



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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Interviewee: C. William Allen

Interviewer: Blair Cameron

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CAMERON: This is Blair Cameron with Innovations for Successful Societies. It is the 12th of April, 2016 and I am here at the Liberian embassy in Paris with Ambassador (C. William) Allen. Thank you very much for your time, Ambassador.

ALLEN: *Thanks for the opportunity.*

CAMERON: Ambassador, if you could start by telling me a bit about your background and how you came to be leading the Civil Service Agency in Liberia.

ALLEN: *I'm currently serving as Liberia's ambassador to France and permanent delegate to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Prior to this job, I was director-general of the civil service in Liberia and before that I was minister of information, culture and tourism.*

My background is in mass communications and public administration. I served as minister of information in the transitional government in 2003 to 2005. When Madam (Ellen Johnson) Sirleaf was inaugurated as President in 2006, she asked me to remain in her cabinet as director-general of the civil service. I had had previous experience with the civil service. In fact, it was my first job out of graduate school. I worked as a staff analyst at the civil service. I was very much interested at the time in reforms. Somehow she picked up on that and she asked me to serve as director-general.

CAMERON: Excellent. So when you got there at the start of 2006, tell me what the civil service looked like.

ALLEN: *Oh boy, now that's a trip through memory lane, if you would. It was a disaster both in terms of infrastructure, in terms of personnel, in terms of everything. Just to give you a picture, when I walked into the civil service, say in March of 2006, they had two manual typewriters; this was all the equipment they had. There had been a systematic brain drain from the general civil service and particularly from the Civil Service Agency, so there was almost little or no qualified staff to work with. The building itself had not had lights for two and a half years. There had been no lights in the building, no light. It was—I mean, I can say, a total disaster. There was almost nothing to work with.*

I remember walking into my office that day. There was a desk and a chair and nothing else. It was a very difficult time. You know the background; we had come out of a 14-year civil war. The infrastructure of the country had been destroyed. Warring factions had come in and infiltrated the civil service, bringing in unqualified people to fill quotas and whatnot. The entire electrical system had broken down.

Now that I think about it, it was a total disaster. In fact, I could go into more specifics, but from an infrastructure standpoint, from a personnel management standpoint, from equipment and all that, it was just next to zero.

CAMERON: OK. So what were your biggest priorities? How did you prioritize how to recover the situation?

ALLEN: *Well, the biggest challenge was to have a very clear civil service reform strategy. I figured I couldn't do anything without a very clear strategy. The president had stated her vision of what she wanted. She wanted a reformed civil service that would drive the overall reform of the country. So this was her vision, clearly*

stated. My job was to take that vision and make it practical so that the country got some benefits from it.

My first task was to have a very clear civil service reform strategy. It is a document that is available online. I don't know if you've seen it. That document sort of outlined what we wanted to do in terms of the reform of the civil service. We were fortunate at the time to get some initial funding from DFID (Department for International Development), which is the UK (United Kingdom) equivalent of USAID (United States Agency for International Development). They gave us, I think, a million pounds at the time, which was about 2.4 million US dollars to start the reforms. That's how we got started.

CAMERON: OK. So before we get into more depth later on about the PYPP (President's Young Professional Program) can you give me a brief overview of the most important programs and ideas for the reform related to the personnel?

ALLEN: OK. Yes, I'm working on the PYP program but the PYP program must not be seen in isolation.

CAMERON: Exactly.

ALLEN: *It has to be seen in the context of the overall attempt to reform the civil service. There were several capacity-building programs. Once the president got in power she realized that if her program of reform was going to succeed, she had to build human capacity in the public service. So there were several programs.*

The very first one was the Liberian Emergency Capacity-Building Support program, the LECBS. That program—I mean, you can read about it—it was designed to give the President the flexibility to hire competent Liberians from anywhere in the world to come in and help her with the reforms. This was initially funded by the Soros Foundation and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and the Liberian government. Several other donors came on board later on to help with that particular project, but it was the very first one. Then the other one was the Senior Executive Service program, SES.

That program—whereas the LECBS focused on political appointees coming into the government, the SES focused on bringing in competent people who would eventually segue into the civil service. That was a nine million dollar three-year program that targeted to recruit 100 qualified Liberians to act as what we called catalysts in the reform process. You can read about it and all of its successes and challenges, but this was in the next program.

The other program was the TOKTEN program, Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals, which is a flagship UNDP capacity-building program. This program was designed to bring in expatriate nationals. An expatriate national is defined as a Liberian—someone of Liberian origin who had lived in the diaspora and had acquired residence, citizenship, elsewhere but was willing to come to Liberia for anywhere from 1 to 18 months to engage in a specific reform initiative.

