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EIFL-PLIP

Improving lives and livelihoods through innovative public library services

Library ICT training empowers women farmers National Library of Uganda

IMPACT CASE STUDY

The Electronic Information Empowering Women Farmers service helps women farmers in Kyangatto village, Nakaseke district (central Uganda), by increasing access to agricultural information, using computers, the internet and mobile phones. The service –

- Led to establishment of a new women's group – the Kyangatto Women's Group – with 60 women farmers and villagers who now meet in the evenings after their work is done to share agricultural information and knowledge.
- Demonstrated the value of information and communication technology (ICT) to women farmers – and increased demand for training and free internet access in the community.
- Inspired the National Library of Uganda (NLU) to identify a new partner in the village and donate an additional five computers for ICT training for women farmers.

“I was always disappointed because I could not find markets to sell my products, and they piled up. But now, through the SMS (mobile phone text messaging) alerts I know where to sell my products at the best prices, and on time!” - Esther Sserwanga, development leader in the Kyangatto Women's Group.



National Library of Uganda's training has enabled women farmers to research the internet and to use email to ask farm support agencies for information.

Nakaseke district, where Kyangatto village is located, is about 80km north of Uganda's capital city, Kampala. The village is a centre for a farming community, working with livestock and growing vegetables and fruit. Farming is mainly done by women, who rely on traditional farming methods. Women farmers speak mainly the local language, Luganda, and have limited access to information that will help improve their livelihoods – for example, about modern farming methods, the weather, animal diseases and plant pests, markets and market prices.

NLU sought a solution in ICT. With a small grant (up to US\$15,000) from EIFL's Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFL-PLIP), and working in partnership with Nakaseke Multi-purpose Community Telecentre, the library bought four computers and 15 mobile phones. The partners developed an ICT training course, including computers and internet research skills, and developed an SMS service to send information in Luganda to a select group of women farmers. Because this was the first-ever ICT training for women farmers in the district, the partners had to work especially hard to build women's confidence and help overcome their fear



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of computers. In less than a year, the service –

- Developed a basic ICT training manual in Luganda and taught 64 women farmers computer and internet skills. For over 95% of trainees, this was their first experience of computers.
- Built women's information literacy skills and taught them to use email to ask questions and request agricultural information.
- Engaged and trained two library volunteers (local youth with an interest in ICT) to send regular SMS (an average of three per week) to 50 women farmers. SMS alerts included information about the weather, market prices, and availability and cost of agricultural supplies.
- In response to community demand, launched an ICT training programme in Bukalabi Primary School in Kyangatto village, where the women live, and organized six ICT refresher courses, further building 60 women's confidence and skills. The popular training attracted other community members, and NLU expanded the programme to include 15 men.

The future

NLU is developing an agricultural web-portal and will seek partnership with local and international farm support agencies and information providers to ensure access to relevant agricultural information. Through partnership with Bukalabi Primary School, which has opened its doors to the Kyangatto Women's Group, the project will continue to host regular computer and internet training for farmers and others in the community.

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. EIFL's Public Library Innovation Programme is supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Public libraries – partners in development

Uganda's National Development Plan (2010/11 - 2014/15) estimates that 83% of women in Uganda are engaged in agriculture, contributing 70-75 per cent of farm produce. However, agricultural production has been declining. The plan identifies several reasons for this, including over-reliance on subsistence farming, use of traditional farming methods and lack of timely, reliable access to relevant information.

There are 32 public and 93 community libraries in Uganda, spread across the country and reaching deep into rural areas. National Library of Uganda's innovative ICT training and mobile phone information service shows how libraries, using technology, can support the efforts of local agricultural agencies and help contribute to improved agricultural production.

"We are going to link the project with the government and other agencies to continue supporting the work that National Library of Uganda has started. We are in the dot com era and this is the right way to go!" - Mr Robert Kinyenya, Head Teacher, Bukalabi Primary School in Kyangatto Village.