

Ban Pruewai Primary School SEAMEO Community Involvement Project

One morning, five years ago, curious onlookers from the village surrounded the [Ban Pruewai Primary School](#), a rural school in Chachoengsao Province, Thailand. They were waiting for the arrival of the highest education official in the country. The school headmaster and the teachers waited in line to receive the visitors. It was unprecedented. No high official from the national level, at least in recent memory, had ever set foot in the humble school of Ban Pruewai.

There was nothing special about the school. There were no remarkable achievements to showcase. But the visitors arrived on that momentous occasion—a convoy of press and media representatives leading Thailand's Minister of Education who came with government officials and distinguished educators from all over Southeast Asia, representing (SEAMEO).

On that occasion, the atmosphere was cleared of educational policy dialogues dense with buzzwords. They simply came to see for themselves what the Minister saw weeks before: the dilapidated buildings, the leaking roof, the barefoot students, which put a human face to the dirt-poor realities of rural schools in developing countries.

The dropout rate is high. The parents, mostly farmers with seasonal jobs, moved frequently from one village to another. A learning environment was hard to encourage at home because in the classrooms, it was common for the students to study and look after their younger brothers and sisters at the same time. They did not have the required textbooks. Those available in the small library were very few and outdated.

The teachers lacked the training to enable them to prepare good lesson plans and teaching materials. They were not subject matter specialists. Most of them could not complete the syllabi as scheduled. There were far too many extra tasks given to them by the headmaster, who had assigned each of the teachers with all the subject matters in one class. The headmaster had no assistant; he also taught classes.



With these findings, [His Excellency Sukavich Rangsitpol](#), the 1996 [SEAMEO Council President](#), proposed that SEAMEO adopt the school to enhance and improve its existing educational system. The key word is “adopt”. The [SEAMEO Community Involvement Project](#) was not a simple “dole out and leave” project. Right from the very start, then [SEAMEO Secretariat Director, Dr Ashari bin Che Mat](#), was very

clear about what the project wanted to do. Direct help would be provided by the Secretariat and the SEAMEO Centres. Sustainability was the target and its impact would and should not be limited to the school.

Five years later, we look back and review what was accomplished through interventions in the school's teaching-learning process involving the pupils, the learning facilities, teachers, school management and the parents' involvement.

The Secretariat solicited books for donations, school uniforms, shoes and toys as well as building materials. The teachers and parents were advised on proper food nutrition. The parents were pleased to be involved. Informed of their children's learning activities, they became more enthusiastic and hopeful. The teachers were sent to the SEAMEO Centres for training. Rewards were reaped. Two teachers, one trained in Mathematics and the other in English, were awarded and recognized as Outstanding Teachers by the Provincial Primary Education Office. Word spread around. Only two years after SEAMEO initiated the project, the students of Ban Pruwei were winning First Prize in Mathematics competition. More students made use of the library with new and more textbooks available. Dropout rate decreased and an additional room was constructed for Kindergarten students

This was reported in a conference in 1999 to the ten Ministers of Education of the region, who encouraged the Centres to carry out projects to help a community in their respective countries. In the Philippines, SEAMEO INNOTECH's adopted schools, the Toro Hills Elementary School and the Pura V Kalaw Elementary Schools in Quezon City, served as laboratories for field testing prototype materials from the Centre's research and training programme. The school principals also provided inputs in the development of the training course designed for school principals to develop competencies on leadership, including the use of computers for effective school management. The teachers of SEAMEO SEARCA's adopted school, the Maahas Elementary School in Los Banos, attended training for teachers' continuing education programme in English, Mathematics and Science and Integrating Environmental Education in Elementary and High School Curricula.

In Brunei Darussalam, SEAMEO VOCTECH initiated and developed a production centre for their adopted vocational school, the Nakhoda Ragam Vocational School, where students and teachers were trained in producing electrical and electronic products, to be sold to various training institutions. The Centre also provided an online learning model for the school. In Dato Basir Primary School and Dato Othman Primary School, the Centre repaired and redesigned the networking structure of the computer laboratories in the schools for maximum usage and effectiveness. Several courses were conducted to train teachers on computer and multimedia. They attended seminars on online journalism and multicultural curriculum.

Altogether, SEAMEO has adopted eight primary schools, two secondary schools and one vocational school in the Philippines, Brunei and Thailand.

After wrapping up the SEAMEO Community Involvement Project in Ban Pruwai Primary School, the SEAMEO Secretariat, now under the helm of Dr Arief Sadiman, officially adopted in June 2000 the Ban Subsanoon School in Saraburi province. A new school was on its way to a better future.

A few years back, Thai University volunteers taught English at the Ban Pruwai Primary School. From their temporary run-down house at the back of the school compound, the volunteers were greeted each morning by children running to them to

help carry their teaching materials. The activities progressed from the hello-how are you-I'm fine-thank you routine to songs and games to the more advanced vocabulary and pronunciation exercises. Two volunteers were moved to receive a letter from a child who drew two hearts and two lotuses and wrote, dear teachers, I hope you are not disappointed with us in the class. On the volunteers' last day, one boy told the volunteers that he wished they would come back. Not for him though, because he will be graduating soon, but for the other kids.