OK. So the TOKTEN program was the third program. There were other programs such as the Scott (Family Liberia) Fellows program and then there was the Financial Management Training Program. But all these programs together were designed initially to create some sort of service capacity over in the civil service. The view was that the entire civil service needed to be improved. But we had 40,000 names on the payroll at the time and you couldn't start to train 40,000

persons. So the objective was to bring in these initial programs to create an initial service capacity in terms of manpower within the civil service.

CAMERON: Were there any concerns you had about these programs? Was there anything that they didn't address or that concerned you—that you might need something else as well as these programs?

ALLEN: *We knew that we needed to train the entire permanent higher civil service because there had been a serious brain drain during the period of crisis. The best and brightest Liberians had left the country to seek "greener" pastures either abroad or somewhere else in the sub region, to seek greener pastures in the diaspora. So we knew that eventually we had to get to the general population, but there is a saying that while the grass is growing the horses should not starve. I don't know if you're familiar with that cliché. So we had to get the engine going initially, while we thought about how to train the rest of the civil service.*

The concerns we had were that for one, the civil servants were very much underpaid in 2006 when Madam Sirleaf took over. The lowest-paid civil servant was making the equivalent of 15 US dollars a month, that's 15 US dollars a month. In order to attract competent people for these programs that I'm talking about, we had to pay them considerably more money. For example, the SES were getting anywhere from 1 to 3000 dollars a month. So of course the initial concern was, how do you recruit these people to come in and help without creating some sort of hard feelings among the rest of the civil service? This was the initial concern.

CAMERON: And did that play out? Were there issues of hard feelings among the existing civil service staff when these people came in?

ALLEN: *Well, the programs were generally successful, if I'm allowed to say that. I think you can do some objective empirical analysis yourself. The reasons being, we had what I would call a transparent and open recruitment methodology for these programs. So Liberians who were selected felt that they had gone through a competitive process. So this sort of mitigated against the hard feelings.*

Secondly, there was also a general payment reform program going on within the general civil service. So people began to see their pay increase even though they were not part of these "elite" programs.

CAMERON: OK.

ALLEN: *The other reason why there wasn't too much of a hard feeling was because there was a knowledge transfer component to each of these programs where the senior civil servants, Senior Executive Service people, were mandated in their contracts to carry out some sort of knowledge transfer to others that they worked with in the various ministries and agencies. So the payment reform within the general civil service, the transfer of knowledge component, and the open and transparent recruitment helped to mitigate whatever objection there would have been. Some people still talk about it, but I think these three ingredients helped to make the programs successful, I think.*

CAMERON: How did the PYP program fit into this spectrum of reforms going on?

ALLEN: *The PYP I believe came into place somewhere around 2009, about midway through the first term of Madam President. It came about because we realized that all the other programs did not target Liberian youth, and that the youth were*

the future of the country and the civil service. So the PYP was conceived as a way to create careers and professional opportunities for the Liberian youth to serve in the public service. It was also seen as a vehicle, once again, to transfer knowledge from senior civil servants to young professionals in the civil service, and by doing this, to contribute to the benefit of the overall capacity of the civil service. So basically the PYP should be seen as a capacity-building and leadership program for Liberian youth, particularly within the civil service.

That's what made it different—that the other capacity-building programs did not target the youth; the PYP specifically targeted the Liberian youth, which in this case was defined as recent college graduates up to age 35, I believe. Because of all the years of crisis we had to extrapolate a little bit and not give the traditional age range of youth. We took it up to 35.

CAMERON: So before the PYP program, if I was a young, Liberian college graduate, what was my path to serving my country in the civil service?

ALLEN: *You would take the regular civil service exam, and get placed somewhere within the civil service, in one of the 15 government ministries or ten agencies at the time. You would be in some entry-level job for a college graduate. But there were no special considerations. You would be paid according to the pay scale at the time, which was not very attractive. Even though there was ongoing constant reform, you would—this would be your path. You would either do that or seek opportunities in one of the state-owned enterprises where the compensation level was slightly better than the civil service or you went to the private sector. I think those were basically the options.*

Of course there was a proliferation of NGOs (non-governmental organizations) at the time still in Liberia, so this was another option for them to work in the non-governmental sector.

CAMERON: Were there a lot of smart, young Liberians taking this path in 2006, 2007, before the PYP program came along?

