

# LAO PDR COUNTRY REPORT

For the 16<sup>th</sup> Conference of Directors of National Libraries in Asia and Oceania (CDNLAO)

## 1. General Overview in FY2007

The Lao Government's policy is to develop the human resources and library infrastructure in order to promote information literacy within the country and quality services in the library sector. The National Library is responsible for the building of public libraries in every province of the country and to develop its reading promotion programme. At the National Library, we are not yet able to physically expand our premises, so we have focused on improving the quality of our services. During FY2007, we developed an IT training room which will be used from 2009 for training staff from Ministries within the Lao Government. We also renovated the Indochina Collection, which was at the same time digitally scanned, including photographs of Laos from the French colonial period. We also started the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts project, which will make almost 12,000 primary manuscript sources (approximately 500,000 digital images) from Laos available via the Internet. Further research was also undertaken on the Annotated Catalogue of Tai Nuea Manuscripts. Six staff members received training for trainers in cooperation with Vietnam and Sweden, and will work to develop public libraries in the region. We have also prepared fresh plans for a new National Library building.

## 2. 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 organise 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 organisations, 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 users 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 30 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 Library 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 digitised, 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 digitisation projects: the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts, and the 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, date, 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 countries, NGOs, 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 a 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 distribution to schools. Reading Festivals are organised 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 books donated are not suitable for our audiences. Laos has not yet established a 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 2008.

### ***Projects***

The National Library organised 10 seminars and workshops 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 year 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 project.

Cooperation with the Thai National Library and Chulalongkorn University library in training on database management and ISBN.

## **3. 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 Viravong 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 rooms) and 6,500 Portable Libraries (for primary schools in remote areas)

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 each year, for 17 provinces.

## **4. 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.

## **5. 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 digitised 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 digitised.

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.

## **6. 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.

## **7. 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, organisations, or clearance centres to date.