and say, “This is not my title” or “This is not my name” or whatever, or “It has been transferred to somebody else.” It has to be really pointed out to you; you wouldn’t know. We had incidents of pages being torn out of the big volumes or when we went to loose-leaf titles,—the title went missing or people would create a title outside of the organization. So when somebody brought the problem to you, you realized that there was a problem here. So now we have, for example, certain security paper that you can see certain features when you use a particular light, a UV (ultraviolet) light. It is a little bit harder for them to do it now, but we still have fraud cases because persons might leave their title around the place. For example, I have a title and I leave it around the place and maybe a relative finds it and does something with it. That is not something that the titles office can stop. What we can stop is someone creating their own title because our titles have these particular security features. If a title is lost for example, we should be able to recreate it from the documents that we now have in office because it is all computerized.*
- GAINER: Those were the main problems you would encounter—people making changes on titles or people transferring it to somebody else without it going through the proper process and without the person who owned it being aware.
- STAIR: *Right.*
- GAINER: Did you figure out what the scope of this problem was at the beginning?
- STAIR: *We knew it was huge. We actually stopped short of doing a full security consultancy on it because that was recommended.*
- GAINER: Why was that?
- STAIR: *It could have been due to money, the cost of doing it. I think we actually started and we identified but I don’t think we went all the way with it.*
- GAINER: During that process can you estimate about how many people were disciplined in some way—?
- STAIR: *Some people voluntarily chose to go.*
- GAINER: I read I think there were a handful of prosecutions in court maybe—or maybe that was earlier—but that wasn’t really the approach taken then?
- STAIR: *No, no. But you know that if somebody deals with your title fraudulently, you have the right as the landowner to take them to court. I didn’t prosecute anybody—no. The agency didn’t prosecute anybody. Any prosecutions would have been privately done.*
- GAINER: It was more that people knew that there was—.
- STAIR: *When they brought it to our attention, we said, “Well, that’s not a title. You have to go and find the person who gave you that bogus title and deal with them.”*
- GAINER: But when you would find out that these things were happening, basically the disciplinary approach was kind of—we know that this is going on.

---

**STAIR:** *Sometimes it is hard to prove. What we did was we made our storerooms—where we stored the titles more secure. You must have a pass, a card to permit your entry. So we can know who goes in and who goes out because in those early days of course the rooms were just open so anybody could have gone in there. It would have been hard to say it was Maya who did it. You wouldn't have been able to know. So we tightened up on the security of those documents. They were able to access original documents in our search area. We no longer allowed them to access the original documents; they can view it on the screen.*

**GAINER:** So it was mostly that there were a lot of preventative steps put in place.

**STAIR:** *Yes, preventative steps were put in place and the security paper, etcetera.*

**GAINER:** Then if people who had been sort of making money on the side from fraud in the past saw that coming in they would know.

**STAIR:** *Yes, they would know. It would be very difficult for them to do it.*

**GAINER:** I was also interested in the agency as a service delivery agency. It seems like it is in parallel as the NLA's establishment was also the LAMP (Land Administration and Management Project) program, and that is a separate thing.

**STAIR:** *That is.*

**GAINER:** But the agency processes the titles.

**STAIR:** *All the titles for everybody.*

**GAINER:** The people who were getting them under that program come to get.

**STAIR:** Yes.

**GAINER:** Are there special considerations for people who are doing sort of a first registration or are maybe dealing with family land and those kinds of things that seem to have been challenges for the LAMP program?

**STAIR:** *One of the challenges for the LAMP program I think it is proving root of title, meaning you said you owned this land, what is the proof that you own it? How did you get it etcetera, etcetera? Another problem seems to be the ability of the persons to pay for the service. I think they are trying to address both of them. I know that the ministry is trying to put in place some legislation to assist with root of title, but I'm not sure how far that has gotten.*

*The LAMP has special provisions that allow—when you want to subdivide land, you go through the Local Improvements Act, which is applying to the parish council for subdivision approval. LAMP cuts across that so that you can actually get what is called a Section 5n waiver and proceed for the titles. So it is an easier process.*

*But let LAMP talk to you a little bit more about that. They deal mainly with private lands. They do some government properties in terms of sugar companies and others where they want the housing for their workers. Once they do that legal work it comes into the NLA Land Titles Division for processing of the title. In the corporate legal section, we have land settlements where government sold land to*

---

*people years ago and we need to give them titles. So we use the provisions of LAMP in order to speed up the titling process as well. So the corporate legal director can talk to you about that one. Generally, Land Titles Division only deals with the processing of the documents after all the legal work has been done.*

GAINER: So that you don't really see those issues coming in so much; everything has to be prepared.

STAIR: Yes.

