



Country Report

To

CDNL-AO

Strategic and Major Developments



National Library of Cambodia



Organization Information

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Overview

The National Library of Cambodia (NLC) has developed a medium to long term strategic plan that encompasses all aspects of the library. There are a number of major projects being developed from the strategic plan. Most will need funding and processes are in place to prioritise these projects. The NLC has been working closely with interested groups and schools to develop reading skills not only for learning but also reading for enjoyment.

An important strategic policy for the NLC is to ensure that its unique collections are protected, conserved and appropriate access be made available to all. The NLC sees the control of access to these unique collections – as every National Library must do – as an important collection development feature now and in the future. These unique collections are the point of difference between our libraries and reflect the rich diverse literary and documentary cultural heritage and are the birthright of the nation. As such it is imperative that the NLC has control over access.

With technological developments the NLC has prioritised its Web site development programme so that it can make available its collections online. Today many formats are being used to produce literary works and along with these we need also to consider DVD movies and music with its various formats. All of these require good strategies in place for long term preservation and detailed planning and organising of appropriate methods of providing suitable access and controls.

Parent Body

The NLC in Phnom Penh falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts with direct responsibility to the Ministry's Department of Books and Reading. It works to preserve and collect the written, audio and visual heritage of and about Cambodia and to guarantee that all Cambodians have access to information. Its motto enshrined over the doorway of the reading room is, "Force binds for a moment, ideas link forever."

Key Facts

- General population of the area served by NLC is more than 1.000,000
- Average number of hours NLC is open to the public each day is 6 hours per day

- Average number of days NLC is open each week is 5 days
- Average number of users NLC serves per year approximately 36,000
- Number of full-time staff at NLC is 14 Active and 8 inactive
- The NLC is the primary library in Cambodia. Given the fact of no public or community libraries the need for reading, teaching and learning support to all Cambodians is crucial.
- The NLC provides a portion of its library as a public library. It offers the community the opportunity to access, read and lend books promoting reading in families.
- The NLC is building a Khmer collection that is available to all Cambodians. This provides the younger generation the opportunity to learn about their recent history. This is particularly important as some history is so recent that parents who suffered tragically do not find it easy to talk about and thus do not do so with their children.
- The NLC has a unique Palm Leaf and Paper manuscript collection, French Protectorate collection, along with Khmer rare book collection.
- The NLC has recently published its first ever National Bibliography.
- The NLC provides free computers and Internet access and when possible training on information literacy, research techniques, Internet research, basic computer usage, Word processing, using email and Job search.

Strategic Developments

With the large and increasing Internet savvy population using the Internet as a means of research and study the NLC recognises the need to cater to this fast developing situation. There is a change in the way the youth of today use materials for study and relaxation. Music and video have a huge impact on the way they use technology and the way they study. Not only physical materials i.e. books and journals but other mediums like online databases and Internet are being used to support their studies.

The NLC has been developing policy and process to handle the multiple technological formats we are all faced with today. Not only do we have an enormous amount of work still to be done with respect to current and future physical collections we need to be able to encompass, manage and make available the vast growing array of different formats that we face in the twenty first century. From official Web site pages, online databases, DVD movie, Music (in all its formats) and digitisation it is crucial that the NLC has the necessary and appropriate capability to house and provided adequate access to these growing collections.

Digitisation

The NLC sees digitisation of its rare and endangered materials as a method of ensuring that these invaluable treasures are safeguarded and preserved for future generations to enjoy.

Reading and writing

The NLC conducted a public forum in partnership with the Australian Embassy and local writers and publishers with the aim to promote reading in families. It was a successful forum that we hope will be continued into the future. We have focused on developing the children's section in the lending part of our library as an important supporting strategy of this concept.

Also in partnership with other Ministries the NLC is promoting the importance of reading for pleasure and storytelling within families. The NLC recognises how crucial it is that parents and especially mothers here in Cambodia, who have the primary and often total responsibility in bringing up their children, be given the means and support to encourage reading where possible and storytelling where it is not possible to open up the minds of their children to the imaginative spectrum of other worlds expanding their curiosity and enhancing their holistic development.

Managing Collections

There has been a great deal of effort and hard work done by the NLC to identify and catalogue the existing collections. With only 14 active staff the workloads are tremendous and the backlog is still substantial. To this end the publication of its first National bibliography is an important step in this process.

