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Interviewee: George Pessima

Interviewer: Summer Lopez

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LOPEZ: Okay, this interview is George Pessima, Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of Civil Service of Sierra Leone. The interviewer is Summer Lopez.

Mr. Pessima, thank you for agreeing to hold this interview. I'd like to begin this conversation by talking about the role that you have played in civil service reform here as well as elsewhere, if you have worked on this in similar settings. Could you just go ahead and start off by describing your role in civil service reform?

PESSIMA: *Well, I'm one of the key players in the reform of the civil service of this country. I have a long range of experience; I served in the service from 1975 to date. I have served in most of the key offices: in the presidency, in finance, in development and in health. I am the former Establishment Secretary. I also served in the provinces, in the provincial administration and rose to the post of Provincial Secretary. So I have a broad, wide-range experience in the Sierra Leone public service. The only area where I did not have the privilege to work was in the Foreign Service. But about almost everything else in the country I know so much. At the moment, I am Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service as well as Chairman of the Steering Committee on Good Governance.*

The steering committee is actually a clearinghouse for all the reform initiatives, the reform initiatives which are developed by the Public Sector Reform Unit and by line ministries. All of those initiatives are submitted for consideration by the steering committee and the chairman. The steering committee considers all the recommendations that are made and what is approved by the steering committee goes to the cabinet for consideration. So, for virtually all the initiatives for the reform process in this country in my capacity as Chairman of the Steering Committee, I lead the process to advise the cabinet because our recommendations go to the cabinet for consideration.

LOPEZ: How did you become involved in the reform work? Did the government ask you for your assistance or was this just a natural extension of your job?

PESSIMA: *Partly a natural extension of my job because as head of the civil service, I needed to be part of the process of trying to reform the service. And partly because they wanted to make use of the wide range of experience I have had in all the key areas of civil service, both in provincial administration and ministerial administration here at headquarters in Freetown.*

LOPEZ: I'd like to start out with some sort of general questions about the civil service reform going on here and then move on to some specific types of changes. Would you talk a little bit about capacity in the public sector in Sierra Leone both when you began the reform work, what it was like then and what it is like now.

PESSIMA: *The Sierra Leonean civil service used to be one of the best in Sub Saharan Africa, to the extent that we were even exporting personnel to service other neighboring countries, which were former colonies in Africa. In Nigeria, Ghana, The Gambia, Sierra Leoneans civil servants were going to work in those countries. The reason was simple. At the time, we had a civil service that was small, well trained and well motivated, particularly the service that the colonial people left to this country. Over the years, decline set in in terms of standards. Recruitment was prostituted. They brought in people who were not properly qualified. There was no organized, regular training and the deployment of officers was political. There was a lot of political interference in recruitment, in promotions*

and deployment of officers, all of which had a heavy, heavy— adverse effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. Today, morale is so low in the workforce that for this country to move forward, we need to go back and look at the service very critically and enhance the capacity of the workforce. That means there has to be some radical reform of the service, which is currently, number one, that the numbers are too large, unskilled and untrained and unmotivated.

The reward system, the salaries paid to the civil servants in Sierra Leone is about the lowest in Africa, the lowest in Africa. Very deplorable wages are paid to civil servants, some of whom—well, if I rate it in dollar terms, earn somewhere about \$40 a month. Some managers of the service earn about \$200 a month; people who attain managerial positions, most of them earn about \$200 a month. So this is again an indication as to the state of affairs we have in the service.

Because of these deplorable conditions of service, officers can hardly focus; it becomes difficult to get the undivided attention to work. You cannot subsist on the actual wages that they're paid. This partly explains the reason why some people get involved in corrupt practices, because of the environment in which they work. I'm not trying to defend it; it is the weaker ones who get themselves involved in activities that they are not supposed to be part of. The public service should maintain high ethical standards of integrity.

So the reforms are absolutely necessary and the government has come to realize this. But the pressure is also coming from our donor partners who believe that the efficiency of the civil service, which is so crucial to move the development process of this country forward, which is supposed to be the think tank, the brain, the repository of knowledge and experience by public service management, needs to be up to the task and the challenges that are facing this country.

In order to do that you need to radically reform and restructure the service, get the right people in the service, provide for and encourage them so that they will stay and not run away to seek greener pastures, as is currently the case. Get regular, organized training schemes for them and also ensure that the service, the level of political interference is reduced to the barest minimum because no matter what you say, it is a tool that is used by the political leadership to translate its policies and actions into practical results, so that there cannot be absolute independence in the service because it is an instrument used by the head of government, the executive branch. It is part of the executive branch of government and there cannot be absolute, watertight independence.

So basically this is what I believe. These reforms were started with the reduction in the size of the service. It is critical for us to have a manageable service and to get rid of the undesirables that we currently have on the payroll and in the service, the unskilled, the untrained, so that they will have the right set of people. Also to bring in personnel to man the critical sectors, mainly the social sectors – health, education and support the agriculture extension services in this country. For us to do that, to be able to get the right personnel to service these key social sector institutions, we need to reduce the size of the service in all the areas whose services are not too crucial. That process has started but we are doing it in a manner that is not going to bring a major convulsion in the system. It has to be done without attracting the attention of—not to create a situation whereby people feel that the reforms have no human face.

No, people who are due legitimate retirement are being retired and they will be paid their retirement benefits. I presided over a meeting, two meetings some time ago to reduce the period it takes for an officer who is retired to get their retirement benefits. The system today has been such that it takes sometimes three, four, five years. Now I have come up with a scheme which has reduced the red tape in processing the retirement benefits of officers who retire either voluntarily or compulsorily from the service. In two months—normally civil servants are entitled to three months leave prior to retirement or severance from the service. In two months their check should be ready.

So I worked out a system, a mechanism whereby in two months all the officers who will be retired from the service, in two months they can collect their check and that's it, that's the retirement benefit.

LOPEZ: This is part two of the interview with Mr. Pessima. You described this a little bit but it would be helpful to hear you describe in a little more detail the history of public sector reform in Sierra Leone and what motivated it. I know you said it was a bit of both the donors and the government, but who has really championed the reform effort here?

