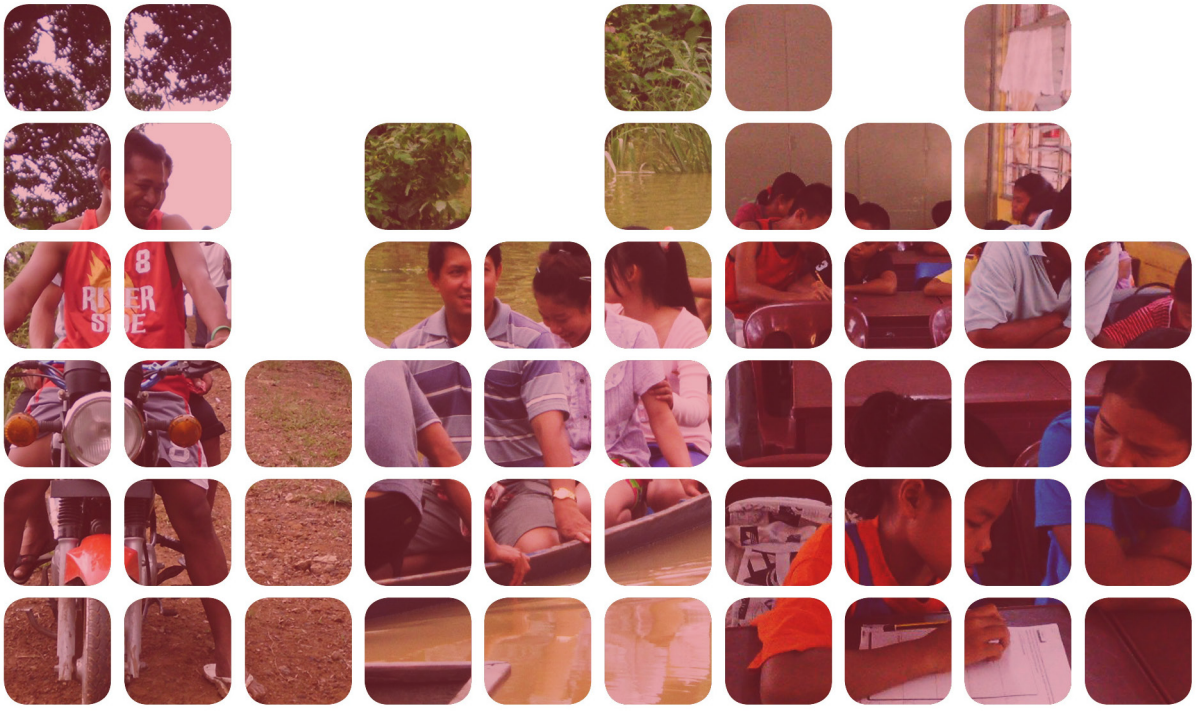
Taking Stock of Small Schools' Big Tasks

Lessons from the Implementation of Small Schools Management for Lifelong Learning (Project SMaLL) in Selected SEAMEO Member Countries



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Lessons from the Implementation of Small Schools Management for Lifelong Learning (Project SMaLL) in Selected SEAMEO Member Countries

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Foreword

From 2010 to 2012, SEAMEO INNOTECH embarked on a project aimed towards strengthening the capacity of small disadvantaged schools in dealing with the challenges of reaching the learners from rural communities in Southeast Asia and promoting inclusive education. The "Small Schools Management for Lifelong Learning" or Project SMaLL was one of the Center's key interventions to pursuing the global thrust of education for all (EFA) 2015. Under SEAMEO's Ten Collaborative Projects to reach the unreached in Southeast Asia, the project was designed to be a community-based, participatory action research activity implemented in Lao PDR, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

This publication looks at the unique condition of small schools and offers lessons learned from the implementation of Project SMaLL. It also provides a preview of other evidence-based studies and interventions that the Center has worked on through the years and is continuously working on to improve access to quality education in communities where education for all is not within immediate reach.

(SEAMEO INNOTECH 2015)

Moving from its 8th (2011-2016) to 9th Five-Year Development Plan (2016-2021), and in support of the new Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) on education (2016-2030), the Center continues to put emphasis on inclusive quality education to address remaining educational access barriers and to sustain progress made in improving the quality of education in Southeast Asia.

RAMON C. BACANI
Center Director

List of Acronyms

4Ps	Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program
ADM	Alternative Delivery Mode
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
DepEd	Philippine Department of Education
EFA	Education for All
FCS partnership	Family-community-school partnership
GIZ	German Development Cooperation
IECM materials	information, education, communication and motivational materials
IMPACT	Instructional Management by Parents, Community and Teachers
KEDAP	Kelas Dewasa Asli Penan (programmes for indigenous adults to eradicate illiteracy)

MOE	Ministry of Education
MOEC	Ministry of Education and Culture
MOOE	maintenance and other operating expenses
MT4T	Mobile Technology for Teachers
MTB-MLE	mother tongue-based and multi-lingual education
Project SMaLL	Small Schools Management for Lifelong Learning
RM	Malaysian Ringgit
SBM	school-based management
SEAMEO	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization
SEAMEO INNOTECH	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology
SK	Sekolah Kebangsaan (Malay-medium national primary school)
USD	United States Dollar
VEDC	Village Education Development Council

Wawasan Community Class in SK Chenderong Kelubi (Malaysia) (Photo from SK Chenderong Kelubi, 2012)

Implementation of IMPACT Learning System In Hawanay Elementary School (Philippines) (Photo from SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2012)

Background: Small Schools in Southeast Asia

Many Southeast Asian countries face challenges in meeting their shared goal of providing all school-age children with access to education especially in poorer communities, remote rural areas and indigenous communities, where many schools are small, under-enrolled, and under-resourced. Small schools, or one-teacher schools, represent a significant portion of the educational landscape in the region. Small schools usually have low enrollments of less than 150 students, with one teacher handling various grade levels simultaneously in a single classroom (i.e., multigrade teaching), trying to cope with meager resources. Small schools in the region are classified as often incomplete or under-enrolled schools, with typically less than five teachers handling multigrade classes and with limited resources.

