

The Richmond Reckoning

What Samuel Sitta and Harrison Mwakyembe Taught Africa About Power

By Parminder Singh | mdbreform.com | March 2026

Executive Summary

This article is a first-person account and institutional tribute by Parminder Brar, former Lead Financial Management Specialist and Lead Governance Specialist at the World Bank, who had a direct role in the events described. It documents the Richmond parliamentary inquiry of 2007–2008 — the investigation that forced the resignation of Tanzanian Prime Minister Edward Lowassa and two Cabinet Ministers, the first time a sitting Prime Minister in Tanzania had been compelled to resign by a parliamentary probe.

The article makes three arguments. First, that the Richmond inquiry did not emerge from a vacuum: it was built on an evidentiary ecosystem constructed over years by individuals of exceptional integrity — notably Ludovick Utouh (Controller and Auditor General), Dr Shrima (Director General, PPRA), and John Cheyo MP (Public Accounts Committee) — and triggered by a procurement review whose findings were presented to Tanzania's entire budget support donor community on 31 October 2007, thirteen days before Speaker Sitta authorised the Select Committee.

Second, that the structural corruption enabling Richmond — the IPP cost trap consuming 96% of TANESCO's revenues, the governance vacuum, the ministerial override of basic procurement processes, and the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau's declaration that the Richmond contract was "transparent and competitive" — had not been exceptional for years. The PCCB's finding directly contradicted the PPRA's own audit and was subsequently characterised by Mwakyembe's committee as a whitewash.

Third, what Sitta did as Speaker was constitutionally exceptional. Over two years before the inquiry began, he quietly amended Parliament's Standing Orders to give committees genuine investigative power — financial independence, the right to summon officials, and the authority to compel testimony. He built the instrument before anyone knew it would be needed. The personal cost paid by both men — a near-fatal road accident, a hospitalisation with unexplained causes, a newspaper banned, a wife arrested, a speakership not renewed — is documented in full.

Introduction

October 31, 2007, I stood before Tanzania's entire budget support donor community in Dar es Salaam — the World Bank, DFID, CIDA, the European Commission, the embassies of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Ireland — and presented the findings of the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability Review of Tanzania's parastatals. As Lead Financial Management Specialist at the World Bank, I was co-team leader on that assessment. One of our six PPRA case studies concerned an emergency power tender awarded to a company called Richmond Development Company LLC.

Thirteen days later, Speaker Samuel Sitta authorised the Select Committee of Parliament.

I am not claiming credit for what followed. The parliamentary inquiry that Sitta and his chosen chair, Dr Harrison Mwakyembe, then constructed was an act of institutional courage that no external diagnostic exercise could manufacture or substitute for. But I have a particular vantage point on the Richmond affair — and it is from that vantage point that I want to pay tribute to two men who, in my professional judgment, built something that Africa's governance reformers are still learning from.

They did not just expose a scandal. They rewired the institutional logic of an entire parliament.

I. The Evidence That Already Existed

The annual review of Tanzania's General Budget Support was, in those years, the most consequential governance event in the Tanzanian fiscal calendar. Tanzania was receiving approximately \$800 million a year in direct budget support from its development partners. The annual review was where that relationship was tested: where donors assessed fiduciary risk, where the Government of Tanzania defended its systems, and where the implicit bargain between sovereignty and accountability was renegotiated.

The PEFA review I presented that October had spent months examining nine parastatals and government bodies. TANESCO — the national power utility — was among the most troubled. What the PPRA's own audit of TANESCO had found regarding Richmond was not ambiguous. The Tender Board had disqualified all eight bids in March 2006, explicitly recording that Richmond's submission was the poorest technical proposal received and that the company had demonstrated no previous experience in similar projects. TANESCO had, in other words, done its job correctly. The Ministry of Energy and Minerals then took the bid documents away from TANESCO, processed them internally, and selected Richmond anyway. The contract was signed at night, 35 days after bid validity had expired, with no performance bond.

Richmond defaulted within months and was quietly replaced by Dowans Holdings SA — a different entity, another layer of opacity.

All of this was in the PPRA's own records. The formal evidence trail was not hidden. What was missing — in October 2007, and for some time afterward — was a political actor willing to use it.

II. A Sector Built to Fail

To understand why Richmond was possible, you need to understand what TANESCO had already become before Richmond arrived. By the time the fraudulent tender was awarded in 2006, Tanzania's national power utility was not simply under pressure — it was in a condition of structured insolvency, locked into contractual arrangements that guaranteed its financial destruction regardless of how efficiently it was managed.

