

Everything counts: impact stories leading to success

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Abstract:

Almost two hundred vulnerable youth in Ghana return back to studies; farmers in Serbia increase the crops and start selling products online; unemployed people in Macedonia find jobs. These remarkable changes happened due to new and innovative public library services. Here are only 3 examples of many innovative service projects, started with EIFL-PLIP (<http://www.eifl.net/plip>) small grants to libraries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America.

All over the world, libraries are gaining the name of the cost-effective and trusted partners in community development. Today libraries have the tools to expand our access to new information, each other, and the world at large. They are places where people are acquiring knowledge from new and innovative services using Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Knowledge is power, and that power is being channeled by libraries to address pressing community challenges, such as issues of public health, rural development and farming efficiency, unemployment, and life prospects of youth at-risk. In many countries public libraries have long tradition of partnership with governments, philanthropies, and the private sector, to provide services and programs to community members, however track of success stays at quantity of activities (or workload) level, leaving impact and meaning un-recorded, therefore un-revealed.

The paper presents a model to measure impact of library innovative services and using impact data to ensure their sustainability. The model consist of three steps: investigating the impact, writing a success story and communicating it to the stakeholders. One year after the project end, EIFL contacted the libraries again to investigate if the new services had continued. We found that following this strategy of measuring, writing up and communication impact stories, most of the libraries managed to secure support to maintain and expand their services. With the proper funds and resources, this success can be spread to other libraries to improve lives and livelihoods of people in communities all around the world.

Keywords: public libraries, impact, evaluation, advocacy.

1 BACKGROUND

There are over 230,000 public libraries in developing countries. Known and trusted in their communities, staffed by trained librarians, and increasingly connected to the internet, they are uniquely positioned to change lives and build strong communities. But this opportunity to reach people with vital information remains untapped.

Recent research^{1,2} provides evidence that in most developing countries, public libraries are under-resourced, technology infrastructure is poor and the digital information and services available are insufficient to meet user needs. Governments see libraries as a valued asset, but are often unaware of the stimulating role they are or could be playing in communities. Often public libraries are viewed as quiet spaces, for books and study, rather than as modern, dynamic public places where people can access ICT and find information that is needed in everyday life.

The EIFL-PLIP program was initiated to change this situation through supporting libraries to implement innovative services that improve lives in their communities, and through demonstration projects that show how public libraries contribute to achieving national and local government development goals. EIFL-PLIP works in developing and transition countries, at grassroots level, to improve standards of living and transform lives through supporting innovative use of information and communication technology (ICT) in public libraries.

2 INNOVATIVE SERVICES TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

EIFL-PLIP is providing knowledge sharing, capacity building and financial support to public libraries to implement innovative service through ICT's. Since 2010, it has awarded small grants to 39 library projects in 23 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Communities reached include farmers, health workers and patients, women and girls, job seekers, the disabled and vulnerable children and youth. Services developed focus on key development areas like agriculture, health, unemployment, youth development and others.

At the end of 2012, because of EIFL-PLIP support over 9,000 people in 23 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe have benefited from ICT training in local libraries. Their new competences helped women and girls, subsistence farmers, youth, those suffering from ill health or are unemployed, and many other disadvantaged communities, to find jobs, do better in school, live healthier lives, improve farming, be socially and economically included. EIFL-PLIP has helped to create sustainable information access and learning opportunities to communities in developing countries, thereby enabling people to improve their lives.

¹ Global Impact Study//Technology & Social Change Group, University of Washington Information School. More information at: <http://www.globalimpactstudy.org>

² Perceptions of Public Libraries in Africa//EIFL, 2011. More information at: <http://www.eifl.net/perception-study>

Below are a few examples of EIFL-PLIP projects.

Agriculture – improving farmers’ lives

In Serbia, Public Library Radislav Nikcevic’s AgroLib-Ja service³, launched in 2010, offers an online market and ICT skills training service through five village libraries. In 2012, i.e. a year after the grant was finished, the library conducted a survey to assess the impact of AgroLib-Ja: over 80% of farmers surveyed said they used AgroLib-Ja to look for agricultural information, and over 70% said the information helped them increase production and improve farming methods.