Small schools can be found in almost all countries of Southeast Asia, but the underlying reasons for their existence vary. Often characterized by multigrade instruction, small schools exist out of necessity to provide learners, especially those in remote rural communities, access to education, and to help achieve the goals of the education for all (EFA) agenda as well.

Small schools in **Cambodia** typically have incomplete primary grades (less than six grade levels). They are often geographically inaccessible, being located in an isolated, sparsely populated, and disadvantaged environment; have inadequate equipment; are made of poor building materials (e.g., made of bamboo, wood, or consists of classrooms without a roof or walls); or have deficient educational resources. Of the 6,566 schools in Cambodia, 81 percent are likely to be small schools (5,329 primary schools in rural areas and 547 primary schools in remote areas). Multigrade classes were established in remote/rural areas that are sparsely populated and/or lack classrooms and teachers. As of 2009, 91.67 percent (22 out of 24) of the provinces in the country have been implementing multigrade teaching in small schools (Chum 2010).

Small schools in **Indonesia** are mostly located in outer small islands and border areas where transportation and communication systems are lacking. They have an average of three classrooms per school. In 2009, there were 3,899 small schools, representing 2.35 percent of the 165,755 primary schools in the country. Multigrade teaching has long been an innovative strategy to help teachers teach especially in religious schools in remote areas (SEAMEO INNOTECH 2012).

In **Lao PDR**, almost 57 percent of all primary schools – and an estimated 70 percent of primary schools in the poorest districts – are incomplete schools, which do not offer the full five grades of primary education (National EFA Review 2014).

Small schools in **Malaysia** have an enrolment of less than 150 pupils. These schools are primarily located in the Peninsular Malaysia and the Penan community in Sabah, with about 460 small schools, and Sarawak, with over 700 small schools. The coverage includes Orang Asli, Penan tribe and other ethnic minorities that are found in the designated rural areas (Malaysia MOE 2010). Overall, in 2009, there were 2,443 small schools that are under-enrolled, equivalent to 32 percent of the 7,669 primary schools in the country (Ahmad 2010).

In rural **Myanmar**, where a large percentage of the population lives in agrarian villages, school populations tend to be small and resources for education limited. Education for many children, particularly those in the poorer areas or from ethnic minorities, remains problematic. Small schools located in remote, border and mountainous areas that are consistently experiencing lower socio-economic indicators have difficulty retaining teachers resulting in the need for improved quality and equity.

Schools with one teacher handling more than one grade have been common in the **Philippines** since the 1920s. Small schools in the country are found in communities that are not easily accessible by regular means of transportation and may not even have electricity or piped water systems. Close to one-half of the public elementary schools (about 37,000) in the country have some form of multigrade instruction (Philippine DepEd 2015a). Recent figures from DepEd show that there are 3,903 pure multigrade schools in 16 regions with 245,772 students enrolled in SY 2014-2015 (Philippine DepEd 2015b).

Students of Hawanay Elementary School, where Project SMaLL served as an entry point for the establishment of an integrated school. (Photo from SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2012)

The growth of small schools with multigrade classes in **Thailand**, from about 3,600 in 2009 to about 4,200 in 2010, could be attributed to the government's program to reduce the population growth and increase the social value of learning in city schools. Smaller student populations in some communities have led to the increase in the number of small schools and implementation of multigrade instruction (Kittiratchadanon 2010).

Multigrade classes are found in numerous small schools and within larger schools in **Timor-Leste**. Research indicates that the vast majority of small schools will need to be multigrade schools. (Timor-Leste MOEC 2005).

There is a continuously increasing presence of small schools in **Vietnam** with multigrade classes. Class sizes in multigrade schools are small, usually not more than 20 children. In 2009, around 8,404 multigrade classes with 169,662 students in 49 provinces adopted multigrade instruction (Vietnam MOET 2009). Small schools implementing multigrade instruction are quite widespread in ethnic minority areas with the purpose of providing education to disadvantaged children and bringing schools closer to the communities where they live.

The Complexities of Managing Small Schools

Generally, small schools have a small number of staff, yet they are subject to the same demands faced by larger schools. In addition, small schools play a central role in their respective communities and provide many additional responsibilities for their school leaders and teachers. Often, the number of students is so small that it is very inefficient to build a school building to serve their needs. The following are some challenges faced by the educators in managing small schools in SEAMEO Member Countries:

1. **For many education ministries, the main challenge is how they could improve the status of small schools to ensure that the schools as learning organizations would be able to achieve their vision and mission of promoting quality education for all school-age children in their respective areas. Particularly, many of their challenges involve the following:**

   Low Academic Achievement. Small schools' performance in terms of pupils' academic achievement is generally poor. For instance, the pupils' academic achievement in 2,443 small schools in Sabah and Sarawak, **Malaysia** is generally lower than the normal average especially in subjects like mathematics, science, *Bahasa Melayu*, and English language (Malaysia MOE 2010). About 10-11

percent of the pupils do not have basic literacy skills by end of Year 1. The cumulative failure rate is high, including absenteeism and dropout rate (Ahmad 2010).

