

Tablets improve learning at model girls' school

The e-readers are helping to boost pupils' grammar, story telling, composition and pronunciation skills

By CHARLES NGENO

The digital world is diffusing to schools even as the government's laptop programme falters.

Children in various schools are already using laptops and tablets to learn. One such school is the Kakenya Centre for Excellence in Ennoosaen, Transmara, Narok County.

Pupils at the institution have embraced tablets as the government's promise to offer free laptops to Standard One pupils remains uncertain.

The school has partnered with Worldreader, an international NGO, to introduce an e-reader programme to over 150 pupils.

According to the school's director Kakenya Ntaiya, the e-reader programme is helping to boost academic excellence as it impacts positively on pupils' grammar, compositions and even how they articulate themselves.

"After realising we didn't have enough and sometimes relevant up-to-date books, we approached Worldreader, who agreed to partner with us so that our girls could get the best. We want to have the best girl in the

country coming from Ennoosaen," said Dr Ntaiya, adding that since the tablets were introduced, the girls have embraced them and want to spend every moment reading.

Ntaiya is optimistic that the programme will promote the reading culture that many scholars and teachers have said is wanting.

The e-reader tablet is a mobile library that can store up to 1,500 books and retain power for over three weeks.

"We no longer need to worry about losing books. The tablets have all the textbooks and story books recommended by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development," she said, adding that learners will be able to sample as many stories as they need from the many class reader texts stored in the tablets.

The tablets have been programmed to help learners sort books by title, author or even collection. They also have keypads for learners who are either left or right-handed.

Muthoni Muhunyo of East Africa Worldreader Publishing said the programme will promote literacy by making digital books available to everybody. "The tab-

“The tablets we have issued to pupils are preloaded with 103 books. These are books that no pupil will be able to carry to school every day – Muthoni Muhunyo of East Africa Worldreader Publishing

AMBITIOUS PROJECT

The government identified 6,000 primary schools that will pioneer the ambitious laptop-for-schools project. The project will be implemented in three phases, the first of which is projected to cost Sh22 billion. Education ministry officials estimate that about 425,000 pupils will be provided with the laptops starting in January, of the 1.3 million children expected to join Standard One

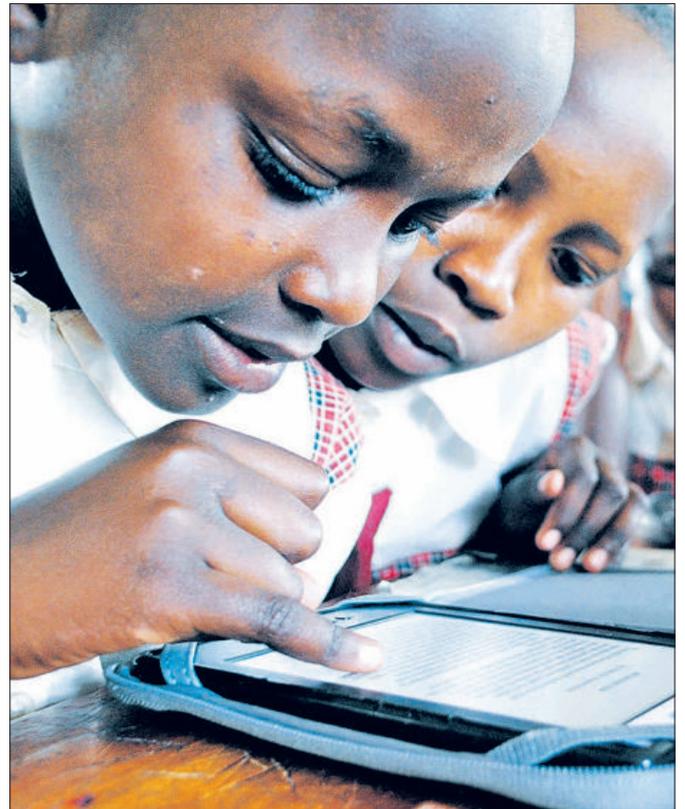
lets we have issued to pupils are preloaded with 103 books. These are books that no pupil will be able to carry to school every day. Technology is making this possible and we want our pupils and even the community to benefit from it," said Muhunyo.

