



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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PARKER: This is Nealin Parker. I'm at the National Elections Commission (NEC) in Sierra Leone and I'm speaking with Idrissa Kamara. If we could just begin with you explaining a bit about your role, your position and what you did.

KAMARA: *My name is Idrissa Kamara. I am the district electoral officer in charge of Bonthe District. As district electoral officer, I am the head of the district office. I'm representing the commission in the district, and I'm responsible for all institutional tasks such as planning, managing and implementing electoral operations, including voter registration, voter education, recruitment, training and supervision of staff, liaising with community stakeholders and updating them on election matters.*

PARKER: What would you say are the goals of your office or the mission?

KAMARA: *The mission is to ensure that we conduct credible elections, transparent elections, and to ensure that these elections promote democracy in the district.*

PARKER: In some election settings, it is mainly the international community that is running the election, whereas in others the National Elections Commission is in charge. Where would you put Sierra Leone on that spectrum?

KAMARA: *Well, for Sierra Leone, the National Elections Commission is charged with the responsibility of conducting the elections. We have this mandate from the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, from the Electoral Laws Act of 2002 and from the Local Government Act 2004. The only problem experienced in implementing this responsibility is the aspect of funding, which to a greater extent is being handled by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Sierra Leone through the basket fund. The National Elections Commission has this responsibility, but because of lack of sufficient funding from the government, we have to work with international partners to ensure that we accomplish our mission.*

PARKER: What would you say are the biggest challenges that arose during the election, during the election environment?

KAMARA: *The biggest challenge is to ensure that the people, the general public, understand the electoral process and accept the electoral outcome. This is so because, in previous times, the Elections Commission was not seen as being neutral, or impartial in the conduct of elections. So to ensure public acceptance of an election outcome, first of all, you have to make sure that all of the activities that the commission embarks on involve stakeholders and clearly explain the process to them so that everybody knows what the commission is doing. This will, at the end of the day, lead to an acceptable electoral outcome.*

PARKER: How would you characterize the security situation?

KAMARA: *In the past election—that is, the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections—there was more violence. But we were able to handle the situation, which did not go out of hand. But for the local government elections, 2008, there was not much security challenge. As for my own district, there was almost none.*

PARKER: What about the restrictions of international organizations or aid donors? Were there any restrictions that made putting on the elections difficult? You can say no if you don't think so.

KAMARA: *No, no.*

PARKER: Perfect. You're answering very efficiently—that's good. When were your offices established, the district offices?

KAMARA: *In November 2005. We started effective work in the district in January 2006. We were recruited in October 2005, started work in the capital city in November to December. In January we were sent to the district. So we started effective work in January 2006.*

PARKER: What will the NEC do now after the elections?

KAMARA: *According to the commission's plan, post election activities will include capacity building of staff and the creation of an electoral institute where staff will be able to learn more about election management. Also, the Commission will be networking with other electoral management bodies in the subregions—such as Liberia, Ghana—in order to expand our experience in election management. So basically it is capacity building.*

PARKER: One of the things that is very important for an election management body for a National Elections Commission is independence. What were some ways that the National Elections Commission maintained independence from the government or a political party?

KAMARA: *The fact that the commission makes the decision and in this case when I'm talking about the commission, we have five commissioners, they are the policy makers. They make decisions. They are not answerable to any other authority. That is the highest authority within the commission. Once decisions are made, these decisions are implemented at the field level. But before this time, the commission was answerable to the president, because if you look at the 1978 act, the commission was answerable to the president. This means that they [the Commissioners] cannot make important or key decisions without consulting with the president. But as of 1991 that has been changed.*

So now the commission has policy makers and these are the commissioners. They make decisions and these decisions are implemented without consulting the executive arm of the government or whatever arm of the government.

So basically in terms of policy making and policy implementation, the commission is totally independent. The only aspect in which the commission is still not independent is the area of funding, because the government gives some money, some funding to the commission, and the international community gives some money as well. And you know, whenever you are in control of the funding you might want to dictate. Like in the past elections, the government funded about 30 percent of the whole electoral operations and the international community funded about 70 percent. Even within that 30 percent, most times funding does not come when it is needed and it affects the electoral operations. That affects the way elections are managed.

PARKER: In this election did you have a sense that the funding came on time, when it needed to?

KAMARA: *Yes, yes, because there were no complaints. Because in the past elections, even to pay polling staff, they have had to wait for some time because the money was not disbursed to the commission on time.*

PARKER: Do you have a sense of what the budget for this election was?