The central mechanism was the IPP cost structure. Tanzania had, over the preceding decade, signed Power Purchase Agreements with two Independent Power Producers — IPTL and Songas — whose capacity charges were fixed regardless of actual power delivered. By 2006, payments to those two entities alone consumed 96 cents of every dollar TANESCO collected in revenues. That is not a procurement irregularity. It is institutional capture — a national utility legally obligated to transfer the overwhelming majority of its income to two private counterparties, leaving four cents in the dollar for staff, maintenance, investment and everything else.

The consequences were visible everywhere. Installed capacity was around 1,000 MW for a country of nearly 40 million people, with electricity coverage below 10% nationally and below 2% in rural areas. Around a third of all power generated was lost in transmission before it reached a consumer — losses far above any reasonable benchmark — because there was no money for the maintenance and investment the grid required. Per-unit generation costs had risen 60% in four years. Operating costs had more than doubled. And through all of it, the IPP payments ran on, guaranteed by sovereign commitment.

The governance architecture matched the financial one. At the time of our 2008 PEFA review of TANESCO, there was no functioning Board of Directors. The Terms of Reference for the Board had been drafted by the Managing Director — the very person the Board existed to oversee. The Ministry of Energy, the Board, and Management had no clear separation of authority. The owner — the Government of Tanzania — had not established a stable long-term strategy for the utility it owned. No one was in charge in any meaningful sense, which meant that no one was accountable in any meaningful sense either.

Into this environment, Richmond arrived. It was not an anomaly. It was the logical product of a sector where procurement rules were routinely bypassed, where ministerial override of technical assessments was normalised, and where the absence of a functioning governance structure meant there was no institutional actor with both the authority and the incentive to say no. TANESCO's own Tender Board did say no — three times. The Ministry simply removed the process from their hands.

Richmond was not an anomaly. It was the logical product of a sector where ministerial override of technical assessments had become normalised.

III. The World Sitta and Mwakyembe Walked Into

The Tanzania they inhabited was one where Parliament's primary function, in practice, was ratification. The Executive governed; the legislature provided procedural cover. This was not unique to Tanzania — it was the dominant operating model across Sub-Saharan Africa, and frankly, it was the model that many in the international community had quietly learned to work around. Annual reviews could document procurement failures. PPRA could publish findings. Donors could raise concerns in carefully worded aide-memoires. None of it compelled executive accountability.

The deeper structural problem — the IPP cost structure, the IPTL and Songas arrangements, the governance vacuum — was known to the donor community, documented in successive PEFA reviews, flagged in World Bank assessments. It had been known for years. It had not been addressed because addressing it required confronting a web of contractual obligations, ministerial interests, and political relationships that no external actor had the standing or the leverage to unpick. It required someone inside the system, with constitutional authority, to act.

When Sitta authorised the Select Committee in November 2007, he was making precisely that claim — that Parliament had both the authority and the obligation to act where the Executive had not merely failed but actively obstructed. Richmond was the entry point; the structural pathology of the sector was the larger target. The documented evidence existed. The PPRA had produced it. The PEFA process had assembled it. The donor community had received it. What was missing was a political actor willing to force a reckoning.

IV. What I Saw in Mwakyembe

Harrison Mwakyembe was chosen to chair the Committee because Sitta understood what the inquiry required. This was not a task for a generalist politician willing to wave a banner and declare victory after a few uncomfortable hearings. It demanded forensic patience — the kind of methodical, sustained pressure that could penetrate layers of orchestrated obstruction without ever giving the other side a procedural escape route.

I had occasion to observe Mwakyembe in action. What struck me was his refusal to be theatrical when the evidence itself was devastating. He did not need to perform outrage. He simply kept asking the next question. When witnesses arrived delivering what he memorably called the Wimbo — the Song, identical scripted testimonies from officials who had clearly been coordinated from a single point — he did not expose this with dramatics. He catalogued it, methodically, until the repetition itself became the evidence.

The PPRA findings I had presented to donors in October were the tip of a documented iceberg. Mwakyembe used the Public Procurement Act of 2004 as a scalpel, working

through each procedural violation with the precision of a legal scholar who also understood procurement architecture. No procurement plan. No cost estimates. Tender Board findings overridden. Contract signed after bid validity had lapsed. No performance bond. Seventeen separate deficiencies, each one documented, each one brought before witnesses who had been instructed to sing the same song.

When officials in Dar es Salaam insisted Richmond Development Company was a substantial American energy firm, Mwakyembe's response was not rhetorical — he went to look. What the Committee found in Texas was, in effect, nothing: no operational headquarters, no generation capacity, no corporate substance. A ghost company had been awarded a contract worth hundreds of millions of dollars, with the full connivance of the Prime Minister's office. You cannot argue with a photograph of an empty office. Mwakyembe understood this.

The Wimbo — identical scripted testimonies from officials coordinated from a single point — became the evidence itself.

