



Event Report

Launch of Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) 2019 Results

1-2 December 2020
Carlton Hotel Bangkok, Thailand & Online Platform

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Event objectives

- 1 The **objectives of the event** were to:
 - officially launch the Regional Report on Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) 2019 Results;
 - discuss the implications of results on policies, practices and research;
 - inform key stakeholders on SEA-PLM 2019 products and next round of SEA-PLM assessment; and
 - engage in policy discussion among experts on implications of SEA-PLM 2019 results and research collaboration.

Conference agenda

- 2 The overall programme was delivered in two half days. Key findings of SEA-PLM 2019 in reading, writing, mathematics, and global citizenship were presented. Using SEA-PLM 2019 proficiency scales, key regional trends on children learning were highlighted. Reflections, insights, and follow-up actions were explored with ministers of education and representatives from the six participating countries, technical teams, and key partners.
- 3 Please refer to [Annex 1](#): Event agenda.

Participants

- 4 The event brought together Ministers, High Officials, and national representatives from SEA-PLM 2019 Core Member Countries; High Officials and national representatives from Honorary Member Countries; SEA-PLM Secretariat (SEAMEO and UNICEF EAPRO); SEA-PLM Technical Advisory Group; representatives of SEA-PLM National Teams; UNICEF Country Office; representatives from SEA-PLM participating countries; Ambassadors and/or representatives from the Embassy of SEA-PLM Core Member Countries in Bangkok; representatives from SEAMEO Centres; representatives from SEAMEO Associate Member Countries; representatives from SEAMEO Affiliate Members; partners; experts; media; and live-streaming audience from YouTube.
- 5 Please refer to [Annex 2](#): List of participants.

Summaries from the event

- 6 The following pages serve as summaries of highlights from each session. The SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report and materials for the event, including a video recording of the event and other supporting materials and photos, can be obtained on the [SEA-PLM website](#).

The Official Launch of SEA-PLM 2019 Results: 1 December 2020

08.30 – 12.00 hours (Bangkok Time, GMT+7)
Carlton Hotel Bangkok Sukhumvit, Bangkok, Thailand
Online platforms (speakers – Zoom/non-speakers – YouTube Live)

1.1 Welcome remarks

Welcome remarks: UNICEF EAPRO

- Ms Karin Hulshof, Regional Director, UNICEF EAPRO
- 7 Ms Hulshof opened her remarks by stating the importance of Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM). SEA-PLM 2019 is the first large-scale assessment on reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as global citizenship education of Grade 5 children in the region. Given the demand for a large-scale student assessment from Ministers of Education in the region, SEA-PLM was initiated by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Association (SEAMEO) and UNICEF in 2012. Progress over the eight years culminated into today's launching of the [SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report](#). The report reveals that many Grade 5 children in the region are still far from achieving the minimum proficiency level defined by the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.1. However, encouraging findings emerge from the report as many children may still improve their learning when well supported by equity-based policies and programmes.
- 8 Ms Hulshof expressed her hope that learnings from the SEA-PLM Report can be put into practice to accelerate better learning outcomes for all children. She expressed her gratitude to all involved stakeholders for open collaboration and commitment: SEAMEO Secretariat, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and experts, Ministers of Education from the six participating countries, as well as UNICEF regional and country offices.
- 9 In the post COVID-19 era, children's needs to master basics in literacy and numeracy is ever more important. These foundational skills will support children's further development of knowledge, skills, as well as extend their interactions with communities and the world. She ended her speech by emphasising the need for reliable data to monitor the outcomes of the learning process. The data, as facilitated by SEA-PLM, is key to ensure that every child in the region has strong foundational learning to achieve their full potential in school and life.

Welcome remarks: SEAMEO Secretariat

- Dr Ethel Agnes Pascua-Valenzuela, Director, SEAMEO Secretariat
- 10 Dr Pascua-Valenzuela elaborated the bond developed for SEA-PLM given numerous milestones of the SEA-PLM she had been involved in since 2012. From the review of the curriculum in Southeast Asia at the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO INNOTECH) in the workshop in 2014 to the agreement on assessing children at the Grade 5 level and now the launch of SEA-PLM 2019 results in 2020.
- 11 The SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report showcases results from the first-round of SEA-PLM assessment in domains of literacy and numeracy. Furthermore, SEA-PLM is the first-ever large-scale learning assessment to monitor the global citizenship education of children. The development of SEA-PLM reaffirms the aspirations of SEAMEO ministers expressed in 1965 to improve lives, equity, and access to quality education. In addition,

improving basic education has always been a central focus of SEAMEO. Strong foundational learning is crucial to impacting the educational success of the individual child, as well as towards national socio-economic growth in the region.

- 12 The valuable collaboration between SEAMEO and UNICEF is recognised given their shared vision on developing inclusive quality education for all children. Dr Pascua-Valenzuela also acknowledged the support of technical experts in the region and globally, particularly the key partnership formed with ACER on learning assessments. She also extended her appreciation to all national representatives of SEA-PLM.
- 13 She concluded her remarks with an emphasis on the alignment between SEA-PLM and the agenda of SEAMEO, particularly in the priority areas of early childhood care and education (ECCE) foundational skills in achieving quality and equitable education; addressing barriers to inclusion; revitalising teacher education; and adapting to 21st century skills.

