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Interviewee:	Gelase Mutahaba
Interviewer:	Andrew Schalkwyk
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SCHALKWYK: OK, today's the 20th of November, 2008, and I'm here with Professor Mutahaba from the University of Dar es Salaam at the Courtyard Hotel. Before we start the interview, I just want to ask that you've given your consent for this interview.

MUTAHABA: *I agree. I signed it.*

SCHALKWYK: Thank you. I'd like to begin this conversation by talking about the role that you've played in civil service reform in Tanzania. Could you tell me about the positions you've held in relation to civil service reform?

MUTAHABA: *OK, I've held initially the position of policy advisor on the coordination of public sector reforms. That was my initial appointment, for about a year and a half.*

SCHALKWYK: And when was that?

MUTAHABA: *1992. No, 2002. I've been coming from London, the Commerce Secretariat. I was Director of Finance in that administration. Then I—after one-and-a-half years of doing that, which was—. That other job involved identifying areas for synergy, coordination, and the great cohesion among the various reforms being undertaken by the government of Tanzania, and pursue them and make proposals to government on how to achieve synergy, coordination. Then a year and a half after that, I was asked to take up the position of chief technical advisor for the Public Service Reform Program, essentially taking on the duty for advising on reform strategy and reform—quality assurance of the reform interventions. And also identifying new areas where the reform program should be heading to. So if you will, I was the chief advisor on the implementation of public service reform to the government of Tanzania, with a number of other advisors on different aspects of the reform, and different components. I did that for up to two years—no, to a year ago—and in the last one-and-a-half years of my tenure, I had the responsibility for coordinating the formulation of Public Service Reform Program, Phase II. The chief person responsible for coordinating the strategy, content, thrusts, and methods to be used in monitoring and evaluation of the program. And I had left the university a long time—almost 21 years. I've been working for UN (United Nations), Commonwealth, and government. And last year, I thought it was best to get back to where I belong. Went back to the university at the beginning of last academic year, where I had been away on leave of absence for that period.*

SCHALKWYK: OK, so I'd like to ask you some questions about the reform, but starting with just some more broad questions...

MUTAHABA: *Mm. How much do you know about the reform yourself, anyway?*

SCHALKWYK: I've been doing interviews for the last week and a half, and I've done quite a bit of background research.

MUTAHABA: *Before that? No, not—I'm saying, before that, how much did you know about public service reforms apart from the Tanzania Public Service Reform?*

SCHALKWYK: Not a whole lot. The Tanzanian area is the first one to...

MUTAHABA: *OK, so go ahead.*

SCHALKWYK: I'd like to ask you about—you were involved in the coordination and the planning. Could you describe the planning process that went into the reforms, starting from the early '90s?

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MUTAHABA: *In the planning process in the government, in the Republic of Tanzania? Within the public administration system?*

SCHALKWYK: Yes.

MUTAHABA: *From the early '90s, or after the early '90s, planning constituted—as if you were a top-down process. Government identified its priorities in the different sectors, with ministries responsible for the sectors taking the lead. Some effort to link the different proposals were generally made, and efforts to synchronize the different interventions were made, but most of those were at the higher level.*

SCHALKWYK: And that's where you were involved?

MUTAHABA: *No, I was talking about starting from the '90s. I wasn't here. In the '90s, I was in the UK. And so I start getting involved with the process in 2002. But I knew what was happening in Tanzania, and in several other countries, with regard to national planning, if that was your question—or you are talking about planning the reforms?*

SCHALKWYK: Planning the reforms. Sorry. So in 2002, when you joined—when you came back to Tanzania, what were the major challenges that you were facing in terms of cohesion of the reforms, and what reforms were you trying to—