In 2008-2009, the drop-out rate in small schools located in remote areas is higher (13.5%) compared to rural (8.8%) and urban schools (7.7%) in **Cambodia**. The same trend can be observed in the repetition rate—the remote schools had an average 15.4 percent repetition rate, rural schools had 10.3 percent, while urban schools had 7.3 percent. Children in rural areas often have difficulty gaining access to basic education particularly into secondary school (Chum 2010).

In the **Philippines**, the small (multigrade) schools' performance is lower than the national and monograde schools' performance. Parents and other stakeholders perceive that multigrade education is second-rate or inferior. This may be attributed to the teachers' lack of preparedness to handle multigrade classes. Current policies on deployment of newly hired teachers and career promotion do not encourage the better performing teachers to stay in multigrade schools (SEAMEO INNOTECH 2012).

Limited number of teachers. Small schools usually have a small number of staff to perform the intricate job of teaching. Due to lack of basic necessities such as roads, clean water, electricity, and telephone, many teachers in **Malaysia** and **Thailand** are not interested to teach in small schools. This further makes it hard to assign and retain them in such schools (Malaysia MOE 2005).

In **Indonesia**, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) implements multigrade teaching in small schools to overcome the shortage of teachers in remote areas and to educate a small number of students in areas where establishing a school, even a small one, is not viable.

The second primary school supported by MOE Malaysia to participate in and benefit from Project SMaLL is Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK) Sungai Perah (Photo from SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011)

Lack of capacity in implementing effective teaching approaches in small schools. It is found that teachers in small schools in **Malaysia** sometimes do not fit the requirements for teaching. If a school enrolment is less than 149 pupils, only four to six teachers are posted in the school. Teachers in such schools are obligated to implement a multigrade program even if they have limited training on the system. They subsequently encounter difficulties in teaching and managing multigrade teaching classes composed of pupils of various age groups within a particular class (Malaysia MOE 2005).

High average cost for pupils and unrealistic per capita grant. As in any other school, the average cost per pupil in small schools is equivalent to the total operational cost of a particular school divided by the total enrolment in the school. For instance, small schools in **Malaysia** with an enrollment of less than 20 require an average investment cost of RM 10,145 (approximately USD 2,518) per pupil. When the enrolment increases to 20-45 pupils, the cost is reduced to RM 3,809 (approximately USD 945). The cost is further reduced as enrolment increases. This shows that small schools require greater funding but at the same time are not cost-efficient (Ahmad 2010).

In terms of per capita grant, it is found that small schools with enrollment of less than 100 pupils receive the same per capita grant. Preparation of the financial grant for small schools does not take into account their actual needs, which is not favorable for small schools since the smaller the school size, the higher the operational costs. (Ahmad 2010).

Limited access to basic infrastructure, learning facilities and human resources. In the **Philippines**, compared to regular schools within the same school division, multigrade schools are generally disadvantaged in terms of teacher-student, textbook-student, and classroom-student ratios. Multigrade schools also have relatively younger and hence, less experienced teachers, as well as higher teacher turnover rates.

Physical access to basic infrastructure and learning facilities remains a major barrier to education in **Lao PDR**. In **Malaysia**, the distribution of computers to regular schools is based on a ratio of 1:1.5 (one class to 1.5 laptops for a class with an enrolment of 25 to 35 pupils). Having a small class size, a small school is not qualified to receive laptops (Malaysia MOE, 2005).

Weak school and community partnership. One of the fundamental challenges facing small schools in **Thailand** is mustering parental and local community support to allow their children to participate in school. This may be attributed to weak school management due to lack of full-fledged school heads to supervise the schools, or due to teaching and numerous other tasks that school heads in small schools need to take on. These circumstances leave the school heads with little time to engage or nurture community partnerships.

Nang Conching, a 72-year-old grandmother who lobbied and initiated the community's clamor to open Grades 5 and 6 in Hawanay Elementary School. Her efforts increased the number of enrollment in the school. During the early beginnings of the school, there were only a handful of teachers handling the students. (Photo from SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2012)

Moreover, the low level of educational attainment of parents contributes to the problem. Majority of parents in remote communities in **Malaysia** reached only Form 3 (Grade 9) education due to inadequate financial resources. This situation limits the parents in terms of providing guidance and mentoring their children in their learning journey (Ahmad 2010).

2. **The big challenge for small schools is their geographic location because: a) they are often far and difficult to reach by social, communication and infrastructure services; and b) they are differentiated in ethno-linguistic groups that require translation of evidence-based curricular materials.**

The demographic and linguistic situations in small schools and their communities tend to be complex, too. Most small schools are located in hinterlands, not accessible by transportation, much less by reliable communication services. Providing quality education in such areas is very difficult with limited infrastructure. Moreover, education solutions can sometimes emerge only from the local community and local education authorities based on their understanding of the situation, including the development objectives of the community, and of the alternative resources available within or outside the community. Consequently, the school needs to actively engage parents and members of the community in identifying and addressing the learning needs of children, and to carefully include the contributions of all stakeholders in integrating local wisdom in developing and implementing the curriculum, giving due recognition to the valued contributions of stakeholders, while at the same time encouraging them to become fully responsible for their contributions.

