

Achieving goals

INTERVIEW WITH HE JAKAYA MRISHO KIKWETE

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What would you say have been your main successes these last four or five years?

When I took the decision to run for office I had a set of goals I wanted to achieve. The first was holding the country together. We are a country of 40 million people made up of 120 ethnic groups. There are also Europeans, Arabs, Indians as well as Christians, Muslims and Hindus. This is a nation of people at various stages of development. We're a union of two countries, Zanzibar and Tanganyika. Holding the country together is the number one challenge. But Tanzania remains united. Tanzania is peaceful. Tanzania enjoys political stability.

Another thing I felt was critical when I took office was maintaining political stability. This is a democracy, with many political parties, and where basic freedoms are observed: freedom of expression; freedom of association, and so on. I think it is one of this country's major achievements. Of course we undertook to improve governance as well: it is there in our election manifesto, the commitment to fight corruption. I spoke about it in my inaugural speech in parliament as well. What we have done is concentrate on building strong institutions that are going to be able to rise to the challenge of corruption. We set up the PCCB, the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau, to specifically tackle the problem.

We also came up with new legislation which gave a broader definition of corruption, and which gave teeth to our institutions to be able to tackle it. We've increased personnel, we've increased resources, so that we can tackle the problem at a nationwide level. The PCCB has taken a lot of people to court, more in the last few years than in the country's history. We need to do much more, I know, but I'm happier that we are on course in terms of building the capacity to deal with, to respond to, the problems of corruption.

You mentioned Tanzania's political freedoms. Do you think that people here exercise those freedoms responsibly?

What is sometimes lacking is an understanding that if you are journalist, for example, you have to have a sense of responsibility, of knowing what it is that can tear this country apart. Take the case of Rwanda. The genocide there was actually orchestrated on the radio; someone sitting behind that microphone encouraging

people to go and kill the Tutsis. Clearly that is a case of press freedom that has gone beyond acting responsibly. People have to be very careful in young countries like ours. Things can go terribly wrong.

Visitors to Rwanda complain that there is no press freedom there. But the reality of that country is that freedom of the press was misused and the whole country went up in flames. There are things that we can't do and there are things that we do which some countries in the West take for granted. We cannot take them for granted. We have really to be careful.

Tanzania is still one of the world's poorest countries. How would you assess your progress in this regard?

We are committed to improving living standards. We look at the issue from two perspectives. On the one hand we believe it is about people getting access to better social and economic services. On the other it is about increased incomes. With regards to better social and economic services, when we took office we looked at health, education, infrastructure in terms of roads, railways, electricity, and water supply. We have developed programmes for each of these sectors. With regard to education we said let's keep focused on the universal primary education target of the Millennium Development Goals for 2015.

At the same time, our population has grown. The schools that we built are now inadequate because the population is always increasing. But now we have more than 96 per cent attendance at primary level, which is good. We believe by 2015 we should be able to attain the goal of 100 per cent.

In education, our biggest challenge is that we have a sizeable population who are nomadic people. And they move with their children. And we are talking about a huge population, huge numbers. There cannot be less than two or three million of these people such as the Masais, the Mang'ati and so on. They stay in a village for two or three years, so you build a school, only to find there are fewer students there because they've just moved on. In places like Masailand we have to build boarding primary schools, so that if the parents continue to roam in search of pastures at least their children are there.

Now we have begun the process of expanding secondary education. Since 1974, we have seen a huge

expansion in primary education, but no expansion of secondary. This created a pyramid with a broad base, but very steep sides. We have around 3,000 wards throughout the country, so we set ourselves the target of constructing at least one secondary school for each ward. This programme has been a great success – some wards have two schools, some have three, some four. District government in partnership with the communities built these schools. What we discovered is that there is a big thirst for secondary education. So what we have actually done is to unlock this gate which was closed for secondary education.

Our biggest challenge now has been how to respond to these huge demands for expanded secondary education. We now have to train and hire more teachers. We used to have 500 graduate teachers coming out of college each year; last year we had 5,300 or more. And we want to progress faster. I am confident in the next two or three years we should be able to produce 10,000 teachers every year.

And then of course we have addressed health. We came up with the primary health care programme to increase access to health care, just like we increased access to education. We looked at building the capacity for the training of doctors and nurses and health professionals. We're building a new university in Dodoma. We are also building a School of Medicine at the new university. We are now producing 200 doctors a year, and the doctor to patient ratio is 1:30,000. I think the nurse to patient ratio is 1:23,000. We have more health professionals now than in the past – 265 specialist doctors.

Water remains an area where we still need to do a lot more. Our target was to give access to 65 per cent of the population – we are at 58 per cent now. In urban areas our target is 90 per cent – we are at 83 per cent. With road infrastructure we are paving all our major roads and then also embarking on the other connecting roads. Electricity has been another challenging area. About 15 per cent of Tanzania has access to electricity – it's very low. The other challenge is people's incomes. And so this is where the biggest challenge is.

