

Country Report

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1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RECENT MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

National Library Development Plan 2016-2025:

In November 2014, the National Library of Laos finalised its strategic plan to set the organisation's future direction. The plan outlines the next steps for improving the quality of critical library infrastructure and services delivered at the national level.

With support from the Department of Publishing and the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism and in cooperation with the Lao Library Association, the *National Library Development Plan 2016 – 2025* sets out the Library's strategies to:

- Develop and expand National Library infrastructure, including the digital library, to support additional public access and to encourage deeper regional and international links.
- Support sustainable National Library services through upgrading staff capacity and skills leading to better service delivery.
- Preserve and protect palm leaf manuscripts so that they remain a key part of the nation's cultural heritage for future generations to learn from and inherit.
- Develop and improve existing National Library database systems to better store and manage data.
- Raise public awareness of reading as a way to improve the livelihood of Lao people, including all ethnic groups.

A New Building for the National Library in 2016

The National Library is set to have a new four storey building and a new location to house its collection in 2016. The creation of a new building supports the Library's 2016-2025 strategic objective to develop and expand library infrastructure at the national level.

The new location is near the Kaysone Phomvihane Museum approximately 6 km north of its current location on Setthatthirath road. The new location will also be in proximity to the new National Museum building and the National University of Laos at Dong Dok, providing an opportunity for closer collaboration with these learning institutions.

The construction of the new building will support the Library to improve conditions of current working space, provide greater public access, and develop better systems for storing data and materials. It will also offer the Library an opportunity to further develop and display its collection, establish training facilities and set up meeting rooms to encourage greater cooperation at the regional and international level.

Australian Government Volunteers at the National Library

From January 2015, the National Library welcomes two Australian volunteers who will support the Librarian Management Board to improve library systems and strengthen librarian staff capacity.

The first volunteer, a librarian specialist, will support and mentor the Board with the development of management guides, reviewing operational systems and helping implement ongoing development projects. The second volunteer, a fund raising and communications adviser, will work with library staff to improve fund raising and marketing capabilities and strengthen communications material.

Both volunteers are fully supported by the Australian Red Cross and funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program.

2. RELATIONSHIP TO GOVERNMENT

The National Library officially opened on 1 July 1956. Formerly under the Department of Fine Arts in the Ministry of Education, the Library is now under the direction of the Department of Publishing within the Ministry of Information Culture and Tourism.

The Library's role is enshrined in the National Assembly Resolution's No.012 *Law on Library* and No.028 *On the Adoption of the Law on Library* and the Presidential Decree No. 053 (2012) *On the Promulgation of the Law on Library*.

Article 5 of resolution No.012 defines the principles of the Library's activities as to:

- Ensure national, scientific, historic, public, progressive and modern characteristics
- Provide useful knowledge for the masses in developing human resources
- Ensure standard services and in a good environs for society

Article 15 outlines the Library's responsibilities that include mobilising resources, handling books, other printed material and visual equipments; processing resources; serving readers; reading promotion; and protecting library resources.

The National Library works cooperatively with other Lao Government ministries, sections and the Laos Library Association (LLA) to promote reading and to increase public understanding of the role of libraries across the country.

3. KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

The National Library currently has 39 staff, including 21 women and is made up of six sections: administrative; acquisition cataloguing; circulation; reading promotion; and heritage and rare books.

There are five ongoing development areas where library efforts are targeted:

- Public and school library construction
- Reading promotion in schools
- Extending traditional knowledge of palm leaf
- Librarian human resource development
- Digitilisation of library resources

The Library has maintained approximately 12,000 members since 1987.

The total number of all types of library in Laos is 1,310 libraries, this includes:

- 41 Public libraries, including 6 mobile libraries (including two boats)
- 40 Special Libraries
- 15 University Libraries
- 1,220 School Libraries (mostly reading rooms); and
- 6,500 Portable Libraries for primary schools in remote areas
- 10 Ecclesiastical libraries

The Library is responsible for building public libraries and developing reading promotion programs in every province around the country.

The Library's total collection includes some 500,000 items, of which around 100,000 are in circulation.

In 2014, approximately 1650 books in about 700 titles were made available for circulation to the Library's reading room. 650 of these books were in Lao, with the remainder in English, Thai and French.

There are about 3,000 audio-visual recordings, including traditional music, ceremony and instruments. The Circulation section is currently digitalising these works.

The Library holds 12,000 palmleaf manuscripts in its database, 6,000 of which are currently available to the public. These works continue to be digitalised and information updated as part of the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts project. The Heritage and Rare Books section is currently re-imaging the Library's microfilm collection from black and white into colour.

The Library also helps preserve manuscripts at each of the four palm leaf centers at provincial libraries in Luang Prabang, Vientiane Capital, Savannakhet and Champasak.

The Children's Reading room holds 2,800 books in languages that include Lao, Thai, English, French, Japanese and Russian. Some of these foreign language texts have been translated and reproduced in Lao language.

