



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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LOPEZ: This interview is for civil service reform in Sierra Leone with Albert Bockarie, Senior Permanent Secretary of The Public Service Commission. The interviewer is Summer Lopez. Mr. Bockarie, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us.

BOCKARIE: *Thank you.*

LOPEZ: I'd like to start just by asking you to describe a little bit your role in public sector reform here, if you could talk about that.

BOCKARIE: *Okay, thank you, Madame Auditor. Yes, we as a commission, are always involved in civil service reform. The reason being, we, on this end, as a commission, we give the best, the very best officers, that will be employed, that work in various line ministries, MDA's, agencies. Because we believe there should be excellence, effectiveness, and performance. So, we make sure we give the very best candidates, with the right credentials, to be employed, to be placed in various MDA's in the service. So, this is why we are always involved in civil service reform.*

LOPEZ: And how long have you been involved in this personally?

BOCKARIE: *As long as—of course, as an administrator, I've worked for thirty years, almost. Since then, I've been involved in reforms in various ministries I've worked.*

LOPEZ: What other ministries have you worked in?

BOCKARIE: *I've worked in the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development and the Ministry of Development. I've worked in the Ministries of Tourism and Labor. I've worked in the provinces as a district officer, Provincial Secretary - the highest position in the field. Then, I've worked in the Public Service Commission now; this is my second inning. I worked at there for six years, and then I was transferred out to the Ministry of Parliamentary and Political Affairs. I worked there for three years—I left there. I worked the longest in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, because I go on and off, I go in the field, I come back, work for some time, and then I'm sent back. The only Ministries I have not worked in are Trade and Industry, Finance, Foreign Affairs, and Education. Quite apart from that, I've worked in almost all the other ministries.*

LOPEZ: How do you think that experience of working in the ministries has helped you in your work on reform?

BOCKARIE: *It has helped a lot, because I deal with officers and some of the ministries are professional ministries, like the Ministry of Education, the teachers, these are technical people. When you work with them, you learn about their own technical areas. If you go to Development, there too, you have the professional wing, who deal purely with development in the field, they deal with the NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) - they register NGOs. So when you work with them, you get a wealth of experience with NGOs, both national and international organizations. Then as well you combine the two with your administrative job, because we are always, as the Permanent Secretary, a head of administration. In all of these ministries, you are always at the helm of things. You coordinate development, develop agencies, etc., etc., and that has really helped me.*

LOPEZ: Can you describe a little bit about your work here at the Public Service Commission and what the commission's role is?

BOCKARIE: *I am the administrative head of this commission. At the political head, there is a political wing of this commission, headed by a chairman, plus four members, making five. These are the political heads and they are appointed directly by the President. I advise them on the administrative aspect of how we can go about recruitment, because we do recruitment - we engage school leavers—from tertiary and the institutions, job seekers, they come. We have to advise them as how we should go about that, because we are independent, this commission is independent, it's quite apart from every interference except that the President has to consult this commission on appointment in the civil service. The other appointments he cannot consult us because that then is political. So, anyone, any appointment relating to the civil service, he usually consults the commission.*

LOPEZ: Great. Could you talk a little bit about what the capacity in the public sector has been in the past and where it is now?

BOCKARIE: *Well, before the war, there was no opportunity for officers to go on training. We didn't—at that time, before the war, we did not take seriously the training needs of the civil servants in the civil service. Just after the war, we saw the need, the government saw the need that these people, the civil service, needs to be really equipped with the best caliber of people to work in the service for effective service delivery. You can do this effectively when these officers are trained. So now government, they have been on training needs, okay. So this time around, every ministry, every department has a training component in their vote. Like, we have just submitted our allocation, our estimate for the next financial year, and in that, I have factored a lot of money in both local training, as well as overseas training. So, if I—like I have two officers who are doing their masters, just after that, next year they'll be fine to go out and get their doctorates and come back. When they come back their experience shared and obtained during the course of their education, they come back and relate that to the service and the country will move forward. So, we have—we leave very happy now, now on the human resource development.*

LOPEZ: Could you talk a little bit about how public sector reform got started, what motivated it, who has kind of been the leaders?

BOCKARIE: *Well, just after the war, the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) really spearheaded all reforms, UNDP, because they financed every sector of reform in the civil service. So, we have to be very grateful and appreciative of their effort. So, after the war, everything was haywire. So, they put mechanisms in place to really bring semblance of good governance, and in fact, that led us to recent, the most recent two elections, the general Presidential election, which went through successfully, and two weeks ago, the local government elections. They have played a pivotal role and seen that sanity returns to this nation and we are seeing a ray of hope. So UNDP and DFID, they have been very good partners in this.*

LOPEZ: DFID too, right?

