

# Return to policy predictability

**INTERVIEW WITH H.E. SAMIA SULUHU HASSAN**  
 PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA

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**After having attended several COP conferences, are you satisfied with progress?**

Somehow yes. I must say that it was a noble responsibility for me to attend as I had never previously attended any United Nations Climate Change Conference although I had studied the literature of previous COPs. It was good to attend because I met so many Heads of State there and CEOs of important organisations and development partners. There is some sense of satisfaction because countries and Heads of State at COP26 agreed on our shortcomings and that we did not implement well the Paris Agreement (2015) accords. This was I believe due to diverse countries not contributing as they had promised. We came out of COP26 with a lot of pledges again and countries such as the United States agreed to participate this time and make their contribution at the conference, so somehow it was a satisfactory conference in which we even managed to cover new controls for climate change activities. You know every country put its own nationally determined contributions (NDC) forward but the tougher determined contributions must begin with the advanced countries, and those countries also have to provide financial support for others. Here in Tanzania we realise that NDCs have to be imparted in our own development projects and that we start implementing them, we do hope however that developed countries are going to keep their promises to the LDCs (Lesser Developed Countries) to contribute what they have said they will contribute to combat climate change.

**How well is Tanzania emerging in this post-Covid, post-pandemic world?**

So far we are doing good. You know if you have the flu and you sneeze a little bit someone will say ‘wow’ you have Covid. But we don’t have any confirmed cases of Covid at the moment nor any cases in hospital. However, we are continuing with our vaccination campaign because we still have a lot of doses in stock and we need to vaccinate our people because we do not know what is coming next. So we have to be very careful and alert and we have to take all the precautionary measures and we have to continue vaccinating. The United States government has supported us very well as we have enough vaccine in stock. So far our estimate is that we have reached about 11 per cent of the targeted population, and when we use all these doses

we are going to have about 15 to 16 per cent of the targeted population vaccinated, which for us is a lot.

**You have adopted a very different approach to your predecessor in travelling widely and meeting potential foreign investors. How well is the economy of Tanzania recovering?**

Our economy is still recovering. In 2018 – 2019 we were growing at 6 to 8 per cent and then we were hit by Covid and growth went down to 4 per cent and that was relatively good for us because many in the region went down to minus figures. We only went down to 4 per cent and this was because Tanzania did not lockdown and we let our people continue producing whether in the agriculture sector or other sectors. We later realised that we had to take measures to align with the rest of the world and so conducted a study of Covid 19 just to know the magnitude of the problem so we decided to step up vaccination and that is when we decided to join the Covax facility. That is when we started to receive support from the outside world. Initially it was challenging because there were those who did not believe in vaccination and by then people had already received messages from some political and religious leaders as to why they should not take the jab, so we had to do a massive campaign and finally people started responding. As I mentioned before we have now vaccinated 11 to 12 per cent of the targeted population and are still proceeding with the vaccination campaign.

When the economic growth went down we implemented various strategies to make the economy grow again and by last year, 2021, we grew by 4.8 per cent and this year we are at 5.5 per cent and our expectation is by 2025 we will be back at growth of 6.8 to 7 per cent and this is because of three important things:

First, you mentioned that I have been travelling to many countries such as Belgium, France and the United States. I started in the region and went to Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda as with all these countries we had barriers to business which impeded trade, so we met and discussed and we decided to remove the barriers. Now the business has grown and our people are trading within the region very efficiently. For example with Kenya trade has increased by 600 per cent. There were also projects which were stuck so we discussed with the leaders of those countries how to move them forward and now the projects have been

financed and are being implemented. I have taken these various measures to unlock the country and that is why we are experiencing this quicker growth of the economy.

Secondly, in all these countries I have been attracting FDI and inviting the foreign investors to come and we have been receiving many of them. Recently, we had a delegation of 41 companies from France. I have also been to the UAE where I signed about 36 MOUs and so on. Everywhere I went the business is growing and investors are attracted to come and so with this expansion of investment we are expecting economic growth to increase. This will create employment for our youth, which as you are aware we have a very young population, so they will be obtaining jobs and receiving an income and we will have greater liquidity in the country.

Finally, we have been focusing on infrastructure development:- roads, railways, aviation services, water provision, and transport knowing that after production goods have to be transported to wherever the market. We are working hard on infrastructure development.

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#### **What about the LNG project?**

On LNG we had discussions about six years ago which didn't end well. We had discussions again last year, 2021, which went much better and we are expecting to sign in June an agreement whereby we will be receiving an investment of US\$30-40 billion. This will be a huge investment, not only for Tanzania, but in regional terms. We expect this gas resource to be used efficiently. The gas was discovered 15 years ago, and now this project is finally moving and we will begin exporting LNG but also we have a project to distribute it to the people of Tanzania so as to reduce the use of firewood and charcoal.