DIGITAL MATERIALS

She further stated that the games that have been stored in the tablets are meant to promote learning. The tablets have E-ink technology that is not harmful to learners' eyes.

"This is a gadget that comes with English and Kiswahili dictionaries to help learners look up the meaning of new words. It also does word recognition and pronunciation," she said.

Muhunyo said if children fall behind in their class work, they can catch up later. She said children can read thousands of local stories together with great international books that have been



Pupils at the Kakenya Centre for Excellence in Ennoosaen, Transmara, Narok County, enjoy using tablets.
[PHOTO: CHARLES NGENO/STANDARD]

curated into the largest most culturally relevant libraries of books. "This is the most effective and inexpensive way to eradicate illiteracy globally," she said.

Muhunyo revealed that by September 2, Worldreader had provided over 721,129 e-books for 12,381 children in nine African countries.

Worldreader Educational Programme Manager Sarah Lauren Jaffe said delivering digital materials is cheaper than paperback books. "Once children are active readers, they become properly equipped to make decisions, learn, grow and change their lives," she said.

Doroty Odidi, the Kakenya Centre project manager, appealed to the community to embrace the programme and help safeguard the tablets.

"The loss of one tablet means we have lost over 103 books. This is a project that will definitely

change learning in the Maa community," said Odidi.

Transmara Quality Assurance and Standards officer Peter Ogutu, while challenging pupils to make maximum use of the programme, reminded them that they have been offered a chance to excel in information technology. He appealed to the Maa community to support the idea by taking girls to school.

MUTILATION

"This project will be useless if the community continues to promote cultures such as female genital mutilation and early marriage," said Ogutu.

Area staffing officer Francis Lenny called for more initiatives to motivate teachers. "It is the teachers who will ensure that the school programmes we roll out succeed. Motivated teachers can deliver effectively and efficiently," said Lenny.

Quest to curb early marriages earns Kenyan CNN Heroes Award nomination

By CHARLES NGENO

A Kenyan has made it to the list of ten shortlisted candidates for this year's CNN Hero of the Year Award.

Dr Kakenya Ntaiya from Ennoosaen in Transmara, Narok County, has been shortlisted because of what has been described as "inspiring change in her native Kenyan village".

After becoming the first woman in the village to attend college in the United States, she returned to open the village's first primary school for girls.

Today, Dr Ntaiya helps provide education for 155 girls.

Dr Ntaiya and George Bwelle from Cameroon are the only contestants

from Africa. The CNN Heroes Award recognises people who are changing others' lives.

Dr Ntaiya is a beacon of hope to many girls. She turned down lucrative job offers at various universities to return to her village, where she began the school.

The Kakenya Centre for Excellence is unique because pupils are admitted in Standard Four. (Kakenya in Maasai means a new dawn).

"This is a critical age when society is telling girls that they need to be circumcised and married off. But I chose to tell them that they are still girls, just learning about their adolescence," says Ntaiya, who is the director of the centre.



Dr Kakenya Ntaiya

When she sat her Standard Eight exams at Ennoosen Primary School, she was one of the two girls left in her class. She proceeded to Sossio Sec-

ondary School and by the time she sat her KCSE in 1999, her promised 'husband' was still waiting.

"But I was not ready to give up my studies. With the help of one of my church elders, I managed to get a partial scholarship to study at Randolph-Macon College in Virginia, US. I studied political science and international studies," she says.

Whenever she returned home for vacations, she would engage villagers by asking them what she could do for them. Mothers would tell her to build a school for the girls so that they could find a refuge from forced circumcision and marriages.

"I knew I had no money but I had the network to raise it. I fundraised by

holding talks where I spoke about my life and the lives of other girls from Ennoosaen. I got over Sh850,000, which we used to erect iron-sheet structures with mud floors. Our efforts and partners have seen us put up a storey block," she says.

She has received many honours, including a Vital Voices Global Leadership Award and a National Geographic Young Explorer nomination.

Dr Ntaiya was awarded a doctorate degree from the University of Pittsburgh in 2011. Her thesis was titled *Warrior Spirit: The Stories of Four Women from Kenya's Most Enduring Tribe*.

You can vote for Dr Ntaiya on heroes.cnn.com.