BOCKARIE: Yes.

LOPEZ: What were some of the competencies that the government, or donors, or whoever, really wanted to build in this country amongst the civil service?

BOCKARIE: *Accountability, transparency, dedication to work.*

LOPEZ: Do you think those were the right priorities?

BOCKARIE: *Indeed, yes.*

LOPEZ: Wonderful. Let's go ahead and talk about recruitment a little bit. So often one goal is to reduce the degree to which employment and recruitment depends on political ties. So, I know that has been one of the things here. So, I'm wondering if you can describe some of the changes in recruitment and promotion procedures that have been put in place here, or that are being developed, perhaps.

BOCKARIE: *Well, in terms of recruitment, the commission serves as the—we work in conjunction with Establishment Secretariat office. The Establishment Secretariat office is the clearinghouse for the commission. The ES Office, which as I told you earlier, come the 7th of August, it is going to be transformed into the Human Resource Management Office (HRMO). That office creates jobs, advertises vacant positions in the service, and informs this commission about the number of vacancies in the various line ministries. Let's say for example, if you need 100 agriculturists or agriculture officials in the middle of a country for security, they want to fill those vacancies, they declare that to us and inform us - we, as a commission, because we have to—a playing field, a clear level ground for every competent and non-competent people to apply. We send adverts out, put it out for two months, we make sure that these adverts, the information goes down to the farthest distance of the country. So, given the opportunity, because Freetown is not Sierra Leone per se, we have Bo, Kenema, Kono, Kila, and these are places with numerous education stations. And the leavers—school leavers in those areas, they do want to be placed, they want jobs. So, we make sure that the advert goes to the farthest distance of the nation.*

After that, they come, when they get the news, they come, we give the forms, we have forms, PSC forms, from it, that one, I have a sample, but it's in the cupboard there, we give you, you register it, you go and fill it, add your CV or credential, your CV, you send it back. We set a closing date about a month or two after that, we close it, at the closing date we stop receiving. Then we scrutinize, or begin scrutiny, scrutinizing the forms. We look for the best materials to be interviewed, for interview. We send the most competent ones, which we feel will get the job so advertised, we send those forms to their line ministry, if it is for—from foreign affairs, we send it there, to them for the head of department to countersign those forms and they send it back, they short-list. We short-list first, then they short-list second then they send it back. After that, we set a date for them—for those that went through the short-listing; we set a date for them to be interviewed.

So we send letters of invitation to them, they come on that date, well dressed. There is a conference hall there. We interview them. We take them on merit, not on political business or regional business, not on tribalism, not on religious bias, but purely on merit. So we take them, after the interview, as the interview goes, the commissioners, they give their rating. After that, we sit and compile. After the compilation, the very best of those candidates interviewed, we issue an order, an order that Mr. XYZ having—the commission has ordered for that appointment as, if it's a stenographer or whatever post, they will send it back to the Establishment Secretariat Office. They will communicate to you if you had gone through, if you afforded to go through, they will communicate with you, they give you a letter of appointment with the conditions of service, remuneration, etc, etc, etc. We don't form, or are not involved in setting conditions of service or salaries. That's purely the domain of Ansu Tucker's office, The Establishment Secretary's office.

LOPEZ: The Establishment Secretary.

BOCKARIE: Yes.

LOPEZ: What do you do if somebody is invited to interview who lives very far away and they are unable to come?

BOCKARIE: *Yes, we give them time, we give them time. They will come, normally they come after the interview, because after the interview they get the information, they will come. If they say we did not get the information on time, so that's why we are late, we give them a second time, we give a second chance, we will set another date for them to be interviewed. But make sure that as much as they've got the information about the vacancy and they want to be considered, we give them their own chance.*

But this time around, I've seen the problem, because in times past we just feel that Freetown is Sierra Leone per se, so I've just put a proposal that this time around we move the commission a bit closer to the people, the applicants, because of this decentralization. So very soon we will be going to, or we have interview, we will be taking the commission to regional headquarters like Bo, Kenema and Makeni. If we go to Makeni, the commission moves to Makeni, those in that region, that district will be able to meet us on time. Same like Kono, in the east, if we got to Kenema, we cover Kono, and all the other places. So, I made that proposal. It's under consideration. So, by so doing we minimize the rate of absenteeism in interviews. Our constraint, as I told the three gentlemen who came from UNDP the last time that we need transportation because we cannot walk from there to those places. We want them to enhance us by assisting us with transportation so we can get—we can work closer to them.

LOPEZ: As far as looking at promotion, what steps have been taken to monitor the performance of civil servants and promote on the basis of high performance?

