

Hello there, and welcome to "As It Is" -- VOA's daily show for people learning American English!

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today on the program, we report on a promise by the Kenyan government to give free laptop computers to first-year students.

"And it will also give the children a chance to, as they progress and grow to be able to research and have more knowledge. I think it's a great idea if it works. It's beautiful."

But first, we take you to the first-ever free school for girls in a poor neighborhood in Kenya's capital.

## **Nairobi School Teaches Girls, Improves Community**

The Kibera School for Girls in Nairobi offers free tuition, uniforms, books and meals to girls who qualify. The students are from pre-kindergarten through the fourth grade. The school is the first to offer free education for girls in the area.

Milagros Ardin tells us about the school...

The people of Kibera struggle to provide themselves with food, shelter, clean water and good schools.

Girls face the additional problems of discrimination and violence. When money for school is lacking, parents and guardians usually withdraw their daughters from school before their sons.

The Kibera School for Girls works to help the community understand the value of education. Parents do not have to pay. But a family member must work at the school five weeks a year as a way for them to support a child's education. Girls are chosen based on the possibilities for their success as students and on financial need.

Ten-year-old Joyce Achieng is one of these students. She says that girls need more chances, especially in Kibera, where she has seen a lot of suffering.

"It is important because when they don't go to school, they will not achieve their goals and their dreams will not come true, and they will not be what they want to be in the future."

Anne Atieno Olwando is the school's headmistress. She believes that girls like Joyce will have a better chance of overcoming the effects of being poor by getting a quality education.

“It’s one of my passions to make them realize that you didn’t choose, you didn’t sign to be born where you were born but you can choose to go where you want to be in the future.”

Helping women make better futures is why Kennedy Odede established the school almost four years ago. He says that growing up in Kibera, he hated seeing that more boys than girls could go to school.

In 2004, Mr. Odede started a community movement that later became the organization called Shining Hope for Communities. He wanted to make life better for girls as well as boys.

He said he began to see communities through the eyes of his mother and sister. But he worried some people might feel unhappy that only students were getting a better life. Mr. Odede wanted everyone in the community to feel improvement in their lives. Today, the school provides services for everyone in the area, not just students.

People can stop by Shining Hope for Communities to get clean water or use a clean bathroom. They can sign up for computer training or visit the medical center. Women suffering from violence at home can get advice and assistance.

I’m Milagros Ardin.

## **The Promise of Free Laptops for Kenyan Students**

Shortly after he was elected, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta promised to give laptop computers to every first-year student in the country's schools. Some people question whether Kenya is ready, and whether the president's plan can really succeed.

The Muthaiga primary school is just outside the capital, Nairobi. First-year students there currently learn the traditional way -- with chalkboards, textbooks and memorization.

Muthaiga's head teacher Bernadette Owino said the new technology will help her students learn.

"The world is becoming a small village, and you need to connect with the rest of the world, if you're only computer literate. And it will also give the children a chance as they progress and grow to be able to research and have more knowledge. I think it's a great idea if it works. It's beautiful."

Educators and students may be excited and pleased about the government's laptop program. But others say the country is not ready. That is because many teachers still are not able to use computers themselves. And a lot of schools are in poor condition and do not have electricity.

The post-primary teachers' union says it supports the idea of giving computers to first-year students. But the union's Secretary General -- Akelo Misori -- says students and teachers must first meet basic requirements.

“If basic skills of math and reading are still a challenge in our primary schools, then it means therefor that the introduction of technology to, in schools through laptops is not, may not be a viable component of our learning circumstances now.”

The laptop program was a major campaign promise of Mr. Kenyatta, who won election in March by a narrow vote. The idea started at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology in Nairobi.

Providing laptop computers for all first-year schoolchildren in Kenya is expected to cost hundreds of millions of dollars. The government hopes to begin providing the computers to students early next year.

And that’s “As It Is” for today. It was written from reports by Jill Craig and Gabe Joselow in Kenya.

We hope you enjoyed our program.

Every day on “As It Is,” we report on issues that concern you. Tell us what you want to hear on a future show.

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I'm Christopher Cruise, and that's "As It Is" for this Monday, September 9th from The Voice of America.



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