<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>The Lao radio situation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Vorassack Pravongvengkham.</td>
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<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td>1999</td>
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<td><strong>URL</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10220/1198">http://hdl.handle.net/10220/1198</a></td>
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Deutsche Welle - AMIC
Seminar on

RADIO PROGRAMMING
IN A MULTIMEDIA AGE

COUNTRY PAPER – LAO PDR

jointly organised by

<dw>
Deutsche Welle Radio Training Centre
Köln, Germany

and

<amic>
Asian Media Information
and Communication Centre (AMIC)

River View Hotel, Singapore
THE LAO RADIO SITUATION

INTRODUCTION

The role of the media in economic and social development in Laos at the present time is a very large question and an important issue. This is so not only for our country, but also for the whole world because, as everyone knows, communication involves expensive and sophisticated technology and communication is potentially an important force for the development of the country.

In the revolutionary history of our country, our Party and Government consider mass-media as important means of spreading ideology and party’s guidelines to the mass, as sharp arms in cultural battle to fight against all kinds of complots and destruction of the enemies. The mass communication became one sector connected with the revolution, actively contributing to struggle for seizing independence, liberty for the interest of the country and to construct new life in favour of the multi-ethnic people.

The Lao Radio before 1975

48 years ago, on 13rd August 1950, in the liberated zone, the “Itsala” Newspaper was founded during the struggle against the colonialism. This Newspaper has given to the actual “Pasason” which is today an organ of the Central Committee Party and Government of the Lao people’s Democratic Republic.

After the “Itsala” Newspaper foundation when the Front of NeoLao Itsala has changed its name to “NeoLao Haksat”, according to urgent need of the revolution, the Radio Station as well as the Khao Sane Pathet Lao or KPL News Agency were also founded in liberated zone. Although the small number of media at that time, during nearly a half of century throughout their confidential and opened activities in different periods of the Revolution, they were able to spread informations at time and in the systematic manner in the field of cultural and ideological struggle. They were one necessary sector in ideological domain of the multi-ethnic people and they were also an important bridge between the Party and the mass.

The Lao Radio after National liberation

After the accomplishment of the National Democratic Revolution, the “Itsala” Newspaper, after changing its name to “NeoLao Haksat” Newspaper, the Radio station and the KPL News Agency have been moving into Vientiane, founding their headquarters in the capital of Lao PDR, then the “NeoLao Haksat” Newspaper rechanged once again its name to “Siang Pasason” (Voice of the people) and since 1982 to “Pasason” Newspaper as it is at present.
Meanwhile mostly, since the 4th (1986) and 5th (1991) Congress of our Party, different media were also founded as following: Labour Newspaper, Vannasinh (Literature) Magazine, Vientiane Socio-Business Newspaper Weekly, Lao Women Magazine, Youth Newspaper, Sunday Pasason Newspaper, Lao National TV Channel 9, Lao TV Channel 3, Suksamay (Education) Newspaper, Army Newspaper, Vientiane Times (First English Newspaper in Lao PDR), Le Renovateur (First French Newspaper in Lao PDR), etc...

Immediately after 1975, the Party saw the role of communication and mass-media in particular, as a tool of the class struggle. However, with the emphasis on economic growth since 1986, the media are now considered tools of modernization. Over the last five years, the mass-media (both print and electronic) in Lao PDR, have experienced the greatest growth since 1975. Evidence of this growth is the proliferation of the print media in the principal cities. In Vientiane’s Morning Market, we can see many private book shops in different languages: English, French, Thai and naturally Lao. Likewise there has been a ten-fold increase in the number of TV sets over the last 5 years. Similar trends are evident in radio ownership and telecommunication facilities. Apart from communications infrastructure, structural changes have been taking place as well. These include the use of media as an education medium, a two-way communication medium between the state and the people, and the general tendency toward less stringent official controls.

After the 4th and 5th Congress of the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party, the Lao Radio as well as all the above mentioned mass-media has played an important role in spreading the guidelines of renovation, new intention of the party, giving to the people, knowledges about new mechanism and new methods of working. At the same time, they have also given contribution to organization, propaganda, agitation in order to promote party members, combattants and multi-ethnic people to apply the guidelines of renovation of the party, congratulating the pilot persons, underlining factors and news experiences acquired during the struggle movement, works and the education of the mass.