Unique

Our unique rare collections are in urgent need of good preservation and long term conservation administration to halt deterioration. It is also important that we attempt to digitise these collections ensuring permanent longevity in case of any unforeseen loss for example fire or flooding.

Legal deposit and ISBN

The NLC, like our peers here at this conference, is responsible for managing, coordinating, controlling, auditing and making available all new Cambodian publications in any and all formats. This places additional pressure on an already understaffed and under equipped situation that has to be managed carefully. It is important that the NLC remain abreast of the increasing numbers of new publications coming to us daily.

General Collections

How these collections are managed largely depends on resources and funds. Priority is given to identification and cataloguing but it is also important that immediate and ongoing conservation measures are taken. This is due to the backlog of cataloguing that is estimated at about 3 years behind.

There is also a programme in place, dependent upon funding, to retrospective catalogue the electronic entries in the library system. As the NLC now uses the PMB library system there is a large amount of incorrect data input due to the migration of data from the old library system to the PMB system.

Music and DVD

The NLC has received archives of traditional music as well as contemporary traditional music from the Cambodian Living Arts. The NLC plans for the creation of a searchable database that in due time will be placed on its soon to be opened official Web Site.

Alongside this collection the NLC has archival VHS material and DVD's that need to be organised into a searchable database.

What is important is that there is in place a clear path on how the NLC will make this diverse material available and under what conditions will it do so. Associated policy and process must provide the framework and guidelines that will determine the methodology used to make finding material easy and to achieve ease of access.

Conservation

Central to the success of NLC digitisation programmes and especially in order to preserve cultural treasures, a planned programme of conservation is in place at NLC. Again it is dependent upon funding to be able to execute appropriate preservation action and staff have been trained in anticipation and accordance of meeting these challenges. We note that the collections are deteriorating fast and are in urgent need of action before the possibility arises of tragically losing some parts forever.

Digitisation

Another central strategy of the NLC is the current state of deterioration of materials of some of its unique collections. The NLC had made this one of its primary objectives in the near to medium term. We see digitisation as the way to ensure that these treasures may be kept in perpetuity even if only as digital images. Of course the need to preserve the actual material is paramount in our determined efforts to conserve but we are realistic enough to know that it is important to cover all possibilities when considering conservation.

Access and Control

For many years now the NLC has very much appreciated the help and support of other countries in its endeavours to save its cultural literary and documentary treasures, and indeed much could not have been achieved without this support. With the advent of the Internet and mobile wireless communications we are all facing another problem arising from this. That is the unlawful use of this material outside of mutually agreed access. Seen as an income generating venture by use of pirated copies of digitised materials the NLC recognises with growing concern the need to make sure that this practice ceases and that control of this material is conducted with and through the appropriate bodies like the NLC.

Control of access

The NLC is guided by International Copyright law and has in place process to ensure any agreements now and in the future take into consideration control of access to its unique collections. Naturally all other materials and collections are available free but as all our colleagues here and around the world recognise we reserve the right to control access to our unique collections. Given the ease of pirating copies it is important that the NLC assumes appropriate responsibility for its collections.

Web Site

The NLC has been developing an official Website and is working with a local IT business to achieve this. It is anticipated that the site will become live within 2 months. The site will be the window of literary and documentary heritage of Cambodia. This initiative alongside NLC building expansion and surrounding ground development, the digitisation programme and collection development are the cornerstones of the foundation on which the NLC is strategically setting itself for the future.

The Web site will provide the means to access all our collections as well as allow income generating ventures from which any profits made will be put back into conservation and other strategic programmes.

Collaboration

Without funding very little progress can be made in Cambodia. Collaborative projects are essential to achieving success of NLC strategic initiatives.

France

The NLC has just signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Library of France with a new 3 year cooperative agreement to digitise a specific journal collection from the NLC unique French Protectorate Collection.

Australia

The NLC is working with the Australian Embassy to continue efforts with writers and publishers to expand the reading programme throughout Cambodia.

LoC (Bangkok)

The NLC is currently developing support for the Library of Congress through its Bangkok branch the necessary expertise required to translate the Khmer material the LoC has in its possession.

Local

The NLC works with local Information Technology company AngkorGlobits to develop and support hosting its soon to be live Web site. The NLC has a Memorandum of Understanding with AngkorGlobits and will develop service agreements for future partnership ventures.

The NLC also has in place service agreements and works in partnership with other local companies like the Khmerdev Company for its PMB service and the Net Asia Form Company for NLC network maintenance and development.