The SBM team of Hawanay Elementary School—a school that can only be reached by a 45-minute private service ride from Talisay City, followed by a 15-minute "habal-habal" (motorcycle) ride. (Photo from SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2012)

3. **Small school authorities feel greatly accountable to the communities that enabled them to be established, yet they do not have the necessary formal leadership development and school-based management training to help them meet the community's expectations. Specifically, there is a need to develop or enhance the technical leadership of school heads/head teachers and strengthen their competencies in instructional supervision.**

As an organization, a small school has a high degree of complexity, stemming from the small number of staff employed and the intricate jobs they need to fulfil. Small schools in rural areas face demands that are different from those encountered by larger schools, particularly because of the central role that small schools play in their local communities. In such contexts, the small school is more embedded and significant to community life than larger schools, which then adds to its complex nature (Tuck 2009).

Interestingly, the highly complex nature of small schools offers a unique setting for learning about school headship. Furthermore, the kind of influence that comes with the position of headship in small schools means that there are greater demands for the heads to lead by example and to demonstrate a grounded and pragmatic view of their pivotal role in the school as a learning organization (Tuck 2009).

Given such condition, the Ministries of Education need to emphasize the importance of investing in capacity-building of school heads so they may improve their abilities to take advantage of the strengths of small schools, practice instructional leadership with diverse learners, facilitate change management to address the weaknesses of small schools, and foster community partnership to make small schools management more cost-effective.

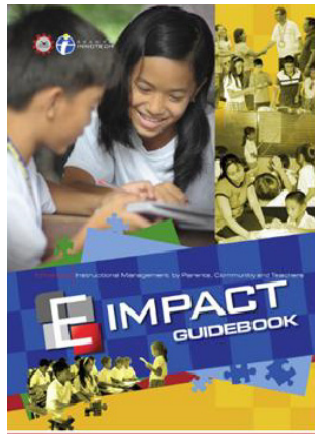
4. Given the nature and location of small schools, there is a need for schools, in partnership with the MOEs, to provide not only academic learning but also lifelong learning appropriate to different cultures and natural environments.

The Ministries of Education need to develop culturally-appropriate curricula in cooperation with the community, civil society organizations, business, and industry entities to keep education relevant and sensitive to different cultures and natural environments of school children. By doing so, education can address the unique learning needs of indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia. Developing a culturally sensitive curriculum and indigenous learning strategies and materials aligned with local values, cultural norms and traditions can help develop basic skills for lifelong learning.

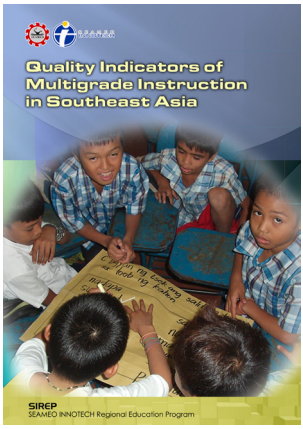
SEAMEO INNOTECH's Response

SEAMEO INNOTECH, as part of its commitment to the overall SEAMEO's Ten Collaborative Projects to Reach the Unreached, committed to pursue the global thrust for EFA 2015 by improving access to quality education – one of the four thematic focus areas[1] under the Center's 8th Five-Year Development Plan (2011-2016).

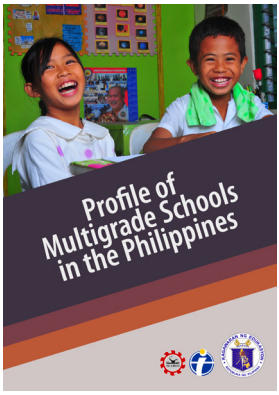
One of the notable projects contributing to this commitment is the promotion of the **IMPACT Learning System**. The Instructional Management by Parents, Community and Teachers (IMPACT) Learning System heavily relies on self-learning modules based on the curriculum of the Philippine Department of Education. It is an alternative delivery mode designed to improve the academic performance of multigrade learners by employing cooperative learning, inter-disciplinary learning approach, peer group learning, and programmed teaching by parents, students and teachers. The learning materials are being updated to align with DepEd's new K to 12 curriculum.



1 The Center's Thematic Focus Areas under its 8th Five-Year Development Plan include 1) thought leadership, 2) equitable access to quality education, 3) educational management and instructional leadership, and 4) education for sustainable development.



The Center conducted two studies aimed at assessing the status of multigrade instruction in the region. The first of these is the study on **Quality Indicators of Multigrade Instruction in Southeast Asia (2012)** which determines the conditions and policies that support the establishment of multigrade classes in the region. It identifies the various terminologies used in multigrade instruction, as well as good practices, challenges, and recommendations to improve the quality of multigrade instruction in Southeast Asia.



The second study is the **Profile of Multigrade Schools in the Philippines** which provides an overview of the status of multigrade schools in the country in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, teaching staff, learning environment, and implementation challenges. The study sets the baseline data which policymakers and school implementers may use as basis for improving multigrade teaching and for progress monitoring.

SEAMEO INNOTECH is also supporting a school health program in many small schools, particularly in Lao PDR. The **Regional Fit for School Program (FIT Program)**, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and spearheaded by the German Development Cooperation (GIZ), aims to improve the health and learning outcomes of school children through effective management of hygiene-related practices and other preventive and evidence-based school health programs. The program is being implemented in Lao PDR, Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, in partnership with education ministries.

