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Interviewee: Neneh Dabo

Interviewer: Ashley McCants

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McCANTS: This is Civil Service interview number three with Neneh Dabo at the Anti-Corruption Commission in Sierra Leone. It is August 6th and the interviewer is Ashley McCants. I would like to begin the conversation by talking about the role you have played in public sector reform here, or if you have worked on the issue in other settings. Would you first describe your role in public sector reform and if you've played a role as advisor or monitor or facilitator?

DABO: *Well my role is small—that of an oversight body from the Anti-Corruption Commission's point of view. We basically operate a three-pronged activity—involvement in the civil service and in the public sector as a whole, in the sense that the principle we are trying to operate on is effective and efficient public service delivery. Therefore the public sector becomes my natural constituent in ensuring that this happens and in ensuring that this happens we have to look at so many variables in the sense that we have to look at the various systems within which they operate. That is the offices, the procedures, what you have available in terms of operational manuals, code of conduct, ethics, policies, etc. Then you have to look at the individuals themselves because there could be one point of having proper systems in place but you do not have the right individuals working in these systems.*

So we take this two-prong approach with regard to ensuring efficient and effective public service delivery.

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

DABO: *No, it is part of my job in a sense. Let me give you a little bit of my background. I am a seconded officer from the Public Service, Civil Service, to the Anti-Corruption Commission. The Commission was set up in 2000 and initially the consultants went about recruiting people of integrity. That was their criteria—and people who could manage this new system because it was a new phenomenon, an Anti-Corruption Commission. We have had other services—we had police commissions of inquiry—but having realized that one of the reasons given, as the cause of the war, was actually corruption the government. Even before the conclusion of the war, it was decided to have a stand-alone institution to take the lead in the fight against corruption going by the name of Anti-Corruption Commission, through an internet announcement of an Act in 2000.*

That has been amended today, interestingly. Not even amended. Today, we have a new bill in 2008 because the old bill had only about nine corrupt practices and it was actually hindering our efficiency in terms of doing what we needed to do. So we went in for an amendment but the amendment was so whole in terms of what we inputted that it is now an entirely new bill, and it was passed last night at 7 p.m. by the parliamentarians. So this is history. This new—just to give you a gist, instead of nine corrupt practices, we have 29 corrupt practices. Of course, from experience during the use of the old act, we discovered most of the corrupt activities were around conflict of interest, which was an element absent in the old act, and then asset declaration.

This is a cash economy and audit traces are very few and far in between, so you want to have an asset declaration as an element in the new act; that would ensure that whatever monies are given to public officers are judiciously expended on the services they are supposed to provide. Asset declaration is one way of actually controlling that so that there are no pilferages, there are no abuses of offices by public officers because they are supposed to be servants of

the people. So these are the new features of the new act and a lot more, which I believe will enhance greatly the work of the Commission.

Having said that—so I was seconded to the Commission since 2000 and I'm still here. I rose to the rank of permanent secretary in the civil service. My last station was the Ministry of Works and from there I was sorted out to come and help with the Anti-Corruption Commission, initially in the prevention and community relations department. That is a combination of systems review and procedures and public education, soliciting of public support. These two offices, departments, were combined and I headed them until recently, July this year, when after a strategic review of the operations and the commission, and in anticipation of the new bill, in readiness we decided to have more strategic focus on the various issues. It would be too much for the two departments to be under one directorate so we now have a public education outreach department with me now in the systems and processes review.

Under this department we have three units. We have the Systems and Processes Unit, which is headed by Mr. Rashid Turay, and then we have the Policy and Ethics Unit headed by another officer, and then the Monitoring and Compliance. In fact, another feature of this new Act is to have compliance sanctions. What is to prevail in the new Act was that we would review systems, come up with the best practices and, because there are no compliance sanctions, it would entirely be at the discretion of the Ministries and MDAs (Ministries, Departments and Agencies) to implement. But now, having done a systems review and come up with best practices together with the MDA and with joint ownership, I think it is compulsory that you go by these best practices. So that is also another new feature in this new Act. So in the event you do not comply, there will be compliance sanctions, non-compliance sanctions. I think that will greatly enhance the work.

Now coming back to the civil service proper. Coming from this background and being a member of a watch—an oversight institution—it really gave me an outside look inwards. I'm outside looking inwards and you can clearly see the deficiencies in terms of recruitment, in terms of retention, in terms of actually matching pay with professionalism because these are the weaknesses in the system, which really could give rise to corruption. In the fight against corruption and more particularly from the prevention angle, we believe that the recruitment process should be streamlined because during the course of our examinations we discovered a lot of ghost workers. That means the systems are not formidable enough to expunge or to detect these ghost workers. In a sense, people left at will and the information would not be communicated to the other authorities like the paying authorities, like the accountant general's office or even the auditor general. Because if you have these three control entities, they could pick up if one fails to. Of course, at the end of the day, lack of monitoring was greatly discovered as a problem.

