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### Final Report on the Regional Seminar on Mobile Library Services in Indochina: from February 2001 and into the Future

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#### **Abstract:**

*The Mobile Library Services in Indochina Workshop was carried out 18-24 February 2001 in Thailand and Laos PDR with participants (including resource persons and observers) from Cambodia, France, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, U.S.A., and Vietnam.*

*Lessons learned from various activities (site visit, presentation, demonstration, display, discussion, observation, etc.) were lined out and put together as suggestions for the future. They include, for example, ways to bring more books to the remote areas (especially books in local languages), the importance of cooperation and support from various bodies, the need for training, discussion, workshops, study visits, etc., and many projects were proposed for implementation in the future.*

*The immediate actions suggested to be taken by IFLA are: 1. To prepare a long term plan for "Mobile Library Services for Sustainable Development", 2. To publish a book "Mobile Library Services in Indochina" as an IFLA publication, 3. To produce a video tape training package for mobile library service activities. This report along with all the suggestions is to be presented to IFLA at the conference in Boston.*

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#### **Part 1. BACKGROUND REPORT**

##### **Mobile Library Services in Indochina: A Workshop 18-24 February 2001**

Initiated by the IFLA Regional Office for Asia and Oceania (IFLA ROAO), the Project, "Mobile library Services for Sustainable Development" has been carried out since 1998 to study the possibility of using

the mobile library concept in supporting sustainable development at the grassroots level. Support for this project came from the annual subvention provided by IFLA HQ and ALP. Later, a pre-proposal was submitted to the Japan Foundation Asia Center (JFAC) in an attempt to further the study to cover the Indochina region. With generous support from the Japan Foundation under the Small Grant Program (FY 1999), our team was able to visit Cambodia and Lao P.D.R. in March, and Vietnam later in May, to make preliminary contact and to study the possibility of future plan. The revised proposal was then submitted to the JFAC in May 2000.

The Project had reached an important stage when the JFAC approved a financial support under the grant program for the period October 1, 2000 - March 31, 2001 to support the organization for a one week workshop, "Mobile Library Services in Indochina". The workshop was carried out 18-24 February 2001 by the IFLA ROAO with the cooperation of the International Librarian and Information Specialist Group of the Thai Library Association (TLA ILIS), Mahasarakham University Library, and the National Library of Laos. Additional financial support from IFLA was provided through its Section on Regional Activities: Asia and Oceania, for the expenses of IFLA's resource persons.

The program consisted of a three-day study visit in Laos P.D.R. and Thailand, a one day seminar in Bangkok, and a final day (also in Bangkok) of group discussions to plan for the future. Participants were high-ranking library administrators and representatives from organizations supporting mobile library activities in Indochina.

The group of 16 workshop participants, which included 7 delegates from Indochina countries, 4 members of the organizing Committee, one overseas resource person, two secretaries and two cameramen, set out from Bangkok by a sleeping night train. The destination was Lao P.D.R. where two mobile library activities were observed and assessed (Ban Maknaonalong and Ban Houaxieng). After an overnight stay in Vientiane, the group crossed the border back to Thailand and was joined by another group of 4 observers and one coordinator in Nongkhai. The trip back to Bangkok was by bus. The group stayed overnight at Mahasarakham after visiting the University Library's Mobile Services and the Sirindhorn Isan Information Center. The last day visit was for the Chalermrajumari Public Library at Borabu District, Mahasarakham, and the National Library Branch at Nakhon Ratchasima (Chalerm-Prakiet Ro Kao). All libraries visited were observed and assessed by the participants and observers using the assessment forms provided.

