

Impact Case Study

Library links farmers to valued support and services

'COMMUNICATING FARMERS IN PANGUIPULLI' – PANUIPULLI PUBLIC LIBRARY No. 296, CHILE

Set in the Andes Mountains in southern Chile, Panguipulli is known for its beautiful scenery and lakes. But roads to the rural areas are poor and the climate is harsh, especially in winter. As a result, farming communities have lived in isolation for many decades, with limited access to information about modern farming methods. Agencies based in Panguipulli recognized the problem, but did not have clear policy for addressing farmers' information needs. Farmers were not coming to the library, and Panguipulli Public Library wanted to reach out to them. They saw a solution in information and communication technology (ICT), including the Internet, radio and mobile phones. The library decided to brave the harsh terrain and use technology to take the library to the farmers.

SHARING INFORMATION, BUILDING LINKS

The aim of the new service is to increase information flows to farmers and between farmers, and information exchange between agricultural support agencies and farmers. The first step was to build a project team comprising the library, its key partner, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), and other agricultural support agencies. The project team began by increasing numbers of agricultural resources – books and journals – in the library. They created a special space for farmers and organized information and discussion sessions on agricultural issues. With support from EIFL's Public Library Innovation Programme (PLIP), they equipped a mobile laboratory with laptops, modems, video and audio equipment, and travelled to remote farming communities to build farmers' understanding of the value of ICT. They created radio programmes on agricultural issues and, to ensure that they reach all farmers in future including those out of the radio signal's range, the library is working to develop a mobile phone text messaging service for farmers.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

- ✓ Panguipulli Public Library is now recognized as an 'information intermediary' – providing the link between agricultural agencies and farmers.
- ✓ The library has established its place in a partnership, including non-governmental and government agencies, whose vision is to improve farmers' lives.
- ✓ The library has demonstrated that it can play a role in relation to agricultural production.
- ✓ More farmers understand the value of ICT. The library has trained 201 farmers in 12 hard-to-reach communities to use computers, the Internet and social networks.
- ✓ Farmers have greater access to valuable information, from the library, agricultural agencies and the Internet.

EIFL-PLIP: EIFL is an international not-for-profit organization dedicated to enabling access to knowledge through libraries in more than 45 developing and transition countries in Africa, Asia and Europe. EIFL's Public Library Innovation Programme (PLIP) supports libraries to implement community development projects. Through innovative use of technology, librarians work with different sectors of the community to increase access to information, improve standards of living and transform lives and livelihoods.

Learn more at www.eifl.net/plip.

PLIP supported the 'Communicating Farmers' service with a grant in May 2010. A year later, the library assessed the impact of their new service. Information presented in this leaflet is based on the library's assessment.

- √ The library has 300 new books and resources on agriculture, donated by partners and other agencies.
- √ Farmers have a special space in the library where they can meet, exchange ideas, hear lectures and learn new ICT skills.
- √ Farmers have access to a social network to share knowledge and experience and to market their produce [www.prodarnet.org/group/AGRoPANGUIPULLI].
- √ 15 radio programmes on agriculture were broadcast on a local station. Programming formats (talk shows, panel discussions, interviews, call-in) were interactive, aiming to encourage communication between farmers and experts.
- √ Many practical issues around use of the internet, mobile phones and radio have been explored and valuable lessons learned.

Mrs Luengo Silvia Vasquez farms with flowers and berries. After the library's training, Mrs Vasquez and her husband have bought a notebook computer and are now regular Internet users: 'I never thought of doing a computer course before, because of the cost. Learning was not difficult, and I already use a notebook without problems. I'm pretty used to reading electronic newspapers every morning. I like to browse through different pages, just for the fun of finding different things, going to distant cities, different lifestyles, and so on. Everything has become easier: I do not have to wait for advice to solve pest problems or flower diseases. I look for the disease and then find the solution. The radio programmes provided a great addition to my knowledge since the topics were varied and the experts gave me confidence.



Ms Vasquez

'Since learning about the project, I have become a member of the library. I am a very shy person. I have always been a housewife, working without many expectations because I find it hard to relate to new people. Through the course, I met very nice people, willing to share their experiences, and today I can say, I've taken a step forward to defeat my shyness, and I feel a little more integrated into the information society. Shyness cannot defeat me!'

THE FUTURE

The library will continue to work with its agriculture team and with the farmers. A key partner was the Municipality of Panguipulli, which provided political support and facilitated networking with public institutions. The municipality is revising its budget to accommodate the library's new service. Learning materials for the training were developed by Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos (DIBAM) and BIBLIOREDES; the National Institute of Agricultural Development (INDAP), through its local development program (PRODESAL) will continue to provide staff and expertise. Panguipulli Public Library has built a strong platform to serve farmers.