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Education is also the key to our work to translate into reality the Millennium Development Goals, the blueprint agreed by all the world's Governments for building a better world in the 21st century.

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General
Message to the World Congress of Education International, 2005

...We believe in the importance of lifelong learning, from early childhood development to primary, secondary and university education and for people to continue to learn in a world where knowledge has become a key ingredient for countries to grow and compete.

Jean-Louis Sarbib, Senior Vice-President,
World Bank, 2005

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In recognition of the importance of regional co-operation in facilitating development in general and Education, Science and Culture in particular, the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) was established to promote regional cooperation for human resource development in Asia. Since 1965, SEAMEO, through its various regional centers, spread across 10 member countries, has successfully explored the fullest potentials of people in the region through quality and equity in education, preventive health, culture and tradition, training, research, information and communications technology, languages, poverty alleviation, and agricultural natural resources. Today, SEAMEO is not only the oldest chartered intergovernmental organization serving the Southeast Asian region but also the Southeast Asia’s largest, longest existing, and most dependable provider in human resource development. This issue of Digital Learning profiles SEAMEO and its outstanding presence in Southeast Asia.

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) is an international and intergovernmental organization established in 1965 to promote regional cooperation in education, science, and culture. Its 10 Member Countries include Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. It embodies 7 Associate Member Countries: Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Norway; and one Affiliate Member, the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE).

**Organizational structure**

The SEAMEO Council, the Organization’s governing body, is composed of the 10 ministers of education of the SEAMEO Member Countries. The Council determines the general policies and strategic directions of the organization. The SEAMEO Secretariat, based in Bangkok, Thailand, is the headquarters and executive arm of the Council.

### SEAMEO Secretariat

The SEAMEO Secretariat is the executive arm of the SEAMEO Council and the Headquarters of the Organization. Based in Bangkok, Thailand, the Secretariat is headed by a Director who is the legal and administrative representative of the Organization. The Director is supported by a team of professional staff recruited from member countries and a group of general staff from the host country.

The primary functions of the SEAMEO Secretariat are to:
- execute the instructions and decisions of the SEAMEO Council
- convene the key meetings of the Organization: the Centre Directors Meeting (CDM), the High Officials Meeting (HOM) and the SEAMEO Council Conference (SEAMEC)
- present the recommendations of the SEAMEO Centres from the CDM to the HOM for endorsement of the Council
- liaise between the Council and the SEAMEO Centres
- coordinate activities and facilitate cooperation among SEAMEO Member Countries, SEAMEO Centres, partners and institutions
- develop membership, raise and manage funds, execute public relations, disseminate information, organise special project and develop project proposals on behalf of the Organization.

### SEAMEO regional centers

Over the past three decades, SEAMEO has developed 15 specialist institutions in 8 of its 10 Member Countries that provide regional leadership in human resource development and the diverse expertise that they offer in learning, health and environment, and agriculture and natural resources. These centres are closely linked with the educational environment of the country hosting
them. Each Centre has its own governing board with a representative from each Member Country.

The Regional Centres maintain SEAMEO’s work and aspirations to nurture human capacities and explore the fullest potentials of people in the region through quality and equity in education, preventive health, culture and tradition, training, research, information and communications technology, languages, poverty alleviation, and agricultural natural resources.

Since its inception, the SEAMEO has not only become the oldest chartered intergovernmental organization serving the Southeast Asian region but also the Southeast Asia’s largest, longest existing, and most dependable provider in human resource development.

**SEAMEO regional centres**

The SEAMEO has 15 specialist institutions that undertake training and research programs in various fields of education, science and culture. Each Regional Centre has a Governing Board composed of senior education officials from each Member Country. The Governing Board reviews the Centres’ operations and budget and sets their policies and programmes.

**Programmes of the SEAMEO Secretariat**

**Community Involvement Project** – The Secretariat coordinates with the SEAMEO Centres in sharing expertise in education, science and culture with selected schools in SEAMEO Member Countries to improve school systems and to help schools achieve sustainability, focusing on students, teachers, learning facilities, school management and parents’ involvement.

**Conferences** – The Secretariat organises joint seminars and workshops integrating various interests in education, science and culture.

**Information Dissemination** – The Secretariat compiles and updates information about the Organization and coordinates with the entire SEAMEO network and beyond Southeast Asia in information exchange.

**Internship** – Coordinates with organisations and governments from around the world in developing the skills of young people in professional work, especially attaining international work experience.

**Partnerships** – Establishes relations with local, national and international organizations, institutions and individuals with interest in education in Southeast Asia to provide venue for foreign cooperation and educational innovation and excellence.

**Press Awards** – The SEAMEO-Australia Press Award is given annually to print journalists in the region to recognize excellence in the coverage of education; cooperation between the SEAMEO and the Government of Australia and in coordination with the University of Melbourne and its Asia Link Centre.

