

## Creative Communications against HIV/AIDS



By Jet Damazo

IN THE uplands of the Mekong region, millions of people from various ethnic minorities once lived in quiet isolation. While their remoteness kept them from accessing basic services like education, it also protected them from the spread of the deadly HIV/AIDS virus.

With newly constructed roads and the opening of borders, however, the situation is changing. Along with the increase in the flow of populations from one country

to another for trade and employment, is the increase in trafficking of drugs and people,

as well as an increase in the rate of HIV infection.

Minority women, mostly from the upland ethnic groups of the Thai-Myanmar-Laos-China border regions, are most vulnerable; they are disproportionately represented in the lowest, most exploited parts of the sex industry. With limited education and knowledge on ways to protect themselves, these women are also at higher risk of acquiring HIV.

Increased injecting drug use, has also aggravated the spread of HIV/AIDS in the region. For instance, in Yunnan Province, about 21% of female injecting drug users also engage in commercial sex work, thereby further increasing their vulnerability and risk to acquire HIV.\*

A regional technical assistance project, funded by the Poverty Reduction Cooperation Fund, will help prevent the spread of the disease through innovative communication strategies, as well as prevent further human trafficking and non-traditional drug use.

"A vast number of ethnic minority groups live in the region and speak different languages and dialects. Their collective stories make up the essence of these radio dramas, which help educate others in their communities about the risks of HIV/AIDS," says Anupma Jain, an ADB Social Sector Specialist.

\* RETA 6247: HIV/AIDS Vulnerability and Risk Reduction Among Ethnic Minority Groups (<http://www.adb.org/Documents/TARs/OTH/tar-oth-36228.pdf>)

The project builds on the successful outcomes of an earlier technical assistance project that embarked on an information and communications technology (ICT)-based preventive education campaign to help combat HIV/AIDS. It produced radio dramas in the local languages that to provide ethnic minorities with prevention information on HIV/AIDS, trafficking and non-traditional drug use.

The project, carried out in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Bangkok, expands the scope of the earlier project by producing radio dramas in more ethnic languages and covering new ethnic groups living in the cross-border areas of Cambodia, Yunnan Province (PRC), Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Thailand. (Cambodia was not covered in the earlier project.)

It includes four new ethnic minority languages – Akha in Thailand; Tai Neua and Tai Lue in Yunnan Province PRC; and Khmu in Lao PDR – and is piloting the production of radio dramas in the Kreung language spoken in Ratanakiri Province, Cambodia, where established broadcasting infrastructure is limited.

"Radio dramas have been found to be an effective vehicle for reaching young people, who are frequently unresponsive to Public Service Announcements or didactic programs," says Ms. Jain.

These dramas are written in the local languages by native speakers, as opposed to being written in English or the national language and translated to the local language, based on intensive research on life stories, issues and concerns. Radio programs are designed following a methodology that UNESCO developed with support from the earlier ADB TA. "This way, the audience can really identify with the stories," she adds.

Once the radio programs are developed, they are translated into English and the national language to check for the accuracy of the information being delivered. The programs are accompanied by local music and sounds to enhance authenticity and emphasize cultural richness of ethnic groups.

Once ready, these programs will be broadcast on local stations or through other communication systems such as loudspeakers or community-based radios. Tapes and CDs of the program will also be produced and distributed for use by communities and health personnel. #