



From VOA Learning English this is As It Is.

I'm Caty Weaver.

Today we'll share some interesting business news from sub-Saharan Africa.

We go to Nigeria, where electricity is sometimes hard to find. Some villagers have turned the problem into a money-making situation.

But first, we look at the cooperative economy that is helping a village in Ethiopia succeed.

A Cooperative Economy in Rural Ethiopia

Awra Amba is different from other rural Ethiopian villages in its beliefs, education levels and general development. It operates under cooperative economic policies.

Christopher Cruise reports that efforts are being made to see if the system that has been successful there could work in other parts of rural Ethiopia.

Awra Amba is a small northern village of about 500 people. It was established in the early 1970s by Zumra Nuru, who was seeking a new way of life. The village operates on a philosophy based on equality and working for the good of the community.

Government officials and development organizations are trying to learn why the village is successful.

Zumra Nuru says he knows why. He says it is because everyone works for each other. He says all of the members of the cooperative believe they are working toward the same goal.

The village established its cooperative in the early 1990s. Every member of the community makes equal yearly earnings. Last year, the amount was 6200 birr, or 300 dollars. That may seem low, but ten years ago the yearly income in the village was only 50 birr, or three dollars.

The money is from farming, cloth goods and from money spent by people travelling to the area. The community also sells goods to nearby villages and cities.

People in Awra Amba work six days a week. Five days of work are for the cooperative. The sixth day is for supporting older people, children without parents and those who are too weak to work.

Semenesh Alemu weaves cloth for the cooperative. She says the money that the members share is not enough to support her family. She says the money is good if you compare it with how much she used to earn. But she says she must work on her personal day to make more money for her family.

Awra Amba is trying to develop jobs for the younger generation of university graduates like Gebreyehu Desalo. He studied agricultural economics. He returned home to work in the financial office of Awra Amba.

“I don’t want to have a life different from my community. I grew up here and they teach me throughout my life and I’m working with them. And I’m sharing equally as a member.”

Staying in the village means Gebreyehu Desalo will probably never buy a car or a computer. There is one laptop for the village now. But the community hopes to be able to buy more someday.

Ethiopia is one of the poorest and least-developed countries in the world, so Awra Amba's success has been noticed. People there earn more money than people in other Ethiopian villages, so there are efforts to establish similar cooperative communities in other parts of rural Ethiopia.

However, no one has asked people in the village -- or its founder, Zumra Nuru -- for help in establishing communities like Awra Amba.

I'm Christopher Cruise.

Charging Cell Phones for a Charge in Nigeria

Wireless phones are common in Africa. In fact, there are more wireless phones for personal use than landline phones in most countries. Nigeria is no exception.

Demand for electric power to charge all those wireless phones is high. But most of rural Nigeria does not have government-operated electricity. So, some creative Nigerian villagers are opening what are called "charge shops." These are places where customers can power, or recharge, their phones. Some of the shops are helping their owners leave their lives of poverty.

One of the places these shops operate is the village of Kakora, deep in a forest in northern Nigeria. A few hundred people live there. Most of them survive by growing crops like maize, cassava and yams.

Homes in Kakora are made of mud and straw. None of them has electricity. But almost every one of them has at least one cell phone.

Edward Sunday lives in Kakora. He has a cell phone. He says he and others in the village need their phones. He says they use their phones not just to talk with others but to log on to Facebook and Twitter.

“Especially the young ones that are coming up. We are educated now. We are connected to more things now.”

Mr. Sunday says his father has a generator that can power the family’s phones. But sometimes the family doesn’t have any fuel to operate the generator.

Mr. Sunday says when that happens he takes his phone to one of the “charge shops” that are opening up around the countryside. These shops offer the use of small generators to charge cell phones.

Edward Sunday says he can power his phone for about five to ten cents -- much less than the cost of generator fuel.

“You will see more than ten phones there because everybody is trying to charge his phone so he can connect to his people.”

In Kakora’s town center, another villager -- named Kojeyat -- puts his phone in his pocket. He says he is out of power and of money.

Kojeyat says there is a place he could charge his phone for free. It is an area with electricity, a few kilometers from the village. But armed rebels are active in this part of Nigeria. He says travel along the roads can be dangerous, especially at night.

“Due to that problem you couldn’t charge the phone because of the risks along the road and everything like that. So we face a lot of challenges in the village.”

People often go to a hilltop near Kakora to make calls. The reception there is better. A shop owner there says he often charges 50 phones a night. He makes a small profit in a place where there are almost no other business possibilities.

Kojeyat says life in Kakora is quiet and happy. But he says he may have to leave the village because he is not a farmer and does not own a generator shop. And, he says, to start any kind of business he needs enough electricity to keep his cell phone on.

And that’s our program for today. I’m Caty Weaver. Join us tomorrow for another As It Is program from VOA Learning English.