

The Power of Public Access in Libraries: Overview of impact evidence and assessment approaches

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EIFL Public Library Innovation Programme

EIFL & IFLA research into public access in libraries



Stage 1: research into national broadband plans and policies in 32 countries regarding the role of public libraries in connecting people to the internet



Stage 2: an overview of the evidence of the impacts of public access to ICT in libraries and impact assessment methodologies



Photo credits: EIFL, “Digital skills @ your local library” project, Uganda

Do you know:

- Who are the users of public access in libraries?
- How has the use of public access changed over the years?
- How do people use public access in libraries?
- What are the outcomes of public access in libraries?
- What is the economic value of public access in libraries?
- How can you go about assessing the impacts of public access services?



Who are the users of public access in libraries?

- In geographies where personal access is still growing, public access is in demand among the most active groups of society.
- In areas with more widespread connectivity, public access helps to go online for those who otherwise would be digitally excluded.
- Studies also show that even when people have alternative options to access the Internet, they continue using the Internet in libraries.



How has the use of public access in libraries changed over the years?

- Studies show that the use of well-equipped public access in libraries is rising, particularly in those that are newly established, or expanded/upgraded over time.
- Challenges with equipment maintenance or speed and quality of connectivity are associated with a decrease in usage rates.
- Furthermore, evidence supports a trend that the free use of Wi-fi in libraries is rising as ownership of personal access devices in the community grows.



How do people use public access in libraries?

- Public access in libraries has shown its versatility in enabling a wide range of uses, from accessing news or specific information online to job-seeking, earning money, from education to accessing digital public services, and private communications and leisure.
- Some of these uses are more popular among vulnerable groups - older people, minority groups, and other locally-specific user groups that may otherwise be underserved.



What are the outcomes of public access in libraries?

- Improved digital skills and confidence in the use of ICT
- Better employability prospects and job job-seeking skills
- Improved performance at work
- Better learning results and grades
- Stronger social cohesion and civic participation.



What is the economic value of public access in libraries?

- Economic and social value studies show public access use in libraries brings significant savings for users and communities.
- Evidence also suggests that investment in public access is cost-effective as benefits derived from public access in libraries surpass investments.



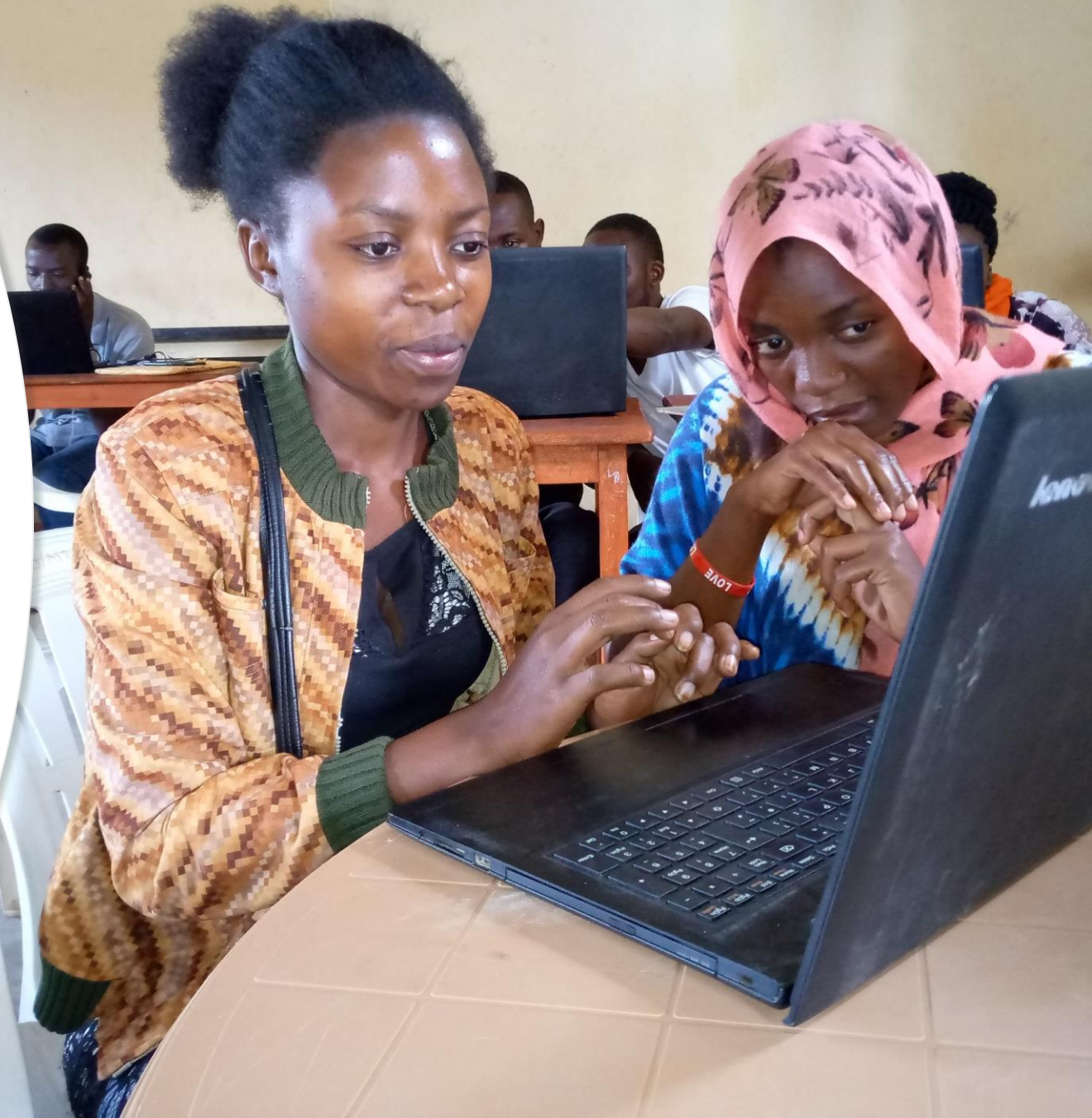
Methodologies for Evaluation of Public Access in Libraries