The Library operates several mobile book libraries which visit students in approximately 72 primary schools annually in four Vientiane districts. Around 5,000 books are donated to schools each year as a result of these visits.

4. NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN CREATING AND BUILDING COLLECTIONS

The National Library partners with not-for-profit and private sector organizations to improve library collections around the country. Some of the major donations in 2014 included:

- Korean NGO, Humans in Love in conjunction with Kolao donated 2,000 children's books to 23 Vientiane primary school libraries; and
- EFA-JAPAN donated 2,000 new books for the National Library's collection and an additional 312 new story books for Savannakhet Provincial Library;

The Library has also received support with palm leaf translation and private donation of texts. An example of this was in October 2014, when Khon Kean University in Thailand transcribed the 123 year old Sang Sin Say palm leaf text from Khon Kean script into Lao. The text was then developed into a Lao children's book for the Library's collection.

5. NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN MANAGING COLLECTIONS

Strengthening Community Libraries: EFA-JAPAN in cooperation with the National Library and HuaPhanh Department of Education conducted a monitoring visit of 16 Community Libraries in 5 districts of HuaPhanh province in November 2014. New story books and newspapers were donated to each Community Library as part of this project.

ASEAN Children's Librarians Training Project: This project sought to enhance the capability of children's librarians from national and public libraries of 10 ASEAN member countries. Held in Seoul in November 2014, two staff from the National Library joined their library counterparts from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam to develop skills that will assist them with delivering reading promotion activities to children and young adults in schools. The training covered teaching method and practice for storytelling, picture book reading and reading program development. The project was supported by ASEAN in cooperation with the Republic of Korea.

Children's Reading Promotion Training: Two retired librarian specialists from Japan held a one day training session in September 2014. The training aimed to support Library staff to improve the quality of reading promotion activities delivered to schools. 12 library staff participated in the training and developed knowledge and skills in developing effective visual aids for students. These techniques support library staff to lead reading promotion activities in schools during the year.

6. NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN PROVIDING ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS

Developing Public Libraries: The National Library supports the right of all Lao people to access information across the country. In 2014, the Library received assistance from French NGO Cobiac, an association of librarians & cultural action consultants, to construct a public library in Bolikhamxay province to support reading culture

development. This project is part of the government's strategy to reduce poverty through reading promotion in Bolikhamxay province.

The Library also received support from EFA-Japan to conduct a survey at a site in Sangthong District. The survey investigated the suitability of a site to construct a public library. Other public library construction projects in NongHet province and Xiengkhuang province are also in the pipeline for 2015.

Library Week 2014 – Improving Access to Knowledge :The Central Library at the National University of Laos hosted Library Week from 11-13 June 2014. With support from the World Bank this event, which included a trade and book fair, aimed to improve the awareness and ability of students to access library information and materials to help their education and human development.

A cross section of Government, NGOs and private sector organizations came together to support this initiative including the National Library of Laos, Lao-Japan Human Resource Development Institute, Lao National Agricultural and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), French Institute, Forestry technical section, IT Infrastructure section, Horticulture section, the Asia Foundation, Room to Read, United Nations Development Program, and the World Health Organization.

7. EXAMPLES OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE REPORTING LIBRARY AND OTHER NATIONAL COLLECTING INSTITUTIONS (LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES AND MUSEUMS)

Facilitating Information and Material Exchange: The National Library works closely with other national cultural institutions including the Archives Centre and the National Museum.

The Archives Centre, which falls under the Prime Minister's Office, is responsible for preserving historical public sector records. The Library engages regularly with the Archives Centre to facilitate an information exchange including when historical records are released.

The National Library collaborates with the National Museum which is also under the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism. The Library exchanges knowledge and information with the Museum on a range of historical topics. In addition, the Museum has assisted the Library when conducting mobile book library visits in schools, providing materials and staff.

Library Network Development: The National Library plays an essential role in training public librarians to encourage the growth of sustainable public libraries in Laos. In 2014, the National Library partnered with Lao Library Association to conduct staff development training and to improve Library services. As a result of the Library's training-to-trainer approach, Public Library is now able to continue developing its library services.

International Cooperation: In 2014, the National Library began a reciprocal exchange of magazines and newspapers with the National Library of Vietnam. With the success of this initiative, the Library is hoping for further cooperation in the future in training and skills development of library staff.

8. EXAMPLES OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE REPORTING LIBRARY AND PUBLISHERS IN YOUR COUNTRY

Following the introduction of the new Laos Library Law in 2012, Laos has maintained a national legal deposit administered by the Department of Publishing within the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism. As part of the Legal Deposit legislation, publishers of new material in Laos are required to submit five copies to the National Library.

The Library plays a role in encouraging publishers to comply with the legal deposit through its responsibilities in issuing ISBN, a requirement for all newly published works in Laos.