



## **SEAMES Final Report and Recommendations on the Next Steps of the Implementation of the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) June 2015**

This report will describe the progress of the implementation of the SEA-PLM in Southeast Asia and provide a summary of the main lessons learned and recommendations of how to build a stronger engagement. This report refers to the activities that took place during the period of the Memorandum of Agreement between the SEAMEO Secretariat and UNICEF EAPRO, from 16 June 2014 to 30 June 2015 (including three amendments on 2 December 2014, 6 February 2015, 29 May 2015).

### **A) Achievements**

#### 1) A series of meetings/workshops to build capacity and inform the development of the SEA-PLM:

- ✓ Launching Ceremony of the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) on 20 October 2014 involving SEAMEO Member Countries, SEAMEO Centres and Partners in Bangkok, Thailand
- ✓ Regional Consultative Meeting on SEAMEO Basic Education Standards (SEA-BES) and SEA-PLM on 4-5 November 2014 involving SEAMEO Member Countries, SEAMEO Centres and Partners in Penang, Malaysia
- ✓ Domain Technical Review Panels (DTRP) Meeting of the SEA-PLM on 11-13 February 2015 involving SEAMEO Member Countries, SEAMEO Centres, Partners, international curriculum and assessment experts in Bangkok, Thailand
- ✓ Item Development Workshop of the SEA-PLM on 1-5 June 2015 involving SEAMEO Member Countries, SEAMEO Centres and Partners in Bangkok, Thailand

#### 2) Country Visits (SEAMEO Secretariat, UNICEF EAPRO and ACER, with the support of the in-country facilitating unit UNICEF CO/SEAMEO Centre):

- Cambodia: 16-18 February 2015
- Lao PDR: 17-19 March 2015
- Brunei Darussalam: 18-19 May 2015

#### 3) Outputs

- ✓ Draft Assessment Framework of the SEA-PLM
- ✓ Draft Items of the SEA-PLM
- ✓ Capacity Building Plan
- ✓ Regional Workplan
- ✓ Country Workplan for the field trial countries
- ✓ TOR of the National Steering Committee
- ✓ TOR for Regional Steering Committee
- ✓ Roles and Tasks of the Country Teams
- ✓ PPT on project structure, partners and stages of implementation
- ✓ Overview of country teams and country costing framework for field trial
- ✓ Roles and Tasks of the Country Teams

4) Several SEAMEO Meetings (SEA-PLM being systematically presented during each meeting):

- ✓ Consultative Meeting on the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metric (SEA-PLM) with SEAMEO Centres on the 26 June 2014, Bangkok, Thailand
- ✓ SEAMEO Governing Boards Meetings (August-November 2014) in the SEAMEO Centres
- ✓ SEAMEO Executive Committee (EC) Meeting which was on 28 August 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand involving five Ministers of Education from Brunei Darussalam, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam
- ✓ SEAMEO 37<sup>th</sup> High Officials Meeting (HOM) on 25-27 November 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand with High Officials from the SEAMEO Member Countries
- ✓ 48<sup>th</sup> SEAMEO Council Conference on 6-9 May 2015 in Jomtien, Thailand involving the Ministers of Education of the SEAMEO Member Countries
- ✓ 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum for High Officials on Basic Education on 11-12 June 2015 in Siem Reap, Cambodia involving SEAMEO Member Countries and Associate Members.

5) A total of five Steering Committee Meetings of the SEA-PLM:

- ✓ Pre SC Meeting: 18 August 2014
- ✓ 1<sup>st</sup> SC Meeting: 20 October 2014
- ✓ 2<sup>nd</sup> SC Meeting: 4 November 2014
- ✓ 3<sup>rd</sup> SC Meeting: 13 February 2015
- ✓ 4<sup>th</sup> SC Meeting: 4 June 2015

6) A series of SEAMES-UNICEF EAPRO regular coordination meetings<sup>1</sup>:

- ✓ 15 July 2014
- ✓ 25 August 2014

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, SEAMES and UNICEF EAPRO had several informal discussions and meetings to discuss about the next steps and the immediate action when required.