ALLEN: *If they wanted to work in the civil service, yes. Many of them opted to go to graduate school hoping to improve their skills level and their capacity to earn money. Right after the war, there was a massive influx of foreign investment into Liberia in the oil sector and other sectors. This provided opportunities for young Liberians to also seek job opportunities. But there weren't that many jobs to go around, so quite a few Liberian college graduates entered the informal sector at the time, which was to start small businesses for which there was not very much support.*

CAMERON: Can you give me an idea of how many entry-level people joined the civil service in Liberia on average each year? Or does that fluctuate?

ALLEN: *It really fluctuates. Well, since you mentioned that, one problem that we experienced when we came into the Civil Service as director-general was the problem of ghost names on the payroll. We had 40,000 names on the payroll when we came in. In about three months we reduced it to 24,000, and not one person complained that they had been fired. So it showed that there were people on the payroll who were not actually working, who had been dead who were on the payroll, people who were on multiple payrolls, et cetera. So the civil service was inflated by almost 80-something percent.*

Once we got rid of those ghost names, then this created more opportunities, more vacancies to bring in younger, more qualified Liberians into the civil service. But I couldn't give you an exact figure, an exact number, I'm sorry.

CAMERON: No problem. Do you remember when you first heard of the idea of the PYPP?

ALLEN: *Well, initially all the capacity-building programs were under the Ministry of Planning (and Economic Affairs), but the president decided very early on in the program, I think in 2007, as early as 2007, to bring these programs into the Civil Service Agency instead. So from that point on, every capacity-building program idea that was presented to the president, she automatically sent it to us to evaluate.*

I do not recall exactly the first time I heard about it, but I would assume it would be some time in 2008, 2009, when the president called me and told me about this vision that she had for the PYP.

CAMERON: What were your impressions?

ALLEN: *My impression was that it was a wonderful idea because I had seen firsthand that there were many young Liberians who wanted to work in the civil service, but the salaries and conditions of the service were just not attractive enough for them. If I should say it, Her Excellency Madam President was and is just budding with bright ideas, particularly at that time of her presidency, so I wasn't surprised she had come up with this.*

We embraced it. The program got underway. I'm sure you will be talking to Mr. Saah N'Tow while you're in Monrovia. He became, I believe, the first program director if I'm not mistaken. He did a marvelous job; tell him I said that. We began the program and I guess the jury is still out as to whether or not how successful it was, but I think generally people believe it is quite a successful program.

CAMERON: What issues in particular—you mentioned how it focused on youth—that was something the other programs didn't do. Are there any other issues that you think the PYPP addressed that the other programs didn't as much?

ALLEN: *The PYPP was very conscious about gender balance in its recruitment effort. At first I thought we would have to water down the criteria to accommodate the women, but this was not the case. We found out that the women, the young women, were just as competitive as the men. We just made a conscious effort to ensure that qualified women knew about the program and would compete with their male counterparts for slots within the PYP. Then there was a very conscious effort to include women, young women, in that particular program.*

The other—I'm jumping ahead of myself, but there was a component of the PYP program called Immersion Excursion and this component was designed to ensure that the PYP was not just a Monrovia-based program, that it was properly decentralized and that the participants were able to meet people who were in local governments, and eventually by the third group of PYP, I think we even began to deploy young professionals into the rural areas to do certain civil service positions. So this was another unique component of the program.

Now the LECBS was mostly—was all in Monrovia because it targeted top government officials, core cabinet ministers, et cetera. The SES had a decentralized component also because we did have 15 county development officers within the SES. TOKTEN was a mixed bag, but there was a conscious

effort to ensure that the PYPs had contact with local governors so that they had a bit of compensation for the fact that the initiatives were not just for Monrovia, it was for the entire country. What else? That's what I can remember for now.

CAMERON: Who was onboard with the program? Who was really pushing for this to happen, do you remember?

ALLEN: *The funding came from the John (Ben) Snow Foundation, I believe, for the PYP program. The president was very much concerned about youth unemployment. Within the country as a whole, there was a need to take some affirmative action to address the issue of youth unemployment within both the public and the private sector. The youth themselves were standing up and saying, "What about us. What is happening to us?" So they were their own advocates in that regard. They wanted to be included because many of them had supported the president in her election, and somehow they didn't see themselves very visibly within the spoils of war, if you would. So they themselves began to—not agitate, but to articulate their own needs through the organizations like Federation of Liberian Youth, FLY, and other youth groups.*

Also I'm—there was always some national consensus that the youth were the future of the country, so it was both economically and politically expedient to include them in these capacity-building programs.

CAMERON: Was there any resistance or opposition at all to this new way of hiring top-performing young graduates and bringing them into slightly higher level than entry-level positions into the civil service? Was there any resistance to that idea?

