EVALUATION REPORT

December 2021

Evaluation of Southeast Asia-Primary Learning Metrics

SEA PLM Evaluation

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Executive Summary

Background

The Southeast Asian Primary Learning Metrics Programme (SEA-PLM) focuses on supporting the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) member countries to better understand the status of student learning achievement, in order to improve the quality of their education systems (UNICEF, 2019). The programme assesses reading, writing, Mathematics and global citizenship, and administers questionnaires contextualised to the regional context (UNICEF, 2019, p. 9).

The overall goal of SEA-PLM is that by 2025, all Southeast Asia countries have regional standardised quality measures to assess learning outcomes for Grade 5 students, and consistently use these to inform improvement within the education sector (SEA-PLM SEAMEO UNICEF, 2019b, p. 16).

Evaluation purpose and objectives

In 2020, an evaluation of SEA-PLM was commissioned by UNICEF. UNICEF has been a key participant and funder of SEA-PLM. Prior to investing in the longer-term expansion and institutionalisation of the survey, UNICEF at the present juncture wishes to take stock of the experience to date. The main purpose of this independent evaluation is to draw lessons learned and account for results to inform the next phase of the SEA-PLM Programme. The evaluation is retrospective (*summative*), but it is also forward-looking (*formative*) in providing conclusions and recommendations for regional- and country-level programming. The evaluation objectives include reviewing the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, likely impact and sustainability of the SEA-PLM programme and identifying strategic approaches that can help better position UNICEF and collaborators for the SEA-PLM programme in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal agenda.

The primary audience for the evaluation is UNICEF, EAPRO, SEAMEO, the SEA-PLM Secretariat, UNICEF Country Office Management teams and Education teams. The secondary audience includes governments, UN agencies, development partners, donors, non-governmental organisations, and civil society organisations working in education, as well as external stakeholders such as contractors and other collaborators.

Methodology

The evaluation has assessed the validity of the results chain, as described in the Theory of Change (ToC). This included the identification of barriers to delivery, uptake, individual change and institutional reform, reviewing how delivery is achieved, identifying the likely mechanisms of impact[1], and identifying any contextual issues that shape theories of how the intervention works. This was done by empirically verifying activities, outputs, and outcomes and assumptions posited along the causal chains in the ToC and drawing conclusions about what is working and what is not working in SEA-PLM and likely impact.

The data sources include a desk review of SEA-PLM documentation, a literature review of large-scale learning assessments, qualitative data collection with stakeholders in three SEA-PLM participating countries and with a wide range of regional stakeholders, secondary quantitative analysis of education data across Southeast Asia and a survey of stakeholders in SEA-PLM participating countries.

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[1] It is recognised that as the programme has not completed a full cycle yet, impact of student learning cannot be assessed. However, the likely mechanisms for impact can be explored by testing the assumptions that exist along the results chain.

Findings

The findings for each evaluation question are listed by Development Assistance Committee evaluation criteria.

Relevance

SEA-PLM alignment to i) the national development policies and priorities of national education stakeholders and ii) UNICEF's national, regional and global objectives and intended impacts

SEA-PLM objectives align significantly with national development policies and priorities and reflects a trend across countries in the region to prioritise learning data.

SEA-PLM objectives align with UNICEF national, regional and global objectives, but are narrower than UNICEF's broad focus on holistic child development. UNICEF national priorities within the area of education focus on, among other priorities, strengthening government capacity to improve the quality and relevance of teaching and the learning environment. At the regional level, UNICEF focuses on inequity in terms of access to education and learning, which aligns with SEA-PLM's stated objectives to improve capacity to analyze learning assessment data towards more equitable learning outcomes.

Programming gaps or unaddressed needs - What could be done better?

The activities related to the development of the assessment framework and delivery of the first round of data collection have been largely successful. However, SEA-PLM has so far missed a valuable opportunity to provide tailored technical capacity strengthening to support participating countries. The level of capacity and ambition varies significantly across countries in the region, a fact that was not well reflected in the approach to training.

Communication planning and implementation can be improved. A communications plan was developed in part and is currently a working document. However, several of the priorities of SEA-PLM outlined in the plan have not yet been reflected in programme activities.

Related to this, there is a widely recognised need for a more structured approach to political advocacy, both for attracting new countries, as well as for supporting the use of data. A more structured forward-looking approach is missing. Ministries of education should be involved in setting key questions that they would like SEA-PLM data to answer.

Regional endorsement activities took place during SEA-PLM's emergence, however there is a need for a longer-term strategy. In addition, while fundraising activities with donors and countries have taken place, a long-term funding strategy is missing.

Effectiveness

The extent to which objectives and expected outcomes of SEA-PLM have been achieved or are likely to be achieved

There is clear evidence that changes in national assessments are being informed by SEA-PLM. There is also unambiguous evidence that SEA-PLM data is supporting increased dialogue around learning data, but it is not yet clear how this will inform decision making.

Participation in SEA-PLM is strengthening capacity of partner institutions but is largely limited to the development of tools and the collection of data. While capacity of individuals and units is growing, it is not clear whether or how this will translate into systemic change in capacity for assessments or the utilisation of data from assessments.

Major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of SEA-PLM objectives and activities - Enabling factors, barriers and bottlenecks

The level of engagement in large-scale assessments (LSAs) has been a key enabling factor for participating countries, as has the work of UNICEF at the regional and country levels that has enabled the successes seen so far on SEA-PLM. The lack of long-term funding is a barrier to success in limiting the ability of the programme to attract and maintain long-term human resources.

UNICEF and partners actions to ensure the objectives of SEA-PLM are met in the future – Country and regional level initiatives.

Flexible, locally rooted support and advice and technical support proved to be a particularly effective mechanism for maximising SEA-PLM impact. Collaboration with academia and the private sector can help to multiply the amount of analysis of SEA-PLM data. Integration of SEA-PLM into a broader assessment strategy has benefits both in use of data and in capacity building.

Efficiency

Strengths and weaknesses of SEA-PLM management processes - How could management of SEA-PLM activities be improved?

The management structure of the SEA-PLM programme has become stronger over the course of the programme so far. Regional ownership of the programme is a key strength for SEA-PLM, but the balance between technical and political participation should be considered. More engagement from political or planning departments within ministries of education would support a stronger link between SEA-PLM data and policy throughout the programme cycle.

In addition to political participation, ministries of education need greater support in packaging and messaging the results of SEA-PLM. Ministries of education in SEA-PLM participating countries are struggling to form a common and understandable language around SEA-PLM results, tie the results to an intended action and communicate with citizens.

While the technical support arrangement has allowed for the delivery of the first round of SEA-PLM data, it presents challenges for future rounds of the programme. Country and regional stakeholders do not view the technical support component of the work as value for money.

Likely impact

SEA-PLM's contribution to national education systems and assessment practices and policies and discourses thus far - And positive and negative changes SEA-PLM has brought about at the regional level

There are several tentative examples of where SEA-PLM has influenced education dialogue at the national level and there are concrete examples of how SEA-PLM is informing decisions for national assessments. There is wide ranging vocal commitment to use SEA-PLM data for a range of different policy issues across participating countries, however it is important to differentiate these conversations from concrete discussions around policy change. The impact of SEA-PLM hinges on the ability of the programme to build systemic change in the capacity to use SEA-PLM data and engage in the political aspects of policy change and education reform.

Sustainability

To what extent SEA-PLM activities, plans and strategies are fully integrated and implemented by the government (s), both technically and financially and to what extent are they likely to continue

It is the view of many stakeholders that the SEA-PLM model has room for more cost efficiency, and for developing a clearer articulation of purpose. The question of sustainability for SEA-PLM is tied to SEA-PLM's long-term vision for assessment in the region and the affordability of future

rounds. Funding availability is uncertain for future rounds and is dependent on a more cohesive articulation of what it is that SEA-PLM offers.

Key barriers and bottlenecks towards achieving sustainability of SEA-PLM activities

The continued existence of SEA-PLM is dependent on maintaining existing engagement, expanding to other countries in the region and establishing a clear narrative on what it provides, what differentiates it from other International Large-Scale Assessments (ILSAs), and/or how it can leverage participation in other ILSAs.

For technical sustainability, the capacity of SEAMEO to provide technical and political support on assessment is a limiting factor.

How SEA-PLM can attract other countries in Southeast Asia and better link other international and regional initiatives

While the cost of participating is the most obvious barrier to entry, it is only one of the reasons identified through this evaluation. The second is technical. It is felt that countries were reluctant to participate until they had seen the quality of data and outputs produced from the first round. The third is political, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, it is not clear that the SEA-PLM secretariat has the dedicated human resources to address all these questions. Support to political narrative building at the national levels is vital, so it is important to ensure that the team has the necessary level of political influence and understanding.

Equity and Gender Equality

The extent to which SEA-PLM is conducive to supporting the most marginalised populations and genders (including those furthest left-behind)

Beyond the inclusion of contextual questionnaires for learners, teachers and parents, there is little evidence of equity being formally mainstreamed within SEA-PLM programme activities. There is evidence that countries are intending to use SEA-PLM learning data to answer equity questions. At the regional level, there are ongoing efforts to use SEA-PLM data to answer equity questions, including secondary reporting on gender differences in learning across the region, and the World Bank's use of SEA-PLM data for looking at learning poverty.

Conclusion

The SEA-PLM Secretariat and partners have delivered a successful first cycle. This has taken place despite human and material resource constraints and is a commendable achievement for all the stakeholders involved. This has also been achieved despite the significant disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is evidence that SEA-PLM is relevant to the needs of participating countries. Increasing the amount of data available on learning is a priority in most of the countries that participated in SEA-PLM. What is less clear is what exactly the relevance of SEA-PLM is, whether as a uniquely regional learning assessment, or as a compliment to other ILSAs operating in the region.

The validity of the SEA-PLM Theory of Change from inputs to outputs is strong but can be improved. The strong delivery of technical outputs is necessary but not sufficient to deliver on SEA-PLM intended outcomes and impact. Overall, the success of SEA-PLM hinges on the ability of the programme to move from data delivery to planning for and supporting the uptake of evidence to inform decision-making. In addition, a more sustainable delivery model for SEA-PLM is needed to ensure the programme remains affordable for countries and attracts additional regional funding to support the programme in the future.

SEA-PLM is entering a pivotal phase in 2022. Moving into the second round of data collection, SEA-PLM has left the "proof of concept" phase and the programme has proved that it can generate data that is robust and trusted by participating and observing governments. Now it must build on this and present a long-term strategic vision.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this evaluation we propose a number of recommendations to be considered for the next round and beyond. Recommendations are divided between three strategic areas related to; i) building of regional assessment capacity; ii) strengthening the link between data and policy formation and; iii) establishing SEA-PLM's regional presence.

Strategic area one: Building Long Term Sustainable Capacity for Assessment in Participating Countries

Recommendation 1.1: Work with countries to develop long term capacity objectives and needs. For the next round, SEA-PLM should work individually with countries to define roles and responsibilities and capacity gaps. This will also feed into a long-term sustainability plan.

Recommendation 1.2: Develop a bank of sustainable and transferrable capacity development materials. While the first round of SEA-PLM has established a strong and valuable dataset, it produced little in the way of transferrable training or capacity building materials. SEA-PLM should take the opportunity to build a library of resources that can be applied beyond those involved directly in training.

Strategic area two: Strengthening the links between SEA-PLM data and policy decisions

Recommendation 2.1: Plan strategically for the communication, uptake and use of data by policy makers. In the first round of SEA-PLM, data has resulted in countries recognising challenges with learning. However, assessment data on its own cannot necessarily influence are the policy and politics streams. The theory of change for the next round of SEA-PLM should include activities which address the political aspects of policy change.

Recommendation 2.2: Mainstream equity considerations into SEA-PLM design decisions. Equity considerations should be tailored to each country and driven by (1) an education sector analysis concerning equity (usually available for GPE member countries) and (2) the research questions that Ministries of Education have regarding inequity.

Strategic Area three: Building SEA-PLM as a sustainable regional body

Recommendation 3.1: Establish network of technical assistance individuals and agencies to support technical teams. In addition to, or as an eventual replacement for, a sole technical assistance supplier, SEA-PLM should see itself as having a coordinating and networking function for technical assistance. This would potentially be a more cost-effective approach to technical assistance, as well as promoting and supporting technical resources within the region.

Recommendation 3.2: Develop a collaboration and networking strategy. In addition to an external communications strategy, the strategy for the next round of SEA-PLM should explicitly focus on networking and collaboration.

Recommendation 3.3: Plan strategically for the establishment of SEA-PLM as a regional technical hub on learning assessment and education quality. In the long-term, SEA-PLM should consider the development of a regional technical agency, housed within SEAMEO. This agency would provide technical inputs for SEA-PLM but would also support other assessment activities across the region for participating and non-participating countries.

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List of abbreviations

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ANLAS	Analysis of National Learning Assessment Systems
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CLMV	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam
DAC	Development Evaluation Criteria
DIFF	Differential Item Functioning
DTRPs	Domain Technical Review Panels
EAPRO	East Asia and Pacific Regional Office
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ETS	Education Testing Service
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GAML	Global Alliance for Monitoring Learning
GEROS	Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System
GOM	Government of Myanmar
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
ILSA	International Large-Scale Assessments
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LLECE	Laboratorio Lantinoamericano de Evaluacíon de la Calidad de la Educacíon
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income countries
LMTF	Learning Metrics Task Force
LSA	Large-Scale Assessments
MOE	Ministry of Education
NEQMAP	Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OOS	Out of School
OOSC	Out of School Children
PASEC	Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QCA	Qualitative Comparative Analysis

RERG	Regional Expert Reference Group
RRSC	Refugee Resettlement in Small Cities
SACMEQ	Southern Africa Consortium for the Measurement of Education Quality
SC	Steering Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEA-PLM	Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics
SEAMEO	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization
SEAMEO INNOTECH	SEAMEO Innovation and Technology Centre
SEAMES	SEAMEO Secretariat
SES	Socio-Economic Status
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
ToC	Theory of Change
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNICEF CO	UNICEF Country Office
VfM	Value for Money
KICE	Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation
KIDE	Korea Institute for Development and Education

1   Introduction

1.1   Background

Around the world, large-scale survey assessments of learning are conducted at national, regional and international levels. These surveys are to produce evidence of learning achievement which enables statistically valid comparisons to be made over time and across different contexts. Such surveys are instruments intended for the measurement of progress, to ascertain the effectiveness of education systems, to monitor progress towards equity, and to guide investment and effort.

In Southeast Asia, the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) programme has been developed and piloted in six countries. SEA-PLM is a sample-based survey of learning at Grade 5 level. It has been developed with the technical assistance of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). UNICEF has been a key participant and funder of SEA-PLM. The first reporting cycle of data was completed in 2020. Prior to investing in the longer-term expansion and institutionalisation of the survey, UNICEF wishes to take stock of the experience to date. To do so, UNICEF has commissioned an evaluation of SEA-PLM, to guide itself, and other stakeholders, for the way forward. The Terms of Reference for this evaluation is included in Annex A.

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) is also a key stakeholder in the SEA-PLM. UNICEF provides support to the SEAMEO Secretariat. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Global Alliance for Monitoring Learning (GAML) are also identified in the Terms of Reference as beneficiaries of the strengthening of regional alignment and integration. SEA-PLM focuses on supporting ASEAN and SEAMEO member countries to better understand the status of student learning achievement, in order to improve the quality of their education systems (UNICEF, 2019). SEA-PLM is nested within the regional Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI), which was launched in 2000 to provide regional integration in order to narrow the development gap within ASEAN. Additional information on primary and secondary stakeholders for this evaluation is included in section 3.2 of this report.

In this way the SEA-PLM addresses both technical and political complexities, across a variety of diverse countries in partnership with a diverse set of actors. Understanding how the programme is working thus far to address technical and political realities towards individual behaviour change, institutional reform and ultimately learning outcomes, is crucial at this stage of SEA-PLM implementation.

In order for SEA-PLM to be effective and sustainable, reflection and possible adaptation of the programme delivery model or structure should be undertaken. This evaluation provides robust data to inform decisions regarding SEA-PLM.

1.2   Report structure

In the remaining section of this introduction the colour-coding scheme used throughout this report in outlined. In Section 2 the evaluation of SEA-PLM is described, and a reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC) is presented. Section 3 discusses the evaluation purpose and Section 4 the evaluation methodology. Much of the detail of the evaluation is annexed for readability purposes. The findings of the evaluation are presented, by evaluation criteria, in Section 5. Based on the findings, the conclusions and lessons learnt are outlined in Section 6 and the strong and weak points in the reconstructed ToC are identified. A set of actionable recommendations are outlined in Section 7 and are grouped by quick wins, unmissable opportunities and long-term visions.

1.3   Colour-Coding scheme used throughout the report

Throughout the report, we use the same simple colour-coding scheme to provide readers with broad overviews of findings against the evaluative judgements for each of the evaluation questions addressed. Its colour-coding scheme represents a three-level rating scale (and a fourth where there is insufficient data of evidence).

The coding scheme reflects a qualitative orientation tool for readers, rather than a quantifiable metric. The scheme allows for identifying stronger or weaker progress of achievement across the programme at this point in time. The coding does not represent the potential to improve and should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Figure 1 Colour coding key

Green indicates strong, achieved or improved	**Amber** indicates moderately strong, partially improved or partially achieved	**Red** signifies weak or not achieved	**Grey** indicates a lack of data or evidence.

We have also included summary regarding the evidence related to the key areas of consideration for many of the evaluation questions. We report on the strength of the evidence that supports each of these summary judgements.

Figure 2 Strength of evidence colour coding key

Green indicates the strength of confirming or refuting evidence is strong. Evidence is strong when documentation, deliverables and most stakeholder experiences and perceptions align. The findings are stable and another evaluation would confirm the findings.	**Amber** indicates the strength of confirming or refuting evidence is moderate. Evidence is moderate when the body of evidence is stable but there are some deficiencies.	**Red** indicates the strength of the confirming or refuting evidence is weak. Evidence is weak when the body of evidence has major or numerous deficiencies (or both) and additional evidence is needed before being able to conclude that the finding is stable.	**Grey** indicates no confirming or refuting evidence. The body of evidence has unacceptable deficiencies, precluding reaching a conclusion.

2 The Evaluation SEA-PLM Programme in Southeast Asia

The overall goal of the SEA-PLM Programme is that by 2025, all Southeast Asia countries have regional standardized quality measures to assess learning outcomes for grade 5 students in the domains of reading, writing, math and global citizenship and consistently use these to inform improvement within the education sector (SEA-PLM SEAMEO UNICEF, 2019b, p. 16).

2.1 Regional and country context

The East Asia and Pacific region is home to one-third of the global population and more than a quarter of the world's children. There is significant diversity in geography and culture as well as economic and political systems across the region. Disparities in wealth between nations can be observed and in many countries, there are also very large disparities in wealth within borders. This also applies to ethnic and linguistic diversity in the region (UNICEF EAPRO, 2020).

Increased enrolment, retention and completion rates and decreased gender gaps have been observed within some countries in the region, however many children remain out of school (OOS) or lack access to quality education (UNICEF EAPRO, 2020).

Across the eleven countries in Southeast Asia, recent progress in improving access, quality and equity varies (See Annex B).

2.2 Timeline of intervention and implementation status

2.2.1 Emergence of SEA-PLM

SEA-PLM was launched as the world refocused education development goals away from access alone, and towards inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The idea informed by the progress of the global Learning Metrics Task Force (LMTF) initiative and was the brainchild of UNICEF EAPRO and SEAMEO in 2012 (UNICEF, 2019, p. 13). The concept was presented during the SEAMEO Council at the 25th SEAMEO High Officials Meeting in November 2012 and SEA-PLM was recommended for approval by the Council of Ministers. A Working Groups was established in 2013, including UNICEF EAPRO, UNESCO Bangkok, UNESCO IS – Bangkok, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Statistics Division, SEAMEO Secretariat, SEAMEO INNOTECH and ACER (UNICEF, 2019, p. 13). The initiative was further conceptualised and endorsed at the 47th SEAMEO Council Conference in March 2013 and a cooperation agreement was established between UNICEF EAPRO and SEAMEO INNOTECH to coordinate the Regional Expert Reference Group (RERG), develop research papers to review education curriculums and assessment programmes across Southeast Asia, and to formulate strategic plans for the future of SEA-PLM (UNICEF, 2019, p. 13). The RERG sat in late 2013 and included 30 curricula, assessment and examination experts from eight SEAMEO Member Countries, along with other partners (UNESCO Bangkok, UIS Bangkok, UNICEF and ACER). The early structure of SEA-PLM was shaped by this meeting.