MUTAHABA: *The reform agenda had already been set. The Tanzanian government, like many others—reforms up to the late 1990s in the public service were essentially containing costs of running government, more or less consistent with the structure adjustment reforms that were taking place in the economy. Governments were bankrupt, governments—it was alleged that governments had taken a bigger role than they could afford. So the thrust of those reforms was to downsize or compress what government does, reduce the size of government, reduce the number of staff, and to the extent possible, involve other actors in doing what government does. By 2002, Tanzania had realized that that was not tenable. You know, you still have—and invariably, if it is education, if it is health, if it is communications, if it is roads, maintenance, and building, the state—if the state said they are going to shrink their involvement, then you're talking about the economic society collapsing. So government had to recognize that, inasmuch as it would have to take economy measures, maybe the more important reform thrust should be on improving service delivery. So from 2000, the reform thrust focused on creating opportunities through restructuring, through development and training of staff, through ensuring that you have the right size of the public service rather than a small size. Instead of focusing on small or downscaling or downsizing, maybe take measures that at the end mean a right-sized public service: incentives, motivational measures to be taken so that people can feel that they are being recognized and they are being compensated well, and ensuring the greater ethics in the public service. And finally, ensuring that the people you have in the public service are the best. So introducing principles of merit in the recruitment. Introducing principles of merit in promotion. And taking all measures to retain the people you recruit so they don't run away, either out of service into the private sector, or out of service outside Tanzania.*

SCHALKWYK: This is part two of the interview with Professor Mutahaba.

MUTAHABA: *Yeah.*

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SCHALKWYK: So when you arrived in 2002, your responsibilities were for the cohesion of the reform process. What were the particular challenges that you faced when you got to the job?

MUTAHABA: *My responsibilities were not the reform, but reforms, because government was then undertaking a number of reforms. One was focusing on the review and the strengthening of the civil service or the public service. The other reform, called the Public Financial Management Reform Program, focused on accounting, budgeting, accountability, and ensuring revenue collection and revenue generation. The other reform focused on strengthening local government, or decentralization. And you had a reform focusing on improving legal institutions, called the Legal Sector Reform Program. They were working each doing their own thing, and there was no coherence. There was no effort to coordinate what each of the reforms was doing with the others. So the challenge I was given was to come in as advisor, the way policies not—is not significant. Advisor on the coordination of public sector reforms, you know, all of them. Reduce the amount of duplication in what they do, ensure that what one reform is doing does not undercut what the other reform is doing.*

SCHALKWYK: Could you give an example of something like that?

MUTAHABA: *Yeah, yeah. An example: The Public Service Reform Program was focusing on decentralizing authority and responsibility to chief executives of organizations, as one important item. For recruitment, for discipline, for promotion of staff under their charge in ministries. Now, that meant that you'd be encouraging chief executives of the local government institutions, in a corner of the country somewhere, to take charge and manage their staff. The Local Government Reform Program, on the other hand, was emphasizing autonomy, devolution to elected local government. Now, the mayors, the councilors, were supposed to take charge of the affairs of their institution. They have a chief executive working under them who says, "The responsibility for staff management is my responsibility; it's not your responsibility as mayor. You're interfering in my being able to do my job." You know? Two acts—the Public Service Act of 2002 and the Local Government Act of 1999—were conflicting. One had to find a way of ensuring that type of conflict. You know, one—the agenda for devolution and the agenda for autonomy and greater management by managers, you know, were undercutting each other. It was a big, big thing. It continues—it still continues; the problem is still there, but it has been minimized. You could cite several other examples: say, management of schools. Schools are supposed to be—primary schools, the lowest level schools—are supposed to be owned and managed by the counsels—you know, the devolutionary, decentralized governments. The Education Act gives the responsibility for ensuring standards and all those things, examinations, quality of teachers, to the minister of education—the national minister of education. You can see there is a big conflict between the two, and it continues. You know? You can minimize it; you have to think of ways and means of ensuring one of those two principles—I mean, both principles are important— let them not clash to the detriment of improving the quality of teaching and learning.*

SCHALKWYK: And could you talk about—

MUTAHABA: *You get what I'm saying?*

SCHALKWYK: Yes.