1.2 SEA-PLM introduction video

- 14 A five-minute SEA-PLM introduction video provided concise information on SEA-PLM. Since 2012, SEAMEO and UNICEF EAPRO have jointly developed SEA-PLM. It is the first large-scale learning assessment system in the region to assess the learning proficiencies of Grade 5 children in foundational skills such as numeracy, literacy (reading and writing), as well as value and engagement in global citizenship. Key contextual information is collected from students, parents, teachers, and school principals. SEA-PLM instruments have been developed by regional and international experts with technical support from ACER. Test and questionnaires were translated from English into languages of each participating country. Six Southeast Asian countries are involved in the first round of SEA-PLM: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Vietnam. The 2019 data were collected from national representative samples with participation from 1,193 schools and 31,187 students.
- 15 The video also introduced potential contributions of results indicated in the [SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report](#), which can be used towards national policies such as curriculum design, teaching pedagogies, and school practices. Through the development of a regional learning mechanism using contextually-appropriate instruments, SEA-PLM enables participating countries to support the regional-building process in materialising the ASEAN Community 2025. Development of the SEA-PLM proficiency scales aligns student proficiencies against global indicators on reading and mathematics as defined by the SDG 4. Furthermore, SEA-PLM strengthens regional learning assessment systems to move Southeast Asia towards inclusive and quality education.

1.3 SEA-PLM 2019 results: Children's learning in 6 Southeast Asian countries

- Mr Francisco Benavides, Regional Education Advisor, UNICEF EAPRO

- 16 The presentation of Mr Benavides focused on key elements of the new proficiency scales; children's performance results in the three domains of reading, writing, mathematics, and their responses to the global citizenship module; as well as key regional trends and policy recommendations.
- 17 The proficiency scales were created to report children's performance in reading, writing, and mathematics. Children who are in the highest band¹ master the fundamental skills expected of them by the end of primary school at the international level, as defined in the

¹ Proficiency scales of reading, writing, and mathematics have different Band ranges.

SDG 4.1.1. All questions, coding materials and procedures were developed, pre-tested, and validated in collaboration with countries and experts. In addition, quality assurance was maintained throughout the assessment process to ensure that the results are comparable across countries and across different test languages.

18 SEA-PLM 2019 is based on definitions² of reading, writing, and mathematical literacy as agreed between Southeast Asian countries and learning domain experts. Overall findings reveal large differences in learning outcomes across countries and among children within each country. It shows poor learning in most countries and alarming trends of inequities in all participating countries. Across countries, only 1 out of 3 children in Grade 5 is performing at the level expected in the *early years* of primary education, while 2 out of 3 children in Grade 5 do not achieve the minimum level expected in SDG 4.1.1 at the *end* of primary education.

- For **reading literacy**, there is a large variation (2% to 82%) across the six SEA-PLM countries at the level expected of Grade 5 children at the end of primary education. Similarly, there is a large variation (1% to 50%) across countries at the level expected of Grade 5 children in the first years of primary education. In all countries, a significant number of children were in Band 5 and have developed a solid basis in reading literacy skills in their language of instruction.
- For **writing literacy**, a vast proportion of children across the six SEA-PLM 2019 countries are not demonstrating the writing proficiencies expected of a Grade 5 student. Approximately 9% of children performed at Bands 7 and 8 or above, the highest two bands on the writing proficiency scale. While 40% of children across all SEA-PLM countries are in the lowest two bands with limited writing skills.
- For **mathematical literacy**, there is a huge variation (1% to 57%) of mathematical proficiency equivalent to that expected in the first years of primary school across the six SEA-PLM 2019 countries at the lowest band. A majority of Grade 5 children have achieved the mathematical literacy skills expected at the end of primary school while some countries have modest percentages of children who have achieved this Band.

19 SEA-PLM 2019 is the first large-scale comparative assessment to focus on **global citizenship** at the primary level. Report findings show that while children show interest in issues affecting them such as climate change and conflict resolution with classmates, there is room for schools to provide further opportunities for children to learn and practice global citizenship skills and knowledge, including speaking in organised debate or discussing global issues.

20 Encouraging findings from the report show promising pathways that can lead to better learning results. With the right equity-based policies and programmes in place, a significant proportion of children may still be able to improve their learning and reach higher proficiency levels. For instance, data found that in all countries, children who had attended at least 1 year of preschool education consistently performed better than children who had not. Similarly, higher levels of parental engagement were associated with higher reading, writing, and mathematics scores in children.

21 Towards the end of his presentation, Mr Benavides presented six policy recommendations³ to facilitate the improvement of children's learning with a strong equity focus drawn from the [SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report](#). These recommendations are indicative and will need to be contextualised based on each country's national context and existing actions.

1.4 Ministerial messages on SEA-PLM 2019 national results and policy responses

² For learning area definitions, please refer to the [SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report](#).

³ For more details on the six policy recommendations, please refer to the [SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report](#).

Moderator:

- Dr Ethel Agnes Pascua-Valenzuela, Director, SEAMEO Secretariat

Speakers:

- HE Dr Hang Chuon Naron, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport, Cambodia
- HE Madame Sengdeuane Lachanthaboun, Minister of Education and Sports, Lao PDR
- Dr Habibah Abdul Rahim, Director General, Ministry of Education, Malaysia
- HE Dr Myo Thein Gyi, Union Minister for Education, Myanmar
- HE Dr Leonor Magtolis Briones, Secretary of Education, Philippines
- HE Dr Nguyen Van Phuc, Deputy Minister of Education and Training, Vietnam

22 **HE Dr Hang Chuon Naron (Cambodia):** In this message, His Excellency Dr Naron stated that suggestions from the SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report align well with the national education reform programmes in Cambodia.

23 He provided key policy responses from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in Cambodia based on suggestions from the SEA-PLM 2019. These include strengthening teacher training programmes; increasing community preschools and early childhood education (ECE) quality to reduce Grade 1 repetition and drop-out rates; focusing on nutrition, clean water and sanitation in rural areas; focusing on writing and composition in the curriculum; integrating global citizenship in social science textbooks; strengthening child-friendly schools and school-based management; encouraging parents' engagement; and enhancing library standards.

