

LOCAL LIBRARIES EQUIP PEOPLE WITH LIFE CHANGING DIGITAL SKILLS IN UGANDA

CASE STUDY



OVERVIEW OF THE DIGITAL SKILLS@YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY PROJECT

Between 2021 - 2023, the Digital skills@your local library project has worked with a network of 27 public and community libraries in Uganda, providing basic digital and mobile literacy skills to youth and women. Learners have used these new skills to generate an income, find jobs, pass exams and build better futures.

LIBRARIES AS HUBS FOR LEARNING ICT SKILLS

'Digital skills@your local library' builds on the existing network of public and community libraries in Uganda, which are equipped with computers and internet and play a role of learning hubs in their communities. The project improved the capacity of librarians and volunteers working in these libraries to offer digital and mobile literacy skills training, specifically targeting women and unemployed youth.

Librarians and volunteers received training to enhance their ICT and training skills, as well as expand their knowledge of online resources and services. This in turn enabled librarians to provide basic digital and mobile information literacy training for women and youth in their communities and help learners to further advance their ICT or vocational skills using a combination of peer to peer learning and open online learning resources.

In remote and rural areas, which have no libraries or ICT infrastructure and capacity to conduct permanent digital skills training, the project organised mobile digital literacy camps. Camps supplied equipment and internet, organising intensive 5-day basic digital literacy training.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

According to Datareportal.com, Uganda's internet penetration rate stands at 24.6 percent. In 2022, the National IT Survey Uganda revealed that 97 percent of Ugandans have not used any computing device in the previous three months, while only 1.3 percent own any personal computer or laptop. A vast digital divide also exists between urban and rural areas. Among individuals that had not used the internet, lack of knowledge or skills was the biggest barrier (37 percent), followed by lack of knowledge about what the internet was (28 percent) and the high cost of internet access (26 percent).

As one of means to encourage take up and use of ICT, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) has been equipping libraries with computers, multipurpose printers and wireless Internet. Since 2018, public access to computers and the internet has been established in 27 locations and UCC continues to onboard new libraries every year.

SUPPORT TO YOUTH AND WOMEN

Women and unemployed youth face particular challenges getting online, yet they stand to gain the most from learning digital skills. According to UNICEF, Uganda has a very young population, around 80% of Ugandans are under 30 years and up to 400,000 young people enter the job market annually. Improving IT literacy fits hand in hand with the development of entrepreneurial skills and can offer young people an opportunity to build confidence and knowledge to find informal employment or start their own micro-enterprise.

The project offered both women and young people flexible and accessible training in internet searching, digital marketing, mobile information literacy, Google tools, online safety and other topics. To ensure equal participation of women in the training, the project took specific measures such as organising women-only groups or seating women with women in mixed groups, timing of the training according to

the schedules that best suit women and encouraging young mothers to bring their babies or children to the training.

“In every library we visited I saw lots of excitement from women, one woman told me ‘I will use every spare minute I have to try and learn something new. People judge us because we aren’t educated and are without skills. This project is an opportunity for us to prove that we can learn and improve our prospects for the future.’ Said Asia Kamukama, Executive Director of the Maendeleo Foundation.

GROWING AND SUPPORTING MICRO-BUSINESSES AND INCOME GENERATION

As news about the training spread, libraries were asked to provide digital skills training to local government officials, police officers, teachers, doctors and nurses. The training has also attracted people in business, early school leavers and people living with disabilities.

After participants had learned basic digital skills librarians were connecting them with online resources to help them continue learning more advanced ICT topics or vocational skills. Learning Circles were introduced to allow groups to meet, take free online courses together and learn from each other. These learning circles were established on a variety of topics ranging from soap making to hairdressing and graphic design. Free and open learning resources used by libraries are available at:

<https://uganda.p2pu.org/courses>

Whilst many classes are held in library buildings, librarians also went out into the community, visiting workplaces such as garages and shops to demonstrate, using mobile devices, how the internet can provide skills to help entrepreneurs, including mechanics, marketing or communications skills.