If a structured monitoring of the system, the recruitment system, is organized, then I think we would probably get rid of these ghost workers who invariably and in turn have a great negative impact on the payroll. Of course, with a great negative impact on the payroll it will affect those who are working in terms of having increased salary as a way of motivating them and retaining them. So what we are doing, and this is in partnership with all these other players, the public sector reform, the Establishment Secretary's office, is actually to ensure and be part of that. First of all we downsized the civil service to ensure effective and efficient service delivery because by getting rid of the dead wood—one, by

getting rid of the ghost workers and actually streamlining the system in such a way that you have records of all the staff. You could track them. That way you have a manageable working force and thereafter you could ask for an increase in salary because the salaries are really, really appalling.

If you look at the national anti-corruption strategy document, which I gave you, I mean, looking at the causes of corruption that was highlighted, I mean, I passed on the historical causes—we looked at the social causes. So as a way of addressing this, and normally we are putting these measures in place—and from time to time we share information. Recently I was told just one ministry, the Ministry of Health, they have gotten rid of over 900. The project is halfway through and they have been able to weed out 900 undesirable elements in the service, either through ghosting or just nonexistent or dead wood. So I think they cleaned the payroll. We are achieving our desired goal.

McCANTS: What motivated this whole civil service reform effort and which kind of organizations or individuals were really the champions behind it?

DABO: *The government of itself realized that they had a bloated civil service, number one. And of course, they made this desire known to their donor partners, DFID in particular, the Department for International Development in Britain. And they formed a secretariat, a public sector reform secretariat that has been working on many issues, not only trying to downsize but to really look at the very structure because as assistance, process or in this sense, we knew the structures were wrong because in the civil service, you have the administrative and the professional wing, but the overall head is the administrator. That created a lot of acrimony in the sense, the control had not been effective because it was like the professionals saying they were being subsumed under the leadership and authority of the administrator who, in their minds, was a nonprofessional. But the wisdom of the colonial people, whose system we are still working with, is that an administrator is a general boss in the sense that professionals are technical people and you're talking about managing people and resources in an organization. Therefore they thought it in their wisdom that the head should naturally be the administrator.*

Currently, the review is making several director generals; you have the Director General of Administration, and Director General of the professional wing. I think that balance is working well. Of course, making the accounts back there the financial sector of the organization, because that has all been about the acrimony, the resource management, the financial resource management. So if the finance president is not just a finance club but also a professional accountant, then he could also be referred to as director to create a balance and to create a healthy working atmosphere.

So these are all ongoing. I believe it is working. The only issue here now is the aspect of monitoring because you are used to one system since independence in 1961. You bring an entirely new system so you need to change managers, to manage these changes because these are phenomenon and a lot of sensitization needs to be done as to the benefit of what has been put in place.

On the whole, basically, I'd say they're on the right track. We also monitor; we come in as monitors, oversight bodies. Currently we are trying to review the policies. I know they have codes of conduct for civil servants, ethical behaviors and everything. So the policy on ethics—you need to have just done a circular to the establishment sector on the public sector reforms to give us whatever they

have by way of operational manuals in terms of codes, policies and ethical—and any piece of legislation. We will review those and come up with maybe— together. We normally don't work in isolation because you do not want to be seen micro-managing in this institution, so we have partnership.

McCANTS: You've already mentioned corruption as one of the drivers behind the reform. Can you describe the other core competencies that the government or other stakeholders wanted to build in the country and what was the thinking behind those skills?

DABO: *To have a professional cadre of civil servants. I think that was really, apart from the corruption issue, I think that was the core because corruption issue is an issue of actually ensuring you have formidable systems in place in the event you do go against what is laid down in terms of principles, in terms of operational manuals. The system will eject you and you'll be brought to justice. But the basic idea behind this civil service reform is actually to have a professional core of civil servants who could be the drivers of government policies and intentions of delivering efficient and effective service to the entire population. Mind you, the working population is just about maybe 2% of the entire population of the country. These are people who are holding all the services, these jobs, these monies, in trust for the rest of the people. So you want to make sure that they are a professional set with integrity and commitment to nationhood.*

McCANTS: In terms of this entire reform effort, were there any efforts to kind of sit down and decide what steps should come first in the process, or did those involved seize a window of opportunity to do something immediately?