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MUTAHABA: Those two very vivid examples, which I had then to appoint and work with teams of experts—and we had to use consultants to look into how best to resolve those issues at the strategic level, because mine were not operational. You're hearing of a teachers' strike or something like that. Mine do not go into the nitty-gritty of how do you prevent a strike. It would be: what are the underlying causes of that issue? How do you resolve them so that they don't recur?

SCHALKWYK: What were some of the other things that you did to make sure that these reforms didn't undercut each other?

MUTAHABA: I reviewed the acts that that established the institutions that are leading the reforms, ran workshops and seminars. We ran a big, joint conference on public sector reforms—and it took place in 2004—where we brought in about 1,000 people for two days, trying to talk about the reforms and finding ways of the reforms reinforcing each other and undercutting each other. A report was produced; it was circulated to government and private-sector civil society. But then, of course, I changed jobs and went into now a more hands-on responsibility as chief technical advisor. Somebody else came to take over for me, [...]

SCHALKWYK: So before we get onto that—onto your next job—who was writing the acts? Who was responsible for the acts, that they were very—

MUTAHABA: Who was responsible? Finally, acts of Parliament, passed by Parliament—the National Assembly—the equivalent of your Congress. Now, that's finally. A ministry with responsibility for a portfolio would start the process. They would—usually acts of Parliament or laws are intended to give weight to a policy decisions, in order that they will be taken. Now, you take a decision to say, we want to decentralize authority and responsibility for running service delivery at local level to elected councilors. You need to have a law—which is an act—passed, ultimately. But before you do, you may need to do a lot of consultations with different stakeholders, those that are going to be affected—the councilors, the staff working at local governments, the ministries who previously had responsibility for those service deliveries—and they are now going to relinquish that responsibility. Look at the consequences of that. Now, when that is done, there is a consultant mechanism that is in place; it's not in the dark, usually. When that has finally been agreed, a bill would be produced by the ministry responsible for the sector in consultation with the office of the attorney general.

SCHALKWYK: Why do you think the consultation didn't work? Because there were too many contradictions?

MUTAHABA: At times the consultations do work, but at times there are some unforeseen issues. But at times you need to move forward. You know these issues are still there—potentially they will cause conflict—but you say, "Let's move on. We'll have an amendment when the time comes." You can't negotiate and consult forever. You have to move forward.

SCHALKWYK: So when you became chief technical advisor, what were your responsibilities there?

MUTAHABA: The Public Service Reform Program, as I told you, is one of the four principal central reforms, but is the main reform or the driver of all the other reforms. Now, as I came in, you already had the reform program formulated, so I didn't come in to formulate it. What you call Public Service Reform Program I had already been formulated; it had started being implemented in 2000. My predecessor as chief technical advisor, who was a Canadian, had taken the main responsibility.

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SCHALKWYK: Who was that?

MUTAHABA: *He was a Canadian. He is unfortunately dead—died a year ago of cancer. But the name, I can't think—[...] was his name. Had previously been the chief advisor, if you will, on the formulation of that reform, working with the permanent secretary and the rest of the staff in POPSM (President's Office- Public Service Management). So I come in when the basic thrusts, the content, the strategy, has already been formulated, and it is being implemented. So my main responsibilities then, is as interventionist, being prepared to carry forward the different reform thrusts—given my knowledge of both reform situations in other countries, given my knowledge from a conceptual point as a very well-read, very well-published professor in the public administration area—one of which was to say, "Can you try this? ...All right, can you try that?" to the staff of Public Service Management, who were carrying forward the reforms. Thinking of innovative ways in terms of content of the reform, thinking of innovative ways in terms of approaching methodology to install the reforms, thinking of ways of how you can deal with resistance to change—that was supposed to be my job, every day. And of course, also, I had to approve this administrative use of resources. I had to approve new thrusts that were coming up by signing up or signing off, so that things moved forward. That was a bureaucratic responsibility, which I didn't like, but that was one of my responsibilities.*

SCHALKWYK: So what sort of innovative—could you give me some examples of these things?