Serving the unemployed

In Macedonia, Public Library Braka Miladinovci’s⁴ ICT and employment information service, launched in 2010, helped 39 women find work. This is 48% of the total number of the library’s trainees in less than a year. The library’s service is now integrated into the local municipality’s services for the unemployed.

Youth development

In South Africa, Masiphumelele Community Library’s⁵ ICT and job-seeking skills training service, launched in 2011, for vulnerable youth living in an impoverished informal settlement near Cape Town trained over 1,540 beginners and 48 intermediate ICT students. In less than a year, over 20 trainees found jobs and 31 entered further education.

Improving community health

In 2010, Kenya National Library Service⁶ installed e-health corners in two provincial branch libraries, in Kisumu and Eldoret. The e-health corners offer free ICT access and skills training. In just one year, librarians trained over 1,600 health workers, students and members of the public to use ICT to access online health resources. Working with the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation, the two branch libraries regularly host public lectures on topics, including HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, personal hygiene, malaria and TB.

3 FROM IMPACT EVALUATION TO SUCCESS STORIES

Impact evaluation is about documenting change. It is about collecting evidence that a project made a difference to the people it served. While traditional project evaluation techniques such as counting outputs – the number of people reached or the number of computers installed also has value - impact evaluation focuses on change in people lives: their behavior, attitudes, knowledge and competencies. Within this program EIFL-PLIP developed and tested its unique impact evaluation model and practice, which helps to track outcomes of implemented projects and develops potential for advocacy for sustainability of the service.

³ More information at: <http://www.eifl.net/public-library-radislav-nikcevic-jagodina-serbia>

⁴ More information at: <http://www.eifl.net/public-library-braka-miladinovci-radovis-macedonia>

⁵ More information at: <http://www.eifl.net/masiphumelele-public-library-south-africa>

⁶ More information at: <http://www.eifl.net/kenya-national-library-service-kenya>

EIFL-PLIP does not require supported libraries to undertake attribution⁷ studies but does ask them to collect evidence of benefits for target group and larger community as well as librarians, partners, local government, etc., that have occurred since the project began, and with this evidence to describe how the program has contributed to the changes identified and has ‘added value’, even while there may be other influences involved. Qualitative and quantitative evidence is gathered: some of the evidence is statistical, and methodology includes questionnaires, interviews and focus groups.

Impact assessment helps project teams to understand what kinds of benefits computers and internet connections can and do bring to their communities, and how people’s lives are enriched as a result. It highlights what works well and what does not, and the information helps decision-making towards improvement of library services. Evidence of impact is also more convincing for stakeholders and, when well communicated, helps sustain morale, momentum, prestige and funding support. There is a close connection between impact assessment and service “advocacy” – awareness-raising and stakeholder engagement to sustain financial and other kinds of support for the project.

At the outset of year-long projects, in preparation for impact evaluation, each project team works with EIFL-PLIP experts and develops their Results Map. With EIFL-PLIP staff, project teams work through a template which gives examples of outcomes to be measured in certain service areas and the appropriate methodology to generate data. The project team may decide to add additional outcomes that are specific to meeting the needs of the target community (for example, specific to farmers’ needs; the needs of women and girls, etc.) Thus, each Results Map is tailored to reflect the desired outcomes of each innovative service for the target group(s) selected by the project i.e. project objectives underly which areas require impact evaluation, and the methodology. The finalized project specific results maps include desired outcomes, defines impact indicators and methods for data collection.

Below is a typical set of desired outcomes:

- New services introduced that make use of new technology – reflects the services introduced, equipment purchased, training and other events organized;
- Increased library visibility – reflects the number of new users, who were attracted to the library during the project and project-related library mentions in the media and by authorities;
- Changed number of library visitors – reflects expected increase in library weekly use;
- Evidence that the library reaches out to members of the community who were previously underserved – reflects the number of new users from specific target group, addressed in the project (e.g. farmers, unemployed, etc.);
- Commitments by the library authority to sustain funding of new service – reflects the support demonstrating financial and other commitment by authorities in relation to the services;

⁷ Authors’ comment: attribution studies in this context are the ones that aim at measuring or valuing change that can be attributed to an intervention.

