



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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Interviewee: Othello Weh

Interviewer: Graeme Blair

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Innovations for Successful Societies, Bobst Center for Peace and Justice
Princeton University, 83 Prospect Avenue, Princeton, New Jersey, 08544, USA
www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties

- BLAIR: I am here with Mr. (Othello) Weh in the Civil Service Agency. Just to confirm for the tape that you have agreed to consent—.
- WEH: *Yes, I have agreed to do that.*
- BLAIR: Could we start by briefly speaking a little bit about your role here in the Civil Service Agency and in particular, the reforms that you've been involved in, the civil service reforms.
- WEH: *I am the Deputy Director-General for Administration, and my role is to carry out the reform. I am supervising the biometric program. I also supervise the selection of employees by giving examinations to those who are entering the civil service for the first time. I am also responsible for internal corporate services such as supervising the general staff internally.*
- BLAIR: Could you speak a little bit about—thinking back to the earliest days of your work here—the people that you count on for support in the programs that you run, the reforms that you're behind—who are the people that you count on to push the reforms through?
- WEH: *You mean internally within the agency as well?*
- BLAIR: Both internally and outside.
- WEH: *The first thing—in order for reforms to take place, you have to have the political will. So what you're talking about—first of all, depending on the ministers in government, the President and those in authority, that they will help the reform to take place. Because the reform is not just the Civil Service Agency but it is a civil service reform which takes you out to the various ministries and agencies of government. There must be some receptivity on the part of the ministers, or the deputy ministers, and the personnel director and human resource officers, in order for you to do the work. So we rely on those people for information. We rely on them for support in terms of whatever—if there is a need for training, for them to identify the training needs, and so on and so forth.*
- BLAIR: Could we speak maybe first about the biometric reform? Let's go through and talk about each reform and the process by which it became implemented. For the biometric reform in particular, could you think about the beginning—what was the coalition of people outside the agency that you were able to get behind it?
- WEH: *The first thing is that we took over the government when it was bloated with ghost workers. We had about 49,000 or 50,000 employees on the payroll and the bulk of them were not actually regular employees, but instead, some of them were ghost workers. Some had died during the war and their names were still on the payroll. Some had gone to the States and other places in the diaspora, and yet their names were on the payroll. Some were working with NGOs and their names were still on the payroll. So in order to clean the payroll, we decided to launch the biometric program. But again, it was difficult for us to do it because most of the employees—the civil servants—are based in the rural areas and it is difficult to reach some of the areas. They are inaccessible, it is not easy to get there by car, especially during the rainy season, it is just difficult.*
- So in order to start we had to communicate. We had to educate those who were to take part in the biometric program—the employees—and that has been going on. We gave the contract to some foreign firm to do and we distributed the form*

to ministries and agencies and those who are closer and those who—where the population is smaller, we delivered to them first.

For instance, the Ministry of Education and Internal Affairs Ministry alone is about 10,000 persons on the payroll, and they are based in the interior, in the rural areas. So those ones I had to reach, we had to take time to deal with them after the rainy season.

BLAIR: Thinking back to the time when the biometric reform began, there must have been many competing priorities for reforms. How did this one—what made it seem like the time was ripe for this?

WEH: *There are a whole lot of issues in reform. For example, we have the issue of decentralization where almost all, most of the work is centralized in Monrovia whereby we have a lot of employees in the interior. Again, if you go into decentralization, there are some legal issues involved. For example, if you are going to decentralize the Ministry of Internal Affairs, or the work of the Minister of Internal Affairs, there are some legal issues. If the superintendents of the counties— district officers—have to be elected by the people in the counties, you have to go and repeal the law that says that the President should appoint the district officer or the superintendent.*

If services are decentralized—for example, if taxes are collected in the county, then the taxes should remain in the county for county development. You have to go back and repeal the law that says that all taxes collected should be sent to the Minister of Finance. So these are some legal issues that have to be addressed.