MUTAHABA: *Yes, one of the things was—OK, you are saying you want to improve service delivery. What are the constraints to service delivery improvement? One of the constraints is that those who are being served don't know their rights. So one of it was to create mechanisms for teaching or informing the beneficiaries of service delivery what their rights are. Radio programs, TV programs that—focusing on rights—but rights of citizens, rights of consumers of public services. We were running—I think they still run, because series of TV programs, series of sensitization workshops—right?—working with ministries to actually tell them on how they should work with their clients. Because you have Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Water. Those different—they have responsibility for delivery of certain services. Now, you have to work with them so that they each understand their obligations as service providers. That involves training, workshops, sensitization seminars, a lot of time. Finally, we had to create mechanisms to enable consumers of public services to make the service providers accountable. One of the instruments which we developed, and which I still feel helped a little to increase accountability, was something we are calling a Service Charter between a service provider—a ministry, a hospital, a school— with the consumers of that [service]. We call them Client Service Charters, which was an innovation that I think I took responsibility for bringing it up. It wasn't new, from my head. It had been tried in several other jurisdictions, several other countries. And I was aware, both from the charter and from my work as an international consultant, you know, to try to bring it here and use it, with some limited success. Some of my students now, doing masters, I'm asking them to go and do their MA (master's) dissertations on either impact or effectiveness in installation of some of those instruments.*

SCHALKWYK: What about instruments for improving implementation of reforms?

MUTAHABA: *We did not focus much on that, except to implement what was already agreed to be the reform strategy, which would improve implementation. Previously, the reform had been—the strategy for implementation was that: you are a reform*

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team of experts on the different areas of reform. Some were regular government employees; others were—what should I say?—others were people hired specifically for the reform. And they were in an enclave, in a corner of POPSM, with the rest of staff at POPSM hearing that POPSM is undertaking the reform. Now, trying to change that was one of the first activities as part of PSRP (Public Service Reform Program) I, whereby first of all, that enclave reform office was abolished, and the responsibility for reform implementation was given to the different directorates or different divisions of POPSM, with the staff taking responsibility for reform implementation, with very little experience of reform, very little knowledge at times, and them being young graduates like you. But you give them the job, they own it, they take responsibility; two, three years later they were singing the song. So that one, it can't have been my innovation. All I did was to push it forward. But as we've concluded PSRP I—I think someone has talked about that. PSRP I, PSRP II—right? Have you—?

SCHALKWYK: Yes.

MUTAHABA: All right. As we developed PSRP II and we concluded PSRP I, the message that was coming up from other ministries where—whereas previously, the people at POPSM were saying the reform belongs to a smaller enclave within the POPSM, now that the reform was being carried forward by the entire POPSM, the people in the other ministries where reforms were supposed to take place would say, "Ah, reform belongs to POPSM." So one of the things we had to do in formulating the structure and implementation strategy of this phase of the reform that is taking place was to develop what we are calling MDA-led reform.

SCHALKWYK: Ministries—

MUTAHABA: Ministries—eh?

SCHALKWYK: Ministries, departments, and agencies.

MUTAHABA: Ministries, departments, and agencies-led reform. It will not be for POPSM to go to ministries and say, "Let's do reforms." It will be for the ministries, departments, and agencies to identify what is wrong with them in terms of structure, processes, procedures within their ministry, work with POPSM or on their own to tackle those reform programs. They will need money, definitely; they will need resources. Resource: a basket will be available, which they can tap directly, and they can improve their reform interventions with respect to systems, processes, procedures within the Public Service Reform into their regular strategic plans. And it was very difficult to sell it to people at POPSM initially. They were apprehensive on two accounts. One, they said, "Then what shall we be doing?" "If these people are going to be doing their own reform, what shall we be doing? We'll become redundant." Two: "Who's going to control the resources?" I said, "Not you. Those ministries." Three: "They don't know what to do!" I said, "No, you didn't know what to do a year and a half ago. You thought those who knew were the corner experts, including myself." So reluctantly, we crafted the program. That was in that direction, and they had to do a lot of work internally at POPSM. Now, they have to do a lot of work to convince the ministries, but they're convincing the converted in other ministries. It may be capacitate the ministries, so that they can move forward. One of the elements we build in terms of empowering the institutions—that's how we abolished the position of chief Technical Advisor. One reason was I left. We abolished it. They said, "But we can't do without it." I said, "No, we have had this position on reform, chief technical advisor to Public Servicer Reform from 1994. It is a technical, non-civil service position. Bring in an international expert." It doesn't matter whether it's

