

NPRS-PRF

Helping Accelerate Poverty Reduction in Asia and the Pacific

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS FOR ETHNIC GROUPS

The Mekong River flows through Thailand, Cambodia, Viet Nam, the People's Republic of China (PRC) Yunnan Province, Myanmar, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), making up the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).

GMS was conceived in 1992, with the belief that economic and social development in these countries is promoted by strengthening economic linkages.

The population of the GMS is made up of people with diverse ethnicities and cultures. Of the subregion's estimated 255 million people, about 75 million belong to about 200 ethnic groups. These groups, typically concentrated in remote mountainous areas, often depend on subsistence agriculture.

Increasingly, the GMS has been the focus of major integrated regional development programs and projects. The subregion has attracted major funding partnerships from regional and international organizations, with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) acting as the coordinator for regional development support.¹ The GMS Program, with support from ADB² and other partners helps the implementation of high-priority subregional projects in transport, energy, telecommunications, environment, human resource development, tourism, trade, private sector investment, and agriculture.³

Since the inception of the GMS, much has been accomplished in the development of economic cooperation and integration to the mutual benefit of GMS member countries, with trade coordination, cross-border investments, and economic linkages expanding rapidly. Regional integration, however, has also posed corresponding challenges to existing lifestyles and cultures, and serious health and environmental threats.

Development in the subregion is facilitating the flow of people, capital, and goods across borders. These flows are inevitably linked to the spread of serious infectious diseases. The combination of high mobility, intravenous drug use, and unsafe sex practices has further caused parts of the subregion, particularly in the cross-border areas, to become flash points of the HIV/AIDS⁴ pandemic.⁵

The GMS Regional Cooperation Strategy and Program emphasizes the need to take precautions against the negative impacts associated with these developments, such as

communicable disease transmission, environmental degradation, and human trafficking. Many of these issues disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, such as women, children, and ethnic groups. At the 13th GMS Ministerial Meeting held in December 2004, GMS governments highlighted the prevention of the transmission of communicable diseases across borders, with particular attention to the developing threat of HIV/AIDS.⁶

The rapid expansion of HIV/AIDS in the Mekong region puts most ethnic groups at risk because of the lack of access to education, poverty, and the lack of culturally-appropriate information in ethnic languages. Women are more vulnerable to exploitation and at higher risk of HIV transmission. They are physically more susceptible and have less power to make decisions because of existing gender disparities.

Making Information on HIV/AIDS Available to Ethnic Groups

Low literacy and language barriers directly increase the risks of HIV/AIDS among ethnic groups living in cross-border areas. The populations of these border areas are highly transient, with migrant populations that come into the areas for employment or trade. If left unchecked, the rate of HIV infection among ethnic groups has the potential of increasing faster than among the general population.

Regional Technical Assistance (RETA) 6247: HIV/AIDS Vulnerability and Risk Reduction Among Ethnic Minority Groups through Communication Strategies⁷ was designed to disseminate information on HIV/AIDS, drug and trafficking prevention to selected highly-vulnerable ethnic groups living in the cross-border areas of Thailand, Yunnan Province (PRC), Lao PDR, and Cambodia through linguistically and culturally appropriate materials. This was the second project designed and implemented in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Bangkok.⁸

Meanwhile, RETA 6316: Asian Development Community Broadcasting Initiative⁹ was implemented as a support project for RETA 6247, which specifically intended to pilot community radio drama programs through the use of digital satellite broadcasting to reach out to high-risk ethnic groups in northern Lao PDR.

Both RETAs aimed to reduce the vulnerability to, and risk of, HIV/AIDS among high-risk populations by increasing their awareness through communication campaigns employing appropriate and effective information and communication technologies.