BOCKARIE: *Promotions are done yearly, every three years. After every year, line ministries, head of line ministries departments, they send, they come here, they take annual confidential report forms, ACR forms for junior as well as senior, technical as well as non-technical, they go and fill it. Their heads of departments resubmit them through us. In that form, we get to know, from the immediate head, from the head of the line ministries, whether candidate "Y," who wants this promotion, has been effective, efficient, hard working, duty conscious, and all the rest of it. They can give us an insight of the officer they are presenting for promotion. So that from those recommendations come from all our ministries every year, it comes. We put in our files, in our archives. Year two, the same. Year three, the same.*

At the end for some officers there can be variations, for some, there is always consistency, that they have been punctual, or see that consistency in some of them. Some of them we default. So we look at it, we look at these forms and these recommendations from various line ministries, releasing to various officers, in various grades, senior as well as junior and intermediate grades. We look at it, then there are meetings, we meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Tuesdays and Thursdays are purely for meetings, for interviews. We interview candidates for various positions in various line ministries. Then, Wednesdays we meet, we discuss crucial issues that require the attention of government. If a candidate has petitioned that he or she has been superceded and he or she wants the commission to intervene, to really be magnanimous and review, we'll look at those issues on Wednesdays. But Tuesdays and Thursdays are purely for interviews. Then those that have been wrongly dismissed, the officers that were dismissed or interdicted, they can appear to us, we look at the writ, if they are

found wanting we support the decision taken by the line ministries. But if we see that there is need that that person has been the cause of one reason or the other, they were wrongly abused or misused, we take sides, and we support him.

LOPEZ: What procedure do people have to go through to bring that to the commission?

BOCKARIE: *Well, if you have been superceded—you are grade 10 by virtue of salary grade, somebody in grade 7 during the recommendation period comes with the staff list, you first join the service or the time in seniority, we see, we look at the staff list, if you first entered the service and you have acquired this “XYZ” of amount of training in various fields, then all of a sudden because the reporting officer, he or she has some link with the one that wants, who he wants to supercede you and she slots him.*

You bring the matter to your officer’s attention, the reporting officer. If he does not take it because he has taken sides already, you apply - you make a petition through the Establishment Secretary, the Establishment Secretary for that petition. They will look at it. Ten years ago, some twelve officers at the Accounting General’s department, they were involved in pension fraud. They tampered with the pensioners’ money, about eight hundred million. Ten years ago, so that matter is still pending. It has lingered all these years. We’ve looked at it, we’ve looked at it, we’ve looked at it. Some have even died, others are still there. They come here every day, even yesterday, even today, those that are still alive are still... So, we have taken the position that because it has, it now, it is a huge financial outlay. For 10 years, we put them on half salary. If you do not find the wanting, you go to the take back, and give them all the monies they have lost, the half salary they have lost. So, very soon we will be taking a position on that. Those are the issues we handle.

LOPEZ: Have higher salaries been introduced as past of these reforms?

BOCKARIE: *Yes, the salary aspect of that, of the service, is really, really appalling. As a result, over the years there is serious “brain drain,” especially in the medical field. Most of our doctors, our nurses are serving in the sub-region, in other countries, because of poor salary conditions. The government is aware of it. We are just from the war, but the government is very mindful about increasing salaries. We are taking every effort; the government is doing every effort to really see that, because we want to be retaining these people, we want to be paying them. And in fact, if government really wants to minimize corruption, people will have to be better paid, the workers have to be better paid. Because if somebody’s supervising millions of leones on behalf of government amid temptation, or have an old commitment—if I’m better paid for tampered government money, then I will take it because, I mean, I would not even be tempted to tap out government money, but when there is not enough to really take care of my domestic problems, the temptation is—will be too high. So we have, so this is to government that let them think, let them think seriously about improving the condition of salaries and the salary. And to inform you, by—come January, there is going to be very huge salary increases for all workers. Government is working on that.*

LOPEZ: Where have those funds come from?

BOCKARIE: *From donors, we depend on donors. The economy is donor driven.*

LOPEZ: Have there been any other strategies considered to counteract the “brain drain,” particularly in the medical field?

BOCKARIE: *If you—according to the general order which governs, which is the working—the bible of the service, if somebody has plans to leave the service and go elsewhere, there is always a portion of the general order, G.O.D. 161; you absentee yourself from work without reasonable excuse, we quote that one concerning the officers that is abandoning your position without giving us any excuse. If we think there is a special thing about this, we give you a month to react to that. But we see that, I mean that's a deterrent, we want to deter people.*

Because, if somebody goes to America, like I have my youngest sister, she's now in London, she is a nurse, SRN; she gets 10 times what I'm paid here. So, and she knows her job and the business government they want her. So when they go to send information to their colleagues that this is what we are getting here, you are wasting time there. So this be that said they are working on it for them to go, so we are minimizing that. In fact, we have to be holding a series of consultations and meetings with the Ministry of Health officers, to see the need as how we should, what steps we should take to minimize this bingeing. But the crook of it all is really to increase a better pay-home package for all of us.

