

# Rural school sets pace in IT

Kikambala hotel management's good proposal succeeds in attracting a highly competitive Nepad programme meant for secondary students

By ABDULSAMAD ALI

**A** primary school in a sleepy rural setting has become a pioneer in information and communication technology (ICT) in Africa.

Kikambala Primary School, whose transport mode from the main road is the bicycle taxi (*boda boda*), is now a leader in e-learning in the continent through the initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad).

And credit goes to the management of Sun N' Sand Beach Resort in Kikambala, for taking a shot at a Nepad e-schools programme targeting secondary schools.

"We had very minimal chance of succeeding but since we believed that Kikambala Primary School met almost all the criteria except it being a primary school, we drafted the proposal," says Mr Andimille Makumbi, general manager of the hotel.

The proposal was accepted primarily because the hotel had agreed to build a classroom with all the specifications by Nepad, says Mr Makumbi. "We were so excited and completed the construction of the classroom in less than a month," he says.

**N**ow the school has become the first primary school in Africa to have the e-learning facilities that include a Vsat connection, 27 branded computers, a fully furnished room and a smart board that could be the envy of any institution offering computer lessons. The smart board acts like a blackboard that operates when it is touched.

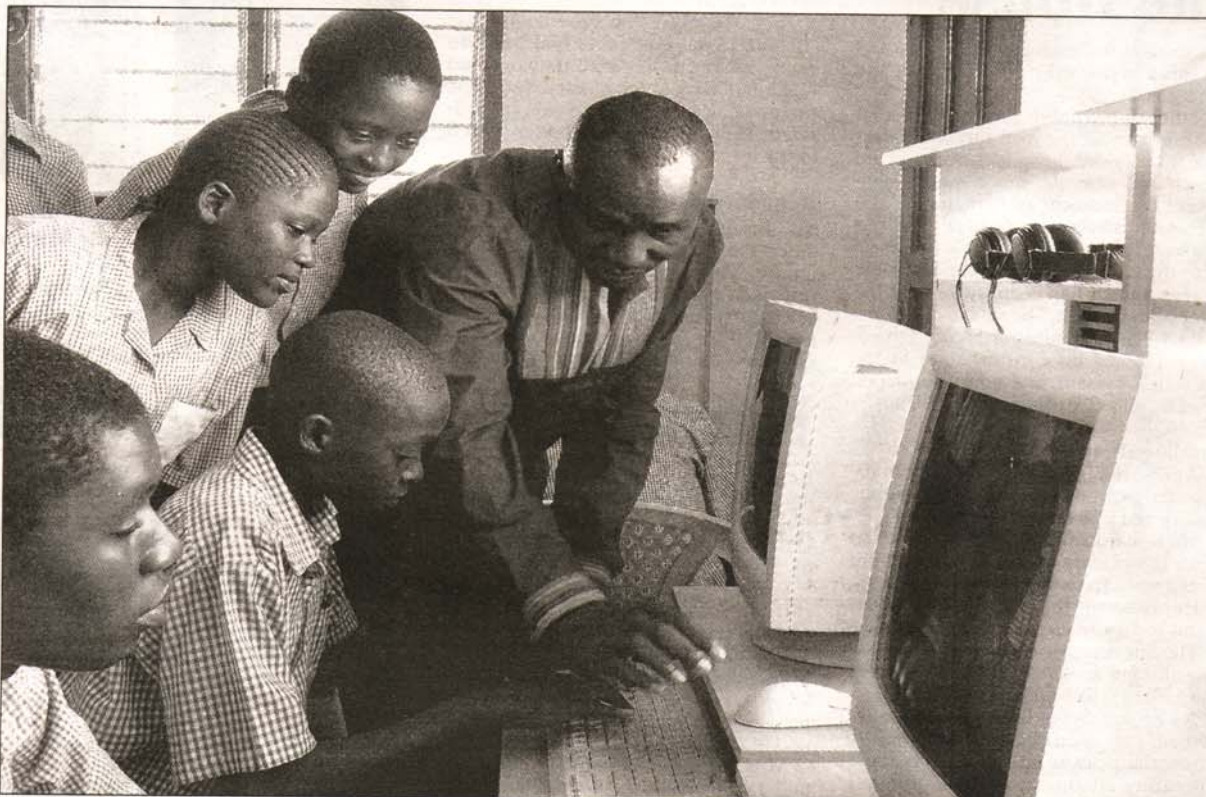
The Microsoft Consortium and Ministry of Education support the initiative launched on June 26. It was attended by Dr Grace Ongile, chief executive officer of Nepad-Kenya and the Microsoft Consortium representative, Mr Mark Matunga.