DABO: *No, no, no. I think before this window of opportunity came we had had commissions of inquiry, we had had review works. Clearly there was an issue that the civil service needed a complete overhaul. So there have been works, review works before the public sector reform. And of course it was just a matter of consolidating and really bringing under one roof all these reviews, all those aspirations identified under one roof to ensure that it happens, that they happen and they are effectively monitored. Therefore you have a lot of stakeholders in this particular project of public sector reform.*

McCANTS: Looking back on what has been focused on in the reform effort, would you suggest that different priorities should have received more attention or was the choice of priorities about right in your opinion?

DABO: *I think the choice of priorities was about right because initially, at the outset of this public sector reform, they concentrated on the social sector ministries—that is education, health, agriculture. These are ministries which impact by and large the entire population of this country—health, education. And these are the issues, of course agriculture, food, and security. These are the issues which really form the monitoring basis of the human develop index—how far a nation is going in terms of providing healthcare facilities, drinking water, the basic things. Then education, because an educated population has a lot of advantage in terms of all the social areas of attention by the commission. So I think the priorities were set right and it was not just gone into, but it was well thought out and I think they're on the right track. Because once you get the social sectors under control then you can look into the other areas.*

Of course, you do not ignore the other areas, but you phase out your interventions to have the maximum impact because you have a pilot project. You

monitor how that goes and the social sector of ministries. They are more or less the pilot project of the public sector reform and it is being phased out now, rolled out to the other MDAs.

McCANTS: My next questions relate to specific types of reforms in which you may have played a role. I'm going to talk about each project separately so that those who listen to this can understand the story behind each. Often a goal is to reduce the degree to which employment and service depend on political ties. I understand that this is something that has been a priority here. Can you describe how the changes in civil service reform are attempting to address this issue?

DABO: *Well the changes—before, vacancies were hardly advertised. Of course, once vacancies are not advertised, you know the next step is nepotism, tribalism. But once you have a transparent system of recruitment, I think the political influence on all of these things will go away. In fact, what they have addressed in the reform as shown in the Establishment Secretary's office—there were times when politicians came with their assistants and they just naturally absorbed them into the civil service. But clearly there is a format through which any individual can be recruited in the civil service so they have checked what you call their life cards and they have seen that this document is absent, that document is absent on the check list, so clearly you are one of those who are brought in by the politicians so you have to go because you did not come through the right channel and you did not follow the right procedure.*

So I think a transparent and accountable recruitment process has been put in place, which will help curb all the fears of political influence in terms of recruitment.

McCANTS: So will there be tests that are introduced in order to properly place the correct people in the right positions?

DABO: *Well, I remember there was the one recruitment required, normally they went through a test and that determined whether you could go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or you could go to the Ministry of Local Government. Mind you, the civil service is flexible in terms of movement because you want to create a well-informed civil service in terms of managing every institution. You have training administrators who should at any time be able to work in any ministry rather than have it specialized. Professionals, yes, but the administrator moves in every MD (Ministry Department). So maybe the competence one could have is an analytical mind, somebody who is sharp, somebody who is committed. I mean, apart from the entrance requirement.*

McCANTS: Are there steps that are being taken to monitor performance of civil servants and to promote on the basis of high performance?

DABO: *Well, that was introduced in—I saw that in 1999 but I don't think whether that was followed through. So my work with the civil service now, in which I've just said we are going to ensure—is it going to be on performance basis and what are the performance bases, what are the elements, and we could have developed that with them together and those could be followed through, monitored by us.*

In fact, just to add, the Establishment Secretary is one of my steering committee members of the national social strategy because of his constituency. He has a large constituency for our business of ensuring effective and efficient service delivery.

McCANTS: How are sitting civil servants reacting to the introduction of these reforms? Are they objecting or do they think it is a helpful effort?

DABO: *Well with this type of answer, maybe it could come from them, but from my own point of view—. Recently we did an overall systems review, a structure where we send questionnaires out and with just what we have received from the Commissioner of Education—which actually we might want to talk more on—the manuals, like we have Budgeting and Accountability Act, are not being used by these people. So there is some kind of lethargy. If we do the performance appraisal and we have these elements part of the appraisal, I think it should force them to come on board fully. There is some kind of lethargy, but I think that could be addressed once it has been found out.*

McCANTS: In some places civil servants long found that paychecks either appear unreliably or the pay is far below what they need to support their family and as a result they have other jobs on the side. Some say that under these conditions civil servants are unlikely to respond to merit incentives. Do you think that that is going to be the case here?