Beyond that, we have restructuring as an issue—redefining the functions and mandates of ministries and agencies. There are some ministries and agencies that have some overlapping functions. For example, you have the Ministry of Public Works, and also a Ministry of Rural Development. If you look at their functions, you see the Ministry of Rural Development is performing similar functions to those of the Ministry of Public Works. They do federal road construction, they do grading, and so on and so forth, and the Ministry of Public Works does the same thing.

The Ministry of Rural Development also carries out some water and sanitation. They dig wells in the interior. And the Ministry of Public Works is also doing a similar thing. So the reform will have to redefine the functions and mandates of ministries and agencies to see if there are some overlapping functions, and to see if those things can be straightened out. If you do that, there are also some problems that are involved, some challenges. If you redefine the role of a ministry, it takes on new functions, new mandates. Maybe the new mandates or functions will require smaller staffing instead of the huge staff or bureaucracy that it has.

Take, for example, the Ministry of Agriculture. If you redefine their function, you will realize that the work of the Ministry of Agriculture is actually based in the rural areas. They are supposed to see about food production, and so on and so forth. But they are doing that and they are also responsible for policy making. So where there are new functions, they concentrate only on policy issues and then maybe the production aspect should be transferred to another agency, or maybe a private entity. Those are issues that need to be addressed in the reform.

BLAIR: So among those issues, how was the choice made to focus, among other things, on the biometric reform?

WEH: *As I said, a biometric is something that we just started. We haven't gone in depth. We haven't taken photos. We haven't actually gone into the details such as going to the counties or even going from minister to minister to take photos and take fingerprints and so on and so forth. It is still in its infancy. What we have done now is that we have printed the forms and distributed them. We are hoping that when we go into full operation, for example, in the Ministry of Agriculture, we will be able to identify exactly who are the employees of the Ministry of Agriculture. If they have any ghost workers we will be able to tell whether they are ghost workers or not. We will be able to tell if there are some people on the payroll who do not actually exist. We will be able to identify that.*

We will be able to tell who has reached the age of 65 and should be pensioned, but are still on the payroll. According to our law, if you reach the age of 65 you should be retired. If you serve for 25 years or more you should be pensioned. Based on those records, we will be able to tell who is ready to be pensioned, who is ready to be retired, who should need some training based on the assessment, and so on and so forth.

BLAIR: So when you go into a department like the agriculture department, the Civil Service Agency goes in and does these assessments, is that correct?

WEH: Yes.

BLAIR: What departments have you done that for already?

WEH: *For needs assessment?*

BLAIR: For this process you were talking about of thinking about whether the department has—

WEH: *As I said, we have already distributed forms to the various ministries—there are just a few ministries that we haven't reached yet, looking at the number of employees that they have. For example, the Ministry of Education has between 9,000 and 10,000 persons on the payroll. There are a huge number of teachers in the rural area.*

The Ministry of Health has a huge number of nurses and doctors in the interior. We haven't reached them. Where there is a smaller number— for example, Agriculture and some other ministries with a small number of employees, we have distributed forms to them. Once we collect the forms, we will identify and then be able to carry on the operation as I said.

BLAIR: What do you think are some of the challenges to that? I mean, when you go into an agency that has all of these—that is a little bit bloated or has some ghost workers, there must be some sort of pushback from the ministries themselves. What are some of the challenges to that work?

WEH: *There are a lot of challenges, huge challenges. The first thing is that we have to recognize the problem in the country as a result of the civil war. There were those who were trained prior to the war, who were either killed or went away, as I did, and then returned. Some of them are working with NGOs.*

Now in order to attract qualified people into the civil service, there must be a good remuneration package that would be able to attract and retain them, and that is not possible; that does not exist for now.

BLAIR: Because of the current budget.

WEH: *Because of the current budget. The budget will not support those things that we need to do, like paying salaries comparable to other countries around us. That is a great challenge. Their income is low. Institutions, or some companies, will come in—for example, they said that there is a forestry company that came in and slowed down its operation because of the global financial problem. That also affects government's intake. So these are challenges.*

In order to send somebody out of the country for training, maybe at a higher level, you need to have the money to do it. That is also a challenge.

BLAIR: What does the reform unit consider your greatest success, or the agency's greatest success while you've been here working as part of the leadership team?

