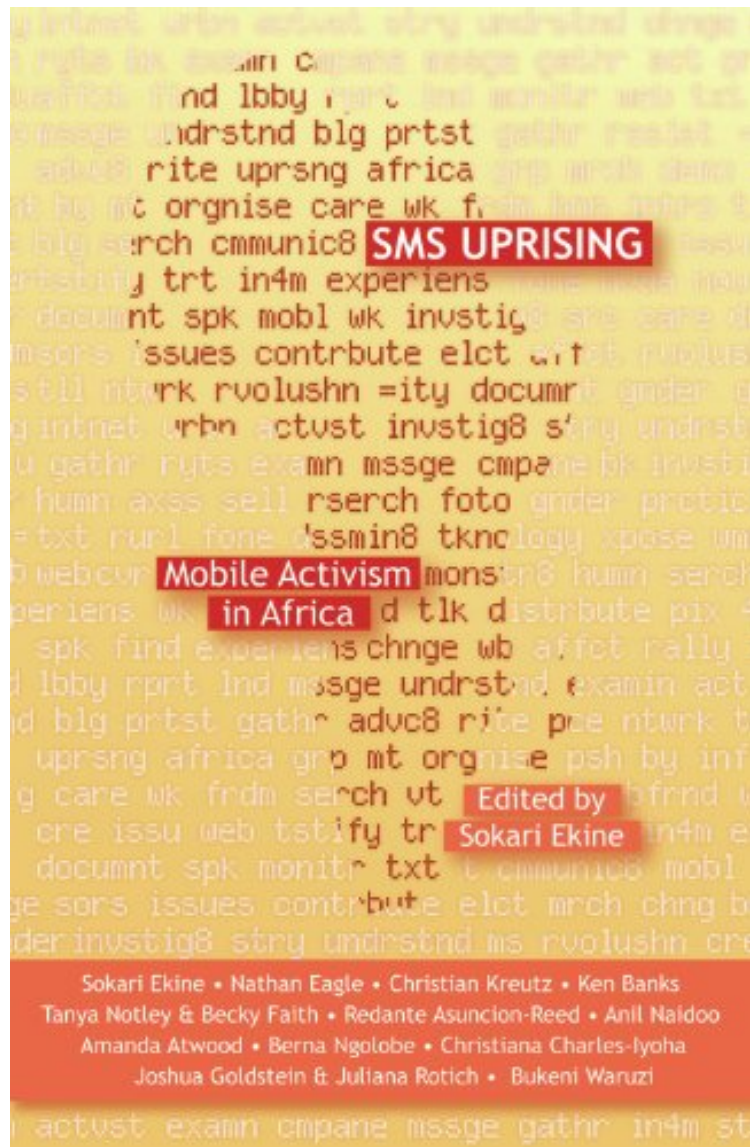


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SMS Uprising: Mobile Activism in Africa

Sokari Ekine

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Sokari Ekine : SMS Uprising: Mobile Activism in Africa before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised SMS Uprising: Mobile Activism in Africa:

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Beyond Six Stars--Hugely Important Useful CollectionBy Robert David STEELE VivasThis book will be rated 6 Stars and Beyond at Phi Beta Iota, the Public Intelligence Blog, where we can do things refuses to implement here, such as sort useful non-fiction into 98 categories, many of the categories focused on stabilization reconstruction, pushing back against predatory immoral capitalism, and so on.When the book was first brought to my attention it was with concern over the price. The price is fair. Indeed, the content in this book