- Strengthened or new partnerships – reflects partnerships developed in relation to the service;
- Increased importance of the library in the community – reflects user perceptions of the library’s importance to them personally, including statements by community members, and to the community, including statements by community leaders;
- Increased social and economic benefits to the users and communities – reflects user perceptions of benefits received in relation to the service.

At the end of their year-long projects, EIFL-PLIP supported libraries fill in the map with their data. As previously noted, they use various sources – library statistics, service user surveys, focus groups and/or interviews with partners and community leaders.

After the data has been collected, supported libraries move on to narrating a case study. To help constructing inspiring and convincing case study or a meaningful story of library work in key areas of community development, EIFL-PLIP designed a case study template and guidelines. A typical case study is constructed from the following sections:

- Introduction – describes a background of the service, the community and the problem which it addresses as well as gives some details about the library;
- Project description – reflects project goals and beneficiaries;
- Implementation – describes milestones, challenges and changes from the original plan;
- Strategies, Tactics and Tools – describes key partnerships, local support, staff training, new equipment or technologies and how they contributed to the success of the service;
- Key benefits – reflects changes in the community as a result of the project;
- Success Stories – provides selected personal stories that show positive impact of the service;
- Lessons Learnt – describes what worked best and what should have worked better;
- Project cost – provides a short statement about how funds were used;
- Conclusion – sums up and gives a perspective of future plans and developments.

A final case study is a two to four A4 pages document, which includes photographs and other illustrations. The examples of case studies of EIFL-PLIP supported libraries can be found at: <http://www.eifl.net/service-areas-replication-case-studies>. When documented, these stories are used to inspire other libraries to develop similar services and to advocate for sustainability of the service on local and national level.

4 FROM CASE STUDIES TO SUSTAINABILITY

The approach described above has been tested with libraries supported by EIFL-PLIP to implement innovative services from 2010-2011. In 2012 we re-visited the libraries to see how the services were faring a year after the end of the EIFL-PLIP grant. The libraries were asked to fill the Results Maps again and provide the data on the status of service, its sustainability and new developments.

The library projects chosen for further investigation were:

- Ghana Library Board, Northern Regional Library in Tamale, Internet Access and Training Programme (IATP) for vulnerable youth;
- Kenya National Library Service - e-health corners in two branch libraries, Eldoret and Kisumu;
- Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library, Lithuania, Play to Study project for at risk children;
- Ulaanbaatar Public Library, Mongolia, Daisy Talking Books service for blind and visually impaired people;
- Public Library “Braka Miladinovci” Radoviš, Radovis, Macedonia, Creative Minds Create Job Opportunities employment service;
- Zavidovići Public Library, Bosnia and Herzegovina, multi-media centre for vulnerable youth;
- Public Library “Radoslav Nikčević”, Jagodina, Serbia, AgroLib-Ja service for farmers.

Sustainability of the service and impact on the library

The libraries reported considerable success as a result of advocating for the sustainability of the service. All supported libraries received commitments of further support, from government and / or other agencies. For example, The Ghana National Youth Employment programme allocated personnel to continue working with the programme; Ulaanbaatar Public Library in Mongolia received funding for an additional staff member and computer with sufficient storage capacity to back-up all audio and digital talking books created by the service; Zavidovici Public Library in Bosnia and Herzegovina received additional funding support (the Cantonal Ministry of Culture gave 500 EUR, the Municipality gave 3,200 EUR); Jagodina Public Library in Serbia received funding from the Ministry of Culture to sustain their Agrolib-Ja project for another year; Public Library Braka Miladinovci in Macedonia won an ERSTE Foundation 2011 Award for Social Integration, including prize money, €16,000 (US\$ 23,113) which the library is using to sustain the service; Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library in Lithuania submitted applications for funding to expand their innovative Play to Study service to reach more vulnerable children from other municipalities.

