



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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

Series: Center of Government

Interview no.: F1

Interviewee: Momo Rogers

Interviewer: Michael Scharff

Date of Interview: 2 May 2012

Location: Monrovia, Liberia

SCHARFF: This is Michael Scharff and the date is May 2nd, 2012 and I'm sitting with Dr. Momo Rogers who is the Director General of the Cabinet Secretariat. We are at Dr. Rogers' office in the Ministry of State in the capital city of Monrovia. Dr. Rogers thank you very much for meeting with me today, I really appreciate it.

ROGERS: *You're welcome and again as I say, welcome to Liberia again. I'm glad I have the opportunity to again have a conversation with you especially now in the process that you're going through.*

SCHARFF: Thank you very much. I'd just be curious if we could just start off if you could help tell a little bit of your background. You had spent time here in Liberia in the government and then you had gone to the United States, so just for our background.

ROGERS: *I was born in Liberia; I was born in Monrovia, in the capital city. I am originally—in terms of parental origins, you know we have fifteen political subdivisions and I was from one of the subdivisions called Grand Cape Mount County, which is in northwestern Liberia. But I grew up here in Monrovia and did all my early education here in Monrovia, graduated from St. Patrick's High School, which is no longer in existence. But then went to the United States where I did all of my graduate schooling.*

I started at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania where I did my Bachelor's in economics. I graduated in 1971 so you know how old I am. Then I went to Ohio State to start my Master's program and didn't complete my Master's program because I was homesick so I decided to come home. I came home in April 1974 and about two or three months later started working at the Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism. I stayed there for at least two years before I was allowed to leave and complete my Master's program at Ohio State. So I went back to Ohio State. I started the program but I left and came—. The Ministry didn't want me to leave and thereby lose my service, but I told them I had to go back so they made an arrangement where I would still be drawing my salary; so I did go to back to Ohio State in 1976 and graduated a year later with a Master's in journalism.

I came back in 1977 and worked until there was a reshuffle of the cabinet. At that time in 1978 I was Special Assistant to the Minister of Information. So he took me along with him to the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication. So at the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication, where I stayed as a Special Assistant. Because of my mass communication background I was also called a mass communication expert because that would entitle me to certain amenities that I couldn't get there. But it was good because I had done some studies in telecommunications while I was in the United States so I was familiar with the area.

While I was there I got promoted to an Assistant Minister for International Post Organization and Telecommunications. In 1979, I was transferred back to the Ministry of Information where I became Deputy Minister for Technical Services. I was there for five months when the coup happened in 1980.

I was a political prisoner for eight months. After I was released, which was like Christmas Eve, December 24, 1980, the following year I got another job as an instructor of journalism at the University of Liberia. But there was no journalism program; they wanted me to build it up. So I did the first series of work to start what is now the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Liberia.

After a year there I decided that I wanted to leave and go back and work on my doctorate. So I was allowed to do that. In 1982 I returned to the United States. Before I did of course I was admitted to Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. So I went to Southern Illinois and that's where I did my Ph.D. in journalism/mass communication with emphasis in international communication and media history. After I got my doctorate I started teaching at Delaware State for about six years.

In 1991, I got another job offer and I moved to Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. I was there for at least another four or five years but was not tenured and therefore had to leave. So I left. I became a consultant briefly in Zimbabwe, a media consultant. Came back to the States and continued to teach, went to Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee and taught there for a while. I think I was there for two or three years, and then moved on to Kentucky Wesleyan in Owensboro, Kentucky.

Then from there I made a final move to Benedict College, Columbia, South Carolina. I was there until 2009 when I was asked by President Sirleaf to come home and help. So I came home not knowing exactly where I was going to work. She just told me, I want you to come home. Usually when the President asks you, you don't say no. I came home and when I met her she told me that I would be working in her office. I was to be Director-General of the Cabinet. It was a position that I had never heard about.

So in June 2009 I was appointed Director-General of the Cabinet within the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs.

SCHARFF: How did the President find you?

ROGERS: *I had known her when she was Minister of Finance in the '70s, just before the coup. I knew her just briefly because I was Special Assistant to the Minister of Information. There were one or two meetings I went to where I got to meet her. Then when we went into political exile in the United States in the early '90s I met with her in Washington, DC. She was then living in Washington; I think she was working with the World Bank. We briefly were on the same board of directors. I was representing a political wing, which was this party, the now ruling Unity Party. I was their representative in the U.S. So we worked together for a few months before I left and went down to Tennessee and then we lost contact. But she knew of me and I knew of her because the network was up and we had contact on the network so everybody knew what everybody else was doing. We were all in exile then.*

Then in 2008 I came home just to visit. She heard I was in the country and she invited me to come and see her. When I did, she then asked me when I was going to come home. I said I was just about thinking of doing it because my daughter, who is the baby, was just going out of high school and once she went to college, then I would feel free to come home. So she said please do. So we kept in touch.

When my daughter graduated from high school, once we knew where she was going to go to college, I then let the President know that I was ready to come and she said ok.

SCHARFF: Interesting.

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- ROGERS: *So then I resigned from my position at Benedict College where I was an Associate Professor of Mass Communication in charge of the print media department. I was allowed to leave. So I came home in 2009 as I said.*
- SCHARFF: That's a great back-story; it is a fascinating series of events.
- ROGERS: *So I have been here since.*
- SCHARFF: May I ask why do you think the President had identified her cabinet as something that she wanted to address?
- ROGERS: *In terms of—?*
- SCHARFF: Reforming the cabinet.
- ROGERS: *Reforming the cabinet.*
- SCHARFF: Why did she identify the need to reform it?
- ROGERS: *First of all I actually didn't know that that was what she was intending to do. I knew that whoever was there, that was the only cabinet ministers left. So that vacancy was there so I thought she was just putting me in somewhere. However, once I started familiarizing myself—because I had a learning curve. I had been out of the government since the '80s. Then for the last twenty, twenty-five years I was in academia and then coming back to government. So I had to reorient myself. I had a learning curve and everything. So I was put in charge of this office. I guess from my academic background I started doing my research and I started to look at all the papers I could look at just to find out what had transpired in terms of how the cabinet ran and everything.*
- I found that there were a lot of processes that weren't in place that needed to be in place. They had regular cabinet meetings but when I looked through the documentation it didn't seem like it was a system; it seemed like it was just done because I'm told that the person who was here before me was also an Executive Assistant to the President so she was torn between two things. She didn't really maybe concentrate on setting up a system. So I was then given that responsibility to set up the system, the processes, that would make the President's cabinet to be much more effective in terms of its function and also to help with the communication between the President and the cabinet. So we set about to do that.*
- Just at that time I was lucky enough to be told that the AGI (Africa Governance Initiative) team which is a team associated with former Prime Minister Tony Blair had also been asked to work within the Ministry of State to help us set up systems or to improve on whatever systems we had. So I started working with that team. Then I think about a year later in 2010 one of them was seconded, Josie Stewart, I think you met her.*
- SCHARFF: Yes.
- ROGERS: *So she was seconded here. So between her and then Mr. (John) Logan coming on board—because when I came I was the only person for a long time. For a year I was here and only Toe actually was with me, but he's more like an office manager because he understood where things were in terms of documentation, etcetera and he took documents to the cabinet. So he was more the logistical person rather than someone who would be in a position to help me with writing.*

SCHARFF: Sure.

ROGERS: *Mr. Logan came on board once AGI started working with us. They realized that I needed help. They said one of the things you need is staff so they were able to get Mr. Logan to come. He has a Master's degree in public administration or management or something like that. We talked to him, and once we found out more details about him, we knew he would become a handy person. For example, one of the challenges I had was that I was almost a one-person operation, running the Cabinet. I had to settle Cabinet matters and I was also the note taker. So on the day of cabinet meeting, I was like a headless chicken running all over the place, doing this and that, and taking notes.*

So when Logan came it was a very opportune time because it really helped to take that burden off me. So besides helping me to set up cabinet meetings and look at documents and other things, now he is the official note taker in the Cabinet. So I don't have to worry about note taking, I can focus on the Cabinet meeting itself and see what is being done and see how we can improve the system and processes because before I didn't have that kind of opportunity, I was too engaged.

SCHARFF: In just the day-to-day management.

ROGERS: *Yes. So that was helpful.*

SCHARFF: When the President first said to you, Dr. Rogers I'd like you to be my Director-General of Cabinet, did she give you any sort of explicit instructions as to what she wanted to see come out of the cabinet?