The Regional Fit for School Program aims to improve the health and academic performance of primary school children in Southeast Asia through various school health programmes. (Photo from School Community Manual - GIZ Regional Fit for School Program Lao PDR, 2014)

In 2015, the program documented the Sisattanak scale-up experience in **Lao PDR** to describe how the MOES in Sisattanak District was able to move from the modeling phase to scaling up the program to all primary schools in the area. The documentation focuses on the structures, processes and mechanisms that were applied to successfully scale up the program in small schools with limited resources and without much external support.

Finally, the **Small Schools Management for Lifelong Learning (Project SMaLL)** was implemented in seven schools in Lao PDR, Malaysia, and the Philippines from 2010 to 2012. The action research aimed to strengthen capacities of key stakeholders in small schools; promote and localize practices of family-community-school partnerships; document effective innovations and lessons learned; and recommend policy directions for enhancing small schools responsiveness and effectiveness in reaching out and mobilizing support of the community, engaging and involving parents, and building more robust family-community-school (FCS) partnerships in marginalized and disadvantaged areas including indigenous communities.

Small schools exist out of necessity to provide access to education in remote, isolated, rural communities such as Sitio Hawanay in Talisay, Cebu, Philippines (top) and Ban Koauy, Vientiane Province, Lao PDR (bottom). (Photo from SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011)

As presented in country reports, small schools in Southeast Asia face common operational and management problems, particularly those located in disadvantaged and underserved communities. Many ideas presented in this research brief are lessons drawn from the implementation of the Project SMaLL. Education ministries face varying levels of difficulties in managing small schools. This being the case, interventions tended to vary from one country to another. Nevertheless, a systematic analysis and prioritization of the challenges and opportunities in managing small schools is the first viable step in strengthening and sustaining the initiatives of education ministries in improving the performance of small schools.

Recommendations from the Project SMaLL Experience

Small schools, at a glance, seem to be easy to manage due to their size. Resource requirements are considered minimal, hence, provision of resources and supportive services has been limited. However, small schools have unique requirements, and the sets of competencies required of school heads in managing small schools are different from those who manage big or regular schools. Following are recommendations proffered from lessons learned from the Project SMaLL implementation:

On low academic achievement of students

Recommendation 1:
To sustain the project interventions relevant to student learning, there is a need for education ministries to strengthen curriculum and instruction, using modified strategies that align with the contextual realities of small schools, and to improve the acceptability and appreciation of multigrade instruction in small schools.

It is important that learning packages for multigrade schooling also contain information, education, communication and motivational (IECM) materials that will promote and gain support for multigrade instruction among parents and community members. Success stories

and experiences of current multigrade schools in the Philippines can be a rich source of caselets or vignettes for illustrating the advantages of multigrade as an instructional approach.

The MOEs, particularly at sub-national levels, need to support the development, adoption, monitoring, and assessment of using learner-centered strategies for small school improvement such as the IMPACT program pioneered by SEAMEO INNOTECH.

On limited number of teachers

Recommendation 2:
Continual review of teacher compensation policies and incentives to encourage both teachers and school heads to seek or accept assignments to lead and/or teach in small schools.

Provision of improved incentives for teachers working in small schools should be continuously reviewed and adjusted to motivate, attract

In SY 2011-2012, the Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK) Chenderong Kelubi had a total of 17 personnel, 14 of whom are teaching with an average of 5.5 years of teaching experience. Each class teacher handles 10 students. (Photo from SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011)

and retain quality teachers and school heads. Incentives in the form of merit increases in salary, out-of-station/hazard pay (special hardship allowance) in accordance with remoteness, additional credits or points in performance ratings, special commendations, staff development assistance (i.e., scholarships), better housing/accommodation, among others, may be given in keeping with what are deemed appropriate and applicable in the respective education ministries.

On lack of capacity in implementing suitable teaching approaches in small schools

Recommendation 3:
Strengthen the institutional management capacity at the district, provincial and other sub-national levels in the areas of technical advice and assistance on matters affecting teacher deployment, incentives, capacity building needs, teacher quality, establishing school networks, contextualizing curriculum materials, encouraging school-based innovations (content and processes), and addressing operational issues.

To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of small schools, it is essential for the MOEs to focus on building the capacity of provincial and district education offices to provide technical advice and other assistance to small disadvantaged schools through trainings programs, orientations, review and planning workshop, benchmarking/ study visits in model schools, among other need-based interventions. The provincial, division and district education levels' supervisory, mentoring and monitoring skills can also be enhanced so they can effectively monitor and assess the performance of students in small schools. The lessons and good practices gathered from evaluation can be used to guide the design of future improvement projects for small schools.

On limited resources, including high average cost for pupils, unrealistic per capita grant, and limited access to basic infrastructure

Recommendation 4:
Create an enabling environment that provides favorable and supportive policies, a pool of school champions, sustainable financing mechanisms, and diversified resource base that would address the inequities faced by small schools in disadvantaged communities.

In the **Philippines,** the new maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE) allocation for schools in remote areas is not only based on enrolment, but also takes into consideration other factors such as distance, type of school, financial capability of local government units, and other applicable factors (Philippine DepEd Order 13, s. 2016).