How would you assess the country's economic progress under your administration?

When we took over, all the macro economic indicators were sound. We knew we could maintain macro economic stability. In the first two years the economy continued growing: annual GDP growth was more than 6 per cent, and we were able to get to 7.4 per cent, and it was 7.8 per cent last year. Inflation was in single figures when we came in; below 5 per cent. Then came the change of fortunes at the international level. Come 2007, we saw high oil prices. It changed the landscape here completely. Petrol prices went up, transport costs went up, the costs of ploughing the land went up, so everything went up. That was the first major shock that affected inflation. And then as if that was not enough, in the second year, 2008, we went through an international food crisis. Our neighbours in Kenya had no food at all. At some point inflation went up to 13.5 per cent. Since then we have got it back down to 9 per cent. In the consumer price index the biggest weight is always on food prices.

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And we had a shortage of rain, which impacted on food production, and made controlling inflation very difficult. And then came the economic slow down. We had a projection of 7.8 per cent growth rate, and found ourselves with 5 per cent. But we are working hard, we think we are now on the path to recovery. We think we should see 6.6 per cent GDP growth this year.

We are also seeing increased investment. We have the resources: in the mining sector, in agriculture, and in other sectors. Improving the investment climate has been our major focus. We have succeeded in attracting a lot of investment compared to our neighbours. We look forward to doing better.

Should you win a second term, what would be your priorities?

What I would really concentrate on is first consolidating the gains of the first term, and then accomplishing what we have not managed in the first term. The areas we need to concentrate on are secondary education and tertiary education, and then of course the health sector. Also infrastructure. We need to do a lot more in the water sector. We need to do a lot more in the electricity sector: we need to expand production. But of course the economy is the area where we need to do more. And my focus in the second term will be on industrialisation. That's an area that we are now looking at seriously.

We need to do much more to develop the agricultural sector. We have started the process. More than 80 per cent of the people live in rural areas. Agriculture is their mainstay. But subsistence agriculture, with low productivity, means food security is not guaranteed. There isn't enough in terms of cash crops to earn these people an income, because they don't produce enough.

The challenge is essentially about better use of science and technology in our agriculture, and applying modern skills in agriculture and farming. We have come up with a programme of agricultural subsidies to give farmers better access to fertilisers and seeds. We have concentrated on maize, which is a major staple. We have concentrated on rice, which is also a major staple.

With agricultural input support we are going into cotton – this is a major cash crop. We have set aside money for our research institutions, putting money aside for the production of seed multiplication capacities. This would be a major area of focus in the second term. We have started it this term and in the second term I am sure by the time we leave we will have made huge inroads in the transformation of our agricultural sector. Of course we have always been too dependent on rain, so we are now increasing irrigated agriculture. Our agricultural development programme involves spending on irrigation.

The other thing that we want to do is make use of our geography. We have the markets of Rwanda, Burundi,

Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, and we have the port of Dar Es Salam. We need to expand our ports, improve their efficiency. We are also going to modernise the railways. So we have been talking to Barrington Santa Fe of the United States, who are building a standard gauge railway from the port of Dar Es Salam to Kigali, Rwanda, Burundi and to the sea.

Regarding closer regional integration, are you concerned about an influx of land-hungry Kenyans?

No way. I don't subscribe to that. The East African Community, which is now the five nations of Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi, started out as a customs union with, the open free movement of goods (duty free) across borders. We had a common external tariff. For many years we used to have a trade deficit with Kenya. Now we have a trade surplus with Kenya – for the first time last year. Of course there are these fears amongst us, but I don't subscribe to them.

Tanzania is the largest country in East Africa. We are twice the size of Kenya. We are three times the size of Uganda. And we are well endowed in terms of resources. Generally speaking we have good rains. Two-thirds of Kenya is almost dry. Tanzania has the land, and the right blend of resources. There are still plenty of opportunities for industrialisation here. The Japanese started later than those in Europe, the Chinese started later than almost everybody else, but they are now major industrial powers. So it is a question of putting in place the right policies and setting the right measures. I am confident that Tanzania will emerge to be a giant in East Africa. I see regional integration as another big opportunity for us. I see big prospects for Tanzania. If we grow within a larger market then the prospects will definitely be better for us.

And at the broader international level?

We are really tied to the international economy. Whatever happens in the international economy is a matter of concern to us. When the economic crisis started in the US with sub-prime mortgages, the financial sector collapsed, the whole economic system went into turmoil. We are dependent on exports, and we couldn't sell as much as we used to sell. The little that we were selling, we had to sell at lower prices.

We had to come up with a rescue strategy for these companies. So whatever happens in the international economy is a matter of great concern to us. We hope the problems in Greece and elsewhere will not cause the world economy to go into another crisis.

At the end of a second term in five years time, will Tanzania be an oil and gas exporter?

Let's keep our fingers crossed. The exploration is ongoing, we are now looking off-shore. There is a lot of gas in our area, and the prospects are very good. **E**