In January 2011 IREX Romania concluded a collaboration agreement with the Payment and Intervention Agency in Agriculture (APIA), aimed at using the computers donated to the public libraries for Biblionet program to fill in online the agricultural subsidy applications managed by APIA. The purpose of this collaboration is multiple:

**Help the farmers fill in the financing applications easier** – They usually have to travel to the nearest local APIA offices. This process could last several days (between 2 days and a week, according to the farmers), and required them to pay for the transportation.

**Provide the local public administration with the opportunity to help the farmers** – Most mayors and local councils are interested in the farmers obtaining the subsidies easier and on time. The existence of computers connected to the Internet in public libraries makes this process much simpler. In many localities, the mayoralty and the library informed the community in various ways: posters, announcements at the local radio or TV stations, announcements in the local publications, public meetings to explain the possibility of filling in the applications at the public library. In a few localities, the farmers were informed by the priest at the end of the church service.

**Help the library be more useful to the community** – Public libraries are brought up-to-date at a very alert pace, provide new services, computer and Internet access. The citizens come to the library to find employment information (some of them even find a new job), to search for a high-school or a university for themselves or a family member, to order medicines on the Internet, which would otherwise have to be purchased from another locality, to get information or study for school or high-school, to seek financing or business opportunities.

This way, the library contributes to the socio-economic development of the community. In other words, it helps the public administration achieve its development strategy objectives, as any local or county council is interested in facilitating the access to jobs, education, healthcare services, etc. This can now be achieved at the public library with the help of the computers and the Internet. Filling in the subsidy applications is a new proof that the library can be useful to the community, depending only on each and every one of us to find the services necessary to the citizens.

Throughout 2011 around 17,000 farmers filled in applications for agricultural subsidies at the public libraries, the total value of the subsidies reaching EUR 20 million. On an average, the farmers saved 2 days by filling in the applications at the public library, which means total savings of 34,000 days throughout the country. Some farmers used these days for the field work, others were not forced to use their vacation days from their permanent job.

**The total savings with transportation costs amount to around EUR 150,000 countrywide.**

In 2012, Biblionet together with APIA will organize training and information sessions for librarians, in all the training centers of the county libraries. In this way, the librarians will have the opportunity to interact with APIA experts so as to have access to all the information necessary to fill in the subsidy applications in 2012.

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15 km from Brașov there is the commune of Hălchiu with a number of 4,200 inhabitants, of whom 261 came to the library to submit subsidy applications to APIA.

Mayor Ioan Gârbacea told us about the opening of the APIA center at the public library: „I was emailed from IREX a notification about the signing of the protocol with APIA. All the persons who came to the Agricultural Chamber within the Mayoralty were informed about this activity at the library. The transportation of the APIA expert from Brașov to Hălchiu was paid by the mayoralty“.

The APIA expert from Brașov Emil Barbura talks about the opening of the APIA centers: „The space was more appropriate than the office from Brașov, where there are 5 inspectors and no space at all for something like that. The entire procedure was much faster, the instrumentation was much more operative and organized. The working conditions are much better thanks to the Internet connection and the space."

To get the farmers come to the library to submit the applications to APIA, they were sent notifications by mail regarding the new organization, by means of which appointments were also made in order to avoid the crowd.

Librarian Gabriela Ticoiu talks about the changes in the library: „The initiative brought more people to the library, new subscriptions were made. Many have just now found out about the library novelties: computers, Internet, new services."

The farmers, who benefited from this new service, were excited about the fact that the process to submit the APIA applications was facilitated. Liliana Marin, one of the beneficiaries told us: “I found out about this initiative from the poster at the library. I used to go to the library before, but the equipment makes it easier to find any information now.”

The welcoming space in the library and the state-of-the-art computers make the library the ideal place for this activity. While they wait in line, the farmers can browse through a book, access the Internet or information about the new services provided by the library: programs with pupils or different cultural events. The same service has also been leveraged by 15 farmers from neighboring localities Crizbav (5 km) and Satu Nou (8 km).

With the development of the new library services, the inhabitants of the commune are coming with suggestions for new activities, like the creation of a “news corner” and, why not, proprieties courses for children and adults.

Farmer filling out forms with librarian’s help

In the commune of Cămărașu from Cluj County, 10% of the population went to the public library to submit financing applications to APIA. Librarian Luminița Ispas is extremely excited about the high number of visitors to the library lately thanks to the modernization work and the opening of the APIA center: „It is a great initiative as it helps the people, clarifies their issues, is beneficial for the community. As the locals know the area better, it is easier for them to identify the physical blocks, the parcels, unlike the APIA expert who does not know the characteristics of the local land or of the locals. The communication with the locals is better, they are more open to the people they know“.