The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) or 4Ps (*Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino*) Program of the **Philippines** and the stipend system of **Malaysia** for the poor and indigenous learners can be further reviewed and improved to make them more responsive in keeping disadvantaged children in school and in supporting them to complete their basic education. Financial allocation and disbursement must be timely and equitably distributed to ensure that small schools are not left behind. Alleviating the noticeable neglect of rural schools will require creative ideas, alternatives, and collective actions of individuals and special interest groups concerned about inequities in resource allocation and utilization (Dunathan1980).

Small schools in isolated communities will need to go out and entice others to come to the school-community environs as a way of improving access and mobilizing and using scarce resources. Across countries in this study, there are inspiring accounts of how parents took the initiative to get the MOE support to have schools built in their communities, or

SK Sungai Perah consists of 3 main buildings, with floor covering, containing offices, classrooms, computer laboratory and other facilities. (Photo from SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011)

to raise extra funds for teachers so that they are motivated to go to or to stay in their communities. Local governments can be encouraged to tap private foundations or philanthropic institutions that may allocate funds and/or develop public-private partnerships that will make teacher assignments to small rural schools attractive and thus, ensure availability of teachers in poorer, indigenous, and disadvantaged communities.

On weak school–community partnerships

Recommendation 5:
Encourage small schools to establish multisectoral action teams focused on designing and implementing initiatives for family–community–school partnerships within small rural schools and indigenous communities.

The multisectoral action team can be introduced as a sub-committee of existing parents-teachers association (PTA), or where there is no PTA, a separate association or precursor to a PTA. From observations made during the study, educators and teachers in small learning communities generally work as partners and catalysts: asking questions, being curious and sensitive, and at the same time learning from and with others. As demonstrated by **Lao PDR**'s model of community engagement, the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC), **Malaysia**'s model

for Adult Education Classes (KEDAP), and the **Philippines**' model for multigrade instruction, the IMPACT system, parents/families and the community can be mobilized to take on a more active role in their children's education.

Recommendation 6:
Provide small schools strong technical guidance and support on how to pursue and sustain collaborations with multi-stakeholders in their own school–community.

Many of the challenges of small schools can be addressed through systematic, formalized collaborative work (Tuck 2009). School-based organizations such as the PTA and the community-based VEDC in **Lao PDR** have helped build bridges with the community by facilitating communication with local school boards or local government links assigned in the area, and other stakeholders in the village or city.

On geographic isolation of small schools

Recommendation 7:
Provide an enabling policy environment for small schools to thrive and foster growth and innovations in remote and rural communities.

It is costly to construct and maintain schools and basic infrastructure in remote areas. In **Malaysia**, the government continuously provides better and cheaper school buildings (e.g., cabins) and upgrades school facilities and amenities such as electricity, water supply and other utilities.

The mainstreaming of IMPACT in the **Philippines** as a recommended alternative delivery mode (ADM) for elementary education provides small/multigrade schools with more tools, confidence and skills in providing inclusive and quality education not only during regular school days, but also in periods of emergency.

Mainit Elementary School is located within the Guadalupe Mabugnao-Mainit Hot Spring National Park — a proclaimed protected area. It takes about 30 minutes travel from the town proper by "habal-habal" costing PhP 25 (approximately USD 0.50) per person. (Photo from SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011)

Finally, ethno-linguistic differences can be addressed by developing culturally appropriate, sensitive teaching-and-learning strategies and curriculum materials attuned to specific needs and conditions of individual learners and to create a natural learning atmosphere where indigenous children are motivated to fully express their own minds and talents, and apply what they learn in the real world.

Recommendation 8:
Design distance learning programs for students and teachers to provide them access to new knowledge and skills offered by Ministries of Education and learning institutions/networks with the assumption that internet connectivity, internet skills and language facility are in place.

To widen access to quality education in rural areas and to keep students, teachers, and school heads abreast with the recent developments in achieving 21st century learning, it will be beneficial for the mentioned stakeholders to participate in distance/e-learning programs. The MOEs may need to invest in solar power for rural schools without access to electricity and internet. MOEs can assist rural schools gain access to a wider variety of courses, virtual schools or distance learning, and collaborative learning opportunities outside of their immediate communities.

Recommendation 9:
Develop a robust infrastructure for learning and sharing such as clustering of small schools in rural areas.

Clustering is an efficient strategy for sharing resources and expertise between and among small schools. A common cluster is composed of one school at the core or center that serves as the lead and model school, and several 'satellite' schools or institutions.

In the case of the Regional Fit for School implementation in **Lao PDR**, the cluster approach was utilized in the expansion of the program. It started with five model schools in 2011 and expanded to 22 schools in Sisattanak District in 2012. The scale-up included the three pilot schools supported under Project SMaLL. Eventually, the district was able to scale up to 42 schools or practically all schools in the district. The MOE used the cluster system to create awareness on school health and as a support hub for learning exchange. The district selected the schools of three cluster heads as model schools. These cluster heads became role models and advocates of the program.

Recommendation 10:
Conduct further research and provide guidance on models of formal and informal school clustering to evaluate their potential benefits for small schools and as well as provide a context in developing the next generation of school leaders.