WEH: *We started with the payroll, and I think between 2007 and 2008, there were some 17,000 unclaimed checks that people could not come to identify as theirs. That was reported to the government. That I think is a success. The payroll has been reduced from 50,000 to about 34,000 right now as we speak. Right now, the payroll is about 34,000 persons. That is a plus. Also, because of the capacity problem, which I talked about, the government was able to get some support from the international community and we launched what we call the Senior Executive Service Program where we employ about one hundred persons. They are being supported by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, the government of the United States of America, the government of the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Sweden, Humanity United and so on and so forth. They are supporting that program.*

Besides that, we also have another program called the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals, TOKTEN, the TOKTEN program. These are people that came from other parts of the world, from the diaspora. They are Liberians and they are being deployed in ministries and agencies to strengthen their capacities. For example, at the JFK (John F. Kennedy) Medical Center, we employ some medical doctors, they are Liberians, they are employed and they are working. They came through the TOKTEN program.

If you went to the Ministry of Education, the Director of Higher Education, for example, is in the TOKTEN program—these people are being brought in to strengthen the capacity of government. So I take those to be a plus.

BLAIR: Can we talk a little bit about the SES program, the Senior Executive Service?

WEH: Yes.

BLAIR: In the beginning of that, when you think about a civil service that exists and then start to bring people in who have not been in the civil service from overseas, what are some of the challenges to both bringing them into the civil service, integrating them, and making people who are already in the civil service comfortable with them coming in?

WEH: *Yes, that is also another challenge. But of those who were recruited, more than 50%—I would say 90% of those who were recruited were recruited locally.*

BLAIR: I didn't know that.

WEH: *Yes, 90% recruited locally and 10% from outside. It's true that if you have someone coming from abroad, maybe coming to do a job similar to what you are doing, maybe at an advanced level or so, some people will feel insecure, or sometimes feel that this person has come to take over their job, and that kind of phobia is there. But the honest thing is that those who are coming are coming with expertise: they're coming with experiences that they will be able to share; they will be able to transfer their knowledge. So before they come in, the ministries or agencies that are going to absorb them have been told that these are Liberians, this is their home. They have their experiences outside, they've been working other places, they need to come to help our country. So they have been informed. The employees have been educated to the extent that they know.*

Another challenge is that those who are coming in, the SES personnel, they are professionals and make higher salary than those on the ground. That is another issue.

BLAIR: To attract them to come back.

WEH: *Yes, in order to attract them to come we have to offer them better salaries. That is another issue.*

BLAIR: How do you deal with that? Is there any kind of campaign among the civil service to educate people?

WEH: *No, that is not so. As a matter of fact, the SES program was open to everyone, even if you were in the civil service already and you felt that you could apply and get into it, fine. If you go through the interview and you're successful, okay, you can be employed. As a result, there were some people who were in the civil service before, they applied, and they were employed into the SES program. So it was open to everyone. That was competitive. It was based on merit. So it is not a matter of whether you're here. If you feel that you are capable of doing it, fine, apply.*

BLAIR: Were there officials, either in the President's office or in the legislature, who you had to get behind these programs to get them passed?

WEH: *No, actually, it is an executive program. It was not something where we had to go to seek legislative approval before we could go into operation. It wasn't so. It is the executive's program. The executive runs the ministries and agencies. The ministries are in the executive branch. The executive saw that it was appropriate and needed. The need was there for capacity building. The need was there for strengthening the capacities of the ministries and agencies and they needed Liberians to do that. The President asked for it and now it has been done.*

BLAIR: So it was the President that had to be—?

WEH: *Of course she was convinced of that.*

BLAIR: What about for the biometric identification program? Did that require legislative support or other support from other parts of the government?

WEH: *No, not really.*

BLAIR: So again it was convincing the President?