The data of Results maps revealed that one year after the project end all EIFL-PLIP supported libraries continue the services – provide access to the computers and internet, computer literacy training and organizing training events for the community. Two libraries –

Zavidovici Public Library in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library in Lithuania – reported that their services were continuing. The other libraries reported extending their services using additional funding from other sources:

- Public Library Radoviš in partnership with Municipality of Radoviš and the Employment Agency in Macedonia has extended their training program with a new modules (25 unemployed people trained in Communication skills, 50 unemployed people trained in Basic Computer skills, 18 people trained on English language, etc.);
- Northern Regional Library in Ghana has started to partner with schools that organize monthly training sessions for pupils in the library;
- Ulaanbaatar Public Library in Mongolia has started to transmit books for the blind through a speaker for the workers of the Occupational and Training Enterprise for the Blind;
- Jagocina Public Library Serbia has organized two lectures and panel discussions on agricultural production in each of four villages with total of 674 visitors and trained almost 60 more farmers to use computer.

Most of the libraries reported continuous increase library visibility and use. They attracted new users, reporting a 40-50 percent increase of library users. An exception was Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library in Lithuania, where the number of library has decreased as a result of high levels of emigration by adults to towns and other countries to seek work; however, the library reported that the number of children visiting the library increased. Libraries also reported numerous project-related mentions in the media, including TV, radio and print, and in internet publications.

One of the main goals of EIFL-PLIP projects is to support libraries to reach out to previously underserved groups. In the case of Jagodina Public Library in Serbia, the number of farmers that use the library increased from 635 during EIFL-PLIP project period to 924 after the project, educational game in Lithuania attracted 445 new players (librarians estimate that around 50 percent of reached children are from risk groups), Macedonia managed to increase the number of unemployed library users by 177, Mongolia attracted 45 disabled people, that became users of DAISY books and listeners to the broadcasts. Ghana had no statistics on new users from target group and Bosnia and Herzegovina reported stable library use by target group.

Another important impact on library is sustained and developed partnerships. Jagodina Public Library in Serbia reported extended partnerships with the Ministry of Agriculture to form e-infrastructure to exchange and use information and data in agriculture. The project AgroLib would be the part of that service, at the local level, where data could be accessed immediately. They have also started partnership with association “Srpska Magaza” (<http://www.srpskamagaza.com>), which is aimed at improving the competitiveness of the rural economy in Serbia by establishing a new model for linking production, promotion and sales and their products and services.

Northern Regional Library in Ghana is continuing partnership with NGO “Savana signatures” through the monthly ICT4D forums at the library. A new partnership with Savana Signatures grew into another project dedicated to the use of technology to improve maternal

health⁸. They have also built a partnership with 12 schools that are having weekly visits and activities to the library.

Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library continues to work with Utena Education Centre, 13 schools, Department of Education, Sport and Tourism of Utena District Municipality). In cooperation with Zarasai and Ignalina libraries they have developed a new project for game extension of the game to Zarasai and Ignalina regions and submitted it to the Culture Support Foundation.

Ulaanbaatar Public Library in Mongolia reported continued partnership with Mongolian National Federation of the Blind. As a result of this partnership and joint advocacy efforts by the library and the National Federation of the Blind, the Mongolian Government changed the legal entitlement for blind and visually impaired people to include provision of DAISY book readers.

In Macedonia, a new agreement was signed by the Municipality and the Employment office for addressing unemployment issues. The Agreement states that all the trainings will be happening at the Public Library Braka Miladinovci. Library also continues partnership with 2 local non-governmental organizations - "Women Action" and "Crea". "Women action" received a grant for the project from U.S. Embassy and many of the training activities were performed in the library. They have also started new partnership with National public and university library "Goce Delchev"-Stip to exchange of experiences and develop new programs and with the organization "Poraka" who works with persons living with disabilities and with Association of Pensioners.

Only Public Library Zavidovici in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose main partner was the municipality, reported suspended funding support because of cutting the budgets on every level of authorities; however this did not prevent library to continue working with the youth target group.

