

SEAMEO as an Example of Effective Regional Cooperation in Education

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Introduction

Effectiveness relates to the capability of producing a desired result. Thus, effectiveness for educational cooperation must necessarily relate to the desired result as jointly decided upon by the parties involved. One of the main issues in any discussion about aid effectiveness relates to the possible conditions that would contribute to effective educational cooperation. To further examine how this effectiveness can be operationalised, this paper proposes to look at the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) as an example of an effective regional cooperation in the field of education.

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization

SEAMEO was established on 30 November 1965 as a chartered international organization with the aim of promoting cooperation through education, science and culture in the Southeast Asian region in order to further respect for justice, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedom. In order to meet this goal, SEAMEO has focused on capacity-building and seeks to develop the full potential of the citizens of the region. This is done to raise the standard of living through enhancing quality and equity in several key areas, namely education, preventive health education, culture and tradition, information and communication technology, languages, poverty alleviation, agriculture and natural resources.

The SEAMEO Community

The original founding member states were Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and the then Republic of (South) Vietnam. Since its inception, SEAMEO has continued to grow and by 2010 consists of eleven member countries, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste and Viet Nam.

In addition to the member states, SEAMEO incorporates Associate Member Countries. The Associate Member Countries extend their cooperation to SEAMEO member countries through programs jointly developed either bilaterally or multilaterally with the member states. As of 2011, there are seven Associate Member Countries, namely Australia, Canada, France, Germany, The Netherlands, New Zealand and Spain.

Further, the idea of Affiliate Members was mooted in 1983 to include semi-governmental and non-governmental organizations which were interested to extend cooperation to SEAMEO. As of 2011 there are three Affiliate Members of SEAMEO: the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), the University of Tsukuba, and the British Council.

Although not an Associate member, Japan has also extended cooperation with SEAMEO as a Partner Country since the 1970s.

SEAMEO Council

The SEAMEO Council is the highest policy-making body in the organization and consists of the Ministers of Education of the member countries. The Council meets annually at the SEAMEO Council Conference to:

- discuss policy and regional initiatives
- set directions for programs and projects of SEAMEO and its Units
- review programs and activities of the organization

Normally, the representatives from the Associate Member Countries, the Affiliate Members and other interested organizations also send representatives to attend the SEAMEO Council Conference.

SEAMEO Secretariat

The SEAMEO Secretariat serves as the executive arm of the organization as well as its headquarters. It undertakes to carry out the policies drafted by the SEAMEO Council and to co-ordinate the activities and programs of the SEAMEO Centres.

SEAMEO Centres

One important feature in the setup of SEAMEO is the establishment of SEAMEO Centres. These Centres are 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 SEAMEO Member Country. The Governing Board reviews the Centres' operations and budget and sets their policies and programmes. At present, there are 20 SEAMEO centres located in the various member countries.

One unique feature of educational cooperation in SEAMEO is that the SEAMEO Centres are set-up, managed and funded by respective member countries, each with a niche area of expertise. Training and other activities are conducted for the benefit of all member countries. Inter-centre activities are also carried out to promote cooperation among the Centres.

The following section describes the set-up and the activities of one of the SEAMEO Centres to further elaborate how co-operation within SEAMEO is accomplished.

SEAMEO RECSAM

The SEAMEO Regional Centre for Education in Science and Mathematics (RECSAM) was of the earliest centres to be established under SEAMEO in 1967. RECSAM's mandate is to improve science and mathematics education in Southeast Asia.

The main foci of the Centre's programs are in training and research. Three main types of training courses are conducted: Regular Courses (conducted at the Centre primarily for participants from SEAMEO member countries), In-Country Courses (conducted in SEAMEO member countries upon their request), and Customised Courses (specially tailored courses that are conducted at the request of sponsoring

agencies). Research at the Centre is focused in its niche area of science and mathematics education and is conducted with the purpose of informing policy and pedagogy.

The key features of the RECSAM's programs are:

- The programs are aimed at building capacity for the region; the main beneficiaries are educators from SEA
- Scholarships are given to educators from all the SEAMEO member countries to participate in the training courses (Regular Courses)
- The Centre conducts income generating activities to ensure the financial viability of the Centre.
- Financial aid is given to educators from developing economies in the region to participate in some of its programs such as the SEAMEO Search for Young Scientists (SSYS).
- Since 2008, the Centre has extended cooperation with other agencies so as to benefit educators from outside the SEAMEO region, for e.g. with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for the benefit of African countries, and with Colombo Plan for the benefit of educators from the Colombo Plan countries.

