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by
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The Lao People's Democratic Republic

Peace, Independence, Democracy, Unity and Prosperity

The Current Broadcasting Situation in Laos

1) Introduction

Radio stations are broadcasting systems and also one form of the electronic mass media. Radio is designed to send messages to targeted audiences.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic has 12 radio stations, one of them being the Lao National Radio Station. The rest are local radio stations. At the present time the Lao PDR has no private or commercial radio stations. The main source of revenue is government funding with some additional revenue coming from commercial advertisements and announcements. All radio stations are under the Ministry of Information and Culture.

2) Broadcasting Situation

During the revolutionary history of Laos, the Party considered radio broadcasting as one form of mass media communication which could communicate messages to targeted audiences. So the government of Laos has made appropriate investment in this field of mass media.

By the end of 1981, the Lao PDR had 7 radio stations established in different parts of the country, but especially in the bigger provinces. Each radio station has its own program, but local stations have a function to transmit local and world news issued by the central radio station.

At the present time the Lao PDR has 12 radio stations with transmitters ranging from 20 watts to 100 kw with a total power of 395 kw in medium and short wave. The programs/news etc., is now broadcast 17 hours per day. The stations can cover 80% of Laos and 85% of the people.

3) The Changes and Challenges of Broadcasting

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the world has seen great changes not only in technology, the economy and society, but also in radio broadcasting. While the needs of the audience are very high in Laos, the response is very low. This is a challenge that we are going to solve in the short term as well as the long term.

Our transmitters have a low capacity that cannot send messages which will reach all the targeted audiences throughout the country. The technical equipment is obsolete, especially the studio equipment which was established a long time ago and for which there are no spare parts for use or for repairs. At the same time we have a lack of quality

personnel and efficient staff who can produce good programmes. Most importantly, we have a lack of sufficient funding to invest in this field.

Furthermore, the audience likes to watch TV more than listen to radio, and also wants more entertainment than information. Now people do not have to wait for the song of their choice to come on the radio, because they can play it on their cassette players any time they wish. The songs are now available on inexpensive audio-cassettes which enable people to listen to the song of their choice. And also there is competition from the other radio stations. Lao audiences often listen to Thai radio and watch Thai television, the reason being that Lao and Thai people have a similar culture, especially language, and can understand each other. Further, some provinces cannot receive the central radio short wave in the early morning from 6.00am to 8.00am and from 17.00 to 19.00 in the evening. These are big challenges for Lao National Radio during this time, and will be in the future too.

4) Foreseen Projects in Response to the Challenges

Of course, nowadays, there are other forms of media such as cable/satellite TV, the Internet and print. The audiences want to watch pleasant views and listen to melodic music. It is a big challenge for Lao radio broadcasting.

To meet the challenge we have plans to:

- to train staff at different levels with the aim of increasing the quantity and quality
- to produce good programmes which are more attractive to the audience
- to present news as accurately and impartially as possible
- to increase links with other news agencies
- to improve existing AM/FM transmission
- to network with other transmitters
- to replace the oldest equipment
- to justify spending on technology support and upgrade

5) Conclusion

Lao National Radio is a government run radio station. It aims to disseminate news, information, education and entertainment to audiences throughout the country and overseas. During this workshop I shall try to learn and exchange experiences about the management of change, so that I can assist the station with the challenges that lie ahead.