As a result of these important changes, all EIFL-PLIP supported libraries report positive impact on perception of the library in the community. They mention that due to the positive feedback from both traditional library users and EIFL-PLIP beneficiaries libraries are attracting more users from groups who previously had little or no knowledge of services,. They also state that more institutions are interested in future collaboration with the library, and that this enables the library to expand services and to initiate or partner in new projects.

Impact on service users

To collect evidence around the impact on service users, most of selected libraries also did a user surveys. They were conducted by Kenya National Library Service in Kenya (42 respondents), Northern Regional Library in Ghana (35 respondents), Public Library Braka Miladinovci in Macedonia (54 respondents), Jagodina Public Library in Serbia (90 respondents) and Zavidovici Public Library in Bosnia and Herzegovina (30 respondents) libraries. Survey questionnaires were adapted from the user survey tool used for the Global Impact Study⁹.

⁸ More information at: <http://www.eifl.net/news/scale-ghana-library-maternal-health-service>

⁹ The Global Impact Study of Public Access to Information & Communication Technologies is a five-year project (2007-2012) to generate evidence about the scale, character, and impacts of public access to information and communication technologies. Looking at libraries, telecenters, and cybercafes, the study

The data provides evidence that service users actively used new the opportunities provided to access information. New opportunities included the internet, printed resources and events, and from these, the internet was the main source used to seek information in the library – in Eldoret and Kisumu branch libraries in Kenya, 63% said that they used the internet to access health information, 18.5% found health information in print form, 14.8% said that they found the health information through library events. In Northern Regional Library in Ghana 50% of users surveyed said that they looked for information on current education or learning, such as doing homework, preparing for exams on the internet through computer available in the library. In Jagodina Public Library in Serbia 87% of respondents said that they used internet in the library to look for agriculture information. In Public Library Braka Miladinovci in Macedonia 82% of respondents looked for employment information through the library internet. It is interesting that in Zavidovici Public Library in Bosnia and Herzegovina 66% of respondents use internet to search educational resources in the library although they had internet access at home.

