

Keynote GPSA Forum Speech- ee 09052021

[Title Slide], Intro: Good morning. The song we just heard is a modern classic by Professor Jay, a Tanzanian hip hop or BongoFlava artist who made the leap from art to a career as a member of parliament. [Slide 2] Sung as a conversation between a politician and his votership, the track begins with a promise of milk and honey but it doesn't take long to change to a negotiation. This track really captures how we create governance, and how we can be both complicit and oppositional in our creation of it together. [Slide 3]

1. If anyone had told me a year ago that I would have something to say to at a World Bank event, I would have laughed it off. A year ago, the Covid pandemic was barely beginning to make its mark on the world. A year ago in April, Tanzania decided that it didn't even have the disease within its borders. A year ago we couldn't have had this talk. A lot can change in a year- as a global citizen I have travelled far. We all have.
2. The first time that I came to the World Bank offices I was wearing my travelling shoes and ready to take on a difficult assignment: how to make the Bank feel closer to the people using social media. At the time social media was still relatively new to organizations and the Bank wanted to try to communicate better with the people of Tanzania. This was one way to do it.
3. I had my doubts of course. The challenge would be: how to overcome institutional stuffiness and make the Bank hip to Tanzanians, especially youth. Tanzania has long and fine leftist tradition in which the World Bank and IMF are usually portrayed as the villains of our economic stories. I come from a generation that

uses “Structural Adjustment” as an expletive. Things have shifted with time but much of our deep rhetoric remains rooted in Nyerere’s philosophies. So you can imagine how the work went on both sides of this aisle. [\[Slide 4\]](#)

4. Communication does wonders though. I learned a lot. From a slow start at the beginning, the WB’s Tanzanian twitter account now boasts more than 50K followers. In helping to push out the social media platforms I found out that ultimately, across our natural barriers, we wanted the best for my society. This opened up notions of cooperation and possibilities in my mind but only a little bit so.

5. The second time I came to the World Bank offices was not so auspicious. The UDART project of rapid transit buses was hosting a conference as part of its winning an award. A few thousand participants were expected to attend from around the world. Having grown up in tandem with the city of Dar es Salaam I have always expressed mixed feelings about seeing it change. When landmarks tied to the living history of the city give way to skyscrapers, I am usually in protest. The UDART project had been talked about for at least a decade before the first major works were seen on city streets. It would take years more before buses actually began to run. I couldn’t anticipate how much I would like the rapid transit buses. [\[Slide 5\]](#)

6. In the event, the UDART buses into and out of town may be one of the few modernizations I have actually liked. This joint project between the World Bank and the Government of Tanzania aims to improve overall transport along the major routes of Dar es Salaam. There in the sweat and crowdedness of riding them, Dar can be felt as itself. I watch people on the buses and beneath the creeping urban impatience I can still see our calm sweetness. We are indulgent

towards kids who crowd us indiscriminately, we remain solicitous to pregnant ladies who never lack for a seat, polite and jovial towards the elderly. It might be rapid transit but even on it we still believe that time should flex around human needs. The project has retained so much of the flavor that I like of “old Dar. “I was excited to be invited to help with the social media aspect.

7. Unfortunately, this was not meant to be and I had to walk away. The project had just that little bit too much of Dar es Salaam that is also our hallmark: what was on paper didn't exactly match what was on the ground in too many ways. Seeing this left an impression on me. Far from omnipotent, the Bank can also be rendered helpless by national challenges. In spite this people working on the project don't give up, demonstrating how a passion for their work can unite them. I know how tough we are as a market, so I can honestly say that UDART is a triumph while simultaneously being a disaster. But it is up and running now, and that counts for something in a city littered with failed or endlessly delayed projects. As I left in my travelling shoes I thought of all the Tanzanians benefitting from this dedicated and mildly chaotic investment in our infrastructure, and this further challenged my prejudices of what can be done in collaborations across so-called divides. [\[Slide 6\]](#)

8. I did leave and didn't think about our common goals again for some time. I spent the next few years on my side of the government-civil society divide and I was smug about calling out institutions and people for not doing their jobs when it comes to Tanzania. Fortunately for me, an incredible project came along with the Public Sector Accountability Monitor (PSAM) where I got immersed in researching the actual business of governance in several African countries. The PSAM project is based out of Rhodes University in South Africa.

9. Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania were each unique and amazing, but Mozambique stood out: it did not give up its secrets easily. The country is big and tough. We travelled a long way into the remote interior. We were welcomed, only to be left out of the real conversations. I felt helpless, 'stuck' by language and cultural barriers. Then we took a chance and did something outside of my comfort zone: we confronted our hosts directly. I will never forget the cool assessment we were subjected to before being taken for an early lunch. By the time we came back to continue with meetings, everything had changed. Now we were not just guests and observers, we had become friends and allies in the discussion on how to get things done. Through this process, many of the "hard" differences I had set between civil society and government began to seem artificial and inadequate. I believe that further along during the Forum Mozambique will be discussed in greater detail, and I hope to learn more about it.