At the 36th SEAMEO High Officials Meeting in February 2014, targeting grade 5 in the four domains was fully endorsed. The formal collaboration was then established between the SEAMEO Secretariat and UNICEF EAPRO and the agreement continued to 2018. So far ACER has been contracted several times on one or two year contracts under UNICEF EAPRO and/or UNICEF Country Offices as the main technical partner for supporting Ministries of Education of participating countries, SEAMEO Secretariat and UNICEF EAPRO (SEA-PLM Secretariat) in designing and implementing the first round of SEA-PLM.

Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand agreed to further support the process and a formal launching ceremony of SEA-PLM took place at the end of 2014 (UNICEF,

2019, p. 14). At the launching ceremony, the official Regional SEA-PLM Steering Committee was established, with membership of the initial Working Group being expanded to include several MOE officials from SEAMEO Member Countries and a revised Terms of Refences was established (UNICEF, 2019, p. 14). Consistent SEA-PLM endorsement took place at regional key High-Official meetings and updates on SEA-PLM were presented during SEAMEO High Officials Meetings (UNICEF, 2019, p. 14).

A range of visits and workshops took place including SEA-PLM Secretariat visits to several field trial countries in 2015, regional item development workshop in June 2015, a regional field operations and data management workshop in August 2015 and a regional workshop on coding in 2016.

Interest in SEA-PLM was raised within the region and at the end of 2015 Myanmar decided to join the field trail, followed by Vietnam, Philippines and Malaysia. Field trails were conducted in Brunei Darussalam, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam between 2015 and 2018 (UNICEF, 2019, p. 15).

In 2016 SEA-PLM was included in the ASEAN Work Plan on Education (2016-2020), under Priority Area 2.2 *Improving the quality of basic education through quality-focused interventions* (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2016, p. 6)*.*

2.2.2   Institutional arrangements

At the time of writing for this evaluation (November 2021), SEA-PLM is in the last stages of the first round of the first regional large-scale assessment in the Southeast Asian Region. The results for SEA-PLM 2019 were reported and disseminated in 2020, supporting the use of the data through to 2021 (UNICEF, 2019). For this reason, it is necessary for partners to conduct this evaluation, in order to explore the strength and weaknesses of the first assessment round before engaging in the second round of SEA-PLM. This includes a shift from a biannual plan to a five-year commitment requiring increased stability, visibility and ownership of the project (UNICEF, 2019, p. 4).

Since inception, the SEA-PLM programme's structure has evolved. Originally, UNICEF EAPRO acted as the conduit between all parties within the partnership (SEAMES, ACER and UNICEF Country Offices) and facilitated all of the contractual arrangements for SEA-PLM (UNICEF, 2019, p. 4). UNICEF COs delivered advocacy for SEA-PLM with the national MOEs. They provided funding for implementation and ensured SEA-PLM queries were directed to the right people within MOE. UNICEF COs acted as the conduit between the MOE and all other partners and ensured continuous follow up with technical teams, highlighting any risks or challenges as they arose. UNICEF EAPRO defined the roadmap for SEA-PLM, identifying needs and ensuring relevant technical support. The regional office supervised all contracts under SEA-PLM, represented SEA-PLM when needed and appropriate, tracked progress, addressed risks and maintained continuous communication with UNICEF COs to deliver support and guidance. UNICEF EAPRO monitored and communicated regularly with technical suppliers to ensure progress and identify opportunities (UNICEF, 2019, p. 43).

From the outset, the partnership with the SEAMES was viewed by UNICEF as crucial in positioning SEA-PLM within the regional intergovernmental governance structures and as a key to the success of SEA-PLM (UNICEF, 2019, p. 4). SEAMES delivered the regional mandate and facilitated the regional and national buy-in. This included coordinating regional workshops, steering committee meetings and processes of commitments. They also represented SEA-PLM at the global, regional and national levels and delivered policy expertise and guidance towards securing SEA-PLM as an integrated and sustainable programme.

ACER, contracted by UNICEF, provided the technical expertise and all direct country implementation support and training for SEA-PLM. ACER were engaged from 2013. External partners included Network on Education Quality Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific (NEQMAP, Brookings), UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), SEAMEO Innovation and Technology Centre (SEAMEO INNOTECH), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Korea Educational Development Institute (KEDI), and the Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE).

As the original governance structure was designed for the inception period, in mid-2018 an external consultancy was undertaken to review, analyse and provide recommendations on how the governance

mechanism for SEA-PLM can be improved and made sustainable, ensuring quality founded within existing regional structures and aspirations. Consultation on the new governance structure was undertaken during the Regional SEA-PLM Consultation in 2018. As a result of the external consultancy, recommended changes included (1) that members of the SEA-PLM Steering Committee will only be Ministry of Education (MOE) country representatives, (2) that MOE representatives of non-participating SEAMEO countries should be invited to the Steering Committee on a no-vote basis, (3) that each MOE will have 2 representatives in the SC, and (4) that a Technical Reference Groups should be established that would advise the Secretariat and Steering Committee (UNICEF, 2019, p. 46).

A Ministerial Declaration was pre-endorsed in draft form and was reviewed by countries during the regional consultation in August 2018. A new approved SEA-PLM Secretariat structure that reports to its chairs, UNICEF and SEAMEO, and ultimately to the Regional Steering Committee and the SEAMEO Council, was endorsed by countries in March 2019. It was agreed that the Secretariat is responsible for the day-to-day management of region and national technical and operational tasks in collaboration with countries and contractors, the SEA-PLM Secretariat is chaired and jointly overseen by UNICEF EAPRO and SEAMEO Secretariat and that the partnership between the two organisations is crucial for enabling the commitment of National Ministries of Education to implement SEA-PLM (SEA-PLM, 2019a). There was recognition that the structure of the Secretariat has shifted over the years based on available financial and human resources. It was decided that given its technical and political networks, the SEAMEO Secretariat would maintain the ultimate ownership and oversight of SEA-PLM through its internal structures. Under the new governance structure, SEAMES contributes to technical development processes, strategic direction and operations of SEA-PLM. UNICEF contributes financial resources at regional and country levels, and technical expertise and operational leadership at the regional and country levels (SEA-PLM, 2019a, p. 6).

In 2019, the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for SEA-PLM was established. The TAG sought to provide independent advice on learning assessment matters and to play a consultative and advisory role on SEA-PLM methodology and results. The TAG chair and members were selected by the SEA-PLM Secretariat and mandated for one SEA-PLM cycle. The current TAG includes five experts, drawn from the Korean Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation; the University of Bath; the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Institute of Educational Research; Universit Sains Malaysia; and Education Testing Service (ETS) Research Institute and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) (SEAMEO and UNICEF, 2019b).

2.2.3   Assessment framework

An assessment framework has been developed and published for SEA-PLM, outlining the technical design of the assessment. The framework was developed in close consultation with national and regional experts and led by the SEAMEO Secretariat and UNICEF EAPRO. The SEA-PLM Assessment Framework was developed to identify '*what should be measured and in what way*'. Recognising the variation between countries, rather than being curriculum-based, SEA-PLM is curriculum-referenced and represents structures, conceptual underpinnings and overarching orientations across all ASEAN countries (ACER, SEAMEO & UNICEF, 2017).

The SEA-PLM Framework was reviewed in February 2015 by the Domain Technical Review Panels (DTRPs), established for each domain subject consisting of national experts in each domain (UNICEF, 2019, p. 14).

The assessment framework is designed for the first cycle of SEA-PLM implementation, aimed at students in Grade 5 or equivalent, but leaves scope for further development for SEA-PLM beyond the SEA-PLM 2019 first cycle (UNICEF and SEAMEO, 2019a). For the future, it is suggested the framework could be adjusted to suit other grades should these be included in future rounds of SEA-PLM, and that the assessment programme could eventually provide measures of students' progress at key stages – middle primary school, towards the end of primary school, and towards the end of compulsory secondary school (UNICEF and SEAMEO, 2019a, pp. 3-4).

The assessment framework includes four domains: mathematical literacy, reading literacy, writing literacy, and global citizenship. A separate assessment framework has been developed specifically for global citizenship (UNICEF and SEAMEO, 2019a, p. 3).

SEA-PLM aims to measure both curricular and cross-curricular knowledge, skills and understanding that are likely to allow school-aged students to progress successfully through school and ultimately to play constructive and fulfilling roles as citizens in society. It adopts broad definitions for the domains of mathematics, reading, writing and global citizenship that are consistent with curriculum specifications but that allow for a focus on the extent to which students in a Southeast Asian context are able to make effective use of their knowledge in a variety of relevant contexts (UNESC0 Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2018).

The programme focuses on comparisons in learning achievement both within and between countries. Programme documentation outlines that sub-national comparisons by social groups are important to inform decisions from an equity perspective, sub-national comparisons by school type are important to inform policy decisions, and cross-country comparisons are important to provide an external frame of reference (ACER, SEAMEO & UNICEF, 2017, p. 5 & 6). In addition, trends over time are expected to provide important information that contributes to monitoring movement towards the learning achievement goals. The trends monitored include changes in achievement at one grade level over time, and changes in differences between sub-populations over time (ACER, SEAMEO & UNICEF, 2017, p. 6).

2.3   Reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC)

The only logframe developed for the overall SEA-PLM programme was developed in July 2015, to support activities to December 2017. The stated plan was for the logframe to be further elaborated and also supported by a Theory of Change, developed collaboratively at a SEA-PLM Steering Committee. The accompanying narrative for the logframe states that the logframe will being used as a means of verification and will be regularly reviewed, validated and updated by the SEA-PLM Committee (SEA-PLM, 2015, p. 4). No further iterations, validations or verifications were identified during the desk review. The logframe can be found in Annex C.

The ToC for SEA-PLM has been implicit, rather than working to a formally prepared initial design. This is discussed in a paper prepared by staff of UNICEF, SEAMEO and ACER for the Oxford UKFIET conference in 2015 (Ahmad, 2015).

The implicit theory of how SEA-PLM programme implementation can lead to the desired outcomes and impact is rarely expressed in the language of a ToC in SEA-PLM documentation. While "impact" and "outputs" are referred to in the logframe, the language of the implicit ToC tends to focus on the programme vision, goals and aims.

One reference to a ToC map within the SEA-PLM 2019 Communication Strategy does not follow the usual logical chain of a ToC (inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact) and rather maps goals to activities, to levers of change, to systemic change and finally, impact (SEA-PLM SEAMEO UNICEF, 2019b, p. 18).

For the purpose of this evaluation, a reconstruction of the SEA-PLM ToC was undertaken. The evidence supporting the reconstructed ToC is provided in Annex E and the ToC is presented below. The agreed assumptions that underpin the ToC are presented in the Findings section of this report, where the evaluation team assesses the extent to which each assumption holds.

Figure 3 SEA-PLM Reconstructed ToC

| Inputs | Activities | Outputs | Intermediate outcomes | Longer term outcomes | Impact |
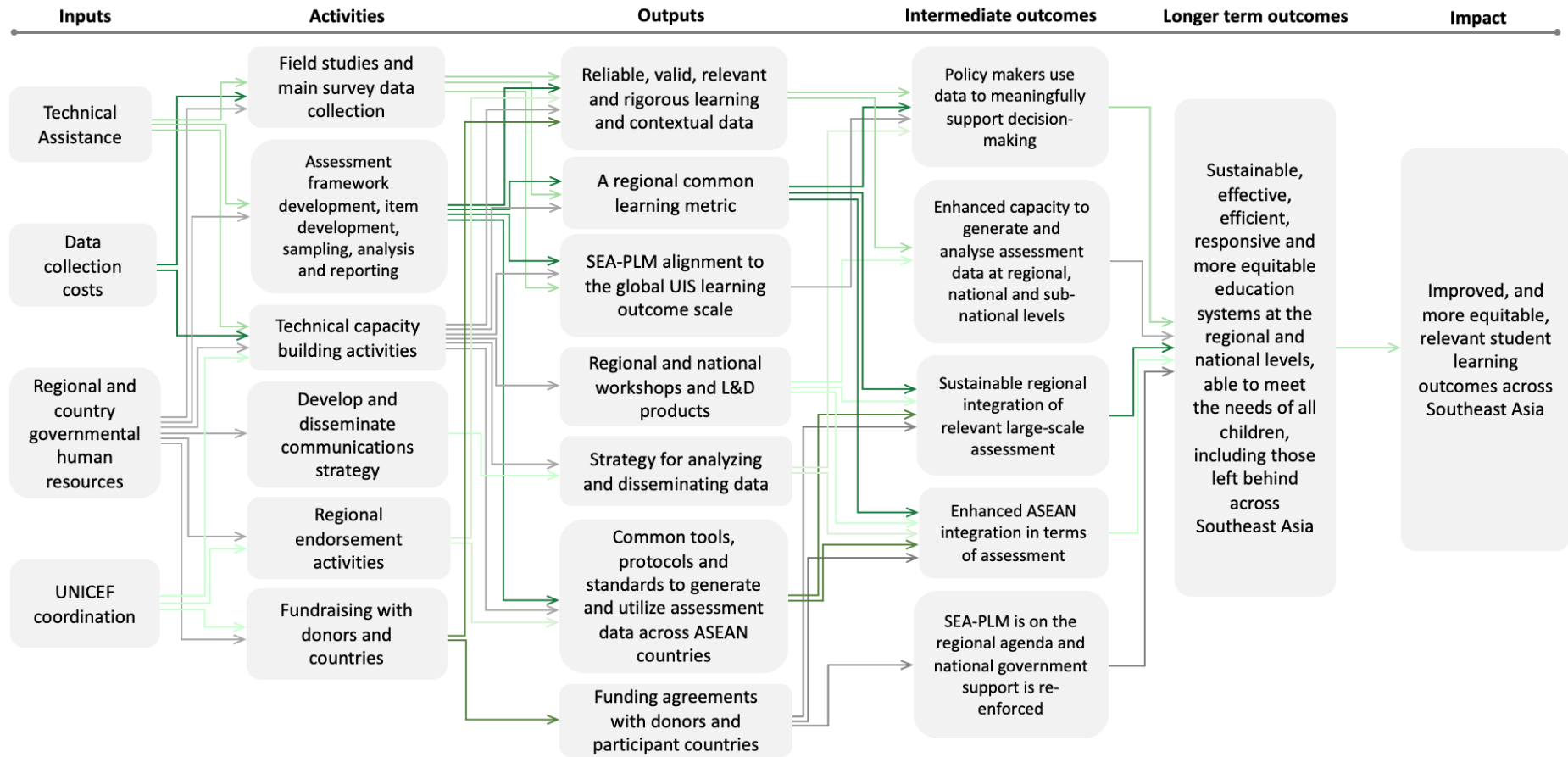
3   Evaluation purpose

This section of the report outlines the purpose of the SEA-PLM evaluation and why it is being undertaken at this time. The primary and secondary audience and users, duty bearers and rights holders are described, and the objectives and scope of the evaluation are outlined.

3.1   Type of evaluation (why being done at this time)

The main purpose of this independent evaluation is to draw lessons learned and account for results to inform the next phase of the SEA-PLM Programme. The evaluation is retrospective (*summative*) and covers *(secondary)* the conception period of SEA-PLM (2012-2015) and *(primarily)* the implementation of SEA-PLM 2019 from 2015 to 2019, but it will be forward-looking (*formative*) in providing conclusions and recommendations for regional- and country-level programming.

The first reporting cycle of SEA-PLM was 2020 and the dissemination of results have taken place in 2000 and 2021 and throughout this time, SEA-PLM has moved towards a longer-term Programme. For this reason, now is an appropriate time to explore the strengths and weaknesses of SEA-PLM governance and assess technical, managerial, funding and partnership perspectives (UNICEF, 2019).

3.2   Primary and secondary audiences

The primary audience of this evaluation is UNICEF EAPRO, SEAMEO, the SEA-PLM Secretariat, UNICEF Country Office Management teams and Education teams. The secondary audience includes governments (in particular government agencies working on assessment), UN agencies, development partners, donors, non-governmental organisations, and civil society organisations working in education, as well as external stakeholders such as contractors and other collaborators. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be used by both the regional and country offices to inform the development or implementation of their country Programme documents and adjust their strategies and implementation modalities as necessary.

3.3   Duty bearers and rights holders (and their involvement)

The right to education is a right of every human being and the principal right-holder is the person being educated (Monteiro, 2010). In the case of SEA-PLM, children in primary school in Southeast Asia are right holders and this is why the impact of the SEA-PLM programme must be their improved learning outcomes. The guarantee of the right to education is an obligation of State Parties in the instruments of International Human Rights Law. Therefore, it is the duty of governments to provide quality education for all. Parents and caregivers, communities, teachers, civil society organizations and the international community each have a subsidiary and auxiliary responsibility to support states and individuals to achieve these duties (Monteiro, 2010). UNICEF and the international community can be major participants in the realization of the right to education. This is captured in the Dakar Framework for Action, which introduces the role of the international community in the allocation of a larger share of resources to support basic education and ensuring education strategies complement other strategies for poverty elimination. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness supports rights-based approaches in terms of capacity building and accountability. In the case of SEA-PLM, the role of non-state actors includes the provision of resources, supporting system strengthening and national ownership and advocating for human rights thinking and practice in aid delivery (UNICEF, 2007). It is important, given the context of this evaluation to consider the impact the global COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent school closures has had on the children as the principal right-holders for education. In particular the pandemic has forced governments and other duty holders to consider a balance between rights to education, and public health measures. An investigation of this balance, and the decisions made, falls outside of the scope of this evaluation, but is an essential part of the context in which it was carried out.

3.4   Evaluation objectives

The objectives of this evaluation are to (UNICEF, 2019):

● Review the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, likely impact, and sustainability of the SEA-PLM Programme and assess the extent to which it has been implemented in line with the objectives and global good practices on regional learning assessments.

● At regional and national level, identify what strategic approaches, programmatic components and intervention modalities can help better position UNICEF and collaborators for SEA-PLM Programme and much broader in a fast-changing EAP region and global initiatives and in support of country programming in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) agenda.

This evaluation will also strengthen and update the knowledge and evidence base on SEA-PLM in complementarity with other initiatives recently completed, on-going or recently launched by UNICEF in the region such as the literature review of what works to improve learning in the region (reference to lit review?).

3.5   Scope of the evaluation

The time boundaries of the evaluation are 2012 to 2021, with a focus on the current implementation period of SEA-PLM (2015-2021).

The scope of the evaluation in terms of SEA-PLM organisation includes UNICEF country offices covered by SEA-PLM, UNICEF regional office, the Regional Secretariat, SEA-PLM participating countries and consultation with non-participating countries.

Geographically, the evaluation covers the six Southeast Asian countries participating in SEA-PLM[2], through the use of three of these countries as case studies.[3]

3.6   Any adaptations from the initial ToR

The evaluation was designed based on the Terms of Reference, informed by the methodology outlined in the technical proposal and discussions with UNICEF. Variations from the initial Terms of Reference are as follows.

1. The evaluation includes case studies of three countries which have participated in SEA-PLM, rather than of six countries as stated in the Terms of Reference.

2. Due to restrictions on travel and face-to-face working imposed globally and in South East Asia to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, significant adjustments were required. All of the tasks originally envisaged as involving travel and face-to-face meetings by the evaluation team, potentially including the country case studies and central meetings, workshops, presentations and consultations, have been conducted remotely, by telecommunications.

The timing and sequence of activities and deliverables were adjusted as indicated in the Inception Report, and were made in agreement with UNICEF during the course of the assignment, rather than fixed against the tentative deadlines indicated in the initial Terms of Reference.

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[2] SEA-PLM countries include: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Vietnam

[3] Case study countries were Lao PDR, Malaysia and the Philippines

4   Methodology

This section of the report outlines the conceptual framework, the evaluation methodology, the country selection for case studies, data sources, data collection methods, data collection instruments, data analysis techniques, equity and gender considerations and ethics guiding the evaluation.