The Seminar Program in Bangkok at the Prince Palace Hotel started early in the morning when Dr. Namtip Wipawin, the Project Director, as the MC invited Dr. Pensri Guaysuwan, Chair of the Organizing Committee, to present her report. Mr. Yoshio Takano, the Japan Foundation Representative, was then invited to deliver his address, followed by the address from the IFLA Representative, Khunying Maenmas Chavalit, who also opened the Seminar and presented her keynote speech. After a short break, Professor Thelma Tate of Rutgers University (U.S.A.), Chair of IFLA Roundtable on Mobile Libraries, introduced IFLA and its mobile library work in a global perspective. The program continued after lunch by the presentation of "Experiences from some Neighbor Countries" by Mrs. Datin Paduka Shahaneem from the Selangor Public Library (Malaysia), and Mrs. Arunwan Pimpapatanayo- thin and Mr. Sopon Sud-iad from the BMA Public Library (Thailand). The late afternoon sessions featured the NGOs who are involved with mobile library and related work in the region. The speakers included Mrs. Chanthasone Inthavong from the Association for Sending Picture Books to Lao Children (Japan), Mrs. Sachiko Watanabe from the Ohanashi Caravan Center (Japan), and Ms. Sachiko Kamakura from the Shanti Volunteer Association (Cambodia). The evening session was a reception with buffet dinner and some light entertainment. Mr. Yutaka Homma, Director of the Japan Foundation Bangkok joined the party and presented his welcoming address.

The last day of the workshop was used for group discussions. Dr. Sujin Butdhisuwan as the MC invited the Chairperson of the Organizing Committee to summarize the study visit and introduce the topics for group discussion. These topics were collected from “Participation Forms” filled out by the participants before they came to the workshop. The list of “Focus Group Discussion Topics/ Questions” prepared by Professor Thelma Tate, and “Some Draft Concepts on Strategic Planning for Mobile Library Services” by Khunying Maenmas Chavalit, were also distributed as guidelines for discussion. Participants were asked to group themselves into five groups by country / language, and pick a topic to discuss. The results were then reported to the Seminar by each group representative and all participants further discussed them. Then 3 projects (training, translation, and strategic planning) were picked for further discussion by the 3 groups in the afternoon sessions. After the reports from the three groups, the Chairperson then summarized the results of the workshop and re-affirmed the participants’ commitments, she then declared the workshop sessions closed.

Participants and observers enjoyed the additional programs/papers brought in by fellow participants, resource persons and observers. Two mobile library bus/van were brought to the hotel doorsteps for inspections. A few video presentations were shown during the breaks, many additional papers and pamphlets were handed out, and there were also demonstrations of reading promotion/story telling techniques.

This workshop provided many opportunities for informal contacts. Many problems/projects were discussed outside the formal sessions. We heard of some old problems which were solved and some new plans were made. In the final “Evaluation Form”, most participants and observers expressed satisfaction with the workshop. At the conclusion, they agreed to bring back ideas to be used in the development of future projects for their own countries and for the region. Many commitments were recorded and they will be followed up by the organizer as well as participants and parties concerned.

## **Part 2. WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED**

### **From the Visits**

Using the form provided, participants found the following of interest:

1. The reading promotion techniques and the creativity in teaching children critical thinking skills, the use of origami paper cutting art to teach biology lessons and the lively demonstration of story telling role play. The enthusiasm of the Laotian children for the activities provided at both sites visited, were remarkable.
2. The support from non-government bodies, foundations, volunteers, as seen in Lao PDR was seen as a very good example. The cooperation of cultural activity with the library and the community involvement, the idea of having a diversity of people groups and funding agents to plan and develop or enrich library services, could be applied to other countries. Participants saluted the efforts put forth in the various programs to provide reading opportunity to children and people in remote areas.
3. Another good example pointed out is the effort to translate English and Japanese words into the local language. Recognizing the need for more reading materials in Lao P.D.R., the translated texts were placed with the pictures in foreign language books, and this method is a perfect solution for their needs.
4. In Thailand, at Mahasarakham University, participants were very impressed with the well arranged Sirindhorn Isan Information Center. The Mobile Library Service Unit which is attached to the University Library, was started by outside support and later carried on by the local authorities. The example of mobile “knowledge bags” seen here, is the one outreach activity that most participants feel applicable in their countries.

5. Libraries should provide all kinds of information needed for the community: books, AV materials, various displays and a museum were observed with interest at the Borabu Public Library. Participants recognized the close cooperation between the school and public libraries, also the good example of building a library in honor of the beloved Princess from collected donations. Other points of interest to most participants were the provision of a mobile unit to follow the governor's team when they visit villages, and the active participation in the school and community activities.

6. Participants felt that the well designed bus and van as seen in Bangkok were suitable to serve communities in the urban areas, and for outreach to schools and communities in the rural areas, but because of the cost for operation and maintenance the vehicles are unaffordable for many countries.

