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SCHALKWYK: OK. Today is the 23rd of November 2008. I am with Mr. Rajani at the SNV compound in Dar es Salaam. All right. Before we start talking about civil service reform in Tanzania, can I ask that you just describe your current position and what you do now in Dar es Salaam?

RAJANI: *I'm setting up a new initiative, which is called Twaweza. Twaweza is Swahili for "we can make it happen." It's a bold initiative. It seeks to have information made accessible to millions of people in East Africa; "information for everyone" is our slogan. And the idea is that the information— if we expand the pathways through which people can get information and transmit their information, that it'll enhance a sense of agency. And that in turn over the long term will lead to better service delivery outcomes. So it's a ten-year initiative, multidonor-supported, and about to get going.*

SCHALKWYK: And so to move on to the civil service reforms, do you see the civil service reforms as linked to this project?

RAJANI: *I think there are similarities in the aims in that if you look at both the public sector reforms as well as the local government reforms, because at the national level it's done through the public sector, and the others through the local government, both of them aim to make government more responsive to people. Both of them seek to promote greater transparency and openness and greater accountability. So in that sense they're similar. You could say that the civil sector reforms are supply-driven. The work I'm doing is demand-driven. And our claim is that one of the reasons the civil service reforms have not had much traction, have not done as well in our view, is because the demand element has been missing. So they've been hanging in the air so to speak. And we think that the demand side work can help animate the civil sector reforms to work.*

SCHALKWYK: With the public sector reforms, what do you think the main motivations behind the reforms were? You describe them as being supply-driven.

RAJANI: *Well, they're supply-driven in that they come from the top. They come from the government and donors. And like with everything in life there is not one pure motive or driver. I think there are some, a few, progressive elements in government who wish to make the government work better and be more responsive. But that's a small part of it. I think also this is a fad. Many countries do this. This is a thing you do now if you are a progressive country. These are the basic requirements if you want to get donor aid. So that's another reason why these are happening. Certainly there's been a heavy donor hand in defining them, in shaping them, in driving them, in making them happen. I don't think— if no donor had in any way pushed or cajoled the Tanzanian government to do this, I doubt whether we would have had the public sector reform in the way that we see it. There might have been some other things, but not the way we see it. So I think there is that combination of factors.*

I think the bigger question in my view, or the more pertinent question, is not so much why they started but what explains their implementation: you know, to what extent are they working, to what extent are some difficult choices being made, to what extent is the culture of public sector – which has been very authoritarian, very bureaucratic, very top-down, very unresponsive – to what extent is that changing. And in my view in practice not much has changed because the ownership of the reforms has been very limited. And it's not on – the key people who matter, it's not on their top agenda to make them work.

SCHALKWYK: Who was involved in the planning of the reforms? And do you think any particular groups were left out?

RAJANI: *There are a bunch of people at the civil service, reform people— and even there, really, it's a small group of people. Certainly the World Bank has been involved in a heavy way, and a few other donors. So they have been driving it.*

You need to have a much better understanding of communication. You need to have a much better understanding of the drivers of change. Governments respond to public pressure, not to stakeholder input in workshops. So you can't blame the people running the reforms for not having made space for stakeholders. My point is that that's not how change happens. It's not about stakeholders sitting around a table. It's about a political project that needs to respond to the demands of the public. And that hasn't happened.

SCHALKWYK: What sort of changes do you think they have been able to achieve? And where do you think they still need to make improvements?

RAJANI: *I think there are a number of technocratic changes. We have for example client service charters. We have communication officers. Though this is technically part I think of a different reform. But it's linked. So in a sense we have the paraphernalia of reform. And there are principles, there are some nice booklets that I have seen, I have seen a booklet I think on ethics. They say nice things. Important things.*

But what matters is where the rubber hits the road, and particularly what interests me the most is the interface between the ordinary citizen and the bureaucracy. So if I'm a 50-year-old woman in Dar es Salaam, or a 50-year-old woman in a village, and I'm trying to go to somebody to figure out about my land and I'm trying to get some help, what happens? How do the public sector reforms help me deal with my issue, practically?