- WEH:** *Yes, the legislators themselves know there are some ghost names on payroll—how are you going to do it, how are you going to get rid of the ghost names off the payroll, what program will you put in place— these are the questions they would ask us. So it is something that they know that we have to do, but need to know about.*
- BLAIR:** So when you go about starting a program like that, what is the process to get the approval inside the executive? Do you go and meet with the Vice President or with the Chief of Staff? What is the process by which people are sort of convinced?
- WEH:** *When we started, first of all, we had to launch the reform program. We had to make a consensus from civil society groups, from donors coming in, international partners. When the consensus was built, the draft of the Comprehensive Civil Service Reform Strategy document was taken to the cabinet for cabinet approval. They deliberated on that and that was approved by the cabinet before we could go into the operation.*
- Within the Comprehensive document, we had the biometric program; we had all the general issues in there. We had the restructuring and rightsizing issues featured in there. We had qualitative service delivery issues featured in there also. That was presented to the cabinet.*
- BLAIR:** Can we talk a little more in detail about how the Comprehensive Civil Service Reform, the plan, how that was passed? How did you go about interacting with the other cabinet members who had to be convinced to go along? What was the process?
- WEH:** *Initially, we had a workshop where they were invited, and many people came and presented papers and expressed their own ideas—how they thought of the issue, how they thought the Comprehensive Civil Service Reform Strategy should go, what was the strategic direction, and so on and so forth. People came and made presentations and institutions made presentations. Civil society groups came and made presentations on how they saw what their role would be, how they would fit into it, and so on and so forth.*
- BLAIR:** What kinds of civil society groups did you invite?
- WEH:** *We invited the Civil Service Association, we invited the legal Bar Association. We invited—that's a long time ago.*
- BLAIR:** Fair enough. What initiated the beginning of this process? Was this internal to your agency, or did the President say "We need a comprehensive plan?"
- WEH:** *Well the issue is one of the four pillars of government. There should be better service delivery. How will you have a better service delivery? That came on the floor. The Civil Service Agency Director-General had to take into consideration that there should be better service delivery in the country. Look at the issues involved: look at pay and grading. Look at how people are being selected into the civil service. Look at the payroll and review the payroll and see whether it is the actual one. Look at issues like pensions and so on. He had to take all these into consideration. He had to call a meeting. He had to build a consensus among the people, among the employees, among the civil society groups, and others, in order to come up with a draft and present it to the President.*
- BLAIR:** When was this? Was this right at the beginning of the administration?

- WEH: *That started in 2007.*
- BLAIR: What happened before that, after the election? There were the four pillars of government, when did that begin?
- WEH: *It started as soon as the President was inaugurated.*
- BLAIR: And so—
- WEH: *In 2006, the beginning.*
- BLAIR: And so a year later you began the process of the civil service reform.
- WEH: Yes.
- BLAIR: What is being done to kind of keep the civil society organizations and the cabinet informed and involved so that they understand and still support what the agency is doing?
- WEH: *When you were entering you saw an office downstairs called the Civil Service Reform Directorate. That office is responsible for coordinating the civil service reform programs. It is responsible for informing ministries and agencies about happenings, about the development of the reform. It is also responsible for coordinating activities of internal reform. We have already established internal reform offices within the ministries and agencies of government. For example, the Ministry of Youth and Sports should have its own meetings on how the reform should go. We have an office that is liaising with these ministries and agencies to address them, on a weekly or monthly basis, on how the reform process is going. That office has been established. We have a director who is responsible for that.*
- BLAIR: I don't know whether this is important, but was it important to build popular support for the civil service reforms, to communicate to the people what was going on, to let them know that this reform process was going on to improve service delivery?
- WEH: *People were involved. It was not difficult to do. These were issues that were glaring. For example, when it comes to the issue of low salaries, it is something that is just everywhere, people know about it. When it comes to ghost names on payroll, it is something that many people know about.*
- BLAIR: Could you talk a little bit more about the work—I'm interested in hearing a little bit more about the workshops and how they were organized.
- WEH: *Which workshop?*
- BLAIR: The workshop for the reform plan that you were speaking about, the one with civil service and international partners and with the agencies.
- WEH: *As I said, when we started, we invited international partners, we invited civil society groups, we invited civil servants and we invited ministers to the workshop. In fact, the President herself was present at the opening and she presided at the workshop I'm talking about. She was there for the whole day. That shows her support to the program. She was not just someone making speeches. She also presided, listened to presentations from ministries and agencies, from international organizations, even from several civil society groups.*

So to start, we had to invite people to come and speakers to present papers. At the end of the day we sort of went into the deliberations, went into the papers—.

