IMPACT CASE STUDY

Farmers in 4 regions inspired to sustain library ICT
Maendeleo Foundation, Uganda

The Connect Uganda Pilot Project uses information and communication technology (ICT) to help rural families build sustainable livelihoods by increasing access to agricultural information in local languages. Working through five rural libraries, the service –

• Demonstrated the value of ICT and inspired farmers' groups and library users to contribute to the cost of internet connections in future.

• Helped farmers petition a government agricultural agency to supply them with disease-resistant coffee plants.

• Enabled farmers to identify new species of trees that they can sell in the community.

• Encouraged young people to take up farming as a career.

• Linked farmers to new sources of farm supplies and marketing opportunities.

• Attracted 355 new library users from all sectors of the community.

1. Caezaria Community Library in Central Region. **2.** Bwera Information Centre in Western Region. **3.** Alebtong Community Library in Northern Region. **4.** Uganda Rural Literacy and Community. Development Association (URLCODA) in Northern Region. **5.** Mpolyabigere Community Recreation Centre in Eastern Region.

"Through the internet, I discovered new nutritious plant species that I can plant alongside my bananas. Now I have started a nursery bed with 600 seedlings of Luceana, which I am selling to fellow farmers. I expect to earn an extra income of UGX120,000 (US$47)."
– Mr John Baluku, farmer in Western Region

With a small grant (up to US$15,000) from EIFL's Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFL-PLIP), Maendeleo Foundation installed wi-fi internet connections and 15 netbook computers in five rural libraries (three netbooks per library). The libraries serve communities in each of Uganda's four regions (as shown on the map). At three libraries where there was no electricity, they installed solar panels to charge the netbooks. Working with the Uganda Community Libraries Association (UgCLA), Makerere University Centres for Lifelong Learning, government farm support agencies and farmers' groups, they launched a programme including free ICT training for farmers and creation and packaging of information in local languages.

Farmers responded enthusiastically. For many, this was the first time they had used ICT.

EIFL-PLIP
Improving lives and livelihoods through innovative public library services

In less than a year, the five libraries -
• Trained 700 farmers and other community members, and 10 librarians to use ICT;
• Supported information searches of 570 farmers;
• Trained 10 farmer volunteers, two at each library, to share information at farmers' group meetings, also serving the needs of non-literate farmers.
• Translated and repackaged agricultural information into local languages to meet farmers' needs.
• Hosted regular monthly community meetings to share information, attracting local leaders and government officials, teachers and schoolchildren, farmers and their families.

Public libraries - partners in development

There are over 140 public and community libraries in Uganda. Here's how just five libraries helped improve farmers' livelihoods –
• A Connect Uganda Pilot Project survey found that 88% of farmers believed the information sourced through library internet, events and print resources had helped improve their farming and produce yields.
• After researching the internet at Caezaria Public Library, coffee farmers petitioned the National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAADS) for help in combating coffee wilt. NAADS sent them 100 wilt-resistant Arabica coffee seedlings.
• Young people who attended ICT training at Bwera Information Centre were inspired to take up farming as a career, and have formed two young farmers' groups.
• Farmers at Bwera Information Centre have started a blog and are now advertising through the agricultural web portal Agri-ProFocus Uganda.
• With solar power, Alebtong Community Library and Caezaria Public Library are offering reading sessions and internet access to the community at night.

The future

Each library serves about 100 farmers' groups. At three of the libraries – Alebtong Community Library, Bwera Information

"We are so glad that we no longer have to wait for middlemen to know market prices."
– Mr Alex Thabulenga, chairperson of the Kyempara Bee Farmers' Association.

Centre and Caezaria Public Library – library users have formed savings groups dedicated to saving money to pay for internet connections. The libraries are considering charging organizations and businesses a small fee for ICT training and usage, and the three libraries with solar power are now generating income by charging community members' mobile phones. Money raised in these ways will also be ploughed back into the service. Farm support agencies, like the agricultural i-hubs **Agri-ProFocus** and **FIT Uganda**, and the government **National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS)**, will continue to provide information for the service.

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 Ms Asia Kamukama, Uganda Director, Maendeleo Foundation, asia@maendeleofoundation.org.

www.eifl.net/plip