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MAJEED: This is Rushda Majeed on the 28th of June 2011. I am with Mr. Iqbal Mahmood who is the Secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration. We are speaking about the Bangladeshi Civil Service and, more specifically, the MATT 2 project, or the managing at the top program that was started in 2006. Mr. Mahmood, if you could start by talking a little bit about your own experience within civil service and the kinds of positions that brought you to your current position.

MAHMOOD: *Well, thank you very much. In fact, I have put in 31 years of service in the Bangladesh civil service. I started my career in 1981 as an Assistant Commissioner. I joined the service and then had a number of positions at the street level within the bureaucracy, as well as in city government, business corporations, local government, district administration and then in the central secretariat. So I have had a varied experience. That is how I came here and ended up as Secretary now. I still have one and a half years to go before I retire.*

MAJEED: Mr. Mahmood, can you speak a little bit about your own involvement with the MATT 2 project? I believe that you have gone through the training yourself?

MAHMOOD: *Yes, possibly, if I can remember. I joined the MATT 2 program in 2006 or sometime near then. I was in the first batch, so I actually had no idea about what MATT was, what it was supposed to do and what was to be done, etc. All of a sudden I was put in the PATC (Public Administration Training Centre), and I just enjoyed the program.*

MAJEED: So what were some of the things that you learned through the program? How did it help you, if it did, in terms of doing your job better? [END of file one]

MAHMOOD: *—that is how I went there. The question is what I have learned.*

MAJEED: Right, what was the purpose of MATT 2, how did it help you or others?

MAHMOOD: *The purpose of MATT 2 is creating a critical mass of reform-minded civil servants—at least in the case of those who are at the managerial positions. When I went and I joined the MATT 2 program, I actually didn't know that. All of a sudden we were just put together in a basket, in a room, and told nothing. You discuss, you try to find your "something". What it was, we didn't know. That is how we started.*

So we started. There were teams, say we were in five-member teams, we were discussing a lot of things we did not know much about. But of course, we began discussing our problems. What were the problems of civil service? How could we solve them better? Because, as you know, there is a colonial history in this country. Bureaucracy is very silo-like; there is compartmentalization, and a kind of contest between ministries, between officials. There is a high contest when it comes to resource allocation etc, but there is no way, the bureaucracy is designed such in this country that I am the one who has to make the maximum share of the budget, so I got to see the way egos work in the ministries and also at the individual level. That is the kind of mindset that you have.

I don't feel embarrassed in telling you that this is a very unacceptable situation in the country, where a bureaucrat thinks that people will come to me for the service they need. But it should be the other way around. I should go to the people. We should be for the people.

So what happened? We were discussing and discussing and so we identified some problems in the civil service. We also identified some of the problems in the delivery of services. Problems related to women, entrepreneurs, female civil servants—a large number of problems. So we were struggling to figure out what the prevailing problems were. And at one point in time, we came up with some specific problems. Then for a day, or two, we were discussing the problems.

After that, the dialogue facilitator came in, and he said, “Then what do you do with these problems? That is how MATT 2 started for me. Then finally, we picked up one problem and tried to develop alternatives to the situation that would help solve the problem. We have had—if I can remember very well, a kind of feasibility study that came up with the alternatives, a feasibility study focusing on what we could do to solve the problem.

MAJEED: This was just your team had the feasibility—?

MAHMOOD: *Yes, we had the feasibility study and then we figured out a lot of alternatives. We talked with people, some of the stakeholders, and interviewed them and tried to understand what the feelings about the problem that we had defined were. I remember, we identified the problem of lactating mothers, those who were working in the office. Lactation has been linked with the nutrition of the baby and the right of the baby to have the mother’s milk and also the establishment of a psychological linkage with the baby. You cannot really put in all of your attention at work when you have a lactating baby outside, at home. You cannot really put all of your efforts in following the job description.*

MAJEED: Right.

MAHMOOD: *So we decided to try and solve this problem. A solution might mark an output of productivity increase at the office. That is what, in simple terms I am saying that—basically, we identified the problem, we ourselves developed alternatives and started feasibility studies. We picked up the project and we conceived the project; we designed the project and we came up with the implementation phase of what was to be done. We analyzed the stakeholders and did all sort of analyses etc.*

During this process, I learned to change my mindset, especially on working with juniors. To speak frankly, we had—I was then a joint secretary, right? In our team, there were assistant secretaries and, I remember, a number of secretaries. Normally, this administration is hierarchical. We don’t really discuss things with junior officers, we don’t care what juniors think. We only ask juniors what they will say on paper because the administration is based on mistrust—that’s the reason we come up with the notes, you see?