ALLEN: *If there was a resistance it wasn't an organized resistance. I'm sure there were individuals who had problems with it. The main problem was that there had been people who had been in the civil service for 10, 20, 30 years and they would see these young professionals coming in and they would start them at 400 dollars a month, US dollars, I think that is what it was. There were people who had been in the civil service for 10, 20, 25, maybe 30 years and were maybe making half of that money. There were concerns amongst those people but the fact that one, this was an open recruitment, a transparent recruitment, and the fact that this PYP program and other capacity-building programs were sort of being developed in parallel with the other civil service reform, people saw that there was hope. Those who were in the civil service saw that there was hope. So there was no organized resistance, that I recall, to the PYP program.*

I keep going back to the open and transparent recruitment because I think it was the key, because the merit system had broken down by 2005, 2006. You had people in positions for which they were not qualified and people who were qualified who were not in positions. So the mere fact that the recruitment was transparent and open and fair, it was seen as that way. I made sure about that since my name was associated with it. It was a recruitment process based on merit. People could see that those who had been selected were actually the best and the brightest.

So I think once again, it sort of mitigated whatever resistance there would have and could have been to this program. Besides, the program was being externally funded by the John Snow Foundation, for the most part.

CAMERON: So setting up that transparent recruitment mechanism, did you have any role in that or did the CSA (Civil Service Agency) have any role in that, or was that mostly left up to Saah and the program itself?

ALLEN: *It was a combination of both. I was sort of the chair of the steering committee that was—I don't remember the exact name now and Saah N'Tow was the program director. Now, he was onboard from day one with the transparency issue, which helped me. Normally, when we advertised for the program, it was an open advertisement which meant that anybody could apply who fit the criteria. Then we eliminated some of them initially just because—I mean, they didn't meet the age criteria, because they didn't have the proper degree or whatever it was.*

Then I believe there was a written test which was graded in a very interesting way. I think they removed the names or something like that from the answer sheets so you didn't really know whose paper you were grading. Then after that, there was a test, I believe, for numerical, verbal, and computer skills. Or maybe it was the same test that tested for that. Then came the interview where you were interviewed by a mixed bag of people. Then each step along the way people were eliminated based on their qualifications. It was based on qualifications alone. So the civil service was very much a part of the recruitment process.

CAMERON: Were you ever concerned that the program might not work?

ALLEN: *Quite frankly, no. For one thing we had—before the PYP came along in 2009, we had built up sufficient experience with the LECBS, the TOKTEN, the SES, the John Ben Snow program, so we knew what we were doing. So the PYP was not an experiment. Once I found Mr. N'Tow was the quality of person that he was in terms of integrity, it just increased my confidence, because I knew from previous experience with the SES that there could be no compromise when it came to the transparency component of the recruitment process. I mean, I keep going back to that because this was the real vertebrate, if you would, of the entire program.*

My concern was, would we be able to find enough young qualified Liberians to meet the standards that we had set for the program? That concern was quickly dispersed because we found that if we looked hard enough and if we eliminated patronage, we could track sufficiently-qualified Liberians from right there in Monrovia and in the counties who could qualify as PYPs. So based on my previous experience and based on the confidence that I had in the program leadership, mostly with Saah, I didn't have that much fear of failure for the program.

Once I started meeting the participants themselves, I was amazed. I came down from my ivory tower and met these kids on their turf and I was so impressed and was given the confidence that Liberia had a future because these young men and women really demonstrated a level of competence that I didn't know existed in our post-conflict country. I was quite impressed with the quality and caliber of people that we were able to find through this transparent recruitment process.

CAMERON: You mentioned in there that you were concerned that you might not be able to find enough qualified young Liberians for the program.

ALLEN: Yes.

CAMERON: Why did you have that concern?

ALLEN: *I had that concern because I knew there had been a brain drain from the country, and also because of the quality of people that I was used to dealing with in the civil service. In post-conflict Liberia it was a very—it had much to be desired. I had people who claimed to have been college graduates who couldn't write an*

error-free memorandum, people who had degrees in public administration who knew nothing about leadership, people who came to take the civil service exam who were high school graduates and could not tell me if aaron, avon, or akin, which one came third. Just basic alphabetical and numerical skills were lacking.

As director-general, I had a basic assumption that the entire population had been inflicted with such a low degree of competency, so I wasn't sure what I would find, but I was in for a pleasant surprise when these young kids coming out of college demonstrated that somehow they were able to acquire a good education in spite of the challenges of conflict.

CAMERON: What issues—I know we've talked extensively about the transparency one and I understand how important that is—what other issues did you think might influence the reputation or the effectiveness of the program?

