

TVET in the Context of Southeast Asia's Regional Integration: SEAMEO's Response

**Keynote Speech
Witaya Jeradechakul
SEAMEO Secretariat Director**

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sawadee krub! Good morning.

My warmest greetings to all the guests in this Conference.

First allow me to express my appreciation and high commendation on the establishment of the Regional Cooperation Platform on Vocational Teacher Education in Asia (or RCP) as a platform for systematic exchanges on reforms for technical and vocational education and training (TVET). RCP filled up a significant gap in the region – that of a venue for TVET educators, universities and technical education institutions to cooperate, collaborate and integrate in advancing TVET systems in Asia.

Indeed, it is an honor that the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education (SEAMEO), through SEAMEO VOCTECH, is an active member education institution of RCP. I think of myself as 'a privileged one' to have been given the opportunity to speak on behalf of SEAMEO on the Organization's efforts on the aspect of TVET and human resource development in Southeast Asia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you know, the Southeast Asia has a goal of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by 2015. AEC will create a more efficient, integrated, and competitive economic environment within the ASEAN region. The sweeping changes that will be brought on by the AEC 2015 will impact the existing economic environment in significant ways, and will also impact the way the national governments, business companies, education institutions and organizations conduct their operations. As such, the AEC also has important ramifications for the way ASEAN is educating its students – students whose entire careers will take place under this new AEC environment.

In response, countries in Southeast Asia have undertaken a number of reforms in their training and education systems; most notable of which its' 're-shifting' to training and education priorities that relate to work productivity, a greater focus on providing skills and training and practical work experience to the students/youth. I call it 're-shifting' the agenda to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) because Southeast Asia is in fact merely revitalizing their efforts on TVET for the region long realized the vast potential of TVET to alleviate poverty and bring national and regional economic advantage through better and gainful employment of the youth and labour force.

Now with the growing awareness of how TVET can potentially bring new skills that will be crucial in facilitating regionalization and internationalization, countries in Southeast Asia has reinforced its efforts to improve their respective TVET systems with special emphasis on improving the quality of vocational teacher education.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Reports and literatures on TVET over the years have centered on discussions of a number of issues that continue to haunt TVET systems and with the onset of globalization, emerging issues and new trends have surfaced that the many countries around the world may find to be quite a challenge. Since I am in the company today of many experts here on TVET, I am quite sure that you all may be more familiar on these issues than I am; but allow me to just touch on briefly on four major issues that are most pressing at the regional level, from the perspective of a person who works for a regional, inter-governmental organization such as SEAMEO:

1. Improving the quality of TVET systems and establishment of national and regional qualification frameworks on TVET (systems change)
2. Guaranteeing evidence-based TVET planning and adequate national financing of TVET initiatives (management change)
3. Ensuring the relevance of TVET curriculum to industry needs through education agency-industry collaboration (curricular change)
4. Encouraging national governments to put greater focus on quality of vocational teacher training (content change)

Taken together, all these four major issues will respond to the Southeast Asia's agenda of increasing its labor force competitiveness; and facilitate greater student and labor mobility within the region and beyond.

[1. Improving the quality of TVET systems and establishment of national and regional qualification frameworks on TVET (systems change)]

Countries have their own established mechanisms on ensuring quality of its TVET content and delivery. TVET standards, self-assessment and accreditation systems of one country though does not guarantee recognition of TVET qualifications in other countries – thus limiting workers' employment or career opportunities and hampering labor mobility.

[2. Guaranteeing evidence-based TVET planning and adequate national financing of TVET initiatives (management change)]

Typically, TVET programmes are delivered in various ministries or national agencies in the countries targeting different participants and vocational sectors. With TVET programme delivery lodged in different national agencies more often than not agencies conduct their TVET planning independently of each other; relying only on data that they have access to and utilizing on their respective data from their monitoring of the effectiveness and quality of their TVET initiatives. When planning for TVET initiatives, policy-makers and decision-makers should be able to make informed decisions based from evidence-based information, likewise for them to be able to allot sufficient funding for the TVET programmes.

[3. Ensuring the relevance of TVET curriculum to industry needs through education agency-industry collaboration (curricular change)]

If you are abreast of the current news in the region, generally reports state stable, minimal economic growth of SEA. However, despite positive economic outlook, employment opportunities or job growth remain low while employable population continues to grow. Job-skills mismatch remains to be a problem. More and more though, countries are becoming aware

of the need to bring TVET more in line with the changing requirements of the labor market at the country, regional and even international level.

[4. Encouraging national governments to put greater focus on quality of vocational teacher education training (content change)]

Admittedly, priorities for education and training in SEA countries are on universal basic education. Training for teachers who specializes on vocational skills development and integration of disciplined work habits in the school curricula is secondary priorities, if not the least. The nature of vocational teacher training is occupation-specific, rather than training teachers on teaching employable skills that will enable their students to transfer jobs from related area in business or industry.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These TVET issues and trends are what are most commonly being discussed in numerous regional meetings and education summits.

For SEAMEO, these issues are at the heart of our efforts on nurturing human capacities and upgrading manpower competencies. The SEAMEO way is through education and human resource development (HRD). For those who don't know SEAMEO yet, is an inter-governmental organization of 11 Southeast Asia countries. SEAMEO aims to explore and strengthen the fullest potential of the peoples of the Southeast Asia region - by means of: (1) development of programmes that address national and regional issues; (2) establishing networks and partnerships on education, science and culture; and (3) provision of fora among policy makers and experts.