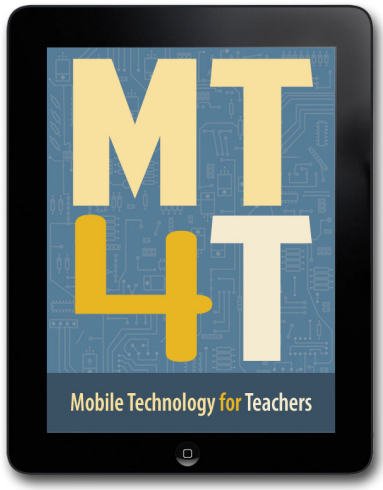
Cluster systems and other soft and hard federations appear to have particular potential for small schools. It may offer means to overcome specific challenges faced by small schools and enable them to retain important aspects of their unique characteristics. Further research and guidance are needed on models of formal and informal clustering to evaluate their potential benefits for small schools and provide context in developing the next generation of leaders and workers in the school-community (Tuck 2009).

SK Sungai Perah builds community awareness through brainstorming, constructing community vision and mission, together with the Parents Teacher Association. (Photo from SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011)

Recommendation 11:
Foster a learning exchange through informal and formal networking such as those in a school cluster system. Online platforms, such as the emerging social media, can also be tapped to facilitate and strengthen such networks.

Informal and formal networking such as those in a school cluster system is mutually beneficial, as observed in the Regional Fit for School program expansion in **Lao PDR**. Networking proved to be a useful basis for cooperation which could be fortified further according to similar needs of small schools.

The emerging social media, which are increasingly accessible through mobile devices, provide opportunities for establishing professional learning networks among teachers and school heads from small schools in cyber space. SEAMEO INNOTECH has developed a mobile technology resource kit known as MT4T (Mobile Technology for Teachers) to support Southeast Asian teachers' use of mobile



devices for instruction and professional networking. Access to mobile devices is rapidly expanding and these mobile devices can be used to penetrate remote schools in rural areas.

Recommendation 12:
Connect or link family, community, and school relationships and roles with curricular and instructional reforms.

Engaging and involving parents and building more robust family–community-school (FCS) partnerships aimed at children's learning and development are important components of curricular and instructional reforms. To enhance FCS interaction in education, it is important to integrate regular, simple, diverse, and practical socio-cultural activities and events that will encourage maximum participation of parents and other community stakeholders.

On developing or enhancing the technical leadership of school heads/head teachers and strengthening instructional leadership

Recommendation 13:
Encourage school heads or head teachers of small schools to demonstrate excellent teaching, and provide instructional leadership through modelling of good practices in teaching and learning and through mentoring/coaching of teachers, parent-mentors and students as programmed/little teachers.

The head teacher is well-positioned to initiate meaningful discussions with other teachers concerning the assignment of responsibilities and sharing of tasks. Given limited human resources, collaboration and team spirit work well in most small schools.

Moreover, in small schools, the head teacher assumes the role of instructional supervisor and is in the best position to coach his/her co-teachers according to their actual teaching experiences. Thus, it is necessary for the MOE to build the capacities of head teachers on instructional leadership, supervision, counseling, and peer mentoring of teachers.

Recommendation 14:
Establish a SEAMEO network of small schools engaged in family-community-school partnerships.

Establishing a learning and knowledge network for small schools in SEAMEO Member Countries will be a desirable pathway to scale up knowledge and facilitate experience-sharing among small schools operating under the school-based management (SBM) framework and other schools (non-SBM practitioner) that have family-community-school partnerships. Through social media, face-to-face meetings, planning workshops, and joint monitoring with community partners, small schools can initiate partnerships and form networks not only with rural schools. Small schools can also expand their network to include large/urban schools and other groups with similar interests.

SK Sungai Perah builds family awareness through after-school activities with students, parents and family. One of the motivational activities is "One Malaysia"— an aerobic session conducted for all school-community members and stakeholders every Saturday. (Photo from SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011)

This network can have fruitful encounters and a better appreciation of each member's good practices and operational processes in SBM. They can also share resources (e.g., human, material and financial), and benchmark on workable systems and viable processes which may include curriculum adaptation, developing culturally appropriate multimedia materials, learner-centered delivery modes, contextualized learning assessment, sustainable funding schemes, and strategies in overcoming challenges faced by both small and large schools.

Recommendation 15:
Enhance school-based management and leadership capacities and commitment of school heads and teachers by creating a pool of trainers across SEAMEO Member Countries and/or by encouraging the MOEs, particularly at the provincial/division and district/sub-district levels, and their partners to integrate and/or mainstream principles and practices of family-community-school partnerships in their training and education programs for teachers.

Support is needed to help head teachers access professional development opportunities, which are often overlooked in leaders' efforts to cope with the daily life in small schools (Tuck 2009). Head teachers in rural schools face difficult and unique circumstances and as such need more adequate in-service and/or pre-service programs to hone their skills in managing small schools. The MOEs need to work together with partner institutions that offer training programs designed to prepare education personnel—school heads and teachers—for school-based management in rural areas. In the process of identifying their training needs, the MOEs may benefit from utilizing the **Competency Framework for School Heads and Teachers in Southeast Asia** developed and validated by SEAMEO INNOTECH with technical guidance from the MOEs.

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN SCHOOL HEADS

(SEAMEO INNOTECH 2015)

The MOEs should encourage development of educational programs and policies that are supportive of small schools. For example, small schools may be utilized more fully as a means of developing leadership capacity through placements of individuals with strong leadership potential in these challenging work situations. Greater practical encouragement and support are needed to facilitate networking between aspiring and substantive small school head teachers (Tuck 2009).

On creating opportunities to promote lifelong learning in small schools

Recommendation 16:
Develop students as partners, anchors and catalysts for educational improvement and lifelong learning.