✓ 28 April 2015

## **B) Lessons learned and recommendations**

### 1) Overall comment:

The scope and the aims of the SEA-PLM have evolved over time and have been adjusted according to the results and outcomes of the different activities, meetings and discussions with the different stakeholders. In order to achieve its goals of enhancing learning and improving education, the SEA-PLM has integrated new components and has been broadened with:

- Focus on capacity building of national assessment staff as an integral part of the initiative
- Curriculum reference of SEAMEO Member Countries with the involvement of all the countries in defining the frameworks and tools
- Integration of teachers, head-teachers and parents in the SEA-PLM framework with the inclusion of contextual questionnaires

This redefinition of SEA-PLM priorities is the result of a learning process of all stakeholders as the SEA-PLM is a totally new and innovative initiative. It is important to keep space for adjustments as the project evolves.

### 2) Communication and Documentation

- Establishment of a direct communication line  
Experience of the first few months of the implementation of the SEA-PLM has shown that it is important to establish a strong line of communication with the national implementers. While the endorsement from the highest level within the Ministry is essential to keep the project moving forward and develop a strong group of leaders, it is important to communicate directly with the members of the national teams especially the technical teams and/or the focal persons. However, this line of communication needs to be approved by the higher authorities.
- Systematic Documentation of the updates and developments of the SEA-PLM  
As part of the communication and advocacy strategy of the SEA-PLM, it is essential to regularly update and document any development related to the SEA-PLM. Indeed, documents such as terms of reference, roles and responsibilities, outcomes of meetings/workshops/visits and project description and developments (including its technical aspects) need to be made available at any time for consultation. The creation of a database that will gather all these documents could be relevant and could be under the shared responsibility of the SEAMEO Secretariat, UNICEF EAPRO and ACER.

### 3) Regional, Country Ownership and Leadership of the SEA-PLM

The SEA-PLM is a regional assessment led by the Ministries of Education (MOEs) of the SEAMEO Member Countries and implemented by national leaders and institutions. The success of the SEA will depend on the level of interest and commitment of the countries. Referring to the desk review of ACER describing the experiences of primary learning metrics in Southeast Asia, a good dissemination strategy of the results of the assessment and the level of soundness of the programme can serve as facilitators to the effective design, administration and use of the assessments. That is why it is important to build a strong network of partners (incl. MOEs, research centres/institutes) who will help to support buy-in and ownership of the assessment based on strong and reliable data and results.

- Launching Ceremony of the SEA-PLM was an important step in gaining visibility (involvement of media from the region) and trigger interest among the different stakeholders. While each of the six initial countries to participate in the programme delivered brief remarks, they did not officially commit (which level of engagement they are interested in, what are their priorities and expectations in regards to the programme outcomes) during this meeting. It might be a reason why the actual implementation of the programme took longer as the countries were not fully engaged and consulted. Consultation visits to the countries by the main stakeholders (prior to the Launching Ceremony) might have been helpful to give the countries an opportunity to share their priorities and national interests when developing the metrics and therefore secure buy-in and ownership earlier.
- Involvement of institutions, centres, offices beyond the Ministries of Education, such as SEAMEO Centres and UNICEF Country Offices (CO).  
Following the readjustment of the SEA-PLM to the needs and requests from the different stakeholders, additional stakeholders have been involved in the development process of the framework at the DTRP Meeting and of the items at the Item Development Workshop. In addition to the representatives from the Ministries of Education of the region, SEAMEO Centres and UNICEF CO representatives have attended the workshops and have significantly contributed as they were experienced and experts in either the domains of the SEA-PLM and/or in developing assessment, and were familiar and experienced with the local context and needs. In view of their expertise, the involvement of the SEAMEO Centres and UNICEF CO in the SEA-PLM is important but is also relevant as they have very close ties with their respective Ministries of Education. They can therefore support the national implementation of the SEA-PLM and further support the development of national ownership. It could be relevant to explore other partnerships with national and/or regional actors to further expand this network of regional/national stakeholders.
- Involvement of high-level representatives of SEAMEO, UNICEF EAPRO and ACER when meeting Ministries of Education of the region. The three recent country-visits have shown that the involvement of high-level representatives of SEAMEO and UNICEF EAPRO and of technical experts from ACER during the different meetings with the

officials from the Ministries brought positive results. The involvement of high-level representatives will ensure strong legitimacy and credibility of the project.