V. Sitta's Constitutional Gamble

The courage belonged to both men, but it expressed itself differently. Mwakyembe's was the courage of the craftsman — disciplined, technical, relentless. Sitta's was the courage of the institution-builder, which is a rarer and, in my view, more consequential thing.

Sitta understood that the inquiry's findings would only matter if Parliament itself had the legitimacy to deliver them. He therefore invested extraordinary care in the procedural integrity of the process: televised sessions, a technically competent committee, a refusal to allow the Executive to constrain the Committee's access to documents, a flat rejection of Permanent Secretary Mwakapugi's attempt to restrict the inquiry to pre-selected pages. Every one of these decisions was a statement about what Parliament was, and what it was not.

His doctrine of Kasi na Viwango — Speed and Standard — was not a slogan. It was a diagnostic of everything that African legislatures had been failing to provide: timely, high-quality oversight that the public could trust and the Executive could not dismiss. Sitta believed that if Parliament performed at that standard once, on something this consequential, it would change what was politically possible for every parliament that followed.

There was a story doing the rounds in Dar es Salaam at the time — one I heard from people close to the inquiry and cannot independently corroborate, but which I set down here because it captures the atmosphere of those months better than anything verifiable. During the inquiry, the pressure from the Executive to discover the committee's findings before the formal presentation was intense. Sitta was travelling in London when, it was said, his briefcase was taken by a hotel attendant between the lobby and his room — and returned with its contents copied. A draft of the report had been in it. Lowassa's camp read what they found, concluded the committee had uncovered nothing of significance,

and relaxed. They were, accordingly, unprepared for what Mwakyembe stood up and read to the Bunge on February 8, 2008. The draft in the briefcase, the story goes, had been a plant — a decoy document, left precisely to be found. Whether or not the account is true in every detail, it describes something that those of us watching from the inside found entirely plausible. Sitta was not merely brave. He was, by every account, several moves ahead.

He was right about the larger gamble too. The resignation of Prime Minister Edward Lowassa — the first sitting Tanzanian PM forced from office by a parliamentary inquiry — was not simply a political event. It was a proof of concept.

VI. What the Reformer's Lens Demands We Notice

I write for an audience that follows multilateral development bank reform, public financial management, and institutional accountability across Africa. The Richmond case is instructive precisely because it did not unfold as the standard accountability model predicts it should.

The standard model assumes sequential logic: external diagnostics surface problems, donors apply leverage, governments reform. Tanzania had working diagnostics — the PPRA was functioning, the annual review process was rigorous, the World Bank's PEFA assessments were technically credible. Tanzania had donor leverage — \$800 million a year in budget support concentrates minds. None of it had resolved the structural corruption in the energy sector: not the IPTL arrangements, not the Songas capacity charges, not the governance vacuum at TANESCO. And none of it produced executive accountability for Richmond.

What produced accountability was a Speaker who chose to act and a committee chair who knew how to use what had already been documented. This is not an argument against diagnostics or donor leverage — the parliamentary inquiry drew directly on the evidentiary record that the PPRA and PEFA processes had established. It is an argument about what the limiting factor actually is. The Richmond inquiry demonstrates that the problem is almost never the absence of documented evidence. Mwakyembe did not need more information. He needed the mandate, the protection, and the personal fortitude to act on what was already known. Sitta provided the first two. Mwakyembe provided the third.

The structural pathology of Tanzania's energy sector — the IPP cost trap, the governance vacuum, the decade of normalised procurement failure — remained largely unresolved after the Richmond inquiry. Lowassa resigned. The contract was cancelled. The deeper architecture that had made Richmond possible continued. That is not a criticism of Sitta and Mwakyembe; it is a measure of how deeply embedded structural corruption becomes when it is allowed to compound over years. What they achieved was to establish, irrefutably, that accountability was possible. That matters. It changes the political calculus for every subsequent actor in every subsequent crisis.

The limiting factor is almost never the absence of documented evidence. It is the absence of individuals willing to act on what is already known.

VII. The Price They Paid

I have used the phrase 'considerable personal and political cost' in this article. I want to be precise about what that meant for Harrison Mwakyembe, because I know it firsthand and because the record deserves to be stated plainly.

In 2008, months after the Richmond report was tabled and Lowassa had resigned, Mwakyembe was travelling from Dodoma back toward Dar es Salaam when his vehicle overturned near Lupembe, outside Iringa. He and his driver sustained serious injuries. He was treated initially at Iringa Regional Hospital before being airlifted to Dar es Salaam for further care. The road between Dodoma and Dar es Salaam is one of the most travelled in Tanzania. The circumstances of the accident — a truck forcing a vehicle off the road, on a route Mwakyembe used regularly as the MP for Kyela — generated immediate and widespread speculation in Tanzanian political circles. I was aware of what was being said at the time. I do not assert more than that. What I can say is that no one who knew what Mwakyembe had done, and what he had cost the people around the Prime Minister's office, would have been surprised that something happened to him on that road.