PESSIMA: *Well definitely it has been the government that actually triggered the whole process. The political leadership of this country realized the deficiencies in our service and then they approached the donors to help us fund a reform package. The government actually approached our development partners and they also realized the weaknesses in our system, particularly the lack of capacity of our public service and especially the civil service, which is so central to the public service. There is the need to restructure, reform and enhance the capacity of this critical arm of government. That was an initiative of the government which is being supported by the donor partners, particularly DFID (Department for International Development). The EU also came in and the World Bank, they have shown interest and the public service institutions are varied as the judicial sector reform and local government reform, now have elected local councils. So we are now addressing the civil service proper.*

LOPEZ: Would you describe some of the core competencies that the government or other constituents want to build in the country and the thinking behind these choices?

PESSIMA: *Well the government really is looking at the managerial class of the service because their functional effectiveness is considered to be very critical. This should drive the reform process down, top down. If we have efficient managers who run the ministries and departments, who are capable, efficient and well focused, then they will be able to drive the process down the ladder, down the rest of the service. So the focus really is on the top echelons of the service so that they will be able to drive the process of reform. That is the government's vision. You cannot equate the role of the messenger with that of somebody who is there to help in policy formulation, analysis and implementation. So the competencies are definitely different. Therefore the focus is on the very critical personnel for now. This is understandable because the functional effectiveness of this particular group is more critical than the rest. That is why the focus—the whole reform process is targeted to a large extent at the very top.*

LOPEZ: Was there an effort to sit down and consider the steps that should come first in the reform or did key actors seize the window of opportunity?

PESSIMA: Well what happened is that various supporters were brought in with us as consultants, from Ghana, then the British came in. In some areas they identified a common problem where there was need for reform. In the approaches, there were slight variances here and there but by and large—we also had our own internal initiatives. The top echelons of the service also contributed toward the debate and then we came out with a program of activities which was—the broad framework was approved by government and which we should now translated into action.

A roadmap was chartered and there is pure reform. We got a consultant from Ghana, an expert in that field. The recommendations the consultants have made have been reviewed. We had done two or three reviews; we looked at it for the last time again. The areas, the consultant had to answer some questions and then the draft when it was submitted again, was reviewed now by the steering committee finally before it got to the cabinet.

For that pay issue of course the matter would have to again be discussed with our development partners because it had budgetary implications. The projected salary increases that we intended to accommodate were in fact our partners, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) in particular would be able to support that level of salary increase, the additions to the wages program with the IMF and whatever increases we want to make should be consistent with the program that we have with the IMF.

Also we had the review of the regulations which govern the management of the civil service. This is basically the constitution of the civil service. It has undergone a lot of extensive review and I played a major, major role in the effort when I was Establishment Secretary. It has been in the works for almost a decade now I can tell you. We had disruptions. Because of the war we had to put it on hold. Then we brought somebody again from the UN because the former President of this country was somebody who worked in the UN system. He wanted the UN to also have a look at the document that was developing. So it has an international flavor also.

So the document, the final product of the regulations, would have elements of what we took from the British colonial government, we have some input from the UN system and we also brought a consultant from Sweden and then our own local, topical, to make it relevant to our own requirements. So we did a lot of work on that. The document is expected to be finalized any moment now. This is why it is important to me: I personally worked on it.

LOPEZ: And what are some of the key changes that have been made to the guidelines as part of this review?

PESSIMA: Well, what we did was retain some of the regulations from the British, which we still believe are relevant. As I said we brought in new ideas from outside, from the UN, from Sweden and also our own ideas based on practical application. We had to bring in certain ideas.

LOPEZ: Are there specific new elements of the guidelines that you think will make a big difference in the way the civil service operates now?

PESSIMA: The new guidelines we have will give a centrality of a place to discipline, because there has been a breakdown in discipline. In ethics, there is a code of ethics for

service officers. And training, there is central consideration for training, regular training in country and where possible, depending on the skills required, if we can fund it, we will send you abroad. But the running of a modern state is very, very complex and therefore it requires people whose skills have to be regularly updated. New ideas have to be absorbed; otherwise we will not move this country forward.

Also I have spoken about the need for officers of high moral rectitude. That is why we have to tighten the screws on discipline. We need officers with standards of behavior and the commitment to work. If we are found seriously wanting of course we will recruit. Under the old civil service code, to take an officer out of the service was very difficult, now it is less difficult. We were bringing in some elements of private sector management of our resources. Because if you don't bring in any value to the agency, it would be pointless for us to carry you indefinitely. You should prove to be an asset; otherwise you should fall by the wayside. These are some of the critical areas that we are focused on now in our regulations.

LOPEZ: And how will the new regulations be implemented? How will they be communicated to the civil servants?

PESSIMA: *Well, when we finally endorse this thing at the Steering Committee level, of which I am chairman, we will submit it to the cabinet so that the government will endorse it as a policy, as a major policy document that will govern the operations of the civil service. There are others—there is a debate as to whether we should even legislate it. For that I would not want to go to that level. Because if we legislate it, because this should be flexible, it is a dynamic instrument and subject to changes if and when the circumstances demand. From time to time we're not going to go back to parliament to effect a change. So I think it should be at cabinet level. So that from time to time, depending on the circumstances and the exigencies of the service, the Establishment Secretary can effect a change in collaboration with the top managers of the service so that a circular can be issued, such and such section has been amended and so on. So it should be a flexible instrument, not something that should be difficult to amend. If you take it to parliament that will make it too difficult, it becomes a constitution. This is my own personal initiative.*

But the implementation of the HRMO (Human Resource Management Office), it is going to be one of the major instruments in managing the service. It will be the Human Resource Management Office and they will make sure we get copies all over the service.

LOPEZ: What was the level of political commitment to public sector reform at the time you started doing this process and has that changed since then?

PESSIMA: *It has not in the sense that all the last two, the former President and the incoming President, the leadership, they all made strong political statements that they supported the process. I think the commitment is there. The political will and commitment is there, that one I can assure you. The only problem is change anywhere is so difficult. To change a status quo that has been in place for too long is difficult. As I said, we are managing human beings, these are not inanimate objects that you can just take here and put here, and so you have to have some tact in effecting the changes. But I believe that by the end of the year we are going to fast track the process. [Interruption]*

LOPEZ: This is part three of the interview with Mr. Pessima. My next questions will be about specific kinds of reform in which you played a role. The first is reducing political and social influence in recruitment and promotion. So if you could describe some of the changes that have taken place in this area.