LOPEZ: Great. How long have all of these current reforms been in place; the strategies for promotion and recruitment?

BOCKARIE: *Since 2000, the year 2000. Just after the end of the war.*

LOPEZ: How have the reform leaders and key personnel, maybe in the different ministries, worked together to make these things, to implement these changes?

BOCKARIE: *All of us, we all are working assiduously; we are all working assiduously, because without these reforms, life would not be meaningful. So we've put our shoulders to the wheel.*

LOPEZ: Would you have advice for other countries on how to make these collaborations work?

BOCKARIE: *We always have consultants who come around and then we share knowledge. People from the sub-region, from the third world, from the first world, with America. So they come, we work with hung heads and they advise us, give us guidelines as how we go about it. The effort is giving us a very good dividend.*

LOPEZ: Was there any resistance from sitting civil servants to these new—maybe the attempts to recruit people openly from outside the civil service or more stringent promotion policies? Was there resistance? Were the civil servants who were already working—were they happy about these changes or were they maybe unhappy that the recruitment was now more open?

BOCKARIE: *Yes, yes, the recruitment, yes, we are happy, except those that do not want to chase change. But everybody who wants to advance in his or her life will chase the move. There are some officers who have reached retirement age and they don't want to go; those are the ones who will be stifling the effort of government, but believe me, we have started weeding them out. Because the government has now set a retirement age limit - 60 years. Once you have reached 60, then we issue you a letter of retirement and give you a benefit. We create avenues for young graduates because they have the young brains, we give them—the old heads give a chance to the new ones to come on board.*

LOPEZ: And when was that retirement age instituted?

BOCKARIE: *Since 2005.*

LOPEZ: Okay, great. What are some of the major obstacles you've encountered in implementing these reforms?

BOCKARIE: *Financial, because you cannot lead these people if you do not have money to pay them their benefits.*

LOPEZ: Has there been—since in some cases civil servants do not receive their paychecks on a reliable basis in some countries, and since they are not necessarily paid enough to support their families, sometimes they have another job and might be less likely to respond to incentives of how hard they work, has that been a problem here?

BOCKARIE: *Yes, that's a problem. After retirement of officers, in most cases, retired officers don't get their benefits until they are dead. They work for it, they work for it, they work for it. But the problem is not the government; it's we the civil servants. Because, if I'm in the pension division, all these offices are manned by civil servants, all the offices are run by civil servants. If a civil servant—your colleagues have retired, you know that he needs or she needs to be paid his pension, or her gratuity, or his gratuity, if his or her documentary sees your desk, if you are really—I don't know how to put it—if you are really sincere enough with yourself, because knowing full well that you yourself will one day retire and when you retire, the way you treat your colleague is how you will be treated. You have to fast track these documents for him to get his benefit on time, but in most cases, would prove to be lethargic in handling these things. So, the problem is not government, it's we ourselves, who are the civil servants.*

LOPEZ: With regard to the reforms in this particular area what do you think has been accomplished?

BOCKARIE: *Now, with the inception of the NASSIT (National Social Security and Insurance Trust) office, the NASSIT has now taken the place of the pension division of the Accountant General's Department. Because with the pension division, then, before NASSIT, it takes ages for them to process papers, documents of retiring officers. But now, if I'm to retire this month, the information, all the information, the data is with NASSIT. They know when I retire, on the date, before that date, my paycheck is ready, and my pensions are completed. So, that one--*

LOPEZ: And what is NASSIT?

BOCKARIE: *National Social Security.*

LOPEZ: Oh, social security. Great. Okay, let's talk a little bit about independent public service commissions, since that's where you are. How long has this commission been in place?

BOCKARIE: *Since—after independence.*

LOPEZ: Okay. And has it always been independent?

BOCKARIE: *Yes, it's independent. It has no interference. The order issued by this commission is not subject to change by any law.*

LOPEZ: Has the way that the commission works changed over time?

BOCKARIE: *No, no, no. Except for now, come the 7th of this month, when the Establishment Secretariats Office will be transferred into a new Human Resources Management Office. We are going to delegate some of our functions and powers to that office, that new office, HRMO. There are some categories of appointment which we are going to leave purely in the hands of the new HRMO office. From grade 1 to 5, those ones, we can leave it in the hands of the new management office. The most senior posts, positions, are going to stay with the commission. And even the one which will have delegated those, some of those powers, will still have, will now be playing a supervisory role, we'll be supervising them.*

If they deviate from the normal, from the norms, we can petition them, we can, we have the liberty, and we are at liberty to intervene and to revert whatever actions they have taken. But if we leave everything in their hands, the situation will not all go well, because if you leave employment, promotion, transfer in the hands of one man, there is a tendency for that person to take sides. So that's why these two offices, we are going to complement the effort of one another. We are giving the very best of officers, we train them.