And at that point it seems that these booklets and the client service charters mean nothing. I think if you were to go on the street now in the capital city, let alone in the villages, and ask people, "client service charter" – even in Swahili it's not well known – "is it a real document? Is it an organic document? Does it have any public resonance?" It doesn't. And again I think it's a combination of— at the end of the day it's not clear to me how many people in government see this as important to them.

For public sector reforms to work, it needs to be a countrywide political exercise with clear leadership, political leadership and cultural leadership. Instead of that it's been treated as a 'development project'. One project, among the hundreds of projects that the government does, and in that sense it's failed to change the culture of the country.

And it's also been very poor in its communications thinking. And that is why its spread is limited. I'll give you one example. In the previous organization that I worked with called HakiElimu, we did an advert, a one-minute advert on Client Service Charters on television and on radio. And while this is self-serving, if you were to ask people about client service charters, I bet the few who would know about them would know about them from that advert, because it was very funny, it was poignant, it was done as an advert through a medium that reaches people, radio and television. Whereas what the government seems to do is to hold these workshops.

So I think both the political leadership has been missing as an overall thing but also the communications strategy has been faulty, devoid of imagination.

SCHALKWYK: OK. So how do you think a government would go about developing a demand-driven reform process in a more coherent and successful way?

RAJANI: *Well, you're assuming first that it wants to. That's an assumption. It's not clear to me that it wants to make the reforms. But it's not as if it doesn't want to, at all. It's mixed. I think there are elements in government that want this to work. I think there are moments when the president really wishes that this would work. The Chief Secretary [in the Office of the President] Mr. [Philemon] Luhanjo has given his time and shown up at critical moments to lend his support toward this. So clearly it's not as if the government doesn't want it at all. There are some people, for part of the time, want it.*

But it doesn't seem to add up to a critical mass. And I'm not sure they want it to add up to a critical mass. Because the implications of a truly widespread demand-driven public sector reform or local government reform is quite scary, for it changes a lot of things. Once you have questions being asked you can't limit those questions. The person who asks you about "how can I get a (certificate) title deed for my land?" might also then go on to say, "how come that huge piece of land was given to so-and-so?" So it's a slippery slope and I'm not sure whether government wants to go there.

What is ironic and interesting I think is that if you step back from these reforms and ask yourself what does Tanzania look like today for people who have been living here or people who know Tanzania well, one clear difference is that today as compared to even five years ago there is a great deal of agitation in the country. We have huge numbers of strikes. There have been about ten different strikes just in the last month. This is unprecedented for Tanzania. The media is open and discussing issues and naming issues and unearthing issues in a way that is unprecedented. So the irony is that some of the aims – only some, but some of the aims of the public sector reform around transparency and accountability – have come about not as a result of the reforms but as a result of these other forces around media, around citizen awareness, which have egged the parliament, despite its dominance of the ruling party, to play a different role. So it is those pressures, which are much more real and organic and widespread, that I think are in a way forcing government to change, rather than the formal reforms themselves.

If I was a person in government or if I was a person interested in the reforms, it should be a lesson for me. I think one should ask themselves "why is it that, for instance, the media has been able to play such a bigger role, so quickly, and achieve so much more than we have despite our years and the millions of dollars we've spent on the reforms." I think there are some lessons there around how politics work, how power works, how communication works that the people doing the reforms should heed.

SCHALKWYK: I've heard a lot about the success of the executive agencies. What is the feeling amongst Tanzanians about them?

RAJANI: *Well, I think you should ask more Tanzanians about that. I think it's like a glass half full, half empty. Take the public procurement regulatory authority. The fact that it's there is a good sign. The fact that they released reports last year on their audits that were quite critical, showed things were in a mess, I think is a good sign. The fact that its existence enables certain issues to be put on the table I*

think is a good sign. The Tanzania Revenue Authority has done relatively well, though again it depends what your benchmark is. If your benchmark is how things used to be certainly TRA has done much better. If your benchmark is what it could be, compared to what problems still continue to persist, then I think there's still a lot more to be done, and it could have certainly done better than it's doing right now. So I think it's a mixed record. I think it's a glass half full, half empty.

