



knowledge without boundaries

EIFL-PLIP

Improving lives and livelihoods through innovative public library services

IMPACT CASE STUDY

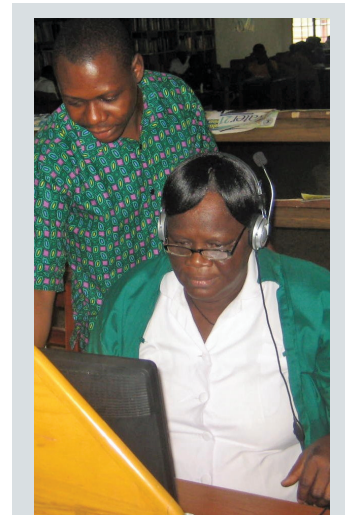
Library service contributes to maternal health Ghana Library Authority/Northern Regional Library

The Technology for Maternal Health service aims to help reduce maternal mortality by improving pregnant women’s access to vital health information. The service uses information and communication technology (ICT), including computers, the internet, mobile phone text messaging (SMS) and radio, and hosts public events at which health workers give presentations and discuss women’s concerns. The service –

- Improved awareness about maternal health issues and encouraged expectant mothers to visit clinics and hospitals.
- Won recognition: the library’s partner organization, Savana Signatures, has received major funding to expand the service to include four more districts in northern Ghana.
- Contributed to a proposal by the Ghana Library Authority to increase the library’s budget by 23% in future.

Northern Regional Library is based in Tamale, the busy administrative centre of Northern Region. On the last Thursday of every month, the library and the non-governmental agency Savana Signatures, which promotes use of ICT, host public lectures at the library to raise awareness about local development issues. At one of the lectures, women expressed concern about high levels of maternal mortality. Later, in a focus group session, health workers said lack of information was one of the main factors putting pregnant women at risk.

The Technology for Maternal Health service grew out of these discussions. With a small grant (up to US\$15,000) from EIFL’s Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFL-PLIP) and with technical support from Savana Signatures, the library created a Maternal Health Corner, offering free access to the internet on five computers for health workers and the community. The library pre-loaded the computers with maternal health information from international agencies and the Ghana health service. They developed a database with information about 94 pregnant women for the SMS service and, guided by health workers, began developing text messages. In just one year, the library



Health workers especially valued downloading maternal health information in film format, for use in outreach campaigns at hospitals and clinics.

“The [text] messages helped me to look out for various signs and symptoms. They prepared me psychologically and I am happy to have delivered safely.”
- Gabriella Wusah, mother.





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in partnership with Savana Signatures –

- Trained 15 health workers to use computers, to conduct online health research and to access the pre-loaded material.
- Sent weekly text messages to 82 expectant mothers' mobile phones, and reached 12 non-literate women through their husbands' phones. Messages were customized, to relate to different stages of pregnancy. A total of 3,186 SMS were sent to 94 registered service users over a period of nine months (June 2012-March 2013).
- Launched a maternal health education campaign over radio, including two radio phone-in programmes on northern Ghana's most listened-to station, Radio Savannah.
- Organized three health information events, for health workers, expectant mothers and the community, attracting 180 people, and reaching non-literate women and women with limited English language skills.

Public libraries – partners in development

Millennium Development Goal 5 requires reduction of global maternal mortality to one-quarter of 1990 levels by 2015. Ghana's 2010 MDG Report finds that Ghana is struggling to achieve this target. The report notes several problems, including barriers to accessing health services as a result of poverty, long distance to clinics and hospitals and low female literacy rates. Northern Regional Library's successful maternal health service uses ICT to help overcome these barriers. The service has also laid the ground for expansion. The library's partner, Savanna Signatures, has received a grant of US\$220,000 from the local funding agency, Star Ghana, to scale up the service to four districts – Tamale, Yendi, Savelugu and Tolon. The new service will translate SMS into local languages and create messages in audio format to reach non-literate women. 'These new areas – the need to translate the SMS into local languages for women who do not understand English, and the need to create audio messages for non-literate women – emerged out of the partnership with the library,' said John Stephen Agbenyo, Director of Savana Signatures.

The future

The library will continue to offer free ICT access and support for health workers and the community in the Maternal Health Corner. The library's resources and experience will be available to the expanded maternal health information service in the region, including a key role in the project's monitoring and evaluation team. Impressed by the Technology for Maternal Health service and Northern Regional Library's other ICT training and outreach activities with youth and officers of Tamale Central Prisons, the Ghana Library Authority is proposing an increase in the library's overall budget by 23%, including further support for the maternal health 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 Mr Aaron Kuwornu, head of the library, aaronkuwornu@yahoo.com.

[EIFL](http://www.eifl.net) (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.