HIV/AIDS, Trafficking, and Drug Prevention Radio Dramas in Ethnic Languages¹⁰

HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, and human trafficking prevention radio dramas were developed under RETA 6247 in the following languages: Krueng (Cambodia), Akha (Thailand), Tai Neua and Tai Lue (Yunnan province, PRC), and Khmu (Lao PDR) using a methodology¹¹ that is based on intensive research carried out in local communities and written in local languages by native speakers.

Capacity development activities were conducted on anthropological research methodologies, language literacy, HIV/AIDS awareness, radio scriptwriting, and monitoring and evaluation tools on audience-focused research. Educational materials are also being developed to accompany tapes for distribution to communities and health personnel in the target communities.

RETA 6247 also piloted the production of radio dramas in low-resource settings where established broadcasting infrastructure is limited or unavailable, and local languages are unwritten. The pilot was developed using Kreung, one of the ethnic languages spoken in Ratanakiri Province, Cambodia. The RETA assisted in the establishment of a mini-FM radio station in the province and provided training on radio production.

The radio drama programs are scheduled for broadcasting between October and December 2007. More information on radio drama programs can be found at: <http://www.unescobkk.org/hivadb>.

GIS HIV/AIDS Mapping

Maps and databases for migrant mobility and HIV/AIDS were produced, disseminated, and periodically updated under RETA 6247.¹² Geographical information systems (GIS) have been developed for Cambodia and Lao PDR, and expanded GIS vulnerability maps for Thailand were produced.

The development of maps and databases provided the venue for networking initiatives between UNESCO, ADB, government ministries, and civil society organizations.

Ethnic Language Monitoring

The first draft of the GMS language map has been produced and is under further refinement under RETA 6247. The draft GMS language map has been digitized from hard copy maps. It

shows the language distribution across the GMS and illustrates how fluid ethnic groups and languages in comparison to state boundaries. The draft map is presently being refined under the RETA.

HIV/AIDS Clearing House¹³

A database of organizations working on HIV/AIDS in the Asia and Pacific region has been uploaded in the internet (www.unescobkk.org/hiv aids/databases/organisations.aspx) and contains 92 organization profiles. Promotional activities have been conducted to inform and encourage the public to access the Clearing House. The bimonthly Clearing House updates have been prepared and distributed to more than 1,800 online users.

Satellite Broadcasting

RETA 6316 pilot-tested the use of satellite broadcasting¹⁴ in rural and remote areas in northern Lao PDR. The project covered four villages in the provinces of Oudom Xai and Luang Namtha. Radio programs on HIV/AIDS produced by RETA 6247 were broadcast via satellite, targeting the Hmong and Khmu ethnic groups in the said provinces. In addition, the TA also broadcast audio programs produced by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Satellite receivers were installed in the provincial relay stations in Oudom Xai and Luang Namtha to allow the stations to receive the satellite broadcasts and re-broadcast on their FM signal if they chose to do so.

Listening groups were organized during the 1-month demo broadcast, which provided the listening villagers forums to discuss the content and impact of the radio broadcasts.

The use of satellite radio technology is also particularly effective in the rural, mountainous areas of the Lao PDR where difficulties remain in receiving terrestrial radio coverage/reception. Satellite broadcasts bypass geographical constraints that make FM reception difficult and, unlike shortwave reception, are not impacted by weather conditions. All the villages reported clear signal reception.¹⁵

Additionally, this method of distribution provides a single broadcast method to multiple locations without an increase in the cost of broadcasting. Sustainability is aided by well-researched and high-quality radio program development that is educational, entertaining, and encouraging of actual behavior change (though the limited time frame of the pilot did not allow for actual behavior change measures). The sustainability of the technology is shown by the limited maintenance and low-energy requirements of the satellite receivers and the access to First Voice International's (FVI) channel content even after the project broadcast time frame.

Sustaining the Gains

The results of RETA 6247 and RETA 6316 showed that radio dramas are still the most effective method of raising consciousness among ethnic groups if these are based on community research, produced in their own languages, and grounded in their own context. In particular, the use of satellite broadcasting provided an alternative method for bringing the

radio dramas in areas where FM and shortwave radio broadcasting are limited.

