

Helping rural schools to become tech savvy

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RURAL schools in the country will soon be able to join their urban counterparts in embracing the digital revolution, thanks to efforts by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Coca-Cola and the Education Ministry.

Under the joint initiative, schools and communities within the vicinity will have access to electronic learning (e-learning) opportunities and information and communications technology (ICT) resources to help them take part in the emerging knowledge-based economy.

Called *E-learning for Life*, the initiative will involve the setting up of ICT hubs in selected secondary schools across the country, equipped with state-of-the-



E-learning edge: From left are Olson, Education Ministry's secretary-general Datuk Ambrin Buang and Coca-Cola Malaysia's country manager Reiner Becker.

art hardware, educational software and Internet connectivity. A core group of teachers and students will also be trained as "peer trainers" to transfer their ICT skills and knowledge to others in the hub area.

Maxine Olson, UNDP's resident representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam, says the initiative is an innovative approach which opens the schools to the community after-school hours so that the same computer resources can serve both the students and their families.

"In Malaysia, we observe

that ICT is a basic component of development and not a luxury," she says.

"We need to ensure that the explosive growth in ICT opens up new possibilities for the marginalised, not widening the gap between the rich and the poor."

The aim of the project is to demonstrate to the community the value of ICT beyond games and entertainment, and to real learning by anyone in the community. "Through this project, we offer the poor new choices to build better lives," Olson says.

Teachers are expected to take on a more broader

role under the project, that is they are not only needed in the classroom but also in the community.

"The teachers' role is not sidelined with the advent of technology. In fact, if at all ICT must be fully used, teacher support is even more needed not only in the classroom, but also in the community," Olson says.

She adds that there is also a need to develop new roles for teachers and other school staff to guide students in the productive use of ICT.

Under the partnership, Coca-Cola and UNDP have contributed a total of US\$360,000 (RM1.37 million) towards the first phase of the project which involves six rural schools - Tunku Anum Abdul Rahman School in Kedah, Sri Muda School (Seberang Prai Utara), Batu Empat School (Perak), Seri Pengkalan School (Malacca), Dato Menteri Ayer Hitam School (Johor) and Pulau Tawar School (Pahang).

The Education Ministry, meanwhile, will provide teachers with tech training, with ICT hub schools to integrate computer lab-based training into existing curricula.