

Octéa Diamond Group boosts learning in Kono District

The Octéa Diamond Group, owners of the Koidu Diamond Mine in the Kono District of Sierra Leone, last week launched an educational programme with South African publishing company Times Media, owners of *The Sunday Times* newspaper, to promote reading and learning in Koidu schools and the surrounding Kono communities.

Octéa's subsidiary, Koidu Limited (previously known as Koidu Holdings), has contributed substantially to education in the area since it began operations in 2003.

The Sunday Times programme being rolled out by Octéa is a pilot scheme that includes the distribution of learning and reading material to over 7 000 school children as well as households in and around Koidu.

"Education has always been central to our philosophy that responsible diamond mining can help empower individuals, the community and the country," said Jan Joubert, CEO of the Octéa Diamond Group.

"Bringing in partners like Times Media and *Sunday Times* will help ensure that learning is encouraged from an early age right through adulthood. It is also a vital strategy for our company to help build the workforce of tomorrow."

Training workshop

The programme will include a two-day training workshop for 50 selected teachers who will then be able to train other teachers in the area. Workshops for parents, residents and schoolchildren on the use and benefits of the education material will also take place.

The material being distributed includes 7 000 storybooks for primary and secondary schools; each book contains five African stories. Over 1,6 million copies of these storybooks have been printed and distributed by *The Sunday Times* in South Africa in recent years.

Schools will also receive learning material in the form of posters, with specific content suited to primary and secondary schools. The content was developed by Times Media in consultation with South Africa's National Department of Education, to improve numeracy and literacy.

Publications to be distributed

Copies of the publication *ReadRight* will also be distributed to classrooms and homes in Koidu and Kimbadu, to fill the need for regular educational reading material.

"Literacy is very dear to our hearts and over the past 15 years I am proud to say that we have developed a highly regarded reputation for the supplements we produce," said Patti McDonald of Times Media Education.

"Research has shown that our publications are valued in schools and homes, by children and their parents and teachers alike. Stories do not have to have glossy, hard covers to be read. Stories, reports, features, surveys and notices have been read in newsprint for ages."

The launch of the programme, which will see workshops being conducted in Kimbadu by educational experts from Times Media, will be attended by over 200 people including paramount chiefs, community dignitaries and office-bearers, government officials, school principals, teachers, town chiefs, school pupils and the media.