One critical question, however, is that, does the public view these executive agencies as critical bodies that serve the public interest? And that's really important. I think the short answer is no. I think some of it is simply because, by their nature, they can be somewhat technical, they can be somewhat removed from people. You know, you don't expect in the United States that Joe Public knows about every executive agency, and that's OK. But I think some of it also has to do with the fact that they have tended to overtechnocratize themselves. They've tended not to position themselves in a manner that actively responds to the critical issues of the day. So for example – this is an obvious example, maybe an easy example, but – the major scandals that have happened around the energy Richmond procurement, are ones in which the agencies of the state have seemed to be irrelevant. They don't have anything to say. They haven't managed to engage. And then on the other hand, if you look at the micro level— I talk to colleagues who are small, medium level businesspeople. And they complain often about “if you want to win a tender the only way you can do it is you have to give a bribe. If I'm selling computers, unless I give 10%, 15% commission to the guy who's a procurement officer, it's not going to work.” And when I say to them “but why don't you complain, why don't you go to complain— they just laugh at you. They say That's not how the way – they're not going to help me, that's not how it's going to work. So it seems to me that in practice these technocratic agencies have not managed to seize the problem. They might have improved it, they might point things out, but they have not solved some of the critical problems that remain.

SCHALKWYK: A number of people who I've spoken to just around as I've been in Tanzania have suggested that Tanzanians are dissatisfied with the current government. Is the goal of the public sector reform program – are those parts of the dissatisfaction amongst Tanzanians? Or are they unhappy for other reasons? And the PSRP [Public Service Reform Program] is just another thing altogether?

RAJANI: *I don't think people will say to you they're unhappy with PSRP. People aren't happy with the government. The question is well, if PSRP was effective it would help.*

SCHALKWYK: Yeah. That's getting to my question.

RAJANI: *Right. If the PSRP was effective, it would have provided a vehicle, a channel for people to have greater confidence in their government and feel there is an effective means.*

It's difficult though because right now it's reached a point where the level of confidence is so low and the level of distrust in government is so high that it's a little bit too late. So, even when government does somewhat reasonable things, it doesn't seem to enjoy legitimacy. Take for instance the strike by the teachers. I don't know the inside details but it's a sector I follow closely. When I was looking at the government explanations they seemed to me at least partly credible, that they are saying, “Before we make these payments, things have to be verified.” When they say that some of the claims made are not documented I

think that sounds plausible to me. But the point is that they have waited so long to resolve these things, the machinery that has existed has been so weak, the fact that the mechanisms of responsiveness have been so limited – in other words the bureaucracy has continued to be the bureaucracy – that it doesn't matter. The teachers lost faith. The government has lost credibility. So that even when they say reasonable things now people don't believe them.

SCHALKWYK: How well do you think these reform programs would endure under a changed leadership?

RAJANI: *Depends what kind of new leadership.*

SCHALKWYK: That's another question. Is a new political leadership likely to take the reforms more seriously? Do you think it's a lack of the current leadership taking them seriously?

RAJANI: *I think there are two answers. One is that leadership is absolutely essential. I think there is a mixed level of leadership right now but it's not adequate. But they have their hands full. They have a lot to do. Government capacity is limited. It's not like— you know, people are fighting to be part of the Obama administration are capable people. It's not like you have something similar here. So it's not easy. So I'm saying, number one, the leadership is inadequate at the moment. But, I sympathize with that at one level as well; I don't think it's easy to pull off. My second point is that any leadership – you know, [Former President Julius] Nyerere used to say, "you get the leaders you deserve." So at the end of the day, any kind of leadership will be responding to public pressure. I think the ways in which the public sector reforms will work is when ordinary citizens across this country are aware, are awake, they have a level of confidence, they know their rights, they know their budgets, they know what they should do, and are actively engaged, not just in a complaining mode, not demanding the moon, not expecting things to change overnight, but in a very pragmatic way focused on "we know ABC is possible, this is what we can do, this is what you need to do." When that sort of climate exists, the government will need to respond. And the leadership will need to get its act together. So in the long term that's what you need, and that's why my friends and my colleagues and myself are working on an initiative that in a sense puts that bottom-up pressure.*