PESSIMA: *As a matter of fact a new commission, a Public Service Commission, has just been appointed, a new team. The issue of political interference is not something that can be written on paper. It is for the political actors, by their behavior we will see if they interfere with the work of the commission or the running of the civil service. That can only be a "wait and see." Let us see. The only assurance, the only indications I have which gives hope that the level of political interference will indeed be very, very minimal is because the head of government, who is also the President, is a man of high principles. He goes by the law. Even the civil service, he wants the service to operate within the law, within our regulations. He will ensure that level of interference, he believes in that strongly. So that gives some of us hope.*

LOPEZ: Can you describe if there have been ways that the recruitment and promotion procedures have been revised, perhaps to minimize outside influence?

PESSIMA: *This has not been addressed as yet. This has not been fully addressed.*

LOPEZ: Have steps been taken to monitor performance of civil servants so that they will be promoted on the basis of performance specifically?

PESSIMA: *The current manner in which officers are promoted leaves much to be desired.*

LOPEZ: Why is that?

PESSIMA: *The reason is what we are trying to address, political influence in some areas. Our own colleagues will promote and advance people who don't deserve promotion. The Public Service Commission also, the performance of that outgoing commission, also was another matter. Now we have a new team and the head of that team is somebody who has a proven record of integrity, was a former head of the civil service and cabinet. Now he has been given this assignment to ensure the integrity of a very important office is maintained. So we believe that some of the ills of the past we will definitely correct.*

Besides, as you can see, this matter went to the former commission. For somebody to be appointed into a permanent and pensionable level position there has to be a job description, a scheme of service which has to be developed to highlight the academic and professional requirements and experience where necessary, fully detailed. At the civil service offices and the Public Service Commission, when there are vacancies, it has to be published in the newspapers and in the gazette so that they apply and compete publicly. When they apply the commission, the Public Service Commission, interviews and order the appointments. They order the appointment of people into the permanence and pensionable establishment service.

Now this is the scheme and these schemes need to be updated from time to time. Now the Ministry of Lands is a ministry which has not earned a good name in administering public lands in this country, state lands and even private land. There is a need for a new director, a deputy director, an assistant director. So the

entire scheme ordered that they be updated. They sent a draft to the Establishment Secretary. It is not my work. But as head of the service I am entrusted in making sure we have the right people, the right skills, I decided that the thing should be [Indecipherable] with me. So they sent a copy here, we are meeting here, look at the corrections, the changes effected by the government to make sure we have the right people to come in.

LOPEZ: This is a job description.

PESSIMA: *It is a job description. Based on this you have to fix this. If you don't you're not going to be employed. They are all based on the old skills. They advertise. Badly done. Only one person applied, only one person qualified. I remember when I was Establishment Secretary during the war period, a chap decided to leave this country and then they wanted to dismiss him. He went and started studying in Britain; he started a degree program in Britain, being supported by some friends. During the war period a lot of people left the country. The doors of Britain and many other countries accepted refugees from this country. I was also in exile, I was a refined refugee. The rebels saw where I stayed in Freetown and two nights in Kamakwie and I was in the United States. I was in the US for eight months continuously, came to Britain for three months, and went to Germany for a month. Then when the government was reinstated, the legitimate government was reinstated, I came two or three weeks thereafter back home, I came back.*

So this chap during that crisis period started a course. Then he got his first degree. Then they wanted to take him out of the service, my predecessor. The man did not apply, he was not covered by the regulation for him to study. He didn't ask for release. So I had to regularize his status with the UK. I demanded that the college should be sending reports on his performance since he was not getting money from the government. We had to give him no pay leave. A study leave without pay, study without pay but we needed regular reports to make sure he was indeed a student. He got his first degree. He got his second degree, a Master's, then he came back.

He came back, I was still Establishment Secretary. He went to his former office, then he assessed especially the level of mismanagement and corruption and he said, "This place is no good for me, I don't think I will fit in in this environment." So what do you want? He said, "I want to go on and continue to get my doctorate." I gave him clearance to go. He went and got his doctorate, then he came back. He found the same old—and he decided to just confine himself to a small place there. Every day he'd be the first to come and the last to go. Very little assignment was given to him, because they were scared of him. Now he is poised to be the next director. So I want to make sure we have the right people. He got his first degree in land surveying, investment management, public property assessment, and so on.

LOPEZ: So is this going to be a new system of recruitment than is different from what was done before?

PESSIMA: *It is an improvement on the old system, we are improving the old system. We are improving on it substantially to ensure one, that there is transparency in the process, two, that the right people are recruited and three, that we find the funds to retain them. There is a very gray area in the service which I am currently trying to address, very serious area. I don't know what they have in the United States, but we need them here, that is the class called stenographers or shorthand*

typists. We no longer have a school in this country, a private institution that trains them. They are being phased out, they are almost going out. We need them, they are absolutely necessary because they cover parliament. The proceedings in our parliament—the parliament in this country is a hybrid of the American system, the British system and our own local Secretariat. That is the parliament we have. There is a separation of powers, but there is patterned debate, the whole proceedings are patterned on the British method as the legislative branch of government.

The proceedings have to be covered, the proceedings of parliament need to be published regularly, every week, every month. Even if you are making a statement or contributing to a debate and there is somebody who has made an undertone, that undertone should be captured in the [Indecipherable]. This is almost impossible. I'll tell you what it currently is, I don't want to describe it because it is embarrassing. They go with an audio recorder, the proceedings are recorded and our civil servants have the task of sitting there laboriously and listening to the recording to begin to copy. When you have a stenographer sitting down there, just like that you capture everything, you capture everything and print it accurately. They are all phasing out.