Under the new HRMO office, you have a training sector component. If I dare say, there is a letter here, written recently—they have just invited us to send in our training needs, submission of priority training needs, so they have written this to all MDA's so I have been working on this today and send my reaction and the areas I want my officers to get training, but, especially from overseas. I'm going to send that one there. So that component is under the Human Resource Management Office that is going to be launched on the 7th.

LOPEZ: Can I ask you what some of the areas are that you think your staff needs the most training in?

BOCKARIE: *Yes, in computers, information technology. Because, I mean, typewriters are now obsolete. The world has become a global village, so if communication is power, information is power, so if we don't train these people to get, to grasp the new information technology, we cannot really achieve what we are aiming at, that is the revamping of the civil service. So we want to be, to train them in human resource management, in accounting, etc., etc. A lot of - a host of related areas. But more so, we are going to introduce a website here, internet, so you can be sitting here, for look at our website, and you know what the commission is about, you can get onto other commissions, so that you can borrow what you lack in your system from what is here from other countries which will suit your situation. So, we are really going to encourage all of them, in fact, they have started, by next week we—I told them, we are going to polish my training.*

LOPEZ: Just to get back to the commission a little bit, you said that the commissioners are directly appointed by the President?

BOCKARIE: Yes, yes.

LOPEZ: How long do they serve for?

BOCKARIE: *For three years. After three years they can be subject to renewal. The President can renew the appointment, but after every three years they are replaced.*

LOPEZ: And where does the budget for the commission come from?

BOCKARIE: *From the Consolidated Revenue Fund.*

LOPEZ: I'm sorry?

BOCKARIE: *From the Consolidated Revenue Fund.*

LOPEZ: Could the party in power potentially influence the budget?

BOCKARIE: No.

LOPEZ: That's developed independently as well, okay. How does the commission acquire the information that it needs to carry out its job?

BOCKARIE: *Information? What sort of information?*

LOPEZ: Well, for instance you just mentioned that if you had the internet, it would be easier to sort of gather information from different--

BOCKARIE: *We are guided by this constitution. Our functions, our powers, are entrenched in this act number—section 151, act number 6 of this constitution. It makes this commission a statutory body, right? And sections 151 to 154 confer the power and functions of this commission, so our activities are all entrenched in the constitution. We deal with the constitution.*

There is also another document, the Public Service Commission's Regulation, 1982. That one is—I don't have the copy now. So these two documents, we cannot go beyond our mandate. There are certain positions which our powers are not covered to a point; like in the judiciary, like in the police, armed forces, they have the armed forces council, so that one takes the appointment. Usually, you have the usual Legal Services Commission, so that way there is nothing above you. But the one purely in the Civil Service is written, so always embedded in the constitution. So that's why I always have a copy.

LOPEZ: Does the commission try to communicate directly with the public to describe what role you play?

BOCKARIE: Yes, yes.

LOPEZ: How do you do that?

BOCKARIE: *Well, in fact, that is why we are trying to install this website. Before the website, they come here, they ask us, and we used to hold seminars, workshops. And in fact, I've written—I'm going to write a letter, I've written a project for us to be holding two workshops. We think the Commissioner of the Public will tell them at the workshop what our functions and our powers are. Again, our function is, we exercise disciplinary actions over officers who are holding or acting in those, in various positions we have, we establish. Because, if we are found wanting, we will dismiss you. There are codes on conduct in the civil service, which all civil servants will go by. If you fall short, fall below that code on conduct, we'll fire you. So, we have the power to hire and fire. But normally we don't fire. We encourage you, officers, to really work within the code on conduct of the service.*

LOPEZ: Would you like to talk about training or about recruitment of new talent?

BOCKARIE: Yes, very soon--

LOPEZ: Both, yes?

BOCKARIE: *Very soon, we start advertising vacancies.*

LOPEZ: Oh--

BOCKARIE: *Very soon. Our constraint had been that the current commissioners, their term is ending, they are now going out. New ones have been appointed. Very soon, say in the next one week or so, by next week they will be on the job. So, since March there has been a moratorium – we have been going slowly; we have not been working. So, a lot of vacancies have been put on hold, or none we are advertising, because the signature of the current, old commissioners have—was finished by government. But luckily, the current ones, the new ones, they have gone through Parliament, it's now left for them to sign into office. Once that is done, then we'll go to our normal function. We start interviewing, we advertise, and that kind of thing.*

LOPEZ: And what are the some of the steps that have been taken to make civil service appear to be an attractive career option for people?