During the past decade, mass-media have developed all efforts to spread information in different forms and aspects larger than before, especially, they have reflected creative opinions of the mass concerning the social reality and the mass’ proposals, enable the mass communication to be able to be free step by step from the manner of only one side of information, thus it is possible to answer partly to the population needs and the mass-media has been more clearly at the same time the speaker of the party and governement and the rostrum of the mass.

Facing to the changing and complexe of the world situation, the Lao mass-media, including Radio which are the main means of information relating to events which were happened, explaining facts at time, helping the cadres, Party members including population in different social classes to understand very good and clearly about these events and to have a correct position in order to act properly according to the party concept. At the same time, they have also to proceed activities against the war’s manoeuvres of the hostile forces to destroy us peacefully, to promote and to mobilize the solidarity and confidence among the mass in regarding to the party’s direction and
our own forces to continue the renovation causes with high determination; to maintain
the political security and social order in our country

Personal rang and cadres working for the mass-media have developed in the field of
number and quality as well, a number of journalists have a clear political concept, high
qualification, receiving the mass’s confidence, the rang of young journalists was born
and has developed its own intelligence to contribute to the renovation's causes of the
country and as well as to the journalistic works.

Regarding the Radio in Laos, there is presently, only one station at national level,
located in the centre of Vientiane, while local stations are existing in almost the whole
country.

As mentioned above, the Lao National Radio was found on the 13rd of March 1960
during the war period. It was built in a forest in Houaphanh province, with a 25 KW
transmitter. Since 1975, under the new regime, the Lao Radio has been transferred to
Vientiane with a capacity of 30 KW.
It represents since the liberation of the country, one of the most principal and important
organs for the propagation of the voice of the Party and Government

Concerning radio stations in provinces, there are today nearly one dozen. Even there
are in slightest scale, their importance is not as negligible before the very eyes of the
Parti and Government.

+ The Lao Radio and its working operation

The personnel

The Lao National Radio which is located in the center of the Vientiane Municipality, has
a personnel of about 170 persons among whom 70 persons are assuming the post of
editor, spreading in the two following main departments:

- The department for programmes in Lao language
- The department for programmes in foreign languages

Each department which is subdivided in various other services, produce programmes
relating to the country's and the people's life in every fields and reflecting to the world
people the good traditions and culture of the Lao nation.

The programming

The Lao National Radio broadcasts its programmes three times per day. We can count
in total 29 programmes including the daily news which consists of local and
international news, variety programmes such as programmes for mother and child,
programmes about Agriculture, Economic, Culture, as well as entertainment
programmes such as Lao and international music, drama programmes and finally, programmes in ethnic minority languages.

In order to inform the foreign public inside and outside the country, the Lao National Radio broadcasts as well one part of its programmes in five foreign languages: English, French, Vietnamese, Khmer and Thai.

The equipment

The Lao National Radio comprises presently two transmitters short wave of 150 kw and 10 kw and one transmitter middle wave with a capacity of 30 kw as well as one transmitter 20 KW FM. The first ones broadcast programmes in Lao language, while the second one is reserved for programmes only in foreign languages. The 20 KW FM transmitter, very newly set up, broadcasts at the present time programmes in Lao only in general, except a few ones in English and French devoted for entertainment programmes.

In other respects, the Lao National Radio is composed of six recording studios, equipped with audio tape, compact-disc and cassette tape players. These equipments on the first hand, came from the governmental subventions and the other hand, are provided by donation from various foreign countries.

- The radio stations in province

In Laos, 13 provinces, at the present time, are composed of radio stations but as mentioned previously, all of these stations have a low broadcasting capacity:

1. Houaphan : one 1 KW AM & one 100 W FM transmitter, cover only 3% of the total surface of the country
2. Xiengkhouang : one 1 KW AM transmitter covers 3% of the total surface
3. Oudomxay : one 1 KW AM & one 200 W FM cover 4%
4. Vientiane Municipality : one 50 KW AM & one 20 KW FM cover 80%
5. Khammouane : one 25 KW AM covers 90%
6. Savannakhet : one 25 KW AM covers 90%
7. Champassack : one 10 KW AM covers 70%
8. Luang Prabang : one 2 KW AM & one 200 W FM cover 50%
9. Bolikhamsay : one 1 KW AM & one 500 W FM cover 2%
10. Sayaboury : one 200 W FM covers 4%
11. Bokeo : one 100 W FM covers 2%
12. Luang Nam Tha : one 1 KW AM & one 200 W FM cover 5%
13. Vientiane province : one 25 KW AM & one 50 KW SW cover 90%

Each province is operating autonomously with the obligation of retransmission of the daily news from the National Radio. The personnel are not more than thirty persons per station, except the Vientiane Municipality, almost 170 staff members.
Besides, each province and district comprise also a loud speaker system for broadcasting programmes received from the National station.