24 **HE Madame Sengdeuane Lachanthaboun (Lao PDR):** Her Excellency Madame Sengdeuane started her message with a brief background on Lao PDR's participation in SEA-PLM 2019, which involved 4,600 students in Grade 5 from 290 schools in Lao PDR. The next cycle of SEA-PLM is under discussion.

25 Participation in SEA-PLM 2019 has enabled Lao PDR to: gather experiences for application towards similar national and international large-scale assessments (Grade 5 Learning Assessment or ASLO in 2021 and PISA 2025); gain insights on Grade 5 children's proficiencies; utilise data captured towards the development of 5-year plan 2021-2025 and reporting against SDG 4; gather the snapshot of learning situation in Lao PDR before COVID-19 pandemic.

26 She concluded her message with the way forward for the Ministry of Education and Sports in Lao PDR on SEA-PLM which include: translate results from the Main Regional Report into local languages; disseminate the results at multiple levels, including the education conference for administrators, national and provincial assemblies, roundtable meeting involving government and development partners; and inform future research based on available results.

27 **Dr Habibah Abdul Rahim (Malaysia):** In this message, Dr Abdul Rahim specified the contributions from SEA-PLM 2019 to Malaysia, which are informing policymakers on future initiatives and research, as well as identifying best practices that can be locally adapted. SEA-PLM 2019 findings show that by the end of primary education, Malaysian Grade 5 children have a 58% reading proficiency level and 64% math proficiency level, signalling progress from the implementation of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025. However, a modest writing proficiency level shows that current teaching skills can be enhanced.

28 Dr Abdul Rahim reaffirmed the commitment of Malaysia to supporting international goals such as the SDG 4, as emphasised in SEA-PLM 2019, to ensure equitable and quality

education. The inclusion of the global citizenship domain in SEA-PLM 2019 is timely in responding to learning needs in an increasingly globalised world. The Malaysian Ministry of Education acknowledged suggestions from SEA-PLM 2019 and will continue to discuss ways of implementation in the areas of curriculum development, pedagogies, teacher education, and professional development. She ended her message by underlining the call for greater use of evidence to improve children learning outcomes.

- 29 **HE Dr Myo Thein Gyi (Myanmar):** His Excellency Dr Gyi started his message by introducing SEA-PLM as one of the two national sample base assessments in Myanmar besides EGRA/EGMA. As Myanmar undergoes ongoing education reform, results from SEA-PLM could be considered as the baseline for the new KG+12 new curriculum implementation. SEA-PLM could be used to enhance the national assessment policy guidelines launched by Myanmar's Ministry of Education.
- 30 Special recognition is given to ACER for assessing 5,715 primary 5 children in Myanmar across key domains of reading, writing, and mathematics literacy. Findings show that 1/3 of children do well as above average in mathematics, 1/4 of children do well as above average in reading, and 1 out of 5 perform well as above average in writing. Results of SEA-PLM 2019 can strengthen Myanmar's national education policy and system, as well as serve as useful evidence in the National Education Strategic Plan 2021-2030. Towards the end of his message, he stated that the Ministry of Education in Myanmar looked forward to continued collaboration to improving the learning outcomes of children in the region.
- 31 **HE Dr Leonor Magtolis Briones (Philippines):** Her Excellency Dr Briones introduced that SEA-PLM 2019 was regionally contextualised with consensus on the definition of 'literacy', which captured rich data on children's learning at home and in schools. Basic education quality improvement remains the biggest challenge in the Philippines and is the underlying reason for the country to join PISA in 2018, SEA-PLM and IEA in 2019, and TIMSS in 2019. Participation in these international assessments signals the Philippines' commitment to improving student outcomes and to having available data for further study on the quality of the Philippines' basic education to inform short- medium- and long-term policies.
- 32 SEA-PLM 2019 results on Grade 5 children will be used to complement PISA results in assessing 15-year-old students from the Philippines, as well as to deepen insights on the level of proficiencies, identify gaps, and understand ways to design effective and targeted interventions. Additionally, the results will be used to enhance curriculum review, teacher professional development, and improve the learning environment.
- 33 She ended her message with the way forward for the Philippines. The Philippines is committed to improving learning quality remains despite the COVID-19 pandemic. It will integrate SEA-PLM results into its broader education efforts. The Ministry of Education will streamline its participation in international large-scale assessment by primarily focusing on PISA and SEA-PLM. It will continue to contribute to SEA-PLM and hopes to benefit from quality programmes and partnerships derived from this regional collaboration.
- 34 **HE Dr Nguyen Van Phuc (Vietnam):** In this message, His Excellency Dr Phuc emphasised that participation in SEA-PLM demonstrated Vietnam's commitment to improving education. SEA-PLM provides an opportunity for Vietnam to integrate in regional education improvement efforts while strengthening its learning assessment systems and improves understanding of its current state of education for better education quality.

- 35 In SEA-PLM 2019, Vietnam's participation involved 150 schools, 832 teachers, 4,937 children, and 4,160 parents. With national averages of 6 out of 6 in reading literacy, 8 out of 9 in mathematics literacy, and 6 out of 8 in writing literacy, these achievements indicate high proficiencies in the key educational domains and use of mother tongue of children in Grade 5. Findings also show that the learning outcomes of females and males are equal in mathematics and reading literacies although females are shown to be more proficient in writing than males. Big gaps in learning outcomes remain for children in mountainous and remote areas.
- 36 Towards the end of his message, His Excellency Dr Phuc specified the way forward for the Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam in the short term and long term. In the short term, MOET will follow up on SEA-PLM 2019 results by organising workshops to discuss findings in mathematics, reading and writing, and global citizenship; identify strengths and weaknesses of Vietnamese children; focus on teaching practice; and innovate classroom testing and evaluation. Long term strategies include focusing on policies and development for children in mountainous areas; supporting ethnic children or those with difficult circumstances as well as parents in mountainous areas; greater investing in male children on their writing skills; designing materials; strengthening teaching methods; strengthening international and regional collaboration; developing modern evaluation system; and continuing further collaboration with SEA-PLM in following years.