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Tanzanian or not, but is—you are recruited on an international competitive basis. So if you are a Tanzanian, like was the case when I came in, I competed against an Englishman, a Dutch, a Canadian, and an Indian, and myself, who interviewed together; I was the one selected. So we don't need it. You don't need—these things should be done by a regular civil servant. And then I said, "I'm going back to the university. If you need me, I'll come in." By the same token, the ministry, POPSM should unseat and push MDAs to do reform. They should be called upon as necessary. Now that's, I think, the greatest innovation, which, given my knowledge of what's happening in the public service reform area in Africa—and I'm fairly convinced, because I visit, I consult with them. I am a consultant to Rwanda now, on the government and public service reform. I am a consultant to Botswana on public service reform on a regular, retained basis. I know that innovation we have done here; no one else has done it. So that's the major achievement, I think. If it produces results.

SCHALKWYK: Who made the decision to shift the reform process out of the enclave and then out of POPSM into the ministries?

MUTAHABA: *Let me put it this way. I don't know who made the decisions. I am going to use the word "government," in the sense that you can't quite pinpoint the person. It was—as we started, they say—the final review of the reform process up to 1999 showed that using a group of experts in the corner will help you to implement the reform interventions quickly, but their sustainability was in jeopardy. So that in itself—and people will then say, "Well, maybe they're right." That's from a study commissioned to look at the implementation process. That convinced people at POPSM and the president and president's office that the next phase should not be in a corner. As we were concluding the reforms that had started in 2006, let's also do a review of the reform implementation process. We commissioned three people to go and talk to people—citizens, government officials, private sector— on how they perceived the reform process that has taken place over the last five years. It was—the message was coming that people would say, "Ah, you are talking about those reforms belonging to POPSM." The ministries were emphatic, they were not owning the reforms. So those of us who then were in the forefront of developing the strategy, we have to tell our colleagues—you know, I was the chairman—I can't even say it—I was the vice chairman—the permanent secretary was chairman—of the Reform Formulation Strategy. But because the permanent secretary is so busy with work, I was effectively the chairman. Or chairperson. We have to tell our colleagues that, as we formulate the next one, let the issue of MDA-led inform the formulation of this strategy. Yeah. So I don't know. We then sold it, but it didn't just come from my head, it came from what people were saying, that if you want reforms to move forward, let the people who are going to implement them—which is the ministries, departments, and agencies—formulate their own reforms, based on their menu, based on whatever—.*

SCHALKWYK: So if you had a chance to write a handbook for people who had to manage civil service reform, what kinds of topics would you consider most important, and what would you find most useful to know?

MUTAHABA: *You need, first of all—not necessarily in any order—you should understand the situation you're trying to reform. Number one. The situation and whatever title you give it. You should understand that. That's the first point, whether it comes first or last, doesn't matter—but an important point, for you to understand where you're coming from. What's wrong with it? Why do you want to reform it? Why can't you leave it alone? Understand? That's the first step. Two, you should then*

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know the options for changing the condition. What are the options? I mean, some of those options may be—now, where do you generate those options?

SCHALKWYK: What do you think some of the options facing Tanzania were, that they didn't choose?