At best progressive governments can try to make some space, make some policies, make some laws. But for the rubber to hit the road you need that citizen engagement, and at the moment that's been missing, though the signs are promising of it increasing. The problem is that right now there's a lot of citizen anger, there's a lot of citizen frustration. That can go in two directions. It can go into a somewhat unproductive direction of people complaining, people in a sense not being reasonable about this and not knowing where to channel it. And that leads to a stalemate where either people's aspirations go down or government chooses to come down hard and beat down on people's heads. You don't make much progress that way. Or it can go in the direction where it's more productive where people are finding ways in which to engage and to exert pressure on government and government is choosing to respond.

I think depending on both civil society and depending on government, if both sides do the right moves it can go in the second direction. And I hope it does that rather than going first. Kenya, for example. What happened in Kenya post-elections is a sign of things not working until people felt the only thing that worked is a certain kind of violence. I hope we don't get to that position ten years from now.

SCHALKWYK: I was speaking to people both in the donor community and in government. They've said that the way donors have interacted with the Tanzanian government has tried to leave a lot of space for the government itself to drive the reforms and to plan the reforms. What sort of influence do you think the donors have had in setting the priorities and helping with implementation in Tanzania?

RAJANI: *It's interesting you say that. I don't think donors are behaving in a way where they come with their preset agenda and tell the government to sign the dotted line and implement it. But it's not as if on the government side you have a clear sense of leadership with a clear program, where they know what they want to do and they do it. So you have a vacuum of leadership there. When the vacuum of leadership occurs but you still want to get things done, you still want to report that things are moving and you quickly fill that up with technical assistance. So there are a number of technical advisors who come in. You send people on missions abroad to learn. You bring in consultants. And they start filling in the spaces. And that's where, in a sense, you win the battle but you lose the war. Because the program is not then owned or government-driven, it's done by a bunch of consultants. And very busy people in government, when they get a chance to look at it, say yes.*

I think the donors are in a bit of a bind when you don't have a clear leadership on the other side. I think in other countries such as Rwanda for example, it may be different. Because when you deal with the Rwandan government now what you're told is they have a clear idea of what they want. And so then they can tell donors "this is what we want." And they're in a sense in the driving seat. I think in Tanzania that's not so much the case.

SCHALKWYK: All right, I don't want to take up too much of your time. So is there anything else that you'd like to add? I suppose one other question I have is how much work is being done on building the capacity of government to be able to carry out these reforms. Or is the question premature before there's political support?

RAJANI: *Yes, yes to both. Meaning there's a whole bunch of initiatives to build capacity. But I think the whole concept of capacity building is problematic. Nine out of ten times the lack of capacity is an institutional incentives issue, not a technical issue. The reason Tanzanians in leadership positions, in senior positions don't do what they need to do is not because they lack some skill, because they need some training or they – it's because the incentives are aligned in such a manner that it doesn't pay for you to do what you need to. It doesn't pay for you to take initiative, to be creative, to take charge, to change things.*

Incentives are aligned that you just keep doing more of the same, keep a low profile, don't rock the boat, let's keep things going. And that when it comes to reforms what you do is call a workshop. It's ironic that the prime minister in this past week quite correctly has rallied out against having more workshops as being a waste of time, using a lot of money. But I think if there was a ranking done of which agency uses most of its money on workshops, I would not be surprised if president's office, public service management comes up on top for spending its largest percentage of its money on workshops.

So capacity building is about aligning the incentives in the right way. That requires leadership. That requires both strategic thinking and leadership. Once you do that things fall into place. And where the technical aspects are needed then they can come in. If I'm really motivated to do my job and I lack some skill, I'll figure it out. I'll take the course. I'll read a book. I'll go talk to somebody who

can help me figure out – I'll feel by heck, I need to figure it out and I need to do this. So what comes first is the realigning of incentives. The rest can come later. In Tanzania we're doing it the other way around. So I think capacity building is a waste of time. And so I would not call for more capacity building. Unfortunately that's what donors keep throwing because there's an unholy alliance here between the donors and the government that when things don't work, what's the safe thing to do?, do more capacity-building, more workshops.