MAJEED: Yes.

MAHMOOD: *We put up the notes and then, that’s the—but while there we understood that there are huge resources in the minds of the sub-workers when it comes to new ideas. So that is one of the first things I learned: it is better to talk to the juniors, they can come up with good ideas.*

Then the second thing I learned was that I could really break those kinds of barriers, the hierarchical barriers, because our aim was to achieve the target, to implement the project. To implement the project, I thought we needed to have cooperation amongst ourselves. Then we needed to discuss—we elected a

leader, we came to a consensus. The consensus-making was also a source of learning during the process. So these are some of the examples of learning.

In MATT 2, we had to come up with an individual action plan. What kind of change can you make at your workplace—this was our individual task. The other project was the group one. For example, my individual plan was that at my office, I will finish all the business that I have in a single day; I will not keep anything pending before I leave the office. That is my individual action plan, and one I still follow every day, you can ask anybody. As a secretary, once I finish my work, even if it is day time, I go home.

MAJEED: In terms of—just on that point, so after the MATT training you came back and you're working in the same environment that you had been in before the training. How different was it to continue working if MATT had changed the way you were thinking or doing things, or did you still find it—were you able to continue to think about change, or think differently, or were you kind of bogged down still by things that weren't changing?

MAHMOOD: *Not really. Of course, I remember, after the MATT program I came—actually, it's a program where you go to the program and come back to your office. Then you work and you implement the project. It is not really that you take time off and then visit the program, no. It is sort of an on-the-job program. So during that program—of course, people were a little bit skeptical—the joint secretary is going to the assistant secretary's room and discussing things and he is going with the file himself—that is the kind of mindset I did have to deal with. People were looking at me, wondering: what is he doing? Has he gone mad? Something must be wrong. This was especially true in the case of the junior staff. They were surprised. But I could disseminate some of the information and some of the learning to the subordinate staff and officials. We are all working for a single goal, for achievement, for performance, so we have to work as a team, in tandem with everyone.*

That is what I could possibly do. Then I was working in the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock— that time it was possible for me to implement my learning. The learning helped me a lot in bringing in the support of the subordinate staff and others when they saw I went to them. Usually, they used to come to me. Because, you know, this is an administration—we call it 'sala' administration; sala is a Portuguese word, it means like 'chamber.'

You sit down in a chamber, and you don't know what is happening outside. When you go out, you see that people are working or gossiping, or something of the sort. So when you go out you have an environment and people see that you are with them. That is how I built a (kind of) team and yes, I am quite happy that I could do something, I could induce some change in the mindset of my subordinates and even my senior—because I used to go to him, off and on. I thought he would accept my doing so, and he did. You see, in this country, the civil servants are quite enlightened. They are highly educated—at least the government officials—they speak good English, they are highly trained, and so on. So I saw that my seniors were accepting the way I behaved in office.

MAJEED: Would you say that this was something that came out of your experience with MATT? Do you think that others have been able to break the barriers in a similar way?

MAHMOOD: *The answer is yes and then no. Because, you see, the learning pattern is such that someone learns and implements. But someone can also learn who doesn't implement. I found people—since I deal with human resources here, I interact with people a lot. I see a lot of changes in the mindset of people working in the civil service. But of course, we still have to go a long way. There are many, many people who are not—there are very stubborn people. They do not want to be changed, they want to be traditional. They want to ensure that there is a traditional civil service.*

Therefore, we have to continue with this kind of learning, continue putting people in this kind of experiential learning, as we call it. You cannot really learn experience unless you go through the process. MATT has elevated that, that you experience the problem. You see the challenge, the problem, and try to overcome this problem by yourself. In this way, innovation is there. System reengineering is another thing you have to learn. You have to change. At the end of the day, it is the citizen's demand that you solve problems better and improve the quality of service. To do this, you have to look at a number of things: waiting time, delivery time, etc.

I am sure you are going to interview many other participants, and I'm sure many of them will come up with that kind of idea, saying that at least we are changed. Now we create an opportunity to work in a changed environment, and to work for citizens, to improve the delivery of services.

MAJEED: In terms of the projects that are implemented through MATT 2 and the particular project that you mentioned that you also implemented, how do you think they are sustained? Was yours, the one that you worked on, did it continue? How do you—?