+ **Creation of a new FM station broadcasting in Vientiane**

Since July 15\(^{th}\) 1997, tests of FM broadcasting have been done daily. The station was launched officially in August of the same year and operates under the supervision of the Lao National Radio. The realization of this project was supported by the Japanese Government, with the contribution of the Lao Government. The staff working in, is coming principally from the National Radio station.

+ **The problems**

  - **Staff**: The training of skilled staff and the modernization of equipment, in conformity with the reality of the work and the standard conditions required throughout the world still remain a big problem to be resolved as soon as possible.

    Unfortunately, the very limited budget and subventions provided by the state are still, in the present time, far from being able to solve the problems.

    There is presently, in Laos any school of journalism yet. The journalists so-called "really professional" who are not existing in large numbers, today in the country, have been trained mostly, outside the country, in Eastern and Western Europe as well as in neighbouring countries.

    This would never be possible without grants offering by various foreign countries such as Japan, Australia, USA, France, Thailand, etc. and some other international or non-governmental organizations.

    But generally and logically, we can say that mostly of the journalists or Lao media staff, more or less qualified, are trained on the job by their "brothers" or seniors.

    However, with the cultural co-operation agreement signed between Laos and different friendly countries and international organizations, journalistic seminars and training courses have been taking place quite regularly, every year, in Vientiane and in other big cities.

    The trainers came mostly from Australia, Malaysia, France, Canada, Germany, etc.

  - **Equipment**: The equipment of the Lao National Radio and provincial stations remain insufficient. The majority of those stations, including the national Radio, is composed of old materials rarely renewed. The lack of means hampers a quality maintenance of equipment, resulting in a perpetual degradation of machines and the quality of the broadcasting.
Beside all the problems mentioned above, we have also some other weak points regarding the radio programming, as follows:

Lao Radio like other forms of mass-communication didn’t receive really yet a large scale of attraction among the mass because their quality and contents were not good enough and they didn’t touch directly the recipients’ interests mostly in the domains of information, scientific and technical knowledges and entertainment, etc.

Therefore, first of all, Radio should have more characters of struggle, education organization and leading the mass and character of reality in order to abolish step by step those weak points above-mentioned, to realize these tasks, the mass communication should understand the following ideas:

- Radio is a sharp means of the party and the Government in spreading the guidelines and policy of the Party and propagating the policy and law of the Government, giving education in ideological domain to the mass, mobilizing and promoting them to contribute to apply two strategical tasks as going on with the construction and developing the people’s democratic regime, creating primary factors for progression along the ways that we have chosen
- Radio is the mass’ rostrum, tie joining between the Party and the mass.
- Radio should have several aspects and abundant contents, should be attractive and entertaining for the recipients, bring ideology, guidelines, concept of the Party to the mass and at the same time, they should be also a rostrum of these latters.

However, among all of the communication tools, we can say that Radio has the most potentialities to serve a larger audience as a cost-effective manner, compared with other forms of communication; it is also very suitable with the low income of the majority of the Lao population.

Consequently, Radio plays the biggest central role in the development processes of the mass-media. With a total awareness of the advantages of the Radio, the Lao Government continuously invests in order to improve the quality and the capacity of the broadcast hardware.

The capacity of the transmitters of the Lao National Radio still remain weak as its nationwide cover represents at the present time only 65% of the total surface of Laos. But do note that from now to year 2000, the Lao Government wish to attempt the 100% cover.

What I have just mentioned above represents in brief, the real situation and some most important problems to be considered at the Lao National Radio.
As we said before, Radio plays an important role in developmental efforts by disseminating information on new policies, technologies and opportunities to the population, but the close contacts maintained between the grassroots rural readers and reporters and editors are more efficacious. We think that the awareness of peasant, about the important role of mass-media event within the reporters and the producer’s programmes of radio-television, is not quite developed. They do not understand the people spend their resources for getting information in the economic and social development. So, we should say that the communication system in Laos is
more modern than the last ten years, but it is not sufficient for encouraging the business sector at the present time.