DABO: *Well, I think that the overall objective of the civil service reform, the long-term objective is—having realized that the pay does not march with inflation, it is not even enough for them to subsist on, so the overall objective is to really have if not 100% increase in terms of what they would require because it has been long overdue, but a gradual phasing out, probably sector by sector depending on the importance. I know everybody is important, but as you talked about the doctors, the medical doctors—we have a medical school here. We train doctors and then they just work for one year and they are off to other countries. I think essentially why we would train these doctors, to beef up our medical services, to increase the health performance of the citizenry. If they are not available then we are just training and they are going out. So I think these are areas that have to be addressed immediately in terms of remuneration and other prerequisites.*

McCANTS: What have been the major challenges to the reform effort thus far and how were you able to overcome those obstacles?

DABO: *Well, I think the major challenges have been the issue of actually putting the reform in the perspective of the drivers, and a better perspective. From the point of view I think there should have been a lot more sensitization because every reform—I mean it's just natural. Human beings have a tendency of being selfish. You want to know what benefits are there for me. Every reform should not disadvantage sitting officers but it should add value to their work. So I think if the most immediate benefits could not be explained, then there could be some kind of—I would refine lethargy in terms of rarely cooperative, but by and large, it is a question of just moving along.*

What we are trying to do is—actually, we recently did a managerial accountability workshop. What the commission is trying to do as an oversized body having detected all these lapses is actually to say, “Whilst I’m giving you a lot of responsibility, which you probably thought you did not have, and we have detected those could be the reasons. Then at the same time I’m making you held accountable, just you.” As a result you ensure that the top management is responsible for the behavior of the organization. So you will become an efficient manager, and if I want anything in terms of accountability I go to you.

Once you have the responsibility and the accountability built in that office, then it behooves you to put it down to your subordinate in terms of effective management—because that is the problem in the whole system.

McCANTS: Has there been the case that there has been resistance from incumbent politicians or other people who hold office that don't want to promote the reforms?

DABO: *Yes, there have been. At times politicians come and say, "I don't want Miss X," they found Miss X in the ministry. Politicians come and go but the civil servants, more or less, are the continuity offices. Politicians have a five-year life span, like everywhere. To me there has to be a clear dichotomy as to where you stand as a politician and where the administration should stand. But many times we have had politicians who have come in and said, "I don't want this permanent secretary", and they've thought that they could really determine the kind of permanent secretary or chief administrator that they want. I find that very appalling because as such, you do not want to have a division of responsibilities. You want to be the politician; you want to know who should—because the chief administrator should be your chief advisor. So if you're going to determine who should advise you, then there is no objectivity and transparency in the process.*

McCANTS: So what steps, if any, were taken to address that issue?

DABO: *The steps have to do with the Establishment Secretary. I don't know about before but the new Establishment Secretary has the stamina and has the confidence, and he has more or less overturned the decisions of these politicians. For instance, there is one ministry that the politicians demanded to send all of the officers, the civil servants on leave, terminal leave. But I see he has reinstated one back to the office because you don't determine—those are not your staff. You should work with them. You don't determine who should work with you. Those are not your personal assistants. So I think that is—I noted it and I called him and I said keep it up. The system has to be tested.*

McCANTS: To do this kind of reform obviously requires a lot of data and information. Information can often be difficult and expensive to come by. How did you, those of you who want the reform, attain the information that you needed to figure out what changes were needed and how you would go about making them?

DABO: *You have consultative meetings, you have stakeholders' conferences, you have review works before—both written, oral, and just being part of the system. Clearly form the basis of what reform and what steps and identifying priorities. What they're trying to put in order now is to really put a whole records management in place, which was lacking. I think that is being sponsored by the European Union. Clearly we have now seen in this effort of tracking and retracing ourselves the importance of records management. So that has also been addressed under the Establishment Secretary's office, which is being sponsored by the European Union. That is gone far in terms of execution.*

McCANTS: Was a shortage of trained personnel ever a problem for this effort? In other words, did you have people with the right capacities in order to engage in reform?

DABO: *Well, for any new phenomenon you would not have the exact right capacity, but you have people who are committed and they can be trained. Of course, you had professionals who came on board and some of these activities were outsourced*

because outside the general civil service, you have private sector individuals who are professionals in this. So they would outsource, giving short-term contracts to come on board to drive the reform process too. Then the civil servants or the public officers underwent training at various levels, both locally and internationally.

McCANTS: Sometimes there can be tradeoffs between short-term objectives and long-term objectives. Did you encounter any of these tradeoffs?