1.5 Expert and partner messages: Implications of SEA-PLM 2019 results for policies, practices and research

Moderator:

- Mr Francisco Benavides, Regional Education Advisor, UNICEF EAPRO

Speakers:

- Dr Sylvia Montoya, Director, UNESCO Institute for Statistics
- Mr Jaime Saavedra, Global Director for Education, World Bank
- Mr Shigeru Aoyagi, Director, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

- 37 **Dr Sylvia Montoya (UNESCO Institute for Statistics):** Dr Montoya's presentation focused on how SEA-PLM 2019 results can be used to monitor the progress in Southeast Asia on SDG 4 (target 4.1, indicator 4.1.1) and to provide continuing support to countries in improving learning outcomes as they move towards 2030.
- 38 She highlighted the contribution from SEA-PLM 2019 to the definition of a comparable set of thematic indicators. It will join other reporting options for indicator 4.1.1 in assessing children learning by the end of primary education, including TIMSS & PIRLS, SACMEQ, PASEC. Being the first comparable national assessment with a focus on global citizenship education and is aligned with the SDG target 4.7, SEA-PLM could also contribute to expanding the use of its learning assessments to monitor and track different indicators of SDG 4, including mother tongue as the language of instruction (4.5.2), children experiencing bullying (4.a.2), teachers' in-service training (4.c.7), basic services offered by the school (4.a.1), and equity disaggregation related to gender, SES, and location (4.5.1).

- 39 **Mr Jaime Saavedra (World Bank):** In this message, Mr Saavedra stressed the current concern that children's learning outcomes and fundamental skills acquisition remain minimal comparing high enrolment in primary education. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the learning poverty indicator shows that only 53% of children in low and middle-income countries could understand basic texts by age 10. Post pandemic, there would be a further increase in learning poverty⁴ as 10 million children are at risk of dropping out of schools permanently (of which, 2.6 million children are from the Southeast Asia region). This would have an impact on children's productivity and lifetime earnings with losses in foregone earnings equating to US\$ 10 trillion or 10% global GDP. This pandemic has implications on education equity given the digital divide which is widening the gap of education between the rich and the poor.
- 40 Mr Saavedra emphasised a need to invest in multi-platform learning strategies, provide support to teachers by training them to effectively use digital tools as well as to improve their pedagogic skills to improve student-teacher interaction. He also stressed the increasingly important role of parents in education during the pandemic. As such, public policies should be geared towards supporting parents to facilitate the education process of children. There is a need for more equitable and resilient education systems to ensure continuity of learning between the school and home. For instance, the World Bank's Read at Home programme ensures that conditions at home are conducive to learning through the provision of reading materials. Strengthened political, financial, and managerial commitment is needed to improve learning outcomes to address this crisis.
- 41 **Mr Shigeru Aoyagi (UNESCO Bangkok):** Mr Aoyagi provided a congratulatory message to SEA-PLM Secretariat by introducing SEA-PLM as a commendable initiative, particularly its contribution in providing reliable data in the region and in achieving consensus among all participating member countries on the proficiency definitions.
- 42 He specified enormous challenges in the education sector. Among them is the limited progress towards SDG 4 considering the report of UN ESCAP that 617 million young children do not have basic proficiencies in reading and writing. There are also a number of out-of-school children. The ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out-of-School Children is an important milestone to address equity in education.
- 43 Mr Aoyagi acknowledged participating countries' achievements in the areas of teacher development and community preschools, 5-year education plan, and emphasis on 21st century skills. Results from SEA-PLM 2019 will contribute to upcoming efforts such as the UNESCO education minister conference in Asia-Pacific to produce a 5-year progress report on SDG 4. He also highlighted the importance of member countries in interpreting SEA-PLM data to improve education strategies and policies and his aspiration to see concrete country responses to SEA-PLM recommendations in the coming months.

⁴ Simulations by the World Bank shows that the learning poverty rate might increase by 10 points, from 53% to 63% in LMICs.

1.6 Next steps: Upcoming activities and next SEA-PLM round announcement

- Mr Antoine Marivin, SEA-PLM Programme Manager

- 44 Mr Marivin presented the way forward for SEA-PLM. Following the launch of the [SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report](#), which consists of a short executive summary with key messages from the report. It has 5 chapters on key results and findings, followed by 6 strategic recommendations on key policy actions. A more detailed executive summary will be released and sent to all participating countries. SEA-PLM 2019's regional database is publicly available, including test framework, examples of items, background questionnaires, regional database, and user manual.
- 45 In 2021, a series of policy dialogues, briefs and web articles will follow by featuring provisional thematic areas such as: equity related to gender; academic resilience for disadvantaged schools and children; teachers' profiles and specialisation; promoting global citizenship education across children and teachers; predictors of success such as pre-schooling participation and parental involvement; children wellbeing and school climate; children's voices on environmental issues and learning outcomes; and improved digital infrastructure in school and teacher preparedness in using digital teaching tools.
- 46 SEA-PLM 2019 results will inform planning for the next round of SEA-PLM 2023. In addition to the dissemination and utilisation of SEA-PLM 2019 results, preparation for the next round has already started and will require consultation, political will, funding, and technical commitment.
- 47 Towards the end of his presentation, he stated the following steps towards the development of SEA-PLM 2023:
- Obtain consensus among Southeast Asian countries and potential partners on participation modality for the next cycle 2021-2015;
 - Share call for participation with Southeast Asian countries in Q2 2021;
 - Invite regional and national partners for inputs to support countries in filling in gaps or resources;
 - Conduct the main survey at end of 2022-2023 academic year; and
 - Increase coordination and planning of SEA-PLM in national assessment strategy.