ROGERS: *When she gave me that she said, I think what she said to me was that in a few months, the AGI team would be on board. Once the AGI team got on board, one of the things they were going to do was to look at how they could make the whole ministry, especially the Office of the President, more effective and functional. So she was saying once that group comes in you will work together and get the whole Ministry moving and part of that will be your function also to make sure that our meetings, especially documentation, and other Cabinet matters can become more professionally done. Actually she didn't give me specific instructions as to what to do but she knew the team was coming on board from AGI, the Tony Blair team and she felt that once they were here we could work together and see how to make things more effective.*

So as I said that was very helpful. Then when Josie was seconded to my office, when we talked and I told her about things I was doing, she said, oh, you're already doing some of the things that you need to be doing but now this is how we can improve on it. So we kind of worked together to do what was needed to improve the Cabinet system.

SCHARFF: So that first year or so between when you were appointed and when AGI came, that must have been a—if I were in your position, that would have been kind of a difficult position because you're largely on your own.

ROGERS: Yes.

SCHARFF: I think last time we spoke you said you didn't have a formal office.

ROGERS: *No, I didn't have a formal office.*

SCHARFF: And no real clear instructions, priorities.

ROGERS: *No, no clear instructions.*

SCHARFF: That must be frustrating because here you've left this good job in the United States to come back and serve the government and yet you must be feeling—

ROGERS: *I realized that one of the reasons I wanted to come home was that I knew the challenges. When you're in the States and doing what you're doing, talking about Liberia, you always say, why didn't they do things this way? But it is easy to say that while you're in the States. But actually coming and experiencing what they're going through is another thing. So I saw things that I was confronted with as challenges that could be overcome. It would be just a matter of knowing how to go about doing it, how to set up systems.*

From my reading and research, as I look at all the documents that I was looking at here, I told myself that one of the problems was that the systems were not in place. Because of the war everything had broken down. All the systems and processes had broken down, not just in the Ministry of State but all over. So for those first few years when the President took over it was really just rebuilding systems and processes.

Of course you had the daunting challenge, which we still have, which is capacity building. We have problems with capacity. Even now I could use another person as a policy analyst. I could use a research analyst. But because we don't have the kind of capacity to do so that's why you have to groom. Logan, when he came, he had to be groomed also but he was a fast learner so he picked things up very fast which was the same I had to do. For example I was joking once and I said, you know the only thing I don't like about this AGI team and everybody went, "what don't you like about us?" I said the only thing I don't like about you is you think I know too much so you don't send me out to shadow other people to find out how things are in other countries. Because I always want to see, I like to go and sit and just watch how another Director General of the Cabinet operates.

Their response was that's no problem because right now, around your area, we need to bring them to see you operate.

SCHARFF: You were the best.

ROGERS: *In other words, they said that I was, just flattering me. But they were saying, especially given the fact I had not been in government for that long a time I had been mostly in academia and making the switch over and seeing how much work I was doing and how much I was getting done—they said they need others to look at what I am doing.*

SCHARFF: Then to just walk through the timeline of the story, when you arrived and you had—what was your first meeting as Director-General of Cabinet like? Can you recall what you were feeling and what kind of emotion you felt?

ROGERS: *It happened so suddenly. I was officially appointed on June 17th and I think the first cabinet meeting was June 26th so actually I didn't have that much time. But Mr. (Samuel) Toe was very helpful because he knew how to set up—he knew what documents I needed to look at and how to send things out. So that first one I was kind of on the edge, not knowing exactly—but we were able to get the information out. We were able to get the documents that we needed to be*

presented out to the Cabinet. So in about two weeks I had the first cabinet meeting.

What was strange about that was that for the first time I'm not only in the midst of the President but also the whole Cabinet. I needed to know the protocol, just the protocol alone, how do I address people in the Cabinet and what can I say and stuff like that. So it was a learning process. But what was interesting was that at the end of the cabinet meeting, one or two of the ministers actually told me they thought it was a very good cabinet meeting that I organized. I said this is my first one. They said, yes, that's why we're telling you. So that was good.

From then on I started getting a feel for the process.

SCHARFF: Was it immediately clear to you in that sort of first meeting, were the challenges immediately clear? Were you able to sort of count on your fingers the things that you saw that needed to be worked on?

ROGERS: *Exactly.*

SCHARFF: And what were some of those?

ROGERS: *For example, presentations were too long. Those who made presentations spoke too long. The discussion also was too long. Over the discussion you can't have too much control as long as the President is in favor of the discussion continuing you can't stop the discussion. But the presentation I knew I could have control over. I could tell them next time you're going to do a ten or twenty-minute presentation.*

One of the things I had to realize quickly was that these people I'm dealing with are all politicians. You can't stop politicians from talking, they love talking, especially when they're before the President because that's their opportunity. I'm before the President; I have to show off what I'm doing. But sometimes it made the meeting go too long. For instance that meeting I think lasted for four hours. Now we have had longer ones than that depending on the agenda, but after that moment I had to streamline the presentation and even help with the discussion.

As we had more cabinet meetings I started telling people how long they should speak. Some of them would say no, no, I've got to speak more than that; I have so much to present. I said no, you're not here just to present, you're also here to have a discussion of what you present and also to have the Cabinet make a decision.

SCHARFF: Were people coming to the—were ministers coming to the cabinet meeting at all prepared or was that another challenge?

ROGERS: *That was another challenge, yes. The main reason for that was because documents were not given to them in time. It was not because they didn't want to take the time to prepare themselves; it was that documents came to them very late. So one of the first things I tried to do was to get documents to come to us in time to be able to send them to Cabinet members so they can read them, so they could be more prepared. Even then a lot of them complained to me that the documents were too bulky. There were documents that were like a hundred pages, two hundred pages to read.*

To take care of that I decided that there was now going to be—by then Josie was with us—on that note, one of the things that Josie let me know about time, one of

the things she asked me what are some of the challenges for the time. I said it takes so long for these presentations and the discussion. She said we can't do anything with discussion because if the President—I said yes, if she wants the discussion there is nothing to do. She said, yes, but you can do something about the presentation. I said yes, but what do I do?

She said, what you can do on the agenda is indicate the time to do the presentation. So then we came out with a template that Josie and I worked on to set what we called indicative timing. Which doesn't necessarily mean that they would follow it, but it means that I can—I did it one or two times—and people noticed there were one or two times where I either put my hand up and told the person it is time for you to stop. One time I had to actually just get up and interrupt the person and say look, you know, this has gone longer than it should, we need to have discussion.

SCHARFF: But that was probably to you because it is hard when you have the head of state in the room to know what your boundary lines are.

ROGERS: *Exactly.*

SCHARFF: And how much you're empowered to take charge.

ROGERS: Yes.

SCHARFF: That must be a real difficulty, something that just with time—.

ROGERS: *With time you get to know it. The other thing was that in the beginning you had to watch the President. That's why when Logan came it helped me a lot. When I was taking notes I didn't look at her because I was too busy taking notes. I would just glance up at her. There were a lot of times she wanted to make eye contact with me but I was so busy taking notes. So now I look, I can see her eyes and her body language and I can tell when I think I need to take over and say something so that helped a lot.*

Then what we did which was something that was not—I started, I found that one of the problems we were having was that there were no guidelines for the cabinet. So I did a ten-point guideline on how to present a document to the Cabinet, how to make a presentation to the Cabinet. Then I sent it to the Cabinet and I said please cooperate with me with that. I tried to justify it by saying it would help not only to make the meetings brief but it would also enhance decision making which is what most of them came to do, as they wanted the Cabinet to take a decision. But if at times people would just go in, I found that once the majority of the cabinet ministers lost interest, then when it came to decision making they don't feel—they say well you know—but if they were sharp on things, you kept them brief and to the point and you ask for a decision then they can make a decision. So that was one of the things that I learned.

SCHARFF: When you started to put these changes in place, at the very beginning, before you really started, I'm curious if you can remember what you thought to yourself? What would success at the end of the day look like?

ROGERS: *For me success at the end of the day was—.*

SCHARFF: Or what were you hoping to get to?

ROGERS: *I was hoping—and hope was the word—I was hoping that at the end of the day most of the documents that were coming when I newly came were policy documents. I was hoping at the end of the day that those documents would be discussed and action would be taken, either approved or not approved. Because there were a lot of times we approved documents, for example, in principle, it was not full approval, it was approved in principle if you went back and did one, two, three, four things. Then you can bring it back. Usually I would say then once you do it you let me know and I will put it back on the agenda. The next time you come you don't have to talk much because we just go over those points that they asked you to go over, then the document is approved and you start thinking about implementation. So that was one of my hopes.*

Actually my first general hope, after my first cabinet meeting, was that I had to work with the Cabinet Ministers in a way that they look at me as a resource person, they look at me as a facilitator, and they look at me as someone who has their best interests at heart. In other words, the temptation of course was that as Director-General of the Cabinet, because you work in the Office of the President and because you wield all this power over the ministers, some of them might think that you might be a threat to them. If they don't do something right you might complain to the President, or you might want their job or that kind of thing.

