

THE WORLD NEWS II

Ringing in Zing: Adamawa residents traveling to make phone calls

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Due to cutting off of phone services, the people of Adamawa now travel outside the state to talk to their relations and business associates. So far, at least five ghastly car accidents have been recorded involving people going outside the state to make phone calls.

Malam Danjuma Usman's story was a pathetic one. To make a very important call, he left Yola for Mayo-Lamja, settlement close to Zing in neighbouring Taraba State, and few kilometers away from Mayo-Belwa. The vehicle he was travelling in had an accident and he died instantly. He lost his life not to insurgents or any violence crime, but in search of a telephone network to make a vital call.

Many residents of Adamawa State have to travel outside the state to call their relations or business associates as a result of the phone service cut following the emergency declared by President Goodluck Jonathan on the state, along with Borno and Yobe.

Like Usman's story, the case of Maimuna Garba, a middle-aged mother of two living in Girei town, was also not an enviable one. She was distraught for over two weeks because she could not be reached on phone and was unable to speak to her son, Abubakar, a cattle merchant in Uyo, the state capital of Akwa Ibom State.

"For one week, I couldn't get him or reach any of his friends there to get me talk to him," she said. She was reluctant to talk about her problems until she was advised by a neighbour to travel outside the state so as to be able to reach her son, and so she did.

Abubakar, too, had earlier tried unsuccessfully to reach his mother. On the day he got her, she was not actually in Girei, she was in Mayo-Lamja, on the road to Taraba State. "It was there he called me," she smiled enthusiastically.

Mayo-Lamja, a roadside village, has now changed and became a Mecca of sorts as many people, including the soldiers of the Task Force deployed in Adamawa, troop in to make phone calls. Other residents find it easier to resort to using Cameroonian phone lines to communicate with their Nigerian compatriots due to the proximity. A resident of Toungo, a border town, Kawu Mallum said people in their dozens now cross to neighbouring Cameroun to talk to their friends and relatives who are outside Adamawa State.

Journalists are also seriously affected to the total GSM shut down. Malam Umar Dankano and Mohammad Ismail of Peoples Daily and Leadership newspapers respectively are all frustrated by the network shut down. "It has seriously affected our jobs; for days I cannot make calls or send reports," says Dankano.

Also corroborating, Mr. Gyang Pam said "I can hardly reach my people the way I used to if I want to make calls, I must travel to neighbouring states," he said. "You would dial a number many times before it gets through; and when you manage to get the line, it would sometimes go off before you finish talking. It's very frustrating."

Also, many who came from parts of Adamawa to the outskirts of Zing Local Government Area of Taraba State, painted a grim picture to Weekly Trust of what they daily go through to communicate with their loved ones and business associates. Nnamdi Christian Nwedo, a business man, lamented that transacting business has become very difficult in the past one month. He said he drove about two hours to Zing in Taraba State daily to keep in touch with his customers and various agents who supply him goods from Lagos and other parts of the country.

"Driving for one to two hours to Zing to make calls is a difficult thing; you spend more money fuelling and the risk you take. I transact business daily; I make calls because of the nature of my business. My goods always come from Lagos to Yola. It is a difficult situation for me," he lamented.

Also, Michael Eldunis, a civil servant, said life has not been easy especially in making contacts with friends and loved ones.

"I couldn't go to the office today because I need to come here (Zing) and make contact with people. This is a global world and definitely, you have to make contact with people. Even the computer we are using to communicate is no longer working simply because there is no network," he lamented.

Eldunis complained that one has to spend about N1,400 on transportation virtually daily to go to Zing to make calls and go back to Yola.

He appealed to the government to resolve the situation especially the restoration of network services.

One his part, John Paul said the situation has impacted adversely on his business, adding that something should be done to ameliorate the suffering of the people.

"Now if something is happening to your family, you cannot get across to them. It is a very difficult time for us but we are praying that with time, God will intervene and everything will normalize," he said.

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Weekly Trust gathered that recharge card sellers in Zing are taking advantage of the situation by hiking their prices. For instance, an MTN recharge card which is supposed to sell at N750 now goes for N1,000.

Mobile phone services from Yola, Adamawa's state capital, down to Damaturu and Maiduguri Yobe and Borno states capitals had been shut down since the imposition of the emergency over one month now.

At the peak of recent military operations, reports indicate that the Nigerian authorities reportedly cut off phone services in the three affected states, to deny insurgents their use.

The insurgents are said to be using mobile phones to carry out their nefarious activities and to communicate among themselves. Though, concern authorities have not admitted cutting off the phone services, but many attributed it to the state of emergency and how to track the activities of the insurgents.

But, as President Jonathan said during his speech while declaring the state of emergency "the activities of insurgents and terrorists have been reprehensible, causing fear among our citizens and a near-breakdown of law and order in parts of the country, especially the North. We have taken robust steps to unravel and address the root causes of these crises, but it would appear that there is a systematic effort by insurgents and terrorists to destabilize the Nigerian state and test our collective resolve." Perhaps given this call, people should endure the present hardship for the sake of the future.

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