Mayor Marcel Mocean organized „citizen meetings“, public information meetings, brochures, posters to inform the locals about the opening of the APIA center at the public library. There was even a comic cultural sketch developed on the topic of the collaboration with APIA „transition affair“. The expert and director of APIA from the locality of Apahida where the nearest APIA Center is found (37 km away) made a practical demonstration
attended by the librarian and several locals, who thus became familiar with the application format.

The community appreciates the efforts and voluntary work undertaken, thus, the collaboration between the library, mayoralty and APIA had a positive impact. “The library must be the place where one can find anything free-of-charge” – says the librarian.

Another collaboration opportunity proved to be the community’s awareness-raising regarding the recently-issued laws or the legislative amendments.

One of the farmers who submitted applications to APIA, Mr. Ioan Cadar said „I was informed about the possibility to submit APIA subsidy applications at the local library by the librarian. I was exempted from travels and waiting in lines, and the procedures were simplified. The time spent to submit the application at Apahida would have been at least one day, under the circumstances in which I have practical map-orientation experience. In the case of the elderly, it takes even 3 days. Not to mention the travel expenses, in the amount of 60 Ron.”

The image of the library suffered major changes in the eyes of the community, being now more frequently used due to the services it can provide. With the launch of the Biblionet program, people without financial possibilities have now the opportunity to learn how to use the computer.

Farmer Ioan Matei Ormenişan still has some objections: “Solve the issues related to APIA – teledetection does not function well, it creates inconveniences or leads to sanctions. Find a solution so that the people would no longer have to go to Apahida. At the moment, even if I submit the application at the library, I still have to go to the APIA center.”

In the commune of Brețcu from Covasna County, the number of the inhabitants is dropping. While there were 1,700 inhabitants in 2002, only 1,400 were left in 2011. Nevertheless, 475 of the remaining ones went to the public library to submit the financing applications for APIA.

The mayor of Brețcu, Dimeni Zoltan, declared: “In order to inform the locals about the APIA center at the library, we launched an information campaign, I personally informed all the people I met with, I made available a transportation means for the inhabitants of the villages belonging to the commune so as to facilitate their access to the library from Brețcu”. The farmers were satisfied after the applications were submitted, and the library and the mayoralty have a better image in the eyes of the community, managing to attract also other beneficiaries.

In the commune of Brețcu is a locality in Covasna County with almost 4,000 inhabitants. Mostly small farmers, the inhabitants of Brețcu make the most out of the APIA funds to improve their level of living. The center closest to this commune is 16 km away, in Tg. Secuiesc.

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travel to Tg. Secuiesc for the APIA files. The space there is very limited, totally inappropriate. There were people last year who felt ill while waiting in line.来到 the library they save time, money, everything is faster, more operative, people come when they can, if there are many people, then they go solve other issues and return afterwards."

The accessibility of the service within the public library was communicated in good time and repeatedly at the local radio station and by posters in the communal centre, at the food store, etc.

The number of farmers who submitted applications at the public library is 450. This service proved to be more than a local benefit, farmers from the neighboring localities coming to the public library from Brețcu for APIA applications.

The opinion of Mr. Radu Fenechiu, APIA engineer: “The space was more adequate than the office from Târgu Secuiesc. The space here is generous, people can work simultaneously on four computers, the procedure being much faster and more efficient. Being here all day, the people can come when they have time, they do not depend on a train or bus schedule.”

The modern library provides also other services, in addition to the traditional ones, such as filling in and submitting applications at the School Foundation. This year alone, 150 applications were filled in at the library, following which the locals benefited from around 50,000 Ron. Moreover, applications for heating aids were filled in and solved, in collaboration with the Mayoralty. The locals are enjoying and making the most out of the new services provided by the library, which became also a modern place to develop social relationships.

**Gighera - Dolj**

The commune of Gighera is a locality from Dolj County with nearly 3,200 inhabitants. The centre located closest to this commune is 13 km away, in Bechet.

“Together with Mr. Cioboată Gheorghe, the representative of APIA, we decided to launch an action in this respect,” declared Mayor Dăbuleanu Ion.

According to the librarian, Dăbuleanu Dorina: “The library provides adequate space for this action. Many people are old and find it difficult to travel to Bechet for the APIA files. As a matter of fact, around 450 persons filled in applications in our library.”

“The initiative was very good, the entire process lasted less, the farmers did not have to go to APIA center, crowding was avoided. Moreover, if there are documents missing from the file, the process becomes even more toilsome, as they have to go to the APIA centre twice. The experience was beneficial for both sides, the local authorities initiated this partnership and we want it to continue in the next years”, says APIA representative, Cioboată Gheorghe.

What the farmers say about this new library service:

**Ion Pârvulescu, 82 years old:**

“I found out from the mayoralty that applications can be submitted at the library and that made me happy. At my age, it is difficult to travel to Bechet, and, moreover, keep standing for an entire day. The librarian here is very friendly.”