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#### **What would you like your legacy to be?**

First, to put Tanzania in a proper place as it was before, because before whenever we had meetings in our region, SADC – Southern Africa Development Community and EAC – East African Community, everybody was looking at what Tanzania had to say, but then it went down. Even in Europe we had a strong voice. By raising Tanzania to its proper place I mean to build the economy in all sectors that can contribute to growth. You are aware that Tanzania has a lot to offer. We have minerals, gas, agriculture; we have everything so we have to use all this to develop not only the

economy of Tanzania but also our human development. This is very important, to build up human development in education, health and all basic needs and to make these services available to the people. Thus we are working hard on education. My predecessor started on free education from primary to secondary level and I have been able to provide free education to A level. This is my plan and I think I will manage to achieve it. So education will be free until the highest level in secondary school and young people will only begin paying in universities, not in primary and secondary.

I have also been trying hard to bring the health services closer to the people by building fully furnished health centres closest to the people. Part of the challenge here, as in education is the provision of enough qualified labour to those sectors such as teachers, doctors and nurses.

Another key objective is to provide cleaner safer water. When I came to office water provision coverage was about 70 to 72 per cent. Now the coverage is about

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Declan Hartnett, Executive Publisher at FIRST, speaks with HE Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of the United Republic of Tanzania

80 per cent and I think by 2025 we will be reaching 90 per cent in urban areas, even 100 per cent in some areas, and about 84 per cent at village level.

Finally, on shelter or housing, we are trying hard to increase provision. I have a plan in this area and I have already invited the private sector to come and construct many residential units for the people both in the urban and rural areas. In rural areas and villages people are already doing their own (constructing houses) so are trying to make sure that construction materials are available and affordable to the people.

With regard to the foreign investors, they were complaining about the predictability of our policies, that they were too unpredictable and changed too often. We have learnt the lesson and we are now predictable. I have given a lot of promises to them and that is why they are coming in good numbers because we even have taken steps to correct some of the policies and laws which they were not happy with.

Could you comment on what you would like from the UK – Tanzania relationship?

Let me start on solidarity. I think that we have to strengthen our solidarity with the UK through the Commonwealth, but also bilaterally. Bilaterally we have done well. I have been to the UK and have been able to talk to the government leaders and we have agreed on some issues. UK ministers have come to Tanzania twice recently working on improving trade relations. We had various workshops together and now we are working on the MOUs. The former UK Minister for Africa visited recently and we discussed a lot of issues, trade, socioeconomic and political, and we are working well with her on strengthening our relations. With regard to the Commonwealth I think I think that we have to use

this organisation to strengthen economic relations with all Commonwealth members.

How do you see the Commonwealth evolving?

I think it depends on the head of the Commonwealth because Her late Majesty The Queen had been working more on political relations and ethics and codes of conducts, but with King Charles, I think he is our generation so I think he has to go with the world moving from political relations to strengthening economic relations. We have such a diversity with members coming from Africa, the Caribbean, Europe and elsewhere, so I think within the membership we can work very well on economic relations and support one another instead of just working on political relations. The last meeting we only talked about human rights, but now we have to look at other sides especially now that Covid has thought us a lesson that economic hardship has no borders. With Covid everybody was severely hit.

Are there are particular challenges of being Tanzania’s first female Head of State?

A lady at the top is a new culture but not entirely as we had women chiefs in the past, and women also often headed the community and controlled the house treasury. To be a Head of State you have to build trust and you have to show to all that you can do the job. I think I have won the trust of the men of Tanzania and they are giving me full support in doing the development activities of our county. It was a challenge in the past, but not anymore, because we have proven that women too can contribute equally as men, and I think Tanzanian society is now more ready to give the top positions to women in different government corporations and even in the private sector. However it is still a challenge but it is a challenge everywhere.

Is the Royal Tour film having the desired impact?

I did the Royal Tours (a PBS television documentary with American broadcaster Peter Greenberg) because I knew that people didn’t know Tanzania. In most of the world when they ask you where are you coming from and you respond East Africa, they will not ask you which country in East Africa because they think Africa is one country. If you say East Africa they say ‘oh so you are coming from the east of Africa’ and they won’t ask you further. If you say Tanzania, sometimes they say ‘so you are coming from Tasmania’. So I did the Royal Tour for the people around the world to know where Tanzania is, what we have to offer, how our people are, our policies and so on. I think the documentary will contribute to people knowing where and who we are and we are beginning to reap the fruits of that to the extent that I am even wondering if the number of tourists keeps increasing where we are going to lodge them.

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