



# Tech 'can help' in Eastern Cape crisis

SARAH WILD

Science and Technology Editor

TECHNOLOGY would go "a long way" to reduce the challenges in the Eastern Cape's rural schools, Cofimvaba's acting district director Malizole Skama said at the launch this week of the R6m Cofimvaba School District Technology Project in the Eastern Cape.

The project aims to introduce technological solutions, such as information and communications technology (ICT), nutrition schemes and energy solutions among others, to the 26 schools in the district circuit, in order to support learning. It comes at a time when education in the province is widely considered to be in crisis.

Last year, the Eastern Cape education department was one of five put under national administration. About 1.1-million pupils in the province wrote the 2012 national assessment test whose results were released yesterday. For mathematics, grade three pupils received an average of 40.5%, grade five pupils got 28.1%, those in grade six 24% and in grade nine 14.6%.

The Cofimvaba project — a collaboration between the nat-



**EXPERIMENTS:** Rachel Chikwamba, a chief scientist at the CSIR, which will be testing various interventions at rural schools.

ional Department of Basic Education, the Department of Science and Technology and the province's education department — aimed to "identify and test interventions that contribute to improvement of rural education through technology-led solutions", according to project documents.

The schools will serve as "a testing ground of different ways in which a range of technology intensive interventions could enhance teaching and learning in a rural environment", they said.

The launch, at Arthur Mfebe senior school in Cofimvaba, focused on ICT

and agri-teaching solutions. "The aim is to develop a model that can be rolled out," Merry Ford, manager: ICT for education mobile learning at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, said.

The council is one of the key implementation and design partners, as well as the Human Sciences Research Council, the Sasol Inzaol Foundation, the Water Research Commission and the Medical Research Council.

"We want to give tablets to each teacher in the 26 schools — about 350 — and eventually the 7,000 learners," she said.

In response to whether the

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tablets — priced at about R1,000 each from China — would be stolen, Ms Ford said that there were lockers at the schools where they could be safely stored and that they would be trackable if taken off school property.

However, this was not a solution to the education problem in the area.

"The worry is that it will be overhyped, and seen as a solution. It is only a tool," Ms Ford said.

Rachel Chikwamba, a chief scientist at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, said: "Just because a school is in a rural area, does not mean it should be disadvantaged... most of the people in SA, and the children in schools, live in rural areas."

Dr Chikwamba said the Cofimvaba project was a pilot programme "in which we learn what is necessary, what works and what doesn't".

■ Wild was a guest of the Department of Science and Technology