“We use ICT training to introduce useful online resources such as courses, tutorials, and YouTube videos. This allows people to learn new skills and generate income or diversify what their business can offer,” said Peter Balaba, librarian, Nakaseke Public Library

RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

In two-and-a-half years, libraries provided basic digital skills to over 6,500 people from different walks of life, including single mothers, street vendors, businesswomen, unemployed youth, teachers, and healthcare workers. Over 1000 people attended mobile digital literacy camps. Over 13,000 people were reached through digital and mobile outreach events. Furthermore, nearly 1,500 individuals completed online courses through learning circles (groups facilitated by librarians) organized in libraries. The training is improving lives in communities across the country, as people apply their new skills to start small businesses, study and complete school projects, and find new jobs. Learners often went on to take new steps forward with their careers and studies and to inspire and support others.

Flexibility was key to the success of the project. Training was adapted to suit the needs of the community in, for example, skills building for specific income generating activities. As librarians grew more experienced they began to leave the library buildings and visit community meeting spaces, schools, businesses and market places to demonstrate how digital devices and online resources can be used.

Project partners worked with libraries to address various challenges including power cuts, lack of devices, connectivity issues and diverse levels of education within learners. Efforts were made to adapt the training to learners' needs by offering to learn at their own pace, conducting training in local languages or focusing the training on specific topics of interest to the group, e.g. digital marketing.

Official recognition of the achievements of individuals taking part in the training was key. At the end of the training libraries provided certificates which were recognised locally by employers and graduation ceremonies with presence of local authorities were frequently held for those who had completed training.

The project's focus on existing networks of community and public libraries was also key to its success. Librarians were already well connected with their local communities, further building their capacity to train groups in digital skills, increasing their confidence, sense of agency and ability to think creatively and encourage others.

The project has also attracted widespread interest, inspiring further donations of ICT to libraries from Absa Bank Uganda, Airtel Uganda, MTN Foundation and other private companies.

SUSTAINABILITY

The project was purposefully built on the network of government funded public libraries and well-established community libraries, equipped with computers and the internet. This network is sustainable and will continue to be operational after the project, enabling librarians and volunteers at the libraries to continue training people in ICT.

As a national authority in charge of capacity building of librarians, the National Library of Uganda (NLU) plays a critical role in keeping the ICT skills of librarians up-to-date. NLU is also engaged with national and local stakeholders who contribute to library development and it is permanently looking for opportunities to complement government funding with donor funding. Our capacity building approach, combined with free and open resources and low-bandwidth tech solutions makes the project easily extendible - new learning circles continue to pop up on <https://uganda.p2pu.org>.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

The project is supported by the Wehubit Programme implemented by the Belgian development agency, Enabel. Project partners:

- National Library of Uganda (NLU), a government body that oversees the establishment and management of public and community libraries and promotes reading culture in the country.
- Maendeleo Foundation, a Uganda-based non-governmental agency that promotes development through digital and job skills training.
- Peer 2 Peer University (P2PU), a USA-based non-governmental agency that promotes and facilitates lifelong learning outside of formal learning.
- EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries), a not-for-profit organisation that works with libraries in Africa, Asia Pacific and Europe to enable access to knowledge for education, learning, research and sustainable community development.
- 27 public and community libraries in different regions of Uganda that have computers and the internet available for public use.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact: Ugne Lipeikaite, EIFL-PLIP Impact Manager: ugne@eifl.net

Watch the video with testimonies about how the project changed lives: <https://youtu.be/Y-UU8mmRkHk>

Read success stories on how library digital skills training has helped trainees: <https://tinyurl.com/483r7jc4>

Visit the map of participating libraries: <https://bit.ly/3pNagxb>

Check out the findings of a study to assess the impact of the project:

<https://www.eifl.net/resources/digital-skills-your-local-library-project-results-and-impact>