So one of my hopes and I told people that—if somebody asks me years from now, what was your greatest achievement? — that to me would be my greatest achievement, that I was able to achieve rapport with Cabinet Ministers. Today I can call any of the ministers and talk to them and ask them for something and it doesn't seem like I'm intruding or I'm trying to be bossy. They know what I'm trying to ask for in in their best interest, that is why I'm asking for this information.

I call that, actually, it was my hope that this would create a cordial working relationship with the members of the cabinet so that they would trust me and know whatever I am doing or asking them to do is in their best interest. It is because I want them to succeed in what they're doing.

SCHARFF: That's really fascinating. In our stories we have the middle of the story is called the getting down to work where we talk about the specific steps the reform leader took. It seems to me just from your outlining some of your challenges and your hopes, it is almost as if I can—one could divide it between--. You had a couple of different things you needed to do it seems. First was to—one of the things was to build that trust and build those relationships.

ROGERS: *That's right.*

SCHARFF: The other was to define some of the processes.

ROGERS: *That's right.*

SCHARFF: Fix the actual meeting itself, the minutes, shortening the time.

ROGERS: Yes.

SCHARFF: So trust, the meetings themselves, and then finally maybe to work on enhancing the policy-making function.

ROGERS: *Policy making and tracking actions.*

SCHARFF: And tracking actions.

ROGERS: *And tracking actions. I think that is one of the things that the President appreciates, that now actions can be tracked. I just did a compilation—I went all the way back to 2006 to compile all the actions up to the end of the first administration. I have that. Anytime she wants to look at that she can look and see, what were the actions that ministers had to do and were these things done.*

That is one of the templates that Josie and I worked on. We did a template called the Ministry Briefing Template. We used to send it out to them and say tell us if you have done this, yes, if you have not done it, no. But if you have done some of it tell us what percentage of it you have done. That was successful. It came back. As a matter of fact one of the things that has helped, has been an innovation, is what I called the cabinet briefing and update. I do that, as soon as the President opens the meeting I do an update and briefing.

I have used that at times to call some ministers on the carpet without sounding very negative but to say, you all were supposed to send me this, ten people did, the others didn't. Sometimes we would list the people who did and the other people who didn't do it would say ok, I will send it.

SCHARFF: You were putting them on the spot

ROGERS: *Putting them on the spot.*

SCHARFF: In front of the President.

ROGERS: *In front of the President. There was one time I remember that one of them tried to give an excuse after I did that and the President said, don't give excuses, the Director-General asked and you didn't give it. But he had to admit that the information was sent to him in a timely manner. It wasn't like it was a spur of the moment thing and he had to work on it, he had it like everybody else. That's one of the areas I think that we have been successful in, in communicating with the Cabinet.*

SCHARFF: Can you talk me through, in terms of the communication with the Cabinet, just so others could maybe replicate the model that you have created. There are a number of things that happen in the lead up to an actual cabinet meeting, those cabinet meetings that are not called quickly, not the emergency cabinet but the regularly scheduled cabinet meetings.

ROGERS: *The regular meetings.*

SCHARFF: What are the specific steps if someone were to try to copy this model? What should they know? What takes place?

ROGERS: *The communication with the Cabinet, especially when it comes to the cabinet meetings, from what I saw when I came was done mostly through hardcopy, like a memo to the Cabinet. It was telling them that this is a meeting being held at this time and place. So they would have this—and Mr. Toe was good at carrying those around. What happened with those was, if for instance, because the regular cabinet meeting, maybe the person who was here before me would send it like a week in advance but people would take it and put it on their desk and forget about it. So there was no follow up. A lot of times there would be a minister who would be—[interruption, end of file one]*

The communication before I came was good but it needed to get better. So that's what I would say, I wouldn't say there wasn't good communication because people did come to cabinet meetings, I saw a lot of citations from my predecessor who sent a lot of stuff out. But what some of the ministers told me was that the follow up was the problem. Some of them would forget that they had to attend the meeting. Some of the circulars that went out didn't get to them. Maybe sometimes they give it to the office person; the office person put it aside. So they would be sitting in their office and somebody would call them, "Where are you? You know there's a meeting in one hour?" What? They would have to jump in their car and rush to come to a cabinet meeting.

So what I did was to improve on that by not only sending out the regular circular or citation, but also by sending e-mail. Now that is another thing that is an innovation on my part. They didn't just get a notice about the cabinet meeting; they do get e-mails on a regular basis. Then what everybody tells me the Cabinet likes more are my text messages.

SCHARFF: You text the ministers?

ROGERS: *I text the ministers. I have them on a group contact and I can text everybody at one time. They like that because—what it tells me is that with the circular they were still having a problem. With the e-mail they still have problems because some of them, depending on the time of day they don't have connection or they can't download whatever it is they have to download or they are looking at hundreds of e-mails and it just slips. But when I text them they get that because everybody looks at their text messages. When I text them, at the beginning of my text there is always a bold letters CABINET so when they see it they know it is a cabinet matter, a cabinet alert.*

SCHARFF: Don't ignore it.

ROGERS: *Right, don't ignore it.*

SCHARFF: Read my text.

ROGERS: *Yes, read my text and they usually do. They tell me they like that. The other thing is, the opportunity documentation, you have to send documents in order for them to prepare.*

SCHARFF: What are these documents?

ROGERS: *A lot of time we have what I call policy documents; a policy that is going to be enacted by the National Legislature but it has to come to Cabinet first for approval before it can then be sent by the President's office to the Legislature for enactment. The first year actually the government did a lot of that, they did a lot of policy documents because there were a lot of policies that were missing in various ministries. Now the second term we're not going to do a lot of policy documents because the President now wants implementation. So you have the policies, now you've got to implement all these programs.*

What I did is I also sent those documents as hardcopy and also as softcopy. So they got it both as an attachment and they got it as printed copy.

SCHARFF: How many days before the meeting would you try, ideally would you try to get it out?

ROGERS: *Ideally we would like to get it out seven days before the meeting but sometimes it was three days.*

SCHARFF: It depends.

ROGERS: *Yes, it depends. But in addition, and this is for those who might be looking at what you're reporting, in addition what I've done, because I was telling you that some of these documents are very voluminous, very bulky, a hundred pages, sometimes two hundred pages. As part of the guidelines that I did which is now in the cabinet manual—now we have a cabinet manual—what I did, it was just one page to them saying these ten points please remember and follow. Now we have a whole cabinet manual and since AGI came we have worked together and put together a cabinet manual that all the cabinet ministers have.*

As part of preparing a document for the cabinet now you have to also prepare a one-page executive summary for the President and a two to five-page summary and recommendations to the Cabinet. In other words you summarize your document and you end up by telling the Cabinet what you want them to do. You tell us what your recommendation is. That has been followed. In the beginning there was some little complaining because that was extra work.

SCHARFF: Sure, nobody wants extra work.

ROGERS: *But now everybody because they have come to cabinet meetings—especially when you're not presenting, you come and you can see all these one-page or two-page documents summarizing things for you it makes things much easier so a lot of them like it better like that. They say that is so helpful. Because we are getting that, we have now instituted in the cabinet secretariat also briefing the President on the agenda items. We get these summaries so it is used to help do that.*

SCHARFF: I'd like to hear more about that, what your experience has been like.

ROGERS: *Because before I don't think the President was briefed other than knowing what the agenda was, she was not briefed on the agenda items. So we have now started a process of briefing her on the agenda items. Now we can tell her in a summary form what the agenda is, what that item is, and what the purpose of the item is. Also taking the audacity, the liberty sometimes, to tell her what we think about agenda items.*

SCHARFF: Is that hard?

ROGERS: *Well it is not if you just—you make a recommendation, a suggestion to her. The briefing, the introduction to the briefing to her is this is information to help her run the Cabinet. So when we make that recommendation we make it in the sense that this is what we recommend and these are some of the questions we think you should ask. We have been very happy that once in a while she would use our questions in the cabinet meeting. Then you pat yourself on the back, she used it—but most of the time she has her own questions, things that she wants to ask. But it tells us that she reads our briefing so that for us is good. So that is one area.*

On the presentation itself we also, in the cabinet manual now, we tell people how to make presentations. Normally we keep presentation and discussion to forty minutes per item. Whereas in the beginning I told you some people come and speak for an hour, an hour and a half on just one item. That forty minutes is for

your presentation and discussion. It has been such that now if we go over what we call the indicative timing, usually sometimes just thirty minutes over being two hours later. In other words we've been able to keep them to our time, to our indicative timing and that has been very helpful in moving the Cabinet forward. [interruption, end of file two]

What were we talking about?

