

CDC Ebola Response Oral History Project

The Reminiscences of

Daddy Hassan Kamara

David J. Sencer CDC Museum

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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Daddy Hassan Kamara

Interviewed by Samuel Robson and Terri Heyns
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Interview 1 of 1

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Q: This is Sam Robson, sitting here today with Mr. Daddy Hassan Kamara. Today's date is October 7th, 2016, and we're in the audio recording—well, in the press room, actually, at CDC's Roybal Campus in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm interviewing Mr. Daddy Hassan Kamara as part of the CDC Ebola Response Oral History Project. Daddy Hassan, thank you so much for being here. It's a real honor to have you here with us.

Kamara: Thank you.

Q: For the record, would you mind stating for me your full name?

Kamara: My name is Daddy Hassan Kamara.

Q: Thank you. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

Kamara: I am a Sierra Leonean. I was born on the 27th of February, 1985. I was born in a village called Kamakwie, in one of the districts in Sierra Leone.

Q: Of course, we want to get to the Ebola section of our interview pretty soon, but I'm interested in your life before that. Can you tell me just a bit about growing up in Sierra Leone?

Kamara: Thank you very much. It's an opportunity really for me at least to speak out about my life before Ebola. Once I graduated from Methodist Boys' High School, I started my O level examination [General Certificate of Education Examination] in 1996. Then I was once a professional footballer in Sierra Leone playing for [unclear] under twenty, national team in Sierra Leone, and also I have played for Diamond Stars in Freetown. A premier league player, about six or seven seasons. I was there with my club. And also, finding myself in my community just after I returned back from Freetown, because it is a provincial team anyway. So, since I returned back from Freetown to come and train my family, I was the youth chairman, the youth chairman in that particular community. At least I'm trying to get the youth, spreading good information about how they can really save their lives because I met them with this kind of [unclear] way with more fighting. They do not love each other. So I try to bring them together as a very peaceful youth because I believe in—I don't believe in brutality. I believe in people having a passion to do something very, very important in the community. Really, I have done a lot in my community like seeing people suffering, usually like interrogate with people, meet them, share with them, support them because I like development. Development is part of me, really. I think these are some of the things that—before Ebola, I really worked within my community.

Q: Thanks so much for sharing that. Can you tell me a bit about when you first started hearing about Ebola, when it started beginning.

Kamara: Well, it's very great because it's very, very—really, it's painful. I came to know about this epidemic in Sierra Leone on the 25th of May when His Excellency, the President, Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, our president, totally [unclear] the media and voicing out that “Sierra Leoneans, let's be very, very careful, there is a virus already that is called Ebola virus.” With enough messaging from the president, that “People, you have to adhere to some of these measures, some of these precautions. You have to get frequent hand washing.” These are some of the IPC [infection prevention and control] instructions that the president announced, at least to Sierra Leoneans, that we should follow. Then also like, if someone died, you have someone that you're supposed to call, rather than you go and play with that person, we should push away those things. With this, we say, ah. So Ebola—because we don't even know what is Ebola. It's a very strange thing to us in Sierra Leone, but still, [unclear] times when people don't even believe what the president is trying to voice out, but some really started putting these things in practice. Like for me in general, because I totally adhered to abstinence. When the president made his announcement, I saw it as something very, very important for me. I'm totally abstained. Then in fact, my movements, I slowed down in my movement. I never went where people gathered. I always made sure that I used frequent hand washing. Usually, you can play a part because in my community, since I'm the chairman in my community, I do something like community mobilization, having my megaphone, pass around in the community to announce about Ebola that [unclear] families, friends, let's see this thing as

very, very important because Ebola is real. Let us put some of these practices in place. I usually did that. Then also, I usually bought chlorine and shared chlorine with people, that they should use this chlorine to put inside water for them to usually apply the precautions. With this, then when someone is sick in my community, I made sure that I had a team, an immediate team that I'm supposed to call, especially what I heard from the president. When I heard this from the president that we're supposed to call 1-1-7, I always made sure that if someone is sick, I called 1-1-7 for them to come with the team so that they'll come and take this person to the hospital.