DABO: *Well like you have said, naturally, but since I really do not work directly with the department I could really not specifically say. But naturally there could be because if you are looking at—for instance, you want this level of officers to have these kinds of qualifications. A tradeoff could maybe be you bring down your qualifications and you add experiences because at the end of the day what do you want—deliverables. So these could be, but specifically I could not say.*

McCANTS: Sometimes countries need to build the skills of their civil servants very rapidly because past events or conflict have left many without the knowledge to do their jobs well. Has there been any kind of specialized training institute or training program that is part of the reform effort here?

DABO: *Oh yes. There is no reform that can go without training. We have the Institute of Public Administration. That has been upgraded to university level, so that has done a lot of training for the public sector. We have local training. We have training of trainers. We have international training. I mean capacity building, that is ongoing because at the end of the day you want to have people who can drive this process through rather than short circuit it.*

McCANTS: Can you describe what are perceived as the main skills that are lacking in the civil service right now?

DABO: *To be really honest with you a lot has happened over the years in terms of preparation and readiness to take up the challenge of managing to ensure an efficient and effective service, public sector service. The training could be on-the-job training but those could come—what we have tried to do, even when we monitored the budget, is for them to put a line item of training. Because when you talk about dynamics in globalization, that means there has to be an ongoing training need. So you can never stop learning. Even with the new restructuring we have done in our commission here, you know we are just trying to put a training needs assessment together because clearly, like monitors, what do you monitor—structural monitoring to create the maximum impact. These are skills we have to go and brush up and we clearly need to learn.*

McCANTS: Who is leading the push for more training? Is it coming mostly from civil service leaders or from politicians?

DABO: *No, civil service leaders.*

McCANTS: In the effort to enhance training, has there been a need to borrow or employ people from the diaspora or from international organizations?

DABO: *Yes, yes. In fact, what the government did shortly after the war was to actually come up with this policy of encouraging people in the diaspora to come back, especially Sierra Leoneans who had trained abroad to come with their skills, and most of them got recruited. In the Ministry of Finance and other MDAs they came*

back. Those who had the prerequisite qualifications and experiences, they were recruited. That is the nature we do with in terms of recruitment. Every recruitment we also ensure that we make it known to the embassies, the high commissions, so that we can encourage our compatriots out there to come.

McCANTS: What were the incentives to bring these people from the diaspora back?

DABO: *Well, there was a program from the—I think that is still being managed by UNDP (United Nations Development Program), so with an enhanced pay package, with specific tasks—and I think that is working. Then others, like the Director General of National Revenue Authority (NRA), there is a special pay package. In fact, it is being headed by somebody who was working from an international organization—it's Ranina in Ghana, so you have to come home. His pay package in Ghana was okay so he could not come and get the normal civil service people. So these kinds of jobs are attracting people who have got the prerequisite skills, which are highly needed to come back and help.*

McCANTS: A common concern with respect to training, as you just mentioned with regard to the doctor, is that people might receive the benefits but may then leave the public service to go into the private sector. How much of an issue has this been here and is there any requirement that those who receive their training remain in the public service for a certain amount of time?

DABO: *Yes, quite correct. When we look at expiration rates it is a little bit high. But what we are trying to do, we have noticed that they go these non-governmental organizations and it is basically running after green pastures. So now, if you train and you cannot retain these people, clearly you have to put a policy in place to ensure you retain them. One of the areas I think they are going to look at is the pay package of the doctors. Clearly you cannot spend all that money training them. You look at the cost-benefit analysis. Spend so much money to train them and then you get them on the job. If you don't pay them the right salary, of course they will go. So your seven years of training will have been lost and the benefits to the society will have also been lost. I think these are areas where you have to have affirmative policy actions to address. I think those have been—they are in the pipeline for address.*

McCANTS: Improving the attractiveness of civil service as a career is an important objective. Sometimes reform leaders decide that the best way to create an effective civil service is to create an elite corps or senior executive service, others create feeder schools that are based on the French model. Some like Singapore or Botswana offer scholarships in return for commitments to a certain number of years in civil service employment. A more general strategy might be to rely on market competition and providing benefits and compensation based on the private sector. You might use several of those strategies at the same time. Can you talk about the options that were discussed here about how to attract talented people and retaining them?

DABO: *I think here your first one, the elites, and then I would like the Botswana. What is happening in the first one is the elite corps of civil servants. That has not—that is in the pipeline. Once the downsizing is done that will be immediately addressed. But in addition to that, I think we used to have what the Botswana model has. Sending scholarships and spending a number of years in the service through the bond system. But because of the financial situation of the government, scholarships are few and far in between from the government itself. We have international organizations offering scholarships which clearly, inasmuch as they*

are for the people of Sierra Leon—but because it is not directly coming from government coffers—in those days, we trained lawyers, medical doctors and they came back to the country to serve like in Botswana. I think that is the best system because if you do that then you retain them.