4.1   Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation answers the following questions, here organised according to the evaluation criteria of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC).

Relevance

1. To what extent SEA-PLM aligned to i) the national development policies and priorities of national education stakeholders and ii) UNICEF's national, regional and global objectives and intended impacts?
2. What are the programming gaps or unaddressed needs? What could have been done better?

Effectiveness

3. To what extent have the objectives and expected outcomes of SEA-PLM been achieved or are likely to be achieved?
4. What have been the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of SEA-PLM objectives and activities? What were the enabling factors, barriers and bottlenecks?
5. What can UNICEF and its partners do to ensure the objectives of SEA-PLM are met in the future? What kind of initiatives should UNICEF prioritize at the country and regional levels?

Efficiency

6. How well have SEA-PLM activities been managed by UNICEF in terms of the technical and financial resources?
7. What were the strengths and weaknesses of SEA-PLM management processes? How could management of SEA-PLM activities be improved?

Likely Impact

8. How has SEA-PLM contributed to national education systems and assessment practices and policies and discourses thus far? And at the regional level, what positive and negative changes has SEA-PLM brought about?

Sustainability

9. To what extent can SEA-PLM activities, plans and strategies be fully integrated and implemented by the government(s), both technically and financially? To what extent are they likely to continue?
10. What are the key barriers and bottlenecks towards achieving sustainability of SEA-PLM activities?
11. How can SEA-PLM attract other countries in Southeast Asia and better link other international and regional initiatives?

Equity and gender equality

12. To what extent is SEA-PLM conducive to supporting the most marginalized populations and genders (including those furthest left-behind)?

The hypothesis tested in this evaluation is the ToC. The evaluation matrix turns the ToC of the SEA-PLM into a set of hypotheses, including judgement criteria, indicators, data sources and analytical

approaches, on which the evaluation design and instrumentation is based. The evaluation matrix can be found in Annex E.

4.2 Evaluation framework

The evaluation used theory-based Process Evaluation to answer the evaluation questions. Therefore, the principal organising structure and framework for the evaluation is the ToC, however we will follow the key functions of process evaluation. The aim of the process evaluation was to explain how SEA-PLM works and has examined the processes through which the programme generates outcomes in different contexts. The evaluation framework is outlined in Annex F.

4.3 Evaluation design and methods

The evaluation explores the interactions between context, SEA-PLM design and causal assumptions; how delivery was achieved; how participants responded to and interacted with SEA-PLM and has assessed the validity of the results chain, as described in the ToC. This included the identification of barriers to delivery, uptake, individual change and institutional reform, reviewing how delivery is achieved, identifying the likely mechanisms of impact[4], and identifying any contextual issues that shape theories of how the intervention works, contextual factors which affect (and may be affected by) implementation, intervention mechanisms and outcomes and any causal mechanisms present within the context which act to sustain the status quo or enhance effects and the mechanisms for impact.

This was done by empirically verifying activities, outputs, and outcomes and assumptions posited along the causal chains in the ToC and drawing conclusions about what is working and what is not working in SEA-PLM and likely impact.

4.3.1 Data collection methods

4.3.1.1 Inception report development and Desk Research

In order to outline the key approach, methodology and workplan for this evaluation, the evaluation team developed a reconstructed ToC based on SEA-PLM programme documentation and an evaluation matrix based on the final evaluation questions.

An inception workshop with key stakeholders was undertaken to validate the ToC. Results were reported on in the evaluation inception report.

As part of the inception period, the team reviewed available programme materials and conducted a review of literature on international and regional assessments.

4.3.1.2 Qualitative data collection

The evaluation methods were predominantly qualitative in nature, allowing us to understand what change is occurring, how and why. The project has a focus on capacity development, which is not readily quantifiable and many of the evaluation questions are 'how' and 'why' questions (rather than 'how much').

A country case study approach was utilized, and qualitative data collection was conducted in three of the six participating countries through virtual and face-to-face country visits. Consultations with countries other than those featured as case studies was light touch.

4.3.1.3 Country selection for case studies

The selection of case study sites was informed by consideration of a theorised and purposive sampling approach to produce data from a diverse set of countries that are collectively likely to produce data on a range of experiences to inform future decisions.

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[4] It is recognised that as the programme has not completed a full cycle yet, impact of student learning cannot be assessed. However, the likely mechanisms for impact can be explored by testing the assumptions that exist along the results chain.

Sampling '*is a core design issue because the purposeful sample will determine what you learn about*' (Patton 2015). Through a carefully chosen sampling strategy, the most relevant sample can be selected, and rigour can be ensured. The chosen approach to sampling for the country case studies was designed to generate responses from small numbers of individuals and groups that are representative (though not statistically) of groups relevant to SEA-PLM and which allow some identification of heterogenous contributions and experiences.

Purposive sampling can serve this purpose. Purposive sampling involves selecting a sample of 'typical' and 'extreme' cases based on available data. In essence, the aim is to select countries that cover the range of national and education system features.

The three case studies were:

1. Lao PDR;
2. Philippines; and
3. Malaysia.

Lao PDR represents a small education system with relatively less experience in large scale assessments. The Philippines is a larger system, with somewhat more established experience and Malaysia is a country with significant previous participation in international surveys.

Additionally, the Philippines has seen a deterioration in many education indicators, Laos has had some very positive progress but remains challenged in some areas and Malaysia has shown progress and very little deterioration across the range of education indicators.

Figure 4 Map of SEAMEO Member States, SEAP-PLM participating countries and SEA-PLM Evaluation case study countries
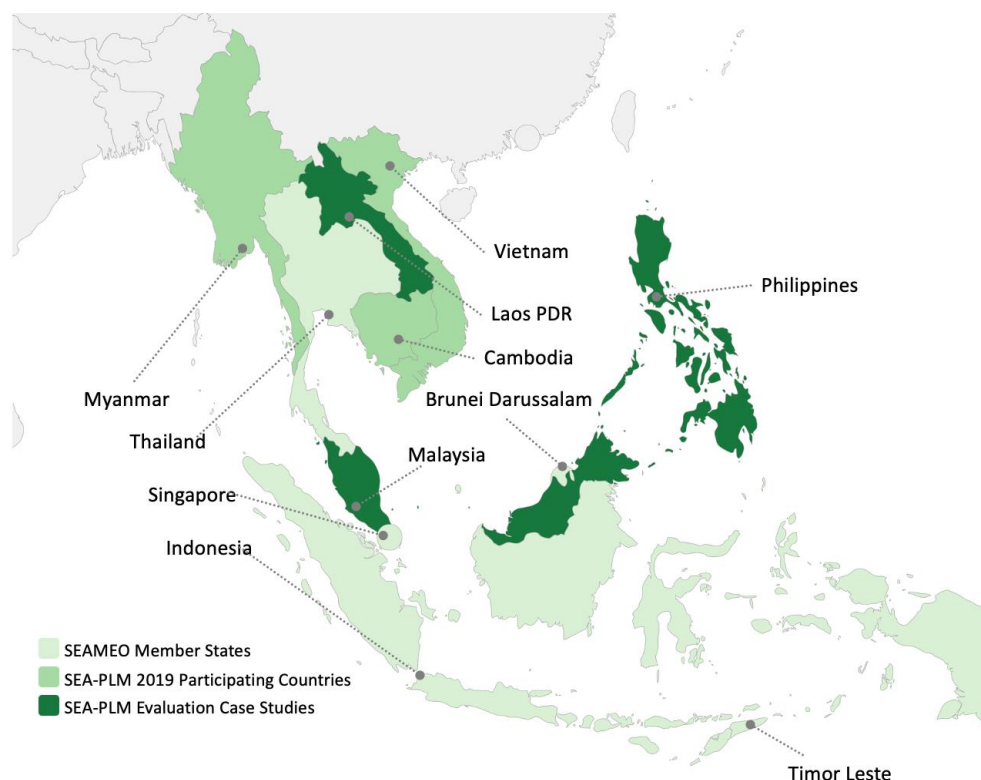
4.3.2 Data collection instruments

The qualitative research tools consisted of Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Semi-structured questionnaires were designed in alignment to the evaluation questions. Instruments followed the results chain from inputs to outcomes but used the language of SEA-PLM activities and SEA-PLM expected outcomes rather than the language of evaluators.

4.3.3 Data collection consistency and quality

4.4 Data analysis

The evaluation team used qualitative comparative analysis and synthesis techniques, carefully ensuring non-bias using triangulation and informed judgements.

4.4.1 Qualitative Comparative Analysis

Within the structure of the overarching ToC, the evaluation used elements of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). QCA is a useful method to identify different factors or combinations of factors that are likely to have led to a specific outcome, in a given context.[5] In line with Contribution analysis, the report will not claim to reliably identify which, of the factors tested, are necessary or sufficient to obtain envisaged results, rather it assesses the factors that are *likely* to have facilitated or hindered achieving the desired results.

4.4.2 Synthesis

The qualitative analysis has allowed the evaluation team to identify the underlying assumptions related to the ToC and the extent to which these did or did not hold in the different contexts.

To ensure efficient analysis of the data, the team kept a running record of evidence against each evaluation question in an evidence matrix in an Excel document.

4.4.3 Triangulation, bias and informed judgements

With qualitative interviews, it is often likely that respondents will provide biased answers. This is why a range of respondents is needed for triangulation. The data of each respondent was organised around the themes / questions which then provided an overview of the frequency and strength of responses for each theme. Furthermore, data from interviews and document reviews was triangulated in order to provide nuanced answers to the evaluation questions. In the case of contradictory and opposing views the evaluation team represented these views in our analysis. Both for primary and secondary data, the evaluation matrix was used to structure the results and the findings.

4.5 Equity and gender

Our approach to mainstreaming equity and gender into the evaluation is captured in the Evaluation Matrix (Annex E). In order to answer the evaluation question "*to what extent is SEA-PLM conducive to supporting the most marginalized populations and genders (including those left behind)?*" the evaluation team sought evidence that equity and inclusion has been mainstreamed into programme activities and that the data SEA-PLM produces will be used to inform equity decisions.

4.6 Ethics

The design and conduct of this evaluation was guided by Cambridge Education's core values of integrity, respect and excellence as we constantly stretch our thinking to find extra value for our clients and their end-users. These values also guided our rigorous internal ethical standards, which are aligned with the United Nations policies and standards for ethics and evaluations. Applicable ethical norms and procedures of UNICEF and Cambridge Education was applied throughout the evaluation.

The evaluation methodology is consistent with the UNICEF Evaluation Policy (2018), the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016), UN SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator, UNEG Ethical Guidelines (2008), UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards and Research, Evaluation and Data Collection and Analysis (2015), as specified in the Terms of Reference. The final evaluation report will conform to the UNICEF-Adapted UNEG Evaluation Report Standards

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[5] See, for example: Baptist, C. and Befani, B. (2015): Qualitative Comparative Analysis: A Rigorous Qualitative Method for Assessing Impact. Available at: http://www.coffey.com/assets/Ingenuity/Qualitative-Comparative-Analysis-June-2015.pdf . See also: *Qualitative Comparative Analysis and the Study of Policy Processes*. Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis, Research and Practice Volume 19, 2017 - Issue 4: Special Issue: Validating methods for comparing public policy: Perspectives from academics and "pracademics".

(2017), including consideration of a gender equality perspective and human rights based approach, including child rights. The respective signed documents that supported the ethical clearance are presented in Annex J.

4.7 Gaps and limitations

There were three key limitations to the evaluation:

1. The first limitation to the evaluation was the timeframe. Because the regional results of SEA-PLM 2019 were only released in 2020 and the country reports released in 2021, the evaluation was not able to assess impact of results on children and education systems. Rather it took a more formative approach, looking at intermediate outputs, outcomes and likely impact.

2. Secondly, accessing sufficient comparable information across the set of implementing countries, and from the five other SEAMEO countries, was difficult, given the diversity and range of these countries. However, a combination of our proposed approach and the assistance of UNICEF's EAPRO and Country Offices addressed this challenge satisfactorily. With accordance to the Terms of Reference, each of UNICEF's involved Country Offices facilitated these respects, by designating a focal point person to support the evaluation, who provided all the information, resource documents and contacts necessary for the evaluation, facilitated communications with implementing partners in-country, organised and facilitated logistics, security, meetings and workshops, with financial support from UNICEF's regional assessment budget, and by providing comments on key deliverables to minimise factual errors, misinterpretations and omissions.

3. Thirdly, a significant challenge was the limitations of availability of cost and resource data disaggregated from general government expenditure and hidden costs borne by various parties. Typically, countries do not cost their activities such as participating in surveys separately. For this reason and due to the highly labour-intensive nature of doing in-depth financial exegesis and analysis, adherence to the principals of VfM will be assessed in the evaluation, as there are not sufficient resources available for a cost-effectiveness component.

4. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the evaluation was complex. While the necessity to conduct fieldwork remotely may have introduced some minor limitations in the range of stakeholders engaged for the three case studies, this is not a certainty, as the remote approach allowed for a wider timeframe to be used, which potentially made scheduling more flexible. The timeline for the evaluation also shifted significantly, with data collected taking place across 2021, rather than in Q3 of 2020. This potentially presented a positive opportunity to see more of the impact of SEA-PLM data, after its launch at the end of 2020.

5 Findings

This section of the report outlines the findings for each evaluation question, listed by DAC evaluation criteria.

5.1 Relevance

Table 1 Summary of SEA-PLM alignment to national and UNICEF priorities

Area of evidence	Assessment	Strength of the evidence
SEA-PLM objectives align with national development policies and priorities	SEA-PLM objectives align significantly with national development policies and priorities.	**Strong.**
SEA-PLM objectives align with UNICEF global, national and regional objectives and intended impacts	SEA-PLM objectives align with UNICEF national, regional and global objectives, but narrower than UNICEF's broad focus on holistic child development.	**Strong.**

5.1.1 To what extent is SEA-PLM aligned to i) the national development policies and priorities of national education stakeholders and ii) UNICEF's national, regional and global objectives and intended impacts?

SEA-PLM as a programme emerged from the priorities of actors at the regional level, including SEAMEO and UNICEF. Two major driving forces at the regional level which led to the creation of the SEA-PLM initiative were the focus on regional integration by ASEAN, and the desire to have more internationally comparative learning data for the region. The latter was largely driven by UNICEF in collaboration with other regional bodies, in particular by NEQMAP.

SEA-PLM's stated aims are to achieve three key outcomes:

1. Enhanced capacity to generate and analyse assessment data at regional, national and sub-national levels;
2. Enhanced capacity to utilize assessment data for education improvement and more equitable learning outcomes at regional, national and sub-national levels; and
3. Enhanced ASEAN integration in terms of approaches to assessment.

SEA-PLM objectives align significantly with national development policies and priorities. Malaysia's Education Blueprint 2013-2025 outlines the importance of student cognitive performance against international standards, Lao PDR's new Education Sector Plan's High-Level Outcome 2 is "increased number of primary school children with functional literacy and numeracy skills". The plan outlines the work being undertaken on the national learning outcomes assessment framework and articulates the need to improve assessment methodologies at the upper secondary education level and seeks to improve student learning outcomes measurement. The Philippines has a long tradition of participation in large scale learning assessments and has both increasing capacity in the DepEd to undertake assessments and has a National Assessment Technical Working Group on System Assessment 6. Vietnam has recently participated as a pilot country in the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) Analysis of National Learning Assessment Systems (ANLAS) as it begins to implement a new general education curriculum and is developing assessment regulations based on the new curriculum (Global Partnership for Education, 2019). In Cambodia a National Education Congress conducts annual reviews of sector progress and relies on learning assessment outcome data to undertake this review (Global Partnership for Education, 2021). Finally, student assessment and

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6 ACTRC, Large-Scale Assessments for use in the Philippines.

examinations is one of the National Education Sector Plan "transformational shifts" in Myanmar (Government of Myanmar).

SEA-PLM reflects a trend across countries in the region to prioritise learning data. Commitment to learning assessment in general is evidenced by the participation in other ILSAs across the SEA-PLM participating countries, as well as non-participating countries. Philippines, Malaysia, Cambodia and Vietnam (along with Singapore, Brunei Darussalam and Indonesia) have taken part in recent rounds of PISA and/or TIMSS. Secondly, functional literacy and numeracy, and the need for improved data on learning levels feature as priorities in all of the national education strategies of the participating countries (See Table 2 for details).

SEA-PLM objectives align with UNICEF national, regional and global objectives, but are narrower than UNICEF's broad focus on holistic child development. UNICEF national priorities within the area of education focus on, among other priorities, strengthening government capacity to improve the quality and relevance of teaching and the learning environment. At the regional level, UNICEF focuses on inequity in terms of access to education and learning, which aligns with SEA-PLM's stated objectives to improve capacity to analyze learning assessment data towards more equitable learning outcomes. Across national, regional and global landscapes, UNICEF has a strong focus on holistic child development. While SEA-PLM objectives align to part of UNICEF's mandate, it is quite a narrow alignment. This is unlike the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, for example, which tracks holistic child development.

5.1.2   What are the programming gaps or unaddressed needs? What could be done better?

Table 2 Summary programming gaps, needs and possible improvements

Area of evidence	Assessment	Strength of the evidence
Field studies and main survey data collection	Field studies and main survey data collection have been completed. The activities were implemented reasonably smoothly, with a few minor issues which were resolved.	**Strong**.
Assessment framework and item development, sampling, analysis and reporting	The assessment framework, item development, sampling, analysis and reporting were all completed. There are some questions regarding the utility of the citizenship measure, which all stakeholders agreed did not live up to the original aspiration.	**Strong.**
Technical capacity building activities	Technical capacity building activities were delivered as expected to ensure the generation of data. Tailored capacity building to suit the needs of individual countries and capacity building for data utilization needs additional focus.	**Strong.**
Develop and disseminate communications strategy	Communication planning and implementation can be improved.	**Strong.**
Regional endorsement activities	Regional endorsement activities took place during SEA-PLM emergence, however there is a need for a longer-term strategy.	**Strong.**
Fundraising with donors and countries	Fundraising activities with donors and countries have taken place, but haven't resulted in adhered to funding agreements with countries or donors. In addition, a long-term strategy is missing.	**Strong.**

The activities included in the Theory of Change for the SEA-PLM programme have largely been achieved. At the time of evaluation, the first round of data had been collected, analysed and disseminated both regionally, and in several of the participating countries. The core activities involved in this, as outlined by the theory of change (see Figure 3) include the development of the assessment framework, the field trial and main survey data collection, the provision of technical capacity building, the development of dissemination and analysis strategy, regional endorsement activities, and fundraising. While all of these have occurred to some extent, there are a number of unaddressed needs, or missed opportunities across the activities.

The activities related to the development of the assessment framework and delivery of the first round of data collection have been largely successful. While there were some minor issues during field trial and main survey data collection, none impacted the timeliness or quality of the results. However, a potential area of missed opportunity was the global citizenship questionnaire. This was included as a priority for ASEAN. Considering the difficulty in developing a cognitive measure for global citizenship the format of an opinion survey was the most feasible approach, but lacked depth compared to other approaches. Some have questioned whether this should have been prioritised as a domain, compared to the other potential non-academic domains which could have been included. Development of the global citizenship framework was slowed by the difficulty in reaching consensus as to what should be included. It is important to recognise that citizenship is one of several enlightenment concepts and that enlightenment concepts (which include liberty, progress, tolerance, constitutional government and the separation of church and state) are not equally pursued across all countries. Therefore, agreement was always going to be slow and the final output was unlikely to fully capture an in-depth measure of citizenship.

SEA-PLM has so far missed a valuable opportunity to provide tailored technical capacity strengthening to support participating countries. The level of capacity and ambition varies significantly across countries in the region, a fact that was not well reflected in the approach to training. An approach based on a formal and collaborative "capacity assessment" would have allowed for specific support to be provided based on the plans and capacities of the partner bodies. For example, in both Malaysia and the Philippines partners expressed a desire to have been more involved in analysis and reporting in order to build the units' capacity.