KAMARA: *No.*

PARKER: Were you handling any of the funds at your level, or did you only receive funds? I'm sorry, receive materials.

KAMARA: *Yes, I received funds as well as materials. All funding, as far as my district is concerned, goes through me. I am accountable for all funds disbursed to the districts. That's why, when we are in the field coordination office at the headquarters, you heard our colleagues talking of retirement; this means making financial returns. At the end of the day the district electoral officer is accountable for whatever funds are disbursed to the district.*

PARKER: And what were you funding? What were you paying?

KAMARA: *For every electoral activity, we have, we pay for delivery of either registration or polling materials, for retrieval of polling materials, for voter education. Although we have voter-education officers, they alone cannot do the voter-education thing, so we have to hire locals in their communities, in their wards, and we have to pay them. The commission is paying through the district account and we pay them.*

We also have funds in terms of running the offices. We call it petty cash. It is given monthly. We also have funds for vehicles, for other things, for storage, etc. We are given funds for various activities. Sometimes we are given funds for conducting meetings with stakeholders, for conducting nominations for political parties, etc. So we receive funds for various activities.

PARKER: Can you think of creative ways to diminish the cost of an election? Elections in general can be very expensive, but that varies greatly across settings. Do you have any ideas of how to make the electoral process less expensive if they conduct it next time?

KAMARA: *Yes, one is building the capacity of the local staff. For instance, before we started preparations for the 2007 elections, the commission embarked on a course called basic electoral administration course. This is to introduce election administrative principles to all staff. So you find out that at the end of the day you have people who have knowledge and experience in election administration. So the need for international advice will be diminished because the money paid to international advisers was too much. The salary of a single adviser is even up to the salary of 10 permanent staff. So building the capacity, not only of the staff but also the general public, will ensure that you have the human resources that are ready when you want to conduct the election, that you can look up to rather than each time you want to conduct elections you hire this expertise and you have to pay them a lot. So that is one way to minimize the cost of administering the elections.*

The other thing is also to involve the stakeholders so that the team becomes—they feel that they own the process and not to always rely on international support. For instance, in the last elections, the commission involved the security personnel, like the military, in the operations. They not only provided security, but

also vehicles, they provide vehicles in this whole operation. But the fact that they were there, there was very little need to hire a lot of private firms or security personnel to be around the offices. So all this, involving stakeholders in the electoral process, will go a long way to minimize the cost.

PARKER: Perfect. How were staff members recruited and how were poll workers recruited?

KAMARA: *We are recruited through a competitive method. Vacancies were advertised, applications received, short-listed. We went for exams. After exams, we went for interviews, and after the interviews we were recruited, trained and then sent to our respective locations. So it was very transparent and competitive. It is not based on—it is based on what you can deliver, it is not based on any connection. I came into the commission without knowing anybody. Of course, that helped a lot, because if you come to the commission thinking that you have a connection with a political person, it means that when you come that person will sort of influence the way you operate within the commission. As far as I know, I came into the commission without knowing anybody. I came, applied, used my certificate, applied, went for tests, went for an interview and finally was recruited. So it was basically a very competitive, transparent method.*

PARKER: Great. And poll workers, how were they recruited?

KAMARA: *Come again?*

PARKER: Poll workers, the people who were there on the day of election, the very short-term staff.

KAMARA: *We call them ad hoc, they are temporary staff.*

PARKER: Okay, ad hoc, temporary staff.

KAMARA: *They too are recruited in a similar method. We advertise positions. They send in their applications, and they go for tests. We test them on basic things like scenarios, possible scenarios that they will experience on polling day. Like, for instance, somebody will ask a question that if somebody does not have an ID card but he is a stakeholder, he is a paramount chief, or he is somebody of a big status, he comes without an ID card, will you allow him or her to—. So it depends on how you answer those possible scenario questions. We give you the mark, you come for an interview, and then we do our final selections. Also, very transparent and competitive.*

PARKER: How is the staff size? Did you feel as though there were enough staff to conduct the election?

KAMARA: *Yes. There were of course too many staff. For every polling station, there is a minimum of five staff. That is, if it is only one polling station, it is five staff. But if it is more than one, if it is two, it's 13 staff. We call it a center. A center can be one polling station or more than one. So if it is more than one, it is 13. If it is two, we have a manager who coordinates between the two polling stations. Then you have the presiding officers who actually are the ones that manage the individual polling stations. Then you have those who issue cards to voters. First you have those who identify the voter card, the voter ID card. Then you have those who issue ballot papers. You have those in charge of the ballot box and others in charge of the queue within the polling station. Then because there are two polling stations, we have two additional personnel in charge of the center queue,*

because before you come to the polling station you come first to the center. So in all we have about 13 staff in a polling center. So it is just too many.