10. Travelling to all these countries and being invited into governance conversations changed me. From seeing the world in terms of groups of us and them, I started to see how much we construct a collective "we" in our everyday business of life. In Mozambique, artists are actively included in local government- something that I would never have imagined before encountering it. I became optimistic about governance. [\[Slide 7\]](#) I started to like institutions, including the "outsiders" like donor institutions and the World Bank because I could finally see how we might all fit together. I was so filled with optimism in fact that friends who had enjoyed my critical views for years asked me if I was turning into an apologist. I wasn't. It was just a few good years in which possibility sprang out of the very air... Until it didn't.

11. My country has changed socially and politically over the course of the past 6 years, tightening up. [\[Slide 8\]](#) 2020 had already started out on a difficult note: the reduction in our civil liberties was affecting me personally and in my work. I couldn't write the way I used to anymore. I had quit blogging years ago in protest, and I have left the Mikocheni Report up to flag that protest. Journalists and activists were having a very hard time all around. I didn't recognize us anymore, and it didn't look like things would get better anytime soon. Then people started getting sick. [\[Slide 9\]](#)

12. It isn't easy for me to make sense of the effects of Covid19 in numbers, I have to say it in words. We got sick with a terrible flu around the end of 2019, but it was nothing that made us worry. We didn't worry until stories came of an airborne illness that was spreading around the world. At first people got sick and got better. Then some people didn't get better. The first to go for me was Jennifer, who owned a bakery with excellent and warm samosas. She had a smile that could light up a room. Then a good man with booming laugh and a son who stutters was here one minute, gone the next. [\[Slide 10\]](#)

13. Then it was other people. Friends of friends. Parents of children at a school my nieces went to. My nephew became an apparent danger to us: whatever he gets I get. We had to find a way to protect our mother, our only remaining parent, from her grandchildren and her many church gatherings. The government told us in April of last year that we only suffered from "atypical pneumonia" and that we could pray it away while drinking various "healthy" concoctions. Germ theory went out of the window, hospital beds came at a premium, we learned the price of oxygen tanks. I watched doctors become stressed, sometimes beyond relief. Then family got sick. Friends lost parents. Friends were lost. The last two did me

in, George and Tony, fathers who have left behind youth who could have used a bit more time to become men.

14. At this low point, the Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church and the Muslim community came together to say: enough. The people of faith led the way to what was becoming a groundswell of resistance. We had buried too many people. We were traumatized and struggling. I could barely look up at what else was happening in my country, let alone the world.

15. If it is okay with you, let us pause for a moment of silence to remember all the loved ones we have lost to this pandemic. And take a moment for ourselves, for having survived it so far. [\[Slide 11\]](#)

16. So. Here we are. What changed? We all did. In Tanzania, the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania died suddenly in March and we were wrenched through a State funeral that put us in the center of the world's attention for a while. A few things changed immediately. It became acceptable to wear masks again in public. Covid19 is now a pandemic that we recognize. During her speeches, President Samia Suluhu Hassan never hesitates to thank the media for keeping the public informed. So I dared to write again. I wrote a lot, about the pandemic, about the state funeral, about Tanzania. Reams of hope. It turns out that people were reading because something of Tanzania's story is in all of our stories. [\[Slide 12\]](#)

17. I asked myself what a strong recovery from covid19 looks like, and the answer has been here all the time. We keep moving and we never lose sight of the essential humanity of all our endeavours. In these travelling shoes, over the years, I have grown from inherited (and understandable) hostility and suspicion of the WB,

through media and infrastructure, outwards into Southern Africa before coming back to Dar es Salaam and Tanzania from where I got to know my society all over again, now armed with a bit of economic knowledge and excellent 'training' through the PSAM paper. **The work we do is mutually important.**

18. Covid19 hasn't left us. I still don't know that we're doing enough, these are confusing times especially when it comes to vaccine policies. But when you come out of a period of such intense grief you realise that it has never been a solo struggle. When I finally looked up and there was Dar es Salaam. There was the world. Possibility is alive again and must be kept that way, now that we have seen the costs of losing our spirit of collaboration.

19. Perhaps before it was harder to appreciate our shared humanity but the pandemic has forced us all to do so. It is this leap from abstract notions like governance and institutions that I hope to illustrate with my story of journeys to the very real fact that we're all in this for the better. **It started small for me with what I thought was a natural distance between myself, my society and institutions like the World Bank but the ensuing experiences and governance challenges resulted in my belief in our common goals: those of human survival and thriving. [Slide 13]**

20. I chose the UDART project to show you Dar es Salaam in its aliveness, and also because it gives me hope every day that the buses keep running. UDART keeps my complex and vibrant city moving, it is a testament that if you hang in there change does come. I chose the Professor Jay track at the beginning to highlight how the political can become so personal, that art is also service. Across the divides of civil society, the World Bank, local and national government in the end there is something in there that draws us together. **Therein is the strength which**

we can use to keep recovering from challenges like Covid19. As someone living in a country that is trying to heal, when you go ahead with the Forum and consider how to recover on a personal level and through your work, I hope there is a corner of you that keeps this in mind. [\[Slide 14\]](#)

This last track is by Bi Kidude and is a Zanzibar classic. Bi Kidude was a quintessential traveller, a rule-breaking woman who took to the seas as a youth. She ultimately became a cultural ambassador for Zanzibar and Tanzania. She brought us together as one. What is more life-affirming than music? I wish you a good Forum. [\[Slide 15- can stay up\]](#)