The development of transferrable technical support materials would allow SEA-PLM to overcome some of the challenges related to staff turn-over. It is a well-recognised fact, that systemic capacity strengthening is limited by turnover in staff in key partners. One way to adapt to this is to create materials that can be used in the medium- to long-term to support continuous training. The evaluation found that, while materials from training sessions are available, they are usually in the form of PowerPoint presentations, not intended to be used as standalone training materials. The materials available relate also to test administration and encoding, rather than on analysis and interpretation of data.

Communication planning and implementation can be improved. A communications plan was developed in part and is currently a working document. While the communications plan outlines that SEA-PLM prioritizes "*improving national and regional capacity to apply the assessment and to work with decision-makers in understanding results and translating these into meaningful education reform*" the activities within the communications plan do not reflect this. Similarly, while the "national target audiences" key areas of messaging include "*factors that lead to certain learning outcomes*", "*result implications for curriculum*" and "*schools and supervisor action to further support learning, monitoring and planning*" (ACER), these messages have not reached the intended audiences. In addition, confusion regarding item and data ownership, item security policies and processes and data access has been evident in several countries.

There is a widely recognised need for a more structured approach to political advocacy, both for attracting new countries, as well as for supporting the use of data. SEA-PLM supported by its technical partners developed several tools to support the dissemination and analysis of data. This included a newsletter and mailing list, a document mapping the key stakeholders at regional, national and global level, and a written communication and uptake strategy for the first round of data, released in 2020. While these are important exercises, a more structured forward-looking approach is missing. Key stakeholders consulted during the evaluation felt that the work on dissemination and uptake should have begun from the beginning of the programme, with ministries of education being involved in setting key questions that they would like SEA-PLM data to answer. This could have allowed the uptake strategy to inform questions of sampling, or the questions asked in the contextual questionnaires. While the activities included were adequate, there is an unaddressed need for a more robust approach that places evidence users at the centre of the design.

An area for improvement highlighted by country level respondents was how comparative data is presented regionally. There has been some dissatisfaction expressed from ministries of education, who felt that their desire for SEA-PLM not to be a ranking exercise had not been met by the regional reporting. The regional report does consistently place the six participating countries next to each other in data visualisations but does so without ranking. Instead, they are placed in alphabetical order. This is visually harder to interpret but has clearly been done to avoid ranking countries. While there is some comparison of countries in the text of the report, this is something of a necessity in a regional report. When compared to the reporting of PISA or other ILSAs, the work done on SEA-PLM to avoid visually ranking countries is obvious. This dissatisfaction could have potentially been avoided by more thorough engagement with ministries of education prior to the release of the report.

Regional endorsement activities took place during SEA-PLM's emergence, however there is a need for a longer-term strategy. Regional engagement included a formal launching ceremony with high-level representation, country visits from SEAMES and EAPRO, and validation of regional and national activity plans. This resulted in SEA-PLM being included in the ASEAN 2016-2020 Education Work Plan. However, regional endorsement activities have not led to a longer-term strategy beyond the generation of data following round one.

Fundraising activities with donors and countries have taken place, however a long-term strategy is missing. The initial projections regarding the costs of SEA-PLM were not accurate and countries have spent more than the original commitment. Additionally, while fundraising activities with donors has taken place, these activities have not resulted in funding agreements for SEA-PLM. There is a need to develop a long-term fundraising/financing strategy regarding the costs of SEA-PLM, the modality of funding and funding bodies.

Box 1 Testing Assumptions — Inputs to Activities[7]

The assessment at this stage of SEA-PLM implementation is:

Assumption 1 holds, but can be improved in some contexts. Stakeholders across case study countries have opportunities to engage in SEA-PLM activities, however in some countries the resources, time and conducive environment allows for deeper engagement. This relates to two key areas. (1) The delivery of capacity building activities and (2) the interpretation of SEA-PLM results towards change.

Assumption 2 holds, but can be improved for some activities. Stakeholders have greater levels of motivation and incentive to participate in SEA-PLM activities related to technical components of SEA-PLM, including data collection, assessment and item development, sampling, analysis and reporting, technical and capacity building activities. Less effective activities (such as dissemination and communication strategies and endorsement and fundraising activities) has resulted in limited stakeholder capacity to address the political challenges of using learning assessment data to inform change.

Assumption 3 holds. The Secretariate has delivered on the first round of SEA-PLM, including influencing SEA-PLM participation and monitoring activities.

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[7] From **inputs to activities** there are three assumptions were: **(1)** Stakeholders have the opportunities (resources, time, conducive environment) to engage in SEA-PLM activities; **(2)** Stakeholders have the motivation and incentives to participate in SEA-PLM activities; and **(3)** The Secretariat has sufficient leverage within SEA countries to influence SEA-PLM participation and monitor SEA-PLM activities.

5.2 Effectiveness and Efficiency

Table 3 Summary of the strengths and weaknesses of SEA-PLM management processes and the achievement of objectives and outcomes

Area of evidence	Assessment	Strength of the evidence
Strengths of SEA-PLM management processes	Regional ownership of the programme, delivery of SEA-PLM data generation	**Strong.**
Challenges to be addressed	Increased political participation and support for messaging SEA-PLM results, overstretching of secretariat resources, technical support to understand, analyse and use SEA-PLM data	**Strong.**
Policy makers are preparing to use SEA-PLM data to inform decisions	While there are some examples of decisions being considered based on SEA-PLM data, there is not sufficient utilisation preparations regarding SEA-PLM data to inform decisions. This is primarily related to the capacity, rather than will of stakeholders.	**Strong.**
Improved regional and national capacity to produce, analyse and disseminate data	There is clear evidence of improved regional and national capacity to generate data. However, a stronger focus on utilisation is required.	**Strong**.
Stakeholders are aligning national assessments with SEA-PLM	There is clear evidence that changes in national assessments are being informed by SEA-PLM.	**Strong.**
SEA-PLM is supported by national governments and is on the regional agenda	SEA-PLM is supported by national and regional governments and is on the regional agenda (evidenced by being included in the ASEAN 2016-2020 Education Work Plan). However, there are threats to ongoing support that need to be addressed, particularly in the availability of funding, a situation exacerbated by the economic shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.	**Strong**.

5.2.1 What were the strengths and weaknesses of SEA-PLM management processes? How could management of SEA-PLM activities be improved?

The management structure of the SEA-PLM programme has become stronger over the course of the programme so far. The management structure of SEA-PLM (outlined in Figure 5) is based on a division between implementing roles, decision making roles, and technical advisory roles. At the regional level there is a steering committee of members nominated by participating countries with non-participating countries and key partners invited as observers. At the national level this is replicated for national decision making. For programme implementation there is a regional secretariat, staffed from SEAMEO and UNICEF EAPRO, and at national level there are national technical teams, staffed from ministries of education. Technical support at the regional level is provided by ACER, as well as by a Technical Advisory Group of global assessment experts. At the national level, technical assistance arrangements have varied, with a number of different approaches being taken to find technical support on tasks such as reporting and dissemination. In some cases, this has been done internally, but in most cases, it has been outsourced to consultants, either nationally, or through the regional and national contracts with ACER.

Figure 5 Management structure of SEA-PLM
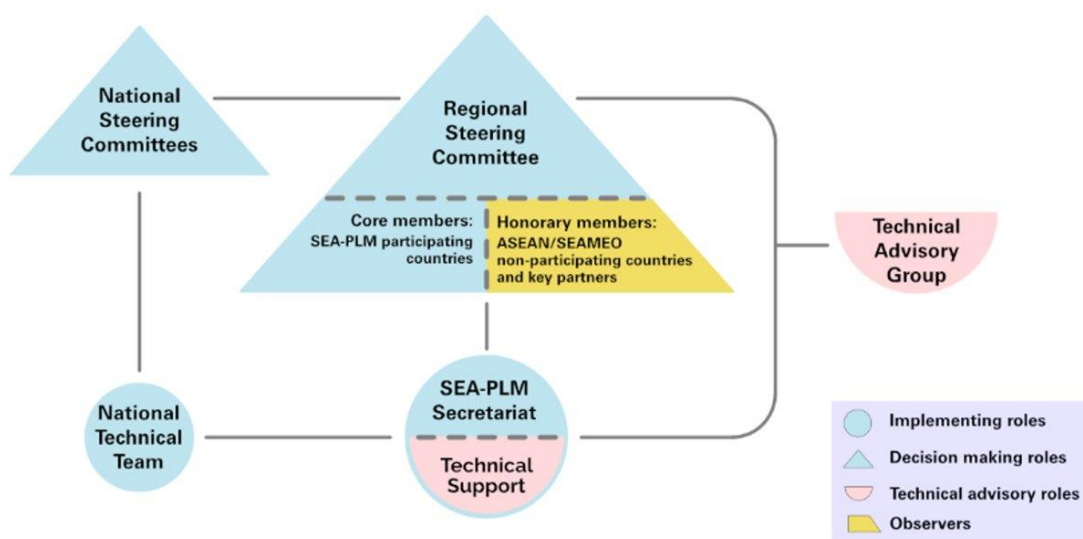
Regional ownership of the programme is a key strength for SEA-PLM, but the balance between technical and political participation should be considered. It is noted that the regional steering committee is largely (though not exclusively) composed of assessment experts from ministries of education in the participating (and non-participating countries). While this has been important for ensuring the quality of technical outputs during the first round, it potentially weakens the advocacy potential of the programme.[8] More engagement from political or planning departments within ministries of education would support a stronger link between SEA-PLM data and policy throughout the programme cycle.

In addition to political participation, ministries of education need greater support in packaging and messaging the results of SEA-PLM. In almost all countries globally, ministers of education can adapt and use a common language when communicating with their citizens regarding examination results. However, ministries of education in SEA-PLM participating countries are struggling to form a common and understandable language around SEA-PLM results, tie the results to an intended action and communicate with citizens. It is not yet clear exactly what information will be publicly available as at the time of evaluation national reports had not all been published. The concerns however are felt by stakeholders both nationally and regionally. This is an area in which SEA-PLM can provide greater support to ministries of education in developing communication strategies for SEA-PLM results.

Programme effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability is threatened by an overstretching of secretariat resources. The delivery of SEA-PLM is heavily dependent on a small secretariat of individuals located within SEAMEO and UNICEF EAPRO. While the work of UNICEF EAPRO and the individuals in the secretariat is regarded as being high quality, there are resource limitations.

As previously mentioned, technical support to understand, analyse and use SEA-PLM data is lacking across participating countries. The majority of technical support thus far has focused on support to complete the activities required to generate data on learning levels. Country level stakeholders reported that a more collaborative approach between education departments, ACER and UNICEF should be used in the analysis and reporting phase of the study. Crucially, meaningful follow up and action to use the high-quality data that has been generated is needed. In many SEA-PLM countries government officials are keenly aware of the low achievement of their children but do not know how to address the problem. While webinars have allowed countries to share insights, key stakeholders feel that more could be done to support the process of translating evidence to policy. Technical support on how to use SEA-PLM data to inform decisions to improve learning levels is fundamental moving forward.

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[8] Advocacy does not only refer to advocating for participation in SEA-PLM but advocating for the use of SEA-PLM data in decision-making.

The focus on data generation is also evident when reviewing the clarity of scope, management and monitoring of outputs across the SEA-PLM programme. Activities that led to reliable, valid, relevant and rigorous learning and contextual data, the regional common learning metric and the alignment of SEA-PLM to the global UIS scale have all be completed to a high standard. However, it is less clear that the strategy for *analyzing and disseminating* data and the development of common tools and protocols to *utilise* assessment data have been clearly defined, clearly assigned to specific actors, managed and monitored.

While the technical support arrangement has allowed for the delivery of the first round of SEA-PLM data, it presents challenges for future rounds of the programme. Country and regional stakeholders view the technical support component of the work as costly and not necessarily value for money. Participants with sufficient technical expertise have also questioned the extent to which transparency is possible with an individual technical partner, suggesting technical experts from more than one institution should be involved in various aspects of the technical processes. Other stakeholders have championed building technical expertise within SEAMEO, to reduce costs and build capacity in the region.

Future decisions regarding the technical support arrangement for SEA-PLM need to consider a wide variety of trade-offs. For example, while expanding the number of technical partners involved in SEA-PLM may increase transparency, the current arrangement relies on the institutional capacity of ACER to deliver on tight timelines and to high technical standards. Changes in the model will need to ensure there remains sufficient institutional capacity to deliver.

Building technical expertise within SEAMEO would require a strategy to build institutional capacity to deliver. Building relationships with other regional assessment centres and learning from their models would be beneficial. For example, the UNESCO Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of the Quality of Education located in Santiago has delivered four rounds of regional assessments across up to 18 countries. Creating opportunities to draw on their technical expertise could reduce costs and increase peer to peer learning.

Box 2 Testing Assumptions – Activities to outputs[9]

The assessment at this stage of SEA-PLM implementation is:

Assumption 1 holds in some countries, but sustainability of funding remains a concern. Donors and participating countries have had sufficient resources to invest in SEA-PLM thus far, however some countries have struggled to keep up with the data collection logistics and budget activities, delaying progress. The cost of external technical assistance represents a threat to the sustainability of SEA-PLM and a more sustainable financial model for SEA-PLM needs to be developed for the future.

Assumption 2 holds. Technical and capacity building inputs have been sufficient to result in the desired results for round one of SEA-PLM. The aspiration for longer-term capacity building outcomes for future rounds is, however, worthy of articulating, with a clear strategy for how strengthened capacity will be achieved.

Assumption 3 holds. Agreement on the analysis and dissemination of SEA-PLM results has so far been achieved across SEA-PLM countries. However, following the first round of data dissemination, strategies need to be developed to support countries to use the data to understand how to improve learning levels.

Assumption 4 holds. The common regional metric has been achieved and linked to the global learning metric.

Assumption 5 holds. The data generated by SEA-PLM has resulted in a high-quality learning assessment programme, producing results trusted by countries and partners in the region.

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[9] From activities to outputs the five assumptions were: **(1)** Donors and participating countries have sufficient resources to invest in SEA-PLM and consider SEA-PLM Value for Money (VfM); **(2)** Technical and capacity building inputs are sufficient to result in the desired outputs; **(3)** There is sufficient common ground between countries to find agreement on the analysis and

5.2.2 To what extent have the objectives and expected outcomes of SEA-PLM been achieved or are likely to be achieved?

There is clear evidence that changes in national assessments are being informed by SEA-PLM. In the Philippines the Bureau of Education Assessment has begun to use approaches from SEA-PLM to inform assessment practices nationally. The Bureau of Education Assessment has a clear mandate to integrate approaches from ILSAs into national assessment practices. This includes both the design and administration of assessments, as well as data analysis and supporting policy makers to use the assessment data in decision making. In Lao PDR there is an intention to use SEA-PLM to contribute to a long-term curriculum review process, however the details of how SEA-PLM data can or will be used in this way remain elusive. In Malaysia there is some suggestion that SEA-PLM could be used to help teachers develop their own assessment approaches and measure learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is also unambiguous evidence that SEA-PLM data is supporting increased dialogue around learning data, but it is not clear how this will inform decision making. The data is trusted as valid and reliable across participating countries and most countries explicitly state that they aim to use ILSA to generate insights to inform policy formation. What remains to be seen is how the data from SEA-PLM can be used to move beyond the recognition of a problem, and toward the generation of solutions.

Participation in SEA-PLM is strengthening capacity of partner institutions, but is largely limited to the development of tools and the collection of data. Capacity building activities covered the necessary training needed to deliver on SEA-PLM activities needed to support data collection. It was felt by many stakeholders, across various groups, that more could be done to take a structured, future-oriented approach to building sustainable capacity to independently continue SEA-PLM activities.

While capacity of individuals and units is growing, it is not clear whether or how this will translate into systemic change in capacity for assessments. Challenges exist in retaining systemic capacity across countries, with individual staff members regularly being replaced due to promotions and retirements etc. The same institutional capacities may be difficult to sustain in UNICEF as personnel are reassigned regularly to different posts and locations.

Support for SEA-PLM at the national and regional level is strong, but there remain several threats to continued support. At the regional level this is evidenced by the inclusion of participation in SEA-PLM as a strategic objective for the ASEAN 2016-2020 education sector workplan. At the national level, there have been public commitments to SEA-PLM from the majority of ministries of education. However, this does not necessarily translate into agreement to participate in the next round. As is detailed under section 5.4, there are a number of factors that will influence participation in future rounds. Of these, the financial question is the one most pertinent for those countries already participating. It is clear across countries, that the economic shock of the COVID-19 pandemic will have an impact on education sector budgets. This introduces an extra element of uncertainty to the commitments already made publicly.

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dissemination of SEA-PLM results; **(4)** There is sufficient domain coverage, international and regional data and political will to support a common regional and global metric; and **(5)** The data generated by countries is of sufficient quality to support a regional common learning metric.

Box 3 Testing Assumptions – Outputs to intermediate outcomes[10]

The assessment at this stage of SEA-PLM implementation is:

Assumption 1 does not hold in some countries and is unknown in others. Some countries do not have sufficient national capacity to analyse available data. In all three country case studies additional technical support was required in order to analyse the available data and develop country reports. However, Malaysia registered an interest in being more involved in the analysis and suggested using a more collaborative approach between country staff, ACER and UNICEF. It was felt that skills exist within countries to analyse the data, with support.

Assumption 2 does not hold in all settings. Policy makers in different countries have different capacities, incentives and political space to access and utilize SEA-PLM data to inform decisions. Malaysia has a strong history of using ILSA data to inform policy making, in the Philippines there is a clear push by the DepEd to use ILSA (with participating highlighting potential avenues for policy change based on SEA-PLM round one results) and in Lao PDR SEA-PLM will likely increase the demand for assessment and research. However, across countries there is limited capacity to know how to use the data to inform solutions, rather than describe problems (low levels of learning) and how to approach messaging of low learning levels in complex political environments.

Assumption 3 does not fully hold. The fidelity of SEA-PLM capacity building activities is difficult to assess, as there were limited protocols and/or programme models clearly outlining the expected implementation of capacity building processes. The dose of capacity building activities has been sufficient to administer and release results in the first round of SEA-PLM, however the dose is not sufficient to support uptake of SEA-PLM evidence yet.

Assumption 4 does not hold. The current financial model for SEA-PLM is not sustainable.

Assumption 5 partly holds. Countries participating in SEA-PLM see the value of a common approach to regional assessment. However, few participants from across SEA-PLM participating countries see the current financial model as sustainable.

Testing Assumptions – Intermediate outcomes to longer term outcomes[11]

The assessment at this stage of SEA-PLM implementation is:

Assumption 1 is unlikely to hold, if gaps are not addressed. Using SEA-PLM data to improve relevance, equity and learning in education systems relies on building the capacity of stakeholders to analyse SEA-PLM data, generate results and findings, act on these findings and disseminate information from assessments down to different audiences, including schools and teachers.

Assumptions 2 and 3 do not hold in all countries. SEA-PLM participating countries do not currently have the capacity to solve education sector issues. While SEA-PLM round one results have allowed for discussions on low learning levels, the capacity to use the data to improve learning is not evident across all SEA-PLM participating countries.

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[10] From **outputs to intermediate outcomes** the five assumptions were: **(1)** There is sufficient national capacity (technical capabilities, political will, resources) to analyse available data; **(2)** Policy makers have sufficient capacity, incentives and political space to access and utilize data to inform decisions; **(3)** The reach, fidelity and dose of capacity building activities are sufficient at national and regional levels; **(4)** The costs of SEA-PLM are sustainable during integration into regional systems and beyond; and **(5)** ASEAN countries see the value of a common approach to regional assessment and believe SEA-PLM is sustainable.

[11] From **intermediate outcomes to longer-term outcomes** the three assumptions were: **(1)** The use of SEA-PLM data leads to the improvements of previous shortcomings in relation to relevance, equity and learning in the education system; **(2)** Stakeholders have the capacity and incentives to solve education sector issues; and **(3)** Stakeholders have the opportunities (resources, time and a conducive environment) to solve education sector issues.

5.2.3 What have been the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of SEA-PLM objectives and activities? What were the enabling factors, barriers and bottlenecks?

The level of engagement in LSAs has been a key enabling factor for participating countries. Four of the six participating countries had recently taken part or were simultaneously taking part in other large-scale assessments. While it may not always have been the same individuals across both assessments, certainly familiarity with the process and activities involved in large scale assessments facilitated the delivery of SEA-PLM. The inclusion of learning assessments as a priority in the ESPs of several countries ensured that human resources could be consistently dedicated to the programme. The relative consistency of staff across technical teams was also seen as an enabler for success (linked to engagement and buy-in).