BOCKARIE: *The civil service, the service for me, is a career. I've spent my whole life in the service. I joined the service in 1982, to date I am there over thirty years, so it's a career. Like, you go to foreign affairs; it's a whole career service. If you are employed here, they will send you to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, their own training is very peculiar because they are educated, they handle diplomacy, so they are professional. It's a professional ministry. So every ministry, like here, I too, am a professional by virtue of my long-standing in administration, my wealth of experience in administration, right? So, that kind of thing. If you are in agriculture, the ministry—your profession depends on the ministry. Like in the—agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture, and for security, you have agricultural officers, you have extension workers, these are the ones that really make things happen because, we sitting in Freetown here, the extension workers are in the field directing farmers how to plant, when to plant, etc., etc. So that ministry is purely a professional ministry, so if they are there, they are purely, purely professional, able to foreign affairs, diplomacy, okay.*

LOPEZ: As far as, let's go back just a moment to training, the IPAM, the Institute for Public Administration Management, that's sort of the training institute that has been created? Is that correct?

BOCKARIE: *Well, the work of, we had, we used to have a civil service training college. But for quite some time now that training college has been defunct because of financial reasons, and other reasons, but purely financial. But we've been trying to reactivate the Civil Service Commission. So in the absence of the civil service college, IPAM most times took the place of the civil service training college.*

So most of our training, our officers, we send them there on three weeks, or one week training courses, or even masters programs. But very soon, we will be reactivating the civil service training college, where we will be training exclusively for the junior cadet of the service. They will learn there, stenographing, now we don't have stenographers, it's only now we are trying to handpick the old, old stenographers who have retired, we bring them, we are planning to bring some of them back on board, those that with sound mind, we can, they can, we will start training these young graduates in the art of stenography. Because, if you go to Parliament now, Parliament is presently handicapped because they don't have,

they lack stenographers. They go to the law officer's department; there too, they are handicapped. So, we have seen the need as a government and as a civil service that we need to train a new class of officers in stenography. Because, if I have to, I can't do most writing, I just call, come and talk, you know, but over the years, the old hands, they have all retired. So, we are creating an institution where we have to train new ones to take their places, as part of our reform effort.

LOPEZ: Have you personally been a part of designing or managing any of these training programs that are in place?

BOCKARIE: *Well, we have Mr. [indecipherable] is in charge of that office. Have you met him?*

LOPEZ: He's actually out of town, but I just met his deputy yesterday.

BOCKARIE: *Yes, he is heading, so they usually put programs in place there—we are invited, we go on hundreds of meetings, so we have our own input as how we can go about this training.*

LOPEZ: We could talk about either payroll reliability and the payroll system or retrenchment?

BOCKARIE: *Payroll is the purview of the new Establishment Secretariat's office.*

LOPEZ: The HRMO, right. Did you say you had some thoughts on retrenchment? I have some questions in that area.

BOCKARIE: *For those that have reached retirement age, some conceal their information, vital information, because they don't want to retire. So, we have all records on them. I keep records on them here when they come for interview. I send part to the Establishment Secretariat's office, then some to the department line ministries. But when it comes to time of retirement, they destroy their own information there, so we cannot get the right information about them. But when you come here, if you destroy that one there, you cannot destroy it in all of the ministries, in all the departments. So, always you come as a reference point through us. That's why, in fact, I am going to create a database, when—that one, that website, I got—found info in setting it up.*

LOPEZ: Are there records that were lost at some point, how are you collecting that information?

BOCKARIE: *Well, that is—we have problems, we have problems. The problem is, like, you see these files? These files, some of these files have taken long years, you see, tattered documents, papers, they are tattered. And in case of fire disaster, we lose all this information. So, that is the reason why I have put in place a project, and want to sell that project to UNDP, for funding so that we can send, we can set in this website and put in thorough data—containing information on all serving officers.*

So, at just the stroke of—you can just go into our data and get all the information we need on each and every officer, every ministry. But as it is now, it's not reliable, there are no guarantees. Somebody can walk into those offices, because most of these offices are in the—junior officers, the staff superintendent and a staff do this, it's only when I need it, I say "bring this file," we have file numbers, according to the number, then they bring it to me. That place is always open. And really, some scrupulous person, somebody would come and enter, they get all that information. And this place, whatever we do here, is purely

confidential. But of course, we have these files, the clerks, they are literate, they can read, they have their own interest areas, so they can divulge information from—to the public. Information that isn't really supposed to reach the public. By their activities, that information can leak out. But if we have a thorough database, especially if you're computer illiterate, you cannot access it. So, that is what I'm going to really resort to doing, by the grace of God.

