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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Khamkhong Kongvongsa.</td>
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Country Presentation

AMIC SEMINAR

MEDIA AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

PERSPECTIVES FROM CAMBODIA, LAOS AND VIETNAM

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LAO MEDIA AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Opportunities & Challenges

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By  Khamkhong Kongvongsan
Deputy Director General
Mass Media Department/Ministry of Information and Culture

VIENTIANE, 10-12 NOVEMBER 1999
Introduction to the Lao Media

In response to the growing demand for a flow information at home and to the explosion of information in the world, great efforts have been made over the past years by the Lao media in order to renovate information.

For this purpose, the information coverage by the printed press, the radio and television networks has become more comprehensive. Domestic and world news obtained from different sources have been completed and edited in such a way as to become more attractive and useful. Newspapers, magazines and newsreel studios have made considerable efforts to extend their coverage to include socio-economic affairs, science and technology, sports, culture and other topics of general interest.

In Laos, all the mass media institutions are state-ownership working towards common goal, politically, economically and socially. Our mass media originated as revolutionary newspapers during the people's struggle for national liberation and has grown to be the most important link between the Party and people while also bringing the people's opinions, wishes and desires to the Party and government.

Though the press laws have not yet existed in our country, the Lao mass media practices their profession along the Resolution No. 36 adopted by the Politbureau of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee.

Role of the Lao Media

As others in the world, the Lao media has the duty to inform, educate and entertain their recipients. In face of profound and complex change in world circumstances, the Lao mass media has grown in number and in quality, and has expanded their awareness and capacity to conform to the tasks of New Changes in our country as well as the media itself. Journalists are called to promote economic production by extolling models in both the household economic sector as well as the state-owned sector. Besides that, they have also to focus on rural life and agriculture because it is the livelihood of 85% of the total population of Laos.

Shortcomings

Coupled with good points and diligence, the media in our country is deficient in various aspects. That is to say, our mass media has yet to receive broad popularity because the content does not yet attract interest and has not yet provided readers, listeners or viewers with the benefits that they should receive. Sometimes only good things are said, weaknesses or outstanding matters are not addressed, and the causes and means of resolving those problems are not pinpointed. Receiving public and constructive criticism
and then incorporating that into the mass media is still little done. Reporting from
time to time lacks a sense of carefulness, causing misunderstandings among the
people. Funds, means and tools used in the mass media have not been allocated
to their maximum potential.

**New Experience**

For the sake of national development, the promotion of good governance
is among top priorities. The idea that the media has function of contributing to
policy
debate is a relatively new one, which has gained currency only recently. Last
October, our mass media, for the first time since the establishment of the
Republic, broadcasted the debate at the 4\textsuperscript{th} Ordinary Session of the National
Assembly from which we gained more popularity from the audience. In so doing,
the Lao press has learned more experience in performing a wider social function.

**Lao Context**

The role of the media in policy advocacy is by no means fully accepted in
the Lao context. But anyhow, standard western descriptions of the media political
functions (such as watchdog, social mirror and agenda setter) are not always
appropriate to the Lao context, where the media is often a political actor in its
own right, linked to or owned by party, state or mass organizations and dedicated
to the people's interests.

**Challenges**

The promotion of good governance by the media appeals for deep
understandings not only in national policy but also specific circumstances and
environments where plans or actions are executed. To be able to grasp
feedback, media practitioners have to have certain background or knowhow so
that he or she will be able to handle the problems and break negative impacts
created by wrongdoers. In the past some media individuals had faced with
concerned case-partners but not all of them were able to tackle those challenges,
thus they were lack of skills of reporting and editing.

But there is one principle that guides everything else. Media is not working
in a vacuum. They are writing and editing for their readers. If they get through the
readers, they are successful. The requisites of good governance impact on
national development.