SCHARFF: You were talking about your ability to shorten discussion times.

ROGERS: *Yes, we have what we call indicative timing. What we did, this is the template that we put together for Cabinet, for looking at the agenda. So if the meeting starts at 10, we just go through and put a time, indicative timing. In the beginning it was ignored by some people but now it is being followed. Sometimes when we do stay like thirty minutes or more after the regular time, usually you get to AOB (Any Other Business) because that AOB is two or three things you don't think about it or do about it. But they know it is purely informational.*

SCHARFF: So AOB is an open?

ROGERS: *It is open and it is at the discretion of the President as Chair of the Cabinet if she wants to, she will allow it. If they ask me, tell me in advance sometimes, I do put them there for AOB so that it's known. But a lot of them don't do that, they wait until it is AOB then they come out. But more and more now they know that it is informational.*

Sometimes we do have discussion on AOB items, but only if it is of general interest.

SCHARFF: To others.

ROGERS: *To others and maybe to the President. Then she will say, tell us more about this. That then works out because that is information that needs to be shared. So we say if you bring the information it is informational so don't expect any discussion on the AOB. But sometimes AOB can carry over time more than we want. Sometimes we will keep track and everything is on time until we get to AOB.*

SCHARFF: Then it goes out the window.

ROGERS: *Yes, it goes out the window. Now we do it all the time, this is the agenda for the cabinet meeting. So you see we do everything, even tell them when to arrive, when to have lunch. But it has helped. It has helped because even when we go beyond that we go one hour thirty minutes at the most but before it would be people would be talking all over the place. So that was one way we were able to do that.*

Now this is our cabinet manual. You remember I told you I had one.

SCHARFF: With ten points.

ROGERS: *Now this is what the ten points has now become, a cabinet manual of about fourteen pages. It tells you everything.*

SCHARFF: All the processes?

ROGERS: *Yes, the processes.*

SCHARFF: Are there dates and deadlines listed?

ROGERS: *Yes, the deadlines. There are two important parts given. We talk mostly about sections 7 and 9, as they are very important. If there is going to be a presentation preparing documents for the Cabinet, we tell them how to do that looking at section 7. Cabinet Presentation Guidelines, see section 9. So I would quickly show you, that's page 6, now we have the guidelines, preparing the cabinet document. So we tell you, give you a synopsis of what is required. We talked there about the executive summary and the two to five page summary for the Cabinet with recommendations like I was telling you.*

SCHARFF: That's amazing.

ROGERS: *And people like it.*

SCHARFF: When did you publish it?

ROGERS: *The first time we did was 2010, end of 2010.*

SCHARFF: Do you remember the President's reaction when she first saw it?

ROGERS: *We did it December 2010. We presented it in cabinet. We had a briefing for the Cabinet. We said this is it. They looked at it. I had already sent it as an attachment but we did it like this to make it look presentable and we presented every one of them with a copy.*

SCHARFF: And the feedback was generally pretty good?

ROGERS: *The feedback was very good. The President's comment was "Make sure that they read it." Everybody laughed. So we hold them to it. They know for instance when you're doing a presentation you get guidelines. Those making PowerPoint should arrive at least thirty minutes prior to the cabinet meeting so you can check your things. It should last no more than twenty minutes in order to allow time for discussion and questions from Cabinet.*

SCHARFF: To facilitate discussion making.

ROGERS: *So now, from that one page ten points that I did now we have a cabinet manual. We even tell them what the cabinet does, what does the cabinet secretariat do? What issues does the Cabinet consider? Preparing for cabinet meetings, preparing documents for cabinet, providing input to cabinet discussion. Some people talk—we tell them you have to give other people a chance to talk. Cabinet presentation guidelines. We even have Cabinet protocol.*

Then we have the subcommittees of the Cabinet. Then we talk about cabinet secretarial processes. Then we do—we even do the seating, so now people know where to sit.

SCHARFF: Really, does it matter how close you are to the President?

ROGERS: *No, by protocol certain people sit near the President. The two people who sit close to the President are the Minister of Finance and the Foreign Minister. They sit on both sides, because it is like a horseshoe. But there is no problem, nobody forces the issue, they know where they sit. Now they have produced for us a table tags for the table, which we put on the table. This is one for you to see.*

SCHARFF: Thank you so much.

ROGERS: *This is the first sample they sent us to look at before. Everybody has that so when you come you can see—. They laughed when they saw it. They said you didn't put our name there (on the table tags) because you don't think we are going to stay for long.*

SCHARFF: I was going to say—.

ROGERS: *So I said you are still called honorable. As I said, one of the things is the fact that, my hope, that the Cabinet members will see me as a facilitator, as a friend, as somebody who is there to help how they work.*

SCHARFF: That's what I wanted to ask you too. So much of your work was on processes and documentation but the other big thing you did was build those relationships.

ROGERS: Yes.

SCHARFF: Did you have a strategy to try to build those relationships?

ROGERS: *Well coming from Liberia I asked myself, if I were a government official in Liberia, I'm in a meeting, I have all this responsibility, how would I want to be treated? I think that was the question in my mind. In other words, how should I treat them to the point where they look at me as a friend, they look at me as a facilitator, they look at me as a resource person and they look at me as somebody they can call anytime and talk to about anything. I think to a very great extent I have succeeded in doing that.*

My phone has all the numbers of cabinet ministers on it, so I can call any of them now. The only reason they wouldn't answer when I call is they're in a meeting, but as soon as they leave the meeting they will call me right back. "DG, what's happening?" Because if I send a text message they will reply to me right away. For instance, I think it was like early 2011, where we had done some changes, we had that change in the cabinet.

SCHARFF: She dismissed her cabinet.

ROGERS: *As a response. We had a meeting later and we shared some information, but one of the cabinet ministers indicated that no, no, he didn't receive the information that I sent out to him or he didn't know what documents—. Before I could say anything there were two or three other cabinet ministers who said, "No, not him. If he said he sent it to you he sent it, so you better check with your office." So I didn't have to say anything myself, well ok, I thought: the other cabinet ministers were coming to my defense, saying, "If he said he sent it, he sent it. It means you have to look in your office and find it." But that's the kind of relationship we have established.*

SCHARFF: Was it difficult because I would imagine if I were in your shoes I'm sitting close to the President's office and you mentioned, you alluded to this earlier on, maybe ministers would see you not as an ally but as someone who could undermine them.

ROGERS: *Undermine them—.*

SCHARFF: Whispering to the President certain things on a daily basis.

ROGERS: *I think in the beginning everybody was still observing me and watching how I was doing but after a while they realized I was not the kind of person to do that. I think that is how come I'm getting the kind of cooperation from them that I do because—and one of the things that they told me—I didn't say who did or didn't do it, but there used to be a time when they would tell people to give the President some information and they would think the President would have the information and she didn't have it. But they know that when they tell me, I would get that information to the President. In fact I do something that I don't think has been done in the past. I do this FYI (for your information) for the President just before cabinet and I call it tidbits or things not on the agenda. As we are preparing the cabinet for that day there will be people calling, some people will be stuck in traffic. For example, there was a cabinet minister who was coming to cabinet and he suddenly got sick and they had to rush him to the hospital. But he called from the hospital, "I just want you to know I'm in the hospital, I had to bring myself in because I wasn't feeling too good and please let the President know."*

So I had another sheet as I had already given the FYI sheet to the President, so I added that information on this sheet and handed it to the President. She became very concerned, and told me: "Good you told me. Keep track of what happened to him." It's things like that.

SCHARFF: Interesting.

ROGERS: *In another example, there was a cabinet minister who was coming and his sister was rushed to the hospital and he was trying to choose whether he should come to the cabinet or go to the sister's bedside and I told him go to the sister's bedside, I will tell the President. I'm sure she will understand. I did and after the meeting he told me the President called him to find out how the sister was doing.*

Because of those kinds of things, it took a while, but it (the relationship) is built now to the point where they know that I'm not going to do anything to undermine them. I will put them on the spot every once in a while but it won't be something that will be deliberately to undermine them.

SCHARFF: We have a section in the story that we call the overcoming obstacles section. The way it works is we try to show the reform leader arrives in office, he or she starts to work on the reforms and then sometimes there are big, unexpected roadblocks that crop up. We'd like to show what the roadblock is and if the reform leader was able to navigate around it or at least try to get around it. Maybe there were some difficulties. I wonder if there were any obvious roadblocks that sort of come to mind?