LOPEZ: When you go through that process, how will you ensure that the records you have are all accurate?

BOCKARIE: *I'm going to employ an IT technician, who is going to manage that place. Already, I have him on board, in fact, he is now putting in place the few machines, the old ones have all the parts, and he is putting it together. There is a website here, but over the years, all have phased out, so it's going to—if I don't have the IT man on the ground, for myself, working in this commission, I don't get the actual, the desired result I want to get. So when he is part and parcel of the commission, like this computer is—when you call an outsider and say "Come and look, my computer it has some virus", in the process of clearing that virus, certain parts that work on the computer disappear. You cannot know until he is gone. When you come, you say "This part is not there" and you have to resort to buying them. So, I've seen the need to get our own IT man, employed and paid, I mean, we can keep some amount of sanity.*

LOPEZ: If we can go back for a minute to talking about the recruiting process. I was just wondering if you could describe a little bit about what you are looking for when you evaluating applications of people?

BOCKARIE: *Okay.*

LOPEZ: What are some of the qualifications?

BOCKARIE: *Yes, when we are looking, we are putting out adverts, we call for qualifications like—somebody has to be, to have a first degree, now first degree is outdated, now we look for master's degree, in related fields. If the vacancy is in agriculture, from the agriculture ministry, we look for candidates with the bias, who are agriculturally biased, are going to Njala, they have done their degree in agriculture, agronomy, etc., etc. If that is a requirement, when the application forms come in, we look for that. We set our criteria; there is a criterion – qualifications we look for.*

LOPEZ: How is that criteria established?

BOCKARIE: *Well, we have in the office of Establishment Secretariat, under general recruitment - they draw the scheme of service. Always meet, in fact, or be invited by the ministry who will be meeting on the—who will be disclosing a lot of scheme of services from line ministries. We set criteria as to how vacancies in those ministries can be filled. At that we look for experience, work experience, we cannot just take you because we want to take you, we want to set criteria. Qualification has to come in. Then number of years - you have to work for a number of years, etc., etc.*

LOPEZ: Have you had trouble finding people that meet the qualifications?

BOCKARIE: *A lot, all the colleges have—they are giving, they are producing graduates on a daily basis, so to speak. Njala, Fourah Bay College, Milton Margai, you name them.*

LOPEZ: Are there enough positions for all those people who are interested?

BOCKARIE: *Well, the few positions that are available, we put it, if it is 10 positions, we'll put it, most time we'll get over 100—200 applicants for those 10 positions. So, when they come, we look for the very best, we place them. Intermittently, when vacancies are created, we advertise it and we take them on board.*

LOPEZ: If I can ask a few, sort of, cross-cutting questions—has there been any attempt to develop sort of citizen monitoring programs or boards as part of the reforms so that the public has a chance to sort of oversee the reform that is going on?

BOCKARIE: *Pardon.*

LOPEZ: Has there been any effort to create a citizen monitoring system or boards so that the public has more of a view of the reform that's going on?

BOCKARIE: *Yes, yes. In fact we have a very vibrant civil society movements, these ones, they poke their nose in all facets of life; politics, civil service, probably NGOs, etc., etc. Yes, the civil service, the civil society movement is really vibrant and—yes.*

LOPEZ: Has that, do you think, helped to encourage faster reform? And what effect has that had?

BOCKARIE: *Yes, yes. That is helping reform very rapidly.*

LOPEZ: How do they communicate with you usually?

BOCKARIE: *They send letters, they hold workshops, they just pop in at us, they want information. They want some information from me; they can come and ask me. Only that, I mean, I'm already restricted, we cannot just divulge information.*

LOPEZ: And then you go out and talk to them about what you have accomplished in these workshops?

BOCKARIE: *Yes.*

LOPEZ: As far as infrastructure and I know we talked a little bit about the IT situation, what other infrastructure obstacles have there been to implementations of these programs?

BOCKARIE: *Well, the infrastructure is good, except that I am trying to do a little bit of refurbishing, renovation, because most of the items have gone obsolete and for a conducive working environment, these things need to be replaced so that we will get an effective service delivery. When they are working in a very conducive working environment; you give your very best. One of the most serious constraints is transportation. Government does not really have the money, the resources to get transport for all the government ministries. So that's why we always look to goodwill donor partners to come to our assistance.*

Like UNDP, a month ago, some officers came from there—I have their complimentary cards, I put—I make an appeal for them to assist us with transportation. So that this plan I have in mind for us to move the commission halfway to the people, so that we can minimize absenteeism or late coming, we

will jump that hurdle. So, transportation really and computers, of course. They give us computers; these are all from donors, UNDP, mostly DFID.