**Drăgulețu Gheorghița, 79 years old:** “The initiative was welcomed, it was quite helpful for the villagers, who would have lost even one whole day standing in line at APIA center from Bechet. The bus would have also cost me 10 Ron.”

[Farmer filling out forms with help from volunteer]
The commune of Urzicuța is located in the South-Western part of Dolj County, in Băileștului plain, one of the most fertile agricultural areas. The commune’s population is 3,150 inhabitants, with field husbandry as the main object of activity, which is why the subsidies provided by APIA are vital. The APIA Center the commune is attached to is Segarcea, situated 22 km away.

"During a meeting with the representatives of IREX Romania organized by Dolj County Library, a possible collaboration with APIA was suggested, an opportunity that was analyzed with the mayor and the decision was made to fill in the subsidy applications locally", declared librarian Petrean Petre.

The initiative is praiseworthy, particularly if we take into account the applicants’ old age, the distance and transportation possibilities and the long waiting-time at the APIA centre, and we should also not forget about the waiting conditions there, the fact that the specialists of the agricultural chamber know the land site well, thus shortening the time-period to fill in the applications.

"Initially, the filling of the applications was promoted in public meetings organized per villages and sectors, then, to prevent crowding, appointments were made. At the end of the action, 200 applications to obtain the subsidy were filled in“, adds the librarian.

"It is a very good idea, which can be further disseminated. Experience is extremely beneficial, the offices of the APIA centers do no longer get crowded. The process can be improved if the majorities employ qualified people. The representative from the agricultural chamber within the majority was extremely helpful in submitting the applications, as he knows the farmers and what lands they have." Tâștea Vasile — representative of APIA Segarcea

What the farmers say about this new face of the library:

The library’s activity has now improved, the librarian is more efficient and can support the citizens with up-to-date information. The new equipment is used to inform the population. Before enabling the submission of subsidy applications, the library had a standard, book-loaning image. (Titirigă Lucian - farmer).

The librarian should be trained to help the citizens with different other services, such as the online payment of invoices. Moreover, it would be helpful to find a method to submit online the applications for the issuance of documents (income records, tax certificates) by public institutions, considering that 2 trips to Craiova are required to obtain such documents (60 km). (Tomescu Cosmin - farmer).

The public library, being a main provider of information and, more recently, due to the latest endowments, of services as well, should be dynamic, receptive to everything new, to anything that can be an option for the citizen to diversify his/her activity based on the current needs and, particularly, those arising at a given moment (in this period, the youth learns to use the computer and access the Internet at the library, so as to get their driving license).

Out of the 1,918 inhabitants of the commune of Bâra from Neamț County, 300 submitted financing applications to APIA at the local library!

17 km separated Bâra from the nearest APIA center, and the locals spent up to 4 days on the road, spending at least 40 Ron.

Some farmers were informed about the opening of the APIA center even by their children who visit the library more often. Librarian Mimi Gherasim, says „The locals discovered many other benefits they can have at the library, in addition to the classical book loaning and namely: English or ethnography courses, meetings with medical doctors and political meetings, AVON, Grawe, activities with the school and the kindergarten”.

Ramona Handuc, one of the farmers who submitted an APIA application at the local library said: “It
In the commune of Țibucani from Neamț County, almost 15% of the population submitted applications to APIA at the public library.

The opening of the APIA center was a great benefit in favor of the community, and the local mayoralty intends to explore also other opportunities to collaborate with the public library by expanding the space.

The 587 farmers who benefited from this new service provided by the library were joined by 15 other farmers from 3 neighboring localities who visited the library to submit financing applications to APIA.

Librarian Maria Ambrosa took the initiative of this activity: “I helped to inform the inhabitants by means of information posters, the cable network or local newspapers. We intend to expand the space for other services, maybe for presentations of cosmetic products.”

The APIA expert in the area, Ioan Bălan indicates some of the benefits of this service: “The farmer has all the documents at hand, the agricultural registry, copies of papers, etc. Thus, if a file is not complete, the farmer does no longer have to allocate too much time or money to go to another APIA center to complete the file. The library is close, saving them the 2-3 days on the road and generating savings of up to 100 Ron.”

There are benefits for the farmers, who do no longer have to travel 35 km to the nearest centre, as well as for APIA, the use of the space and of the computers within the library eliminating the crowd and the pressure from other centers and, thus, increasing the efficiency of application submission.

Mr. Ștefan Tătaru, an inhabitant of the commune: “The library modernized, it provides access to information to needy people as well. Next year, I will come also to the library to submit the application to APIA.”

Mayor Constantin Ciobanu, from the local public authorities: “The mayoralty made available local resources to provide the transportation of the APIA representative, and the library provided the suitable space and technology necessary for this activity.”

Once the library was modernized, the locals changed their opinion about the building where only children would go for book loaning until recently. The library space is now more welcoming and, by means of the computers and guided by the librarian, the locals rediscover their world.