ALLEN: *Patronage was one. No matter how hard you try in Liberia, you always get a phone call from a clergyman—maybe we should leave the clergy out of this, but from a clergyman or from some politician or from some family member or friend, who will tell you, "Oh, my nephew or my niece applied for the PYP, can you see what you can do to ensure that they get in?" Liberia had been a very close-knit society—a place where everybody knows everybody. I was very much conscious and almost frightened by the possibility that that sort of influence would be attempted, which it was. I was approached by people and I just referred them to Saah, knowing that Saah would take care of the problem. But I warned them that we were engaged in a transparent recruitment process and there was nothing I could do, that their niece or nephew should apply and if they made the cut, then so be it. This was always in the back of my mind.*

Because I was conscious of the gender issue I was hoping that we would find enough qualified women, which we did. I was also concerned about the funding, hoping that the funding would not dry out and that we would always have sufficient money to support the program. I'm still concerned about that because the PYP was set up as permanent employment for these young people, meaning that once—because I think we paid their stipends for the first two years or so after they graduated, and then they were supposed to just flow into the civil service. They were supposed to be absorbed into the civil service. I was always concerned as to whether when the time came for government to put up our share of the funding, whether this would happen. I've heard complaints about that so I'm assuming that this did happen, but you can ask Saah.

CAMERON: Was there any talk initially of the PYP program being part of the CSA itself?

ALLEN: *The program being part of the CSA?*

CAMERON: Being run by the CSA?

ALLEN: *No, no. As director-general, I chaired all of the steering committees and all of the committees that supervised these various programs. This was the level of involvement. We felt that it would be better—that the objectives of the program would be better served if it was physically located away from the Civil Service Agency itself. So I don't recall that discussion ever taking place in terms of—you mean, in terms of physical space?*

CAMERON: Well, both physical space and to make it part of the—because you are recruiting people for the civil service through the PYP program.

ALLEN: *Right.*

CAMERON: So whether it was ever thought that it should be part of the Civil Service Agency itself then?

ALLEN: *I don't think so.*

CAMERON: OK. I want to go back to what we were just talking about there, about the PYPs being absorbed into the civil service after the first two years.

ALLEN: Yes.

CAMERON: Do you recall when that decision was made or who made that decision or whether there was any funding commitment from the government to ensure that that was the case?

ALLEN: *From the get-go, this was part of the vision, that we were not recruiting people for a two-year program. We were offering them permanent career opportunities in the civil service. This was understood from the get-go, and the president was very clear on that. We were trying to build capacity of the public service and this was just one of the programs. So I think that was very clear from the beginning.*

CAMERON: Was it clear that the government would front the money to pay that?

ALLEN: *Yes, after the donor component ran out which was, I think, two years after the orientation.*

CAMERON: Did you think of this, of the PYP, as being a permanent program that will be part of how civil servants are recruited in Liberia for the foreseeable future, or did you think it was more of a, "This is going to be something we do for 5, 10, 15 years until we rebuild the civil service and then we can phase it out"?

ALLEN: *I thought at least it should remain throughout the duration of Madam Sirleaf's presidency. That was clear in my mind and then it would have to be eventually phased out once the rest of the civil service recruitment program caught up with the civil service reforms. To that extent, we had to introduce a component of performance management within the civil service just around the time that I left. But all of that takes time to really sink in. So yes, I did see it as something to be eventually phased out once the rest of the recruitment system in the civil service caught up with the PYP in terms of meritocracy, in terms of restoring the merit system and selection and promotion.*

CAMERON: How was it decided how much PYPs should earn during that two-year period?

ALLEN: *We bounced it around a little bit and decided on what would be reasonable in terms of cost of living, and that was the figure that we came up with. It was based on some rough estimates, so that they're not paid too much to cause a rebellion in the civil service and not too little, to prevent them from being distracted in terms of their work.*

CAMERON: What about once they finish those two years? How do you decide where they fit in in the general civil service pay scale?

ALLEN: *It was left to the PYPs. If you look at the data right now some PYPs have really been very successful in the public sector. I wouldn't be surprised if some of them have even become junior cabinet ministers by now. So this was left to the ability*

of the PYP to get in there and make the right impression and fight for upward mobility within the service. Once they completed their program and they did their two years, it became a sink-or-swim situation for them. Because they were transparently recruited, because they were well prepared, and because of the knowledge transfer component, most of them were set up for a win-win situation, I think. But it was very clear that they were to be put into leadership roles. We're not recruiting boy Fridays and girl Fridays. I mean, these were actually people with substantive knowledge and substantive potential to rise within the Liberian civil service.

CAMERON: Can you explain to me—I've spoken to a couple of people about this, about how the pay system works as far as salary and allowances?