MAHMOOD: *You see, this is quite interesting. This was a very small project. We implemented it in roughly three months, taking very little time. The project, in that sense, was very successful. We drew people participating in the project. Mothers were bringing in their babies; they contributed to establishing the (baby care) center (for lactating mothers). We call it the lactating baby center. The mothers were very interested, they contributed and they were very happy. We found that the output—and it was just very interesting, it was a busy press, you understand, (Bangladesh) Government Press. As such, you can see the productivity. I mean, take note of how many books you have been binding before this, and after this. As such, it was a piece-rate time.*

MAJEED: You can count it.

MAHMOOD: *We could see quantitative changes as well as qualitative changes, in the quality of work and the concentration level and so on. In terms of sustainability, they came up with the idea of forming a committee to take over from the project. And the project is still there, the center is still there. The interesting thing is that we could roll it out; the Prime Minister has given the order that where thirty women who were working—there should be a baby care center. Though many offices have not implemented this, some of them have. The garment factory, they have picked this up.*

So that is the way we think we have been somewhat successful, and it is sustained in that sense.

MAJEED: That is a very good example. Can you think of others that you have heard of that have been able to be replicated or sustained?

MAHMOOD: *Yes, many projects are still on, more than 300 projects have been implemented if I'm not wrong.*

MAJEED: And have all of them continued—?

MAHMOOD: *Oh no, no.*

MAJEED: Or replicated?

MAHMOOD: *Replicated, many of them.*

MAJEED: What percentage would you say?

MAHMOOD: *I think replication may be quite minimal, I'm not sure, I can't really say how much in terms of percentage, but I would say there has been minimal replication, but implementation has occurred.*

MAJEED: And continued?

MAHMOOD: *Continued. Replication is a very difficult thing. You need the resources and cooperation of other ministries and so on. But many of them are prep—though minimal, but in terms of numbers, I think it hasn't been bad. Like passport issuance service, like the reform—the broader reform came through MATT. Civil service reform, like the Civil Service Act—again, the idea came through MATT, from a (performance improvement) project. This ministry has been working for reform since we have been struggling for reforms for the last two years. This government has come with a mandate of reforms—so we saw now as the opportunity. There is a political will to reform. So we thought—we picked up—then MATT 2 came in. The project, like the performance based evaluation system (PBES) that came from MATT 2—we are going to roll out this successful project, so that every officer has to perform a job in the coming year. Normally, we don't have any performance appraisal system. The system which we do have is meaningless, it is quite subjective.*

MAJEED: The annual confidential—.

MAHMOOD: *The annual confidential report (ACR) which we are going to replace with a performance evaluation system. There is a lot of resistance, but we know that this is the demand of the citizens that public officials must serve. You know, for the survival of the bureaucracy itself—and not only here, but all over the world, the contracting out, the use of public-private partnership—all these concepts came in because of the failure of bureaucracy of the workers. We understand that we have to induce change. How to actually get this change is hard—unless you have formal planning in a particular area, you have to say what all you are going to do because you have a job description. You need to—otherwise why do you take taxpayers' money as compensation under the so-called ACR regime?*

They are very happy to go around—they have no problem as there is no accountability. But now, with the introduction of a performance evaluation system where you have to explain what you are going to do in the coming year, where there is an evaluation at the end of the year, you know what your evaluation will be because you know what you have done. It is not a lofty thing for the officials,

and so there is resistance. But there is also understanding on the part of the officials that, unless you do your job, we will not survive. The private sector will come in and take over. For your career, for your performance, and for the country, you need to change. We are struggling but we will succeed.

MAJEED: And the performance evaluation system that you said came as an idea from MATT, how did that happen? Where's the connection?

MAHMOOD: *If I recall correctly, one team picked upon the current system, saying this is rubbish, why should the report be confidential when the world is open? They came up with the idea that—because they suffer—and when you suffer, you try to solve the problem. During discussion, they came up saying that we suffer with this ACR, because the ACR is basically designed for the senior officer to catch the subordinates. As a result, 'you will follow what I say but don't follow what I do' is the sort of mindset present in the senior officials in many cases. That kind of relationship is present in boss-subordinate relationships, and people are suffering.*

So they thought if there was any performance evaluation, it should be open. Hence a boss cannot harm a junior's career. So they came up with the idea. Then, of course, we picked up the idea and then we discussed it, and we brought in foreign knowledge. We researched what was happening in other countries like India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore.

MAJEED: When was this? When did the discussion happen?

MAHMOOD: *In 2007, possibly, or around then.*

MAJEED: Then after that you were—.