- Involvement of several departments within the Ministry of Education and of other relevant Ministries. The implementation of the SEA-PLM has financial implications and therefore needs to be connected to the Ministry of Finance for example. By doing so, relevant department or Ministry can include SEA-PLM in their planning. In addition, it would increase the chances of having SEA-PLM included in national education plans.
- As recommended during the SC meetings, we will be able to secure the continuity of the SEA-PLM only if it is housed in a well-established and strong Southeast Asian institution. Therefore, it was suggested to house it in one of the SEAMEO Centres. It would be relevant to start exploring now the different possibilities with the SEA-PLM SC to house which Centre, conditions, roles and responsibilities and its timeframe).

#### 4) Usage of Assessment Results for Education Reform

- Based on the different discussions with the countries and after redefining the scope of SEA-PLM, several areas/elements have been identified as being priorities when developing the SEA-PLM:
  - Emphasis on teacher education and training
  - Capacity-building of national assessment staff
  - Synergy of the SEA-PLM initiative with national education plans and assessments<sup>1</sup>

These priorities have been identified by the different ministries which means that the SEA-PLM will be designed to support specifically these areas.

- Robust analyses of the results need to be publicized to inform policy in reports. In order to communicate the results to a large audience, different reports targeted to different audiences need to be prepared. The report that will be produced for dissemination within the governments needs to be specifically targeted to high level officials.
- Communication strategy and communication materials: the purpose of the SEA-PLM is not to provide another assessment and to put an additional burden on the children, teachers and parents. The purpose of the SEA-PLM is to provide tools that will generate results and will allow comparisons between the different SEAMEO Member Countries in order to improve education and learn from each other. These key objectives of the SEA-PLM need to be carefully communicated to different audiences through communication materials and a website where information and specific documentation on the methods used, process and involved partners will be made available.
- Institutionalization of SEA-PLM through a decree or similar and inclusion in the country's long-term planning to encourage involvement of other partners and government agencies. As an example, for the case of Lao PDR and Cambodia, the SEA-PLM is included in the agenda of already existing working groups.
- The establishment of a high-level National Steering Committee chaired by the Minister of Education is a prerequisite for the national ownership of the SEA-PLM and for ensuring that the results and findings of the SEA-PLM are transformed into action. In light of the

developments and results of the SEA-PLM, regular meetings of the National Steering Committee need to be encouraged and **documented**.

### **C) The Way Forward**

The SEA-PLM was initiated about 3 years ago but is now at a very exciting stage as developments are happening very fast and timely. While six (6) countries initially got engaged in the initiative (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand), many other countries expressed interest (e.g Indonesia, Myanmar and Vietnam). The first round of field trials will take place in September/October/November 2015 and a second round will probably take place in 2016, targeting the main survey to take place tentatively in 2017.

Several points arise when considering the next steps:

- 1) Involvement of all 11 SEAMEO Member Countries' Ministries of Education. It is important to raise awareness in the entire region so that the SEA-PLM can expand as it is initially planned and be regionally useful and meaningful. So far most of the countries have been considered when developing the framework but each of them will also have to do a field trial before being included in the main survey.
- 2) Funding: while UNICEF EAPRO is financially supporting the SEA-PLM for the moment, it is expected that the SEA-PLM will be fully funded by the SEAMEO Member Countries once firmly established. Other sources of funding with Development Partners need to be explored but it is the responsibility of each country to budget and plan for the future implementation of the SEA-PLM.
- 3) Housing the SEA-PLM in a regional institution or centre is central to ensure the sustainability of the programme. Some of the usual prerequisites for any successful initiative lie behind the establishment of a strong network of committed members, regular meetings and long-lasting commitment from the members to fund the programme. SEAMES and UNICEF EAPRO (and other partners) could serve as facilitators and support the establishment of such a coordinating centre but it should become fully independent after some time.
- 4) So far SEAMES and UNICEF EAPRO have been in direct contact with the Technical Teams and the respective in-country facilitating units for the implementation of the SEA-PLM. While these contacts were necessary as the SEA-PLM is only at its developing stage, it would be recommended to establish a line of communication with the National Steering Committee in the concerned countries. Even if the use of the results being under each country's Ministry, additional suggestions, advice and interpretations from other contributors could be helpful. These contacts must be supported by the high authorities of each country and could potentially be initiated by the SEAMEO Secretariat.

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<sup>i</sup> For more details about the discussions with the countries, please refer to the mission reports of the country-visits in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia and Lao PDR and the minutes of the Steering Committee Meetings.