McCANTS: Were other options considered here and why did the senior executive service take hold?

DABO: *Because the Botswana model we spoke about, sending, I mean, giving scholarships and asking them to come back has not been working. That was what we were operating on. But because of the financial situation of the country—mind you, inasmuch as we have come a long way but the coffers are still not consolidated in terms of self-revenue drive. We are trying to—the budget is around 50-55% donor funded. That, to me, is the best option. You train your citizens and they will have a natural commitment to come home then. But the option we are looking at is the elite corps option.*

McCANTS: Who is helping to oversee this transition to the elite corps?

DABO: *Well that coincides with the Office of the President under the presidential minister, the Establishment Secretary, and the public sector reform coordinator. And of course, all the parties involved have to be stakeholders.*

McCANTS: Can you describe how these different reform leaders and personnel are working together on the senior executive service plans and how well you think collaboration is working?

DABO: *Collaboration is working. Probably you could find resistance in one area, like the Public Service Commission which is supposed to be the commission overseeing all public officers, which is a separate entity from the Establishment Secretary's office, another entity, and the public sector reform, another entity. So these, during the course of the war, are collaborating because they have one objective to have an improved, manageable civil service. So the Public Service Commission has some regulations or powers which clearly the establishment sector wants those to go to them, like the issue of firing, when to sack an individual. Every public officer has to go through the Public Service Commission, but the establishment set for a certain grid of civil servants—you could leave that in the hands of the human resources, which is the establishment set up to handle it, rather than wasting time in terms of bureaucracy sending it to public service. That tradeoff is going on. The last meeting I attended it was almost accepted, but they needed it in writing because that is the power of the Public Service Commission—so that those powers could be delegated to the Establishment Secretary's office. Really, they are collaborating because they cannot do without each other.*

McCANTS: What will be the role of the independent Public Service Commission in the new system?

DABO: *I think it is just to—for the reason I have—an enhanced public service in terms of accountability and transparency.*

McCANTS: And their role will be as a monitoring organization?

DABO: *Monitoring and ensuring that the principles, the core values of the Commission, the Public Service, are upheld and maintained. At least you have one forum that could address issues in terms of anomalies or objectives.*

McCANTS: Returning to the idea of the senior executive service, to the extent that some members of the service would be compensated at a higher level than the members of the lower cadre, envy of those that are earning high salaries may undermine their ability to work effectively. Do you have any advice about how to address that problem?

DABO: *Well we have tested it and yes, you are quite correct. For instance, in the Ministry of Finance we have that kind of elitism as a pilot and I think we have some public officers who were even being supervised by other officers who were getting less, these were like professionals. I think the World Bank or International Monetary Fund was paying their salaries. So there was real dissatisfaction.*

McCANTS: What do you think are good ways to address that difficulty?

DABO: *Well, a lot of fora mention that—that is actually demotivating the rest of the officers because if you pay two officers a high wage and then the rest—. Of course these two officers cannot really create the necessary impact you want in an organization, and that will undermine the general objective of the organization. I don't know a way but probably from my own personal point of view you may just want to address the whole issue across the board. But then, another way, if you are giving these enhanced salary packages, they should be tied to what is expected in terms of output and clearly measurable outputs.*

McCANTS: Sometimes a perk, a public sector employment that can counter the appeal of the private sector, is the ability to take another job for some number of hours a week or a month or to take a day off every ten days in return for longer hours at other times. Do you know of any such experiments here?

DABO: *Well, as in our commissions, our conditions of services, this commission, if you have any extra employment in terms of a system like in the university, you inform the head of the institution, that is the commissioner. Clearly, as long as those hours don't conflict with your working hours you are free to take on those employments. Basically it could not even be for the money, but actually to help in the dearth of lecturers in the university. I want to believe. I don't know. I have just sent for their codes of conduct and policies and after I have studied those—probably as a way of encouraging retention we could have those kinds of bylaws in the policies. I think with doctors, those are there. You can have your practice—you are entitled to have your private surgery after working hours.*

McCANTS: You mentioned that the senior executive service was still down the pipeline and hasn't been implemented yet. What are the obstacles right now to implementing that program?

DABO: *The money.*

McCANTS: No practical obstacles to implementation?

DABO: *No, because the requirements are stated such as you should have an advanced or post-graduate degree, you should have this kind of experience—and a lot have gone out to acquire these qualifications, but they are yet to be upgraded. I think they are waiting for the package.*

McCANTS: At the beginning of this reform process can you please describe the situation with respect to the reliability of civil service pay?