**Research Fellowships** – The SEAMEO-Jasper Research Award is an annual grant bestowed by the Government of Canada and the SEAMEO for outstanding research conducted by SEAMEO Member

**Area of specialization**

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Photograph by Rachan Woramunee, Publications Officer, SEAMEO secretariat
SEAMEO Regional Centre for Innovation and Technology (INNOTECH)

The SEAMEO Regional Centre for Innovation and Technology (INNOTECH), based in the Philippines, is principally dedicated to identifying common and unique education problems and needs of Southeast Asian countries and developing innovative and technology-based solutions to address these problems. With a vision to be the preferred education solution provider in Southeast Asia, the Centre aids in educational development within and outside the region through training and human resource development, research and evaluation, information and communications technology and other special programs addressing specific areas of concern in the Southeast Asian educational scenario.

SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Centre’s (SEAMOLEC)

The SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Centre’s mission is to assist SEAMEO Member Countries in identifying educational problems and finding alternative solutions for sustainable human resource development through dissemination and effective use of open learning and distance education.

SEAMOLEC was established with the conviction that conventional schools alone will not be able to meet the “education for all” goals, and distance learning programmes would be required to meet the gap. Thus open and distance learning was to complement, supplement, or substitute conventional classroom instruction. Following this, several SEAMEO member countries had implemented open and distance learning programs as alternative ways for increasing the opportunities and access for learners to participate in educational/training programs.
SEAMEO Regional Centres

SEAMEO Regional Centre for History and Tradition
Based in Myanmar, the SEAMEO CHAT was inaugurated December 2000, making it SEAMEO's newest Centre of Excellence. It promotes cooperation in the study of history and tradition among member countries through research, human resource development, education and networking.

SEAMEO Regional Training Centre
Located in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, the SEAMEO RETRAC assists SEAMEO Member Countries especially the three Indochina countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam) to identify and solve common problems in human resource development. Its area of specialization is educational management.

SEAMEO Regional Centre for Science and Mathematics
Established on the island state of Penang, Malaysia, the SEAMEO RECSAM is designed to meet the needs of the SEAMEO Member Countries in developing science, mathematics and technology education programmes.

SEAMEO Regional Centre for Vocational and Technical Education and Training
Located in Indonesia, the SEAMEO SEAMOLEC assists SEAMEO Member Countries in identifying educational problems and finding alternative solutions for sustainable human resource development through the dissemination and effective use of open learning and distance education.

SEAMEO Regional Centre for Innovation and Technology
Based in the Philippines, the SEAMEO INNOTECH initiates and disseminates innovative and technology-oriented educational programmes that help SEAMEO Member Countries identify and solve common or unique educational problems and address anticipated needs.

SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development
Hosted by the Government of Thailand, the SEAMEO RIHED plays a crucial role in the capability building of Member Countries in the field of higher education. It responds to needs on policy and planning, administration and management of higher education.

SEAMEO Tropical Medicine and Public Health Network
SEAMEO TROPHEM Regional Centre for Public Health
SEAMEO Tropical Medicine and Public Health Network
SEAMEO TROPHEM Regional Centre for Community Nutrition
Dr. Edilberto C. de Jesus, Director of the SEAMEO Secretariat, assumed office at the start of 2005. Previously, he was the SEAMEO Council President from 2003 to 2004, while he was also the Secretary of the Department of Education in Philippines. The Director is committed to promoting the role in SEAMEO in strengthening education in Asia.

What is SEAMEO’s mission and priority area of work?

The Charter states that SEAMEO’s mandate is “to promote cooperation among the Southeast Asian nations through education, science and culture in order to further respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are the birthrights of the peoples of the world.” In terms of priorities, many member countries are still focused on attaining the EFA and MDG targets within the 2015 deadline, if not sooner.

What are the most pressing educational challenges facing Thailand at the present time?

In terms of access to elementary education, Thailand is focused on reaching the last 5% to 10% of the school-age population not yet covered by the formal education system. At the same time, like many middle-income countries, it has to cope with the growing demand for post-secondary education, even as it addresses the concern of raising the quality of the educational services it delivers.

Do you believe new technologies have transformative power for education in developing countries?

Governments in the region are hoping that the progress in ICT will enable their countries improve both access to, as well as quality of, educational services. It certainly makes sense to explore the potential of open and distance learning systems for bringing education to communities in far-flung areas or those rendered less accessible by peace and order problems. ICT can provide powerful learning tools, but governments must invest the resources, not only to purchase the tools, but also to provide the training for their effective use.

What is SEAMEO’s vision for education in Thailand?

The same as its vision for the other countries of the region: that the educational system provides the human resources it needs for the development of a prosperous, democratic and caring society.

How has SEAMEO aimed to fulfill the UN Millennium Development Goals particularly in providing ‘Education for All’?