ALLEN: *That is a tough one. Basically the objective with the pay reform is eventually to have only one form of compensation. OK. But in 2006, we were faced with a situation where we developed what amounted to a two-tier system, because we wanted to bring in people into the civil service who were qualified but we knew that they wouldn't accept the pay scale because at that point the pay scale ranged from 15 Liberian dollars on the low side to about 2 or 300 on the high side. That was it. So we came up with a system where temporarily, we allocated a certain amount in the budget for allowances, and the salaries were paid in Liberian dollars and the allowances were generally paid in US dollars. The whole objective was to bring in sufficiently qualified people to keep the engine running while the reforms were going on by paying them an allowance.*

The head of the agency or ministry had some flexibility in deciding who got the allowances and who did not. For example, in my case, my driver got an allowance but not all the drivers in the Civil Service Agency got an allowance. Why? Because I worked until nine o'clock at night sometimes and he needed to be there to take me home. Or I would go into the counties to supervise civil service reform programs and he had to be away from his family during those times.

The man who ran my generator to give power to the building was on an allowance because he had to be there at seven o'clock in the morning when the work at that time was eight o'clock to get the engine going, and he stayed for as long as there were people in the building. So the distribution of allowance was based on task on the one hand and based on performance on the other.

CAMERON: You're saying that it is being phased out over time?

ALLEN: *I'm not there now, but the whole idea was to phase it out as we worked on the payment reform, so that all of a sudden we would eliminate the need for the allowances and just have one compensation package.*

CAMERON: Right. Would you say that most civil servants had allowances of some sort?

ALLEN: *By the time the program evolved, yes, yes.*

CAMERON: Did the PYPs ever get allowances or were they on that certain scale?

ALLEN: *Well, I guess if we're trying to be transparent we shouldn't go off the record, we should stay on the record. But we left that to the agencies where they were assigned. They were supposed to get the 400, I believe. I think there may have even been an increase by the second year, some nominal increase. But then the agency to which they were assigned was allowed to give them motivational*

allowances—scratch cards for telephone, for example, allow them to ride the agency's bus, maybe give them gasoline coupons if they had vehicles they would use for those coupons. In some cases, if the minister or the senior level civil servant who was the mentor of the PYP was impressed enough, then they put them on the ministry allowance also, as an additional motivation to also keep them happy.

So once it was transparent, I mean once it was known that this was going on, then it was okay.

CAMERON: So as far as choosing which ministries and agencies the PYPs went to, did the Civil Service Agency have any role in that, choosing the agencies where the PYPs were needed or giving guidance to President Sirleaf or whoever else was deciding which agencies and ministries would get PYPs?

ALLEN: *She didn't decide. She didn't decide. She did have her pickings of PYPs at times. If they had been assigned to the minister of state (for presidential affairs), which is the minister that supports the presidency, there were certain key ministers that were driving the reform, such as the minister of finance and development planning.*

The minister of finance, for example—we had to report a reduction strategy that was being driven by finance and planning and the budget bureau (Bureau of the Budget). So depending on the role the particular ministry or agency played in driving the overall reforms, certain special considerations were given to them. But the idea was to spread these PYPs across the public service so that the impact would be felt, and we developed a metric system. I can tell you more about this. There was a metric system where if the finance minister got five in the first round, then of course they didn't get five in the second round. There was a mixed bag of processes that were used to place them.

Also, the particular major of the PYP in college played a role. There were certain ministers or agency heads that embraced the program more than others and would say, "Please send me a PYP." I mean they would actually ask for a PYP. It was like the squeaky wheel getting the grease in a situation. Then the PYPs themselves, I think, had some sort of first, second, and third choice. Saah can tell you more about that; I was mostly at the policy and the mentoring role of this. Whatever he tells you supersedes whatever I've said.

CAMERON: Was your impression that the program was well-known? Did all the ministers and agency directors know about it and know that this was something that they might be able to benefit from?

ALLEN: *Yes. We bragged about the program in cabinet meetings. So they knew about it from that direct standpoint, when Saah made reports to the cabinet so they knew. When time came for the recruitment, it was widely publicized in all the major newspapers, and on the radio because radio happens to be the most effective medium in developing countries like Liberia. So there was a very active attempt to ensure that people knew about the program.*

CAMERON: Did you request PYPs to have within the CSA agency itself?

ALLEN: *As a matter of fact, I think we did. It was the Financial Management Training Program people. Sometimes I get a little bit mixed up; there were so many programs. I believe we did. Yes, I believe we did. I couldn't speak specifically to that. Are you going to be talking to Puchu Bernard?*

CAMERON: Yes.

