



knowledge without boundaries

EIFL-PLIP

Improving lives and livelihoods through innovative public library services

Library ICT helps farmers combat plant pests Rwenzori Information Network (RIC-NET), Uganda

IMPACT CASE STUDY

Working through Busongora Rural Information Centre (BRIC), a community library, RIC-NET helps farmers to combat plant pests and diseases and to improve their yields. The service, which uses smart phones and other information and communication technology (ICT) –

- Helped 852 farmers to find solutions to plant pests and diseases.
- Trained 20 volunteers to use smart phones to access and share information, who are now permanently available to support farmers.
- More than tripled the number of library users – from 310 in 2011/12 to 1,050 in 2012/13. Over 350 (about 48%) of the new users are farmers.
- Renewed the interest of local leaders in establishing a new public library in Kasese District.

“I am impressed with the ways that information sharing and access has been improved. I pledge to lobby my colleagues in the District Council to learn from BRIC and to start up the district public library.”
– Mr Muhindo Tadeo, vice-chairperson, Kasese District, who has tabled a proposal on the library in the District Council.

RIC-NET serves 6,000 farmers in Uganda’s Rwenzori region. Farmers struggle to keep up yields because of severe infestations of plant pests and diseases, especially banana bacteria wilt, cassava wilt and maize weevil.

In 2011, over 1,650 farmers approached RIC-NET urgently seeking treatment for infestations. To speed up response times, RIC-

NET developed the smart phone information service. With a small grant (up to US\$15,000) from EIFL’s Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFL-PLIP), RIC-NET equipped 20 volunteers – six plant doctors and 14 community information facilitators – with smart phones. They trained the volunteers to use the phones to photograph diseased plants and to send the information to agricultural experts for identification. In addition, RIC-NET purchased two laptop computers and upgraded BRIC’s computers and internet connection, so that BRIC can provide free ICT access and training to farmers and their families.



Plant doctors help farmers at Mawa market.

“As a result of the plant doctors’ advice and information, I have seen great reduction of pests and diseases in my orange orchard.” – Mr Francis Baita, farmer and farmers’ group leader.



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In less than a year, the service -

- Conducted 30 plant clinics at village markets, where experts known as plant doctors helped 500 farmers identify pests and diseases, and proposed solutions.
- Deployed plant doctors and community information facilitators to 224 farms, helping 352 farmers.
- Trained 112 community members – including 30 farmers – to use ICT.
- Trained seven library staff to use ICT to find agricultural information and to respond to farmers' questions.
- Developed an agricultural web portal with information specifically selected for farmers in Rwenzori region. The website (www.library.ricnet.co.ug) attracted 780 users.
- Increased the library's stocks of books, CDs and journals on agriculture.

The future

RIC-NET will continue to support BRIC to maintain the agricultural information service and free internet access. The non-governmental organization, ORDISEF will continue to pay the rent for the building and the Uganda Community Library Association (UgCLA) has donated about US\$2,000 towards the library's running costs for 2013.

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. For further information, contact Mr John Silco Murugahara at director@ricnet.co.ug or mjohnsilco@gmail.com.

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

Strategic partnerships were central to this vital information service. Partners included –

- Rwenzori TeleCentre (RWETEL) – developed the agricultural web portal.
- The agricultural and scientific non-governmental organizations, [Plantwise Uganda](#) and [CABI-UK](#) – provided information. Plantwise Uganda also donated five plant clinic kits.
- [Mountains of the Moon University](#) and the government agency, National Agricultural Research Organization ([NARO](#)) provided expert support to plant doctors in the field.
- The Uganda Community Libraries Association provided books and funding to sustain the service.
- Kabarole Public Library provided management training to BRIC staff.

“Smart phones have reduced the time we spend attending to farmers' needs. It is now easy to take photos and send them to get further advice from experts.”

– Mrs Astalhuzi Bahungula, plant doctor.