MAHMOOD: *Then I was Additional Secretary in this ministry. So I actually picked up—I thought, yes, this is the right thing to do. Then we started doing it: 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, you could see how difficult it was. I took it, I consulted with all the services and some of them said okay, it's good. Some said bad, etc. Then I was transferred from there to telecommunications and then from there to communication.*

Then when I came back, two years back in this ministry, I picked up again and took it to the Prime Minister. I gave her a presentation and she agreed. I think there is a contribution, there is something for the citizens that we could do to offer better service, because there are huge cases against the bureaucracy, not only in here, but everywhere in the world. You are a student, you know how criticisms are going on, centering on the bureaucracy. They are trying to reinvent government, they are trying to build in trust in government, all these things. So there is also here—this is more true in the case of developing nations like us, bureaucracy, nepotism, stubborn, not changing, all kinds of perceptions, public perception is bad.

Possibly with this kind of performance evaluation, which is linked with many other things like placement, promotion, your training, advancement and so on. At the end, delivery of service is improved so this is quite an important thing.

MAJEED: So this year you talked to the prime minister and it was approved?

MAHMOOD: *So I went to the prime minister. She was very kind, and I convinced her—she thought this was a good thing to do to ensure better delivery of services to citizens—because the prime minister is always concerned with the citizens since she has to face the citizens. So we brought in—and we now plan to take it to the Secretaries Committee. There is a committee for administrative reform, and we need permission from the minister to put it before the committee. As a result, next time, in a week's time, we are going to put it before the Secretaries' Committee and then we'll roll it out. I think we will need six to eight months to roll it out because we need to train people. We need to train them on how to fill in, how to come up with the delivery of services and so on. Personally, I am very optimistic about rolling this out to all services.*

MAJEED: What you say about the performance evaluation system is very interesting. Related to that, one of the questions I wanted to ask was, do you feel that with MATT 2—has there been resistance to the program? Have you felt that you or other people felt any kind of resistance from the political establishment or even the public or so on in terms of perception of the program or the projects? And how have you overcome such resistance?

MAHMOOD: *Basically, there has been no resistance from the politicians because they are not really going in depth into any—they dream something, but this is a project—whenever we went to the politicians about this project, they were very supportive.*

MAJEED: For the performance evaluation—.

MAHMOOD: *No, the whole MATT 2.*

MAJEED: The whole MATT 2, yes.

MAHMOOD: *That is your question.*

MAJEED: Yes, that is my question.

MAHMOOD: *The whole MATT 2, because when we tell politicians that this project is really meant for creating a critical mass in the civil service to change the civil service, they are delighted. It has been at every time. When we have asked them to come, they have participated. So this is how I deduct that, conclude that they are always supportive—there was no resistance. But there was a negative perception in the minds of some of the people in the bureaucracy, especially the senior-level bureaucracy—the senior bureaucrats, because these brokers, they are going, they are leaving.*

MAJEED: Retiring?

MAHMOOD: *Retiring. So they don't want to really change—that is my personal view. They don't want to see some thing happen. They want to go on happily. I go and I retire happily. So I don't want—. You know that for every reform, you have to pay something; there is a payment for every reform. Those older people, they don't want to pay, they want to continue happily as they were. That is how I saw that the people—there were some people and there are some people still, who question, what is MATT 2? People are only going and wasting time; it is a waste of time. Why aren't they working in the office; they are going for training for a long—they're gone for forty-two days. These are all things they are saying. But what they are not saying is that there is a change in the mindset of many officers, a kind of cultural and behavioral change in the process.*

So the most valuable thing in MATT 2 is that you have some hands-on experience: you feel that there is a problem, you feel the need to address this problem and within the shortest possible time. This is something tangible. You also feel that we need to address the problem together. We cannot do it alone; we need to have the cooperation of others, a blending of coordination, teamwork, leadership—the kind of leadership which entails coaching, not the traditional style leadership where the people are following one person.

MAJEED: Mentoring.

MAHMOOD: *Mentoring, yes, that is the right word. So that kind of leadership style is coming in, even in the minds of mid-level bureaucrats. And I would say that that is a big change.*

MAJEED: In terms of the public and popular support, have you made—has the ministry made efforts to inform the public or at least tell the public that there is a project like this? If you do, how do you build popular support, or is that not part of the building?

MAHMOOD: *Actually, that will be done to get support of the people. Because when there is a project, a small performance improvement project, there are stakeholders who know what is happening.*

MAJEED: And the media?