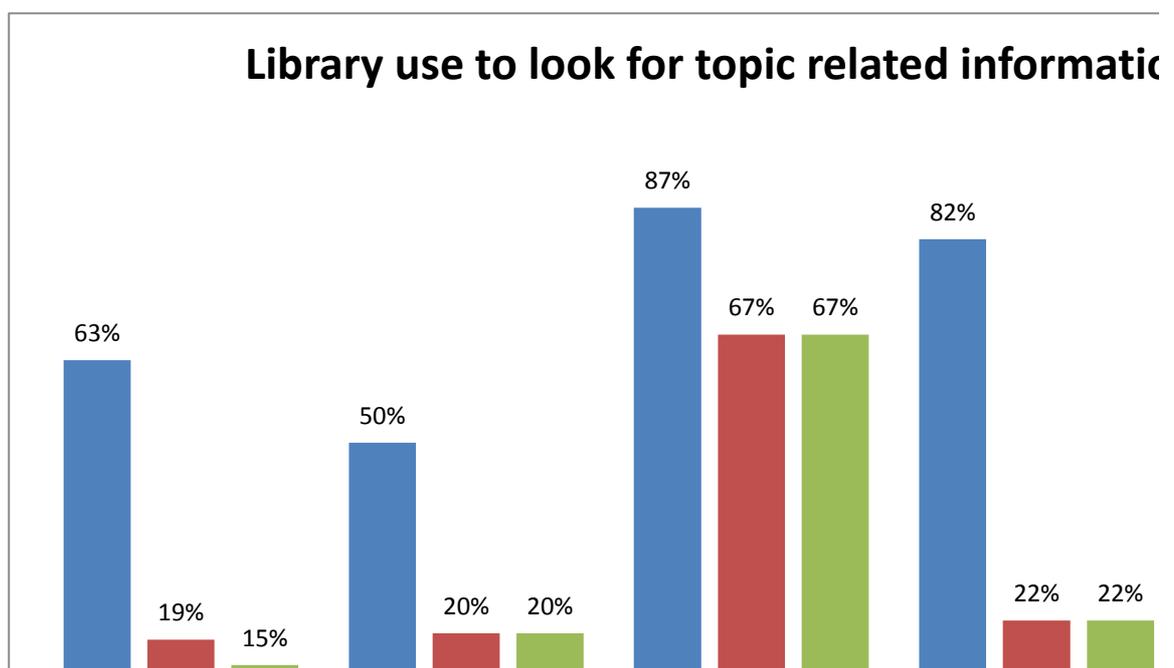


Figure 1

Data analysis shows that in most cases users succeeded in finding information that they were looking for. Respondents reported most successful searches on the internet result: 67 % of users in Kisumu and Eldoret branch libraries in Kenya, 50% in Northern Regional Library in Ghana and 80% in Public Library Braka Miladinovci in Macedonia reported that they had found the information that they needed though the library internet.

As a result of the information found through the library, respondents reported significant changes in their professional and person life:

- 91% of the health workers responded that the information they found helped them improve their health related studies or work (Eldoret and Kisumu, Kenya);

- 70% of farmers responded that the information they found help them increase their production and / or to improve farming conditions (Jagodina Public Library, Serbia);
- 50% of farmers reported that this information helped them to increase their income through sales of production or subsidies (Jagodina Public Library, Serbia);
- 89% of unemployed used the information they found to apply for jobs and 69% that the information they found helped them to find job (Public Library Braka Miladinovci, Macedonia);
- 90% of youth responded that the information they found helped them to improve their grades (Northern Regional Library, Ghana);
- 80% of youth start further education as a result of the information they found at the library (Northern Regional Library, Ghana)
- Majority of youth responded that the information, they found on internet or in written sources in the library helped them to improve grades at school (Public Library Zavidovici, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Another important aspect of EIFL-PLIP projects was ICT training. Surveys show significant changes in IT skills of the participants.

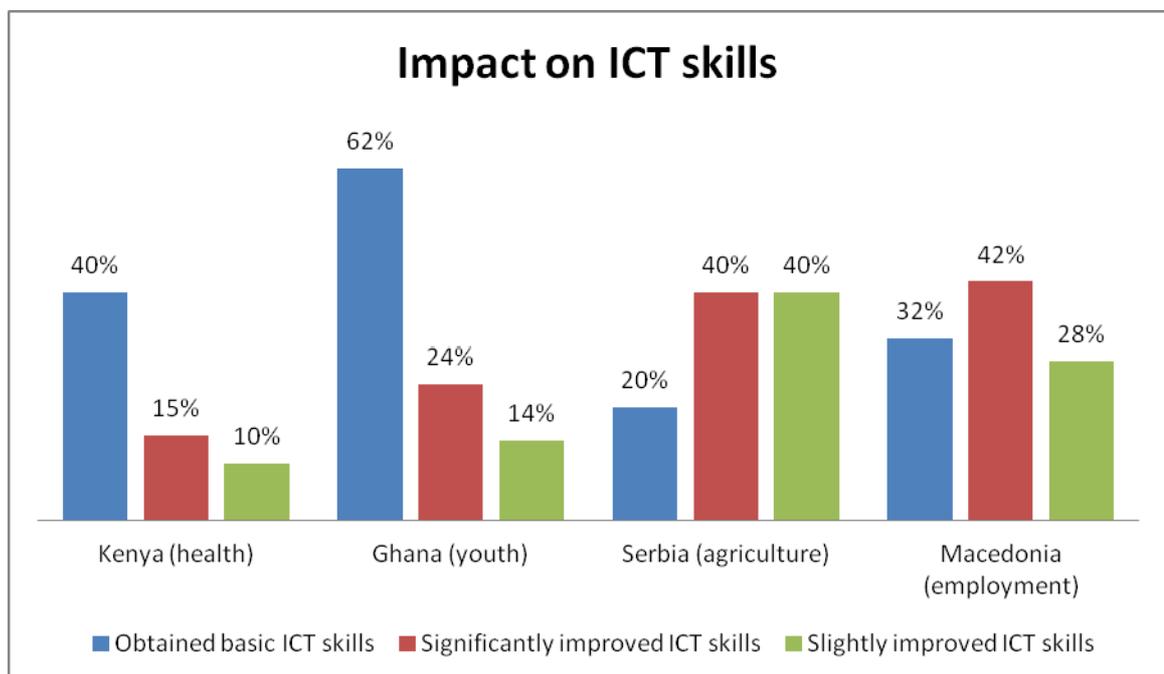


Figure 2

As a result of library ICT training:

