

Digital learning content deal sparks protest



Kenya Literature Bureau managing director Eva Obara

[PHOTO: FILE]

By **JOSEPH NGUNJIRI**

Publishers are headed for a major showdown with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) over education material for the Jubilee Government's digital ambitions.

At the centre of the storm is the Sh53 billion allocated for the procure laptops for Standard One pupils next year and the accompanying digital learning content. Publishers now allege that KICD, formerly the Kenya Institute of Education, is plotting to lock them out.

"If forces of goodwill do not intervene, we are looking at a scandal that will severely compromise the implementation and success of the laptop for schools programme," said Simon Sossion, the vice chairman of Kenya Publishers Association (KPA).

He accused KICD of plotting to get back to publishing through the backdoor, which is in conflict with its role of vetting and approving submitted education materials. Sossion said publishers cannot expect a fair process if they compete with the body that is supposed to referee their work.

"We have received information that KICD is working in cahoots with Kenya Literature Bureau (KLB) to sell the digital content to the Ministry of Education. Microsoft has been roped in to give the

whole thing a global appeal," claimed Sossion, who heads KPA's digital sub-committee.

On June 11, KICD officials reportedly assured a KPA delegation that the state body had no intention of providing digital content. But Sossion now claims the meeting was merely a public relations stunt aimed at silencing publishers.

"They lied to us," charged Sossion, who is the managing director of Target Publications. "We now have proof that KICD is planning to single-source the provision of digital content against the law."

He claimed there is reliable information that KICD will get content from KLB — a state publisher — then dismiss any other submissions as 'not meeting the required standards'.

However, Eve Obara, the KLB managing director, denied the allegations saying that like any other commercial publisher the organisation is positioning itself to provide digital content.

"The mandate of KICD is very clear and our mandate as publishers is also quite clear. There is no way we are working with KICD to provide content at the exclusion of other publishers," she said.

Sossion alleges the new KICD Act poses a threat to the commercial publishers.