Again, it is affecting the productivity of our judiciary particularly of higher courts. The judges, some of them are old: the high court, the appeals court. They have to sit down to write these depositions. Where the court proceedings are covered by stenographers, first we have old people in government as ministers. The former President Ahmad Kabbah he was alright. He could explain this, everything, they can dictate, a stenographer will capture it, type it, bring it, make minor corrections and then it will enhance productivity. Now we don't have this in office. So I've written to the Establishment Secretary. We were having a meeting, if you and I have, if you were inside, we'd sit down and brainstorm and find a way how to make sure we don't lose out. What I have in mind is, provision is being made in the current budget so that one can have training and to have the civil service college built. The whole world will have this opening ceremony this morning. They have rooms. Two of those big rooms are going to be taken, furnished and serve as central that's going to be a training school for civil service training and maybe stenographers, who are writers from the civil service and those young people who apply will be subjected to written examination. You have to qualify. You have to be very sound. If you fail, you are not—we are going to recruit people from outside. We will provide the books and the tutors.

When they qualify they will sign a bond with the government. Once you've been trained at the expense of the state for a specified period, you have to sign up, you don't disengage until you work with the government. More importantly, we make sure we pay them well so that they don't go to the private sector.

LOPEZ: Is that going to be a system in general that people will be required to serve for a certain amount of time if they have received training from the government?

PESSIMA: *That is what I want to introduce.*

LOPEZ: And how long would they be required to serve?

PESSIMA: *It would depend on how much—the area of study—how much money the government has spent on you. For medical doctors it is a lot of money we spend. It will depend on how much money we spend, it will vary.*

LOPEZ: How would that be enforced?

PESSIMA: *Normally when you sign a bond there is a collateral. Whoever is going to sign the bond, if you default there is a remedy and will cause us to recover money. You have to go with the collateral or some relative will have to sign up for you. If we are spending money to educate you, you must work for the state. I will make sure we are going to improve the conditions so that the officer is not a slave, but then we cannot spend money on you and then you say you're not going to work for the country. You go elsewhere, you go to Gambia, some other country, that's unfair. We are spending scarce resources to develop our human capacity.*

LOPEZ: And what stage is this proposal in? Has this become part of any of the guidelines yet for the training policy?

PESSIMA: *The training policy, we worked on it, within the next two weeks I'm sure that should be ready for consideration by the Steering Committee and they will take it to the cabinet.*

LOPEZ: Will this be a part of that policy?

PESSIMA: *I want to make sure it is going to be part of it. It will be part of the training policy, it is going to be.*

LOPEZ: Let me ask a few questions about training programs and capacity-building programs in general. You mentioned trying to reopen the civil service training college. What other sort of specialized training institutes or training programs have been tried here or will be tried in the near future?

PESSIMA: *We have our tertiary institutions, we have the College of Medicine where we train our doctors, nurses, pharmacists, they train public health workers at the school of Njala in Bo Then we have the Institute of Public Administration and Management and the general university which provides for engineers, geologists, and so on. But, the need for the civil service college: the civil service as an institution has its own code of ethics. If you want to imbibe those values into civil servants, you may have education and be a nurse and what have you. But the ethics, all of those things, you have to go to the college from time to time. So that we think it is in the national interests, the things you are not supposed to do and the things you are. Also, you have an induction course when you are recruited you have to go through a course.*

Now for administrative officers for instance, if you come as a university graduate, you are recruited, the conditions are fairly rigid. You have to be an honors university graduate or a second degree division, not below second division. Third class, third division, you are not qualified. In fact, based on this admission, even with a degree, you have to sit for an entrance examination.

As I was saying for an administrative officer, when you're recruited, you go for a training program, for an induction course, sometimes two months, intensive. They tell you exactly what the service is all about, the initial work, and so on. Then at the end of the training program you sit for an examination, that's the first step. Three years you'd be on probation. Three years they will be grooming you. If you go through our training programs and you're found to be potentially a good officer in terms of your work and output and comportment, then you're confirmed.

Within three years if you are found to be deficient, that you will not be an asset to this country, we take you out at an early stage. So we bring you out of this.

Then as I said as administrative officers you have to sit for preconfirmation examination, seven subjects. You have to go and read law, criminal law and evidence, criminal law and procedure, common law and evidence, local arts, then the regulations that govern civil service; this one you have to know it, you have to study it.

LOPEZ: This is for all levels of the civil service?

PESSIMA: *No, this is for administrative officers and senior police officers. You have to do that. As an administrative officer, you are supposed to be there to interpret, you are supposed to be conversant with all of this.*

LOPEZ: And who is constructing these tests? Who is writing the tests?

PESSIMA: *For the law aspect, the law office department does the questions. For the rules and regulations it is going to be the human resource people now, they are going to do that. In our office we have a whole training unit; it use to be the Secretary of Training and Recruitment, now it has to be the Director of Training for Human Resources.*

LOPEZ: Then will those same officers review the results of the test?

PESSIMA: Yes.

LOPEZ: Are there some positions that are reserved for political appointees or will everybody go through this process?

PESSIMA: *There are only a few political positions. The Secretary to the President; there have been constitutional changes: formerly the Secretary to the President used to be a civil service post.*

LOPEZ: But now it is appointed?

PESSIMA: *Now it is appointed.*

LOPEZ: And when people have reached the end of their probation, what is the procedure by which they will be evaluated to see if they will be confirmed?

PESSIMA: *You have three reports on you. After eight months, eight months in the service they send a report on you. Then after 17 months they send a report on you and then the final report by the head of your department. Then some people get report summaries, and they copy me. I think I should have a copy somewhere.*

LOPEZ: This is part four of the interview with Mr. Pessima. So as far as the implementation of these changes do you anticipate that sitting civil servants will welcome these changes or do you think they will be resistant?

PESSIMA: *Some will welcome it, some definitely, it depends on—some will welcome it for the changes. There are so many things involved in the reforms, one, to bring in the right people. We are preparing them not for this current staff really as far as I see it. The major focus is going to be the future, the next three years, to bring in*

the right people, to train them. The older people, no matter what you do, they're already stale. Their contribution is going to be minimal. Young, talented people need to be brought in, we need to train them, and make sure they're properly focused. Most of the work we are trying to do now is lay the foundation so that the older folk will phase out. Get them out. The people coming in should behave differently, professionally and they should be happy and proud that they are working in the civil service.

The conditions will change. There has to be responsibility. The people who are there in this country cannot continue to be on life support. The people who will make the dramatic turnaround must be the work force; the civil service and the political leadership together. The politician, that's the tool they use. All of their ideas, because most of these politicians come, they have never worked in government before. So you, the civil servant, you should be there to guide them to develop the appropriate policies that will take this country up. So you need a professional civil service officer, well focused, well disciplined.