1.7 Closing remarks

- Mr Francisco Benavides, Regional Education Advisor, UNICEF EAPRO

Mr Benavides thanked all participants who attended the launch in-person and online. He emphasised the important role of countries in providing leadership on the next steps and reassured that the coordinated efforts can be counted on SEA-PLM Secretariat, co-chaired by SEAMEO and UNICEF EAPRO.

Policy Discussion on SEA-PLM 2019 Results: 2 December 2020

09.00 – 12.00 hours (Bangkok Time, GMT+7)
Online platforms (speakers – Zoom/non-speakers – YouTube Live)

2.1 Welcome remarks

- Dr Ethel Agnes Pascua-Valenzuela, Director, SEAMEO Secretariat

48 Dr Pascua-Valenzuela welcomed all delegates to the policy discussion on SEA-PLM 2019 results. This policy discussion is an initial effort among many more activities in 2021 to translate SEA-PLM 2019 results in more inclusive and greater learning outcomes for all children. As observed in the Main Regional Report, there are alarming trends of inequities and poor learning in the region with only 1 out of 3 Grade 5 children performing at the level expected of them in the early years of primary education.

49 To foster a systemic change to primary learning development, SEA-PLM provides opportunities for countries to participate in the assessment and inform on children's learning outcomes and develop evidence-based policy. It also builds the capacity of human resources to improve primary learning assessment systems to ensure each participating country can actively develop, implement, monitor and report the quality of learning at the national level.

50 She highlighted that SEA-PLM 2019 results specified challenges to children's learning and assessment systems development, which would allow us to better align curriculum and teaching pedagogy to ensure inclusive and quality education as enshrined in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community 2025 and the SDG 4.

51 Towards the end of her remarks, she expressed her appreciation to all national representatives including SEA-PLM technical teams, UNICEF country office focal points, ACER experts, Technical Advisory Group for validating the SEA-PLM technical standards and SEA-PLM Secretariat staff for the commitment and contribution to SEA-PLM.

2.2 SEA-PLM 2019 results in focus: Quality learning and equity outcomes

- Ms Jeaniene Spink, Research Director, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

52 Ms Spink's presentation focused on equity of learning outcomes, understanding context, and factors influencing student learning. SEA-PLM 2019 shows that there are significant disparities in learning outcomes across all countries and within each country. For interventions aimed at supporting educational improvement, social inequalities of learning provision must first be addressed. Questionnaires were developed for children, parents, schools, and teachers to understand learning provisions in the regional contexts. The following factors influencing children's learning are considered in SEA-PLM 2019:

Children's background such as *gender, age, school location, the language of instruction, preschool education, socioeconomic status (SES), repetition, and school readiness*. In all SEA-PLM 2019 participating countries, girls outperform boys in reading and writing. Similarly, in 3 out of 6 countries, girls also outperform boys in mathematics. Based on the SEA-PLM-developed index for each country, a substantial difference in learning outcomes by SES quartile⁵ across three domains of highest parental occupation, highest educational level of parents, and home resources is found in each

⁵ Children from higher SES backgrounds and those attending schools in wealthier neighborhoods performed better than children from less advantaged backgrounds.

country. Across all participating countries, children who attended at least 1 year of preschool education performed better than children who had not. There is a significant difference in most countries on the school readiness of children who are able to complete early language and mathematics tasks before entering primary education. The home environment may contribute to this difference. Additionally, children who spoke the language of instruction more often at home achieved a higher level of literacy in reading, writing, and mathematics than those who did not, except in the Philippines. In terms of grade repetition, approximately 1 in 5 children in SEA-PLM 2019 repeated a year of school by year 5, thus providing a worrying trend as children repeating a grade of school tends to perform worse than those who do not.

School environment such as *school size, school location, access to textbooks, and teacher preparation*. A majority of children are enrolled in schools consisting of 200-499 students. Students who attend larger schools tend to perform better, likely due to adequate school resources. Access to reading materials varies widely within a range from 0% to over 60% across countries. In terms of teacher preparation, there is also a huge variation within each country with some providing targeted pedagogical training during pre- and/or in-service training while some others do not provide it.

Attitudes to school such as *children's attitudes to school, parental engagement, and issues affecting the classroom*. 80% or more children had a positive attitude toward schools. 50% of parents motivate their children to succeed in school; however, a majority of parents do not engage in other activities to support their children (such as helping with homework or asking what children learn in school). Perceptions of children, school principals, and teachers were also asked to identify issues affecting children's learning in the classroom.

53 Addressing the learning gap for all children is a complex challenge and thus systematic approach is needed to address it. Ms Spink ended her presentation by underlining that SEA-PLM 2019 has suggested understanding factors influencing children's learning through a comparative perspective is a key starting point to reduce inequalities in basic education across Southeast Asia.