PARKER: How did they handle the training of those staff?

KAMARA: *The training method used was the cascaded method. At HQ level, at headquarters level, the district trainers, we have district training officers. They are trained at HQ level. They then go and train ward coordinators. At every ward, for this local government, at every ward we have somebody we call the ward coordinator. He coordinates all electoral activities within that ward. So the district training officers, they train the ward coordinators and the ward coordinators in turn train the polling staff, but not all the staff. We have those whose job on polling day is not too complex, or very, very simple, like the queue controllers. They are trained by the managers. So the ward coordinator will only train the manager, the voter identification person and the ballot-paper issuer. These are the ones they work on to train.*

For the queue controllers and the ballot box controllers, they are trained by the polling center manager. So the whole process is a cascaded method, because of the large amount of staff involved. There was a limit to the training sessions. We have two training sessions; there is a maximum of 35 participants per session. So if within the ward you have over 35, then you have two training sessions. The length of time is three days for training. So within this training all the procedures are being taught to the polling staff. So the process is a cascading one.

PARKER: How did you handle monitoring of the districts, or of the polling stations within the district?

KAMARA: *The training, monitoring the training, because the training of ward coordinator is done at district level. There is a specific location within the district. After that, now the ward coordinators train in their individual wards. But in my district, the majority of the staff are recruited; 80 percent of the staff, polling staff, are recruited in the district headquarter town. So that gives me an opportunity to monitor the training. But the remaining staff, they are recruited in the individual wards. So myself, the training officers, the U.N. advisers and the other staff, we distribute ourselves to visit these training centers and see how the training is going on.*

The same thing happens for monitoring on polling day, but actually it is difficult, for my district it is extremely difficult to monitor on polling day. Why? Because 50 percent of the centers are along the river, and we don't have enough funds, I mean we don't have a motorized boat of our own. So we cannot move along the river. For the mainland, we can. But even here, we have remote areas that are not accessible by vehicle. So we cannot monitor. Especially on polling day, there are lots of issues to address. So it is difficult for me to move outside of the headquarters town. I will only monitor the polling stations within it and those nearby. But on polling day, it is extremely difficult to monitor—because you have complaints from political parties, from security personell, and you have to address all these, and you also have to address questions and interviews from international observers who came to your district on polling day. When they come they want to know which area it is. So it is really difficult for me to go out. But we do our level best to monitor.

PARKER: What steps were taken to protect poll workers from threats?

KAMARA: *Right. Every district has a security committee. We work with the police. We work with the security personnel, and we work with stakeholders. Quite recently the Political Party Registration Commission formed a body called the District Monitoring Committee. This body is comprised of the election officers, the security personnel, representatives of political parties, and representatives of civil society. We meet and discuss every security threat and address concerns. So you have these two institutions apart from the Elections Commission. You have the District Monitoring Committee and you have the District Security Committee. We address security concerns even before polling. On polling day, we coordinate our activities to ensure there are not many security threats.*

PARKER: Perfect. In terms of boundary delimitation and districting, there are often difficulties in boundary delimitation, in setting the boundaries of the wards prior to an election. Could you describe the process of how the districts and the wards were formed, or the constituencies and the wards were formed? Who was responsible for determining where they would be and what laws were shaping that?

KAMARA: *The National Elections Commission is responsible for delimiting boundaries in Sierra Leone. This is stated in the 1991 Constitution in section 38. The commission has the sole responsibility for boundary delimitation. But before the National Elections Commission embarks on delimiting constituency boundaries, first of all we need data. Official data is provided by Statistics Sierra Leone. This is the institution that is responsible for collecting data, I mean the population census. It is the sole body that is responsible for collecting census figures.*

So we use census figures to determine boundaries, to draw boundaries. So the commission, we also have signed an MOU, a memorandum of understanding, with this body. Then you have Parliament. Parliament has to determine the number of seats nationally. Like in the past parliamentary and presidential elections, the commission requested to Parliament how many seats they would like to have nationally and Parliament approves that the existing 112 seats should remain, should continue.