LOPEZ: Can you describe some of the core competencies and skills that you feel are missing in the civil service? I know you mentioned stenographers.

PESSIMA: *I've just spoken about stenographers. You go to the mining industry, the mining sector, this country, we have no universities that train mining engineers. We train geologists, but because of our reward system we employ a geologist today, the next moment they are hired by the mining companies and they pay them tenfold. They pay them \$3000 plus dollars a month and in the civil service a geologist who is newly appointed will get 120 to 130 dollars a month. We can't retain that person. The mining engineers, within the next two years, we'll lose all of them, they're all going to retire. I would not be surprised. So it is one area I am going to address. We have no institution, we do not have the money now to train mining engineers in Britain, and we don't have the money to send them to South Africa.*

So what I intend to recommend as an interim is that we are going to recruit some civil engineers and send them for maybe six months training in Ghana. That, we can afford. Now we have big mining companies that are in this country. We lack the capacity to monitor the operations of these companies. We don't have the engineers, the officers that are capable, and the competency to be able to monitor the big mining enterprises that operate in this country.

We have mines monitoring officers but these are secondary school dropouts. It is a misnomer. When you talk about mines monitors you need somebody who has the expertise to know the problems of mining, the aspects of environmental protection. To be sure that what is shipped in the country is what they're supposed to ship; they're not taking things out that they are not supposed to take out. To be sure that labor standards are maintained. We don't have that. Those are the areas missing, too many.

LOPEZ: Who has—?

PESSIMA: *And the health sector, you want to know. We have only one psychiatrist doctor, only one. The gentleman is long overdue for retirement. He attended his retirement and we kept him on contract, extended his service. He is now 70 something, he will drop dead some day and there will be nobody there. We have only one pathologist in the government medical service at the moment, one or*

two. The other one is on contract, he is almost 70 something, I brought him, and I kept him there. He will soon drop dead and we won't have anybody.

So the other day the director of human resources, we had a long meeting here. I went to the ministry. I have been going around talking to them. I say, "Look we made a mistake." They advertised lately, they have some money from WHO (World Health Organization) for study in the African region, most of that will go to Nigeria and South Africa. They put on this notice for pathologist, for psychiatrist and then public health specialists and others. Nobody applied to become a psychiatrist, nobody applied for pathology, nobody. I said, "No, you should have asked for just those two critical areas, just those two, you would have had some positive responses." By bringing in the others where they're easily marketed, it is a mistake. Secondly, in the mental hospital there should be special pay for a psychiatric doctor, to make it attractive, and people well trained. Officers working in the mental hospital, not many want to go there, there must be a special reward. You have to make it an attractive office for them to go there.

LOPEZ: I was going to ask, who has been pushing for the creation of the training program that you're going to put in place for the civil service?

PESSIMA: *The training program, both us in the service as well as our donor partners.*

LOPEZ: And who helps to oversee these changes?

PESSIMA: *The reform changes? We have a structure in place. We have a Public Service Reform Unit, which is under the presidency. They coordinate in all the reforms. Then the issues come to the Steering Committee, of which I am chairman. Then from the Steering Committee recommendations are made to the cabinet and when the cabinet improves it is to implement.*

LOPEZ: And are there training programs that you have helped to design or manage?

PESSIMA: *Yes, I made a lot of contributions to those processes.*

LOPEZ: Could you describe some of the things that you've helped to design?

PESSIMA: *One is local training. We need to have regular in-service training for service personnel across the board. Even for the clerks, our secretaries, their attitude when they come to work, how you deal with clients, how you answer the phone calls, office decorum, and then to be managers. Then a few technical professionals, the ones that can be trained in country, we would have to have them. A few that will require external training subject to availability of funds, we will send them abroad. That is where the bond issue comes in. If we are going to give you that, that opportunity to go out of this country to train and we are spending a lot of money on you, one there has to be a guarantee that you come back, somebody has to guarantee. You have to come up with somebody who will sign off. If you don't come, we'll get the government to put the money. So a few certainly would have to go out but the rest can be in country.*

LOPEZ: Will the training policy be put in place all at one time or will it be sort of phased in?

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- PESSIMA: There is going to be broad policy, broad policy in various sectors and how we intend to proceed. Once that is approved by government, it will serve as the basis. So all of that, MDAs (Ministries Departments and Agencies), we want to address your training issues and to be—that will be the reference point. It will be consistent with the broad policy which will have been approved by government.*
- LOPEZ: Will this be both in Freetown and in the provinces as well?
- PESSIMA: For the whole country. I believe the local governments, the institutions will want to benefit from it.*
- LOPEZ: Will training be mandatory or voluntary?
- PESSIMA: In some areas it is going to be mandatory because promotion is going to be tied up with some training, once they have done some training before they can move to the next step. In some areas, in many areas, your promotion is going to be contingent to your having undergone some training and possibly prescribed examinations and interviews before you can be promoted. So it is going to be mandatory in that sense. In some areas it is going to be optional. You can say, "I want to go and do this." The forms are there, the arrangements are there, you can go.*
- LOPEZ: And what are some of the major obstacles that you have encountered to this element of reform so far or obstacles you are anticipating in encountering in implementing these reforms?
- PESSIMA: Well, the whole thing requires, as I said is a human situation: money. And we need money. If, for instance we want to reduce the size of the service drastically, we target—we are going through the normal attrition policies. Regarding retirement, the attainment of—we've got the people who retire or somebody who voluntarily leaves the service, those numbers are very few. So if you want to take drastic action, they'd have to be a retirement package. Take out some people whose services you think are no longer required. Then you pay them an exit package. That will require money. You need money again to enhance, how much training are you going to approve. If they are not properly motivated they will be distracted from doing what you want them to do. The new reward system is to be announced.*
- Three, they need working tools, they need training, pay, but the tools to work with have to be there. The logistics. So no matter how brilliant your reform initiatives are, properly documented, approved by government, if you don't have the means to translate them into action, it is a major constraint.*
- LOPEZ: So if we could talk a little bit about the recruitment of new talent and improving the attractiveness of civil service employment. Some reform leaders have said the best way to create an effective civil service that is attractive to talented people is to create an elite corps or a senior executive service; others create elite feeder schools on the French model. Some like Singapore, Botswana have offered scholarships in return to commitment to a certain number of years and others just rely on market competition and offering competitive packages. Would you talk about the options entertained here for attracting talented people to the civil service and for retaining the good people that you have?