The work of UNICEF at the regional and country level is another key enabler of success for SEA-PLM. UNICEF are widely seen as having been a key factor in driving the delivery of the first round of SEA-PLM. At the country level, the presence of UNICEF country office teams allowed for flexible support to be provided to governments. This support was financial, but also included the facilitation of technical assistance (either from ACER, or from other contracted bodies). The responsiveness and adaptability of this arrangement was seen as a key enabler for success in the first round of SEA-PLM.

A lack of long-term funding is a barrier to success in limiting the ability of the programme to attract and maintain long-term human resources. The skillset needed for the development and delivery of large-scale learning assessments is specific and not common across the ASEAN region or globally. This means that it will always be a challenge to recruit assessment experts. It is considered by many respondents that this is exacerbated by the lack of long-term funding. Regardless of whether this is the case, difficulties in finding and recruiting assessment experts at the regional level, particularly as SEA-PLM moves towards more in-house technical capacity, presents a key barrier.

5.2.4 What can UNICEF and its partners do to ensure the objectives of SEA-PLM are met in the future? What kind of initiatives should UNICEF prioritize at the country and regional levels?

To avoid overlapping with recommendations, the findings of this section are organised to detail particularly useful mechanisms observed from the first round that could support future planning.

Flexible, locally rooted support and advice and technical support proved to be a particularly effective mechanism for maximising SEA-PLM impact. As mentioned in section 5.2.3, the presence of UNICEF country offices as a source of flexible support for national technical teams has proved to be very useful. Beyond facilitating the provision of technical support, the UNICEF country offices have acted as a "thought partner" for governments in navigating the dissemination and use of SEA-PLM data. To a certain extent, ACER have also played this role at the regional level, but the understanding which UNICEF country offices have of context has been particularly valuable. Whether or not it is UNICEF or another agency playing this role, this has been a particularly useful mechanism for the SEA-PLM programme.

Collaboration with academia and the private sector can help to multiply the amount of analysis of SEA-PLM data. SEA-PLM has created a rich dataset on learning across the region. This dataset is of great interest to a range of organisations working in education research. Ensuring that the dataset is made available in as complete a format as possible has already allowed for secondary research to be undertaken, for example by the World Bank or UNICEF Innocenti at the regional level. Encouraging, facilitating and consolidating this kind of work can allow, and has already allowed SEA-PLM data to be applied to a range of different research questions, with minimal additional investment for the programme.

Integration of SEA-PLM into a broader assessment strategy has benefits both in use of data and in capacity building. For both the Philippines and Malaysia, SEA-PLM was undertaken to complement PISA and TIMSS. In the Philippines SEA-PLM was included in a broader national assessment strategy which included both the other ILSAs, as well as the national assessments. In both cases the approach

allowed for the data from assessments of different ages and subjects to be compared to each other, increasing the visibility and scope of findings. In the case of the Philippines, it also helps with longer term planning for the role and capacity of the Bureau of Education Assessment.

5.3   Likely Impact

Table 4 Summary of SEA-PLM's contribution to national education systems and assessment practices so far

Area of evidence	Assessment	Strength of the evidence
Changes in the topics, focus and amount of education dialogue at the country and regional levels	SEA-PLM has tentatively influenced the topics, focus and amount of education dialogue at the country level. Results have not been circulating for long enough to change regional dialogue yet.	**Strong.**
Changes to national assessment practices	SEA-PLM has influenced changes in national assessment practices.	**Strong.**
Regional changes in assessment practices	It is too early to identify regional changes in assessment practices.	**Weak.**

5.3.1   How has SEA-PLM contributed to national education systems and assessment practices and policies and discourses thus far? And at the regional level, what positive and negative changes has SEA-PLM brought about?

There are several tentative examples of where SEA-PLM has influenced education dialogue at the national level. There is wide ranging vocal commitment to use SEA-PLM data for a range of different policy issues across participating countries. It is important to differentiate these conversations from concrete discussions around policy change. In many cases the dialogue around SEA-PLM data is at the level of recognizing that challenges exist, and that learning needs to be prioritised. In some cases, the level of dialogue has moved beyond this, and towards discussions of policy change. These are detailed in Table 5. While these conversations are largely tentative and yet to be borne out in concrete changes to policy, this is to be expected. At the time of writing, not all countries had published national reports on SEA-PLM data. It was noted in Lao PDR that compared to previous assessments, SEA-PLM had had a larger impact in terms of being discussed publicly. This is testament to the increased degree of buy-in that comes from a regional assessment.

In the Philippines the data from SEA-PLM is being used to reform the curriculum. An example of ways in which SEA-PLM might expect to be used in the future can be seen in the Philippines. The Philippines Normal University is currently conducting an analysis of the curriculum in comparison with SEA-PLM questions. The purpose of this analysis is to highlight where the kinds of analytic thinking assessed by SEA-PLM are not currently being covered by the curriculum. Should this result in concrete changes to the curriculum it would be a positive example of how SEA-PLM can explicitly inform education reform. It shows how assessment data cannot just highlight a challenge, but can also provide a concrete policy response.

Table 5 Indications of policy directions and changes in assessment practice

Country	Indications of Policy Directions	Changes in Assessment Practice
Cambodia	Suggested policy responses include: • Increase number of community pre-schools • Introduce GC concepts into curriculum • Review quality and contents of textbooks Too early to say how these will be manifested	Item models are being used to improve assessment items used in national assessments
Lao PDR	Too early to say. Some indications that SEA-PLM results have better uptake than previous assessments, but this has yet to translate into concrete policy directions.	Some overlap with developments in national assessments and SEA-PLM approach, but no conclusive influence of SEA-PLM

Country	Indications of Policy Directions	Changes in Assessment Practice
Malaysia	Too early to say. At the time of evaluation Malaysia was producing its national report and preparing for discussions on policy implications. Central use of PISA and TIMSS results in sector planning shows a strong likelihood that SEA-PLM data will be used as part of planning.	Early stages, intention to use SEA-PLM methods to help teachers develop assessment approaches for their schools.
Myanmar	No data	No data
Philippines	Wide ranging commitment to use SEA-PLM data as part of the process of reviewing the curriculum (with a review underway), and to re-examine the national language policy. Too early to say whether these will result in concrete action.	SEA-PLM approaches used to deliver the first national assessment of writing in 2019/20 Introduction of contextual questionnaires on the basis of SEA-PLM experience.
Vietnam	Strong commitment to further analysis and wide dissemination of SEA-PLM results. No concrete policy directions as of the time of evaluation.	SEA-PLM methods have been used to inform the development of a circular on the evaluation of primary school students. SEA-PLM used to inform a national large-scale assessment of learning outcomes for the school year 2019-2020

There are concrete examples of how SEA-PLM is informing decisions made for national assessments. In the Philippines, Vietnam and Cambodia there are concrete examples of how SEA-PLM is being used to inform national assessment practices. While these are positive indications, it is important to reflect both on association and causality. Cambodia, Vietnam and the Philippines took part in SEA-PLM as part of a broader commitment to assessment reform, rather than SEA-PLM inspiring a reform of assessment practices. Similarly, Cambodia, Vietnam and the Philippines have all recently taken part in PISA and/or TIMSS, making it difficult to dissociate the impact of SEA-PLM from its environment. Regardless of causality or attribution, these are positive indications, and should be tracked and built upon for the next round.

Box 4 Testing Assumptions – Longer-term outcomes to impact

From **longer-term outcomes to impact** the main assumption was that changes in the education system positively affect relevant learning outcomes and equity.

The assessment at this stage of SEA-PLM implementation is:

Assumption 1 may or may not hold. There is insufficient empirical evidence regarding how changes in the education system positively affect relevant learning outcomes and equity, mainly due to a lack of data. The evaluation of GPE support to 29 countries conducted between 2017 and 2020 found that 15 of the 29 jurisdictions had insufficient data to identify learning outcome trends. Of the 14 jurisdictions where data was available, outcomes improved modestly in 7, remained the same in 5 and deteriorated in 2 (Universalia 2020).

5.4   Sustainability

Table 6 Summary of the integration of SEA-PLM to government

Area of evidence	Assessment	Strength of the evidence
Capacity expectations to implement future rounds being achievable within TA budgets	There is sufficient capacity to implement future rounds of data generation within the technical assistance budgets allocated in round one. However, there is currently insufficient resources to implement future rounds within TA budgets to support the utilization of data, using the current SEA-PLM delivery model	**Strong.**
National technical capacity to undertake technical tasks	There is increased national technical capacity to generate SEA-PLM data, however continued technical assistance is required and increased technical assistance is required to improve national capacity to use data.	**Strong.**
Funding availability and SEA-PLM affordability for future rounds	Funding availability is uncertain for future rounds and SEA-PLM is not seen as affordable by many stakeholders.	**Moderate.**

5.4.1   To what extent can SEA-PLM activities, plans and strategies be fully integrated and implemented by the government (s), both technically and financially? To what extent are they likely to continue?

The question of sustainability is tied to the question of what SEA-PLM's long-term vision is for assessment in the region. Across the stakeholders consulted for this evaluation, there is some disagreement about the role of SEA-PLM, as compared to other ILSAs. It is clear from UNICEF and SEAMEO that there is a vision to have a regular regional assessment for the future. However, outside of these two bodies, some have questioned how SEA-PLM should relate to TIMSS and PISA. The suggestion from some quarters that Singapore would not take part due to their achievement in PISA suggests that SEA-PLM is a stepping stone towards achievement in PISA rather than a standalone regional assessment.

It is clear that capacity building activities will be necessary for future rounds, at both the national and regional level. There is wide agreement that capacity building activities should continue as an integral part of SEA-PLM. This is driven by two findings. The first is that the scope of capacity building has not reached all of the technical areas that participating countries would wish to build their capacity in (see section 5.1.2), particularly for data interpretation and use. The second is that turnover in key technical staff means that some degree of capacity building will always be required.

The affordability of future rounds depends on what decisions are made regarding the technical assistance arrangements. The technical assistance arrangement in place for the first round was sufficient to deliver activities. However, it is widely considered that this arrangement will not be financially sustainable in the long term. Figure 6 shows that country technical support (largely covered by the UNICEF EAPRO and country offices) amounted to 34 percent of the total cost of the SEA-PLM programme (excluding pre-2018 costs for developing the assessment framework). This cost burden for UNICEF may be sustainable in the short term but will need to be reduced if ministries of education are to take this cost on. There is also some reluctance in participating countries for this technical assistance to be sourced internationally, when more cost-effective alternatives may exist.

Figure 6 Proportion of costs by implementation/TA
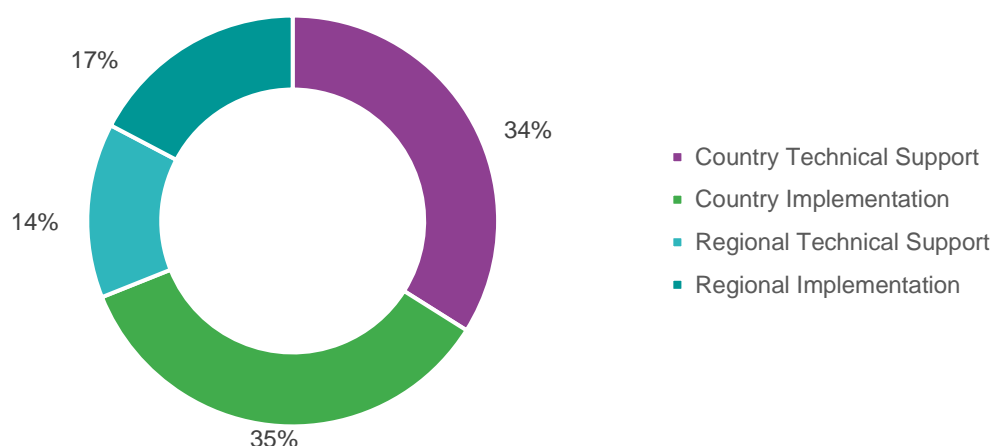
Source: Author's calculations based on SEA-PLM budget data

Funding availability is uncertain for future rounds and is dependent on a more cohesive articulation of what it is that SEA-PLM offers. SEA-PLM seeks funding for learning assessment from its national government partners at an extremely challenging time for government budgets. While governments have in many cases publicly committed to participation in future, budget allocations have not been confirmed. The response from UNICEF has been to re-assure participating countries that they can ensure that funding is available to support participation in the next round. While there are ongoing efforts to secure funding at the regional level, either from high income countries in the ASEAN region, or from international funders, funding is currently not yet confirmed. It is the view of many stakeholders that these efforts are undermined by a model that is viewed as having room for more cost efficiency, as well as not having a clear articulation of purpose. In comparison to other ILSAs, SEA-PLM is seen as not doing well in "marketing" itself internationally as a worthy investment. However, it is important to nuance this perspective in recognition of SEA-PLM as "the baby" (the newest) regional assessment and the early stage of implementation for the programme.

5.4.2 What are the key barriers and bottlenecks towards achieving sustainability of SEA-PLM activities?

The continued existence of SEA-PLM is dependent on maintaining existing engagement and expanding to other countries in the region. It is unanimously agreed that the long-term legitimacy of SEA-PLM as an initiative depends on maintaining or increasing the number of countries who participate. There is a strong possibility that Myanmar will not participate in the next round, considering the ongoing political situation in the country. This means that it will be necessary to include at least one more country for the next round to maintain at least the same number of participating countries, something cited as a priority for a number of key regional stakeholders. This will be a challenge for the secretariat. If not achieved there is a risk of creating a vicious circle in which undermined legitimacy through a reduction in the number of countries makes it harder to convince new countries or funders to come on board.

SEA-PLM needs to establish a clear narrative on what it provides and what differentiates it from other ILSAs, and/or how it can leverage participation in other ILSAs. As mentioned in 5.4.1 there is a sense among stakeholders that the narrative around SEA-PLM's unique value is not clear. One SEA-PLM stakeholder suggested that SEA-PLM is a programme which aims to create a narrative around improving learning, space for discussions around the improvement of learning outcomes, and data to describe learning outcomes, alongside building national and regional assessment capacity. This is a clear articulation of SEA-PLM's value as a regional ILSA. However, in analysis of documentation used to market SEA-PLM (brochures, concept notes, minutes from launch meetings etc.) these differentiations are not clearly articulated. While capacity building, support in generating political

narratives and policy solutions, and forums for regional collaboration are mentioned, they are not given clear framing or structure. The absence of a concrete and clearly articulated service offering is a barrier for achieving the sustainability of SEA-PLM activities.

For technical sustainability, the capacity of SEAMEO to provide technical and political support on assessment is a limiting factor. It has been suggested by a range of stakeholders that a sustainable solution for SEA-PLM would be to have a regional assessment technical agency, located within SEAMEO. This would be equivalent to SEAMEO-INNOTECH (which is focused on innovation and technology), and would be able to provide on-demand, cost-effective support to SEA-PLM countries, both for SEA-PLM, as well as potentially across other assessment activities. While this is a promising avenue, there will be challenges in its development. It will be difficult to attract technical expertise in assessment needed to create such an agency without long term funding commitments.

5.4.3 How can SEA-PLM attract other countries in Southeast Asia and better link other international and regional initiatives?

Reasons for not participating are complicated, including financial, technical and political reasons. While the cost of participating is the most obvious barrier to entry, it is only one of the reasons identified through this evaluation. The second is a technical issue. It is felt that countries were reluctant to participate until they had seen the quality of data and outputs produced from the first round. The third is a political issue, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. As outlined above, SEA-PLM needs to do more to market itself as a solution to ministries of education. This solution needs to be more than just a dataset and capacity building activities, but an articulation of how data can support the goals and ambitions of ministries. This is made harder by the recognition that learning levels have almost certainly suffered due to school closures in the last year. Governments considering participation may wish to wait until a future round to allow time for recovery.

Currently, it is not clear that the SEA-PLM secretariat has the dedicated human resources to address all these questions. The SEA-PLM secretariat is widely praised as having been the key player in the delivery of the first round of data. It is however, a small team, with several team members having significant responsibilities outside of SEA-PLM. 2021 and 2022 are crucial years for the expansion and sustainability of the SEA-PLM programme. It is crucial that sufficient human resources are dedicated to resolving some of the financial, technical and political reasons outlined above. As mentioned above, it is the political narrative building, which is the key area, so it is important to ensure that the team has the necessary level of political influence and understanding.

The economic and political consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic both complicate the process of attracting countries to SEA-PLM, as well as emphasizing the importance of the programme. As mentioned above, there is a potential risk that countries may not wish to engage in a new comparative assessment at a time when they know that learning levels have suffered. However, this also presents an opportunity for SEAMEO and UNICEF. SEA-PLM 2019 was the last data set collected in the region before 2020. This is a unique position from which to monitor recovery of learning levels from the pandemic. This opportunity is widely recognised but should be clearly articulated and taken into account both in the process of attracting donors and countries, but also in looking at how the assessment is designed and delivered.

There are numerous opportunities for better networking for SEA-PLM both regionally and internationally. SEA-PLM follows in a strong tradition of regional learning assessments. In particular PASEC[12], SACMEQ[13] and the LLECE[14] have to varying degrees, and for varying lengths of time, delivered regional learning assessments. There is an opportunity for SEA-PLM to establish, as part of a revised approach to technical assistance, networks with experts involved in the delivery of these assessments across participating countries. While this would not necessarily "localise" technical assistance, it would promote south-south cooperation. This approach could be replicated for sharing

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[12] Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN

[13] Southern Africa Consortium for the Measurement of Education Quality

[14] Laboratorio Lantinoamericano de Evaluacíon de la Calidad de la Educacíon

insights on policy linking across regions. Within the region, both NEQMAP and the GPE KIX East Asia Pacific Regional Hub are active in learning assessments in SEA-PLM participating countries. At a minimum these forums should be used to amplify messages from SEA-PLM. Pathways for deeper collaboration would be to use both networks to leverage training resources and/or experts to support participating countries.

5.5   Equity and gender equality

Table 7 Summary of SEA-PLM's support to the most marginalized

Area of evidence	Assessment	Strength of the evidence
Equity and inclusion has been mainstreamed into programme activities	There is little evidence of equity being formally mainstreamed within SEA-PLM programme activities	**Strong.**
Data will be used to inform equity decisions	There is evidence across countries that SEA-PLM data will be used to explore inequities in learning.	**Strong.**

5.5.1   To what extent is SEA-PLM conducive to supporting the most marginalized populations and genders (including those furthest left-behind)?

The SEA-PLM assessment includes contextual questionnaires for learners, teachers and parents. The purpose of the included questions was to allow the exploration of correlations between learning and individual, home and school characteristics. Some of the content of these questionnaires, as reported in the main regional report in 2019, is shown in Table 88.

Table 8 Contextual questionnaire topics

Questionnaire	Topics
Child background, home influence and school experience	- Gender - Age - Socioeconomic status (SES) - combined gender, school location and socioeconomic status - Preschool education - School readiness in language and mathematics - Speaking the language of instruction at home - Grade repetition.
School Environment and teacher profiles	- School size - School location - Access to textbooks and library - Teachers' preparation and specialization.
Children's, parents', teachers' and Schools principles attitudes	- Children's attitudes about School - Parental engagement in children's learning - Perception of issues affecting children's learning in the classroom - School principal's perception of issues that hinder their school's capacity to provide instruction - Teachers' perception of issues that hinder their ability to provide instruction

Beyond the contextual questionnaires there is little evidence of equity being formally mainstreamed within SEA-PLM programme activities. Equity is mentioned in a number of SEA-PLM design documents but is never given an explicit strategy as to how SEA-PLM will actively address questions of equity in learning outcomes. Similarly, there is not an explicit strategy to support ministries of education in developing secondary analysis to address equity questions. In the country reports that

have been published there is equity-based analysis (as in the regional report), but this is not aligned to a formalised equity strategy. What is also missing is a country specific equity strategy, which would have informed both the exact content of the contextual questionnaires, as well as the approach to sampling (e.g., oversampling minority groups to allow for between group comparisons). This was done in some cases, for example in Malaysia where the MoE requested that the sample take into consideration the need for analysis between the three major language groups. This was done, but the numbers of schools sampled did not allow for comparison between schools within language groups. What was absent from the planning process was an equity-focused sampling strategy across all countries. In the case of Malaysia, it was driven by the MoE, rather than being a standard programme offering. For GPE member countries, the most recent sector analysis can serve as useful guides to collecting data on learning equity.