- 43% of health workers said that training helped them to improve their studies and health related work (Kisumu and Eldoret, Kenya);

- 51% of farmers said that training helped them to improve their farming (Jagodina Public Library Serbia);
- 87% of unemployed said that training improved their potential of employment (Public Library Braka Miladinovci, Macedonia);
- 90% of youth said that the training helped improved their potential to be employed (Northern Regional Library, Ghana)
- 46% of youth said that library was the most important place for development of their ICT skills to search for educational resources (Zavidovici Public Library, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

The libraries also evaluated the impact of service-related events (lectures, discussions, webinars). The data shows that great majority of respondents managed to apply knowledge and skills learnt during these events.

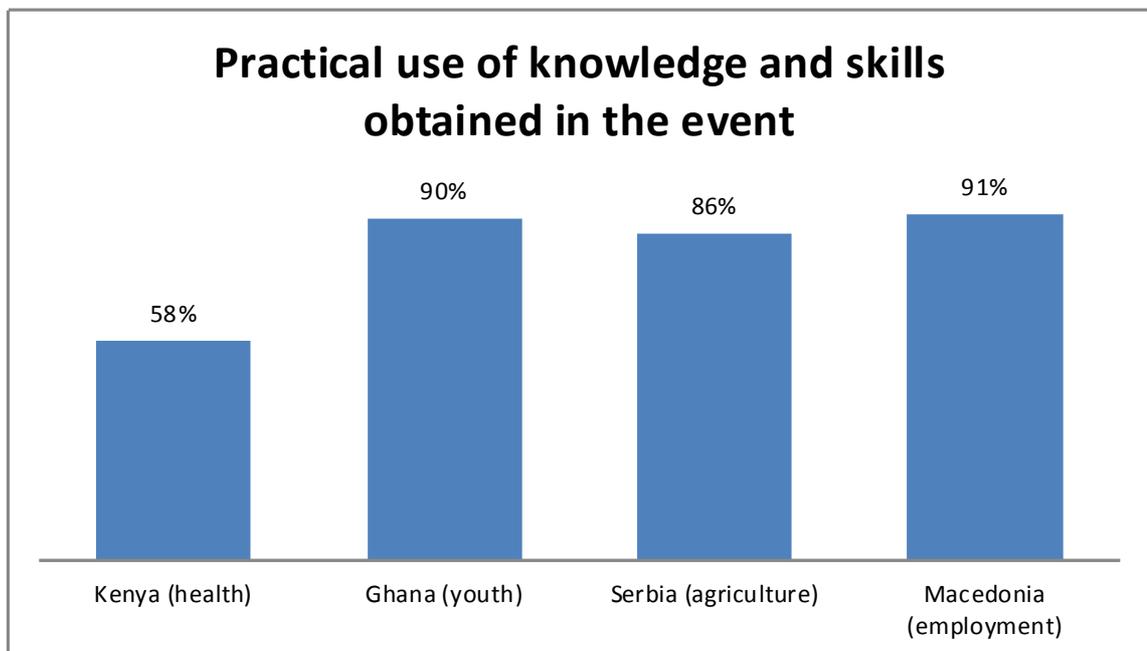


Figure 3

As a result of these thematic training events:

- 60% of health workers said that the event improved their health related studies and work (Kisumu and Eldoret, Kenya);
- 77% of unemployed said that the event improved their potential to be employed (Public Library Braka Miladinovci, Macedonia);
- 62% of farmers said that the event improved their farming (Public Library Jagodina, Serbia);

- 90% of youth said that the event improved their potential to be employed (Northern Regional Library, Ghana);
- Unfortunately due to the difficult economic situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Zavidovici Public Library, was not able to organize events after the project ended.