### **From the Groups' Discussion**

In the morning session, we learned of a national project which set up a national library system, from the government level down to the local level in Lao PDR; the steps for a project to receive books donated from a Vietnamese outside Vietnam; the necessary government channels to go through in order to receive books donated from outside the country of Cambodia; the mobile library services in Thailand; and a project to translate books in academic settings (Thailand and U.S.A.).

The three areas identified as most needy: training, translation, and strategic planning, were discussed by the three groups in the afternoon session. We learned of a plan to train para-professionals on reading promotion activities in Cambodia. Vietnam and Lao PDR were also expressing interest in hosting a training course for professionals and non-professionals. The Malaysian resource person volunteered to carry out a training project on "Strategic Planning" in Malaysia. The team at Srinakharinwirote University and the American resource person agreed to explore further on a translation project.

### **From the Participants' Evaluation**

Participants (full participants, speakers, observers, and invited guests) expressed highly satisfaction with the workshop. They all indicated that the workshop was very useful and productive. They had a chance to learn from one another. The long travel period by train and bus offered them a chance to spend days and nights together which lead to closer friendships and mutual understanding, thus facilitating for possible future cooperation.

There were, however, some suggestions for the future organization of the workshops. Many expressed interest in a wider coverage of areas to be visited: more visits and more activities/demonstrations, and more participants from various areas should be invited. one participant, however, was suggesting the use of slides and videos instead of the traveling, since the long trip could be too tiresome. Some participants wanted to hear more presentations from small organizations working in the areas, and felt a need for more time for the discussion sessions. It was noted that the central organization in charge of the mobile library project, the national library, and all other organizations dealing with the mobile library and similar mobile services were not yet included in the workshop. One participant frankly mentioned that the seminar room was a little too small.

## **Part 3 SUGGESTIONS**

### **General Suggestions**

Suggestions collected from all participants are grouped as follows:

1. Exchange of ideas and experiences between libraries in different countries were identified as most useful. It was suggested that participants should have more time during the visit to meet and discuss the

activities/libraries observed, on the spot. It was further suggested that establishing a direct contact between libraries of neighboring countries could be most beneficial. Examples from one area could be useful for other Asian countries and elsewhere.

2. Libraries need to provide more activities to promote reading and the use of the library. Cooperative work like the “Vientiane Caravan” was ideal to many participants, but they felt they would not have the staff or skilled people to accomplish the same. Many participants agreed that it was essential to find a way to keep experienced personnel.

3. Schools in Lao PDR need more books in the local language. This problem is identical in many countries. There were various suggestions for book acquisitions, maintenance, and utilization from the participants. Also, there were discussions of the need to find the way to get books to these countries.

4. Mobile libraries are still in need while there are not enough libraries in the rural areas to serve the disadvantaged groups and they need more support from all sectors concerned.

A key to success in Mobile Library Service is how to get the support from the local community. One participant suggested that attracting more research and other projects from the academic community in developed countries, could be another way to reach out for more funding.

5. Cooperation with various bodies: church, parents, school, community center, local, regional government, etc. is needed.

6. Mobile library services should reach all groups of people in the community, e.g. elderly, blind, priest, farmer, etc.

7. Bringing together greater support and finding a way to establish a stronger buying base (funding) is needed.

8. A change of education and training is necessary.

### **Future Workshop**

Participants suggested the topics to be added to future workshops as follows:

1. Administration and library planning, strategic planning for mobile library services, practical aspects, budgeting, organization, and management.
2. Assessment of mobile library impact on reading skills.
3. How to encourage and accomplish local creation of children’s books
4. Writing good proposals for financial assistance
5. Reading for all or books for all and mobile library activities in practice
6. Practical problems of mobile library services and how to overcome them
7. Discuss local contents and oral history
8. Mobile library service for ethnic population in remote areas
9. Activities for anti-illiteracy campaign.

There were also suggestions for various kinds of workshops to be organized:

1. Invite all the organizations working in this area and conduct conferences like this once a year in the Asian Region to share experiences and exchange ideas.
2. Organize a similar workshop for other countries in the region
3. Have another workshop for Indochina countries with more features: exchange of field activities, reading promotion techniques, and some joint performances.
4. One participant expressed the need for “know how” of strategic planning and the ways to convince the government. Another participant suggested that the group should “make a statement together”.

