

# **Lao PDR Country Report**

## **For the CNDLAO Meeting in Korea 2011**

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#### I. General Overview

1. **Organization:** The National Library is administratively under the Dept of Publishing and Libraries within the Ministry of Information and Culture. It is the main institution responsible for all library development and activities, for reading promotion, the sharing of information and for the preservation of cultural heritage and documents. It is also responsible for the training and administration of all library staff. It administers and controls both copyright and the delivery of ISBN numbers.
2. **Overview:** 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 the development of its reading promotion program. 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 FY2009, we developed an IT training room which has been used from 2010 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 continued and improved the second phase of the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts project, which has made 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

#### II. Version, 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 does 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

#### III. Collections

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.

- **Manuscript and Indochina collections**  
There are two unique and rare collections: the first is the collection of 12,000 traditional manuscripts (mostly palm-leaf) and the second is the Indochina Collections of 3,000 volumes, both of which have been catalogued and digitized, and will be available via the Internet.
- **Bibliographies and Indexes Published**

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 and for the ASEAN COCI project.

- Audiovisual Collections

For audio visual materials, our main collection is the Archive of Traditional Music in Laos, which has 1,200 recordings, including video.

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

#### IV. Digital collections

- E-collection of Indochina: a collection of 3,000 records with documentation that three countries can access.
- Lao Palm Leaf Manuscript Digital library: all libraries in the world can access our collections through the internet at [www.laomanuscripts.net](http://www.laomanuscripts.net) This digital library now has 12,000 records. The website is open to the public but we are still continuing with our expert team to revise and update the data. The National Library this year will become the center for the development of similar collections in neighboring countries as having worked with experts our staff are now qualified to help through cooperation with neighboring countries.

#### V. Depository Collections

This aspect of our National Library work is progressing well, as we are able to collect copies of all publications every year. We have 5 main depositories:

- National Legal Depository: Every year we collect approximately 600 copies of new publications (150 titles 4 copies per title). From this we prepare the National Bibliography.
- UNESCO and UNDP Depository Collection: we continue to work closely with UNESCO especially in the educational and cultural sector to make a national collection.
- ASEAN Depository Collection: we receive publications from the ASEAN countries every month and also send to their Depository Collections.
- Women and Gender Depository Collection: This collection contains both National and International publications.
- Traditional Music Depository: We collect all traditional and ethnic music from all national and international research conducted in Laos.

#### VI. Library Service Situation

National Library 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 organized annually in June and October, in collaboration with many partners. We also have a mobile library service.

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

## VII. Types of Libraries in Laos:

There are many types of libraries in Laos:

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

40 Special Libraries

15 University Libraries

1000 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 computerize 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 programs for local library staff. Approximately 15 trainings are held each year, for 17 provinces.

## VIII. Affiliations, Cooperation, Membership (local and foreign)

Important cooperation projects during the past years include:

- The Lao-Vietnam-Sweden program 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 Indochina Archive library in training on database management of ISBN.

## IX. 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.

Every year we organize 10 training seminars for library staff in the Provinces.

## X. Copyright and Library Act and Law

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.

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

The laws regarding Libraries are in a state of transition in Laos. According to the rule of the Prime Ministers' Cabinet all copyright and depository laws are now being revised by the National Library and Department of Publications. The new Library Law is expected by 2012. Now we still use the temporary rules established by decree of the Ministry. The situation is the same for the Lao Library Association; it is being reorganized and will be reestablished in 2012.

## XI. The Role of the National Library in the New Era

The National Library plays a very important role in developing countries such as Laos. As an underdeveloped country educational opportunities have been more limited in the past, particularly in the countryside. While this situation is improving, a large percent of the population has had limited access to information, education and skills development. Thus an important role of the National Library system is to assist these people through libraries that function as life long learning centers where people can gain access to information and upgrade and improve their skills.

The National Library should have a strong administrative structure, and a qualified staff, prepared to lead libraries throughout the country into an expanded role for libraries. The staff should have a large vision in which the National Library should play the role of developing Human Resources through their collections and facilities. Where access isn't available to higher education, libraries should become knowledge centers supporting the population through staff with appropriate skills and access to information. This requires an expanded role for librarians, skilled in finding and passing on the information and resources appropriate to build the knowledge base of local residents.

The Government should support the National Library so that it is able to meet information needs of the people, for literacy, culture and history as well as knowledge and skills.

Now we are trying to upgrade the National Library to be representative of the kind of knowledge center that is required to help the citizens continue to develop themselves and the country. Our new National Library facility should be fully automated, with IT systems in place for complete library administration as well as for public access to information. Digital access as well as librarians trained in search and information retrieval will enable access to broad ranging and up to date information that is not available if we have to rely on hard copy texts. It can enable the sharing of a wealth of educational, training and skills development materials, whether written, video or interactive. Digitization will also enable complete access, from any computer to our fragile cultural heritage and historical documents.

A broadening of our view to see libraries as the knowledge, information and skills resource centers of the future, with IT as an appropriate means to provide such access, will speed Laos on its' path to development and equalize opportunities for life long learning throughout the country.