PESSIMA: Well, the issue of recruiting talent in the service, how to go about it, as I explained to you, we have a job description that has to be clearly spelled out: the requirements for you to be brought to the service, the academic qualifications, professional qualifications and experience in public or private enterprise. So that is how we attract talent. Tied up with the job description of course the salary is also specified in any advertisement.

I will tell you, lawyers for too long now have been advertised; nobody applies. Magistrates don't apply because of the salary. So that is one area. So to attract people the salaries, the prerequisites, academic and professional qualifications, and also the salary has to be attractive to bring them on board. Once they are brought on board the question now is how do you retain them. Retention will depend on the work environment. The officer has to feel happy. Nobody comes to work—they spend the greater part of their time at work, so the environment has to be conducive. Not just the tools to work with but the level of interference, intimidation, once you remove all of those, you can get it to work.

So the issue here is, at the moment, that the British left us a structure which is sound, it only needs slight modification. We don't need to go and borrow ideas because they exist in other countries. This is not an elite country. We have a senior service in the civil service. There is a senior level in the service, there is a middle and there is a junior and then you have the minor, the cleaners and so on. So the structure we have inherited from the British is very clear.

At the very top these are the managers, deputy manager level. This senior level you have to be—before you can get there you have to prove your capability to be able to manage an enterprise, an institution. You have sufficient experience and knowledge to provide leadership and to effect change. You should be strong enough to even talk to the politicians, to make sure you understand, to appreciate—those are the senior levels. For you to get there you have to go through some crucibles.

The civil service has its own culture. You cannot just get somebody from the university with a Ph.D. and make him a high manager; he'll fail. You have to get a culture developed. This is why the college is there. You have to go there yes, the values of the civil servant.

LOPEZ: So is this formalized in the form of a senior executive service?

PESSIMA: The senior executive service is well documented. It has not been permitted—the whole process, the last President encouraged the idea. He set up a commission. He came up with the write up and then it was put on hold, the implementation was put on hold. Part of the reason was one, its funding and sustainability. Because when the civil service proper [Indecipherable], then those who are not qualified by way of the profile, the scheme that should be implemented, you have to have a package to get the service money. Two, then if the president said, "are we just going to focus on the civil service," well then the rest of the public service would raise hell. What about people in the university, people in the military, in the police. So if we say we're going to pay you so that is why the President said, "Hm." It became a nightmare so we had to put it on hold. That is where it is at the moment.

LOPEZ: Do you think that is the right decision?

PESSIMA: They did an assessment. If they want to come and say, "Let's do this for the civil service" then the military will raise hell, the police, security, the teachers. They're out there. They're a potent force.

LOPEZ: You think they would have been resistant?

PESSIMA: They are organized. This is a democratic country. They can easily effect a change in government. So that was why the former President said it, to put it on hold. But he should have had the courage, if that is what he wanted, to first of all to address one, the civil service because of all the public service, that is the most critical. For the public, the civil service influences all the other public sectors. Now they were talking about the commercial bank and all of this, these are poised now for privatization. The state should not be running banks. Government should have hands off. They oppose [Indecipherable] the real workers whose interests we should protect are the civil servants, who help the government formulate its policies, analyze its policies, and translate decisions into action and develop the budget, plan the economy. Those are the people who should be well trained, professional, and motivated. Their actions influence the rest of the public service.

LOPEZ: And the current President has not revived this idea?

PESSIMA: Well, he is looking at it.

LOPEZ: A common problem in many countries that have experienced conflict or other difficulties is that civil servants are often paid unreliably. They may receive paychecks irregularly or unpredictably. I'm wondering what has been done here to improve the reliability of civil service pay.

PESSIMA: Well the system has improved a lot over the years. Our donor partners have helped us tremendously in this regard to develop the management of our finances. There is an integrated financial management system in place, highly computerized to ensure that people are properly paid. Once the funds are available, the resources are there, they are paid. The only problem is that the wages are low. Forty percent of the GDP goes on wages, 40% of our GDP is there. So the wages are terribly low for many people, civil servants proper. They work on contracts. They are well paid. The Secretary to the President for instance is a contract employee, he is not a civil servant. The Financial Secretary was working for some organization abroad. They brought him in with a contract.

The problem is, these same civil servants that we have who are so poorly paid, some of them, when these project implementation units are set up and employed, they are signed there, because of the differential of pay and the conditions of work they'll do remarkably well. Some go to the NGOs. These NGOs are training people.

I remember about four years back I went around the country to explain—on consultation on this civil service code. I went to the provinces, all the provincial headquarters, to delegations of civil servants. In the northern region I had gone to a town of Makeni where we had a meeting. All the civil servants in the five districts, the key people, they all came. We had 200 and some people in the room. We reviewed the new, the old document and what ideas they had about the new regulations for the civil service. So at the lunch break, this was a big hall, bigger than this building. In some of the sections of the building, some NGOs, the

NGOs were having their own meeting, non-governmental organizations that were meeting.

So we had a lunch break together. The civil servants were working at these NGOs and you see the stark difference. Our colleagues, the civil servants looked like refugees, they were so emaciated you can see poverty in their faces. Then the NGO staff, the personnel, they were so well fed. You could see they were coming from elsewhere. The difference was amazing. You could see the situation, you could see we had a problem. Look at the state of the civil service, look at the NGOs. And that was the cream of the public service in that room.

LOPEZ: To go back to the reliability of the payroll it does seem like that has been achieved here, what were some of the—

PESSIMA: *We are trying to. I told you that there has been considerable improvement because of the intervention of our donor partners who set up the system. But then you see you heard the statement that today there is verification of the payroll once again to check if there are undesirables on the payroll. That exercise is addressing the workers such as teachers, civil servants proper. I believe at the end of it we might have a cleaner payroll.*

In the case of the teachers, they are not part of the civil service per se so I don't have much control or influence over them. But for the civil servants this verification is being done. In the process, the teams should be able to identify—this is part of our process now—anybody, regardless of age, if we see your physical age, you have a physical problem, either your eyesight, depending on what you do, we make a list of all those and we have to retire them. We will finance—will provide for them and take them off. The President has been talking about this, he wants to downsize from 15,000 to about 10,000. When they have 10,000 they will have a manageable service. So we have to take off about 5,000 to get down to 10,000. The military they are trying to do something else.