is so valuable that I would pay \$45 without a second thought. I am especially pleased that the African publishers have been so very professional and assured "Look Inside the Book"--please do click on the book cover above to read the table of contents and other materials. This is the first collection I have seen on this topic, and although I have been following cell phone and SMS activism every since I and 23 others created the Earth Intelligence Network and put forth the need for a campaign to give the five billion poor free cell phones and educate them "one cell call at a time," other than UNICEF and Rapid SMS I was not really conscious of bottom-up initiatives and especially so those in Africa where the greatest benefits are to be found. I strongly recommend this book as a gift for ANYONE. This is potentially a game-changing book, and since I know the depth of ignorance among government policy makers, corporate chief executives, and larger non-governmental and international organization officials, I can say with assurance that 99% of them simply do not have a clue, and this one little precious book that gives me goose-bumps as I type this, could change the world by providing "higher education" to leaders who might then do more to further the brilliant first steps documented in this book. At Phi Beta Iota I will add all the links to Internet resources cited in this book that refuses to tolerate, one reason why we created the alternative site for all of my reviews (all connected back to their page, but much more fun and easier to exploit at Phi Beta Iota the Public Intelligence Blog). The authors are a deeply impressive "baker's dozen" (13), most of them of, by, and for Africa. Some high points that stay with me and are best appreciated with a full reading of this extraordinary work, a gift to humanity: 01) Focus is on bottom-up success stories that are easily replicated. 02) Cell phone distribution can be over-stated, some upper class will have 2-4 phones at same time that some lower-class may share a phone among several people. 03) "Technology in itself does not lead to social change" 04) HOT SIDE: Erik Hersman's "White African and the Africa Network," coined the phrase "It works in Africa it will work anywhere." 05) Downside of cell phones is the strategic mineral coltan, heavy out of Democratic Republic of the Congo. 06) Google Earth mash-ups have been hugely empowering for both SMS and voice alerts on violence against women and many other forms of insecurity. 07) HUGH: cell phone technology is enabling the sale of water pumped rather than the pump itself, farmers can pay by their use of the pump which "calls home" when used, this is utterly brilliant. 08) Cell phone banking, e.g. Safaricom's M-PESA, is changing local economies for the better. 09) "The mobile phone will be a strategic tool for communication, collaboration, coordination, and collective action." 10) Four trends are mobile participation through citizen media, local innovation around mobile tools (this includes precision watering of plants, see Phi Beta Iota posting on plants that call when they are thirsty), mobile tools for monitoring and transparency; and finally, decentralized networking (which in my mind helps eliminate wasteful and often corrupt intermediaries). 11) Africa is GPRS (General Packet Radio Service) ready but most lower-cost phones are not GPRS capable. 12) Activists are finding mobiles more than sufficient for both building open information repositories, and for doing analysis with advanced features (which I presume includes back office web sites structured to receive and display SMS text and numerical inputs with added visualization). 13) I share the African reservations about very large NGOs (such as the Red Cross) that keep 50-75% of all contributions for "overhead" and are often arrogant as well as ignorant--the two seem to go together. Here is a wonderful quote that explains why small NGOs with cell phones can be so effective: "What they lack in tools, resources and funds they more than make up with a deep understanding of the local landscape--not just its geography, but also the language, culture and daily challenges of the people." 14) Frontline SMS is free software that turns a laptop or desktop, a mobile phone and a cable into a two way group messaging center. 15) Throughout this book what comes across is low-cost easy to replicate innovations not only "sticks" but it explodes in outward circles of influence and adoption by others. 16) I learn for the first time about e-rider, a "roving NGO ICT consultant" who provides specialist support across a number of like-minded NGOs and also supports information, knowledge-sharing and collaboration among them (link at Phi Beta Iota). 17) SMS campaigns are not just about the limited number of messages sent and received, but also about attendant publicity, with high-profile volunteers adding political and economic weight beyond the mere numbers. 18) It is clear from more than one contribution (half the book is short case studies, all extremely well done), that over half of the population in Africa, if not more, does not participate in political and economic engagement for lack of relevant information, for lack of local counselors or opportunities to do face to face deliberation, and for lack of money for telephonic communications. As Earth Intelligence Network concluded, following in the steps of Arthur Clarke, communications should be FREE--it is the transactions and the creation of wealth through connectivity that can be monetized. 19) SMS costs are much too high, and the bottom line is that the networks are cheating everybody (this is my conclusion, not that of the book, see the "true cost of SMS" posting at Phi Beta Iota). 20) Another obstacle to public journalism is the fee structure put in place by unethical governments that seek to control journalism and reporting, and have the power to imprison or kill unlicensed "reporters." The USA is no exception, in Pennsylvania and elsewhere idiot police chiefs are seeking to criminalize Twitter and the use of cell cameras to record police brutality. 21) One author provides a high-level easily memorable description of the cell phone advantage with the four D's: dynamic, diverse, discreet (camera and recording features), and direct. 22) A downside of "mass SMS" is the ease with which it can broadcast hateful messages that lead to genocide, the author discussing this labels that section "viral hatred." The same author calls for moderates to be ready to counter-attack with messages of moderation, and not yield or leave the "mass SMS" capability only to extremists. I put this book down with deep, deep respect. This is a positive book, a book

that adds to my personal belief that indigenous peoples will ultimately triumph as they receive and use tools such as mobile telephones. I can be very tough on books, but this is one book that is clearly beyond six stars--a fair price, proper use of information supplements, SUPERB quality control in all respects, superb representative collection of grass-roots authorities who are authentic in every way, and replete with real-world examples that are changing the world now and that change is just beginning. The publisher also impresses me with four books advertised at the back of the book, one of which, *Development and Globalisation: Daring to Think Differently* I particularly recommend. This book for me also represents, in all my years of reading, the first sign that indigenous knowledge is now beginning to flow, aided by low-cost printing and the channel. Well done all the way around, those who can afford to should buy ten copies of this book and give them away. The twenty web sites listed at the end are named and linked at this book's review page at Phi Beta Iota. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Not only about SMS in Africa but valuable discussion about all Internet platforms. By Nicholas J. This book is an invaluable resource for learning about SMS in Africa, but it has broader value for understanding the challenges and opportunities of social networking on all Internet platforms. The authors, pre-eminent in the field of Internet activism in Africa, both cover general issues and provide detailed case studies of digital information gathering and activism in Kenya, DR Congo, KwaZulu Natal, Uganda and Zimbabwe among others. The digital divide is addressed but so also is the exponential growth of mobile technologies and the innovative adaptation of old and new technologies to local circumstances. An often overlooked feature of technological adaptation in Africa is the relentless creativity of people in Africa as they attempt to keep automobiles, phones, computers and other items operational far beyond the warranty dates. *SMS Uprising* applies this well to communications technologies. Authors also note both the positive and negative uses of such technologies, including distribution of both non-violent and violent speech as well as the ability to track movements for good and bad purposes. I was surprised at the positive presentation in the book of market liberalization in the context of telecommunications. It seems that there was a clear support for privatized networks rather than government intervention. This position deserves broader integration into debates about neoliberal marketplaces, efficiency, innovation and human welfare.

Providing a unique insight into how activists and social change advocates are addressing Africa's many challenges from within, this collection of essays by those engaged in using mobile phone technologies for social change provides an analysis of the socioeconomic, political, and media contexts faced by activists in Africa today. The articles address a broad range of issues--including inequalities in access to technology based on gender and rural and urban usage--and it offers practical examples of how activists are using mobile technology to organize and document their experiences. An overview of the lessons learned in making effective use of mobile phone technologies without any of the romanticism so often associated with the use of new technologies for social change is given. Examples are shared in a way that makes them easy to replicate, hoping to lead to greater reflection about the real potential and limitations of mobile technologies. Contributors include Ken Banks, Nathan Eagle, Anil Naidoo, Berna Ngolobe, and Juliana Rotich.