

## Abstract

### Assessment for Quality Education: Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM)

While many Countries have made impressive gains in access to education, improvement in quality has not always kept the pace. The EFA Global Monitoring report concludes that 250 million children are still failing to learn the basic and 130 million of them have spent at least 4 years in school. The World Declaration for All from 1990 identified quality of education as a prerequisite for achieving the fundamental goal of equity. A decade later, the Dakar Framework affirmed that quality of education is at the heart of education as a fundamental determinant of not only enrolment, but also retention and achievement. Since these two declarations, access to education in most parts of Southeast Asia has increased rapidly and across the region the majority of Countries now enroll almost all children in Grade 1, and most children complete the primary cycle in most Countries, though many underachieve. This is also reflected in a moderate number of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) (6.9 millions) compared to other regions. However, this number covers a range of different patterns of achievements among Countries which is also reflected in the fact that the East Asia and Pacific region has the highest proportion of drop-outs (58%) out of its OOSC.

Much debate surrounds the attempts to define good quality education, and the recent SDG4 “to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” have shown a global commitment to address this issue. This has increased the need for effective strategies to assess and monitor knowledge and skills and demonstrate measurable learning outcomes. Since, without effective assessment systems, we cannot understand the variations in learning outcomes and where to focus interventions to enhance access to inclusive and quality learning for all children.

To address variations in learning outcomes in the region and to have a better understanding of where to focus interventions to enhance access to inclusive and quality learning for all children the **Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM)** was initiated in 2012. The SEA-PLM serves the goal of improving quality of education through system level monitoring of learner achievements. The initiative aims at **supporting SEAMEO Member Countries** to better measure and understand the **status of learning achievement** amongst the general population and for specific groups by applying culturally appropriate metrics to learning outcomes associated with reading, writing, mathematics and global citizenship. The metric targets children in Grade 5 (ten years of age) and will be a unique tool to address common concerns across all Countries in the region to ensure quality education and learning outcomes for all children from the early years of primary school. The metric takes inspiration from the Global Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF) and linkages are established to the Monitoring Learning Partnership.

The SEA-PLM is jointly implemented by Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) who contributes with political leadership and expertise and UNICEF who contributes with programmatic expertise and Country support. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) supports this initiative through technical advice and provision of capacity development based on its extensive experience in assessment and quality education. This ensures that the SEA-PLM meets the same standards as other major regional and international assessments.

To date seven Countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Vietnam) have committed to field trial SEA-PLM and have contributed thoroughly to the development of the assessment incl. development of items, protocols and general inputs in regards to the definition and content of the domains. In addition, Indonesia, Thailand, and Timor Leste have contributed with expertise and comments thereby ensuring its regional relevance and contextualisation.

Being an important step towards regionalization of the SEA-PLM, ASEAN leaders have recognized the relevance and importance of SEA-PLM as the initiative was included in the ASEAN 5-Year Work Plan on Education 2016-2020.