That leads me to your question. When you called me to ask for this interview I think I heard you characterize these reforms as largely successful. And many people perhaps in government and donors will characterize them as successful. My question is, who defines success? What level of accountability is there for these reforms? How do we know that the millions of dollars that we're spending, and more importantly the time of senior civil servants that we're spending, is actually helping, rather than a game that we play in order to make things look good and keep the money going?

My point is that in development, in the area of public sector reform but more generally as well, what we lack is robust evaluation, independent evaluation. Evaluation is typically done by our friends. Again, the incentive is for them to say the right things and to say the nice things. A typical evaluation will say: "there are a few problems, this and this needs to be improved, but on the whole things are moving in the right direction." That's— any typical evaluation would say, because that's how the game is set up. You don't have objective criteria. You don't have a level of transparency and independence. You don't have a way of checking some of the claims that are being made.

The indicators that are used tend to be more process and internal outputs. Such-and-such a report produced, and this assessment done. What really matters is, what is that ordinary citizen feeling? What difference is she experiencing? That's what matters. And I think for all reforms, including public sector reforms, what we could do with is a truly independent set of evaluations which are not run by the government or the donors, where the evaluators don't have to worry about the consequences of what they say. Because if they have to worry about the consequences of what they say, oh, will this mean the donor cuts funding?, will this mean that the government gets angry?, they will then have to censor themselves. What we need is to have a truly honest truly independent set of evaluations. Then the government and the donors can say "we've had a good hard look in the mirror. This is what we're finding. Now what the heck do we do if you want to move forward?"

In short I'm saying we need more honesty. I don't think we have that in the development game, in the public sector reforms or in development as a whole, because at the end of the day, both the government and the donors need things to look good. The donors need to disperse. For the officers involved, their personal incentives are aligned in such a way that, to get your promotion and so forth, you need to look like you ran a successful project. It doesn't look good to report back home that this thing I've been working on for the last three years has been spinning in circles. Government certainly needs it to look good. And those are the two who are essentially running the show now. So there's a complete conflict of interest. I think we need to break that cycle, if we are serious, for the sake of the citizens of this country.

SCHALKWYK: Do you think major political change in Tanzania could do that?

RAJANI: *Well, how will the major political change come about? It's a little of a chicken and egg thing. I think –*

SCHALKWYK: Even just a new government elected at the next elections.

RAJANI: *In all likelihood the new government is going to be a CCM [Chama Cha Mapinduzi] government. There was incredible hope when this government came in. The President won with a landslide, there was no rigging needed. Governments – I don't think I would put my faith in a new government. Look at the situation again in Kenya now. OK, so the violence has ended, but what has really changed in terms of people's lives? Unless there's a major split within CCM so that a splinter perhaps teams up with one of the opposition parties, that could bring a change in the sense that there would be a real opposition that keeps the government on its toes. I guess my point is that I don't think I'm putting my faith in some enlightened new leadership coming at the next election. One, it's unlikely, and second, that's not how change really will happen. What I am more hopeful about is a greater level of pressure that holds the executive in check, that forces, that sharpens the perspective of the executive in its need to deliver. One way in which that can happen is for the opposition to be stronger, whoever is the opposition, regardless of who is in power. Another way in which that happens is the greater public pressure that I mentioned. Here the freedom of the press is absolutely essential. The government has, in recent years, been trying – there was last year a kind of bill, a draft bill, that had it gone through it would have muzzled the press significantly. There's a new bill being worked on right now, there have been actions against the press. I think those sorts of things are really important and one should look for. Ironically I don't see anything in the public sector reforms that speaks about an open press, when I think that is perhaps the most important institution in getting the public sector reforms to work.*

SCHALKWYK: OK. Thank you very much.

RAJANI: *Thank you, Andrew.*