

Big business vow to reduce digital gap

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Article blurb If representatives of international companies keep promises made at GKP3, millions may benefit. Microsoft Unlimited Potential Group, Microsoft Corporation, Intel, Alcatel and iMallGlobal outlined their plans to reduce the digital divide during a panel titled *Emerging Markets: Is there a fortune at the bottom of the pyramid?*

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"The vision and mission of [Microsoft] is to create sustainable social and economic opportunities for five billion people in the next five years," said Microsoft Senior Vice President Orlando Ayala. "We have decided to consider the strategy of moving forward with new innovations." Ayala said this would include provision of relevant content and access to affordable ICTs and facilities.

He said one of the biggest challenges is to make ICT available to millions "at the bottom of the pyramid".

Ayala believes current business models and development approaches may not be geared to cope with the diverse conditions in emerging markets.

Intel's World Ahead programme vice-president John Davies said their programme targeted youth who need to be skilled and connected.

"The programme have given out 40 million computers and targets one billion people. We want all countries to get involved and this would enable more people to get skills and create more jobs," he said. He said the company targeted several countries including Guatemala, Costa Rica, South Africa, Libya, Thailand, Malaysia and others.

He said that World Ahead was also implementing a rural access programme through telecentres, for example with fishermen in Vietnam and remote schools in Egypt and Pakistan.

Vice president of Alcatel corporate marketing, Valerie Faudon said her company is implementing a programme to provide broadband to 40 African countries. Intel is applying its experience and assets to address health challenges in the prevention and management of diseases and promotion of wellness.

Faudon said Intel has also introduced mobile banking in the Philippines. Intel's service includes payment of bills through SMS, micro-finance loan re-payments, airtime, cash deposits and withdrawals, retail purchase and peer to peer money transfers.