- Physical access to computers and the Internet for the public
- Public access use and impacts
- Perceptions and impacts of public access among non-users and the public
- Economic value studies



Physical access to computers and the internet for the public

- Public access inventories for in-depth information about infrastructure
- Surveys and interviews with managers and operators of public access facilities for information about infrastructure, services and use
- Interviews with public access managers and operators for a more detailed view into the operation of public access venue and related challenges



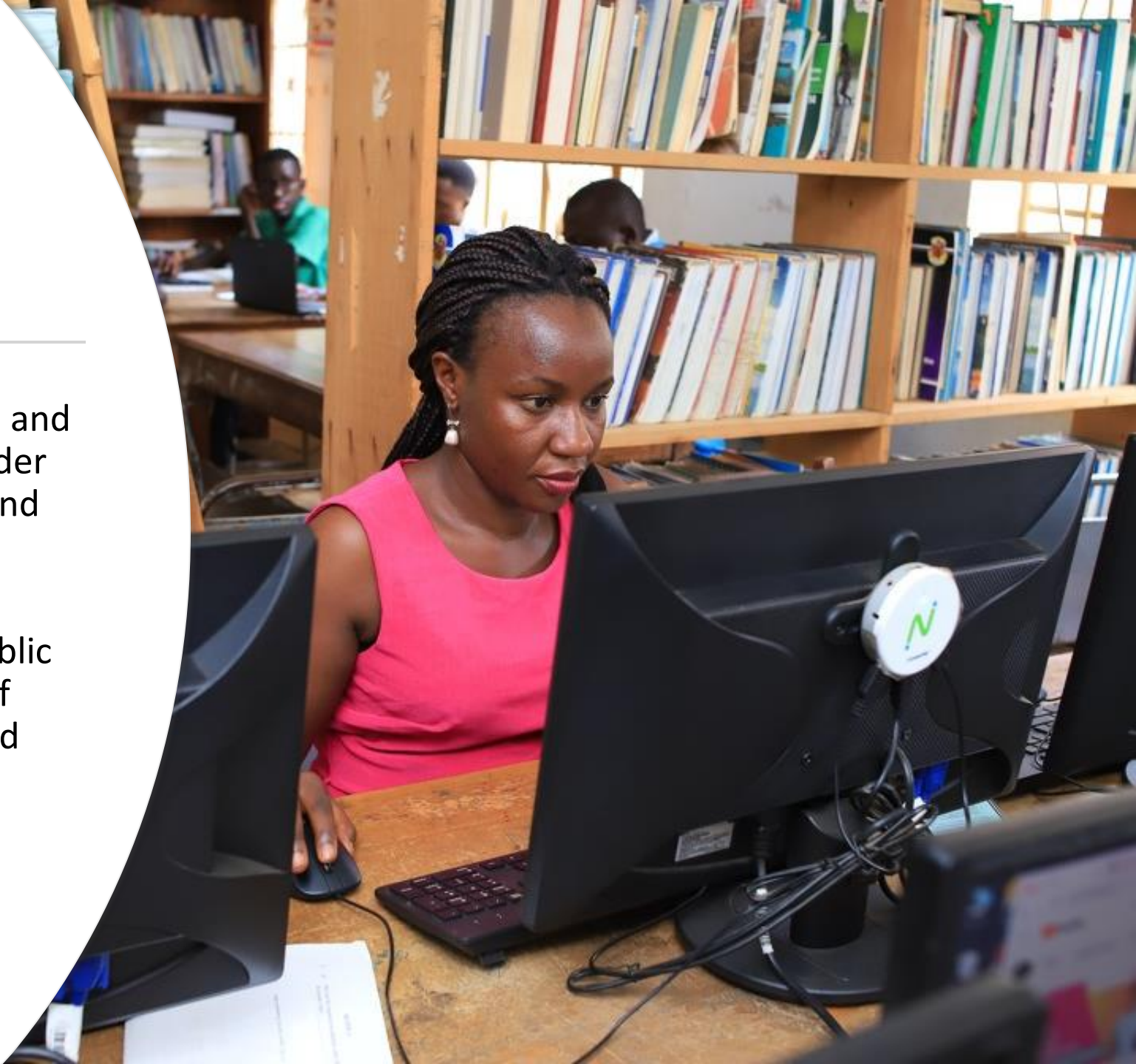
Public access use and impacts

- The most widely used way of gathering data about public access use and impacts is directly from public access users through surveys or focus groups.
- The outcomes of public access are often measured in relation to broad domains such as digital inclusion, education, communication, civic engagement, employment, culture, health, and others.
- User surveys can also help gain insights about barriers to public access use and needs or demand for new services related to public access.



Perceptions and impacts of public access among non-users and the public

- Surveys targeting the general population and non-users can help understand the broader context of impacts and perceptions around public access.
- Such studies can help outline what percentage of the population is using public access venues, what alternative places of internet access are available to them, and what their motivation to use or not use public access venues is.



Studies of the economic value of public access

- Market pricing analysis
- Contingent valuation (willingness to pay / willingness to accept)



For further information

- Stage 1 Report "[The Role of Libraries in National Broadband Plans and Policies](#)"
- Stage 2 Report "[Impacts of Public Access to Computers and the Internet in Libraries](#)"
- <http://www.eifl.net>