DABO: *In terms of?*

McCANTS: In terms of, as you've begun this reform process can you talk about how reliable payroll is for civil servants?

DABO: *Well in terms of the record itself, it has been improved. Like I said, the issue of payroll verification has been ongoing and it is still on because it was a long area of neglect and one clearly of massive corruption. An area like that to be what we expect it to be it would take a while because you are dealing with human beings and they move. But it is ongoing. I want to believe that—I think they have given themselves a cut off point, and I think we will start downsizing and commensurate salaries will be phased out.*

McCANTS: In your view, will the measures that will be undertaken with the cleansing of the payroll and the ghost workers, will they improve the reliability of pay service or do you think other programs or initiatives will be required?

DABO: *No, I think it will improve the reliability because as they are cleaning they are also putting the records and measures in place. Clearly you now have—they are working in tandem with the National Social Security (and Insurance) Trust (NASSIT). So it is not just one organization, they are working also together with the Accountant General. So you have three, four organizations keeping records of one individual. Clearly that is a strong control measure. It is not just cleaning, but the records are being put in place at the same time. As I told you there is a records management project ongoing side-by-side with the reform because these are all the necessary ingredients to ensure you have a reliable public service—which you can now sit down to analyze and then to put certain measures in place in terms of ensuring professionalism, ensuring deliverables, and ensuring motivation.*

McCANTS: You've spoken in some detail about ghost workers. Another issue can also be large numbers of low-skilled employees on the payroll. In order to reduce pay levels or recruit new talent it may be important to retrench large numbers of staff and this process can be hard if you have to absorb people who may have been involved in a war or other people. So I have several questions about this. Can you talk about any strategic considerations that play a roll in whether or not to retrench employees?

DABO: *That's a very good question because when the reform started, I could remember I think three years ago there was a general option for people who want to leave. That option of course went with a package and with so many options. Again, I think there was the issue of the money. Because when you are talking about retrenchment and if you have clearly come back with various options, you want to have the money and ready so that the sooner you sever a relationship, you give them their severance packages and off they go into other fields which will open. But I think that has not been done.*

You clearly mentioned about retrenchment, yes, because you have a large population with no greater skills. I mean, for instance, you go to like the Ministry of Agriculture. You would have five secretaries and only one computer. So clearly that means the four are really idle. At the end of the day when you put the salaries of the four together that could help enhance somebody who is working to get more pay and is on the desk. So these are all the options they are looking at. There are 900, I was telling you about in terms of the Ministry of Health—these are all the areas, not only ghost workers, they are also people who really do not

have anything to do. Then you have dead wood, people who have passed retirement age and they just have their names on the payroll. So it is not just ghost workers, there are all these people.

McCANTS: Were these efforts voluntary or nonvoluntary or partly voluntary?

DABO: *On the part of the establishment?*

McCANTS: The workers, those who opted for the package, the severance package.

DABO: *Some opted, they wanted the package. But I think the money was not ready. If I could recall, I think the service statistician will be able to give you more information on that because he was driving that process when he was in the Office of the President. I'm sure people responded but in the absence of the ready package that program had to be put on hold. Because when you are doing these kinds of reforms in terms of retrenchment, you need to have the money readily available so that you don't create any disaffection, any acrimony, any conflict because what we are basically trying to avoid is—to have a smooth transition considering where we are coming from. These areas, if not properly managed, could lead to or trigger other conflicts.*

McCANTS: In terms of making the civil service leaner in general, is there a broad base of support in the broader community for this reform effort or has it been controversial?

DABO: *Well I think there is broad-based support because, rightly or wrongly, people perceive civil servants as not really working in their interest. So if we have a lean civil service you have their criteria. It is performance-based. You can manage them in a better way in terms of portraying a better image of them to the people they serve and giving them a more free hand in terms of responsibility rather than breathing on their necks. Because, mind you, I think your intention is making them professional managers just like they would manage the private sectors. That environment is created. I think their output could be measured by the people they serve out there, and their perceptions could change.*

McCANTS: I just want to ask a few more questions about relationships between donors and host countries. Sometimes relationships within international organizations or between donors can affect the ability of people like you to do their jobs well. Sometimes foreign assistance can create its own sets of problems. You may have advice that you want to pass on to others about this and I'd like to ask you about it.

Are there two or three mistakes that you commonly observe in the way that donor countries or that international organizations make with respect to relationships with host country personnel or politicians?