So we now come to divide the national population, the total population of Sierra Leone by the number of seats. Then the total population of Sierra Leone was 4.9 million. We divide this—in 2007, it was 4.9 million—we divide this by the number of parliamentary seats, which is 112. This gives us what we call the national population quota. If you divide the population of Sierra Leone by the number of parliamentary seats, it gives you the national population quota.

So when you get the national population quota, you now take the population of each district. You divide the population of the district by the national population quota, and that is the number of seats you have to allocate to that particular district. So, at the end of the day the commission was able to allocate the seats to all the districts. But in this case, when the commission did this, there was a remainder of some seats, about eight seats remaining. But we have a method we call the highest-remainder method. The highest-remainder method. That is to say, when we have done the allocation based on whole numbers, if there are any seats remaining to allocate, we don't just allocate the seats because we like this district or we hate that district. No, we use the highest-remainder method to allocate the remaining seats. The highest-remainder method considers the highest number after the decimal point. If a district has, like for instance, my district has 3.2 in the parliamentary elections. So it means the three is the whole number, that is three seats going to my district, then point two.

So, the highest remainder. We now look at which district has the highest remainder after the decimal point. So we start allocating the seats to them, until we finish allocating the remaining seats and that's the end of it. It is like a classroom method. If you have 50.4 and I have 50.3, automatically you become the first. So this is the way we allocate seats, constituency seats to districts.

We use the same method for the allocation of wards to districts. We call this the highest-remainder method.

PARKER: Did this process, having this process, reduce the tensions or make it easier to come to a compromise about where the wards were? Where the lines were?

KAMARA: *For the presidential and parliamentary elections, there was not much controversy, because we did extensive public consultation. We consulted before, during and after the process. Okay, maybe you say after the process is a kind of sensitization. But we did extensive consultation before, during and after the process, explaining all of the methods to stakeholders. During the process, the actual drawing, because even when you have allocated the seats, you now come to physically draw the boundaries. When you involve the stakeholders, they will now submit their concerns. Like, in my district, when, during the physical drawing they were able to agree to themselves that chiefdoms A, B and C should be blended to form one constituency because they were able to make the quota, the required quota by constituency. They will decide now. But unlike this recently passed elections, the local-government elections, there was not enough time.*

Because remember, for the presidential and parliamentary elections, we started planning in January 2006 and the election, we conducted it in August 2007. So we had close to two years in the planning and implementation of the presidential and parliamentary elections, but for the local-government elections we had barely six months. So we don't have enough time. So the commission did not carry out extensive consultation, believing that we had done extensive consultation in the past and because when we did this consultation in the past we took into cognition the fact that we have to conduct local-government elections. So there was not enough extensive consultation during the local government elections.

The problem here was that since the ward boundaries were not drawn for over 50 years, because the last time they drew the ward boundaries was in 1956, that's during the colonial period. It was not until now that they drew the ward boundaries. So it was difficult for the commission to actually draw these boundaries because of lack of time. Because the people—there was not enough public consultation, there was even delay in Parliament for them to approve the boundaries. Because once these boundaries have been drawn, they have to be submitted to Parliament for approval. Until Parliament approves, then they become legal.

So because the commission did not do extensive public consultations, there were complaints from civil society, from the stakeholders, that they did not understand the boundaries. So that made Parliament delay the approval of the boundaries submitted until very late before they were finally approved. Then we went to sensitize the people on the boundaries. But actually, the difficulty was because they were not involved from the start. In some cases, the commission was even asked to redraw, I mean to review what was submitted to Parliament. Several times they submitted a report to Parliament and they asked the Commission to come back and review it, and it takes a lot of time, but all that because there was

not enough public consultation. There was not enough consultation because there was not enough time. Because, if we had extended the period for election, it would have affected the councils because their mandate was supposed to end in July as the last election was in July of 2004. So their mandate was expected to end in July, I mean July 3rd.

So because of this concern and the time limit, the commission has to work within this limited timeframe. Because everything we do is based on what the constitution states.

PARKER: I think you actually covered the rest of the questions in that section, so I'm going to move to the registration. Would you describe how the registration of voters took place in this election? Voter registration, sort of all of the pieces of that?