To sustain the gains achieved by both projects, among the recommendations forwarded include

- Continue to advocate for ethnic programming in national radio stations in the GMS.
- Explore possibility of expanding the use of GIS for tracking the spread of HIV/AIDS in Yunnan province.
- Dissemination of RETA findings to wider public and generation of support for scaling-up activities.
- Development of educational materials designed to accompany and enhance the radio programs.
- Expand the use of radio drama programs in ADB infrastructure projects to aid in disseminating project details and HIV/AIDS prevention.
- Explore the application of radio dramas to countries across borders.
- Test the developed methodology for radio programs in other sectors (e.g., sanitation awareness programs).

Endnotes

¹ http://www.mekonginstitute.org/html/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=223&Itemid=91

² In its Medium-Term Strategy II (MTS II), approved in March 2006, ADB identified regional cooperation and integration (RCI) as one of its five strategic priorities for achieving ADB's overarching goal of poverty reduction.

³ <http://www.adb.org/GMS/Program/default.asp>

⁴ Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.

⁵ <http://www.rockmekong.org/over/lab-overview.htm>

⁶ ADB. 2005. *Technical Assistance to the Greater Mekong Subregion for HIV/AIDS Vulnerability and Risk Reduction Among Ethnic Minority Groups Through Communication Strategies*. Manila.

⁷ RETA 6247: HIV/AIDS Vulnerability and Risk Reduction Among Ethnic Minority Groups through Communication Strategies in the GMS. It was financed by the Poverty Reduction Cooperation Fund (PRF), contributed by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) and administered by ADB, in the amount of US\$700,000. TA Approval Date: July 2005. TA Completion Date: November 2007. UNESCO provided parallel financing in the amount of \$522,000.

⁸ RETA 6247 builds and expands on the lessons learned from the previous project, RETA 6083: ICT and Prevention Education in the Cross-Border Areas of the GMS, also a joint project with UNESCO Bangkok. Additional ethnic groups and a new country (Cambodia) were added and some methodological improvements were done in the second round of RETA.

⁹ RETA 6316: Asian Development Community Broadcasting Initiative. The TA was financed by the PRF in the amount of \$150,000. TA Approval Date: April 2006. TA Completion Date: June 2007.

¹⁰ ADB–UNESCO. 2006. *Mid-Term Report*. RETA 6247: HIV/AIDS Vulnerability and Risk Reduction Among Ethnic Minority Groups through Communication Strategies in the GMS.

¹¹ The methodology was first piloted under a UNESCO-supported initiative for the Shan ethnic group, and then further developed and refined with ADB and UNESCO support under RETA 6083 and RETA 6247.

¹² The latest version of the HIV/AIDS CD-Rom was released in November 2006. (ADB–UNESCO. 2006. *Mid-Term Report*. RETA 6247: HIV/AIDS Vulnerability and Risk Reduction Among Ethnic Minority Groups through Communication Strategies in the GMS.)

¹³ The HIV/AIDS Clearing House was initiated under RETA 6083 and was expanded by RETA 6247.

¹⁴ The satellite broadcasting utilizes First Voice International's information communication technology strategies, services and endowment of 5% of the WorldSpace satellite network.

¹⁴ First Voice International. 2007. Technical Assistance Consultant's Report. Lao PDR: Asian Development Community Broadcasting Initiative.

This case study was written by Social Development Direct (RETA Consultant) under the Regional TA 6270: Facilitating Knowledge Management for Pro-Poor Policies and Projects with inputs from Jennifer Francis and Anupma Jain, project officers of 6316 and 6247, respectively, and Sonomi Tanaka, Senior Social Development Specialist. The views and assessments contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of ADB or its Board of Directors or the governments they represent. ADB does not guarantee the accuracy of the data and accepts no responsibility for any consequences of their use.

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