

From VOA LEARNING ENGLISH, welcome to AS IT IS!

Hello, I'm Steve Ember.

Today on our program: African elephants facing their worst crisis in years...a revolution in information and communication technology for mobile telephone users in Cameroon...and in Nigeria, clean water to drink is resulting in environmental issues, endangering public health.

Sound: Elephants trumpeting

The United Nations Environmental Protection Agency and other conservation groups say elephants are now facing their worst crisis in years. In the race to satisfy the demand *in Asia* for ivory objects and carvings, elephant poachers have found easy hunting grounds in Mozambique. Bob Doughty has more.

Five years ago, 15,000 elephants lived in the large Niassa Reserve in the northernmost part of the country. But those numbers are decreasing quickly.

The Rovuma River forms a natural border between the park and Tanzania. All the poachers need to do is cross the water by boat to reach the elephants. Then they attack the animals with high-powered weapons.

The Wildlife Conservation Society recently joined the government of Mozambique in an effort to manage the reserve. Carlos Lopes-Pareira is the organization's technical advisor. He says poachers can shoot as many as five elephants at a time.

"They go after the matriarch. They create a temporary state of confusion. While the other elephants are looking for guidance, which is given by the matriarch, they are shot."

Officials say poachers kill an average of three elephants a day. That is more than one thousand a year. Mister Lopes-Pareira predicts a sad future for elephants.

"The destruction is such that in probably eight years we will have very few elephants, or what we could call a not-viable population of elephants."

Wildlife officials, called rangers, try to stop the poachers, but it is difficult. There are only 40 rangers to guard the park, which is the size of the country of Norway.

Even if the rangers manage to catch a poacher, the chances of sending him to prison appear small. Mozambique's legal system dates from colonial times when the country was ruled by Portugal. Mr. Lopes - Pareira says the law does not recognize poaching as a crime.

"It is like a traffic violation, not a crime."

Now, the Niassa Reserve hopes to train 100 rangers by the end of the year. Also, more severe anti-poaching legislation will soon go to Mozambique's Parliament.

You are listening to AS IT IS from VOA Learning English. I'm Steve Ember.

Big changes are taking place in Africa. It's a revolution in information and communication technology, ICT for short. The World Bank and the African Development Bank say there are about 700 million mobile telephone users in Africa. That makes the African mobile phone market larger than either the European Union or the United States.

Today we visit Dzekwa, a community in northwest Cameroon. Villagers there recently marked the second anniversary of the availability of mobile phones and the Internet.

It was only two years ago that the government opened a Community Telecenter in Dzekwa. Most people there -- uneducated farmers -- say the difference is revolutionary.

"Now, I take pictures and even images of my cattle with information on the weight and send to buyers through this center. Before now, I covered long distances with my cattle to the market and had to return with the unsold cattle. Now I take to the market only what my customers want."

"A long time ago it was difficult to send money to my children. At times, people even removed the money from the envelope. But see now, I have just been told by my son that he received money, five minutes after I sent it to him."

In the past, most farmers depended on people who took a lot of money for their services as middle men to buyers. The farmers never knew the prices their produce or animals really brought in distant markets. Today, through the telecenter, they can communicate with buyers directly and set prices.

A group of Americans, called Connect Africa, came to Dzekwa after learning about the telecenter on the Internet. Connect Africa head Maxine Muffet says her group wants to help the villagers escape poverty. She tells about the possibilities for users of the center.

"You may have a woman that maybe sells earrings or she makes furniture and she may find a person in Switzerland, for example, who may possible buy her products."

The community telecenter does not just provide communication technology. It also provides Internet services on education, training in business and health. The villagers pay between one and two American dollars each day they use the services.

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Most homes in Nigeria do not have running water, or at least not water that is clean enough to drink. As a result, people drink water from small plastic bags sold in markets or on streets. Environmental experts say the bags are now blocking pipes that carry off water. They say these blockages are a threat to public health and are causing diseases. Mario Ritter has the story.

A boy about six years old is selling water. He is balancing a bucket filled with clear plastic bags on his head. Each one holds about a half liter of water. He calls out for people to buy his water.

SOUND: Child hawking the water.

The product he is selling is known as “pure water.” For a little more than 10 cents, buyers tear off an end of the bag with their teeth and drink the water. It is a simple, low-cost way to keep enough fluid in the body. And it provides a much needed chance for young people to earn money in a country where most people are poor.

But experts say the bags are becoming a problem. Cletus Bebefagha directs operations for the Delta State Waste Management Board. He says most people drop the bags on the street when they are finished drinking. He says this is harmful to the environment.

“Plastic is a problem because they don't decompose and by the time they get into any drain, that drain is plugged and causes flooding.”

In his opinion, the only other supply of clean water for most people is bottled water. Yet bottled water is also considered a threat to the environment. But Cletus Bebefagha says bottles can be reused. He says they are easier to control and less damaging over a shorter period than bags.

Still, he notes, not everyone has the money to buy bottled water.

He says his agency is attempting to persuade people to throw the bags in waste cans, and is providing containers to do that. The agency is also working with pure-water producers to find a way to recycle the bags – to treat them so the plastic can be used again. I’m Mario Ritter.



And, finally, on this date in 1938, a Hollywood film was released with a cartoon rabbit later known as “Bugs Bunny.” Over time, the movie-star rabbit who loves to eat carrots and get into mischief became a world-famous star. Bugs hops in today to close our program with one of his favorite expressions: “What’s Up, Doc?”

Let’s give that man a carrot. And that’s our program for today. Remember - for the latest world news, join us at the top of the hour Universal Time for VOA News on radio and here on our web site. I’m Steve Ember. Thanks for joining us.