The concept is aimed at equipping learners, teachers and members of the local community with relevant computer skills. So far 51, have been trained.

Among them is the area assistant chief, Ms Rose Kabibi Kadogo. "I have learnt how to prepare my reports using the Microsoft Word. From now on, my reports to the district officer will be printed rather than handwritten," she said when the *Nation* visited the facility.

Teachers are equally enthusiastic about the project. "I can now prepare my lesson plans using the computer and gather resource materials from the internet," Ms Purity Kasichana, said.

She says her work will be made easier because she will not use a chalk or duster to prepare and print her teaching materials. "This is just marvellous," she said. Another teacher, Ms Dorothy Ashiro, said she was looking forward to having her lesson schemes prepared on the computer.



Photo/Jack Ouwor

**East Africa Microsoft representative Mark Matunga (right) shows Kikambala Primary School children the components of a computer during the launch of the e-learning facilities in the school.**

Mr Wilson Methu, centre manager of Institute of Advanced Technology (IAT), which has been contracted by Microsoft to undertake the training, took the teachers through the paces of archiving resource materials for teaching. "Any information is just a click away," he told the learners.

Pupils will have to wait a little longer for the training for teachers and the community members to be completed before they can start theirs.

The e-school programme, launched in Kenya in September 2005 by President Mwai Kibaki, is intended to nurture the appropriate capacity for sustainable development of the continent.

As a pioneering example, the headteacher, Mr Francis Wanje and a Standard Eight pupil Time Kazungu, have just returned from a Microsoft-organised conference in South Africa dubbed *Accelerating Africa's Global Competitiveness*. It was addressed by, among others, Microsoft chairman Bill Gates and former US president Bill Clinton.

"We are now the top African public primary school in the ICT

development," said Mr Wanje on his return.

The school has 2,058 pupils who will benefit from the new facility.

Area district officer Moses Ivuto said he would ensure security for the facility.

"This is the first time that African governments, the private sector, foundations, development agencies and civil society organisations have come

together for a common ICT project developed and driven by Africans, and for Africa," said Dr Henry Chasia, the deputy executive chairperson for Nepad e-Africa

Commission.

"Broadband information and communication technology will be key to the success of our e-schools project as we intend to procure satellite capacity in bulk and make it available for the connection of Nepad e-schools to the internet," he added.

The 10-year Nepad flagship e-schools initiative involves establishment of an Africa-wide satellite network that will connect the schools to the internet as well as to points within each country from which, educational content will be

fed to the schools on a continuous basis. It also involves ICT training of teacher and students, content and curriculum development, community involvement and participation, and establishment of "health points".

The Nepad e-schools demonstration (demo) project has been identified as a critical initial step for the implementation of e-schools project. Six schools from each of the participating countries will initially benefit from the demo.

**T**he countries are Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, DRC, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda. The Heads of State and governments will officially launch the first Nepad e-schools in their respective countries. The first e-school was launched in Uganda in July 2005.

The partnership created by the commission to fulfil the objectives of Nepad ICT programme is known as Information Society Partnership for Africa's Development (ISPAD).

Private sector partners leading the consortium for the Nepad e-schools demonstration programme are HP, Microsoft Corporation, satellite operator INMARSAT Limited, Oracle Corporation and Cisco Systems.

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