

LAO PDR COUNTRY REPORT (National Library)

1. National Library

Organisational Structure

The Lao PDR began to diversify its system of library development throughout the country since 1990. Reading is not widespread among the population due to the lack of libraries and insufficient supply of books.

The Government and the Ministry of Information and Culture have appointed the National Library to cooperate with all sectors to organize a library development project, and to promote this project in order to attract assistance from international and neighbouring countries within the ASEAN network.

The work of the library is the duty of the entire public of the country as well as requiring the participation of relevant ministries, sections and organizations, in order to provide places where people can read and gather professional data to contribute to the development of human resources.

Vision, Activity Evaluation

The development of the National Library is at present restricted by its small physical premises, which do not allow space for many user to read books in the library itself and do not allow for the storage of large numbers of documents. The National Library has therefore focused much of its attention on developing resources such as provincial libraries, human resource development, and information literacy.

Manpower

The staff of the National Library has reduced to 32 in number due to the need for staff in new libraries, such as provincial libraries. At present, less than 50 percent of library staff have graduated in library sciences, and since there is no school of library sciences in Laos, it is likely that this number will further reduce in the future.

Library Users

The number of library members is increasing every year, in particular among Government workers and students.

Collection

The library collection includes some 385,000 volumes, of which 100,000 are in public use, while the rest are in storage due to lack of shelf space at the National building. The books in storage are rotated from time to time.

There are two unique and rare collections: the first is the collection of 2,000 traditional manuscripts (mostly palm-leaf), and the second is the Indochine Collection of 3,000

volumes, both of which have been catalogued and digitized, and will be available via the Internet.

We produce bibliographies each year for our database, but do not print them due to lack of funding. Indexes are produced for English language publications for the ASEAN COCI project.

The Library has recently undertaken two major digitization projects: The Digital library of Lao Manuscripts, and Indochine collection.

For audio visual materials, our main collection is the Archive of Traditional Music in Laos, which has 1.200 recordings, including video.

We are compiling an electronic database of 12.000 traditional manuscripts, which will be searchable by title, location, ancillary term, language, script, etc. and will be available via the Internet.

Services

The National Library continues to provide reading corners for information on ASEAN country, NGO, Women's rights and the Lao Women's Union, and National Heritage as reference materials.

This year almost 20.000 books were borrowed which is a 100 percent increase on the previous year.

The National Library cooperates with M.Bernard Gay, in producing *Le bibliographie du Laos*, which is widely used. We also provide current bibliography of Lao publications yearly.

Reading promotion Activities have increased due to further cooperation with JICA. Approximately 1.000.000 books are printed each year for free distribution in remote areas to promote reading. Volunteers from the National Library help children with reading, storytelling and advice about different kinds of books. The National Library has also published children's books for the distribution to schools. Reading festivals are organized annually in June and October, in collaboration with many partners. We also have a mobile library service.

Information literacy programmes are conducted in local communities by the National library and the Ministry of Education, often using community libraries as the centre.

Acquisition continues to rely upon foreign support, due to lack of funding. This sometimes creates difficulties when the donated are not suitable for our audiences. Laos has not yet established Legal Deposit, and therefore must buy books for the national Library collection.

The Digital Library of Lao manuscripts is scheduled to go online at the end of 2009.

Projects

The National Library organized 10 seminars and workshop on library management and specific skills such as preservation, cataloguing, etc.

15 staff have participated in local, regional and international trainings.

The physical facilities have remained unchanged.

Affiliations, Cooperation, Membership (local and foreign)

Important cooperation projects during the past years are:

The Lao-Vietnam-Sweden programme on public library development .

Cooperation with Japanese NGOs on reading promotion and library construction.

Cooperation with the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin and the University of Passau on the Digital Library of Lao manuscripts.

Cooperation with the French Government on the Indochine Archive library in training on database management ISBN.