Survey results demonstrate evidence of public libraries' contribution to education and knowledge, their ability to stimulate changes in attitudes and behavior, and to inspire community members to take steps and widen their life prospects.

5 USING IMPACT EVIDENCE FOR ADVOCACY

Our approach to impact evaluation ensures that EIFL-PLIP supported libraries not only work a lot to provide new services, but also are equipped with rich impact data in various formats, which they can use to advocate for the sustainability and extension of their service. This approach has proven to give great results as EIFL-PLIP supported libraries continue receiving support to continue and expand their work. Below are the examples from public libraries that received EIFL-PLIP grants in 2011 and 2012.

Because of the Libr-A service, the municipality chose Pasvalys Public Library (Lithuania) to partner in a project "Establishment of business support library cross border network" (project's total budget 829,394 EUR / US\$1,075,180), implemented on both sides of the Lithuania-Latvia border. Pasvalys Public Library's Libr-A website will be expanded, upgraded and filled with new content. The target audience will be expanded from farmers to entrepreneurs. In addition to this, the municipality allocated an European Regional Development Fund grant to renovate library building that will cost around US\$265,400¹⁰.

East Kazakhstan Oblast Pushkin Library's meetings with the East Kazakhstan Administration resulted in the library being appointed to manage a US\$200,000 United Nations Development Programme grant to fund installation of ICT in 17 village libraries. Pushkin Library's Youth-IT Yurt service also focused attention on the value of technology, and the East Kazakhstan administration are now funding RFID technology; the creation of e-catalogues for rural libraries, and have increased the library's internet speed to 8MB¹¹.

In 2013 Armenian Environmental NGO Network (AEN) and Green Lane, NGO (Yerevan, Armenia) is launching a new Waste Management Project in Berd, supported by the Norwegian government. Berd Regional Library, now having ICT training lab and resources, will be involved in training to be organized in the framework of the new AEN project. Library information support to organic farming will expand to include environmental issues.

Northern Regional Library's Technology for Maternal Health Project for mothers-to-be in northern Ghana is to be scaled up to reach a wider area and to produce maternal health messages in local languages and in audio format. The expansion follows receipt of a US\$220,000 grant by the library's partner organization, Savana Signatures, from the funding agency STAR-Ghana. "Savana Signatures", a non-governmental organization that promotes

¹⁰ More information at: <http://www.eifl.net/news/lithuania-library-service-inspires-major-fund>

¹¹ More information at: <http://www.eifl.net/news/library-inspires-ict-grant-kazakh-villages>

information and communication technology (ICT) for development in Northern Ghana, was one of 29 successful grantees out of 230 applicants¹².

CONCLUSIONS

Public libraries that investigate community needs and design services to address community issues like education, health, social inclusion and others become important players of local development and centers of community life. However, to be recognized as community development hubs they need to have data and stories, which would demonstrate the work that they do and the results that they achieve.

The success that libraries achieve is sustainable only when it is documented with hard evidence and testimonials. The impact evaluation models have to be realistic in terms of time and resources required to perform the evaluations. In many cases few key indicators of library statistics, supported by user surveys and interviews is simple enough for library to perform themselves and sufficient to reflect its achievements. However, the data has to be repacked to make it understandable to different audiences, built into nice stories with pictures and quotations which would be easy to understand and attractive to read. Finally, ready-to-use stories have to be communicated to the stakeholders that are important in the light of service sustainability.

EIFL-PLIP's experience shows that conducting impact evaluations and communicating results is both useful to the library and to the EIFL-PLIP program as a whole. Following this practice a lot of EIFL-PLIP supported libraries managed not only to sustain their services, but also to expand them. Meanwhile EIFL-PLIP as a program has built a rich set of diverse and well documented examples of libraries that contribute to community development which strengthens potential for international advocacy for libraries and provides useful knowledge for other library advocacy initiatives.

¹² More information at: <http://www.eifl.net/news/scale-ghana-library-maternal-health-service>