GAINER: Once it gets to—

STAIR: *When it gets in our office, we have referees of titles who can say, "This doesn't meet the test for root of title." So they can reject the application.*

GAINER: Because there are still multiple agencies or institutions that are dealing with land issues, even though NLA is sort of the primary one and deals with all the services have there ever been challenges in terms of managing the division of responsibilities or the relationships between the agency, ministry, LAMP and the private sector as well?

STAIR: *I don't think so. We know our function and we just stick to our functions. There are other agencies dealing with land. The ministry of course sets policy. They monitor the performance of the agency.*

GAINER: If there is some sort of disagreement about policy that is going to affect the NLA's work, how do you work that out with the ministry and have a conversation with them about what could be proposed?

STAIR: *We have to have the conversation with them. In the end, they will decide whether or not but we just have to have the conversation with them and tell them our concerns.*

STAIR: *We would normally bring it up at our regular meetings; the ministry has regular meetings with the agencies, monthly. So if there is a particular problem, I can bring it up there. I can also address the minister directly but usually I just bring it up there because I don't want to be running to the minister with problems.*

GAINER: What have been unexpected challenges or situations that have come up during the last fifteen or so years where you've had to adapt or make a change in response to something that you didn't see coming?

STAIR: *I can't think of any now. What I should mention is that we have won several customer service prizes over the years as well so we know we're doing something good. The government has a customer service competition every two years, and I think we have won twice—once or twice..*

GAINER: What do you think in retrospect maybe were areas where things could have been done better early on? Knowing what you know now with the experience that you've had?

STAIR: *In retrospect, if I had to do it again, we'd probably do it the same way. We might have been the only one to interview persons for every single post. It was not popular with the staff, but I think it worked out the best for us. What we wanted was for people to realize was that it was not business as usual; this was a major*

---

*change. You had to make a major commitment. I don't think I would have done it any other way.*

GAINER: That seems like it has come up several times. It seems like it was really difficult but one of the key success factors. Were there other things you think that the agency did or chose to prioritize early on that really were critical?

STAIR: *It was the technological changes and the business process reviews. We constantly—even now—we constantly do business process reviews because there are other things that we want to take into our digital environment. So it is not a matter of OK, you have reached here, you are doing well, you can stop. You always have to be reviewing, and I think the hardest part for us now is that, because we have to depend solely on our earnings, some technological changes that we want to do, it takes a little longer to do it.*

GAINER: What kinds of improvements are you still looking at now?

STAIR: *In our survey area, we're trying to put in some new software that will allow us to reduce turnaround times more and we are also looking at compiling a cadastral map. The new software will help us to get to that position a little bit quicker. It is a very long process, but it will help. But mainly, every time we look at the business process review, we really look at it because we want to shave time off of the turnaround times. We recognize that time costs money. We are very cognizant of that. We are always trying to find new ways of doing things, easier ways of doing things, quicker ways of doing things.*

*Training our staff is key. We have a performance indicator that measures how much staff—we seek to train at least 50% of the staff every year in something, whether it is supervisory management, whether it is project management or it is updating them on new legal issues, etcetera. We try to keep the staff, and the ICT staff of course, at a level where they can respond easily to changes in our environment. We really have to do that. That is what I would say. Maybe other directors would come up with other things. They might see that there could have been another way or we are still having certain challenges. If we had more money, we could do more things, but of course that is always everybody's cry.*

GAINER: I know the NLA has hosted visitors from other countries—.

STAIR: *Lots.*

GAINER: It has been an example for people around the world who are looking at this model.

STAIR: *Yes.*

GAINER: What kinds of advice do you offer to those people, to maybe someone who is about to become the CEO of a new agency somewhere else?

STAIR: *When you're trying to do what we did, you have to look at what is in existence and try to see how you can move it into the future. You can't just throw it all out; you must do those business process reviews. You have to know what the agency is about, what it is seeking to do, and where you want to take it. A lot of times you don't know where you want to take it. That is why it is good to do case studies and to do visits.*

---

*We actually did some visits to Teranet and New Brunswick. Sometimes you can't conceptualize what it is you want. So those case studies and those visits help you to see things from a different viewpoint and make you say, "Oh, I can do that too. With a little bit of tweaking I can go there too." I think that is important. Unless you have done this before, you don't know what to look for; you really don't know what to look for. You don't know what you're getting into. You have to make sure that the staff is prepared to go where you are going.*

*You have to prepare the staff as you can. You can't do all the work by yourself. You have to find a way to make the staff buy in to the process.*

GAINER: For somebody who is facing that challenge, what would be the one or two things you would recommend?

STAIR: *Sometimes people get thrown into a situation and they don't know what is coming. You have to have a good management team. You have to select that management team to help you in the process; you cannot do it alone. So the first thing to do is select your management team, brainstorm, and then take it from there. That is basically what we did. We set the management team first and then we did the other things; that brainstorming was good.*

GAINER: I think we can leave it there for now. Thank you so much.

STAIR: *You're very welcome.*