



knowledge without boundaries

# EIFL-PLIP

Improving lives and livelihoods through innovative public library services

## Library introduces local language health service Busolwe Public Library, Uganda

IMPACT CASE STUDY

The Humanye Obulamu Project (HOP) uses information and communication technology (ICT) to improve flows of health information to villagers living in Butaleja District in Eastern Uganda. The project –

- Improved communication between health workers and hard-to-reach communities in distant villages.
- Developed a partnership with the local non-governmental organization, A Little Bit of Hope, which has built pit latrines for 30 households in two villages.
- Raised visibility of the library and increased library user numbers by 22%.
- Demonstrated the value of ICT in relation to health: responding to a library survey, 50% of library users said they were now using library computers to research health information.
- Increased the numbers of people coming to the library with health queries.

Busolwe Public Library is the only library serving Butaleja District, a rural area with over 200,000 people. According to the Healthcare Workers' Association, a local community-based organization, improved access to reliable health information will help reduce numbers of people suffering from the most common preventable diseases, like malaria, HIV/AIDS, respiratory infections and diarrhoea. However, because many people are non-literate and speak only the local language, Lunyole, they struggle to access information. The library uses ICT and expert translators from the Lunyole Language Association to overcome these challenges.

The library initiated HOP with a small grant (up to US\$15,000) from EIFL's Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFL-PLIP). They installed five computers, a photocopier/scanner, and an internet connection in the library, and also purchased new books on health and hygiene. Librarians conducted ICT skills training and, with health workers, embarked on an outreach campaign, targeting hard-to-reach communities with information about how to prevent and identify common diseases. In just one year, working with the Lunyole Language Association,



Health worker addresses a group of women during a library health event

*“After the training on nutrition, I have been able to use my scarce resources to feed my children properly. Through referrals of health care workers, now those who had big bellies have received treatment at the hospital.” - Bashir Mbulambago, resident of Mugulu village.*



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the Healthcare Workers' Association and doctors, the library –

- Developed a course in basic ICT skills and trained five health workers and over 80 community members to use ICT.
- Researched the internet for locally relevant health information focused on preventable illnesses, translated it into Lunyole and created leaflets for dissemination in the community.
- Hosted four events where doctors gave presentations on disease prevention strategies, including good hygiene and nutrition, the importance of clean water sources and latrine construction, self-diagnosis and treatment of minor health problems and recognizing signs of more serious illnesses like cholera, diarrhoea and malaria. Responding to a library survey, 77% of library users reported learning something new during library health events.
- Formed health clubs with six secondary and two primary schools and worked with students and community drama groups to develop short plays on health issues, which the groups performed in four villages, reaching non-literate people.

## The future

The library's health information programme will continue, with the support of the Healthcare Workers' Association and the Lunyole Language Association. The relationship with A Little Bit of Hope is expanding, further extending the library's health information service, and providing practical solutions to sanitation problems.

The EIFL-PLIP grant was awarded in April 2012. A year later, the library assessed the impact of the service. Information presented here is based on the library's impact assessment.

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**EIFL** (Electronic Information for Libraries) is an international not-for-profit organization dedicated to enabling access to knowledge through libraries in more than 60 developing and transition countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. EIFL's Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFL-PLIP) supports libraries to implement community development projects. Learn more at [www.eifl.net/plip](http://www.eifl.net/plip). EIFL's Public Library Innovation Programme is supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

### Public libraries – partners in development

Busolwe Public Library's health information service overcomes major barriers to information access through strategic partnerships –

- The Healthcare Workers' Association built librarians' understanding of local health issues and helped librarians develop health messages. They also worked with community drama groups, guiding development of plays focused on health issues.
- Librarians researched the internet for locally relevant health information, and passed it on to the Lunyole Language Association for translation into Lunyole. They then developed posters and leaflets in Lunyole, which health workers and drama groups disseminated to village communities.
- School and community drama groups performed health plays in villages, reaching non-literate people with vital information.
- The NGO, A Little Bit of Hope further disseminated the library's messages, and engaged communities in practical action, building pit latrines.