There is evidence that countries are intending to use SEA-PLM learning data to answer equity questions. Through the three case studies, it is clear that equity in learning outcomes is a strategic focus, and that to a certain extent, SEA-PLM data is being used to further these conversations. While it is too early to say conclusively, a potential limitation of these conversations will be the lack of country specific contextual data that would align to national strategic objectives. At the regional level, there are ongoing efforts to use SEA-PLM data to answer equity questions, including secondary reporting on gender differences in learning across the region, and the World Bank's use of SEA-PLM data for looking at learning poverty.

6 Conclusions and lessons learned

SEA-PLM has emerged from the priorities of SEAMEO and UNICEF EAPRO in 2012 to a regionally endorsed regional learning assessment programme, with a successful first cycle in 2021. A significant amount of work has taken place to develop the SEA-PLM concept, present the concept in High Level Meetings in the region, establish and develop working groups, develop a cooperation agreement, establish a Steering Committee, develop an assessment framework, conduct field trials, have SEA-PLM included in the ASEAN Work Plan on Education and successfully deliver valid, reliable and comparable data across six countries in SEA.

This has taken place despite human and material resource constraints and is a commendable achievement for all the stakeholders involved. This has also been achieved in spite of the significant disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. **There is evidence that SEA-PLM is relevant to the needs of participating countries.** Increasing the amount of data available on learning is a priority in most of the countries that participated in SEA-PLM for the first round. SEA-PLM builds well on this prioritisation of learning data. What is less clear is what exactly the relevance of SEA-PLM is, whether as a uniquely regional learning assessment, or as a compliment to other ILSAs operating in the region.

The validity of the SEA-PLM Theory of Change from inputs to outputs is strong but can be improved. The strongest components of the ToC are those which have focused on data collection, the development of the assessment framework, and technical capacity building activities (see green marks in Figure 7). These activities have led to reliable, valid, relevant and rigorous learning and contextual data, a regional common learning metric and alignment with the global UIS learning outcomes scale.

The strong delivery of technical outputs is necessary but not sufficient to deliver on SEA-PLM intended outcomes and impact. Less-strong components of the ToC include activities intended to result in a strategy for analysing and disseminating tools and funding agreements with donors and participant countries. These weaker aspects of the ToC may potentially limit the realisation of outcomes and impact in the future.

There are improvements to be made to ensure SEA-PLM can both continue to generate data on learning and to ensure this data is used to inform decision-making. As has been highlighted within this report, a vision for the future of SEA-PLM is needed with associated strategies to see this vision come to fruition.

Overall, the success of SEA-PLM hinges on the ability of the programme to move from data delivery to planning for and supporting the uptake of evidence to inform decision-making. While capacity building leading to the generation of data has been achieved, a stronger focus on the utilization of data is now needed. This is crucial as the only avenue for SEA-PLM to achieve impact is through the uptake of evidence generated by SEA-PLM *at the country level.*

In addition, a more sustainable delivery model for SEA-PLM is needed to ensure the programme remains affordable for countries and attracts additional regional funding to support the programme in the future. This evaluation has shown that, while the current arrangement has delivered successes, it is widely considered not to be sustainable. There are differing views on what the final structure and technical assistance arrangements for SEA-PLM should be.

SEA-PLM is entering a pivotal phase in 2022. Moving into the second round of data collection, SEA-PLM has left the "proof of concept" phase. The programme has proved that it can generate data that is robust and trusted by participating and observing governments. Now it must build on this and present a long-term strategic vision. Recovery from school closures places extra importance on SEA-PLM data, which can now play a role in helping governments measure the impact of school closures on learning and can play a key role in the recovery process for the region.

Figure 7 Assessment of the validity of the SEA-PLM Theory of Change after Round One

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Intermediate outcomes	Longer term outcomes	Impact

Inputs:
- Technical Assistance
- Data collection costs
- Regional and country governmental human resources
- UNICEF coordination

Activities:
- Field studies and main survey data collection
- Assessment framework development, item development, sampling, analysis and reporting
- Technical capacity building activities
- Develop and disseminate communications strategy
- Regional endorsement activities
- Fundraising with donors and countries

Outputs:
- Reliable, valid, relevant and rigorous learning and contextual data
- A regional common learning metric
- SEA-PLM alignment to the global UIS learning outcome scale
- Regional and national workshops and L&D products
- Strategy for analyzing and disseminating data
- Common tools, protocols and standards to generate and utilize assessment data across ASEAN countries
- Funding agreements with donors and participant countries

Intermediate outcomes:
- Policy makers use data to meaningfully support decision-making
- Enhanced capacity to generate and analyse assessment data at regional, national and sub-national levels
- Sustainable regional integration of relevant large-scale assessment
- Enhanced ASEAN integration in terms of assessment
- SEA-PLM is on the regional agenda and national government support is re-enforced

Longer term outcomes:
- Sustainable, effective, efficient, responsive and more equitable education systems at the regional and national levels, able to meet the needs of all children, including those left behind across Southeast Asia

Impact:
- Improved, and more equitable, relevant student learning outcomes across Southeast Asia

Programme Assumptions

Inputs to Outputs	Outputs to Outcomes	Outcomes to Impact

5 Assumptions hold, 3 assumptions hold but can be improved or require attention. | 4 assumptions partly hold or hold in some settings and not others. 1 assumption does not hold. | 3 assumptions do not hold in all countries or are unlikely to hold if gaps are not addressed

7 Recommendations

There is an important role for SEA-PLM to play through the next round, amplified by the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic. SEA-PLM 2019 was the last learning data collected in many of the participating countries pre-pandemic, and therefore can provide valuable insights into learning loss through the next round.

Based on the conclusions of this evaluation we propose a number of recommendations to be considered for the next round and beyond. Recommendations are divided between three strategic areas related to; i) building of regional assessment capacity; ii) strengthening the link between data and policy formation and; iii) establishing SEA-PLM's regional presence. Within each of these areas we have used an investment/impact matrix (detailed in Box 5.) to help differentiate between recommendations to be considered for the next round (2022-2025), and those which should be considered as part of the long term vision for the programme.

The recommendations are aimed at the SEA-PLM programme as a whole, though specific responsibilities may lie with a number of different actors. The primary recipient of these recommendations will be the SEA-PLM secretariat (consisting currently of UNICEF and SEAMEO). However, actioning these recommendations may rely on inputs from other actors involved in the delivery of the programme, including participating country governments, technical suppliers, and other partners.

Box 5 Categorising and prioritising recommendations

The recommendations from this evaluation are designed to be easily actionable in support of strengthening the next round of SEA-PLM data collection. They are also intended to inform the longer-term development of the programme. To simplify the process, we have categorised recommendations based on their potential impact on the programme, and the level of investment needed to implement them. This has resulted in three categories of recommendations:

Quick Wins: These are changes that will not have a transformational impact on achieving the programmes objectives but will also not require significant investment. They should be implemented, but not in isolation. Rather they should be included as part of a suite of changes.

Unmissable opportunities: These are changes to the programme which will not take large investments but will have a large positive impact on the programme. They are un-missable opportunities and should be prioritised.

Long Term Visions: These changes will take large, long-term investment, but will be transformational for the programme. They may not be immediate priorities but should be considered as part of long-term planning.

There is a fourth quadrant of the matrix; those changes best avoided. We do not include any here as they involve a large investment for a modest impact.
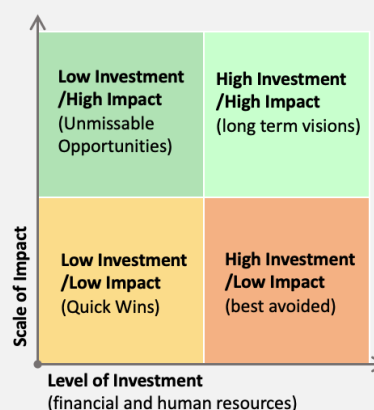
7.1 Building Long Term Sustainable Capacity for Assessment in Participating Countries

Unmissable opportunities

Recommendation 1.1: Work with countries to develop long term capacity objectives and needs

The findings of this evaluation show that in some cases there is a mismatch between the kind of capacity building that technical teams in participating ministries of education want, and what was made available. This can be partly explained by a one-fits-all approach to what training was provided. For the next round, SEA-PLM should work individually with countries to define roles and responsibilities and capacity gaps. This will allow countries to contribute their technical capacity where it already exists. It will also create a long-term sustainabi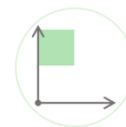lity plan. While it is unlikely that ministries of education would ever take responsibility for all SEA-PLM tasks, each should set their own ambitions as to which skills they would like to have in-house, and which they are happy to have externally available.

Long term visions

Recommendation 1.2: Develop a bank of sustainable and transferrable capacity development materials

This is an interim goal towards establishing a regional technical support hub (Recommendation 3.3). While the first round of SEA-PLM has established a strong and valuable dataset, it produced little in the way of transferrable training or capacity building materials. In addition to continuing and refining face-to-face capacity building activities SEA-PLM should take the opportunity to build a library of resources that can be applied beyond those involved directly in training. This would be a strong public good for the region and would also reduce the need for re-training due to staff turnover in technical teams.

7.2 Strengthening the links between SEA-PLM data and policy decisions

Quick Wins

Recommendation 2.1: Plan strategically for the communication, uptake and use of data by policy makers.

The Kingdon's Multiple Streams Approach (MSA) provides a useful framework for thinking about how policy change windows occur. The MSA includes a problem stream, a policy stream and a politics stream. When these three streams intersect a window for meaningful policy change opens. Learning assessment *data* most commonly influences the problem stream. This is seen from the first round of SEA-PLM data, with all countries recognising challenges with learning. What assessment data on its own cannot necessarily influence are the policy and politics streams.

This framing can be used to inform SEA-PLM planning in two ways:

4. The theory of change for the next round of SEA-PLM should include activities which explicitly seek to influence all three streams towards opening policy windows.
5. The SEA-PLM secretariat and technical partners should work with participating countries from the outset to ensure that SEA-PLM data, contextual questionnaires, dissemination plans and secondary analysis plans can work to bring the three strands together.

Using this planning would allow for SEA-PLM to support political communications at the national level, ensuring that findings from the assessment are useful in *identifying problems, designing policies,* and importantly in *establishing a political narrative* around the improvement of learning outcomes.

Figure 8 Overview of Kingdon's Multiple Streams Approach
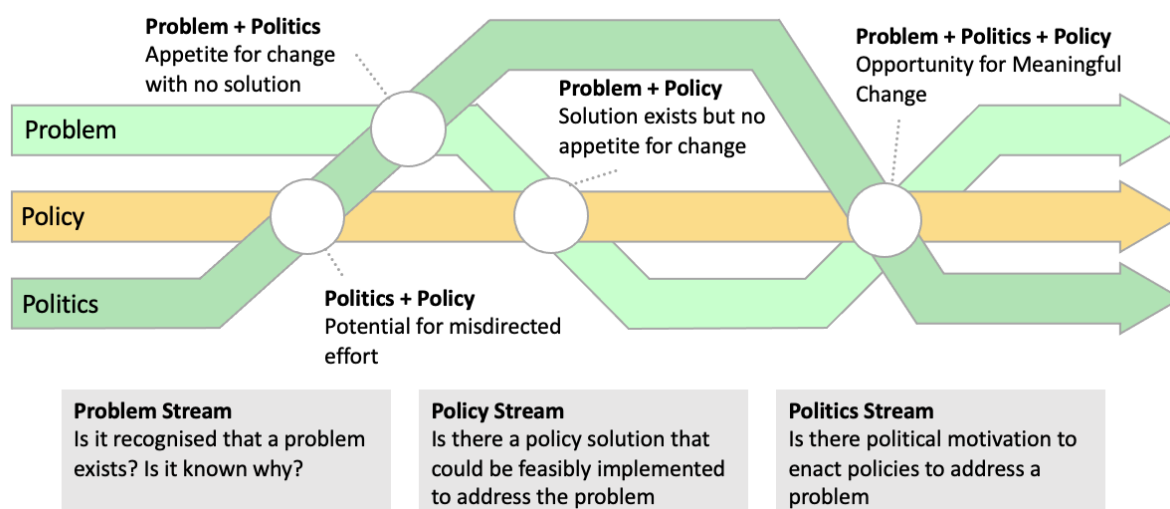
Problem + Politics
Appetite for change with no solution

Problem + Policy
Solution exists but no appetite for change

Problem + Politics + Policy
Opportunity for Meaningful Change

Problem

Policy

Politics

Politics + Policy
Potential for misdirected effort

Problem Stream
Is it recognised that a problem exists? Is it known why?

Policy Stream
Is there a policy solution that could be feasibly implemented to address the problem

Politics Stream
Is there political motivation to enact policies to address a problem

Unmissable opportunities

Recommendation 2.2: Mainstream equity considerations into SEA-PLM design decisions

Equity considerations should be tailored to each country and driven by (1) an education sector analysis concerning equity (usually available for GPE member countries) and (2) the research questions that Ministries of Education have regarding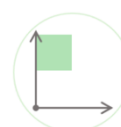 inequity. Key considerations regarding what is known and unknown about the learning gap between different groups or the marginalisation of certain groups should be identified and SEA-PLM's potential contribution to the evidence discussed with education ministries. Sampling and contextual questionnaire decisions should be informed by the equity focus agreed. Mainstreaming equity into the design and communications around SEA-PLM will be particularly important in the next round, where school closures are likely to have exacerbated existing inequalities in learning outcomes. It will be crucial that the data produced is suitable for examining these inequities in learning outcomes.

7.3   Building SEA-PLM as a sustainable regional body

The final set of recommendations relate to the structure and purpose of SEA-PLM as a regional body. There is an opportunity for SEA-PLM to establish itself as more than a regional metric, but also as technical support hub for assessment across the region, as well as a networking and collaboration organisation, providing a space for discussions on education quality and learning data. In the short term this means reforming the approach to technical assistance and focusing on collaboration and networking. In the long term there is an opportunity to establish a dedicated technical agency at the regional level.

Unmissable opportunities

Recommendation 3.1: Establish network of technical assistance individuals and agencies to support technical teams

In addition to, or as an eventual replacement for, a sole technical assistance supplier, SEA-PLM should see itself as having a coordinating and networking function for technical assistance. The secretariat (supported in the medium term by a coordinating partner) should develop a database of experts in assessment and other related skills (communication, training, policy development and planning). This database would focus on experts and institutions (academic or otherwise) from participating countries, as well as countries in the region and global experts. This would allow for both the secretariat and participating countries to take advantage of a call down service for specific

support. This would potentially be a more cost-effective approach to technical assistance, as well as promoting and supporting technical resources within the region.

Recommendation 3.2: Develop a collaboration and networking strategy

In addition to an external communications strategy, the strategy for the next round of SEA-PLM should explicitly focus on networking and collaboration. Specifically, SEA-PLM should look to:

a. Strengthen collaborations in countries, particularly with Academia and the private sector. This should focus on generating additional secondary analysis, as well as building the policy and political narrative around SEA-PLM data.

b. Facilitate increased cooperation between participating countries. The results of the country case studies for this evaluation highlights that there are missed opportunities to facilitate knowledge sharing on the use of assessment data between countries. This is a valuable chance to create a learning focused policy community in the region.

c. Strengthen networks within the region. SEA-PLM should be explicit on how it will support, and be supported by other projects, organisations and networks working on learning assessment.

d. Foster global collaboration. There are other learning assessments with similar purposes and scope being implemented in other regions of the world. Fostering collaboration with these organisations, or affiliated organisations is a way that SEA-PLM can draw on, and contribute to global expertise, and South-South collaboration.

Long-term visions

Recommendation 3.3: Plan strategically for the establishment of SEA-PLM as a regional technical hub on learning assessment and education quality.
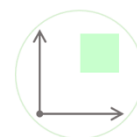
In the long-term, SEA-PLM should consider the development of a regional technical agency, housed within SEAMEO. This agency would provide technical inputs for SEA-PLM but would also support other assessment activities across the region for participating and non-participating countries. This would mirror the work done by SEAMEO-INNOTECH in supporting innovation and technology in education. While this recommendation may not be immediately feasible to deliver upon, it should be explicitly considered as part of the articulation of SEA-PLM's long-term vision. Establishment of this technical capacity at the regional level would allow SEA-PLM to work towards an aim of being more that a metric, and would allow the programme

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Annex A Terms of Reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR INSTITUTIONAL CONTRACTS.

UNICEF Bangkok

Requesting Section: EDUCATION/EVALUTION SECTION, EAPRO

TITLE: Terms of Reference for an Evaluation of the South East Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) Programme in Southeast Asia

1- Background and rationale

The Regional Context in Southeast Asia

UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) is supporting a regional large-scale learning assessment with the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) since 2012. The Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) is the first regional learning assessment at primary level (Grade 5) in Southeast Asia – www.seaplm.org.

As an alternative to international large-scale assessments initiatives (OCDE-PISA, IEA-PIRLS, TIMSS) and national tools (EGRA, national assessments) already used in most of the Southeast Asian countries as part of their system-level mechanisms to generate robust learning data on national representative sample thanks to standardized testing. SEA-PLM is designed as a regional Programme of cyclic assessments to measure quality and equity trends in education over time, sub-population and countries by repeating cycles. This regional initiative is a step forward for measuring, accelerating and tracking progress over SDG 4.1.1 (b) and 4.7.4 by defining and reporting collected data on common scales, levels and learning descriptors.

SEA-PLM collects learning data on national representative samples of students as required by the Global Partnership in Education and the Unesco Institute for Statistics for reporting learning progress. SEA-PLM is integrated into international mapping as one of the active Regional Large-Scale Assessments (ERCE, PASEC, SEA-PLM, SACMEQ, PILNA). Regional assessments are considered by the international community as critical tools to track SDG 4.1 targets over time thanks to their nationally representative samples and reliable competencies scales.

The implementation of each cycle of the assessment is framed to follow a generic framework and timeline of 4-5 years standardized with participating countries. The SEA-PLM first round is branded SEA-PLM 2019 in reference to the data collection year and is having an average duration period of 5-6 years (2015-2020/2021 for SEA-PLM 2019). Six[15] (6) of the eleven[16] (11) Southeast Asia countries have decided to implement SEA-PLM 2019 survey, however, all Southeast Asia countries are involved in the Programme governance structure, methodology development and policy exchange. Those countries may join the next round of the assessment. The initial methodological framework and procedures and SEA-PLM Programme inception have been developed between 2012 and 2015 with the contribution of all countries.

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[15]Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Philippines and Vietnam.

[16] Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.

GPE countries use results from Regional Large-Scale Assessment to report national progress in learning outcomes, actors' practices, expectation and attitudes, and evaluate project impact on targeted groups within specific domains and context. Such assessments are used as a strong component of Education Sector Plans to monitor, plan, design and refine policies and strategy documentation related to curriculum, assessment, resources allocation, equity, workforce development and accountability.

SEA-PLM focuses also on supporting Southeast Asia countries by developing a network and community of practices, mentorship and peer-learning between experts and countries to better measure and understand the status of student learning achievement and thereby improve the quality of their education systems. The regional collaborative framework offers the possibility to build individual and collective capacities around learning policies and assessment through SEAMEO and ASEAN agenda.

SEA-PLM expects to achieve three key outcomes including:

1. Enhanced capacity to generate and analyse assessment data at regional, national and sub-national levels.
2. Enhanced capacity to utilize assessment data for education improvement and more equitable learning outcomes at regional, national and sub-national levels
3. Enhanced ASEAN integration in terms of approaches to assessment, with an initial focus on primary Grade 5 in the domains of numeracy (mathematics), literacy (reading & writing), and global citizenship.

The initiative gathers multiple actors and stakeholders from the regional and national level on time-consuming timelines, standardized in-countries survey activities, high-level expertise for methodology development and quantitative/qualitative research, political commitment and transformation of results in educational policies and practices. The Programme is also engaged in international and regional learning policy dialogue on SDGs, learning policies and large-scale assessment area.