But it is a time when even though I'm doing this in my community, I was totally abstained from all these things, but all of a sudden—to be real, the reality, that's why if should have—and having my T-shirt here, you will see all the ones that I lost. I lost nine of my relatives, nine of my loved ones. I contracted the disease from my mother [Lamrana Kamara]. When she's sick, because I just saw her lying down. I said, “Mother, what is wrong with you?” But she said to me that, “Daddy, it's just a cold, I have a cold.” I said, “Oh. Since they have announced that if someone is sick, I think the hospital is more paramount for you to go there rather than lie down here.” I started to observe the way she behaved, until the following day on the 30th of October, I decided, let me just take her to the hospital. When I took her to the hospital, when the doctor diagnosed her, the result came out, doctor said, “She is suffering from diabetes and a heart problem.” So right then, I think it's not an Ebola case because they have already diagnosed her. In the hospital, I started to wipe her tears and try to give her food to eat. With all these things, just after all of a sudden, she died on the 2nd of November. When she died on the 2nd of

November, I said wow, I started crying, fell down on top of her, then started crying. Also, my father [Samuel E. Kamara] is with me by then in the hospital. My two brothers [Abdulai and Ibrahim Kamara], my sisters, all of us, we are there in the hospital. All of us, we started crying, crying, crying for our mother. One day, about four days because they took her to the mortuary, so she spent there about seven days before they took a swab. When they took a swab, the results came and said that she's an Ebola case. All of a sudden, all of us have already interrogated now with her.

We buried her on the 9th of November. When we buried her on the 9th of November, on the 12th of November, I started having the signs and symptoms. I said, wow, what is this? I know that I have already contracted this disease. I advised my friends not to really come in touch with me. I decided to isolate myself because I already knew it's Ebola, I have contracted it from my mother. By then, they call for the team, the 1-1-7. They came with an ambulance. It's so many, you can see so many community people, the pastors, the imams, they are praying for me. Some are crying because they took me to the holding center. I left my father, my wife [Aminata Turay], brother, sisters, all of them at home by then, so when they took me to the treatment center, I mean the holding center, I spent there five days, wherein they tested my blood and they took my blood to the lab. Then when it came back with the results, oh, the results show positive. So I was positive with the infection. But before I left the holding center, two of my brothers, they paid a visit to me. They paid a visit to me to counsel me, say "Daddy, you have to be patient, you have to really put your mind down. Don't worry, you will be okay." I said, "Yeah, no problem, by the grace of God." They left me and returned back home. Then, just after I was

positive, they took me to the treatment center. I was at the treatment center trying to recuperate with treatment, just after about eight days, when they took me to the treatment center, PTS 1 [Police Training School 1]. Just after eight to nine days, I heard that my father, they have taken him to Kenema, [unclear] Ebola treatment center. He was infected with the disease. My father died here in Kenema. He died on the 17th of November, just after my mother died on the 2nd.

It's not an easy thing for me when I'm explaining. It's very painful for me. It's not easy. It's just a bit of a thing that I don't normally want to relive. It's not easy.

When my father died on the 17th, I am still trying to recuperate at the treatment center. Two of my brothers paid a visit to me just after my father died, I saw them, they just bring them back, yes, at the same treatment center where I find myself: my two elder brothers. I said, wow, what is wrong now with my family? These two, they have contracted the disease? From there, two of them, they go and find their own ward, where they can treat them. But since I was the first person that took to the treatment center, I was already starting to bulk up. So I left my ward, trying to assist them in their own ward. But all of a sudden, the two of them passed off. Just after my father died on the 17th, the elder one died on the 20th. Three days. Three days. The elder one died on the 20th. So I said, wow, what is going on? I left my wife at home. She also contracted the disease at home. They called for 1-1-7 to come, but there was no response. So she died at home. Just after three days. The 17th to the 20th, my elder brother died; therefore, the 20th to the 23rd, my wife died. Three days again, my wife died at home. I said, wow, what is going

on? My other elder brother at the treatment center died in front of me the 28th of November. With this, I am totally finished. Still with God's blessing, prayer upon prayer, I have just seen everything, looking at everything, that I don't even know what is going on with my family.

I come to discharge on the 6th of December. When I discharged the 6th of December, I turned back home. I was at home when one of my sons, Michael [Kamara], died in front of me at home. I called, I tried to call for the team, but there is no response then. Michael died on the 8th. I discharged on the 6th of December, he died on the 8th. My sister, my younger sister, she too died on the 13th. After the 8th, the 13th. So automatically, I have lost about eight first. These eight lives that I have lost, I say, oh, I am finished, I am totally finished. I'm now without no family. Only my stepmother [Amina Kamara], that's who I am looking up to. She's the one that's really passionate now with me, be close now with me. All of a sudden, the 23rd of January, she passed off. So I lost nine of my loved ones. Totally lost nine of them. I look at myself, whoa, I don't have family. I'm really—it's not an easy thing for me. I've really gone through it. Then, I really know what I've gone through. The epidemic really ravished all my family.