BLAIR: Internally?

WEH: *Yes. Then, after about three or four months, we called in people to review and vet the paper, the strategy document. After that it was sent to the cabinet for approval.*

BLAIR: What was the process like in the internal meetings in those three or four months? How were different constituencies weighed? How did you incorporate the feedback from the various groups?

WEH: *That again was not a major problem because we ourselves were part of the process, we ourselves were chairing the meetings. Our discussions went on. We knew the duration, and we were also guiding during the duration. There were also some consultants that came into the process to help guide people. People who had had experiences with the best practices were invited to share their experiences. The internal work was also done by consultants. We had consultants who had to pull the people together to assemble views and so on and so forth.*

BLAIR: Could we talk a little bit about how you—you've been here since 2005, is that correct?

WEH: *A bit longer than that. I was serving as a technician before—.*

BLAIR: During the transitional government?

WEH: Yes.

BLAIR: So after her inauguration? I'm interested in speaking a little bit about how you pulled an office together to carry out the reform. In many parts of the world, it's a great challenge to get the people in your office and in the agency together to get the job done. What were some of the challenges to that and how did—?

WEH: *The first thing is that the Director-General is someone who had worked here for many years in the '80s. He was sent abroad to get his master's degree. He returned, he worked here before going abroad for his Ph.D. He knows the job. He has been here, he has experience. So it was something that was not new—when it came to organizing and reorganizing, doing all that stuff was something that he knew very well.*

For some of us, like for me—I started working here in 1997, so I have worked here for a long time before I was appointed by the President. I am aware of the work. I worked here as a technician, I know most of what we do here, so organizing it was not a difficult problem.

BLAIR: So was most of the staff in the agency there during the transition?

WEH: Yes, exactly.

BLAIR: In the beginning of the transition, how did you identify the kind of talents that you needed to find and the kinds of people that you needed to find? That must have been difficult in the beginning, finding the right people to bring in.

WEH: *Most of the real technical work had been given out to consultants; most of it was given to consultants because of the capacity problem. For example, the technical analysis of pay and grading was given to consultants. The pension review was given to a consultant. Even the SES program—setting it up, putting it together—was given to consultants and so on and so forth.*

BLAIR: So are there efforts now to bring that back in?

WEH: Yes.

BLAIR: So what are those efforts like? What are the challenges to that work?

WEH: *The first thing is to secure funding, to get some funding from donors in order for the work to be done. That was a challenge. Getting the capacity built here was a big problem, so we had to appeal to the UK (United Kingdom) Department of International Development (DFID) to come in. That's why you see our computers. I would say the whole building was totally dilapidated. So first of all, building the capacity of the institution before going to work was a big challenge for us.*

BLAIR: What strategies do you use to build the capacities of the staff that you do have over time?

WEH: *For example, when we got computers from donors, we started training our own people in-house. We have a computer lab where we do computer training. We hire someone who will come in to train the employees so that they will be able to cope with the work they will have to do. In the past, people were dealing with a heap of papers here and there. When you check our record room you can see all our papers, but now, we're trying to put it on computers and store it that way.*

So to answer your question, we had to first of all build the capacity of those within to be able to understand their job and do it right.

BLAIR: What about the technical capabilities beyond that, to do the civil service reform work?

WEH: *In order for the reform work to actually take place, in order for it to succeed—this is why we deployed the Senior Executive Service personnel, professionals, into the system and the TOKTEN professionals into the system. That's one aspect. In some ministries and agencies the Liberian Institute of Public Administration is carrying out training.*

BLAIR: What ministry is that part of?

WEH: *That's the IPA, the Institute of Public Administration is doing that.*

BLAIR: Did you take any steps to ensure that your team was dedicated to the mission? Was there any need to employ any sort of special incentives or management techniques to get people to work hard for the mission, for the reform effort?