The direct beneficiaries of the assessments and policy exchanges are the Ministry of Education officials, the Education policymakers and sector planners. The development partners, researchers in education and technical institutions get also the opportunity to take benefit from quality data, capacity building in assessment and improved standards across the region. At bottom level, all current and future children studying at primary level and teachers in the region will benefit from the future education reforms that are informed by SEA-PLM findings for improving learning opportunities and professional practices.

ASEAN, SEAMEO and other regional and international organizations will also benefit from increased coordination, alignment and increasing Southeast integration at regional and international level as Global Alliance for Monitoring Learning (GAML).

UNICEF EAPRO and UNICEF CO are supporting SEAMEO Secretariat and participating ministries in their Programme participation by supporting the institutional development of the Programme, mobilizing external expertise to undertake and control technical operations and contribute to funding national and regional operation for training, data collection, communication and human resources. The day to day management, reporting and decision making is jointly managed by UNICEF EAPRO and SEAMEO Secretariat through different bodies and actors at the regional and national level.

Time to take stock: Context for the external evaluation

With the coming implementation of the last stages of the first round of the first regional large-scale assessment in Southeast Asian Region, the Programme is going to deliver SEA-PLM 2019 by reporting, disseminating and supporting the use of results in 2020 and 2021. In the meantime, the Programme is continuing to transform this approach toward a long-term Programme.

The necessity of exploring strength and weakness of the first assessment on a governance, technical, managerial, funding and partnership perspectives, is necessary before engaging in the second round

of the assessment and switching from a biannual plan and commitment to a 5 years approach to support a complete round of assessment and increase the stability, visibility and ownership of the project.

As one of the Co-Chair of the Secretariat of SEA-PLM and main donors of the assessment, UNICEF wants to commission an independent evaluation of this intervention.

The evaluation will focus both on (i) the inception phase of the assessment (2012-2015) and (ii) the implementation of the first round of the assessment (SEA-PLM 2019). The evaluation primary focus will be on SEA-PLM 2015 to 2019. SEA-PLM has the potential to organize three rounds of assessment before 2030 SDG's.

2- Purpose, Objectives & Scope

The main purpose of this independent evaluation is to draw lessons learned and account for results to inform the next phase of the SEA-PLM Programme. As such it combines a formative and summative focus and intends to inform future Programme planning and re-positioning. To do so, this evaluation will assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability as well as equity, gender equality and human rights considerations of the SEA-PLM Programme. It will also consider these criteria in relation to issues including national coordination, leadership and institutionalization according to national priorities and global frameworks. The evaluation will draw evidence-based findings and recommendations which will identify both emerging good practices and new regional strategic approaches, programmatic components and intervention modalities needed to better position UNICEF and its partners in a fast-changing EAP regional context in support of national governments in achieving their national goals and targets and contribute to the SDG agenda.

The primary audience of this evaluation is UNICEF EAPRO, SEAMEO, the SEA-PLM Secretariat, Country Office Management teams and Education teams; the secondary audience includes governments' development partner, donors and external stakeholders as contractors and other collaborators. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be used by both the regional and country offices to inform the development or implementation of their country Programme documents and adjust their strategies and implementation modalities as necessary.

At the regional level, it will inform the design and the implementation of a SEA-PLM long-term strategy and multi-annual activity plan as the regional learning Strategy of the UNICEF regional office, and as well as the regional policy advocacy and partnerships leveraging efforts. Findings of the evaluation will also be disseminated to other UNICEF Regional Offices and UNICEF Headquarters.

The objectives of this evaluation are to:

1. Review the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, the sustainability of the SEA-PLM Programme and assess the extent to which it has been implemented in line with the objectives and global good practices on regional learning assessments;

2. At regional and national level, identify what strategic approaches, programmatic components and intervention modalities can help better position UNICEF and collaborators for SEA-PLM Programme and much broader in a fast-changing EAP region and global initiatives and in support of country programming in achieving the SDG agenda.

This evaluation will also strengthen and update the knowledge and evidence base on SEA-PLM in complementarity with other initiatives recently completed, on-going or recently launched by UNICEF in the region such as the literature review of what works to improve learning in the region.

Evaluation Scope

- The evaluation will be retrospective (*summative*) and cover *(secondary)* the conception period of SEA-PLM (2012-2015) and *(primarily)* the implementation of SEA-PLM 2019 from 2015 to 2019, but it will be forward-looking (*formative*) in providing conclusions and recommendations for regional- and country-level programming.
- Time boundaries: from 2012-2019 with a focus of the current implementation period of SEA-PLM 2019 (2015-2019).
- Organizational level: UNICEF country offices covers by SEA-PLM, UNICEF regional office and the Regional Secretariat and a focus of SEA-PLM 2019 participating countries and consultation of non-participating countries.
- The geographic scope of the assignment will cover six (6) Southeast Asian countries participating in SEA-PLM 2019: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Vietnam. The desk review will cover eleven (11) SEA countries.
- Type of interventions: both upstream (enabling environment and system strengthening work as learning and/or assessment policies planning, implementing and monitoring) and downstream programming strategies (enabling local environment and actors as learners, teachers, head teachers and community in developing capacities and new opportunities for teaching and learning.

Evaluation framework and questions

Evaluation evidence will drawn against the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee's criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact These criteria are prioritized because they capture the evaluation questions presented below. In addition, the evaluation will review equity and gender as cross-cutting issues.

Key evaluation questions (and sub-questions) are clustered according to the evaluation criteria provided. This initial list of questions will be further refined and unfolded by the evaluation team and included in the Inception Report following desk review of key documents.

<u>Relevance</u> of SEA-PLM to the priorities and policies of national education stakeholders in the eleven (11) Southeast Asian countries

1. To what extent is SEA-PLM aligned to i) the national development policies and priorities of national education stakeholders and ii) UNICEF's national, regional and global objectives and intended impacts?
2. What are the programming gaps or unaddressed needs? What could be done better?

<u>Effectiveness</u> of SEA-PLM to intending outcomes in the six (6) SEA-PLM 2019 participating countries

3. To what extent have the objectives and expected outcomes of SEA-PLM been achieved or are likely to be achieved?
4. What have been the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of SEA-PLM objectives and activities? What were the enabling factors, barriers and bottlenecks?
5. What can UNICEF and its partners do to ensure the objectives of SEA-PLM are met in the future? What kind of initiatives should UNICEF prioritize at the country and regional?

<u>Efficiency</u> of the management of SEA-PLM and timely use of resources at country and regional levels in the six (6) SEA-PLM 2019 participating countries

6. How well have SEA-PLM activities been managed by UNICEF in terms of the technical and financial resources? Have SEA-PLM activities been implemented in the most cost-efficient way compared to alternative approaches?

7. What were the strengths and weaknesses of SEA-PLM management processes? How could management of SEA-PLM activities be improved? To what extent and how did the UNICEF Regional Office contribute to efficiency of SEA-PLM in education programming?

Impact resulting from the SEA-PLM Programme at this stage of its implementation (positive and negative changes, intended and unintended) in the six (6) SEA-PLM 2019 participating countries

8. How has SEA-PLM contributed to national education systems and assessment practices and policies and discourses thus far? And at the regional level, what positive and negative changes has SEA-PLM brought about?

Sustainability of SEA-PLM and benefits

9. To what extent can SEA-PLM activities, plans and strategies be fully integrated and implemented by the government (s), both technically and financially? To what extent are they likely to continue?
10. What are the key barriers and bottlenecks towards achieving sustainability of SEA-PLM activities?
11. How can SEA-PLM attract other countries in Southeast Asia and better link other international and regional initiatives?

Equity and gender equality considerations

12. To what extent is SEA-PLM conducive to supporting the most marginalized populations and genders (including those furthest left-behind)?

These questions can be further refined by the evaluation team and included in the Inception Report following desk review of key documents.

3- Evaluation approach and methodology

The primary task of the consultant is to undertake an evaluation of the SEA-PLM Programme to date and provide formative guidance to inform the future developments of the Programme.

It is expected that the evaluation will employ a non-experimental design and use both a theory-based (re-constructing the theory of change), utilization-focused, participatory and a mixed-methods approach drawing on key background documents, monitoring frameworks at country and regional levels and interviews with key informants. Key documents, data and a contact list of relevant informants will be provided to the evaluation team once a contractual agreement has been made. Documentation will include methodological materials, ToR and meeting minutes of bodies of governance, activity plans, letter of commitment and political statement as an example.

The methodology will primarily use mixed data collection methods include:

- **Brief Literature review** of emerging good practice concerning regional and global large-scale learning assessments;
- **Desk review** of key SEA-PLM Programme documents;
- **Key informant interviews** with SEA-PLM technical team, SEAMEO, UNICEF staff at regional and global levels, and key counterparts at national, regional and global level considering the eleven (11) SEA countries; and,
- **Six (6) Case studies** covering SEA-PLM 2019 participating countries

A limitation to the evaluation is the timeframe. Because the results of SEA-PLM 2019 will only be released in 2020, the evaluation will not be able to assess impact of results on children and education systems. Rather it will take a more formative approach, looking at intermediate outputs and outcomes. The applicants should discuss the above or other potential limitations in their proposal.

Based on the above-mentioned purpose and scope of the evaluation, the bidder is expected to submit a proposal for methodologies including data sources and selection criteria among regional and country programming strategies as well as the set of key evaluation questions. Methodological rigor will be given significant consideration in the assessment of proposals. Hence bidders are invited to interrogate the approach and methodology preferred in the ToR and improve on it, or propose an approach they deem more appropriate. In their proposal, bidder should clearly refer to triangulation, sampling plan and methodological limitations and mitigation measures. Bidders are encouraged to also demonstrate methodological expertise in large-scale assessment.

Country visits are envisaged to cover six countries case studies.

The evaluation will occur in three phases, which are further described below: 1) Inception phase, 2) Data collection and analysis phase, and 3) Reporting and communication phase. The following offers guidance on the evaluation process and UNICEF's expectations and thinking. It should be commented on, further developed and improved by the bidders in their respective proposals. Alternative approaches can also be proposed. The methodology will be further specified and finalized by the selected evaluation team in collaboration with UNICEF during the inception phase.

Phase 1. Inception Phase

Step 1. Literature search and review. The evaluation team will review relevant data and analyses from national, regional and global frameworks to understand the context in SEA-PLM were and are operating, and research and practical evidence on successful approaches to regional and global large-scale learning assessment relating to national framework to monitor learning. The literature review should form the basis of the background and context section of the evaluation.

Step 2. Desk review. The evaluation team will review key SEA-PLM background documents from the eleven countries and the regional level, including assessment framework, technical standards, Secretariat strategy documents, monitoring reports, communication materials and field trial documents. The aim of the desk review is to familiarize the consultants with SEA-PLM, to contribute to the background and context sections of the report and to shape the methodology for the inception report.

Step 3. Preparation of Inception Report that includes evaluation methodology and tools. The methodology should be prepared to cover all the intended objectives of the evaluation, including: Summary of literature and desk review, reconstructed theory of change, evaluation criteria and questions, methodology and data collection and analysis tools, foreseen limitations, list of priority interviewees, workplan with timeline and bibliography. The evaluation methodology design and evaluation questions will be finalized in agreement with the UNICEF Regional Office.

Phase 2. Data collection and analysis phase

Step 4. Data collection. The evaluation team will collect data using a mixed methods approach. Data will be collected remotely from all the six countries. Field visits will be included in bidders' proposals for covering the six countries.

Step 5. Data analysis. The evaluation team will compile and analyze data. The methodology used should be clearly described in the final report.

Step 6. Case studies and preliminary findings. The evaluation team should prepare a case study of about 5 pages for each country participating in SEA-PLM to document the evolution of SEA-PLM in the country and its current role and contributions to the education sector as well as gaps, opportunities and recommendations for maximizing impact and long term Programme sustainability.

Phase 3. Reporting and communication phase

Step 7. Draft report. The consultant will prepare a draft report, with conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations for the way forward drawn from the analysis. The report structure should follow the UNICEF-Adapted UNEG Evaluation Report Standards (2017).

Step 8. Validation **workshop** with UNICEF, evaluation reference group, and other stakeholders (validation workshop if applicable, virtual meetings) to validate findings, conclusions and prioritize recommendations.

Step 9. Finalisation of the evaluation report. The consultant will present the final draft evaluation conclusions and recommendations to SEAMEO and UNICEF RO, using a PowerPoint presentation and/or other methodologies. Comments and feedback on the findings and recommendations should be incorporated to finalise the report.

The evaluation methodology should follow the UNICEF Evaluation Policy (2018), the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016), UN SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator, UNEG Ethical Guidelines (2008), UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards and Research, Evaluation and Data Collection and Analysis (2015) (Report must be compliant with the UNICEF-Adapted UNEG Evaluation Report Standards (2017))

4- Deliverables and payment schedule

No.	Tentative Deadline	Deliverable	Percent payment
Deliverable 1	March 2020	Phase 1 Inception Report and presentation, including: • Literature review • Desk Review • Methodology and data collection and analysis tools including sampling strategy • Foreseen limitation and mitigation measures • Workplan with timeline • Annotated Bibliography • Presentation to SEAMEO and UNICEF EAPRO (remotely)	10%
Deliverable 2	May-June 2020	Phase 2 **Case Study Reports** • Key stakeholder interviews and country visits • Case studies in six countries (5 pages each)	10%

Deliverable 3	August 2020	Phase 3 **Draft Evaluation Report**, including the following content in draft form: • Executive summary • Literature review (from inception phase) • Synthesis of desk review (from inception phase) • Final methodology including sampling strategy • Analysis of key findings for each evaluation question • Conclusions and Lessons Learned • Recommendations, country specific and regional • Bibliography (from inception phase) **Validation Workshop of** preliminary findings, conclusions and prioritization of recommendations from draft report.	30%
Deliverable 4	November 2020	**Final Evaluation Report, Brief, Video and Presentation**, including the following content: • Executive summary • Literature review (from inception phase) • Synthesis of desk review and mapping of country level activities (from inception phase) • Final methodology • Analysis of key findings for each evaluation question • Conclusions and Lessons Learned • Recommendations, country specific and regional • Annotated bibliography (from inception phase) • A 4-page brief intended for a broader, non-technical audiences • A PPT and video for UNICEF and SEAMEO to use for general audiences	50%

*Deadlines and timelines are subject to change.

5- Reporting requirements

The deliverables listed above should include the reporting requirements, as described in the table above. The final report should follow UNICEF guidelines and be no more than 40 pages (or 12,000 words excluding annexes) and should include an executive summary. The final report should also include a summary PPT presentation.

In addition, regular progress reports should be provided either via email or phone to the UNICEF RO team, as requested.

All deliverables must be in professional level standard English and in compliance with UNICEF Style Book 2019 and UNICEF Brand Toolkit 2012. They must be language-edited / proof-read by a native speaker.

All reports will be in Microsoft Office Word format while all presentations will be in Microsoft Office PowerPoint. No PDF or hard copy will be submitted by the evaluation team. No page limit is set but all

deliverables should be of the necessary length but not longer, and should be reader friendly. The use of bullet points, tables, graphs, photos, and other visualization methods is encouraged. The use of annexes is required for the evaluation tools, for all secondary information that is not directly related to the evaluation findings, as well as for any long technical documentation intended to a specific audience. PowerPoint presentations must include notes below each slide to make them easy to understand for people who could not attend the meeting.

All data collected, documentation gathered, and photos/videos taken and analyses produced for the purpose of the evaluation are to be made available to UNICEF in the appropriate format. Graphs and maps must be in editable format for layout purposes. All key deliverables will be made available on the UNICEF public website and widely disseminated to all target audience

6- Evaluation management and quality assurance

The evaluation will be conducted by an external evaluation team recruited by UNICEF EAPRO. The evaluation team will be led by a team leader, whose role will be to:

- Oversee and manage the other team members;
- Manage communications with UNICEF;
- Ensure adequate workspace, work equipment, accommodation, international and in-country travel, food, security and insurance arrangement to all evaluation team members;
- Orient and train team members where applicable;
- Organize and facilitate key meetings and workshops;
- Ensure that deadlines are met and all draft and final evaluation products and deliverables are of the required quality as per UNICEF standards (format and content).
- If necessary, the team leader will mobilize a dedicated quality assurance person for additional quality review.
- All draft and final deliverables submitted by the evaluation team leader will be accompanied by a detailed comment matrix describing whether and how earlier comments received have been incorporated, and when they have not been fully included, providing an appropriate justification.

The evaluation team will operate under the guidance and supervision of an evaluation management team led by the Regional Evaluation Advisor and the Regional Evaluation Consultant with support from the SEA-PLM Project Manager and the Regional Education Advisor/Specialist and the Reference Group. The evaluation management team will be responsible for the contractual aspects, day-to-day oversight and management of the evaluation as well as evaluation budget. They will facilitate the communications with the country offices, the reference group members (see below), and other relevant stakeholders. They will be also responsible for the quality of the evaluation, and provide the first round of comments to the evaluation team before submission of the revised draft to the reference group. They will check whether the findings and conclusions from the evaluation are relevant and recommendations are implementable, and propose improvements to the recommendations. They will approve all deliverables and payments. In addition, the team will contribute for dissemination of the evaluation findings and to follow-up on the evaluation recommendations with a management response.

The role of the country office Education and Evaluation teams will be the following:

- Designate a focal point for supporting the evaluation,
- Provide the evaluation team with all information, resource documents and contacts necessary for the evaluation,
- Facilitate the communication and coordination between the evaluation team and UNICEF's implementing partners in-country,
- Organise / facilitate logistics, security, meetings and workshops; any related costs will be part of the regional evaluation and not from county office budgets,
- Provide comments on the key deliverables to minimize factual errors, misinterpretations, and omissions

UNICEF will provide quality assurance on all evaluation tools and documents based on the UNEG's and UNICEF's norms, standards, and guidelines as well as on other best practices related to Programme evaluations. Once approved, the final evaluation report will be submitted to the UNICEF's global evaluation reports oversight system (GEROS) for an independent quality rating. The report and the review will be made available on the UNICEF Internet website, in compliance with the commitment for transparency of evaluation findings.

Evaluation Reference Group

A reference group will be established with the following people and led by the evaluation management team.

- o Regional Education Advisor, EAPRO, UNICEF
- o Education Specialist, EAPRO, UNICEF
- o Regional Evaluation Advisor, EAPRO, UNICEF
- o Chiefs of Education section, UNICEF COs in EAPR (3 from case study countries, 2 from other countries)
- o Education Specialist, HQ, UNICEF
- o Representatives from development partners (donors: Korea, Australia, NZ, ASEAN, JPE, WB, ADB, OECD)
- o SEA-PLM Secretariat representatives
- o Three (3) SEA-PLM 2019 participating countries
- o Two (2) SEA-PLM 2019 non-participating countries

Additional members may be identified during inception phase.

The reference group will have the following roles.

- o Generally, advise the evaluation management team on various aspects of the evaluation and help this team make decisions
- o Contribute to the preparation and design of the evaluation
- o Provide feedback and comments on the second draft of the inception report and on the technical quality of the work of the consultants
- o Assist in identifying internal and external stakeholders to be consulted during the evaluation process
- o Participate in review meetings organized by the evaluation management team
- o Provide comments and substantive feedback from a technical point of view to ensure the quality of the second draft and final evaluation reports
- o Propose improvements/inputs to the preliminary recommendations
- o Play a key role in learning and knowledge sharing from the evaluation results
- o Contribute to disseminate the findings of the evaluation
- o Advise on the management response to the evaluation, and follow up when appropriate

7- Location and Duration

The indicative start date of the assignment will be 15 December 2019. The proposed institutional contract will have a duration of one year months, with all work being carried out between December 2019 and November 2020. The consultant will work remotely from home, with travel as agreed and two travels to Bangkok to present the inception report and the final report recommendations.

8- Qualification requirements and required experience

The core evaluation team may be comprised of 3 experts, while UNICEF is flexible in the team's composition so long as the evaluation work is of high quality. A gender balanced and culturally diverse team composition is strongly encouraged.