MAHMOOD: *Yes, media have come up with positive criticism, positive appreciation to this—good things are happening. There are some reports that the Civil Service Act—with people saying “oh my God, what a big thing has happened”. This is a product of MATT 2. So there were a number of articles—.*

MAJEED: Positive stories?

MAHMOOD: *Some editorial on the Civil Service Act, the promotion policy, etc, that we are doing—we have not done this yet, but we have generated a strong debate in the minds of people and civil society for coming up with good ideas—at least we are trying to do something. So in that sense, MATT is (possibly) successful.*

MAJEED: So basically, what you're saying is that even if people are not aware of MATT 2, the ideas that are coming out of MATT 2 have generated strong public, at least discussion at this point. Very interesting. One more question. Based on the overall things that are happening with MATT, has your office proposed changes in procedures based on MATT 2 or some of the projects that have come out of MATT 2?

MAHMOOD: *The learning of MATT 2—in many, many cases you will even find—such as ambulance services at the rural level, primary school management committees—functions to be redefined, such as hospital management. These are the things that I found rolled out in many cases. E-governance, e-services—and when we talk about the human touch, let me tell you, corruption is a problem in our country. As you know, corruption eats 2-3% GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of this country. If we could possibly stop it we could have good delivery of services, good roads and good improvement in the standard of living of the people of this country. Through e-services we can reduce corruption. We have seen that when there are human beings in the process, there is a possibility of corruption.*

MAJEED: Everywhere, yes.

MAHMOOD: *But when we depend on a machine and a system, when the delivery of services is system-centric, as you see in the US and other places—here it's person-centric. If you are a big man here, you can break the law. But in the US or western world, you can't, it is system-based. That is an idea that we generated in RAJUK (Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha), the capital development authority, where huge corruption was present. So one PIP (Performance Improvement Project) picked up the idea, and decided to share information with the clients through a web portal. And they did it. Small corruptions have been done away with. That generated a huge project, for e-governance, e-service. That is a success story of MATT 2 that we picked up.*

Now we have ten districts where one-stop service is present. There was the case of passport delivery. We have 7 million people working outside this country, so a passport is something—

MAJEED: That you need.

MAHMOOD: *Yes. But there was huge corruption in passport issuance. One PIP picked up this passport delivery issue: how to reduce the time taken and how to get rid of corruption in the process. And they did it. What happened was—before, it was centralized. Then the project came up with a decentralized passport issuance system. And now, in all districts, you can get a passport. Ordinarily, it would take three to four months to have a passport, but now you can get a passport in one day. In this way, the process was reengineered by this project. So even here, the project process, they would say this passport process—I am sure you will have the briefing from them.*

MAJEED: Is the career path of civil servants who have gone through MATT 2 training different than those who have not?

MAHMOOD: *No, not yet. We expect that when they implement the performance evaluation system, with a new promotion policy, then the answer may possibly be yes, but not at this point of time. Now, the answer is no.*

MAJEED: Right now the MATT 2 is only part of the administrative cadre—.

MAHMOOD: Yes.

MAJEED: Why was that decided originally, and are there plans to expand?

MAHMOOD: *Very simply, because the administration cadre is dominating the bureaucracy.*

MAJEED: How big is it, how many people?

MAHMOOD: *5000. Dominating here is not done by number because, by number, you would find teachers and doctors are large, but it's by power. The key positions have been held by the administration cadre traditionally. This came from the British, then India, and then Pakistan—we have this as a legacy from colonial times. The British, they didn't implement this kind of administration back at home, but here, they did it intentionally. So we could not break those, but we are trying to do so. We have picked up another project where we are really thinking to incorporate all the cadres in the next phase of MATT 2. We understand that we should*

really—I feel that that is also a MATT 2 product, with regard to holding the highest post in administration—I feel that we need to bring them in the loop, in other cadres. So that is a success of MATT 2 too because unless I had gone through this process, I could not understand—let us take them all.

MAJEED: One final question. In terms of MATT 2, can you think of anything that has worked particularly well or something that could be done better if you were to implement it again?

MAHMOOD: *Actually, we thought MATT 2 failed in one place: capacity building. MATT 2 could not do institutional capacity building in this ministry. Though it is our failure, not really that of MATT 2. They tried. We just really didn't pay so much attention to that area. But I think we are now focusing on that. We still have one or two years to go to finish MATT 2. So I think we will be able to build the institutions. Otherwise, if we cannot do structural capacity building, I think the learning of MATT 2 will go away.*

MAJEED: Very interesting. Thank you so much for your time.