The threats did not stop there. In 2011, while serving as Deputy Minister of Infrastructure, Mwakyembe was hospitalised with a severe and unexplained skin condition and flown to India for specialised treatment. The Tanzanian press reported openly on allegations that he had been poisoned. A Swahili newspaper ran the headline *Maisha ya Mwakyembe hatarini* — Mwakyembe's life in danger. The government subsequently banned that newspaper for two years. The ban was imposed by Mwakyembe himself, by then serving as Minister of Information — a fact that carries its own complicated weight, and that I note without editorial comment.

I raise these episodes not to make Mwakyembe a martyr — he would reject that framing, and his subsequent career demonstrates a man who continued to operate with energy and purpose inside a system that had tried to break him. I raise them because the governance reform community has a habit of celebrating institutional courage in the abstract while glossing over what it actually extracts from those who exercise it. A near-fatal road accident. A hospitalisation with unexplained causes. A newspaper banned. These are not footnotes to the Richmond story. They are part of it.

The governance reform community celebrates institutional courage in the abstract while glossing over what it actually extracts from those who exercise it.

VIII. A Legacy Still Being Written

Samuel Sitta went on to serve as Minister of East African Cooperation. Harrison Mwakyembe served across multiple cabinet portfolios. That both men moved into executive roles after their parliamentary work is not without irony — but it also speaks to the nature of political courage in complex systems. They used the positions they had, when they had them, to do something that mattered.

After the report had been presented and the resignations had come, I travelled to Dodoma. Sitta hosted a gathering — around twenty MPs around the table, drawn from across the political spectrum, still processing what they had collectively achieved. The World Bank had supported Tanzania's Parliament through the Public Financial Management Reform Programme, and it fell to me to say something on behalf of the Bank and the entire donor community. I stood up and told them that what we had witnessed in Tanzania was not merely African good practice. It was global good practice. I meant it. I had worked in public financial management across Sub-Saharan Africa. I had sat in rooms where parliamentary oversight was performed as theatre, where committee reports were written to be filed, where the gap between what was documented and what was acted upon was treated as a permanent feature of the landscape. What Sitta had authorised and Mwakyembe had executed was something different in kind, not just degree. The MPs around that table understood what had been said. So did Sitta.

The blueprint they built in 2007-2008 is still studied. The Richmond inquiry is taught in governance programmes, cited in parliamentary procedure reviews, and referenced in every serious discussion of African legislative oversight. It deserves to be. But more than the report, more than the resignations, more than the contract termination — what Sitta and Mwakyembe left behind was a demonstrated possibility. They showed that a parliament in Sub-Saharan Africa could, when led with integrity, hold a Prime Minister to account on the basis of documented evidence that the system had already produced but lacked the courage to use.

Demonstrated possibilities matter more than theoretical ones. They shift what reformers believe they can ask for, and what citizens believe they can expect.

I presented the PPRA findings on Richmond to Tanzania's donors on October 31, 2007. The findings went into a report. The report joined a file. Thirteen days later, Samuel Sitta did something with what was in that file that I — and most of the room that day — had not anticipated. I have been thinking about the distance between those two acts ever since. It is the distance between accountability documented and accountability delivered. Sitta and Mwakyembe closed it.

In the years before I left Tanzania, Harrison Mwakyembe and I had dinner on the beach during an accountability conference in Dar es Salaam. The sun was setting over the Indian Ocean. We talked about what had been built, and what remained unfinished. At some point in the evening he turned to me and said: come back, take a shamba, settle down here by the beach. It was, I will admit, a genuinely appealing proposition in that light, at that hour. I have thought about it since — not just as an invitation to a place, but as a measure of the man who extended it. A person who had survived a road accident that

should have killed him, who had been flown to India for reasons that were never fully explained, who had operated for years inside a system that wanted him neutralised — and who was sitting on a beach at sunset, in good spirits, inviting a friend to stay.

That is what I want to say about Harrison Mwakyembe and Samuel Sitta. That institutional courage is not a product of circumstance. It is a choice. They made it, at considerable personal and political cost — and as I have tried to show, that cost was real — and Tanzania, and Africa, is the better for it.

The author is a former Lead Financial Management Specialist and Lead Governance Specialist at the World Bank, with field experience across Sub-Saharan Africa. He was Co-Team Leader of the PEFA 2007 Parastatals and Government Bodies Assessment in Tanzania and co-presented the 2008 PEFA Analysis of TANESCO with the Embassy of Sweden. He operates mdbreform.com, an independent platform for policy analysis and advocacy focused on multilateral development bank reform.