WEH: *In order to do that, the government introduced a (sort of) incentive to encourage and help boost the morale of employees in order to be able to carry on the reform. That is, to give a general allowance to employees. Not all employees though; that is tied to functions. For example, those who serve for longer hours in the offices as compared to regular employees, they get some kind of allowance given to them.*

Regular working hours for us is 8 o'clock to 4 o'clock, but there are some who work beyond that and the government is compensating them to do that. That is to help the reform process to move forward.

BLAIR: Leaders in many countries face pressure to provide jobs to important people or family members or difficult factions in the country. Has there been pressure in the civil service agency or have you encountered this in more general civil service reforms?

WEH: *No. That was the case during the interim period. That was the case before the government took over. That is what caused the overstaffing of employees in the civil service. Prior to this government, some of the warlords would take anyone—maybe their family members, maybe those who served them during the time of the war. If, for example, you have a minister who was a warlord, he has people who were serving him, he has people who were his bodyguards, and so on and so forth. He took them to the Ministry of Finance and just placed them on the payroll without any regard for civil service procedures. Regardless of whether the person was even a high school graduate or not, he just put him on the payroll. That was the kind of situation that was experienced during the interim period. But it is no longer like that.*

BLAIR: So how did your agency go about reversing that in the first year and a half of the new administration?

WEH: *Well, the agency is not in the business of dismissing people— to say “You were brought by so and so person, so you get dismissed.” No, we don't do that. Those who need to be trained are being identified so that they will be able to cope with their job situation. Those who, for example, if those who fall in grade one—*

BLAIR: Is that the lowest grade?

WEH: *Yes, that's the lowest grade. If your position is in grade one, but your salary is in grade ten (chuckling). It happened. Those are issues that we're battling with now. You're in grade one and we find out that your salary is in grade ten because a warlord carried you in. They put you in and gave you any kind of salary. We are not dismissing you and we are not bringing you down to grade one level, but when there is an increment, a general increment, you don't benefit. You remain in that grade, you remain where you are. That's the kind of situation that can happen and how we try to address the issue.*

BLAIR: That's very interesting. Are there other things like that that you do? There must be salary issues and people must be in the wrong jobs. Are there other—?

WEH: Yes.

BLAIR: This is a topic that people around the world are very interested in.

WEH: *There's another issue. For example, say you were a college graduate and you were looking for a job and there's no opening. But maybe we have opening for just an office assistant. He's looking for a job, whether it is an office assistant or what, he needs it. So he forgets about his degree and accepts the job.*

What we are doing now, once we know that you are a college graduate and you are being underpaid because of that situation, we will bring you to the level that

you are supposed to be and give you a correct salary, give you better responsibility to function properly.

BLAIR: Do you have any other advice on the patronage problem and dealing with people who have outsized salaries or don't have the training they need?

WEH: *Yes. Those who were brought into the system in the manner I talked about earlier—when we found that they are not trained, we try to train them. If they are not qualified, we send them to maybe IPA for training. Those who were brought in and maybe reached the age of 60, were nearing the retirement age when they were brought in, we try to pay them off or maybe pension them. Those are the kinds of steps we have been taking.*

BLAIR: That's interesting. We spoke a little bit about decentralization. In a lot of places, leaders in the capital are worried about the power of local leaders.

WEH: Yes.

BLAIR: And yet, you're trying to deliver services into these rural areas. Do you have any advice on balancing those concerns in the context of your work here?

WEH: *I've not seen the local leaders—or I've not seen those in the capital being afraid of their local leaders. No, that is not the case here in Liberia.*

BLAIR: So you're saying this is a good relationship.

WEH: *Yes, there's a very good relationship. We have a rural areas outreach program where we want our presence to be felt in the rural area. Instead of those that want to be employed coming to Monrovia, to us, we go there and administer examinations to those who are qualified and we try to employ them. That's the kind of thing that we're trying to do, opening our offices in the counties. We've identified regional offices, five regions. Since the budget has passed, we're now going to be opening new offices in the counties where employees in government, civil servants, can relate to us directly in new offices. Those that have special problems or special cases can be addressed at that level.*

BLAIR: We've heard a little bit—we have some people who are in Indonesia this summer who have been talking about this issue of sort of buying and selling civil service posts, that you pay off someone to get into a different post, such that people are moving around a lot. Is that something that happens or has happened in the transitional government?