DABO: *Well, I would not say mistakes because everybody has their own policy objective. It is in terms of the technical assistance, which would be given in terms of personnel. I think that has been addressed in terms of what you want from these organizations. It is no longer using "I'll give you this technique, our system is going to be on a demand basis...I want this type." In other words, you are giving me an opportunity to identify what technical assistance I would want rather than using "I will give you this." I think that was the problem and that is now being addressed on a demand basis.*

McCANTS: If you could offer reformers here or in other places advice about how to work effectively with international organizations, personnel, what recommendations would you give?

DABO: *I think you should be clear about what you want. At the end of the day there should be ownership because whatever comes in in terms of resources, in terms of both financial and human resources, the main objective of those assistance would be to improve and enhance whatever you're doing in terms of projects. You should ensure that that is clearly stated and spelled out right from the outset of whatever intervention and project. Equally, there could be benchmarks and you should also put demands on them in terms of what you should expect at the end of the intervention.*

McCANTS: Is there anything about the specific context or history in Sierra Leone that means that lessons learned in other places are not applicable here or maybe that lessons learned here will not be transferable to other places?

DABO: *Clearly a lot has been learned here and a lot has been commended as good here in terms of the way we have operated. For instance, the issue about our war victims, how we handled the issue, has been commended and that has clearly given us a lead in terms of international consultancy. Seeing how to go about it. So I think that is highly commendable. We have also learned a lot of lessons but clearly Sierra Leone has taken the lead in so many things in terms of a post-conflict country making the necessary strides, and we are having people from Liberia coming to see, Uganda, coming to see certain aspects of what we did right. So I believe we are on the right track. But clearly what I would say, the lessons learned, we had too many reforms, or we are having too many reforms in a very short break.*

I think what we should put emphasis on is the aspect of monitoring. Because clearly you could have all these reforms beautifully handled and everything, but monitoring to ensure where you have gone wrong, or where you need to make improvements, identify your weaknesses and where you need to lay more emphasis and appreciate your strengths in terms of probably passing knowledge to other organizations or countries.

McCANTS: Is there a monitoring system that will be put in place here?

DABO: *There is an overall general monitoring system in the country but I don't think that is very effective. In my organization, the Anti-Corruption Commission, we have rarely put that as a unit because clearly we are seeing the weakness in all these reforms, that sustainability in terms of monitoring is not there. To me, it is a core aspect of any reform work.*

McCANTS: Are there any technologies, cell phones, solar computers or other technological devices that have made your program successful?

DABO: *Yes, yes, computers, the mobile telephones. The computers more because with so many softwares like the intranet, the closed circuit call, group telephones. This will keep you in touch with your particular set of people. Yes, those telecommunication gadgets have improved and the information technology generally has improved the working atmosphere of the country, greatly.*

McCANTS: Infrastructure problems can sometimes make reform objectives difficult. Have there been infrastructure difficulties that were obstacles to your efforts here?

DABO: *Certainly, yes. When you consider a country, imagine from war, and a lot of the infrastructure destroyed, yes. And these are capital-intensive projects, but we are gradually getting over it.*

McCANTS: So how do you work around those difficulties?

DABO: *For instance, in this commission the office space is not ours, it is rented. Clearly we do not have what it takes to do like—you want to recruit, you want to have this kind of unit. You want to have this kind of model. You want to have customized things. So we work around it by actually managing, having ad hoc relationships. For instance, here we need, we retain our suspects—we should retain them within the ACC premise in terms of custody, but we do not have that facility so we take them to the police. Sometimes that is challenged by people in court because that should not be the case, because once you take a suspect, or he ceases to be a suspect, I mean, to the police, he ceases to be your suspect and he is now in the custody of the police. So these are challenges we try to work around through these means.*

McCANTS: If you had the chance to write a handbook for people who have to manage civil service reform in challenging environments, what kinds of topics would you consider most important and what would make this handbook most useful to you?

DABO: *I think accountability of a manager, management accountability. To me it is core. Of course that goes with responsibility, and responsibility goes with provision of the wherewithal, the right environment, the right tools. If a manager has all of these, I think he will be motivated to drive the organization or department properly.*

McCANTS: Are there any areas or topics that I haven't covered that you feel you wish to speak about?

DABO: *We have covered the financial aspects; we have covered the working environment. We have covered the personnel excess. We have covered the political area. What else? We have covered the donor interventions. We have covered the aspects of training and learning, which is continuous. I think we just—for training and learning, it could be local and international, it could be through networking. It could be studied tours because you want to learn lessons from other agencies and organizations, from the donors—and probably not taking everything, but managing what you can take from these successful stories.*