As for the training, participants suggested the following subjects:

- Multi-user technique groups
- Assessment needs
- Evaluation of projects
- Preparation of materials and activities

## Projects

Participants suggested the following projects:

1. Obtain second hand books from overseas  
Write children's books in many languages, print books from recycled paper, plastic, or fabric.
3. Build a network of cooperation between organizations whose missions and goals are identical, e.g. have a network of organizations whose work deal with mobile library services and reading promotions. There should be a meeting among them, to plan and work together. The project should start small and extend to a larger one later.
4. There were also a suggestions to follow-up and continue with several library services that are not mobile library projects but have the aim to reach out to the people in remote areas, e. g. village libraries.
5. Compile a directory of mobile library services in the region
6. Produce videos to demonstrate various mobile library activities
7. Survey the state of development in the region
8. Print children's books on fabrics or some other non-paper materials
9. Plan to do "Research into the history of Mobile Libraries", all participants should be part of the project

## Part 4 PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Following the workshop, participants continue on with their contacts and cooperation according to their own and mutual interests. The follow-up activities at the IFLA Regional Office in Asia and Oceania include:

1. Two follow up letters to all participants in Indochina countries.
2. The Newsletter of the IFLA Regional Section for Asia and Oceania June 2001, published the Report of the Mobile Library Services in Indochina Workshop, and it was mailed to all participants.
3. Various telephone calls and E-mail exchanges between the participants and the Regional Manager.
4. Some preliminary survey has been made into the possibility of publishing children's books on non-paper materials. The procedures to go through for copyright permission are still need to be explored.

From the above communications, the following was learned:

1. The National Library of Cambodia is working on a project to translate two books from French into Khmer and a proposal was also submitted to secure funding.
2. Another participant from Cambodia is also writing a regional proposal to carry out a training program.
3. The National Library of Laos is continuing with the project to expand the mobile library services to cover the whole country.
4. The Malaysian resource person is preparing a project to carry out a Strategic Planning Workshop in April or June 2002 to be held in Malaysia
5. The Vietnamese participants are also developing proposals to seek funding for projects to be carried out in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (for story telling and book review projects)
6. The Department of Library and Information Science, Faculty of Humanities, Sri Nakharinwirote University, organized a two-day workshop (6-7 August 2001) to acquaint students and librarians with professional translators and experts in the field. They had a chance to learn about translation technique for children's books, and they enjoyed the various experiences told by each of the speakers. They also had a chance to practice translating some selected books. The team has a plan to produce a translation manual that, hopefully, can be used as a training manual in the future. Also, a plan for the translation of children's books (Thai-English, and English-Thai) is underway.
7. Learning from the workshop, the Director of Sripatum University Library has initiated an outreach program for the mobile unit from the University Library to service school libraries in the nearby areas.

Putting together all the observations, appreciation comments, suggestions, and updated information received from the participants, the plans for the future might be:

1. To propose a long-term plan for the future which should include further cooperation among the IFLA groups and relevant organizations in the region. IFLA Professional Priorities as adopted by the professional Board of IFLA (December 2000) will be observed. The project should aim to support activities, which promote literacy, reading, and lifelong learning and it should also support activities that provide unrestricted access to information. The concept of “Mobile Library Services for Sustainable Development” will be the framework of this mission under the assumption that “information and knowledge are the driving force for societal productivity and citizen’s well being.”

2. Observing that papers presented and contributed to this workshop are very high quality, we hope that the first proceeding, which collected so many good quality articles will be further edited and published as a book by either JFAC or IFLA.

The video tape, a very precious by-product, although our first experience turned out quite good. We are hoping to be able to use it again and again as it is, and in the future, we may develop a mobile training package, which will utilize more of the audio-visual media.

This summarizes the development of the mobile library project up to the present and we plan to continue along these lines into the future. We know this IFLA conference (The 67<sup>th</sup> IFLA Council and General Conference, August 16-25, 2001, Boston, U.S.A.) will give us more concrete ideas for our future plans.

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