KAMARA: *We applied two types of registration—one for the presidential and the parliamentary, and other one is quite different, although the procedures and methodology are all the same. For the presidential and parliamentary elections, we conducted registration before nominations. The commission recruits and trains staff for registration. These are four per center. It is non-mobile registration, it is stationary. You go to a particular center. You present yourself to the registrar. He or she will ask you certain questions to prove that you are eligible to be registered.*

To be registered, you must be 18 years or older. You must be a Sierra Leonean. You must not be a prisoner—that is, convicted and sentenced. You must be of sound mind, etc. You must be a Sierra Leonean citizen. Under normal circumstances, you will not be asked to produce any documents to prove this eligibility but if the registrar doubts your eligibility, then he/she will ask you—. Like, for instance, if you claim to be Sierra Leonean, sorry, because of your color, maybe they will not believe that you are Sierra Leonean, or ask you for your birth certificate, or something that can prove that you are a citizen.

But in most cases, it is the cases that we are in, somebody presents himself or herself to the registrar and the registrar doubts his or her age, especially we have in Sierra Leone some children who have stunted growth. You see them very little, but they are old. So in that case, if the registrar is not satisfied, they will now ask you to prove that you are 18 years. We call them minors. In this case, we have two proofs. One is documentary proof and the other is non-documentary proof.

The documentary proof could be your birth certificate for age or your national ID card for citizenship. Also, you have to produce your documents proving that you are a citizen. The non-documentary proof is if you have to come with a stakeholder. It could either be the local authority in that particular community, like a paramount chief, a religious head or the head of an institution. These are the people who will come and testify on your behalf that you are a Sierra Leonean or you are 18 years or older and you are qualified.

So these are the requirements and this is the process. If the registrar is satisfied that you have met the eligibility criteria, he or she now proceeds to register you. When you are registered, they take a photo of you. They will make an instant voter ID card, and you are given it, so you will be told to keep the ID card because you have to use it on polling day to cast your ballot. There is another addition to the requirements for local-government elections. Because it is ward-based, you have to prove you're ordinarily resident; you have to prove that you are ordinarily resident in the ward. So you also have to prove more, like I said,

you either have to present documentary or non-documentary proof to show that you ordinarily resident in that ward.—like you can come with a paramount chief to prove that this person stays in my community, he or she has been living in my community.

Or, as documentary proof you can present your tax receipts, because if you live in the community, you are expected to pay a tax. So you can produce your tax receipt. That is also acceptable. These are the ways we register people now. But if you come to the register and he or she refuses to register you, then he or she will advise you that as a Sierra Leonean you have a right to be registered. If I refuse you registration, you can challenge my refusal. You can appeal sort of.

So we advise you as to where and when you should come to further prove that you are eligible and your name should be on the register. So after registration we have a period we call inquiry period. It is a kind of a mini-court wherein, an officer will sit and look into all these rejection cases. Not only rejection cases; we also have objection cases. For instance, I'm at the registrar because we cannot trust them 100 percent to be neutral. Of course we are professionals. We have been trained with—we are always told to work within the NEC principles. But the ad hoc staff that we recruit, we recruit them just days before polling, so they cannot imbibe the principle as we do. So some of them may have some form of influences, political influences whatever. So they can register people whom they know they are not qualified, especially underage people, the minors, those who are not 18 years.

So in this case, if you are a political agent, I come, I see the registrar. Though you are not a citizen but because the registrar knows that you both support the same party, he or she proceeds to register you. I have the right to object to your registration. So I will now come, I will object to the registration, to your registration, and will fill out a form called the Objection to Registration form.

So these are all the cases. On inquiry day, the inquiry officer will look into it. But the burden of proof lies on the person who objects. If I object to your name, I will have to prove to the inquiry officer that indeed your name should not be on the register either by bringing documentary proof or non-documentary proof. Then, for the case of rejection, the person who is rejected has to present himself or herself to the inquiry officer and defend why his or her name should be included on the register. He or she has to prove beyond a reasonable doubt. These are all provisions to ensure that the register is as inclusive as possible and also to ensure that people's names that are not supposed to be on the register have been deleted from the register, so as to make the register a credible one and not a bloated one.

PARKER: Perfect. What logistical and operation problems did you face during the registration period, if any?

KAMARA: *Funding for one, especially for my district. It is both a river line and mainland. For accessing remote areas sometimes we need to hire boats; these are called motorized boats, they are local boats. They are given—I mean, yes. Sometimes the funds allocated are not sufficient. Even though we may make our movement plans and attach a budget to each, the commission's field-coordination office decides what they think they should be given to each district, without taking into consideration the reality on the ground. So funding is one major problem during registration, because you have to not only transport election materials but staff as well; this is because the money that is paid to staff is very, very small for the job*

they do, especially in remote areas. That can even influence the way they work. Because if you are paid a very small amount and a politician comes with a big amount for you to do the wrong thing, you can be influenced by that.