In other respects, we can understand together that the main problems and difficulties of the Lao Radio came from the lack of financial means, for assuring the respect of the world tendency towards technology, as well as for warranting a perpetual training in favour of reporters and technicians who will assume the Radio of the future. Laos needs to raise the level of education in order to be able to participate fully in the processes of technological modernization and social-cultural development.

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**RADIO MEDIUM**

**Local Radio Stations Available:**

- **Lao National Radio (LNR)**
  
  **Ownership:** Government
  
  **Transmitter Location:** Vientiane

The Lao PDR has only one Radio Station at national level which is located in Vientiane Capital.

We can listen to the Lao National Radio on three frequencies: AM 6,130 Khz, AM 1,030 Khz and FM 103.7 Khz.

- The AM 6,130 Khz broadcasts programmes in Lao Language.
- The AM 1,030 Khz broadcasts programmes in Foreign languages: English, French, Thai, Vietnamese and Khmer.
- The FM 103.7 Khz broadcasts most of its programmes in Lao and some in English and French languages.

**Commentary:**

- Suitable medium to reach rural market because of low television penetration.
- No audience research available.
- Very popular because it can cover a vast area.

**Number of Radio Stations:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>STATION CALL SIGN</th>
<th>COVERAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMMERCIAL</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOVERNMENT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lao National Radio</td>
<td>Nation-Wide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Laos, there are the Central Radio Station (LNR) on the one hand and the Provincial Radio Stations (in each province) on the other hand. The Lao National Radio (LNR)'s Information Programmes are transmitted also to all the relay Stations.

**Ownership:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATION CALL SIGN</th>
<th>OWNER(S)/BACKING</th>
<th>SIGNAL TRANSMISSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LAO NATIONAL RADIO (AM6,130, AM1,030, FM103.7)</td>
<td>GOVERNMENT</td>
<td>50Kw, 10Kw, 20Kw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vientiane Radio</td>
<td>GOVERNMENT</td>
<td>25 KW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savannakhet Radio</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>20 KW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champassack</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>10 KW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khammouane</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>25 KW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luang Prabang</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
<td>01 KW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etc...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Radio Station Transmission Hours:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATION CALL SIGN</th>
<th>TRANSMISSION HOURS</th>
<th>DAYS OF THE WEEK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LAO NATIONAL RADIO AM 6,130 Khz</td>
<td>5 am - 11:30 pm</td>
<td>Mon - Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM 1,030 Khz</td>
<td>10 am - 1 pm</td>
<td>Mon - Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM 103.7 Khz</td>
<td>9 am - 9 pm</td>
<td>Mon - Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIENTIANE RADIO</td>
<td>6 am - 7 am / 5 pm - 7 pm</td>
<td>Mon - Sun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Costs:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATION CALL SIGN</th>
<th>PEAK TIME COST/30&quot; SPOT US$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LAO NATIONAL RADIO</td>
<td>US$ 3.2 (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIENTIANE RADIO</td>
<td>US$ 2.5 (1997)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Household Penetration:
- Out of 10 households in Vientiane, about 8 own Radio sets.
- Out of 10 households in the provinces/rural areas, nearly 6 own radio sets.

Government Restrictions:
- Cigarette and Alcohol (except Beer) advertising are banned.

RADIO AND TELEVISION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>1992</th>
<th>1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio Transmitter</td>
<td>Places</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Management</td>
<td>Places</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Management</td>
<td>Places</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud-Speaker Systems</td>
<td>Places</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television Broadcasting Transmitter</td>
<td>Places</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Management</td>
<td>Places</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Management</td>
<td>Places</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of Radio-Television Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Television</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

I). General Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land Area</td>
<td>236 800 Km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital City</td>
<td>Vientiane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Lao (official), English, French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currency</td>
<td>Kip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Per Capita (US$)</td>
<td>US$ 350 (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Growth</td>
<td>7.0% (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>4,975,772 (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Density</td>
<td>54 per sq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Groups</td>
<td>Lao Loum 68%, Lao Theung 22%, Lao Soung 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Buddhist 85%, Animist and other 15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>