

TRAVELLING WITHOUT MOVING

Transferable training and improved access in rural Uganda

Patrick Kasangaki, 2009

Improved Access to Online Resources' was a series of three-day workshops run in four rural regions of Uganda (Kayunga, Mukono, Jinja and Kalangala). The aim of these workshops was to provide much needed training in access to, and awareness of, information resources. By reaching out to a variety of roles and teaching transferable skills, key information was extended beyond the large city centres, to 200 researchers, extension agents, policy makers and students.*

The Rural Empowerment Network (REN) is a Ugandan non-profit organisation aiming to provide development information to researchers and students in rural Uganda. To achieve this, REN, in 2005 and in collaboration with the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO), set up a Resource Centre in Kayunga District of central Uganda. The centre provides users with the tools they require to access information they may otherwise have no means of accessing. This is a much needed, and appreciated, facility in the district.

This initiative responded to a need for access to electronic resources. There is a wide variety of resources and information available on the internet that rural users cannot access or are not aware of. We aimed to address this issue. As a Programme Coordinator at REN, I took steps to convince management that this initiative was essential since most information users in the rural areas did not only lack adequate sources of information, but also, in many cases, needed training in the use of available resources.

Consequently, in early 2008, we applied to INASP's small grant scheme. We wanted to plan and conduct a series of sensitisation and training workshops on 'Improved Access to Online Resources'. Supported by the coordinating team for the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERii) Uganda, we designed a three-day workshop to run in four rural regions of Uganda (Kayunga, Mukono, Jinja and Kalangala) throughout October 2008. As well as planning for the workshops to take place in these rural locations, we felt it was important for delegates to continue practising their newly acquired



skills following the workshops. Arrangements were made for additional resources and specialist support to continue in each of the four locations until February 2009.

Roughly fifty delegates attended each workshop. Each workshop consisted largely of hands-on practical exercises (online and offline), presentations and group discussions.

The workshops were aimed at researchers, extension agents, policy makers and students and had 4 main objectives:

- To improve access to e-resources and information
- To raise awareness of available e-resources
- To improve work output of participants
- To enable participants to contribute to national development

Outcomes from the workshops

Feedback from participants indicated that the objectives of the workshop series were well-met; the content was relevant, useful in their work and easy to understand; and

I am a researcher who values information access and this workshop gave me some tools to assist me in my researchI am now able to get information easily while conducting research and, since there is no library here, the course was useful for me

**Participant Feedback
Follow-up Impact Review**



Patrick Ksangaki, Rural Empowerment Network (REN)

the materials were easy to use. In addition to this, internet access at the workshops was generally good, allowing easy access and demonstration of online resources. If we heard a complaint, it was that the three days could have been five, or even a week, to allow more time for hands-on practice!

A key outcome remains the wide range of impact the workshops had. They were provided training for 60 researchers, 40 extension agents, 40 policy makers and 60 students from four districts in central Uganda. This training was designed to be transferable, generating a much larger long-term impact.

What made the events successful?

This series of workshops provided a wide range of participants in rural areas with the training and information they required, both for their own use and in training others. It also gave them the tools to practise and build upon what they had learnt.

Conducting the workshops in rural areas that may not be aware of the access available in more central institutions, the attendance of a wide range of participants from those areas, and the sheer number of people involved at each location were major contributors to the overall success of the workshops, along with the fact that we were able to organise and facilitate the events locally.

Training outside of the centre helped to build and develop the skills and capacity of rural area researchers and institutions that can, in turn, pass on that new-found knowledge to others around them. Added to that, the variety of activities, online and offline practical work, discussion groups and presentations enabled the participants to learn, practise and apply the teaching.

The most obvious impact of the project is the improvement of knowledge, skills and networking

I can now help farmers by enabling them access to information on diseases attacking their crops

Participant Feedback

I will teach my fellow students how to use the search engines that we have been taught and share the knowledge with my colleagues on the information learned

Participant feedback

opportunities and, therefore, the overall improvement in access to online scholarly information resources, both directly and indirectly.

Looking ahead

Those who attended are now more aware of the resources available and have the skills to share on searching and use of information. Putting a demonstrable case to government to integrate this type of training and access initiative into the national strategy is now an avenue which can be explored. Strengthening the existing REN and expanding to link with other networks and organisations has also been facilitated. To build on this project and further address information needs, again in collaboration with INASP we are planning development of a community identified needs database. By adopting a practical approach in systematically capturing information requests directly from researchers or extension agents, we will be confident that the service is truly demand driven.

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* Extension agents work with the community to share knowledge and improve the productivity/livelihoods of rural populations. In this case, they link researchers and farmers to make research accessible and transferable.



Participants of 'Towards improved access to online resources'