So that is one constraint we have. A logistical constraint, just like I said, we don't have a motorized boat of our own. I'm talking for my district. So as a result, we depend on the locally hired boats. It is difficult to control them, to let them understand that once this boat is hired, it is rented by the commission, it becomes the property of the commission at that moment. Therefore, and the commission's policy is that once we are traveling with election materials, we will not even take onboard any other personnel except security. So that is another challenge.

There is a lot of risk in my area because whenever you use this motorized boat they are not as safe. The polling staff, they don't have life jackets to put on. They are vulnerable to a lot of dangers. Conducting registration or elections at the height of the rains is also very, very challenging because the roads become impassable. In some cases, you have big trees that fall on the road. It is difficult to access. So all of these are challenges we face during registration.

But in terms of procedures for registration we normally receive enough procedures from field coordination. We normally receive enough materials. They are always available. It is only on the aspect of finance, the aspect of logistics, transportation that we face challenges.

PARKER: Great. What were the ballots, this is for voting day—what were the ballot security measures put in place to keep from having voting fraud or to make sure that the votes that people cast were the ones that made it to be counted?

KAMARA: *Okay. When materials are sent, election materials are sent, we have what we call sensitive materials and non-sensitive materials. Sensitive materials are the ballot papers, they are the indelible ink, the ones that after voting they will ink your finger. The stamp, as well as the register for that particular police station. This is among the sensitive materials.*

PARKER: The register?

KAMARA: *Yes, the register. We have a register where the names of the voters are. These are the sensitive materials. They are placed in a kit called the center kit. It is sealed. That kit will not be opened until polling day. These instructions are given to polling staff. Once those materials are sent, we tell them they are packed, they are correct. We don't open the materials in between the district office and the polling station, no. You only open the sensitive kits, kits box on polling day in the presence of party agents, in the presence of observers, if any. That is one way; it is sealed because if they want to open it, the party agents, observers, they have to take the seal numbers. And all of these kits have seals with numbers. We communicate these numbers to political parties so they know exactly. If I am sending these kits to this station, this is the serial number we expect. So you cannot tamper it without breaking the seals. So that is one way we ensure ballot security before polling starts.*

After polling, copies of the results are placed in the polling stations. Some are given to party agents. They are in triplicate: one copy for the polling station, another copy for political parties, then the other copy is for the tally center. Now, after that, the copies for the tally center, the results, will be placed in a pack

called a tamper-evident envelope, that is TEE, call it TEE. That is to say, once this result is placed in this envelope and the envelope is sealed, you cannot enter into that envelope, you cannot access the results without breaking the envelope. So when you want to access the results, then you must tamper with the envelope; that makes it evident. So if you bring it to the tally center and they see it has been tampered with or opened—then it is automatically questioned, they would quarantine it—you would put it aside, it is questionable, it is subject to further investigation. That alone is the security measure; in itself it is a security. So after that it is placed in the ballot box and sealed again with a seal number.

The political parties' agents and observers, they will take the seal number of the ballot box as well. You cannot access the TEE without breaking the seal. So all of these are security mechanisms. Then, once the results, the ballot boxes with results that are meant for Freetown tally center—. We, as district officer, we, cannot have an idea of what it is, what is the result in that ballot box or in that tamper-evident envelope; we don't have access into it. From the field office it only comes to the district headquarter office because we have to collect everything and bring it down to Freetown. But we cannot determine the results; we don't know the result, because if you want to, it means you have to break the seals, then tamper with the envelope—which becomes evident in itself. So these are the security mechanisms that are put in place to ensure that nothing is done in between. That is why, if there is anything done in between, it will be seen on the envelope. The envelope will come in a way that it is not supposed to be, and that will lead to further investigation.

Then the other piece is difficult because each political party agent will have a copy of the result, and these political parties will collect all of these copies in the districts. They collate. They themselves do collation; they do tallying even before the official result comes out. Although it is unofficial because NEC has the responsibility to announce the final result, they do have an idea of the overall result. For them, they have an idea, but the district offices, they don't have an idea until the result is announced from the tally center. So all of these are security mechanisms put in place to ensure that no fraud takes place after the results—I mean after the election, after the poll closes and the results are taken down to Freetown.

PARKER: Did you experience any family voting, where the head of the family would say to the rest of the family, this is how you have to vote?