ROGERS: *There are one or two. One that I can tell you about is the whole idea of getting policy documents prepared. There is enormous pressure on them, in their offices, to prepare those documents. A lot of times, especially for those who were not doing it as a process for a long period of time but were told they had to make a presentation in cabinet, now they've got to prepare a document. They already have a document, but they can't send by internet because they can't get the attachment to download or upload. I tell them send it to me and I will get it on the computer. But the documentation has been the area because a lot of them have felt that the documents are too bulky.*

I tell them there is nothing I can do about it. If a ministry writes a document and a minister says, "This is a policy document" I can't tell them boil that down to ten pages when they have all these details they want to give. But that is why I can say do the summary. At least beside the document you have the summary.

SCHARFF: Right.

ROGERS: *So that has kind of dampened down their concern. They were complaining that why do you send all these long documents, we have other things to do, when will we sit and read it. But once I instituted that summary, it mitigated the situation a little bit.*

SCHARFF: Do you remember where in the timeline you instituted that summary if I were to just mention it in the story?

ROGERS: *We did that sometime—it must have been a year after I was here so that would be June, July of 2010 because it was not too long after that I sent those guidelines. We worked on them. When Josie came on board, by December we already had the cabinet manual.*

SCHARFF: Interesting.

ROGERS: *I think the cabinet manual turned out to help a lot. The other thing was—the other obstacle that I had that I have not really been able to succeed at is the whole notion of the subcommittees. Because we have what is called the poverty reduction strategy, PRS, the Cabinet was kind of divided in terms of the pillars. We had the security pillar, the economic revitalization pillar, the governance and rule of law pillar, the social and basic services pillar, and infrastructure pillar. All these ministries are underneath these pillars.*

One of the problems I've had is how to deal with the subcommittees system, even though I'm sold to this system that was brought here before I did. It was a document done by my predecessor based on the way the cabinet runs in South Africa. They do a lot of things with the subcommittees in South Africa. Based on the document I have I think they traveled and brought back the information and then did our Cabinet document that incorporated the subcommittees. They do a lot of subcommittee kinds of things in South Africa. Based on that documentation I think that he had traveled there and brought the information. So they re-did a document that incorporated that into what they call the Cabinet State something. I have that document. So the idea was to do it. But then a lot of ministers found it to be too cumbersome, it would take too much time. If we're going to have a cabinet meetings why do we need to meet as subcommittees, some asked.

But my reason for supporting it is that if we meet at this level and discuss cabinet documents, two things can happen. A lot of that information would be cut down because the other people would look at it and say it's too long, let's edit it. So one of the things that can happen in the subcommittee is that the document can be edited. The second thing that can happen in the subcommittee is that that group then becomes a support base for that document. So when it comes to cabinet you have the support.

SCHARFF: Because these are, for instance, if it policy having to do with security, we can kind of get agreement here so when we bring it to the cabinet there is sort of unanimous agreement, it lessens the amount of argument and discussion.

ROGERS: *Exactly. The other thing was, I remember one time—I mean they have met one or two times but it is not a continuous thing. The President is saying maybe we need to just scrap that. But I went to one subcommittee meeting where there was a minister that was having some problem. Other ministers were willing to work*

with that minister to resolve the problem they were having. So I said I like that idea.

The other thing was, and I remember it was the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Public Works, yes, this was infrastructure, the Minister of Transport was presenting a plan but then he had to leave and travel. So on the day of the thing I said who else can, where are the other people on that. So I called the Minister of Public Works. I said you know the infrastructure? He said "Yes, I know the document, I can present it when I come." So he was there, he was the one to present the document on behalf of the Minister of Transport. Even though it was a transport document, but because he is on that subcommittee—.

SCHARFF: He was familiar with it.

ROGERS: *He was familiar with it. The only thing against the subcommittees is that they are very time consuming, there are too many meetings. The ministers already have too many meetings. They saw this as an additional meeting.*

SCHARFF: And it didn't really necessarily have the political will from upstairs.

ROGERS: *No I didn't have that; the President told me they're already busy. But we still have it in the cabinet manual because it is under their policy so it is part of the manual but those are the one or two things I can think of.*

The other one—this had to do really with—we do a lot of changes of the cabinet schedule based on the President's schedule. Based on how her schedule changes we have to change. In the beginning some people resisted that. We already set the time and now you call us at the last minute and say it is changed. But I've always told them, "don't kill the messenger." I'm just the messenger so we joke about it. So they are coming around now. Now because I do texts I can text them and they say, "Oh yes, you texted me, I already changed it."

SCHARFF: So the texting allows you to quickly change because a lot of times the schedule upstairs changes, like this past weekend.

ROGERS: *Yes. Schedules, state visits, like what happened—.*

SCHARFF: Changes like what happened last weekend.

ROGERS: *Yes last weekend, but then just I think 48 hours or so or 72 hours, the council, the President from Malawi—.*

SCHARFF: And that throws everything out the window and you have to start over.

ROGERS: *So I came right back down and sent them an e-mail telling that it had been postponed and also text it. So both of them.*

So that would be one of the things that I would see as a problem but actually the challenges that we have had to overcome really have been with the cabinet secretariat itself, making sure we had things in place that would make it easier to deal with the cabinet and to do things with the cabinet that would make them feel that their time is not being wasted.

Even for the President, at one point I remember telling the President that I wanted to brief her. The way she is she, she does actually tell you straightforward how she feels. She said, "You haven't done enough yet for you to

brief me." What she meant was you need to put up systems and things and get them going before you come and brief me." I said, "Ok, Madam President, we do a lot of stuff." So the next time I went around I had all my stuff I had done. It was after I did the manual, then she would talk to me. She wants to see action; she doesn't want too much talking.

SCHARFF: Do you think that that first attempt at briefing was probably in the summer of 2010 or was it earlier than that?

ROGERS: *Earlier than that. It was just when Josie came on board—I can't remember exactly when Josie came on board, you can ask her, she will tell you. I remember that she and I had planned what are we going to say—our outline. She said, now you can go and talk to her. Josie was a supporter of mine because she knew I was working hard, and yet the President wasn't talking to us. Josie says ok, we're going to continue working on gaining her confidence. I said yes, we're going to do that. But then yes, it was like a year, a year and a half ago.*

SCHARFF: To you, when the President actually allowed you to brief her, that must have been an indication that for the first time the President signaling that she actually sees value—.

ROGERS: *Exactly.*

SCHARFF: In the cabinet.

ROGERS: *In how the Cabinet is being run. I don't think she just wanted us to be there just for clerical matters like taking minutes. She wanted to see us engaging the Cabinet in a way that makes the Cabinet productive. One of those ways was for us to do a manual. Then we had a cabinet directory. We had done a directory also that everybody has praised. There was a problem sometimes that they didn't know a minister's number so we have a cabinet directory now.*

SCHARFF: That lists?

ROGERS: *That lists all their names and their telephone numbers and their e-mail addresses, those that have e-mail addresses. So we do—in fact this is the latest one we are putting together based on the new Cabinet. This is the cabinet directory. It gives listing. Now the one Logan is doing is nice, he is putting in the portfolio so you will know not only he is an assistant minister, but we know he is the assistant minister for what, as part of the portfolio.*

SCHARFF: And this is—?

ROGERS: *Logan is doing that.*

SCHARFF: You have the deputies and the chiefs of staff?

ROGERS: *Yes, what we do is we have the minister, the deputy, the assistant ministers and their office contact.*

SCHARFF: That's really good.

ROGERS: *So that's what we've done. Now you can see the Ministry of Health. You have the minister, you have all the deputies, now you have the assistant ministers and the office contact. The cabinet really liked this because for the first time they want to*

call—there was a time I was told that when they wanted to call someone they had to call the President's office to ask such an information.

SCHARFF: To get the number.

ROGERS: *Yes, but now they have everything right there. And I send it—everything I send it is softcopy and hardcopy. So that is one of the things we achieved.*

SCHARFF: Great. Just generally speaking Dr. Rogers why is it in a place like Liberia, why is it important to have a Cabinet, a strong Cabinet? Why is it important for governing in general, why is it important to have the Cabinet?

ROGERS: *It is important because of the fact that generally the Cabinet, not just in Liberia, the cabinet ministers are known as lieutenants of the President. They have to carry out the day-to-day function of the government in terms of looking at the various sectors within the government. Of course you know the biggest decisions are at the presidency. Then they have to implement. They have to carry out programs and they have to come up with policies that can then be accepted in terms of establishing programs and policies and also implementing them. So the Cabinet meets as a way of informing the President in a sense of what they are doing based on what she has set as her goals and priorities in terms of the development agenda.*

That is basically what—for instance, for the first term of her administration the Poverty Reduction Strategy, PRS, was the focus of the government. So as you can see by the subcommittee each one of them had an area where they are. A lot of times while they may individually report to the President, the Cabinet gave them (the ministers) a collective platform where they could talk about things and have their colleagues react and get feedback. Also they have to inform the whole government because it is from cabinet meetings that all the cabinet ministers know what is happening in other agencies. That information necessarily is not shared by circular. So a lot of that information comes through the cabinet meetings.

