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EIFL-PLIP

Improving lives and livelihoods through innovative public library services

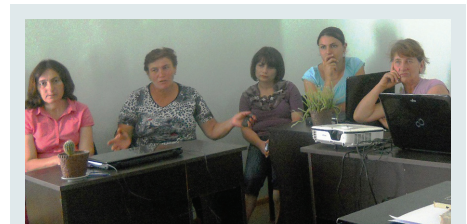
Library service increases interest in organic farming Berd Public Library, Armenia

IMPACT CASE STUDY

The library's 'Harnessing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Improved Farming Practices' project -

- Increased farmers' interest in organic farming and created new online sales opportunities for organic produce.
- Raised the profile of the library – now 200 more farmers are using the library.
- Convinced the municipality to fund renovation of a room in the library to accommodate a computer laboratory.
- Established a computer laboratory with high speed internet access, which has become an important information centre in the community.

Berd is a small town of about 9,000 people in Tavush Province in north-eastern Armenia. Tavush Province is known for cattle breeding, and around Berd farmers keep bees, make wine, and grow tobacco, fruit and vegetables. For about half of the population, agriculture is the sole source of family income; for the other half, farming puts food on the table and supplements income from other jobs.



"The training organized by the library was of huge importance!" - Hratsin Grigoryan, agricultural extension agent and farmer.

"Supporting farmers is a high priority for us. Rural people are mostly deprived of access to up-to-date agricultural information. Modernizing the library and turning it into a fully functional information centre, which will work with the Municipality, opens new perspectives for the community of Berd and the whole region." – Andranik Sharyan, former Mayor of Berd.

The farmers desperately need information to improve their farming and increase their incomes. However, there are several barriers to information access: ICT infrastructure is unevenly spread and rural areas are especially deprived; the Ministry of Agriculture does not have resources to send extension workers to all rural areas; the Ministry has a website to publicize its services, but farmers cannot afford ICT and do not have digital skills.

Working with the non-governmental organization (NGO) Green Lane, which assists farmers, the library developed the project, 'Harnessing ICT for Improved Farming Practices'. With a one-year grant of US\$15,000 from EIFL-PLIP, the library equipped a computer laboratory with seven laptop computers, high-speed internet and a two-in-one printer/scanner, creating



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a comfortable training space with free access to ICT for the community. The library chose laptops because they can be transported to villages, saving farmers the time and cost of travelling to Berd.

In less than a year, the library...

- Trained a team of 8 librarians who now guide farmers conducting internet research.
- Organized 22 training courses, reaching 150 people in Berd and the villages of Tavush, Chinari, Norashen, Verin Karmir and Chinchin. Courses included ICT training and lectures on organic farming, crop rotation, soil analysis and fertilization, cultivation of seedlings and irrigation.
- Increased its stocks of books and journals on agriculture.

The future

The service is included in the library's budget for 2013. The library will continue to work with Green Lane to support the government's agricultural extension programme and to provide information and ICT training for farmers. In 2013 the library will conduct training for a new waste management project to be launched by the Armenian Environmental NGO Network (AEN) and Green Lane, with funding from the Norwegian government. The library's information to support organic farming will expand to include environmental issues more broadly.

The EIFL-PLIP grant was awarded in November 2011. 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 library director Ms Alvard Adamyan alvard.adamyan@berdlibrary.am / alvardadamyan63@mail.ru, or project coordinator, Ms Nara Yarialian - narayarialian@yahoo.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

After hearing lectures on organic cultivation, presented by experts from the library's main partner, Green Lane, 15 farmers have expressed interest in learning more, and some are now applying the new methods. A group of farmers has joined Green Lane's national network of organic farmers, and are now marketing their produce over the internet to customers in other towns and cities. The library reports that women farmers in Berd are especially enthusiastic, and are using the network to advertise fruit and vegetables, wild herbs and berries.

There are over 1,000 public libraries in Armenia. Berd Public Library shows how – through strategic partnerships and effective use of ICT – public libraries can support governments in bringing vital agricultural information and new skills to remote rural areas.

“Many farmers cannot afford to buy chemicals and pesticides, so the yields are very low. When the library project told us about organic farming we realized that there were ways to produce healthy and safe food without spending money on chemicals.” – Anahit Yesayan, farmer