

Mombasa > Ten private and 10 public schools in the county are using the software

Digital learning tool that's teaching children reading and writing skills

Abacadabra is a joint initiative of AKDN and Canada-based Concordia University

BY WINNIE ATIENO

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When President Uhuru Kenyatta visited the Mombasa County government stand during this year's Agricultural Society of Kenya trade fair, he marvelled at Sofia Mpenza's literacy skills displayed using a digital learning tool.

The five-year-old Mombasa Primary School Pre-Primary 1 pupil was teaching hundreds of learners, who had thronged the fair on September 5, how to use a laptop to read, write and spell words in English.

"He asked me several questions, my name, school and the class I attend. I later showed him how Abacadabra is helping me learn to spell words in English. At first, I did not know who he was but I told him he looked familiar, I knew I had seen his face on TV and a poster at the trade fair," she said in an interview after the five-minute session with the President.

The little girl was later informed

More information

DIGITAL LITERACY SOFTWARE

Abacadabra is a web-based early literacy software designed for lower primary learners. The computer application is in use in 10 public and 10 private primary schools in Mombasa County, and the Aga Khan primary schools.

The use of the software is a joint initiative of the Aga Khan Development Network and Concordia University in Montreal, Canada.



that she was speaking to President Kenyatta. Sofia, who wants to be a teacher, is among more than 500 pupils learning Abacadabra in Mombasa's Early Childhood Development Education centres.

"Learning is fun, the lessons are exciting. I have become the Abacadabra champion in my school, I teach my colleagues how to use it especially newcomers in PP2," she added.

Once logged in, learners click on a tab labelled "Kenyan feed". It has vocabulary, reading, spell-

ing, stories, writing and singing. Her teacher, Ms Mishi Mwidau, says learners log in using unique usernames and passwords.

The tool helps learners develop skills in phonological awareness, reading fluency, numeracy, comprehension and writing. Some 20 ECDE teachers and five Mombasa County education officers were trained on the programme at the Aga Khan Academy.

The county's chief officer in charge of education, Mr Innocent Mugabe, said the programme was rolled out earlier this year in

public schools, including Ganjoni, Mikindani, Mwijabu, Bamburi, St Augustine and Kisauni.

Education officer Mary Nyale, who has been implementing the project since 2010, said all the teaching aids are installed in the digital literacy programme.

Unlike regular classrooms, where students follow lessons on the blackboard under the guidance of the teacher, with Abacadabra, the teacher spends only a few minutes to introduce the topic, then leaves the rest of the learning time to the software.

Sofia Mpenza, a pupil at Mombasa Primary School, shows President Uhuru Kenyatta how to use Abacadabra, a digital literacy tool.

PHOTO | PCSU

Lamu >

Islanders want more schools, better roads

BY KALUME KAZUNGU

Residents of Manda Island in Lamu West are pleading with the national government to build more schools and improve infrastructure, including roads in the area. Only three schools — Manda Airport and Manda Maweni primary schools and Manda Airport Secondary School — serve the over 2,000 residents on the island.

Addressing journalists over the weekend, the residents urged the government to speed up the establishment of new learning institutions in order to cater for the high population.

Locals say the schools are barely enough to accommodate the hundreds of learners.

There has been a steady influx of people onto the island in recent years, leading to a steady rise in population, said a resident, Mr Benard Onyango, who has lived on the island for more than 15 years.

Mr Onyango said most children trek tens of kilometres daily to and from school.

"We're really desperate here in this isolated village," he said. "We need more schools established so that our children can learn. Manda is no longer a small place. There are so many people here and more come in daily. Three schools are not even close to enough. We need at least seven more and hope the government comes to our aid."

Nyeri >

Court delays textile firm's reopening

BY JOSEPH WANGUI

The national government's plan to revive the Mount Kenya Textile Mills (Mountex) may take longer than expected after a Nyeri court extended injunctive orders stopping the Industry, Trade and Cooperatives ministry from recovering or interfering with the site land.

Nyeri High Court Deputy Registrar Ruth Kefa pushed the order dated August 8 to October 9, when a case filed by Braeburn Schools Ltd, which is claiming ownership of the land, will be mentioned. This means the much-awaited reopening of the Nanyuki-based factory might be delayed.

Occupants evicted

The dispute over ownership of the 50-acre parcel started in July when the ministry expressed wishes to reopen Mountex.

Government officials, led by Laikipia County Commissioner Daniel Nyameti, entered the land and evicted the occupants. The land, currently worth more than Sh100 million, is registered as LR No 12503.

This came a day after Industry Cabinet Secretary Peter Munya visited the property with other dignitaries.



JOHN NJOROGE | NATION

Tempting fate

Nakuru > Oblivious to the danger, a boda boda operator carries his passenger on top of his luggage at the Migaa blackspot on the Nakuru-Eldoret highway yesterday. Accidents have reduced since the erection of road barriers.

Turkana >

Governor, State agency ink Sh72m deal to supply water

BY SAMMY LUTTA

The county government has signed a Sh72 million deal with the National Water Storage and Harvesting Authority (NWSHA) to deliver piped water to residents.

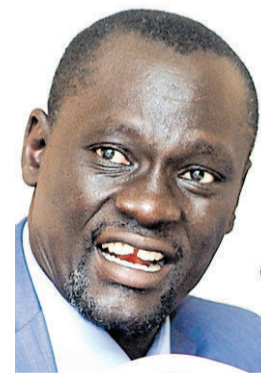
This comes exactly six years after the discovery of vast reservoirs of water in the Napuu and Lotikipi aquifers.

The project will see a 4.6-kilometre pipeline connected to a 300,000-litre elevated steel tank. The water from the tank will be reticulated to more than 25,000 households, relieving residents from their usually long trek in search of the precious commodity.

This will be the first time that water from the aquifer is being supplied beyond the source.

Governor Joshat Nanok (above) said the longest pipeline from the elevated tank will be 27 kilometres to Lotereji village on Lodwar-Lokichar highway that has for many years relied on saline water.

Mr Nanok said other



parts of Kanam Kemer ward, including Turkana University College, Narawa, Lokitela, Ekaales, Mesewan, Kasarani, Juluk and Kisumu Polytechnic, will get fresh and affordable water by December 25.

Protecting aquifers

Many of the targeted learning institutions, private investors and residents have for long been subjected to water rationing and buying water from vendors.

"Sufficient water supply will have a great impact on the development and expansion of

Lodwar town and its environs," the county boss said. "We also want aquifer water utilised for commercial agriculture."

NWSHA chairman David ole Nkedianye said the aquifer has the potential to supply the entire Lodwar municipality if proper infrastructure is put in place. He added that more investments will be made to step up water supply to other parts of Lodwar.

Governor Nanok revealed that his government will have to come up with proper legislation to protect the aquifer so that it can serve locals for many years.

"We will have to engage residents around the aquifer and discuss the ways in which we can help each other in protecting the critical resource," he said.

However, some residents living near the aquifer have urged the governor to pipe the water to remote villages before the plans to supply to the entire Lodwar municipality are fulfilled.