Presently, I do have a family again in Sierra Leone. Then also, I'm facing a lot of stigma and discrimination in the community that I found myself. But [unclear], we decided to really form the association. We started to form the survivors' association, that we that survived—I came up with the initiative for us to form the association so that people will see us as vulnerable ones. Because some of us have lost all our families. It's not an easy

thing. So I'm coming to form the association and trying, fighting hard at least to really know that we too, we are patriotic citizens, we're the survivors. Because the association is a legitimate association. We are sanctioned by His Excellency the President, Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, using us as—doing community mobilization. Some of the quarantined homes, we go there. Build confidence in some of the lives of people, explain our challenges, explain my challenges to them, my story to them that you have to be patient. I have gone through it. For me, Daddy Hassan, I lost all of my family. So do just be patient when you're sick. Just call 1-1-7. Don't be afraid. They will take you to the treatment center. Then, you will come back. As you can see me, Daddy Hassan. So with this, I think we formed the association to complement the efforts of the government by then in the fight against Ebola, responding [unclear]. We have about 4,052 survivors in Sierra Leone. Then also, we have a lot of orphans, about ten to twelve thousand orphans now. We are now advocating for these people because we are their leaders now because I am the national spokesman for the survivors' association in Sierra Leone now. I think advocacy is the thing we should really focus our attention to the world because since we have the passion for our members, the vulnerable ones, I think for us to really come out here to explain our challenges, what we are facing in terms of the livelihood aspect, capacity building.

Then also, we have what we call “aftermath illness” now. The health issues. Just after treatment center, we turned back to our community. We are facing a lot of complications with the survivors in Sierra Leone. A lot of complications. We have twenty-three health complications now that we are facing due to aftermath illness. Some of the hard

treatment, because some of the medicine that they poured in our system made some of these complications, started inflaming out. So we have to detail the joint pain, muscle pains, headache, eye problems. We have some survivors that have cataracts in their eyes, uveitis, menstrual problems, visual problems. We have a lot that we are facing in Sierra Leone.

I think our presence in Europe and also in the world is also to say thanks to organizations that participated in the fact that there is [no] Ebola in Sierra Leone. That's why we are here, to say thanks to them, because we're more happy because they too played a part to see that the virus, the epidemic, really stopped in our country now as it is. Also, to advocate for our survivors, the orphans, the widows, those that lost their husbands, the widows. Some of them are not really in that good mood because they are with no husband now. We are advocating for them at least to the world to see that these people are vulnerable. Then also, we decided to come because if the end has something for you people, you too have to render something. Since we have survived Ebola, yeah. What we too have something to play in the world, to sacrifice in the world because thinking about our immune system, it's more stronger. We want to really see ourselves as a force, as a stand-by force that should in case if any outbreak comes, like for instance in America, that they will use us as a stand-by force. So that we will be at the forefront by assisting, so that it will not kill the life of many. So once more, I thank you. Let me just stop here because I know how I feel. That's why our motto, we say, "he who feels it knows it." Thank you very much. Once more, my name is Daddy Hassan Kamara, the national spokesman for the Sierra Leone Association of Ebola Survivors. Thank you.

Q: Thank you so much for honoring us with your story, Daddy Hassan. That is very powerful.

Q2: Can I ask you one thing? If you were talking with a donor or someone that could support some of the work, what would you say is the greatest need right now?

Kamara: The greatest need that I am hoping, because thinking about the survivors, the livelihood aspects. The livelihood aspects really because there is no livelihood support. They are suffering. Like clothing, education, these medical issues, think about the capacity building for them to get, to capacitate them.

Something just brings my mind back. When they took me out to the treatment center, they burnt everything, they got out everything inside my bedroom. They burnt everything. You can see now, some survivors, they are not with proper clothing, housing. All these challenges that we are facing. These are some of the things, basically. The health issues, the livelihood support, the capacity building for them to see themselves as very, very important people now. These are the challenges because there is a lot of stigmatization. Also, the psychosocial area is a very important thing because thinking about me explaining now my challenges, my story, looking about the mental faculty, sometimes I just sit alone, start to cry because this brings my mind back to reflect on all the ones that I lost. That's why we are asking donor partners that [unclear] to really see

the survivors in Sierra Leone, the orphans, the widows, as vulnerable people. Whatever help, I think. They will be there at least to assist us.

Q2: Could you give me an example of maybe one story or one orphan that you have talked with or worked with that you could tell me more about?

Kamara: The orphans? Yes. In fact, for me, I have about seven orphans that I am taking care of. The two of my brothers that died, their children. I am taking care of them. Then, like I'm [unclear], these children, they have lost their mothers, but not in Ebola, by death. So now they are orphans, seven of them. Having them together is not easy for me. It's a lot of challenges for even me to get food for them, except I go down the street, strut for some time, then when I turn back home before they have something to eat. I think this home, for us to have something like a home, this orphanage I think is very, very important, orphanage homes. I think these are some of the things. There are so many challenges, really.

Q: Thank you so much. It's been a real privilege.

Q2: Thank you. It's an honor to meet you and to talk with you and hear your story.

Kamara: It's okay, no problem. It's a pleasure.

END