Ensuring Effectiveness and Quality of the Training Programs through Constant Consultation and Monitoring

Planning of the Centre's programs and activities are done through consultation so as to ensure that the needs of SEAMEO Member States are always considered. Since the establishment of SEAMEO in 1965 several forums for consultation have been put in place:

- The Centre's Governing Board Meetings (The Governing Board consists of representatives of all the SEAMEO member countries) is held yearly to set policies and plan programs for the Centre
- The Centre Directors Meeting (CDM) held yearly serve as a forum for strategic planning where the Centre Directors of all the SEAMEO Centres discuss plans of the respective centres as well as for SEAMEO.
- SEAMEO High Officials Meeting (HOM) is held yearly where the high officials of the member states further discusses plans and proposals put forward by the SEAMEO Centres.
- SEAMEO Council Conference endorses the plans and proposals of the CDM and HOM

At the Centre level, the training programs in RECSAM are monitored by having regular evaluations through:

1. Weekly feedbacks during courses
2. End of course evaluation
3. Impact Study for the Regular Course

Ensuring effectiveness of Regular Courses. RECSAM regularly conducts Impact Studies to study the effectiveness of its Regular Courses. This survey study is conducted six months after the end of the course. The respondents of the Impact Study are the participants of RECSAM Regular courses. The survey is designed to study the impact of the Regular courses in three areas: Application, relevance, and dissemination. The findings from the Impact Study indicate that

1. the participants have been able to apply the knowledge learnt from the courses to their work,

2. the courses were relevant to the nature of their work, and
3. the participants were able to partially disseminate the new knowledge learnt to other teachers in their home countries.

The participants of the Impact Study also reported that the main constraints that they faced in their efforts to implement new knowledge were time constraints, the overloaded and examination-oriented curriculum and large class size. Having realized that participants faced these constraints, the Centre is now in the process of incorporating course content to assist participants overcome these challenges.

Ensuring effectiveness of TCTP_JICA courses. The TCTP (Third Country Training Program) -JICA courses which have been conducted since 2008 for the benefit of educators from Africa is another example of a joint cooperation conducted by SEAMEO RECSAM in cooperation with the Government of Malaysia and JICA. Effectiveness of the program is ensured through:

1. Initial needs analysis done in consultation with JICA officers and visits by RECSAM officers to African countries.
2. Course content drawn up by RECSAM specialists in consultation with JICA.
3. Effectiveness of the course was indicated by pre- and post- tests on participants' perception of new knowledge acquired during the course which showed significant improvement scores.

In recent years, some of the participants have been promoted to become key resource personnel in the ministries in their home countries.

Effectiveness of Educational Cooperation in SEAMEO

Since its inception in 1965, SEAMEO has been able to sustain cooperation among its member states and to continue conducting training and research so as to enable capacity building in the region. The strength of SEAMEO lies in its organizational structure that encourages and enhances educational cooperation among the member states. The effectiveness of SEAMEO to be able to sustain this cooperation can be attributed to following features of the SEAMEO community:

- Each member country shares its strength and contributes towards the success of SEAMEO without attempting to interfere into the member state's own national programs.
- Each country receives benefits from the cooperation.
- Constant consultations at various levels of involvement (from Ministerial to Centre level) in the planning and implementation of the programs of the SEAMEO Centres. The uniqueness of SEAMEO meetings enhances effective and concurrent top-down and bottoms-up flow of information.
- A well-resourced secretariat that coordinates the activities of the SEAMEO, and facilitates in the development of future plans.
- Empowerment by the Ministers of Education facilitates the effective implementation of SEAMEO programs.
- SEAMEO as a regional organization facilitates external institutions and agencies to cooperate with its member states either through bilateral or multilateral cooperation.