Through its network of 12 Regional Centres, hosted by eight of the Member Countries, SEAMEO can deploy resources at ground level to help ministries of education in the implementation of their EFA/MDG programs. The annual ministerial council meeting provides a forum for policy discussion and a platform for regional collaboration. A regional perspective helps in uncovering policy inconsistencies, identifying dead-ends and best practices, and disseminating innovative projects.

What role has SEAMEO played in introducing learning technologies for expanding the quality and reach of education in Thailand?

An example is the SEAMEO Regional Centre Tropical Medicine (TROPMED)’s use of ICT in HIV/AIDS preventive education. This project has two development goals: (i) reduce incidence of HIV/AIDS infection among vulnerable age groups, poor and marginalized population groups; and (ii) expand the use of ICT and other multimedia technologies in HIV/AIDS preventive education by building the capacity of teachers, health workers, and other stakeholders in using the technology. The project develops ICT HIV/AIDS learning materials in local languages and delivers ICT-based interventions to isolated, marginalized, and vulnerable populations.

What have been the goals and achievements of the SEAMEO IT Development Taskforce with respect to education?

The Regional Centres all aspire to expand the use of IT as a tool to achieve learning objectives. The SEAMEO Regional Language Centre
in Singapore, for instance, runs the SEAMEO Regional Schools Internet Project. The Project allows students to interact electronically through the web pages they create. Through its web-based learning and interaction programmes, the SEAMEO RELC reinforces the use of English among the participants. RLC also manages a virtual forum for English language teachers and linguists in the region for the exchange of ideas in their field.

How do you see Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as delivery mechanisms for non-formal education?

The potential is there, but organizing the target participants and developing the delivery system will require a lot of work.

What is the penetration of e-learning in Thailand?

E-learning has been introduced and implemented at all levels of education in Thailand during this decade to support the formal education system. The Thai government promotes e-learning by making available to the schools ICT equipment and facilities. It offers soft loans for staff and students to acquire personal computers and provides tertiary education with the infrastructure for internet networking.

Globalization is presenting new challenges and opportunities for students and educators. What role is SEAMEO playing in harnessing the opportunities of globalization for education?

The globalization of education, understood as the delivery of learning programs across national boundaries, can help countries meet the rising demand for post-secondary education among their population. To benefit from the availability of cross-border educational programs, governments must establish the quality assurance systems to protect consumers from diploma mill operations.

What is your view of the growing liberalization of higher education? What is its impact on Thailand?

The Government has established two Open Universities to give both high school and vocational school graduates and working adults a chance to pursue tertiary education. In recent years also, enrollment in private colleges and universities has surged in Thailand and now accounts for about half of the tertiary education sector population. Thailand has also taken major steps towards providing greater autonomy to public institutions of higher learning. These trends will reinforce the need for strong quality assurance systems.

Last year SEAMEO signed an MOU with Microsoft in 2005. How does SEAMEO see public-private partnership as a means for achieving the National Education goals? Could you elaborate the framework of partnership between SEAMEO and Microsoft?

Governments in the region have come to recognize that their resources are inadequate to meet the growing demand for education at both basic and tertiary levels. The private sector, which needs a steady flow of human talent to staff its operations, has also accepted this reality. It is to the private sector’s interest to help government develop the country’s human resources. A public-private partnership to achieve national education goals works to the benefit of both parties.

Through the web-based Innovative Teachers Network, Microsoft provides to SEAMEO Member Countries a communications platform that enables teachers to work together in the enhancement of their professional skills. The system allows access to networks within their respective countries and across the globe. In the Partners-in-Learning Programme, Microsoft provides affordable desktop tools and licensing for primary and secondary schools using donated computers and free upgrades, student skills assessment and high quality curriculum for teacher training. The facility the system provides to communicate with students, parents and other stakeholders also help teachers in the performance of their classroom tasks.

SEAMEO has a strong presence in Southeast Asian countries. How is SEAMEO strengthening its existing partnerships and exploring new opportunities in these countries?

SEAMEO, through its network of 12 Centres, does have a presence on the ground. The SEAMEO Regional Centres work across all ten of the ASEAN countries. SEAMEO is focusing on regional projects and has been expanding partnerships with international development agencies, such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UN-HABITAT, the ADB and the World Bank, that share its concern for the development of education, science and culture in the region. In the last few years, it has also pushed a process to establish closer linkages with ASEAN.

How has SEAMEO provided regional leadership for human resource development in the field of education?

SEAMEO is in a unique position to provide this regional leadership on education. Only the ministries of education have the structure and organization, maintained successfully over more than 40 years, that potentially allow for intervention at both the policy and project level on a sustained and coordinated basis.

How would you like to see Thailand with respect to its human resource in 2015?

Thailand, by 2015, would have achieved the EFA and MDG targets, raised the tertiary-level enrollment, and demonstrably improved the quality of educational services in both basic and higher education systems.