In the **Philippines**, students are given challenging responsibilities as programmed teachers (little teachers) and peer group leaders (as learning partners and coaches) in implementing the IMPACT program to improve the academic performance of students in multigrade schools. This provides opportunities to build leadership skills, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills.

Likewise, the little doctors in the UKS (school health program) of **Indonesia** are trained to support each grade level in the orderly practice of group toothbrushing and handwashing before meals. In the **Philippines**, some schools formed health patrol teams to monitor the orderly implementation of group toothbrushing and handwashing as daily group activities. In **Lao PDR**, student leaders (little marshalls) likewise assist their teachers in the orderly distribution of deworming tablets and toothpaste to pupils when they line up in their assigned handwashing facilities.

Group Toothbrushing Activity in Phonsinuane Primary School, Lao PDR prior to construction of handwashing facilities (Photo from Phonsinuane Primary School, 2012)

Students should ultimately have a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by their school and the issues affecting the development of their community through investigative projects in which students are given a chance to identify, assess and prioritize the learning needs/issues of the community that can be addressed through school-based management and project-based learning activities.

Recommendation 17:
Small rural schools can be transformed into community centers to serve as hubs for linking and integrating development initiatives that will, in the long run, have a cumulative effect.

Community learning, when properly encouraged in small rural schools, is especially sensitive to and responsible for the living conditions of marginalized ethnic groups. Community learning also supports social movements that aim to overcome marginalization, discrimination and bullying in school. In **Lao PDR**, the VEDC is a mechanism for community learning that can influence community members to develop school-based activities that will promote and support their efforts for full equal rights for the women sector; the realization of children's/human rights for the youth and labor sector; and integration and acceptance of ethnic, cultural or religious minorities for the indigenous group.

One of the objectives of SK Chenderong Kelubi's Action Plan on Project SMaLL is to foster cooperation programs between the school and the community. One of the activities under said objective is the traditional handicraft making demonstrated by parents in schools. (Photo from SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011)

Recommendation 18:
Enhancing the content and expanding availability of localized learning materials are necessary in ensuring lifelong learning and integration of learning with real-world experiences such as use of the concepts of family-community-school partnerships, school health, disaster risk management, climate change adaptation, resiliency, and indigenous culture and knowledge as learning context.

Specifically, for the Orang Asli learners and other indigenous communities, there is a need for the MOEs and their institutional partners to invest in developing indigenous learning materials which are culturally appropriate/sensitive, using pedagogies that support linguistically and culturally diverse learners. Mother tongue-based and multi-lingual education (MTB-MLE) and emotional intelligence should be strengthened in the early grades to motivate pupils to listen attentively, relate with teachers, interact with other pupils, and actively participate in class discussion and learning activities, allowing them to gain more confidence and freedom to express themselves.

Vignettes and knowledge nuggets can be developed from significant milestones, successful innovations, and effective initiatives of pilot schools captured by the study. However, there is a need to develop complementary teaching-learning materials intended for training and/or orientation of parents and community members. To facilitate localization and institutionalization of family-community-school partnerships, a guidebook on how to make this happen and what the good practices are at each stage of development as well as crucial milestones, can also be developed by the MOEs in partnership with SEAMEO INNOTECH.

Sustaining Small Schools beyond 2015

Small schools are not necessarily efficient on account of being small. Rather, small schools work best when they use their smallness to their advantage. The best small schools offer an environment where teachers, students, and parents see themselves as part of a community, and deal with issues of learning, cultural and ethno-linguistic diversity, local governance, and building community at the local level (Knowledge Works Foundation 2002). Communities should respect and promote their small schools and policymakers should support these schools with enabling policies, adequate financial resources, and responsive instructional solutions/strategies.

SEAMEO is steadfast in its commitment to help achieve universal primary education. The SEAMEO 7 Priority Areas (2015-2035),[2] particularly *addressing barriers to inclusion and revitalizing teacher education,* directly put small schools at the center of SEAMEO initiatives.

2 The SEAMEO 7 Priority Areas include 1) early childhood care and education, 2) addressing barriers to inclusion, 3) ensuring resiliency in the face of emergencies, 4) promoting technical and vocational education and training, 5) revitalizing teacher education, 6) promoting harmonization in higher education and research, and 7) adopting a 21st century curriculum.

Moreover, *inclusive quality education* continues to be part of SEAMEO INNOTECH's 9th Five-Year Development Plan (2016-2021).[3] Accordingly, the Center plans to organize a regional forum on good practices in school-based management of small schools to provide exemplars of family-community-school partnerships. Such a forum will provide an opportunity to bring together theoreticians and practitioners to map out workable modalities and forge pathways for addressing the complex realities faced by small schools in disadvantaged communities. The goal of the forum is to improve learning and assess the contributions of small schools in ensuring equitable access to quality education in Southeast Asia. The experiences of exceptionally performing small schools can be showcased in such a forum.

The Center will continue to support the development of relevant, responsive and innovative research and educational solutions to help provide a better future for every learner in Southeast Asia particularly in small disadvantaged school-communities.

The full report on **Small Schools Management for Lifelong Learning (Project SMaLL)** can be accessed through www.seameo-innotech.org.

3 Thematic areas under SEAMEO INNOTECH's 9th FYDP include 1) educational leadership, governance, policy and accountability in the context of educational reforms, 2) inclusive quality education, 3) education for sustainable development, 4) technology-enabled educational innovations, and 5) education solutions supportive of regional integration.

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