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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
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Paper No. 8
COUNTRY PAPER

Country: Kingdom of Cambodia
Name: In Chhay
Organisation: National Radio of Cambodia

Located in Southeast Asia on the Indochina peninsula, Cambodia is rich in natural resources. After gaining independence from France in 1953, the country had started to build a strong economy by exploiting all resources and workforce available. But the efforts had been disrupted when the kingdom had been dragged into civil war which culminated in the takeover of the country by the communist regime of Khmer Rouge.

It is since then that the nation was on the verge of abyss. Many skilled workers especially journalists, were systematically murdered, while all development based on the advent of technology was refused. With the internal conflict persisting and the government devoting their resources to settle military problem, natural resources have been indiscriminately exploited, social infrastructure fallen apart and people have been given no or little opportunity to acquire or develop their knowledge.

As of now the kingdom is striving to attain the country's redevelopment and prepare itself for the integration into the regional group of ASEAN. By examining a number of factors in the environment in which the radio broadcasting is operating, the radio station is the only medium to contribute to keep the peace and promote the redevelopment of the nation.

National Radio of Cambodia (NRC)

The NRC started in 1960 in Phnom Penh. Fully funded by the government, the station broadcasts from a complex built in 1959. The building has seven studios for production and one large studio for recording music or audience participation programmes. The studios are equipped with a variety of technical equipment supplied over the years by many countries, with most dating from the early 1960's (only recently that some of the studios have been equipped with new recording equipment funded by the government of Australia).

The NRC broadcasts programmes daily in the Khmer language. Apart from news and entertainment, the programmes also include features on education, agriculture, health care and other development issues. The station also has an overseas service.

Even from the start, the NRC has played important role in getting messages across to people all over the country. When television came on the scene in Cambodia, many people predicted the death of radio broadcast. But some social factors have helped radio broadcasting not only to survive, but also become more popular. NRC listenership, most notable in the countryside, is growing.

History of the last two decades or so had proved that through the years of hardship, political upheaval, and prosperity, the governments of successive regimes in Cambodia have relied on radio broadcasting as a main tool to disseminate their political ideology to the masses. The present authorities have still depended on its role to improving national education, to deliver important information for everyday life and to mobilise the people to contribute to solving problems against the national redevelopment.
Even today, although there are more than 10 FM radio stations in the city, the NRC is still retaining its popularity among the audience, especially rural listeners. The main factors that make radio stations, and above others the NRC, the most active in presenting information are:

- Road communications in poor condition,
- Remote areas not accessible by vehicles, but ox-carts, and
- High rate of illiteracy among rural people.

Changes to be made

A democratic government had been founded in 1993 through a free and democratic elections sponsored by the United Nations. So the NRC which used to show its allegiance to the ruling Party, and got used to the one-party system must shift its long-running norms and act as an independent tool to serve the nation and people's interest. This is the first thing that the NRC had to deal with. The NRC leadership has already made this commitment that will be proved during the run-up to the July's scheduled elections this year.

The second issue that the NRC may find it difficult to handle is the change in the way of reporting and production. With the advent of new technology, many radio stations in developing countries are capitalizing on the fast development of electronic information system to improve the quality of their programmes and to upgrade the skills and qualifications of their respective journalists. With their computers linked to the data base which stores in library of reports, documents, newspapers, reference materials, journalists and radio producers can write their specific subjects of production.

Electronic information sources provide a wide range of facts and figures journalists need to write into their stories. This new technology does change the way and behavior of journalists who switch from writing with traditional news gathering model (checking for facts in newspapers, files and documents, interviewing or meeting people who can provide facts) to writing with electronic data models.

Electronic information has a double-edged effect. A reporter who is assigned to write a specific field of national development may acquire information through electronic information sources not only for his needed articles, but also on related policies. For the management, it attests to the growing productivity, and thus the increase in popularity, as the subordinates are able to cover events of greater importance required by a broad section of listeners.

This kind of new technology is completely non-existent in the NRC. Staff still turn to their old way of reporting: going from one community to another, meeting government officials here and there, typewriting out their reports.

So far attention has been focused only on upgrading professionalism. Training alone is not enough to say that the trained journalists can do better to promote the popularity of the station. The ability to exploit the effectiveness of the electronic machines will help improve their professional skill and build the station's identity among more listeners. Searching through electronic data, they are exposed to different choices of information-beyond the local limits. At the NRC, there is one constraint that needs to be removed in the way of improvement: the availability of electronically supplied information. Most local journalists are confined to a boundary where the range and the quality of the stories are limited. Computer systems, if available, will help them cross that boundary by widening the range of the subjects, the contents.

Cambodia is embarking on economic development. This is closely linked with the development of a democratic society. It would not be realised without the formation of skillful, hard-working, conscientious and reliable human resources. That can help the government in achieving their immediate task of rebuilding a new, democratic society in the local community. The Government must look into essential ingredients to make use of and turn those communities into a supportive force for the positive changes in the future. Those
ingredients are the people’s ability to communicate, the unrestricted flow of information, politically, economically and socially.

The flow of information between people and decision-makers—a process that is made possible by information—will help make democratization of people in the process of policy making through incorporation of the opinion of the general public into decision making.

In Cambodia, given the three main factors of the environment in which the NRC is operating, the national radio station is the only medium the government has to rely on to garner massive support and contribution from all walks of life to reaching the goal of national redevelopment. The NRC is expected to assume a much greater role in that it does not only inform, but also educate and mobilize the masses in national rebuilding. Before they make their choices, people require information so that they fully understand what they think is of great interest to them and to the nation as well.

Joining the world commitment to eliminate the exploitation of women and children, the NRC also has a special role in enhancing these vulnerable groups’ knowledge, and especially women’s position in the society. The NRC is to counter publications and publicity that portray negative images of women, and is against all kinds of discrimination against them.

Good management at the NRC now does not attest to:

- How well we can develop appropriate organisational structures and links within the organisation,
- How well we can make planning and deployment of resources.

The ultimate better management would be:

- When database is linked to computers in the news room,
- When journalist and editors can search for facts and figures in this electronic library to edit their specific subjects of coverage.

At present computer literacy at the NRC is very low. The prerequisite to computer literacy is not only the required knowledge of hardware and software, but the ability to read and understand the computer language—English. So future training should be extended to information technology training and application, while journalists should be given more chance on learning the language.

Electronic communications are becoming a norm in most of the development and developing countries. And while most stations are getting used to their effectiveness to compete with other stations, and while the weakest are often being exposed to programmes reflecting western culture and values, the NRC is in dire need of big investment to achieve the above prerequisites.

Thanks