ALLEN: *Ask her that question.*

CAMERON: OK. What sort of interaction did you have with PYPs yourself?

ALLEN: *I was always invited to give them a rah-rah motivational speech during the two-week continuing education program. I think it was two weeks. I went there and told them about the civil service and what it meant and talked to them about the merit system and got them all riled up to become good civil servants. I had that interaction with them. We always had a very formal program which involved the president whenever we rolled out a new group of PYPs. I was with them at that level also. They knew who I was and they knew that they could come to me with their problems. I don't believe any of them ever did. We had social events, like mixers, that I attended where we interacted with them on a one-on-one interpersonal basis. I believe we also formally inducted them into the civil service. There was an induction program where they actually raised their hands and said an oath. I administered that oath in the presence of the president. So there was no ambiguity on their part that they were civil servants and they had been recruited into the civil service. I think that was the level of interaction that I had.*

CAMERON: Did you ever hear other agencies or ministries reporting back about how their PYPs, how they performed?

ALLEN: *Most of the feedback was positive. In fact, the challenge for these agencies was keeping these PYPs in check because, I mean, they were bright, they were brilliant. Some graduate schools were after them to come and be graduate students. Headhunters were after them. They were a very hot commodity. But most of the feedback I got—in fact all of the feedback I ever got from my colleagues was positive when it came to the PYPs.*

CAMERON: How did your average PYP compare to your average civil servant after spending the same amount of time in the civil service?

ALLEN: *I'm not too sure I want to answer that; maybe I should take the Fifth Amendment. No, the PYPs were clearly better prepared when they entered the civil service. They were more motivated. They were all—all of them were above average, seriously because—you can ask Saah about this, but within an average recruitment cycle, I mean we would get, what was it, 500 applicants? Don't put that number down because I'm not sure, but we'd get say 500 and we're looking for 15 or 20. So by the time you sifted through those numbers you came up with the best, you came up with the very best. So the average PYP was better than average when compared with the others, with their peers who came to the civil service, which was good because their peers who they went to school with knew they did better than they did in school. So if you saw the valedictorian of your class as a PYP, you couldn't complain because you knew that even earlier on in that person's academic career, they were smarter than you were. So I think that sort of answers the question.*

CAMERON: Were there any particular skills that PYPs had that other civil servants didn't have?

ALLEN: *Yes, yes. Good verbal skills were important. They had to have that. So they actually wrote essays. They had to have good numerical skills. They had to have good analytical skills. They would turn to computer literacy skills for good*

measure because it was a tool that they would use. That's, and quite honestly that's why I start—I know the issue of leadership was a given, almost, because if they weren't good leaders, they wouldn't make it to the top of the 15 of the 500. So I think, without extrapolating, I think those would be the main skills.

CAMERON: Was the—without the PYP program, was there any other way that you could find these people and bring them to the civil service?

ALLEN: *Not with the same degree of proficiency as the PYP did. The PYP was a special program. The criteria were very clear and those who made it were the very best, which I guess should be the way the civil service operates. But when you're in a post-conflict situation, it's not always that simple. So I think the answer to your question would be: I don't think applying the criteria of the PYP to the overall civil service in the initial days of the post-conflict situation would have been as effective. I mean, there were just too many extraneous variables. What, for example, do you do with a 40-year-old man who has been told he's a director for 10 years during the conflict because his uncle was a warlord? What do you do with such a person? Do you tell him, "As of tomorrow, you are no longer a director"? What you could do is, you could reclassify him without him losing his salary, which is what happened in most instances, but you couldn't tell him—I mean, you couldn't dismiss him because the bread and butter issues were also there. The social and political consequences of such actions wouldn't have been expedient for the government.*

But the PYP was starting from scratch, so you could do that. You could put up an advertisement, and 500 people could apply. You could eliminate people based on certain strict criteria, criteria, and you could administer tests to then make it so you could eliminate them at a second level. You could interview them and eliminate them at the third level, and come up with your 15 or 20 that you really wanted. So if that methodology had been applied to the overall civil service in 2009, I don't think it would have worked. It had to be a little bit more gradual.

CAMERON: So I want to ask you to give me your overall thoughts on the program. Do you think it's been successful? Do you think it was cost-effective? What's your impression on the first few years of the program and what you've seen?

ALLEN: *I'm not the proper person to be asked that question because I'm clearly biased. I was chair of the steering committee of the program. I like to think that I was relatively successful as director-general of the civil service. But in spite of all that, if I should be very objective, I think that the jury is still out on this. But based on the actual feedback that I've received from PYPs themselves, from Saah and from my colleagues in the cabinet, I would say that the program has been relatively successful. I would say the program has been relatively successful.*

You asked something about funding?