When we have a cabinet meeting those documents that are distributed are sometimes the first time that it is seen by another cabinet minister; it comes through the cabinet secretariat. So we become like a clearinghouse as it were for a lot of the information that is circulated in government. In fact to the point that there are other government agencies that want our directory. I cannot give it to them because actually it is done for confidentiality sake; it is done for the Cabinet and the Minister of State for Presidential Affairs.

So some people are saying you need to do a directory for the whole government but that would be out of our purview and out of our power.

SCHARFF: And it would cause a lot of people calling.

ROGERS: *Yes, but this is very helpful. So actually the function of the Cabinet in a sense is to: 1. Have the opportunity where the government, the executive branch can meet and deliberate on decisions and issues that affect the operation of the government. So that is broadly—.*

SCHARFF: Do they vote in Cabinet?

ROGERS: *No, the way this Cabinet works is by consensus. So a lot of decisions are taken by consensus. But there is a vigorous discussion of some of the items. Some*

items they are so clear that there is no need for vigorous discussion, maybe one or two questions are asked. Some may feel like there is missing information and once clarification is given it goes through. So there is no actual voting, just consensus, decisions are made by consensus.

One of the things that, because of the way we have streamlined presentation, the way cabinet documentation has been distributed, adds a whole lot in terms of the discussion and therefore increased the amount of decisions that are made at cabinet. If the Cabinet is not very clear about certain decisions they are going to drag their feet about implementing them. There are a lot of times of course where the President has chaired the Cabinet and will intervene and ask that something be endorsed. But she always gives them ample time to discuss it. So anybody who has reservations can express that reservation but eventually things are done by consensus.

SCHARFF: I'm very conscious of your time. The last part of the story that we have we call a reflections section. We ask the protagonist in the story to step back and reflect on their time in their role thus far. I'm curious, when you look back over your tenure as DG, what are you most proud of?

ROGERS: *One as I said is the relationship I was able to establish with the cabinet ministers to the point that I feel they have become very responsive to the information that we sent out to them. So that is one area that I'm proud of because I am of the feeling that had that relationship not been established my job would be much more difficult to undertake. While I am the one who asks them to present stuff, they have the resources and the information, so if they don't share with me that would make my job to be difficult. I can't go to the President and make excuses, saying, I can't have cabinet because—it would be like I was complaining. But because we cooperate, we work together so that for me I think this is number one.*

The second thing is the meeting themselves have improved really to the point where I can relax in Cabinet. In the beginning I couldn't relax because I just saw things fall apart at some point but now I can relax because I know everything is there. Everything that is needed to run the Cabinet successfully or make that meeting productive is there.

Also the third thing I would say in reflecting back is that, as I said, in the beginning I thought the President saw my role mostly as just organizing meetings but now I think she knows that I am not just one who just organizes meetings, but this office can also help her in following actions, so we track actions. We are able to brief her about things that are happening. We are able to keep track of her schedule and are able to integrate the cabinet schedule within her schedule. For the most time it has been a smooth operation.

So I would say that overall when I look back I feel coming from a background that had nothing to with what I am in to that I have been successful in making the Cabinet to feel—I mean the way I want to put this is that people from the outside who are now members of the Cabinet always tell me they have been impressed because they say that it is a lot more work coming out of Cabinet. In other words, from the outside people do see that, the cabinet is now more productive. That for me is a consolation that comes my way every once in a while. People tell me that since you have been there everything is working smoothly and everybody is informed and so forth.

I would say overall improvement in how the Cabinet is functioning; its level of productivity is something that makes me feel good. If I leave this position I can say one day that I did help to bring the cabinet processes and system to that level. There is still a lot to be done. For instance, one challenge we have is capacity. Actually we could be doing—if we look at the documents and things, I was talking about voluminous. If we had somebody in the cabinet secretariat like a policy analyst or somebody who did just documentation they could even go to the various ministries and help them to prepare documents the way we want them to be prepared to come to Cabinet. For instance they could also give pointers to people.

We are doing the same for public corporations. When they are making presentations at a cabinet retreat, a few have already begun to call me asking us if we have a template they can use. So they put the idea in my head. Now if we can come up with a template that they can follow. But it is the capacity thing; I am so busy doing other things. You need somebody who will be there.

SCHARFF: Dedicated to—.

ROGERS: *Dedicated to do that. So the greatest challenge I think is capacity. I'm told that there is a possibility that we can get a policy analyst so that would be very helpful. A lot of the stuff that Mr. Logan does now could be—he has taken on a heavy load because we don't have that capacity. We all—the only reason we survive is because we work as a team and everybody who works around me they know I believe in teamwork. I don't believe in the fact that if it is not your area that's fine, but because of that you don't say that you're not going to participate in what is happening. In other words, I try to lead by example. When we have to be up there, for instance distributing a document I don't sit back and say I'm the DG you do it, I'm there too.*

SCHARFF: Which is helpful.

ROGERS: *You have to lead by example. That's what I believe. I think working in the cabinet secretariat as a team has helped us a lot in taking care of that capacity problem because actually some ministers would say, I don't see how you three guys are able to respond this quickly. The thing is we work as a team, nobody sits around waiting for the other person to do something, and we all are hands on. We get things done. Our biggest achievement is at the end of the day we can sit down and say everything went well.*

We do have what is called a cabinet post mortem. It is something we started about a year ago where after every cabinet meeting we come down and sit here and ask each other how did it go? What were the strengths? What were the weaknesses? What did we see that went wrong that we can correct the next time. So we do a post mortem and that has been very helpful to help the system. Actually there are things that do go wrong sometimes in Cabinet, but for the average person they might not be able to tell but we can tell. Maybe next time we should do so-and-so.

Then the other thing we've done is the President also wants to go on what are called cabinet retreats which can be for a day, two days, three days, especially when we go further away from Monrovia. Sometimes we have three days for these (meetings) we call cabinet retreats. We do what we call a dry season schedule. That is when we do most of our cabinet retreat meetings.

One of the things I've done since I've been here is to set up what I call CRAT, it means Cabinet Retreat Assessment Team. The Cabinet Retreat Assessment Team is comprised of all the agencies in government that have an effect on the cabinet or the movement of the cabinet as we leave Monrovia. When we are in Monrovia it is just the Minister of State, but when we leave Monrovia we have to know, for example, are the roads in a condition so the whole Cabinet can go where we want to go? So the Ministry of Public Works is on that team. We have ten agencies that are on that team. We all meet. For example, we are planning a retreat on Friday, by Monday we already had a team in Kakata doing that assessment.

So now when we go back to Monrovia we know—everybody comes back and makes a report, an assessment report on the various areas. We involve the Minister of Internal Affairs because everything outside of Monrovia is referred to as internal affairs or local government. So they have to contact the local officials and say the President, the Cabinet, is coming up there. Then they have to identify facilities that we can use. We have the Ministry of Health. They have to tell us what kinds of medical facilities are there, will there be an ambulance just in case somebody got sick.

Then we have the Ministry of State is the overall overseer of the cabinet retreats since I'm in this office. Then we have the GSA, the General Services Agency, and GSA takes care of government properties and things. So for instance if the superintendent identifies a building, GSA goes there, makes sure the building is in good condition, it has air condition, the roofing is ok. Then we also involve the Ministry of Justice because they're security. They have to inform the security forces in that area.

SCHARFF: That you're passing—.

ROGERS: *That the Cabinet is passing through and that the Cabinet will be situated here. That will also involve the presidential security, the SSS (Special Security Service), because they have to also do an advanced assessment. So the CRAT team has been very successful. And they have kept the meeting moving, like it is trouble free. Before I came, when we were going to have the first cabinet retreat outside Monrovia, I found that everybody was doing their own thing. I said no, we can't work this way, we have to work as a team and coordinate as a team.*

SCHARFF: Quite innovative. I think this is something that others might want to model.

ROGERS: *Yes, it is very important. Now when we come back we are all on the same page. Mr. Kromah, who just walked in is the acting chairman of GSA. He is here because of the Kakata retreat; now he is acting minister but is the deputy for administration so we can harmonize whatever we need to harmonize so that come Friday when the cabinet ministers arrive there they will think that we had no problems.*

SCHARFF: They will never see the magic that went on behind the scenes.

ROGERS: *Exactly. So that has been something that we have done. So overall it is like—I believe that in reflecting that I can say modestly that we have moved the cabinet processes and system one notch up. I'm sure there is someone who will come and tell me you can make it better. But everybody who has been in government tells us this time around the Cabinet is functioning much better than it ever did. So I like to take credit for that.*

SCHARFF: Just in conclusion, if you could look back over your time and do one thing differently, I'm curious what that would be and then to piggyback on that, the very final would be what is your hope for the future of the Cabinet?

