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9th CDNLAO Meeting: Cambodia Country Report

Update on the National Library of Cambodia

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Library Administration

The National Library is only one institution responsible for maintenance of the national filings and documentation centre. It is under the direction and management of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts. Since 1993, after Cambodia had consolidated with multinational parties, the Royal Government of Cambodia intended to restore and develop this related issues in collaboration with other local and international organizations for restoration and development of the major factors related to the national society. There are some International Organizations and UN agencies such as UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF that have set up their own independent libraries. Currently, there are more than 70 libraries in Cambodia, both small and large, and these include:

- National Level:
 - National Library, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts
 - Buddhism Library, Ministry of Cults and Religions
- UN Libraries
- University and Faculty libraries
- Provincial Libraries: these libraries are set up throughout the vertical line of the National Library
- At schools

On average, there are about 3,000 visitors (readers) a month who come to the National Library for reading and research.

The Librarian Association of Cambodia was established in 1996 but it was not elected or well functioned. In January 2001, this Association met and re-elected the Management Committee Members.

Collection Profile

- At the National Library, there are 8,327 national documents and books. This includes the national writing heritage documents, which were published in French between 1925 to 1970. There are also some books and documents published in the Khmer language in the years 1955–1975.
- Sastra are special documents which were written on palm leaves. These documents are quite rare to collect or find, and have only one for a subject (title).

Infrastructure

In Cambodia, there are no dedicated Library Networks in the country, due to the lack of technical and financial supports.

Services

The National Library currently provides services for study and research and for finding national histories and heritages. Researchers and clients can borrow books from the Librarian and read inside the building or the compound, but they are not permitted to take the books home where the books and documents are quite aged, or are rare. However, the other new re-printed books available at the National Library, we can lend to the readers within their suggestions. Beside this, the National Library has organized a place for everyone who wants to come and freely read the books whether English, French and Khmer languages, magazines, news and other study purposes. Separately, the National Library hasn't affiliated with other specified technical libraries such as the libraries of the University of Medicine and Law. The affiliation between libraries is still quite poor due to the lack of a networking system and other mutual information exchange.

Training

The total number of staff working in the National Library is 26, and 3 of them have received training on Librarian Skills. One was trained on conservation and maintenance and repairs, and two others were trained on catalogues. Four other librarians were sent overseas to Malaysia for training on maintenance and repairs, two people for 2 months, and two others sent to France for one

year to study on catalogues. The National Library has also sent one staff member to Singapore for one-week study on Information Technology (IT). Recently, there was one voluntary librarian from France working in the National Library assisting and providing technical assistance and maintenance. Others are support staff, and have been receiving continuing education while working. I also would like to emphasize that the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts of Cambodia have sent some staff for further education and training on Librarian skills, but after they completed the training, they had left to work for other international organizations due to the shortage of government salary payment. It is not more than US\$15/month.

The Copyright

Regarding the reserved copyright in Cambodia, Cambodian writers are facing a lot of complications and constraints in this matter. Presently, there are no copyright laws in Cambodia; therefore it becomes more and more anarchic with issues such as stealing someone's achievements to make a copy, which causes discouragement to the writers' initiatives.

Institutional Survey

The National Library of Cambodia was built in the 1920s. It was inaugurated and publicly opened on 24th December 1924. There were only 2,879 copies of books then. It was successively supervised by French Directors. The first Khmer Director, Mr. Pach Chhoeun, took over the responsibility of the National Library of Cambodia in 1951. Most of books in the National Library of Cambodia were in French. Cambodian publication has increased more and more after Cambodia completely gained independence in 1954. Unfortunately, during the Pol Pot regime (1975 – 1979), the National Library was closed down. A number of Pol Potists lived in it. They put the books down on the floor and piled the shelves up. Many books were destroyed, some of them were used to make fire and some were used as cigarette papers. In 1979, Pol Pot regime was overthrown, people came back to Phnom Penh after clearing, rearranging the shelves and putting the books back. The National Library of Cambodia was re-inaugurated and opened to the public on 1st January 1980.

Many countries and organizations such as the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Germany, Australia, France, The United States of America, Daniel Mitterand Foundation, Asia Foundation, Ranfurly Foundation etc, have helped to develop the National Library of Cambodia by providing both materials and trainings and other varieties of assistances. The National Library is actually in the government sector. It is under the Department of Books and Reading of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts. It is staffed with 26 people including one male and two female deputy directors.

Now the National Library of Cambodia holds a collection of 103,635 copies in various languages such as Khmer, French, English, Russian, Vietnamese, Japanese and Thai. Besides these above-mentioned books, we also have 710 titles of Palm Leave manuscripts. They are also available on microfilm reader.

Website

As I mentioned previously in this document that the National Library of Cambodia provides the only services to clients who want to read and research for further study purposes. There is no modern equipment and/or network systems at all. Recently, the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts had reached an agreement with the Francophony agency with the purpose for reorganizing the National Library to be an Electronic Library.

It is very important for better mutual information exchanges from one to another Francophony countries and Worldwide communication. The National Library of Cambodia has no such system in use yet. In addition, the Information Technology Technicians have not been properly trained and qualified. And, there are only three Computers at the National Library, and all of them are used for day to day administrative work only.

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