KAMARA: *Well, it is common. It is common because, if you look at the voting pattern in Sierra Leone, it is basically on a regional basis, on a tribal basis, and once it is done on a tribal basis, it becomes a family thing, because the family is the unit, is the key unit. Some do actually, when they know their dad is in this party so automatically they become a member. It is not like that you vote the way you think. Well, it is not a hard and fast rule, but it is the voting pattern in this country, basically on a regional basis. They don't want to know whether the person who is contesting has some good ideas or some policies to implement. The question is where you come from, what language you speak. That becomes the question.*

So even if you were a criminal before, as long as you come from my region, as long as you speak my language then you are my brother, you are my sister, so I vote for you on that basis. Not on the basis that you have some ideas, you have done something good in the past, you can help promote this community if we elect you into office. That is not the basis. Although a few will deviate and try to actually vote based on issues, but that is very, very minimal.

PARKER: How do you think you would address that? I don't know, I'm just asking.

KAMARA: *By awareness raising or sensitization. A lot of organizations, including the commission, should embark on civic and voter education, so that people will actually vote on issues—but it is really rooted in our history, so it is really just like saying red and green. That is why people are so particular about color in this country. It is really rooted in the history. Our regionalism and tribalism is not as pronounced as Nigeria's, but it is muted, which makes it much more dangerous than even Nigeria. It is muted, because you don't see it, you only sense it out at the height of elections. But after elections you don't seem to see that—but it is there, it is operating.*

PARKER: I wish I had more time to ask you about that. In terms of election logistics, how were you communicating with headquarters from the district?

KAMARA: *We communicate through field coordination. We have an office called the Field Coordination and Reporting Unit. It is the unit that is responsible for coordinating all electoral activities between headquarters and the district offices there. All logistics, voter education, every unit would pass their instructions through Field Coordination. They receive information from the district for every unit and disseminate it. So, all operational instructions relating to logistics pass through Field Coordination Units and there—.*

PARKER: Did you have a phone system set up or were you using cell phones predominantly or how was that?

KAMARA: *Before, in 2007, we relied more on our U.N. advisers because they have the internet facility. So we were relying more on phones, phone calls. But for this election we were given internet facilities. We have the cell and modems so it is both cell phone and internet.*

PARKER: Okay, I've already run longer than I meant, so let me move to the election dispute resolution. You mentioned that there were contact stations; there were 19.

KAMARA: *Complaints.*

PARKER: Complaints, could you describe those and the process to handle them?

KAMARA: *The complaints ranged from violation of campaign codes, requests for recounts, some against election officers, believing that they commit fraud, etc. Yes, these complaints are sent through the district office. We receive them in the district office. There are also procedures drawn on that. First, we inform stakeholders and political parties that between this period and this period is the time for you to file any complaints. You can complain about me as district elections officer, you can complain about another political party candidate, you can complain about whoever you want to complain about, but this is within the timeframe—the period within which you must file complaints.*

So for the past election it was between the fifth, the day of elections, and the eighth. This was the period for receipts of complaints. So when the complaints are received, we send them to Freetown to the Field Coordination and the commission has legal advisers. When these complaints are received, the commission passes them to the legal adviser. They will look at these complaints and address them according to the law. Most of the complaints made are either

of a criminal nature, which is beyond the powers of the commission to investigate. We have the police, they have the authority to investigate complaints of a criminal nature. Some complaints of violation of the campaign code of ethics. We have an institution that is responsible for monitoring the activities and the implementation of this code; it is called the Political Parties Registration Commission. So it is the Commission that is supposed to address these complaints.

So basically the response...each and every complaint was responded to. So they send the letters back to them to us and we distributed it to the political party agent who complained. Most of the address was that okay, we received your complaint regarding election officers or regarding fraud, the commission will investigate that. If your complaint was of a criminal nature, we advise that you seek the police. For complaints of a violation of the code of conduct, we advise that you see the Political Parties Registration Commission. But as far as the commission is concerned, we are looking into your complaint and the result that came from that particular polling station, as far as our procedures are concerned, is correct. So this is the way they address complaints.

PARKER: Perfect. In terms of civic education, but getting to marginalized populations, what steps were taken to help marginalized populations like women and youth, or internally displaced people who are living as refugees, or the disabled to know about the election?

