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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Bou, Vannarith.</td>
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Deutsche Welle - AMIC
Seminar on
RADIO PROGRAMMING
IN A MULTIMEDIA AGE

COUNTRY PAPER - CAMBODIA

jointly organised by

Deutsche Welle Radio Training Centre
Köln, Germany

and

Asian Media Information
and Communication Centre (AMIC)

River View Hotel, Singapore
Vannarith BOU, 43, has been an announcer and reporter in the National Radio of Cambodia since the liberation from the Khmer Rouge in 1979. In 1989, he became Head of Programming, his current position.

Introduction

It is necessary to recap Cambodia recent history to understand the current situation in radio broadcasting in the kingdom, which has just been welcomed to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as its 10th member.

Cambodia perhaps is the least developed of the grouping because of strife as a result of being innocently turned into a pawn in the Cold War.

The second factor is a legacy of conflict among factions stemming basically from international power politics.

Candidly, on becoming independent Cambodia decided to remain non aligned to any of the power blocks existing at that time.

The United States, then fighting the Vietnam War, considered non alignment unacceptable and helped a coup that ousted the government of then Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

In turn, the Khmer Rouge, incensed by US blanket bombing of rural Cambodia, led a short lived popular rebellion and ousted the American-installed General Lol Nol.

For about three decades, Cambodia stood still.

Leap-frogging 30 years is no small task for a country left in ruins following a Khmer Rouge genocide which over nearly four years killed about two million, mostly the educated.
It was followed by western imposed isolation for a further 12 years because Vietnam had intervened to stop what had become known as the killing fields.

Only in 1991, after the Paris Peace Agreements that things began to clear up.

Even after that Cambodia has been subject to conflict, and the recent formation of a new coalition government, has again cleared the cloud.

Radio

During the Khmer Rouge years [1975-79] there was limited radio broadcasts.

But the national radio, then the only station, lost its personnel in the genocide and facilities were left to deteriorate.

Following liberation on Jan. 7, 1979, a token service was started with the help of Vietnam and other socialist countries that came to the aid of Cambodia.

It provided a very limited service, about seven hours split into morning, afternoon and evening broadcasts, and perhaps in the most unsophisticated way.

But it progressed slowly, even adding on foreign language broadcasts like English, Thai and Vietnamese.

After the United Nations sponsored elections in 1993, radio received support from several countries, notably Australia.

This had made the National Radio of Cambodia a workable entity, albeit with a lot of room for improvement.
The Situation

The National Radio of Cambodia is the only station with country-wide reach, although there are several FM stations catering mostly for the capital and its environs.

About 85% of Cambodians live in the rural outback.

According to a recent survey, 25% of all Cambodians listen to local radio, second to local television which has a reach of 37%.

Local newspapers come third with 17%.

Other source of information are friends and colleagues at nine percent, and village and community elders six percent.

Therefore, the radio, and in particular the national radio has an important role in shaping the thinking of the people.

The Desirability

Cambodia is poor, even up of 40% of national budget, is supported by foreign aid.

As the nation struggles to get on its feet, the radio is called to help in development.

Most people in the rural areas are poor, illiterate, suffer from malnutrition, from food shortages mainly because of constant floods and drought.

Another scourge is mines, anti personnel mines left across the nation during the conflict years.
These problems are being addressed, but the measures can be boosted with the national radio going more into development broadcasts.

It can play a role, for instance, in providing weather forecasts to forewarn farmers and fishermen of floods and bad sea conditions; tell them prices of their produce in the main markets and so on.

It can tell families to limit or space births, personal hygiene and the benefits of hygiene and sanitation.

It can provide education through the air.

These appear simple problems that developing societies can easily address, but Cambodia cannot, because she is one of the poorest countries in the world.

Some of the issues are being addressed on an adhoc basis, but that is not enough.

Programmes need to be researched, thought out, professional produced and aired.

Audience reaction should be gauged and alteration made to ensure that the right messages are received.

The quality of broadcast is important, but the contents and ability to positively shape thinking is more important in the Cambodian context.

Our rural listeners are not sophisticated to extent of wanting the sound quality and or clarity demanded in the more developed society, but this does not mean we don't want better things.

It is a matter of getting the priorities right.

Let’s give them information that will help them to change their lives for the better.
What is needed

Hands on training of personnel on how to effectively produce radio programmes to meet a variety of needs.

The training should be done as an on going affair specially tailored for Cambodia.

It must be simultaneously with those being trained doing their daily work.

We need better equipment, not necessarily state of the art equipment, but workable items ranging from tape recorders to portable field stations that can relay messages back to the broadcast centre.

International and regional seminars and workshops do help Cambodian broadcasters to a breath of fresh air, a change from routine, a chance to see what others are doing and to reflect.

Returning to work is a disappointment, because our work environment is far from satisfactory due to host of reasons, basically due to our financial inability to do things the way others do.

But we still manage to remain about 14 hours on air, that includes interruptions because of the breakdown of electricity or subsequent breakdown of the standby generator.

We have an official break between 3 pm and 5.30 pm.

But Cambodian ingenuity is winning the day, although it is not broadcasting through planning, but broadcasting under crisis.