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Welcome back to the program. I'm Caty Weaver.

In January, Britain and Nigeria signed a prisoner exchange agreement. Now, Nigerians are questioning what will happen with a well-known Nigerian politician currently in a British jail. If the former Delta state governor returns to Nigeria will he be loved or hated? Will he be jailed or freed?

Then we talk about the growing popularity of games of Chance among Liberian youth. Some say the activity could be damaging to the country.

## **James Ibori: Liberian Hero or Criminal**

Britain is preparing to send some Nigerians jailed in the country back to Nigeria. British officials say any Nigerian serving a sentence of more than 12 months will be sent home, if both governments agree to the prisoner exchange.

One of the prisoners could be James Ibori, a popular former governor. He is serving 13 years for corruption. Unlike other prisoners, Ibori may be treated like a hero if he comes home.

Two years ago, a court in London sentenced James Ibori to 13 years in a British prison. He was earlier accused of stealing \$250 million in public money from the Nigerian government. Before that, he was accused two times of corruption in Nigeria. But he was never found guilty of any crime.

Ibori supporters say the accusations and the British court ruling were moves by politicians seeking to crush Ibori's support. They say they would welcome him home.

Davidson Okparamidevi worked on Ibori's two successful campaigns for governor. He says Ibori's popularity in Delta State is indisputable.

"Ibori became so popular because of his clear-cut achievements that have impacted positively on the lives of the entire Deltans. The list of his achievements as impacted on the people is inexhaustible."

He says Ibori built roads, bridges and hospitals. He says President Goodluck Jonathan would do well to get Ibori back home and pardon him. The president is expected to seek re-election in 2015.

In recent months, Mr. Jonathan's ruling People's Democratic Party has lost several top officials, including five state governors. Rebellion in the north and poverty around the nation has also damaged the president's popularity.

Again Davidson Okparamidevi.

"So if Ibori shows up it will be a boost. A real boost to Goodluck Jonathan to office."

But other Nigerians are not so sure. Onyiye Gandhi is a lawyer in the oil-rich but poor city of Warri in Delta state. He says that Ibori used money from oil to pay back his followers and buy loyalty.

“Giving him freedom would indict Jonathan and confirm the allegations, very widespread now among Nigerians, that his government is massively corrupt, and pampers corruption.”

The British-Nigerian prisoner exchange was announced in early January. Under the proposal, hundreds of Nigerians in British prisons could be sent home, as well as one British citizen in Nigeria.

Amnesty International says it is “extremely concerned” that poor conditions in Nigerian prisons could make the exchange inhumane.

Observers in Nigeria say if James Ibori is sent home but not freed, there is no way he will serve the rest of his sentence in a dirty jail cell.

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## **Betting for a Living in Liberia**

Several sports betting companies have set up operations in Liberia. Young people who are unemployed gather at these betting parlors in hopes of winning money on things like televised football matches. Some say betting can provide the money they need -- just like having a good-paying job. But others are not so sure these games of chance are a good idea. Christopher Cruise has the story.

At a betting parlor in Monrovia, a group of young men place their bets on a football match. Then they wait for the results on television.

Harris Kokeh is 37 years old. He completed a college degree program, but could not find a job. He says he started betting and is making a living from it.

"I've really been living by it. It has been helping me a lot. The last time I won about 700 United States dollars. It was a great help to me."

But not everyone is sure betting is a good thing. Harrison Myers is about the same age as Harris Kokeh. He says students are playing games of chance instead of going to school.

“This gambling thing is bad for our society. Our youth are not going to school any longer. They spend the entire day at the gambling center.”

Back at the betting parlor, Theo Varney says he does not have much choice. He is out of work, and has two children.

“We have no much facility to take care of our affairs, so what do you expect? We are not betting because we want to bet. We are betting because we want to make our living.”

Randall Kaybee works for a betting company named Winner’s Incorporated. He says the business employs young people across the country, creating hundreds of jobs.

He also says betting companies are changing people’s lives for just a few Liberian dollars per bet.

“As you just enter my office, as you can see from this evidence. This is a ticket. Somebody bet 50 LD (Liberian dollars) and winning 233,275 Liberian dollars.”

One American dollar is worth about 86 Liberian dollars.



Winner's Incorporated says more than 7,000 Liberians bet each week at its parlors around the country. And there are 300 to 400 weekly winners.

The Liberian government controls all legal betting in the country. Liberian officials say the betting shops "help promote government poverty reduction strategy."

I'm Christopher Cruise.

And that's As It Is for today. I'm Caty Weaver.

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