WEH: *No, that is not happening.*

BLAIR: Not a problem. I just have a couple of more final questions. We're almost through. Reflecting on your own background and your sort of personal management style, do you think either your background or, drawing on your personal style, are there aspects of that that might have helped you make more progress here where others have failed?

WEH: *Yes. My background has been of use. I went to teachers college and I served as a classroom teacher in the past. I also served as the principal of a high school prior to entering into the civil service. In that, dealing with people, serving as a principal, dealing with teachers and students and helping to solve student and teacher problems and so on—all that has helped me to manage what we are doing, and has helped me to supervise the work here internally.*

- BLAIR: Some people have pointed to the need for the reform team to articulate a vision for the reforms. How important has it been to have this strategic plan that you've written and how do you use that on a sort of a day-to-day basis to guide people forward?
- WEH: *We've been having workshops. For example, last week, we had a workshop with the personnel directors and human resource officers of the ministries and agencies of the government to sort of let them know how far we are going and what we are doing, how they too are to perform in line with the reform and what we expect them to do in terms of the reform. What are the challenges that are ahead of the reform? For example, where the function of a ministry or an agency has been reviewed and a ministry takes on a new function, there will be some challenges. There may be a need to reduce the staffing of that ministry, depending on the new role it has to play. The question would be, what happens to those who are working there if you have to reduce staff? How can you deal with such an issue? There will be a need for counseling; there may be a need for redirection. There will be a need for retraining of some staff to take on new roles, and all these are issues that they need to know.*
- So to answer your question, we have regular workshops and meetings and so on for ministries and agencies of government, especially those that are dealing with the reform issue. As I said earlier, we've established internal reform committee administration agencies of government. If you go to the Ministry of Education, for example, you will see that there is an internal reform committee functioning, which is headed by the minister. This is how we get to them.*
- BLAIR: Great. One problem I think many leaders face is where to turn for information and advice as they're preparing these reform plans. Where do you turn for advice and information?
- WEH: *For us?*
- BLAIR: Yes.
- WEH: *Here we are talking about where to turn. I think ministries and agencies turn to us. But the work that we do is a collaborative work among three institutions, where the Governance Commission has a bigger umbrella, or bigger picture of the reform. The Governance Commission is responsible for the land reform, is responsible for judicial reform, and is also responsible for other reform programs. In our reform, we are responsible for civil service reform, of course, but we fit into the work of the governance reform. Besides that, we have collaborated with the Liberian Institute of Public Administration. They are responsible for training, but we collaborate and get advice and meet together. That's how it works.*
- BLAIR: Just a final question. Our program helps leaders share their experiences and innovations in addressing challenges that arise in rebuilding states. We're always sort of on the lookout for items that we should include in the resource that we're building. Do you have anything that we've missed here in this conversation or anything that you'd like to add?
- WEH: *You know, it depends on the environment, it depends on the society. For us in Liberia, Liberia is unique, totally unique. Issues that you may easily address here without problem maybe cannot be addressed in other countries, depending on the environment. For example, in Liberia, the government took over the civil service when the government owed 18 months in back salaries. The government*

has been paying these, but that is not cleared totally. During this July, the government will be paying the regular pay and will also pay one month back pay.

In some countries, maybe based on their environment, that can easily be done—where the government owes and maybe speaks to the employees, and they just accept it and go on easily. That is an issue. Here in Liberia, for example, we have social security. In other countries, when you talk about social security, if you have a job, if you make contribution to social security at a job, we read from books and magazines and newspapers that you are supposed to get some sort of support or benefit from social security when you are out of a job. But here, that aspect is not working. If a person who made contributions before is dismissed, social security cannot give you your benefit. That's a different scenario altogether.

So to address your question, I would say that depends on the environment. What can be done here easily may not be applicable to other countries. So for us here, there are some issues that have to do with cultural background which are not applicable to other countries. That's how I see it.

BLAIR: Well thank you very much. This has been a very helpful interview, I appreciate your time very much.

WEH: *Thank you too. Thank you for coming.*