2.3 Turning results into actions: Round table comments and reflections

Moderator:

- Dr Ethel Agnes Pascua-Valenzuela, Director, SEAMEO Secretariat

Co-Moderators:

- Dr Wahyudi, Deputy Director (Programme and Development), SEAMEO Secretariat
- Dr Kritsachai Somsaman, Deputy Director (Administration and Communication), SEAMEO Secretariat

Speakers:

- Mr Ung Chinna, Director of Education Quality Assurance Department, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Cambodia
- Mr Kadam Vongdeuane, Director of Center for Educational Research and Evaluation, Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR
- Dr Haji Azhar Haji Ahmad, Director of Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education, Malaysia
- Mr Aung Htike, Deputy Director General of Department of Myanmar Examinations, Ministry of Education, Myanmar
- Dr Diosdado M. San Antonio, Undersecretary for Curriculum and Instruction, Department of Education, Philippines
- Dr My Ha Le Thi, Director of Center for Educational Quality Evaluation, Ministry of

Education and Training, Vietnam

- 54 **Mr Ung Chinna (Cambodia):** Mr Chinna began his presentation by highlighting that 76% and 64% of Cambodia's Grade 5 children had achieved the minimum SDG 4.1.1 proficiency levels in reading and mathematics expected of them by the end of primary education.
- 55 Based on SEA-PLM 2019 policy options suggested, Cambodia has come up with its dissemination plan as below.

No.	Activity	Level
1	SEA-PLM National Report Launching	National
2	Online dissemination via MoEYS website and facebook page	
3	Consult with technical departments and DPs on the SEA-PLM 2019 findings, mainly focusing on problematic areas. E.g. early childhood, primary education	
4	Discuss with Primary Education Department to improve the above problematic points. I.e. to enhance Early Grade Learnings (EGRA & EGM)	
5	Discuss with the Department of Curriculum Development on integration of Global Citizenship to national curriculum and textbooks	
6	Consult with Teacher Training institutions on how to use the SEA-PLM 2019 findings. E.g. quality of teachers=quality of students	
7	Consult with education inspectors in all 25 provinces on how to use the Sea-PLM 2019 findings	Sub-national
8	Develop SEA-PLM Sample Item Bank manual at the school level	School
9	Coach and mentor on use of SEA-PLM findings at the classroom level	

- 56 **Mr Kadam Vongdeuane (Lao PDR):** Mr Vongdeuane stated that the Ministry of Education and Sports in Lao PDR agreed with the SEA-PLM 2019 results pertaining to Lao PDR and will continue to learn from and progress based on the learnings.

- 57 The following are actions that will be undertaken:

No.	Activity	Level
1	Share and discuss SEA-PLM 2019 results on country learning outcomes compared to regional outcomes at the Lao PDR roundtable discussion. This is in relation to development of the 5-year Plan 2021-2025.	National
2	Share SEA-PLM results at the National Assembly of Lao PDR	
3	Disseminate results at the provincial and district levels	Sub-national
4	In-depth analysis of SEA-PLM 2019 database with collaboration from UNICEF Lao PDR	UNICEF
5	Develop SEA-PLM 2019 national version report in local language	

- 58 **Dr Haji Azhar Haji Ahmad (Malaysia):** Dr Ahmad indicated that Malaysia has a 96.7% of enrolment rate in primary education. Based on SEA-PLM 2019 results, 18% (Band 5) of Grade 5 children in Malaysia have achieved reading literacy skills in the language of instruction expected of them at the end of primary education. As for writing proficiency, a modest percentage (11%) of Malaysian Grade 5 children are in Bands 7 and 8, suggesting that these children may be able to have a well transition through to secondary education and are on the right track to meet the 21st century challenges. Furthermore, a majority of Malaysian Grade 5 children are in Band 6 and above and have achieved the mathematical literacy skills expected of them at the end of primary education.
- 59 Based on the SEA-PLM 2019 results, Malaysia would emphasise the use of digital platforms, online teaching and learning materials to enhance learning; provide a digital resources repository for teachers; focus on the role of parents in providing early foundational reading and writing skills to children; engage multiple teaching techniques to

enhance children’s learning interest (e.g. via role play, acting, and singing); strengthen in-house training or sharing session among teachers; and support children in developing higher-order thinking skills. SEA-PLM 2019 results have provided insights to Malaysia on further improving more activities related to global citizenship in schools.

60 The following are follow-up recommendations from Malaysia.

No.	Activity	Level
1	Implementation of Professional Learning Community is expanded to all schools	School
2	Strengthen differentiated learning in the classroom	
3	Focus on the problem and project-based learning as children further explore knowledge	
4	Continuous structured teacher’s professional development to improve teacher’s quality	
5	Raise quality of all preschools towards universal enrolment	
6	Share and disseminate findings with stakeholders with regard to curriculum, assessment, teacher education and pedagogy.	Various levels

61 **Mr Aung Htike (Myanmar):** Mr Htike shared reflections on the SEA-PLM 2019 results. SEA-PLM 2019 findings show that Grade 5 girls in Myanmar are more likely to perform better than boys in reading, writing, and mathematics. It would be useful to identify the reasons for this difference if it is due to teachers and/or gender tendencies. The insight on the language of instruction (in particular in the Philippines where children are still performing at high levels of reading, writing, mathematics proficiencies despite children not speaking the language of instruction at home), is a new lesson learned for Myanmar. Across the six participating countries, Myanmar has the highest number of children without preschool education (over 60%). This has implications for its newly introduced KG+12 education system.

62 Mr Htike also highlighted Myanmar’s initiative on better and safer schools through the Happy School Project’s development of a School Quality Assurance Standards Framework (SQASF) framework for learner well-being in the Asia-Pacific to promote learner well-being and prioritise the environment for better learning outcomes. Parental engagement in children’s learning is a continued emphasis in Myanmar, particularly through the introduction of parent teacher association.

63 SEA-PLM 2019 results show fewer ‘*chance and data*’ items in the lower proficiency levels of the mathematics proficiency scale. This may reflect that topics in this area are not taught to children as much as the other two mathematical strands.