SEAMEO utilizes a holistic, integrated approach in introducing and implementing reforms; targeting aspects of: (1) system change; (2) management change; (3) content change and (4) curricular change. SEAMEO works with the 11 national governments to influence policy changes, but SEAMEO, through its 21 SEAMEO Centres also work at the practitioner level where direct practical application is expected.

To illustrate this holistic approach, for the advancement of TVET, SEAMEO is responding to all four major issues I have just enumerated/discussed:

- For instance, in improving the quality of TVET – TVET systems has to be reformed and countries will need to **change or enhance their system** of quality assuring their TVET policies and programmes. National qualification framework should align to international standards on TVET so that qualifications issued in one country will be recognized within the SEA region. SEAMEO, through SEAMEO RIHED, has been working with ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN University Network in the development and implementation of Regional Qualification Framework (RQF) in Southeast Asia.

Through SEAMEO VOCTECH, SEAMEO has actively contributed to the initial development of ASEAN RQF in TVET. SEAMEO VOCTECH in fact highly active in enhancing skills recognition and accreditation in Southeast Asia, of which the Centre has undertaken the *Project on Enhancing Skills Recognition and Accreditation (SRA) in CMLV Countries* and contributed to the development of the Roadmap of Regional Qualification Framework and Skills Recognition.

- To introduce **change in the management** of TVET systems, SEAMEO is influencing national governments to put greater emphasis on TVET policy planning and adequate financing of TVET initiatives. Countries will need reliable, up-to-date data for policymakers to make well-informed decisions. SEAMEO has set up the SEAMEO

Database on Education, which intends to provide SEAMEO Member Countries with reliable, updated education data that will facilitate, better planning for TVET programmes.

Through various SEAMEO fora, meetings and policy dialogues, SEAMEO advocates for the SEA countries to prioritize TVET agenda in planning and correspondingly, financing TVET.

- In terms of **curricular change** in TVET, SEAMEO is a champion of greater partnership between national agencies/education institutions and industry sector to address the issue of skills gap and job-skills mismatch. Industry participation is significant in the development of apprenticeship program and integration of on-the-job training industry training for TVET students. SEAMEO through SEAMEO VOCTECH offers training programs on the development of TVET curricula that are both competency-based and responsive to labor market needs.

SEAMEO through SEAMEO College, intends to conduct manpower demand forecast studies or labor supply-demand gap studies so that the region will have a better sense of employment trends and opportunities and thus enabling the countries to adopt interventions that would ensure responsiveness of labor force to the employment market.

- Through a number of capacity building programmes, SEAMEO is promoting a **change in content** and approach of the countries in their development and conduct of teacher training. Particularly for TVET, SEAMEO VOCTECH, has over the years offer a wide variety of regular and special TVET teacher training programmes that are labor market-driven and multi-skilled-oriented.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These are but a few of how SEAMEO has been responding and is continuously responding to emerging issues and trends on TVET and HRD in general. I may not have mentioned the numerous programmes and its details but SEAMEO VOCTECH, in the course of this conference may be able to provide more updated information on TVET initiatives of SEAMEO. Particularly, one can avail and access latest reports and research literatures on TVET from SEAMEO VOCTECH's regular publication of the SEAMEO VOCTECH Journal.

Ladies and gentlemen,

SEAMEO has long ago found its niche in the region - serving as the lead service provider for HRD and setting the pace for education research and innovative programmes in education, science and culture.

SEAMEO continue to introduce new ways, new platforms and new thinking in the region. A few of these 'new ways', 'new thinking' relate to establishing innovative platforms for open dialogues/discussions and promote cooperation among national governments, education institutions, business and industry, regional and international organizations in the region:

- **Through the creation of SEAMEO College**, SEAMEO will provide a regional platform that will offer policy discourse and cooperation mechanism on regional, trans-boundary issues that relate to education and human resource development in Southeast Asia.

- **Regional Discussions on for the Development of Post-2015 Education Agenda in Southeast Asia.** SEAMEO intends to conduct foresight study applying futuristic methodology to find out possible and preferable depiction of the Post-2015 education in Southeast Asia. SEAMEO will bring together different stakeholders and discuss about the most appropriate education agenda in Southeast Asia beyond 2015, particularly taking into consideration the region's unique needs and context.
- In SEAMEO's conduct of **SEAMEO Congress** in 2014, one of the themes will be a focus on bridging skills gap in the region. The SEAMEO Congress will bring together education-industry-international organizations to draw their views and experiences on education-business alliances or education-business-international organization cooperation models that could potentially address the demands of regional integration to TVET and to education in general.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I cannot emphasize often enough the significance of regional cooperation on education. As one of SEAMEO's core competencies - establishing partnerships and collaborations with different partners in the region and beyond- I strongly believe that only through collaborative efforts and shared goal that reforms in TVET can be move forward; and only through education and human resource development that Southeast Asia can attain its goal to be regionally and internationally competitive and successfully integrated as one Southeast Asian/ASEAN Region.

Thank you very much. Khob Khun Krub!