LOPEZ: How have people worked around some of those challenges so far?

BOCKARIE: *Pardon.*

LOPEZ: How have people worked around or solved some of those challenges until now?

BOCKARIE: *We meet them, like, if I meet, I go to Wilkinson Road, I meet officers there, they can move me to, and they can get me to, those that will make things happen there. I sit with you, I discuss, I put my case to you through letters or—I mean most of my effort has been positive, yes, my effort has been positive. Like, we go to—the last time I went to the Chinese Ambassador, and we were able to get a few things from him. Even in times of training, they invited us, invited some of our officers and even commissioners to go to China to get a working knowledge of their own system there, and then when we came back, what we gained from them, we related it to our situation, then we move forward.*

LOPEZ: I have a few more questions; I wanted to ask you quickly about the relationship between the host country and the donors. This is—obviously the donors provide a lot of support and do a lot of wonderful things, but I think they are also always looking to learn about how they can improve their relationships with the country in which they are working.

BOCKARIE: *Very cordial, because these donors, they always set benchmarks, which government, if you fulfill it, they continue their support. If you don't, they will give you time for you to match up, and we have always endeavored to really meet the benchmark. So, we have a good working relationship.*

LOPEZ: Are there any mistakes that you think that sometimes donor countries or international organizations make when they're relating to and building relationships with host countries and host country personnel? Any problems that come up?

BOCKARIE: *Well, like the problems, like the donors, like the NGOs, the NGOs, when they bring their money they don't want us to sit together and plan. They decide where and where to go, because they have their money, they come with their money, they want to dictate, go and—where they want us, they are not supposed to go. Then, in most cases, we clash over, over, over—well that one, I mean, most of those problems are rectified. Because we don't want the donors to cluster, if you come for agriculture, we sit together, we know where we need you, and we send you where, we tell you where you operate. But if you go for yourself, the tendency is that you go and clash with another NGO in agriculture, you cluster at one point.*

So, that is the problem that usually comes up. We don't want donor fatigue in one area. Like, if you come for education, you know where to go, you go to the Education Ministry. There you work with that line ministry. But mostly when they come they want to do things on their own, but certainly they run into not much of a problem really, but just to put them through, we guide them that we should work together.

LOPEZ: What advice might you give to donors either here or in other countries about how to work effectively with personnel in the country?

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- BOCKARIE:** *That they work effectively with government. The donors and government are partners in development. So, partners should work together.*
- LOPEZ:** If you could write a handbook for people working on civil service reform in other countries that have challenging environments, what would be some of the things you would say would be most important to talk about?
- BOCKARIE:** *Let me get it again.*
- LOPEZ:** If you could give advice to people in other countries trying to do civil service reform, like you have done here, public service reform in general. What would be some of the things you would think be most important to tell them?
- BOCKARIE:** *Better coordination, better coordination. You work together, teamwork, because two heads are better than one. When you sit together you put your effort together, your brains together, your resources together, and your ideas together, then you move forward. So, teamwork - proper planning. Then, the political will has to be there. Whatever you do, the decision has to be taken to government.*
- LOPEZ:** Is there anything else that I haven't brought up that you would like to talk about that you have worked on?
- BOCKARIE:** *We have touched on everything.*
- LOPEZ:** I think so, excellent. Well, thank you so much. If I can just ask you to close up, what are the things that you think you're most proud of that you've accomplished in terms of reform here?
- BOCKARIE:** *Here?*
- LOPEZ:** Yes.
- BOCKARIE:** *I'm just, as I told you, I go on and off, by the time I was here, six years back, all the reforms I did, like I inhabited the whole ministry, the whole infrastructure, infrastructure development, that one, I've come, I've reactivated it again. I've asked for funds, it has not come yet. If that one comes, they will have to refurbish the roofing, have to do some infrastructural development effort. Then the obsolete working tools, I'm trying to really put them back in place, get new ones, through support of goodwill donors or donor partners. Then training, of course. I've sent two of my officers, one is going for his fourth degree, the one—has just, is right now on his masters, the one is—two are in the training colleges. So, I've sent five officers, they are in college. Then the other ones, they are doing computer courses elsewhere in various computer establishments. I'm paying for them so that when they come back they can handle these things, work will be very easy for us.*
- So, in terms of training, I'm training my—I'm going all out to train myself and my officers because we have to be computer literate. Not every information I want my officers, my clerk, to know. When I am computer literate, I can go into my—into the internet and the website so, I'm doing it. It's not easy. Most depends on availability of finance. But with the support of God and the good donor partners, I'm on the move.*
- LOPEZ:** Wonderful. Thank you so much Mr. Bockarie.
- BOCKARIE:** *Thank you.*