64 **Dr Diosdado M. San Antonio (Philippines):** Based on the SEA-PLM 2019 results, Dr Antonio emphasised a need to increase efforts on quality enhancement in primary education in the Philippines. The Department of Education in the Philippines have launched a quality education programme with a focus on K-12 curriculum review and update; improvement of the learning environment (classrooms, learning materials, textbooks); upskilling of teachers and career advancement, in particular, pre-service teacher education should be made more relevant; and partner contributions to improving learning outcomes.

65 Equity is also another focus area where the Department of Education in the Philippines is intensifying efforts (e.g. through the ‘Every Child a Reader’ programme launched in 2019 to improve foundational proficiencies). Furthermore, there have been initiatives to improve teacher quality including recognition of teachers and school officials, as well as the creation of a circle of innovators for learning as a platform for teachers to demonstrate

best practices and inspire other fellow teachers. Blended learning efforts would also be sustained.

66 Additional follow-up actions are captured in the table below.

No.	Activity
1	Increase efforts on quality primary education
2	Enhance efforts on equity
3	Improve teacher quality
4	Sustain blended learning efforts
5	Conduct in-depth analysis of SEA-PLM 2019 for greater information on the schools and learners
6	Disseminate results and analysis to stakeholders
7	Conduct consultations with stakeholders to generate programmatic and strategic recommendations to improve the quality of primary education

67 **Dr My Ha Le Thi (Vietnam):** Vietnam's participation in SEA-PLM 2019 involved 150 schools, 832 teachers, 4,837 students, and 4,160 parents. In Vietnam, Grade 5 female children better than males in reading and writing proficiencies. Children in cities perform better than those in rural and remote areas given greater resources are available in the cities. Additionally, children with higher parents' qualifications such as parents with bachelor's degrees and above tend to perform better in reading, writing, and mathematics.

68 The following table details the SEA-PLM 2019 results dissemination plan in Vietnam:

No.	Activity	Level
1	SEA-PLM National Report outline	National team (completed)
2	Data-analysis to develop the national report	National team (in the process)
3	Organise seminars to research and discuss results in domains of Mathematics, Reading, Writing, and Global Citizenship to find out the strengths and weaknesses of Vietnamese children	
4	Identify the strengths and weaknesses of Vietnamese pupils about the SEA-PLM 2019 assessment to draw on the experience of SEA-PLM implementation in the following years	National team (December 2020)
5	Develop a national report	National (January-March 2021)
6	Discuss and revise the report	
7	Publish national report	MOET (April 2021)
8	Request schools to put SEA-PLM assessment into practice to innovate classroom testing and evaluation on a daily basis	MOET (next school years)
9	Create practical lessons to apply in teaching in Vietnamese schools	School level (next school years)

2.4 Insights from SEA-PLM partners

Moderator:

- Mr Francisco Benavides, Regional Education Advisor, UNICEF EAPRO

Speakers:

- Dr Sang-Jin Ban, President, Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI)
- Ms Kyungsuk Chang, Head of International Cooperation Division, Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE)
- Ms Ramya Vivekanandan, Senior Education Specialist, Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

69 **Dr Sang-Jin Ban (KEDI):** Recognising SEA-PLM 2019 as a milestone in establishing meaningful data of Southeast Asia to monitor primary students' learning outcomes, Dr Ban provided three key suggestions for SEA-PLM's consideration.

70 First, a *full understanding of the SES for the participating countries* is crucial, especially in reflecting similarities as well as differences stemming from local and cultural contexts. Second, the inclusion of the *global citizenship* dimension, in addition to reading, writing, and mathematical proficiencies, in SEA-PLM 2019 is commendable as it reflects the changing needs of children in the 21st century. Similarly, in Korea, results of a 2019 global competence survey with a focus on multicultural education and education for sustainable development was released in PISA this October 2020 and will inform the preparation of the next Korean education policy. It is suggested that SEA-PLM should emphasise the evaluation of global citizenship items in its 2019 results and set a specific plan towards policy implementation. Finally, the *SEA-PLM team could expand collaboration* with countries and organisations with relevant experiences. For instance, Korea has undergone radical social change and could serve as an example for Southeast Asian countries undergoing similar social and economic changes.

71 Dr Ban ended his message with a statement on the potential contribution of KEDI to SEA-PLM by stating that KEDI's experience in educational research in supporting policy implementation could benefit SEA-PLM in survey implementation, data analysis, development of educational policy, and finalisation of the report.

72 **Dr Ki-Sun Sung (KICE):** On behalf of Dr Ki-Sun Sung, KICE President, Ms Kyungsuk Chang shared four reflections on SEA-PLM 2019.

73 First, SEA-PLM 2019 has the potential to *supplement the reopening of schools post COVID-19* as countries plan for and implement different learning assessment strategies. SEA-PLM data can complement national or local assessment in monitoring system-wide learning losses as well as facilitate evidence-based decision making in determining children's learning trajectory prior to the pandemic.

74 Second, *differentiated strategies should be used to support low achieving children*. More focus should be put towards various angles of the SEA-PLM 2019 results to draw policy implications. It is essential to consider that there is no cure-all in supporting low achieving children but instead customised support at various layers of the socio-educational system is needed to improve learning outcomes.

75 Third, *advances in assessment tools are needed to reflect changes in the learning environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic*. Significant changes to education have been observed during the pandemic. As schools closed, actions to mitigate learning disruptions have been undertaken such as continuing education through various modalities of online learning platforms, television and radio, paper packets, while for some learning has

stopped altogether. SEA-PLM could reflect these changes to measure what it aims to do, by including items related to digital literacy in reading and writing, as well as the environment for online learning.

76 Finally, *SEA-PLM plays a role in regional assessment* for participating countries to monitor their education systems, facilitate evidence-based decision makings to support quality learning, and reach global goals, rather as a means to rank countries' achievements in any particular order. Ms Chang ended her message by stating the contribution of SEA-PLM to countries by providing an opportunity to collaborate by sharing experiences and gather expertise in the field.