2. Library at the national level

1 Library council (at the national University Library)

1 library Association (the Lao Library Association, at the National Library)

1 library Foundation (the Maha Sila Vilavong foundation, private)

41 Public libraries, including 5 mobile libraries (one of which is on a boat)

40 Special Libraries

15 University Libraries

250 School Libraries (mostly reading room) and 6,500 Portable Libraries (for primary schools in remote area)

10 Ecclesiastical libraries

3 New libraries are being established every year.

In provincial libraries, satellite groups have been established to exchange experience on reading activities and to circulate books. They also conduct study visits to public libraries.

Each large public library now has a computer, which uses CDs to simulate Internet use and to start to computerise catalogues.

Since the Lao PDR does not have a dedicated school of library sciences, the National Library, in cooperation with the Lao Library Association, conducts training programmes for local library staff. Approximately 15 trainings are held year, for 17 provinces.

3. Infrastructure

The National Library is the centre for local library networks throughout the country.

Telecommunication facilities remain very limited in the Lao PDR and are further restricted by their high cost.

4. Preservation

The National Library has conducted preservation activities for many years, especially in the field of traditional manuscripts. The Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme was supported by the German Foreign Office from 1992 until 2004, and continues under Lao Government support. During the last two years of German support, 4 regional Manuscript Preservation Centres were established, which continue to operate.

The Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme also established a microfilm collection of some 12,000 texts from throughout Laos, which is now digitized and will be made available via the Internet as the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts.

The Indochine Archive of documents from the period of French administration in Laos has also been preserved and digitized.

Many old books in the National Library general collection have also been preserved.

A large collection of old photographs from temples in Luang Phabang is being scanned and catalogued and will be made available to the National Library

Many libraries in Laos have been damaged by flooding and by termites.

5. Education and Training

There are 15 professional and 5 paraprofessional librarians in Laos. An additional 6 people have received 3 months' training in IT skills.

There are no library schools in the Lao PDR, but some subjects such as cataloguing, ISBN, etc, are taught by lecturers from overseas.

6. Copyright and Library Act

A new Library Act was established by the Ministry of Information and Culture in 1989 in line with Government policy, detailing management, staff and services.

There has been no Legal Deposit in Laos since 1975, which creates difficulties for the National Library collection in terms of completing national bibliographies, etc.

There are no copyright associations, organizations, or clearance centres to date.

7. Summary of the National Library activities

The National Library still belongs to the Ministry of Information and Culture. We are working on various projects for education development of our country. We are still working on main programs throughout the year such as the preservation of ancient manuscripts, reading promotion, library construction and staff training for library management, IT training and information literacy training.

We are collecting and preparing information on traditional music. We are also collecting local information such as history, tradition and costume. We are working to preserve local literature such as folktales and legends. We are collecting, research and print the results books to be distributed in primary schools. We also have started a digital library. One project is for Lao palm leaf manuscripts and the other is for the Indochina collection. Finally, an ongoing project is the public library development program. Every year we organize around five training workshops on library management, mobile library, book production and some specific subjects on library sciences for 20-30 large public libraries. During the year, the National Library works for the public including those in the countryside. We have three working teams to go out to work in the rural areas throughout the year. They spend one week in each area. We organize local staff training in cooperation with NGOs who are working in this area. We are able to conduct around 25 workshops and training each year.

Since the National Library is part of the Lao Library Association. We have worked hard as a member and also we are collaborating on establishing manuals and guidelines for librarians. We have two ways of disseminating information to the public.

Under the reading promotion program, the National Library encourages local authors to write various books for children such as picture books, short stories, fiction, non-fiction and scientific topics. The National Library writes, edits and prints around 15 titles a year. In our current situation, our workplace is not adequate for a National Library. We lack space, newspapers, new collection and space for library users. We are now planning to ask for funding to expand our services and built new facilities. We hope to actualize a new library by the year 2015.

This would cost 2-3 million dollars. We need to seek funds from overseas because of our government's lack of funds. In order to improve the National Library, we still need to purchase new books, send the staff abroad for training and improve the service ability of our staff. Normally, running expenses should come from the national budget, but since we depend on overseas aid, we are slowed down in meeting our goals.

At times, it is difficult to supply sufficient information for foreign donor agencies. We have an extremely limited national budget to work with and have no financial support for research and data collection.