They hired the accountant general. Two nights ago we had a special function and we said, "Look, you are the strong man. We have a large caseload of workers, in the military. They are not soldiers. Nobody over the years has been able to get that—you know. You need to help us get rid of these." So we are going to have a meeting with the Defense Minister and we are going to see what we can do about that. And the president, the present president, he has told us we need this reform. We are driving this process. If my colleagues cooperate. They said it is now that the hard decisions should be taken. These hard decisions need to be taken now. Don't wait until it is two years to election, one year to election. It is now. By the time we get to the election then the public would have seen the benefits of the hard decisions. It is now. So please help me to make the hard decisions now. This is why I told you in my opening statement that the will is there. This present President means well. He says help me take the hard decisions now.

LOPEZ: The integrated financial management system that you mentioned, how was that implemented? Was there training that was required to put that in place?

PESSIMA: *Oh yes, they are all chartered accountants trained in the United Kingdom who are managing the program. Even the procurement of goods and services, the line ministries, it has to be first of all integrated in the system. Every payment to a contractor, a service provider. That is all the more reason why it is so easy now*

for the accountant general to prepare the national accounts for parliament to consider. The Accounts Committee that oversees the management of resources, the funds are approved by parliament how they are disposed. So the accountant system has improved significantly with the introduction of the Integrated Financial Management System.

LOPEZ: And that was a donor-initiated process?

PESSIMA: *Yes, it was donor-initiated, by the World Bank.*

LOPEZ: And were the accountants trained specifically for this or were they recruited?

PESSIMA: *We recruited them. Some for this, others for the capacity of the accountant general's department.*

LOPEZ: And are they being compensated in such a way that they are likely to stay?

PESSIMA: *Yes, they are paid well.*

LOPEZ: Now if we can go back as you were talking a little bit about retrenchment. Would you talk about some of the strategic considerations that played a role in whether to retrench employees or not?

PESSIMA: *Actually this is a matter which falls within the reform process. We who are driving that process the ball is in our court really. We cannot continue to have the kind of service structure we have where we have almost 90% unskilled people in the civil service whose productivity is very, very insignificant. Then we say, "Well we have to carry this excess baggage indefinitely?" So for the good of the service we have to take the difficult decision now to reduce that number significantly and drastically so that it will give us room for skilled personnel, who will make a difference, to come on board.*

LOPEZ: You've described a little bit, can you just sort of summarize again the retrenchment program that is going to be put in place?

PESSIMA: *This is a very sensitive subject, politically sensitive. The people who are managing it have to make sure that we don't do it in a manner that might consume ourselves. They say "oh, the politicians will easily, they will sacrifice you." When it is going good they say, "oh yes," but when it is not they say "no." So we are also very mindful about that. But definitely, personally, it is for the good of the country and the service. I've told you in this verification exercise, they are going to identify some who are physically unfit to be in the service. There are areas where we have far too many officers, more than are needed. At least this is what was represented.*

You had the civil servants talk about drivers. In agriculture for instance, they have about 170 drivers. The number of vehicles is less than 30. So why do we need this? They all forgot to take them off? You see? If you want efficiency, you have to reduce numbers. All we have to do is have the funds available so that if we want them to go we can give them two weeks and then say here is the check. The people want that, they welcome that. Again, at some point we are going to ask who wants to voluntarily opt out. Some will want to go on their own provided that they can be assured that they will be paid decently whatever they are due in terms of a retirement package, that they will be paid. Of course, if you

volunteer—. So when you add all those numbers, I'm sure it will make a significant reduction in the size of the service. We are not going to do it with a big bang, too mechanical, raise the dust or attract the attention of the press, civil society. This is a fragile country. Again, out there, the rest of the world will yell "oh, human rights!" So we are going to do it but we are mindful about all these pitfalls. We are operating in a minefield so we have to be careful how we tread.

LOPEZ: And in addition to being able to get people severance payments, will there be an effort to give people training if they want to pursue other work?

PESSIMA: *For this country, most of them who leave—for the young chaps yes. The young ones who find out for them. But most of them are middle aged who cannot be trained. They are illiterate, you see.*

LOPEZ: Is this going to be focused on specific ministries or will it be across the board?

PESSIMA: *Across the board.*

LOPEZ: Who will oversee the changes?

PESSIMA: *I told you, I've given you the structure; we have the public service reform unit of which I am a key player. We want to—at a point I remember the director of the unit a few months back, that is before I came here, I said I wanted to be in the service. I said if you leave now you are strong, you have courage. Make sure, we will help together, let us fix the service and then you leave. Don't leave the civil service the way it is. That is why I am here, to help make a difference. It is a difficult assignment. The key is money. What we generate in this country is very small.*

For the last two years, we have had a cash budget meaning we spend what we collect as revenue. The donor funds support the budget since 2007 to date we have not had any support. Two weeks ago the Minister of Finance reported that we signed an agreement with the IMF that they have not given us the stamp of approval for them to start releasing the funds, that should have been released to support the budget from 2007. So by the end of this month, this very month, we are looking forward to some external funds. But that cannot go on indefinitely. We have to try to manage our own affairs, to begin to reduce significantly the dependence on the donors. We have to try.

For us to make that effort and to make that breakthrough, to make a significant reduction of that dependency, we have to bring efficiency to our public service, management of our own affairs of state across the board. Reduce corruption. Make sure we encourage and motivate our workers. The problems are too numerous, too monumental, too many.

Social problems in the country are terrible. Our roads are horrible. Two thirds of this city has no water, drinking water. Electricity is one of the action measures of government when they came in. Most of the areas where these key social sectors, they require a huge investment. It is not a small drop in the ocean, it is a huge investment for infrastructure development. Roads, water, huge infusion of capital.

LOPEZ: Could you talk about some ways in which the civil service has worked around some of these infrastructure challenges?