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Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization
Regional Centre for Education in Science and Mathematics

Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO)

- Established on 30 November 1965 as a chartered international organization
- Purpose is to promote cooperation through education, science and culture in the Southeast Asian region in order to further respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedom

SEAMEO Member Countries



Brunei Darussalam



Cambodia



Laos



Indonesia



Malaysia



Myanmar



Philippines



Singapore



Thailand



Timor Leste



Viet Nam

Associate Member Countries



Australia



Canada



France



Germany



Netherlands



New Zealand



Spain

Affiliate Member



International Council for Open and Distance Education
(ICDE)



University of Tsukuba



The British Council

Partner Country



Japan

SEAMEO Council

Consists of the Ministers of Education of the member countries. The Council meets annually to

- discuss policy and regional initiatives
- set directions for programs and projects of SEAMEO and its Units
- review programs and activities of the organization

SEAMEO Centres

- 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 SEAMEO Member Country. The Governing Board reviews the Centres' operations and budget and sets their policies and programmes.
- There are 20 SEAMEO centres located in the various member countries
- Setup and managed by member states for the benefit of educators in the SEAMEO region

SEAMEO RECSAM

- ◎ SEAMEO – Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation
- ◎ RECSAM - Regional Centre for Education in Science and Mathematics
- ◎ Established in 1967
- ◎ Mandate to improve science and mathematics education in Southeast Asia

Training Programs

Regular Courses

In-Country Courses

Customised Courses

International Conference on Science and Mathematics
(CoSMEd)

SEAMEO Search for Young Scientist Congress
(SSYS)

Research

To inform Policy

To inform Pedagogy

Publication of Journals

Key Features of the RECSAM Programs

- The programs are aimed building capacity for the region; main beneficiaries educators from SEA
- Scholarships are given to educators from the region to participate in the training courses (regular courses)
- The Centre conducts income generating activities to ensure sustainability of programs (e.g. Customised courses)
- Financial aid is given to educators from developing economies in the region to participate in selected events such as the SSYS

Educational Cooperation in SEAMEO

- ⦿ Centers set-up, managed and funded by respective member countries
- ⦿ Each center focuses on a niche area of expertise
- ⦿ Training conducted for the benefit of all member countries
- ⦿ Inter-center cooperation

Ensuring Effectiveness and Quality of the Training Programs through Constant Consultation

Forums for consultation:

- Governing Board Meetings (The Governing Board consists of representatives of all the SEAMEO member countries)
- Centre Directors Meeting
- SEAMEO High Officials Meeting
- SEAMEO Council Conference

Monitoring the Training Programs

Regular evaluations through:

1. Weekly feedbacks during courses
2. End of course evaluation
3. Impact Study

(The impact study is conducted for regular courses. Regular courses are conducted for participants from SEAMEO member countries).

Impact Study

- Survey study conducted six months after the end of the course
- Respondents: participants of RECSAM Regular courses
- Content cover 3 areas: Application, Relevance, Dissemination
- Findings: Able to apply, courses are relevant, partial dissemination.
- Constraints: time, overloaded curriculum, curriculum that is examination-oriented, big class size
- Regular course content will be modified to address the findings from the Impact Study

TCTP-JICA Courses

- Conducted since 2008 for the benefit of educators from Africa
- Joint cooperation among the Government of Malaysia, JICA and RECSAM.
- Effectiveness of the program is ensured through:
 1. Initial needs analysis done in consultation with JICA officers and visits by RECSAM officers to African countries.
 2. Course content drawn up by RECSAM specialists in consultation with JICA.
 3. Effectiveness of the course was indicated by pre- and post- tests on participants' perception of new knowledge acquired during the course which showed significant improvement scores.

Some of the participants have been promoted to become key resource personnel in the ministries of the home countries.

Conclusion

Effectiveness of SEAMEO can be attributed to following features of the cooperation within the community:

- Each member country shares its strength and contributes towards the success of SEAMEO
- Each country receives benefits from the cooperation
- Regular consultations at various levels of involvement (from Ministerial to Centre level)
- A well-resourced secretariat that coordinates the activities of the SEAMEO, and facilitates in the development of future plans
- Empowerment by the Ministers of Education facilitates the implementation of SEAMEO programs
- SEAMEO as a regional organization facilitates external institutions and agencies to cooperate with its member states either through bilateral or multilateral cooperation.

Sustainable Growth and Synergy between SEAMEO and ASEAN

SEAMEO	ASEAN
Established 1965 – 7 Southeast Asian States: Lao, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Republic of Vietnam,	Established 1967 – 5 Southeast Asian states: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand
1984 – Brunei joins SEAMEO	1984 – Brunei joins ASEAN
1992 – Socialist Republic of Vietnam joins SEAMEO	1995 – Vietnam joins ASEAN
1998 – Myanmar joins SEAMEO	1997 – Lao PDR, Myanmar joins ASEAN
2006 – Timor Leste joins SEAMEO	1999 – Cambodia joins ASEAN
Number of SEAMEO Centres expanded from 2 in 1966 to 20 in 2010	

Arigato Goymasu
Thank You