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MEDIA AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Country : Kingdom of Cambodia
Name : In Chhay
Organisation : National Radio of Cambodia (NRC)

Mr. Chairman,
Honorable delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me begin my presentation with many thanks to the organisers of this Seminar for giving me this opportunity to speak to you all on the theme of "Media and Economic development".

Cambodia is embarking upon the path of rehabilitation and development with 85 per cent of its population farmers who are living and working on agricultural farming. Due to many years of civil war, the policy of genocide and natural disaster, especially flood and dryness, they are subjected to a mire of deprivation, and worse still are lacking the basic means of farming production: irrigation system, rice seeds, paddies fields which are strewn with landmines, roads...

Bestowed by nature, the country is rich with natural resources which, due to some financial, technical and human constraints, have not been exploited in a full swing.

For every government in office, their top priority is to rehabilitate and develop the economy which has been moving in a snail's pace. In particular, the development of Cambodia's rural economy is crucial to the government's plans for raising the living standard of all rural Cambodians. Given the importance of the rural economy to the national economy, and the potential linkage between poverty and social instability, it is obvious that there exists a common strategy for raising living standard, nationwide, for eliminating poverty, and thus for strengthening national reconciliation and national security.

To carry out this strategy, the government have to mobilise all means and resources, and need support and contribution from a number of government and public departments, including the media.

During the early 1990s, mass media in Cambodia is growing fast, with nearly 40 newspapers circulating in the capital, three radio stations (now there are 6), and a couple of TV stations. To some extent, newspaper and broadcasting industry has played a very important role in national rehabilitation and development.

As I have been with radio broadcasting for many years, my presentation...
centers mainly on this industry, especially National Radio of Cambodia.

NATIONAL RADIO OF CAMBODIA

Radio broadcasting in Cambodia started in the year 1960 in Phnom Penh. Data on the circumstance and the reason why radio was established has not been available as documents and files at the station were ransacked and completely destroyed right after the downfall of the Khmer Rouge regime which had brought the whole nation on the brink of extermination. Today the broadcasting is still carried out by the National Radio of Cambodia (NRC), an organisation fully subsidized by the government.

Through years of political, social upheaval, the Cambodian governments have seen radio broadcasting as a reliable medium to give their political, economic perspective across to the people. With changes in political leadership, the National Radio has remained a crucial instrument for the governments to provide information on the fields of health care, education, culture and agriculture.

CHALLENGES AND ADVANTAGES

From its very start to the early 1990s, the National Radio had monopolized the broadcasting in the whole country. After the general elections in 1993, however, more stations have been in place, thus creating a strong competition. The NRC has tried hard to build and maintain its identity among people. The rapid growth of private broadcasting has opened up a lot of challenges for the NRC. Private stations tend to be permissive than the NRC which is owned by the state, and they have captured a big number of listeners in the capital and its outskirts as their programs are the primary sources of meeting the lifestyle of the young generations while the NRC's program contents talk much about politics, farming, traditional culture... And while the NRC broadcasts on AM, all of the private stations are FM.

Luckily, the NRC has seen an increase in listenership among rural people especially villagers living in the far North and the far North East. This is thanks to three main factors that make the NRC the most popular:
- Most people who are farmers are illiterate, or if not, they tend to bother buying a newspaper. Only a relatively small number of people can afford the luxury of buying a newspaper each day.
- Road communications are in poor condition. It takes sometimes 10 days for publications to reach some localities.
- Circulation of newspapers is only in downtowns while in villages it is virtually non-existent. This is due to the lack of transport means and because some areas are hardly accessible by vehicles, but only
With these three factors, the government sees the NRC as the most reliable tool to give a message across to people, to educate and arouse them to national rehabilitation and development.

Moreover, it is proud to say that of all the private stations in the country, only the NRC remains the top station as it provides the widest range of coverage.

In Cambodia, radio broadcasting continues to play an important promotional and mobilization role for meeting the development objectives. Already the NRC is fulfilling this task through its programs which are on air everyday. The daily programs contain news, education and information on better farming practices, primary health care...

Advent of New Technologies

The world today is moving towards new changes in technologies and methods, and towards an information-based society. And the role of the media have to play is now increasing in order to educate and familiarize the public at large about those new changes.

Here in Cambodia when television and newspaper came into existence, many people predicted the death of radio broadcasting. But as the local conditions are given, radio broadcasting has not only survived, but also has been more active and popular.

With the advent of satellite technology, it is difficult to stop the flow of alien contents into the country, and this has posed a challenge and threat to the local media in their bid to convince, educate and mobilize the public.

Media in Cambodia do not experience the same thing as in many other countries in the region and in the world, the Internet has become a big challenge.

While many radio station in the region are considering going digital, and the Internet and computers are the most available, the NRC is still going on with the old way of reporting and broadcasting. Most of the program producers are computer illiterate. Many stations have seen great changes in the way of reporting and producing programs among their staff by relying on database plus first-hand accounts collected from meeting people face to face.

CONCLUSION

The flow of information is very crucial to national development, especially economic one. Our people and farmers must be given the chance to acquire additional skills, and must have the ability to understand...
take advantage of the new changes in technology and methods to come up with creative applications that can lead to the increase in daily productivity.

Cambodia is now working hard to develop the economy. The effort is closely linked with the development of a democratic society. It will not be likely without the formation of skilful, conscious and reliable human resources. Cambodian governments see in their people the most important assets, and any strategy to reduce poverty and to secure a sustainable development must be founded on a pool effort to mobilise and train a healthy and educated human resource base.

The task is monumental. The government must look into an essential ingredient to build that human stock and to turn it into a supportive force for the positive changes in future. That ingredient is the people ability to communicate and interact.

The flow of information between people and decision-makers - a process that is made possible by information means - will help make democratisation effective. Democracy means active participation of people in policy making, through incorporation of the opinions of the general public into decision-making.

Given the three factor that give broadcasting the most active role, the NRC has been the crucial instrument in partly realising this objective.

Development of radio broadcasting will offer immediate and long term effect on Cambodia. The NRC projects to improve its facilities and upgrade its personnel in order to increase the level of professional skills and the coverage.

Training and investment in broadcasting is crucial. Also co-operation with other countries will help to some extent ease the burden. If all these are realised, effective contribution of the NRC will be likely.

Thanks
Media & Economic Development in Vietnam: Opportunities & Issues

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