ROGERS: *Ok, if I could—the only one thing that—and this has to be something that only the President can allow to happen is I would like—as I was saying initially, the feeling that I got, the outlook that I got, listening to people talk about the Cabinet before I came and I took it over, they had the feeling like it was just so much for organizing meetings. But the cabinet is more than that. The cabinet is actually the President's liaison with the rest of the executive branch of the government.*

If I could see anything to change it is that the cabinet secretariat should be involved more in the beginning of policy making because there are a lot of policies that come through the Cabinet that have already been made and when they come to us we can own them—you understand what I am trying to say?

SCHARFF: It is already done.

ROGERS: *Yes, it is already done. For instance, there are consultative meetings that I had held and we don't get invited to them. I recently spoke to the President about that and she said she has nothing against it. But it is a way—in other words, now I have to sell that to the Cabinet: say, "Look, when you are dealing with policies or having consultative meetings we need to be invited." Then somebody said, hey you are just one person, how are you going to divide this? But the idea is, if anything I want to change it would be that the Director-General of the Cabinet is not just somebody who sets up meetings, he can be much more than that, he can also be a policy person. That can help the Cabinet formulate the kind of policy that needs to be brought to the meeting.*

I think that if we do have a policy analyst they would give them the opportunity to do that, or they might just have to intrude. As the President said she had no problem with that. In other words she was saying I have no problem, you go to them.

SCHARFF: You do it.

ROGERS: *With another additional manpower we can do that because as I said, even preparing documents that person could be involved from the beginning with them. Then we can have—it is not that we want to influence the policy, we just want to be aware of the policy. Therefore we can brief the President better if we are. We can also be able to disseminate the information in a better form.*

In the future I'm thinking of doing updates for the cabinet, which would be like newsletters, in the form of a newsletter. So if we are involved in—I can say at the ministry of this, so-and-so things have been done and blah, blah, blah. I can keep people involved and knowing what is happening across government.

SCHARFF: Essentially without you, without the cabinet secretariat, there is really no other way to coordinate across ministries.

ROGERS: *To coordinate, thank you, exactly.*

SCHARFF: Really a successful government must have that strong coordination.

ROGERS: Yes.

SCHARFF: Without you and your team there is no other mechanism in this government, right?

ROGERS: *As I said for example some documents come to cabinet and other ministers are seeing them for the first time. But if we had that capacity to be involved before it came to Cabinet, we would have enough information already passed to everybody so that when a document comes they already have a gist of what is involved in this document and how this document should go forward. I think that might even help to speed up a lot—. For example, there was a document once that came and because we didn't even have a chance to look at it because when it came we just sent it. When Cabinet was discussing the document there were a lot of things that were left out that if we had a chance to look at it we could have suggested—for instance, there was no timeline. There was no recommendation. Things like that.*

Sometimes cabinet ministers basically leave it up to their junior officers to do those things and sometimes they don't do them properly. So that would be, if there is anything I would like to change that would be one. It has to be known that we are more than just an office to set up cabinet meetings.

SCHARFF: Thank you very much for your time.

ROGERS: *I hope you got enough information.*

SCHARFF: Is there anything that you think is particularly important to include in the story that we didn't discuss?

ROGERS: *The only thing I would want to say is I was reading the other report that you did. In writing this report what I want you to indicate is that what works here may not work elsewhere. Most of the system if you follow like making sure the documents are there on time, making sure the Cabinet is informed regularly and frequently, all of those things are things that anybody, anywhere can do. But there are certain nuances that you have to make local. For example, a good example is that's why Josie and I work very well together. When the AGI team came, they came with a lot of good ideas but some of those ideas were good for Great Britain and not for Liberia. I would say, no, we don't do it like this.*

SCHARFF: What were some of those ideas specifically? This is great that you brought this up. It is a context specific—.

ROGERS: *It is a context and culture thing.*

SCHARFF: What were they sort of suggesting that wouldn't work?

ROGERS: *One of the things—I'm trying to think, I know it—oh yes, the document thing. If Josie had her way in terms of the way we would look at the document she is still not pleased with the document that comes to Cabinet. But then I tell her, I say, in terms of the Liberian culture, we are not a research-oriented people.*

Also, she thought that the cabinet members should be more prepared than they are when they come to Cabinet. I say just getting them now to come, to read the one or two pages they do, at least the summary, that's fine with me. I can't tell them that they have to read this document before they come to Cabinet. So that's why I say that.

Then when we were doing the manual there are some things I have to tell them leave it out. The thing is even though I've been away from Liberia for over twenty-some odd years, I grew up here so I still know some of the things that people will take and not take. It's not major things, it's just small things. It's mannerisms, the way people look at things. That's why you have to know. I think part of my success of dealing with the cabinet ministers is that I do know some of those things. I can tell—in other words I know when to push and when not to push. You understand.

SCHARFF: Yes, I would imagine there is definitely a level of—the ministers too have to show deference to the President.

ROGERS: Yes.

SCHARFF: And they can't really be seen as pushing back too hard on her. You need unanimous decision-making. So it must be hard sometimes for people to speak openly, freely, truthfully, to voice perhaps dissent. That must be difficult.

ROGERS: *Well luckily there are in that sense, there are three, four, five ministers that, I guess because of their relationship with the President, are not held back when they want to talk. Sometimes they say things that others need to say and then—.*

SCHARFF: They jump first.

ROGERS: *Yes, there is that deference. Actually you know the whole thing, the cabinet, the presidency, there is a chemistry. You have to know the right moment and the right time and the right thing to say. It's not like you're afraid but we are dealing with a President that is very knowledgeable so it is usually not when you come up with a suggestion, an idea, it is not something new. You're not going to be impressing her as much as you impress somebody who doesn't know—.*

You know she worked in international relations and has all this experience so there is really not much. But she will engage them sometimes just for them to speak. Sometimes she will make a remark off the mark just to get the person to—however, there are some ministers who will not say much regardless.

SCHARFF: I think what other countries, maybe you've seen this too in the area, sometimes it is hard, the head of state doesn't necessarily—it is almost like they don't really need or even favor a strong cabinet. They would much prefer—especially a cabinet where it is a reconciliation cabinet, where you have some members who are not necessarily your allies.

ROGERS: *That's right.*

SCHARFF: It is much easier as the head of state—if you're the head of state and I'm your minister who is friendly, just to have one-on-one conversations in the office and not to have to air difficult, sensitive issues in a full group when you know that the minister sitting here is not—and he may—and tensions arise.

ROGERS: *That is right, that has been a problem sometimes, not always, but sometimes because of that, that inclusive cabinet thing. So she has a lot of one-on-one sometimes. I have noticed even sometimes from cabinet meetings one or two ministers will just follow her into her office.*

SCHARFF: Which kind of undermines—.

ROGERS: *What I found is that it is not really undermining. What it does is that, like you're saying there is certain information that they don't feel should be voiced in Cabinet. But when it has to do with cabinet matters, whatever is on the agenda is fully discussed so there is no problem with that. But I think those moments that you're talking about are moments when there might be something you want to say but you don't want to say it because everybody else is there so you wait and you go and then you follow her. So that has happened. But when it comes to the cabinet agenda itself, it has been fully discussed.*

One of the things that I like about the President is that she is very open-minded. Now, of course, as a minister, you take a risk sometimes when you say some things. Even though she is open-minded you have to think about how sensitive is the information.

SCHARFF: Yes.

ROGERS: *But she will allow the discussion. Too, when we started the indicative timing things, every once in a while when I try to stop people she will look at me like—. One time she even told me, "No Dr. Rogers, who is chairing the meeting, me or you?" "That's you Madam President," I responded. So things like that. I find also that if the discussion is meaningful she will let it go, but if it is just trying to show off, they're showcasing, then she will cut it off.*

SCHARFF: So a lot of your work initially at least was focused on trying to make sure that the meeting itself was meaningful enough for the President.

ROGERS: Yes, for the President.

SCHARFF: That she felt she was getting something out of it.

ROGERS: *Yes. Once we were having a meeting and she had to make an important phone call, or receive an important phone call. So she said, "you should be talking about something else, I'm coming." She left and came back later to continue where she left off. Ordinarily she would say you talk about the agenda but she wanted them to stop talking about the agenda and talk about some other things until she got back. In other words she was so involved, even though she knew she had to go out and make obviously that call, she wanted to be back in there. So you had that. It was a good sign to me that she liked the way the meeting is organized and how it is going.*

Then also she knows that because, depending on—most Presidents have some pet projects or pet programs.

SCHARFF: Sure.