77 **Ms Ramya Vivekanandan (GPE):** Ms Vivekanandan started her message by introducing GPE as a multi-stakeholder partnership to leverage global and national resources towards education for the poorest and most vulnerable children. GPE 2025 is a new strategy which focuses on quality education for every child with a goal to accelerate learning outcomes.

78 She highlighted that GPE 2025 priority areas align with SEA-PLM and include early learning and quality teaching. Currently, 87 countries are eligible for GPE's support in 2021-2025, including SEAMEO member countries which is inclusive of 5 SEA-PLM participating countries including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, and Vietnam.

79 Ms Vivekanandan shared perspectives on SEA-PLM commending it as a state-of-the-art assessment programme, in particular, this is the first ever cross-national learning assessment in the region and for the writing domain. SEA-PLM includes the global citizenship domain (the new GPE strategy also has this emphasis), collected comprehensive background information from students to parents, and aligns with SDG 4.1.1a by the end of lower primary and 4.1.1b by the end of primary. She commented on the contributions of SEA-PLM to allowing participating countries to easily report on indicators and its actionable policy recommendations, many of which are aligned with the priorities of GPE.

80 In terms of SEA-PLM 2019 results, greater progress is needed to improve learning outcomes, significant variation is observed on the performance across the six participating countries, and Grade 5 children seem to have a better grasp of local issues than of regional and global ones. Recommendations from SEA-PLM 2019 is aligned with GPE's priorities are captured in the figure below.



81 Towards the end of her message, she suggested the following next steps and implications.

- Making sure that SEA-PLM results are widely disseminated at the national level in 6 countries;
- As part of the above, ensuring that the results are also explicitly discussed in each country's Local Education Group (LEG) in order to inform policy dialogue, including sector analysis, planning, implementation and monitoring;
- Working to guarantee that the data is used for regional and global reporting purposes. E.g. in SDG 4.1.1 reporting, regional SDG 4 progress;
- Continued dialogue between countries on the basis of these findings. GPE's Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) can and should be mobilised for this purpose as well as for research through KIX EAP Regional Hub coordinated by The Network for International and Cooperation in Education and Training (NORRAG) and ACER.
- GPE wishes to deepen advocacy and technical relationship with SEAMEO to drive a step-change in addressing the learning crisis. E.g. participation in High Officials Meeting. SEA-PLM is a component of this.

2.5 Closing remarks

- Mr Marcoluigi Corsi, Deputy Regional Director, UNICEF EAPRO

82 Mr Corsi started his remarks by showing his appreciation that key findings of SEA-PLM 2019 on reading, writing, mathematics, and global citizenship were explored during this event. He stressed that there are significant inequities and low performance in certain groups of children as identified by the SEA-PLM 2019 proficiency scales. In some countries, only 10% of the children reach the minimum proficiencies suggested in SDG 4.1. He was delighted that ministers, technical teams, and key partners have shared their insights as well as specific actions on how SEA-PLM 2019 results and database can be used.

83 In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr Corsi believed that the revision of priorities in light of the SEA-PLM data would be even more relevant. In 2021, SEA-PLM will provide a platform for participating countries to define and confirm key priorities and strategies as countries share their SEA-PLM reports, thematic spotlights, national debates, and action plans. Mr Corsi concluded his remarks by extending his appreciation on behalf of the SEAMEO-Secretariat and UNICEF EAPRO to all participants, speakers, SEA-PLM technical teams, ACER, partners, and UNICEF country offices. He reaffirmed that UNICEF will continue to support countries to ensure that every child in the region has strong foundational learning.

84 For more information, please visit the [SEA-PLM official website](#) and download the [SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report](#).

Annex 1: Event agenda

Programmeme at a Glance

As of 30 November 2020

Official Launch of SEA-PLM 2019 Results

Tuesday 1 December 2020 at 08.30-12.00hrs. (GMT+7: Bangkok Time)

Carlton Grand Ballroom 2, Carlton Hotel Bangkok Sukhumvit, Thailand

Online Platform (Speakers: Zoom/Non-Speakers: YouTube Live)

TIME	SESSION
08.30 – 09.00	Registration
09.00 – 09.15	Welcome Remarks
09.15 – 09.20	SEA-PLM Introduction
09.20 – 09.30	Official Launch of SEA-PLM 2019 Results and Photo Session
09.30 – 10.00	Key Regional Trends and Policy Implications From SEA-PLM 2019 Results
10.00 – 10.45	Ministerial Messages on SEA-PLM 2019 National Results and Policy Responses
10.45 – 11.00	Refreshments
11.00 – 11.40	Expert and Partner Messages: Implications of SEA-PLM 2019 Results for Policies, Practices and Research
11.40 – 11.50	Next Steps: Upcoming Activities and Next SEA-PLM Round Announcement
11.50 – 12.00	Closing Remarks
12.00 – 14.00	Lunch (Carlton Grand Ballroom 1)

Policy Discussion on SEA-PLM 2019 Results

Wednesday 2 December 2020 at 09.00 - 12.00hrs. (GMT+7: Bangkok Time)

Online Platform (Speakers: Zoom/Non-Speakers: YouTube Live)

TIME	SESSION
09.00 – 09.15	Welcome Remarks and Photo Session
09.15 – 09.45	SEA-PLM 2019 Results in Focus: Quality Learning and Equity Outcomes
09.45 – 10.45	Turning Results into Actions: Round Table Comments and Reflections
10.45 – 11.00	Refreshments
11.00 – 11.45	Insights From SEA-PLM Partners
11.45 – 12.00	Closing Remarks

Annex 2: List of participants

A: SEA-PLM Participating Countries

- | | |
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