MUTAHABA: *I don't know. I mean, you had—the options were many. You could take a blueprint picked from what the UK was doing about similar programs—or the US or Germany or Kenya. That's one option. So why are you worried about options for reform? It is often called public management, which has options for moving public service forward. Pick one of those and implement it. But we realized that that's going to hit the wall. So that's one option—one source of options. The other source of options is the people you are working with. They have the options, so interact with them—which we did. A lot of time was spent running small seminars, workshops, so on, as we were discussing the options for phase II. So the options came mainly from the people, as you see it formulated.*

SCHALKWYK: From civil servants?

MUTAHABA: *Yes. Have you seen the PSRP—yes, because this is the very abridged version. The entire Civil Service Reform Program, Phase II is 2,400 pages. Four volumes. And that was written by not less than 100 people. They have their hand somewhere. So ownership—do you understand what I'm saying? This is enough for you. It may be enough for the general public. The ministries may have the strategy document, which is about 100 pages, which is volume I. That's possibly enough for them. Then you have volume II, which is Implementation Action Plan. You have volume IV, which is monitoring and evaluation arrangements. So it is a lot. I spent a year and a half essentially working to develop that implementation— not me alone, but leading the process. Now, the options came from the people. Civil servants, but since we did—civil servants, the local government, councilors, and some citizens—we also involved some groups of citizens, so the options for resolving what was wrong with the public service and had not been cured by PSRP II; this came from the people. It did not come from POPSM, it didn't come from me or the right person working on it, mostly dreaming it. You know, I mean, times I would be asleep, you know, and I'd dream. One effort, and doing nothing else. You know, except when I had the flu. Doing nothing—that was my job. Leading the process of developing PSRP II. That's why I'm saying, when I— when it was ready, we looked for a blessing by government, Cabinet approved it, and required some resources in addition to those from government, from donor agencies; we obtained it. I was part of the negotiation process. We signed. I said, "Let me go on a holiday and teach." Deal with people who go on strike every day. I think we are getting there, because somebody will show up. I'm going to a pre-wedding party at 6:00 and have to go home, which is about 20 kilometers, and then come back.*

SCHALKWYK: Did you have anything else to add before we stop?

MUTAHABA: *I don't know. I mean, how do you use these? Because it can't be just for keeping these for posterity. The results of this thing—what do you do with them? And how does it contribute to our own knowledge... No, to knowledge, even. How is it getting disseminated in the end? Planning a book, you know? That's the question.*

SCHALKWYK: We're planning to first make it available online, so other people in your position in other countries can read or listen to what you have to say and perhaps gain something from the experience. But we're also going to highlight particular

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innovations in Tanzania, particular challenges that Tanzania has faced, and ways that it's got around that—the particular ways that it's done it. We're trying to be as detailed as possible.

MUTAHABA: *OK, fine. That's the first question. The next question, which maybe you are not the right person to address—Professor...*

SCHALKWYK: Widner.

MUTAHABA: *Right. These good interventions—and this is a very good thing you are doing, but it could be better if it was a collaborative venture. You know? It would be better.*

SCHALKWYK: With whom?

MUTAHABA: *I don't know. I mean, I'm saying, you... I don't know. I mean, I've not thought through, and don't think I came thinking about that question. At the end, I said OK. Three years ago, four years ago, the Center for Policy—Strengthening Policy in Developing Countries that—in Brussels—came to us to try to record our experiences, more or less on the same thing. They were looking about—mainly focusing on the process of reform. And I talked to them and sort of saidy, "Yes, but why can't we do it together? You know, why should we just be respondents?" They said, "We hadn't thought about it." Why can't the center, if it was working in the Tanzanian context or—they've chosen four, five, six countries—and had the resources, because I'm making assumptions that they did—think about the collaborative project on an issue like this, so that ownership—. Is that—? I don't know. I have not thought it through. But it would be helpful for you to pass it on.*

SCHALKWYK: Will do.

MUTAHABA: *Yeah. OK.*

SCHALKWYK: Thank you very much.

MUTAHABA: *Thank you also, Andrew.*