

As It Is / June 10, 2013

Mobile Phones Changing Lives in Kenya, But Not Always for the Better

Some people are choosing cheaper food so they can buy more phone time

Hello, and welcome once again to "As It Is," our daily show for people learning American English.

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today on the program, we visit with some musicians in Nigeria who are hoping to change their world...

"They don't believe music is something you can make money with so they can put food on your table. Or that music is something that can make you achieve anything."

But first, we hear how mobile phones are changing lives in Kenya -- and not always for the better...

Food or Phone?

Mobile phones were once something only rich people used. But with prices falling, both rich and poor people now depend on them for both personal and professional needs.

The World Bank asked two groups -- iHub Research and Research Solutions Africa -- to study mobile phone use in Kenya. They examined mobile phone use among Kenyans earning less than \$2.50 a day. The groups reported their findings late last year.

Jim Tedder tells us more...

Angela Crandall led the project. Her group found that 20 percent of those questioned chose to give up necessities like food or transportation in order to purchase minutes to use on their mobile phone. Some said they ate rice and vegetables instead of something more costly, like meat, so they could buy credit. Ms. Crandall says there was a reason for these decisions.

"They thought that by using this money to call their friend or by having this airtime, that they could text someone, they actually, potentially could earn more money in the future.... I definitely don't want people to blow this out of proportion, and, the idea that, you know, the mobile phone is making people hungrier, I don't think necessarily is true. Other studies have shown that actually when people at the base of the (economic) pyramid get more

money, it doesn't necessarily mean they'll spend it on food. And so, I think that this is sort of a stereotype or misassumption that we make, that people at the BoP (base of the pyramid) are so hungry that any extra coin will go towards food. I don't think it's true because we found even a small, marginal income increase will actually go towards entertainment, so I think that this is, you know, exemplifies that finding. I would say that it really shows the value that Kenyans are placing on, on, you know, potentially getting more money or even just the communication aspect of it."

Eighteen-year-old Martha Bosibori sells fruit at a market in Nairobi. She says she has avoided eating some meals so she could buy mobile phone credit. That way, she can earn money through the business she gets by using her telephone.

"Sometimes, you know, for example, I'm hungry but I need to talk to someone, for example. So what I do, I just sacrifice that money, I don't take (eat) that food. Then I buy that credit and use it to talk to that person who I was supposed to talk to. Okay, now for example, I, I have customers. Here, for example, I sell mangoes. Now to, to take some orders, you know, from, from maybe let's say, like neighbors, they do know that I do sell mangoes. So sometimes, they call me and say, 'Today Martha, you can, can just bring five like mangoes'. So, I take their orders through the cell phone."

The study found that people chose phone credits over spending on necessities. The study also found that more than 60 percent of the poor people who were questioned own a mobile phone.

I'm Jim Tedder.

In Nigeria, Music Can Change Lives

There are many bands in Nigeria. VOA reporter Heather Murdoch spoke recently with members of a group called the Heroes Band International. These musicians say they want to be more than rich and famous. They hope their songs can help protect some ancient values and strengthen the country's economy.

Kelly Jean Kelly reports.

Becoming successful in the music business is never easy. But in Nigeria, musicians say it is the best and only way to escape a life of poverty.

Ifeyinwa Samuel Ndukwu is the lead singer with Heroes Band International, an Afro-Pop group in Abuja. She is known as Ify De Diva to people who actively follow the band. She supports new musicians and singers by letting them perform with the group. This helps many of them find work elsewhere.

“As they are featuring with my band, maybe they may be engaged on a show. Somebody may see them to engage them for a performance. Maybe people will give them something, you know, reasonable thing. But it’s better than to steal.”

Olawale Akinduro plays bass with Heroes Band International. Like many musicians, he needs a second job to survive. He says many Nigerian parents urge their children not to enter the music business.

“They don’t believe music is something you can make money with so they can put food on your table. Or that music is something that can make you achieve anything. ”

These musicians say they make music not just to earn money. They say it is also about the love of music and their love for their country.

I’m Kelly Jean Kelly.

And that’s “As It Is.” We hope you enjoyed our program today.

Every day on “As It Is,” we explore the latest events and report on issues that concern you. We would love to know what you want to hear on our show. Write to us at:



VOA Learning English

Voice of America

Washington, DC 20237

United States of America

Or send an email to LearningEnglish@voanews.com

Or go to our website -- learningenglish.voanews.com -- and click "Contact Us."

Follow us on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter at VOA Learning English.

From all of us of at The Voice of America, thanks for listening!

Remember, for the latest world news, listen to VOA at the beginning of every hour, Universal Time.

I'm Christopher Cruise, and that's "As It Is" on The Voice of America.