PESSIMA: Well our contribution in this regard has been—actually trying to prioritize our needs. Basically that is all we can do in the planning process. Energy is at the top. Energy is at the top followed by, we are talking about power, water for the people, then the roads, infrastructure. The rural people, the community lives, they develop their own farms, agriculture products. They want to enable them to bring their products to the market where they can earn money, then they need to fix the roads to the market centers. It is a major problem.

As civil service we don't implement these projects, but our job is to prioritize and then we advise government as to how we can get the funds and save the funds. For now we cannot raise much locally until we get the mining sector. The money sector, if that can develop within the next couple of years then we are going to make a significant contribution to the budget and our development efforts, mining, marine resources such as fish. We have a vying economic sector, which has not been developed in this country, tourism. It has been lying fallow. We want to make sure we send some of our most experienced officers, managers, to help to send the key people on tourism.

I would be going over to the Minister of Trade or Industry, most of these ministries I am going to go around and actually sit down with them. I will brief them, you need to move. We need an investment code, a code that should be properly documented, that you clearly specify the obligations of whoever wants to invest in this country be it foreign or domestic investor, these are your obligations and these are the incentives the government will provide for you including repatriation capital, a tax holiday where necessary both for industrial development including the tourism center, tourism and mining.

Mining industry, tourism, finance, we need to see them get working for this country. Instead of somebody coming who wants to invest in this country groping in the dark you have to go to this office, you have to go to this person. If you don't know what you need, that's unacceptable. We are competing for scarce resources with other countries. Enable the environment fine, electricity, roads, and the judiciary.

We need a judicial system that is predictable, that is transparent, that people have confidence in. The health of a society is judged by its justice system. Where the judiciary is suspect and questionable, nobody feels safe. That branch of government is one of the problems in this country, the judiciary. Parliament is much better. Executive yes, judiciary no. I feel so strong. Who is going to bell that cat, somebody has to shake that monster.

So that is why we have to come up with that incentive, that document, that clearly defines the obligations of an investor, the incentives provided by this country and so on. It should be on the website. You come to this country, you do have to have somebody that will promote you. That document should give you one-stop, lets go forward with all that.

LOPEZ: If I can ask you a few final questions, I don't want to take too much more of your time but I'd like to ask you a few questions about relationships between host countries and the donors. Sometimes foreign assistance can create its own set of problems. I'm wondering if you would have advise that you would pass on to other people working on civil service reform in terms of improving donor and host country relationships?

PESSIMA: Well relationships with the donors, frankly we are helpless. Helpless in the sense that because we are down, not out, but we swallow almost everything they come up with which is unfortunate for this country. We need to be strong to tell them these are our priorities and that is where the money should go. They should not go and say this is what I want to do. That is currently the case. In my own little way I'd be able stand up to them and I'd be able to win, local governments, the councils. They don't know we're here. So many of the initiatives they've come up with. One, they say we should make sure, we should provide in the law the local government act that 3% of the councilors should be women. I ask is that what it is in your own country? How can you mechanically legislate 3% when it is an elective position. These people are not going to be appointed. That is out of the question. So we should have the courage, where we know we're right to say so.

The money, there is international money. We are all part of the Bretton Woods organization. We're member of the World Bank, the IMF. There are UN agencies of which we are members. For the good of the world, the whole world, you talk about human rights; the human rights start with food, subsistence. We should not allow one segment of the world to live in terrible sub-human conditions in this 21st century. In the west, in your own country people are wasting so much money. It is true, management is a major problem here in Africa, poor management of resources even the ones that we are suppose to generate. This country can support one hundred million, the land is good, that much I know, one hundred million. The land is good. We are lazy, we are unresourceful, we lack—we are not enterprising, we need a work force, we have to push people.

China, go to China. I have been there four times. There the government works. The work ethic of the Chinese is obvious. They work unsupervised. If we are to have a meeting with them here, even the ones in this country, if it is a 10 o'clock meeting, if they are late for a meeting, quarter to ten they are late. If they want something from this office they will not rest until they got it. They are efficient, and patient to get what they want, they have pinpoint precision, efficiency. Very rugged country, we don't have smooth land, mountains and deserts. We need to wake up. This country if it gets organized, get good systems in place, good government is key. A judiciary that is effective, transparent, a judiciary that people have public confidence in. A bureaucracy and civil service that is efficient and committed to the client, the people of this country. In five years we could see the difference.

But maybe they don't know they are making too much noise. We don't want small minor things, we want big things, big things. Big enough to make real impact on the lives of the people. We need a bridge, there is an estuary that is about 2-1/2 miles, fix that bridge for us. Then the present concentration of population there will shift substantially over there.

LOPEZ: What are some of the other things you think donors could do better in their relationship with the host country?

PESSIMA: One, as I said is know what are our priorities are and when they know those are the priorities, they should support them. On the contrary they come with their own ideas. This is what we want to fund. These may not be consistent with our own broad vision.

LOPEZ: Since you were sort of at the hub of a lot of the civil service reform going on here, I'm wondering if you could offer some advice to other people working on civil service reform in other countries. What would be some of the key pieces of advice that you would give to them? What would be some of the top priority things that they should work on?

PESSIMA: *Well it would be difficult to advise somebody where you don't know their own problems, it would depend on the problems they have. For us I know our own problems. You need to diagnose the problem before you can prescribe a cure. So it would depend on what the situation is. But by and large, I think in the case of Africa, our problems are almost uniform, we have similar problems of poor pay in the work system, lack of skills, training, getting the right people in the service and also trying to retain their services, to curb the excessive brain drain of the few skilled people we have. Then we will train them and they will move out to other countries and so on. So I think that should be a matter that will concern all of us. We should attract, efforts should be to attract and retain the best.*

LOPEZ: Are there strategies that have been developed here in Sierra Leone that you think could work other places that would be good things to try?

PESSIMA: *Personally you already know we're dealing with the problems now, we are not in a position to advise others so much; on the contrary we should be learning from the others, comparing notes.*

LOPEZ: Is there anything else that I haven't brought up that you would like to talk about with regard to civil service reform? Things that you have worked on or lessons you have learned from what has happened so far?

PESSIMA: *Well, we have covered a lot of areas. There may be one or two which I cannot pick up. There are too many things to cover here.*

LOPEZ: Then I think we've covered most of it, thank you.