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Lifelong Learning with Lifelong Libraries

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Lifelong Learning with Lifelong Libraries

Within today's information society, the most important learning outcome for all human is their being able to function as independent lifelong learners through lifelong learning. But what actually is the Lifelong Learning? Universally, educators refer it as a continuous gaining of knowledge, skills and understandings from the “cradle to the grave”. Similarly, libraries are considering as one of the perfect places for developing knowledge, skills and understanding since civilization emerged. Libraries are the wonderful gathering places to pursue knowledge, whether you are student, teacher, parent, laborer, employed or unemployed. They assist in finding, using and interpreting appropriate information that opens up opportunities for lifelong learning, literacy enhancement, informed citizenship, recreation, creative imagination, individual research, critical thinking, and ultimately, empowerment in an increasingly complex world. In addition, libraries are one of the best places that preserve reading resources and by using those resources we become literate and civilized, the main ingredients of a Lifelong Learning Society.

In 2005, the Vietnam government adopted the Life-Long Learning (LLL) society strategy until 2010 by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) and the Vietnam Study Encouragement Association. In 2013, the LLL project was extended to 2020 under a new official title ‘Building a Learning Society by 2020’, with clear responsibilities of ministries and agencies involved. Organizations of lifelong learning activities through the mass media, libraries, museums, cultural center club are targeted to achieve this state ambition. According to the Vietnam Government Portal, under the extended LLL project, 98 percent of people aged between 15 and 60 will be able to read and write by 2020.

To accomplish this national goal, Vietnam government alone has taken a number of innovative enterprises such as: between 2005-2008 it established more than 9,000 community-learning centres in 10,600 communes and wards throughout the country; in 2008 it approved October 2 annually as ‘Vietnam’s Day for Study Encouragement’; a week in response to lifelong learning that delivers the message: ‘Lifelong learning – key to every success’ lunched in 2011 and in 2013 it established a Lifelong Learning Centre, namely SEAMEO Regional Centre for Lifelong Learning under the auspices of SEAMEO (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization), UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, as well as other SEAMEO associate member countries. Finally, in 2014 the country granted a ‘Book day’ (21st April) along with a ‘Book Street’ and a ‘Book Week’ organise in the central cities and provinces, and promoted through seminars on books, exchanges between writers and readers, and a book auction.

It is a good indication that the Vietnam government considers libraries as one of the stakeholders to get done this national target. However libraries would contribute far more to facilitate lifelong learning if they are systematically nursed and empowered. To empower libraries, it is important to raise the awareness of the role of libraries and also to improve library activities and services. Library Associations should be important players in promoting library services and to increase the understanding of the role of libraries in national development. Service attitudes of library

personnel must be developed. They should also be more dynamic in their connection with information seekers. Then staff training is a prerequisite for further development. Therefore, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism along with MoET should set up an action plan for educating and training library professionals on different levels.

Certainly there are impressive examples of ambitious services by Vietnamese library professionals such as the General Sciences Library in HCM City, the National Library, and the brand new Public Library in Hanoi. However there is a gap not only between urban and rural areas library systems but also between different provinces. To create a comprehensive public library system there is a need for national coordination and standardization in certain fields. Here the National Library should play a more strategic role in public library development. The National Library should have a clear mandate and adequate resources to act as a central resource for library automation, digitization, standardization, coordination and professional training. If all the above can be ensured then it is hope that the existing libraries in Vietnam will become the centres of lifelong learning that significantly contribute toward building a learning society. This continuum of libraries is conceptualized as a support to lifelong learning with lifelong libraries.