CAMERON: Not at that moment, but is that something you want to share something on?

ALLEN: *Not really. Not really. I think the program has been relatively successful to be honest with you.*

CAMERON: Do you think it is sustainable?

ALLEN: *It is sustainable only if the Liberian government lives up to its commitment to absorb these young men and women into the general civil service. If the PYP is set in parallel to the overall civil service reform, then at a certain point, it's going*

to naturally phase itself out. When you get to the point where the merit system intersects with the recruitment process of the PYP, then I think there will be no need to continue the program.

Or—I mean, let me qualify that. Then there will be no need to continue the program as a separate entity. I mean, you could still identify people as President's Young Professionals based on where they came out of our civil service recruitment process.

CAMERON: Right, so how far away do you think that is?

ALLEN: *Well, the civil service reform is a process. The first time I went to the UK to talk about civil service reform, I seemed a little bit frustrated at the slow pace, and a senior level civil servant from the British civil service told me, "Dr. Allen, don't feel bad. We've been reforming for 400 years and we are still reforming." So it is difficult to put a timeline on it, because civil service reform is an ongoing process; there are so many components of it. But when you get to that point where the merit system has been reinstated, you will know.*

CAMERON: So what is still left to do at the Civil Service Agency?

ALLEN: *Well, there are several components of the program. You have the performance management. You have the payment grading reform process. You have the civil service rural development project, where you want to make sure that the rural areas are also beneficiaries of the reform. You have a leadership component: training leaders, public servants and managers. There are several components of the program that need to develop in parallel. You never get to a point where you say, "Now the civil service is reformed." There will always be continuous reform. But I think we are off to a good start. We are off to a good start. In the first 12 years of the reform, I think we'd set the reform on an irreversible path, which I think is what you want to get. I think as far as being on an irreversible path, we are already there but to say that you will fix a broken system that it took 25 years to break down—and I say 25 because I believe that from the day of the military intervention in politics in Liberia, which was April 12, 1980, to today, we began to see a decline in the merit system. So by 2005, it had been 25 years of patronage and 25 years of military intervention in the civil service. So it is going to take a while.*

CAMERON: How do you see the PYP in the short term and the medium term? You talked about it being—eventually it will be able to be phased out. What do you think could make the program more or less effective? What do you think could make the program more effective or what do you think is making it less effective right now that could perhaps be changed in the next short to medium term?

ALLEN: *I think the PYP must be an integral part of the government decentralization initiative. That is critical. It is very critical in that it is part of that initiative so that PYPs are deployed at the county level. There is a great need for them at that level. I think some of that is going on now, but perhaps Monrovia benefited initially a lot from it, so maybe some effort should now be made to maybe send a whole batch into the rural area. Monrovia is not going to suffer too much for one year if that happens.*

I keep going back to the transparent recruitment process. I think it should continue. It's critical because if that goes, then everything goes. The government must commit to the funding of the PYPs after the donor assistance phases out. That's critical. And the program management must maintain its integrity. Saah is

a minister now, so I don't know who's in his place, but the program management component must maintain its integrity. That is critical. I think that's about it.

CAMERON: OK. Well, I've kept you for an hour and 20 minutes now. I really appreciate all the time that you've given me. If we can wrap things up there, is there anything else that we haven't touched on that you think is important?

ALLEN: *Without being political, I think it's appropriate to thank the president for having the vision to conceive of the program and to have supported it, because it's a program that bears her name. So I think it's important because it really got support from the highest level. I look forward to the day when PYPs will take on top leadership roles in the government, in the public sector. I think this will send a signal that it is indeed successful. Hopefully, the PYP can serve as a model for other post-conflict countries, as one way to build capacity in the civil service.*

CAMERON: Just one quick follow-up there. You noted that it does bear the president's name and the program did start with a strong vision from President Sirleaf. Do you think that the program will be able to continue through a presidential transition?

ALLEN: *Well, it's called the President's Young Professional Program, not President Sirleaf's Young Professional Program, so I think any other President coming in that has a similar vision should see positive potential for such a program. They might decide to call it something else, I don't know. But in most countries, you have some version of a program to tap youth. I think Bill Clinton was one of those who went to the White House and shook President (John F.) Kennedy's hand on some—it wasn't a PYP, but it was a similar type program that attracted top leaders, people with top leadership potential. So it's not unique to Liberia. I'm hoping that when there's a change in political leadership, that people will still see the merit in having such a program.*

CAMERON: Excellent. That's it. Thank you so much.

ALLEN: *I hope I have been useful.*

CAMERON: Extremely useful.