ROGERS: *If there is a minister making a presentation she wants to be there to make sure she knows that they are doing the right thing. So that happens. Other things are there such as just the body language. Sometimes I may want to intervene on something and I look at her and I keep my cool—you can tell from the body language. So even though we have the indicative time, if I think the discussion is going very well and there is a lot of contribution, even though I know the time has been taken, I am sitting, just watching. I have now learned to make eye contact with her.*

SCHARFF: What she wants.

ROGERS: *Yes, and of course she has the power to stop any discussion she wants to. She looks at me like—.*

SCHARFF: She's the boss.

ROGERS: *For instance, interestingly we had a cabinet retreat not too long ago, last month—no it was in March. I set the agenda. She liked it, there was going to be presentations and then we would have a discussion period. That's how I set it up. But the ministers are not used to that. They're used to getting in there and talk. So I had to go to her and remind her, you know we'll have a discussion period. So she said, "Yes, but I can talk can't I?"*

SCHARFF: Yes Ma'am.

ROGERS: *Then eventually she followed. She wanted to accommodate a certain minister but then she realized that if she does that then the general time would be lengthened—she knows how the other cabinet ministers might refuse my time warning and then we'll be there until midnight, so she had to go along. I think she likes that because she knows that we have that system set up. I have to follow the agenda.*

That's the point I'm making, as the Director-General or Cabinet Secretary you have to also know what the Prime Minister or the President wants. Now I know how she (President Sirleaf) conducts meetings so I can tell when I need to make things happened, like stop the talking or just let things go. You get to know that. In the beginning I was a little bit bashful because I didn't know when to intervene or when not to be, but now I know.

SCHARFF: That at the end of the day is just a matter of time for someone in another country taking on a role similar to yours. They have to realize that it is going to take time.

ROGERS: *Yes, it is going to take time for that to happen. The way to actually do that is to engage the President with the Cabinet. I'd go up to her sometimes with the agenda and she'd ask me, "Why did you do this? why did you do that?" We harmonized that. So now when the Cabinet is meeting, I know that she has approved what is there in the agenda. So even when she thinks something is boring, I know she knew it was on the agenda. So again you have to do that individual thing.*

I think it is very helpful, as I said, and I will repeat it if there is somebody else, is that I think for me personally that for you to be successful—you can be successful in two ways. You can be successful where every person likes you and likes what you're doing. But to me, the best way to be successful as the Director General of Cabinet is to be one who can get along with the cabinet ministers. Because even if you are one who wants to undermine the some ministers, it might backfire one day. There is only so much you can say. Some will challenge you. I think, when I look at the Cabinet, I want when the Cabinet is in session that it is a tension-free cabinet meeting.

Of course there are going to be some issues that come up that may look tense, but in other words I want the whole atmosphere to be tension-free. So even if that item has tension, on the next item everybody comes back to normal. Because if it is not tension free then one of two things happens, a person will put somebody on the spot. Then to me you're not doing your job. I think for the Cabinet to be able to make decisions, first of all the cabinet ministers should be prepared in a way that everybody is on the same page and knows what is

happening. Also that nobody is putting anybody on the spot, but that the issues are there and that is what is being discussed. In other words, I don't want a cabinet minister to tell another cabinet minister, oh you're just wrong because you haven't read the document. You understand what I'm saying?

SCHARFF: Yes.

ROGERS: *That doesn't happen because everybody got the same information. I do the two to five-page summary. When it is finished I send it to everybody. You may disagree with a point but you do it because you are doing it from an intelligent point of view, you're not doing it just because you say I don't know what's happening I just say what I want to say. Which can be disruptive. So I believe that for the cabinet meetings to function it has to be, as the Director of the Cabinet you have to make sure that everybody is prepared the best way possible so that when they are there they feel that they can contribute if they want to. Then every meeting some people will be more vocal and other people who were vocal will be silent and another group will speak out at another meeting. I like that because it shows that the group that was vocal at this time is because of the issues that are being discussed at that time. The next time it is another group. So that makes the Cabinet work smoothly. At the end of every meeting, one or two or three ministers will come by and tell me, "I enjoyed it." That to me is an achievement. These are the people who I got to come here and sit for three or four hours and they're happy when they're leaving.*

SCHARFF: Time well worth investing.

ROGERS: *As I say again, there were little things I arranged to have a smooth cabinet meeting like having a meal prepared for the Cabinet. Usually when we have a cabinet meeting I have it in the morning and it goes from like 10 a.m. to maybe 2 p.m., sometimes 3 p.m., depending. A lot of them by noon they're hungry. I've had cabinet ministers say what are you trying to do, starve us? But they do it in a joking way, and I would say, don't worry, you'll get fed. But I have to make sure that all of that is arranged.*

The way my role is I'm not just about what is happening in the room but what is happening outside. Even when somebody has to bring someone to the cabinet room I have to know in advance and then I work with the protocol office because some ministers may need to sign documents prepared by their offices even while they are in cabinet meetings. All these kinds of things happen. I try to make it all encompassing, not just having the document on the table and say what time to have the meeting. I have to make sure that everything else works.

In other words that's why I'm saying the work of the Cabinet Secretary is not just to organize meetings; that's a major part of your job but it is also to make sure that everything else is in place to make a cabinet meeting productive. It is the same idea of the CRAT team because when we were going out, the same thing. We get people from the Ministry of Commerce who tell us where there is local lodging and GSA will do that too for government lodging. So the cabinet ministers are told in advance if you want lodging this is where you're going to be because all of that is support, the Cabinet ministers get there and they need a room, a place for them to lodge. That is going to affect their—.

SCHARFF: Their attitude. They might not be so happy.

ROGERS: *All of that is taken into consideration. So I think we are at the point since I've been here that all of those things are not taken for granted. When they call me,*

they just call me "oh who will be in Kakata? Who will be there?" They're not worried about will there be enough chairs, will there be air conditioning. That to me is a lot of what we're doing as the Cabinet Secretary. We are not only the liaison between the ministers and the President, we are also a coordinator. So now we even get to the point now where when other people want to get in touch with the Cabinet they come to us to do it.

SCHARFF: To talk to the ministers.

ROGERS: *Or to send information to the ministers. For instance when President (Joyce) Banda was coming, the chief of protocol, once they had the time they just sent it to me and said let the Cabinet know that she is coming, because they have to be there. I sent the information out. As I said the cabinet ministers respond to the things that I send them.*

SCHARFF: That is really interesting, that the role of secretary, that may not have been something you initially envisioned would be your role.

ROGERS: *It is because of what they see us as facilitator—they see us as the contact. You can call the President and say we're having a meeting, where is it going to be? But they can call me and get the information. One of the things they tell me is that whenever we call you, you have the information at your fingertips to tell us what to do or what not to do. But if you don't we know you will tell us you will call us right back, you usually call us right back and tell us. So there is confidence, it is starting to be established. We established that also.*

SCHARFF: You have rapport—.

ROGERS: *Rapport, for instance right now there is one of the ministers in South Africa and I have had three or four or five text messages.*

SCHARFF: From South Africa?

ROGERS: Yes, from South Africa.

SCHARFF: Asking for requests?

ROGERS: *Asking questions about ok, at nighttime I got your e-mail that we're going to be in Kakata but I'm in South Africa. I said who is acting? I have to know so I can inform the President. They said sorry, I didn't have a chance to send you an e-mail before I left but this is the person. I said good, fine. These are little things. You understand what I'm saying? Holding the cabinet meeting is the big thing, but the Cabinet functions more if you also do the little things. To me doing the little things is what gets things going because you know I can send a text message and say we're having a cabinet retreat at Kakata and then when they call me I'll say, didn't I send you a text message or didn't I send you an e-mail? When they call me and someone says, "I can't download the information" or "I can't get into my mailbox" I say, don't worry, I'll get it for you. So I talk to them and tell them. These are little things but they appreciate that.*

Then they will say I've got everything, I don't even need to go to my e-mail. I say don't get used to it. We joke about it. So we're like friends. I think that is very important. From my experience, coming back after twenty some odd years, not knowing most of the people and being able to work with them, it tells me that it is very important in being Director-General of the Cabinet to have good people relations. You have to be a people person. It helps a lot. It doesn't mean you

have to like all the ministers. There are a few of them who are very good friends of mine, but I treat my good friends and the rest all the same so nobody can tell whether I like them or not.

SCHARFF: You have to.

ROGERS: *For instance, there is, maybe we should have, they have been saying DG, you need to put us together on a social level. Maybe on a Saturday we can just have a social time. I say shall I bring the President? No, no.*

SCHARFF: Don't bring the boss.

ROGERS: *Just us there socializing. The only reason they ask me to do that is because they all feel like they can have a good time. But we don't have the time to do it; everybody is so busy, with family or something else. One of these days we might find the opportunity to get together.*

SCHARFF: Thanks.