KAMARA: *Of course, we don't have internally displaced persons any longer because the war has been over since 2002. In the 2002 elections we had them. For the marginalized people, we developed a lot of strategies because we don't only rely on the media, we have these ward coordinators, those who are coordinating activities at ward level, they also have in their terms of reference as their responsibility, voter education. But apart from that we recruit hailers, we call them town criers. These are the people who are resident in these respective wards and these are community people—they speak the local language. We hire them for a number of days. When we, especially when we want to undertake a particular activity like voter registration, then we go out and explain to the people the importance of coming out and registering, all important information pertaining to registration that we give. The voter education officer and the district train and work a little, and train these people about which information to disseminate to the public.*

Then we also have meetings with stakeholders and community people, and we hold workshops. We have radio discussion programs, panel discussions, and we also distribute leaflets. We work with organizations, women's organizations, youth organizations, etc. The commission has a policy to focus on women and youth. Even in the employment of temporary staff, our focus is mainly on youth and women. We give more priority to them; that is the focus of the commission.

On polling day, like the disabled, if the voters come out and queue to vote, we give priority to the disabled to vote first. If you, even if you are in the front of the line and somebody who is disabled comes, we give him or her priority to vote before you. We give priority to pregnant women because they cannot stand for a long period in a queue. We give priority to the old and feeble. These are all strategies for them to get themselves involved.

PARKER: And how effective do you think this group of policies was in bringing in these marginalized groups?

KAMARA: *To a very great extent it has encouraged a lot of people to come out. Because if you look at—though for local government the percent of turnout was low, as was expected, but there are other reasons outside of the commission. But the fact of the matter is, if you consider the voter turnout in the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections, when we conducted the elections at the height of rains, because August is the height of rains in this country, the voter turnout was very high because of all of these strategies.*

But again, like for the local government elections, one of the reasons was that you have this issue of voting fatigue. I mean, conducting an election immediately after a very, very hectic election like the one in 2007, voters have a kind of fatigue. They have just voted in the past six months and then you have these other elections coming in. Second, the level of, how can I say it, the level of support for this election is not as the one for—both in terms of the political parties, they don't fund their candidate much. People don't see this election as crucial. They only see presidential and parliamentary elections as being crucial. The local government, they don't think is very, very crucial. So the interest is not so much. Even from the international level, we don't have any international observers for these elections. So I don't think—there is a kind of perception. They don't see the election as being crucial. So a lot of people did not bother to come out.

PARKER: Were there any other countries, in the work that you were doing here, where you were looking to what had happened in those countries as models?

KAMARA: *Yes we had a role model in West Africa, that is Ghana. Ghana is a role model. Most of what we did was based on experiences from Ghana. We also have some international facilitators from Malawi, but Ghana was the model.*

PARKER: What aspects of the election management did you find hardest to—I'm sorry. The last question I have actually is what do you think the role of this election was in the overall democratic development of the country?

KAMARA: *Having this election further deepened democracy in this country, because, like I said, the first local government elections were in 2004, after almost 50 years. This was the second election. These were the elections conducted by the National Elections Commission on its own. Democracy was deepened because if you think about the violence during 2007 and now there was very little violence. So democracy has deepened. A lot of people were satisfied with the way the elections were conducted—. If the commission continues to conduct elections in this way—that is, if the commission continues to conduct transparent, credible elections in this country—democracy will surely deepen. Although you can have elections without democracy, I believe you cannot have democracy without elections.*

So elections are a gateway to democracy. It makes all the institutions that will contribute to deepen elections become much more responsive in a way, because elections assess the performance of representatives, policy makers. The people now believe that if they don't perform they will be kicked out of power.

PARKER: This is Nealin Parker and Kamara part two. You were saying about democracy and elections.

KAMARA: *I said that although you can have elections without democracy, I believe that you cannot have democracy without elections at the same time, because elections are the gateway to democracy. If people say you can have elections without democracy it means the way elections are conducted is questionable; but if you conduct elections in a free, fair and credible manner, it will go a long way to deepen democracy, because it will also encourage participation, because people believe that if they come out and cast their votes, at the end of the day they are, they feel satisfied that they have given their consent to whatever government will come in and they believe that who they voted for at the end of the day will become the winner and not the status quo coming in who will be the winner.*

The other thing is, the representatives themselves will become much more accountable to the people. If they believe that they cannot come around the National Elections Commission to change results in their favor, they will work harder to meet the needs of the people. In this way you make the people become involved in the process. You make them accept the government of the day and you make the leaders themselves become much more responsible. And this is very healthy for democracy.

PARKER: Perfect. I want to thank you very much for this interview. As I said before, if you have any questions, you can feel free to contact me, you have my information and that of the program.