The consulting company must provide details of qualification and a work profile of the team leader who should meet the following required minimum conditions:

- Have proven experience (minimum 8 years of experience) in the use of participatory, qualitative and quantitative evaluation/analytic methodologies with experience in conducting UN evaluations;
- Have a minimum of MA/MSc level in Education, Social Sciences, Public Policy Analysis or other relevant fields related to Education. Experience of at least 5 years of work in the consultation domain;
- Evidence/proof of experience in a similar field;
- Strong communication (written and oral) and networking skills;
- Have proven competencies in research, facilitation skills, good communication, excellent English language and writing skills.
- Knowledge of Education in the East Asia and Pacific region is an asset.

Other team members should have the following qualifications:

- Advanced degree in related field with relevant work experience.
- Minimum 10-15 years relevant professional experience, ideally in education and large-scale assessment.
- Previous experience working in issues relating to education, large-scale assessment and/or related fields.
- Strong experience in research, program management, monitoring and reporting.
- Excellent interpersonal skills and previous experience communicating with partners at different levels.
- Demonstrated ability in work planning and report preparation.
- Demonstrated skills in professional high-quality writing in English.
- Experience working in the East Asia Pacific region highly desirable.
- Excellent communication skills in English.
- Experience working for a United Nations organization an asset.

Annex B Access, quality and equity of education in SEA

B.1 Access and equity across the region

Increased enrolment, retention and completion rates and decreased gender gaps have been observed within some countries in the region, however many children remain out of school (OOS) or lack access to quality education (UNICEF EAPRO, 2020).

Across the eleven countries in Southeast Asia, recent progress in improving access, quality and equity varies. As can be seen in Table 9, (based on available UIS data) Brunei Darussalam's progress is constrained across many indicators, Cambodia is making positive progress in reducing overage enrolment and gender equity, and Indonesia is making positive process in reducing the percentage of Out of School Children (OOSC). In Indonesia primary school life expectancy has improved for boys, while secondary school life expectancy has improved for girls. Laos is making positive progress in reducing overage and underage enrolment, increasing access to Early Childhood Development (ECD), gender parity in primary enrolment and secondary school life expectancy. Malaysia has reduced overage enrolment and primary school life expectancy for boys, with improvements for girls remaining stagnant or small. Myanmar has made advancements in reducing the rate of OOSC, increasing school life expectancy at the primary and secondary levels and improving the graduation ratio at the primary level. The Philippines has reduced overage enrolment and improved secondary school life expectancy. Thailand has made improvements in access, school life expectancy at the primary and secondary levels, reduced repetition in primary school and graduation ratio at the primary level. Timor-Leste has reduced the rate of OOSC, improved gender parity in enrolments at the primary level, improved school life expectancy at the secondary level, reduced the rate of primary repetition and improved primary graduation ratios. Based on the available data, Vietnam has improved across the full range of indicators, with the expectations of reducing underage enrolment, school life expectancy for primary boys and improving gross graduation ratios (where indicators have remained reasonably stable).

Gross graduation ratios remain reasonably stable in Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam because starting ratios were near or at 100 percent in 2013.

There is very little comparable data available for these indicators in Singapore.

Table 9 Trends across access, enrolment, schooling late expectancy, repetition and graduation indicators (2013 to 2019), using stoplight rating[17]

Columns (left to right):
- Rate of OOSC of primary school age, both sexes (%)
- Rate of OOSC of primary school age, girls (%)
- Rate of OOSC of primary school age, boys (%)
- Percentage of students enrolled in primary education who are over-age, both sexes (%)
- Percentage of students enrolled in primary education who are under-age, both sexes (%)
- Gross enrolment ratio, early childhood educational development programmes, both sexes (%)
- Gross enrolment ratio, early childhood educational development programmes, girls (%)
- Gross enrolment ratio, early childhood educational development programmes, boys (%)
- Gross primary enrolment ratio, both sexes (%)
- Gross enrolment ratio, primary, gender parity index
- School life expectancy, primary, female (years)
- School life expectancy, primary, male (years)
- School life expectancy, secondary, female (years)
- School life expectancy, secondary, male (years)
- Percentage of repeaters in primary education, all grades (%)
- Gross graduation ratio from primary education (%)

Rows:
- Brunei Darussalam
- Cambodia
- Indonesia
- Laos
- Malaysia
- Myanmar
- Philippines
- Singapore
- Thailand
- Timor-Leste
- Vietnam

[17] Green stoplight rating denotes improvements, yellow denotes stagnation or small movements in trends and red denotes deterioration. Grey reflects an absence of data. Source UIS data 2013-2020.

B.2   Learning assessment programmes and Southeast Asia

Underscoring the impetus behind SEA-PLM, data on learning outcomes are not available for many countries in the region, particularly in reading and writing. Of the eleven countries, only Singapore has participated in PIRLS and Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand have participated in the Grade 8 TIMMS (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Hooper, 2016).

As can be seen in Figure 9 and Figure 10, average proficiency scores in Singapore (in both Maths and Science) have sat between the High and Advanced International Benchmarks since 1995. Thailand's average proficiency scores have sat below or near the Intermediate International Benchmark for both domains and Malaysia's average proficiency scores have declined and then improved both above and below the Intermediate International benchmark, since 1999.

Figure 9 Trends in Grade 8 Maths Proficiency, TIMMS
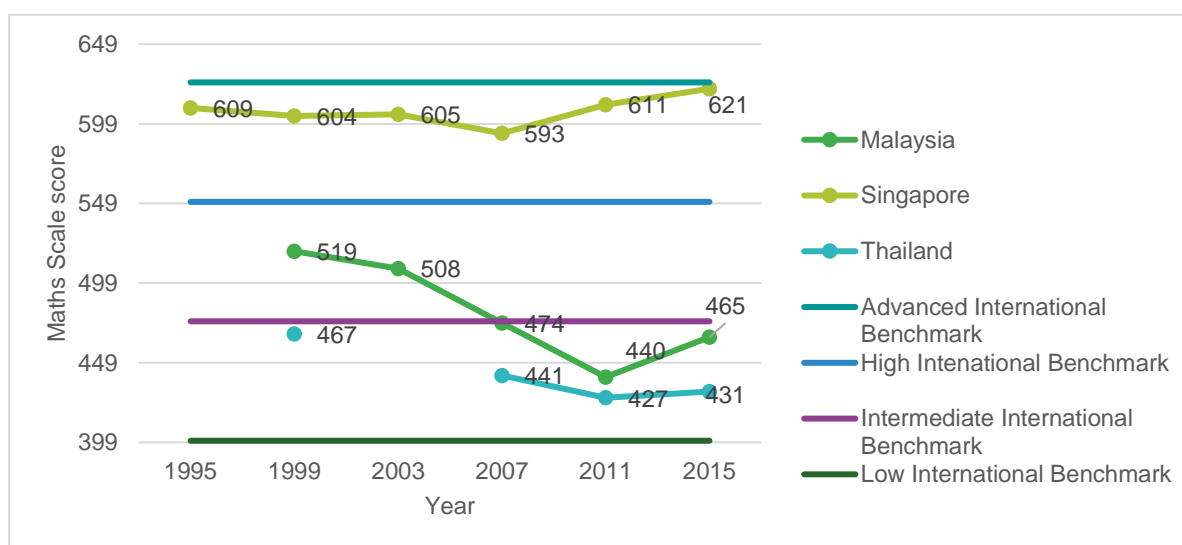
Figure 10 Trends in Grade 8 Science Proficiency, TIMMS
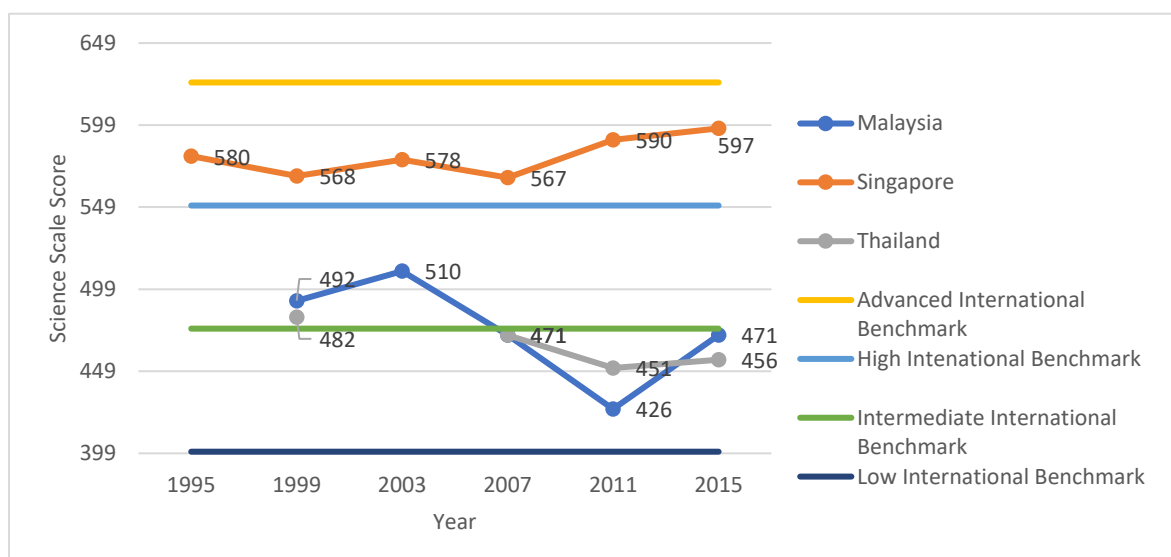
Gender differences in proficiency can be observed in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand (TIMMS 2015) in Figures 11 and 12. Girls perform higher than boys in each country in Maths and perform higher in Science in Malaysia and Thailand, while boys perform higher in Science in Singapore.

Figure 11 Average Proficiency in Maths, by Gender (TIMMS 2015)
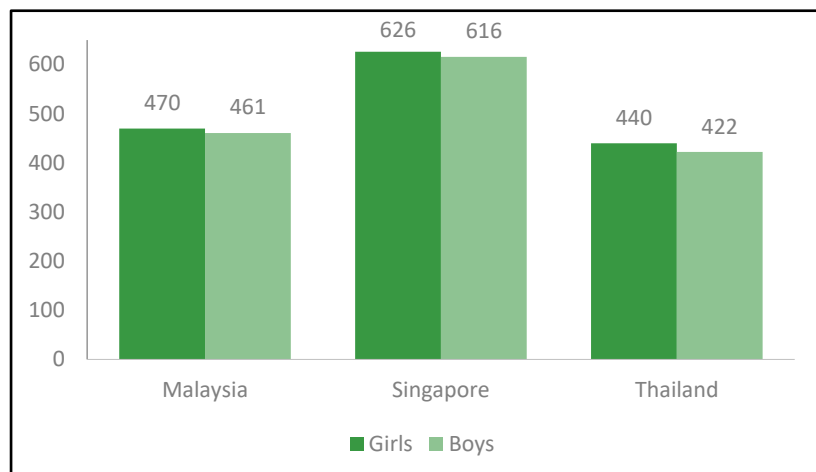
Figure 12 Average Proficiency in Science, by Gender (TIMMS 2015)
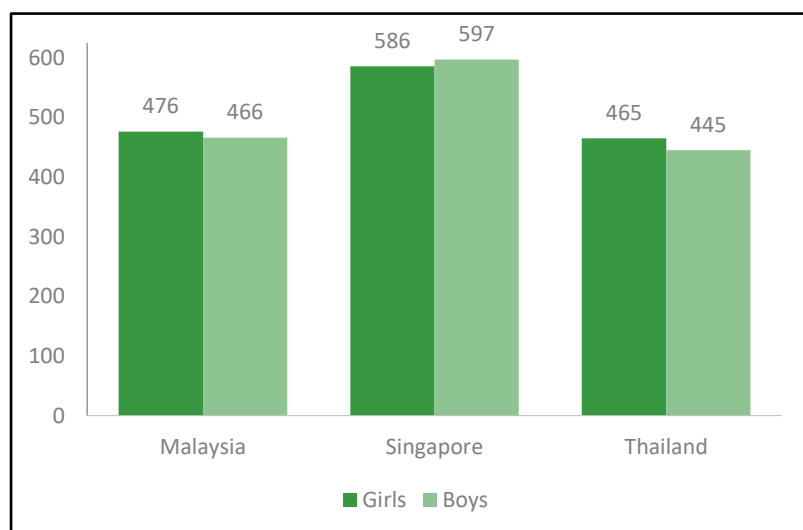
The higher performance of girls in maths is also observable in Vietnam, reflected in the Young Lives Secondary School wave one and wave two survey results. However, larger inequalities exist between districts, ethnic group and, for some measures, urban and rural divide (Iyer, Azubuike, & Rolleston, 2017, p. 31).[18] This highlights that forms of inequality beyond gender are also important to understand how disadvantage takes hold across contexts.

B.3   Education System Quality Indicators in SEA-PLM participating countries

Of these eleven countries, six countries have participated in SEA-PLM, including Cambodia, the People's Democratic Republic of Lao, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines and Vietnam.

These six education systems are diverse in terms of size, quality and equity (Figures 13-17). The primary school age population in PDR Lao is just over 700,000, over 7 million in Vietnam, and roughly 2 million in Cambodia. The pupil-teacher ratio in primary education ranges from approximately 12 in Malaysia to approximately 43 in Cambodia. Similarly, approximately 93 percent of schools in Malaysia have basic handwashing facilities, while in Cambodia just under half of all schools have these facilities. For other education quality indicators, the countries diverge less. For example, the percentage of trained teachers across the countries are reasonably similar, as is the Gender Parity Index for primary school enrolment.

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[18] This was also observable for English and Transferable Skills performance and for wave 1 and wave 2.

Figure 13 Primary school age population (in millions) 2019[19]

Figure 15 Percentage of trained primary teachers[21]
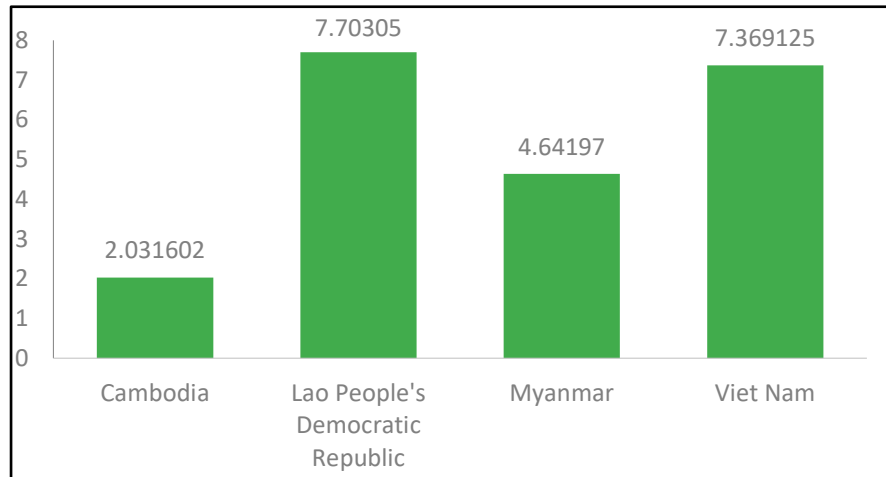
Figure 14 Pupil-teacher ratio in primary education[20]
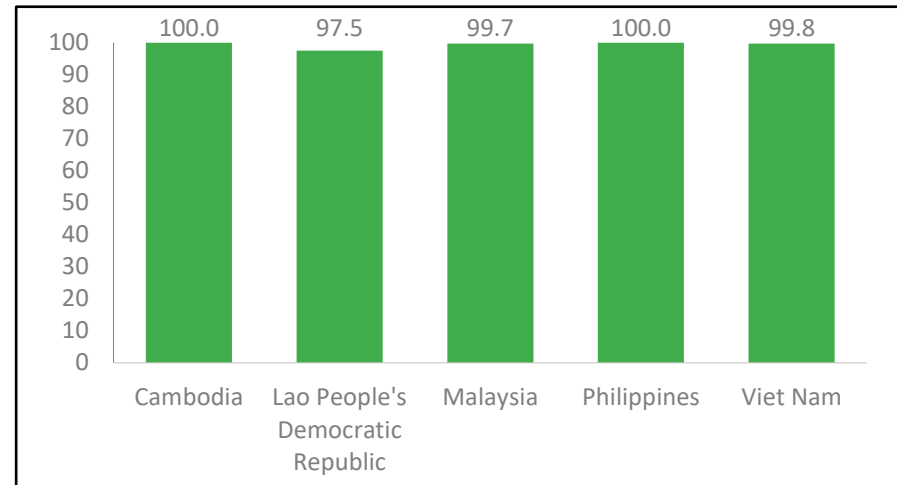
Figure 16 Proportion of primary schools with basic handwashing facilities[22]

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[19] Source UIS
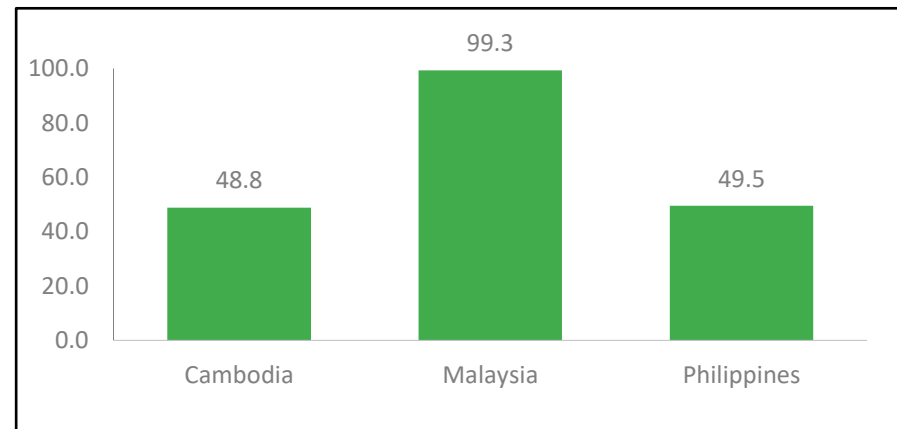
[20] Source UIS

[21] Source UIS

[22] Source UIS

Figure 17 Primary Gross enrolment ratio, Primary, Gender parity Index[23]
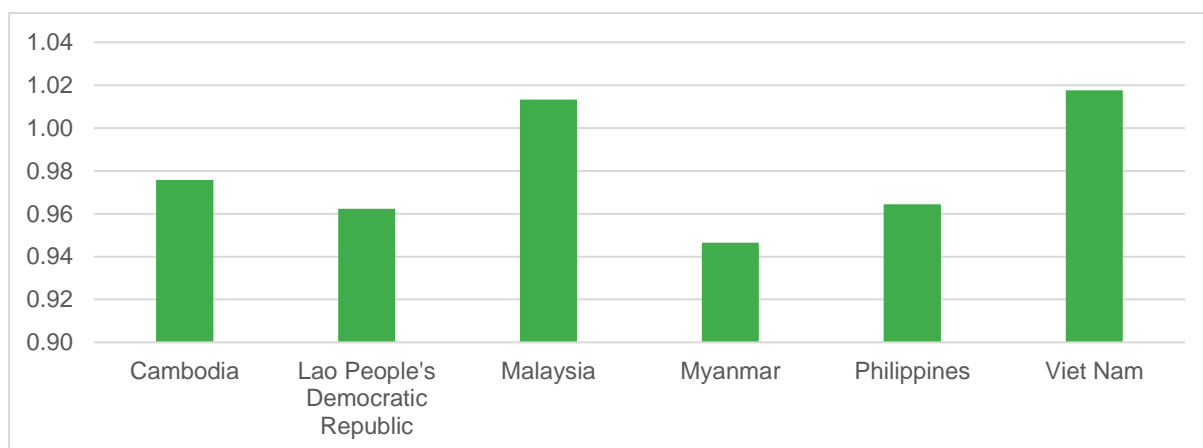
B.4 Access, retention, survival and equity in SEA-PLM participating countries

Across the six SEA-PLM participating countries, primary school life expectancy tends to be higher for boys than for girls (Figure 188), yet survival rates to the last grade of primary education is higher for girls (Figure 199). This indicates a high rate of repetition for boys, which can be observed in **Error! Reference source not found.**0.

Figure 18 Primary school life expectancy, by gender 2017[24]

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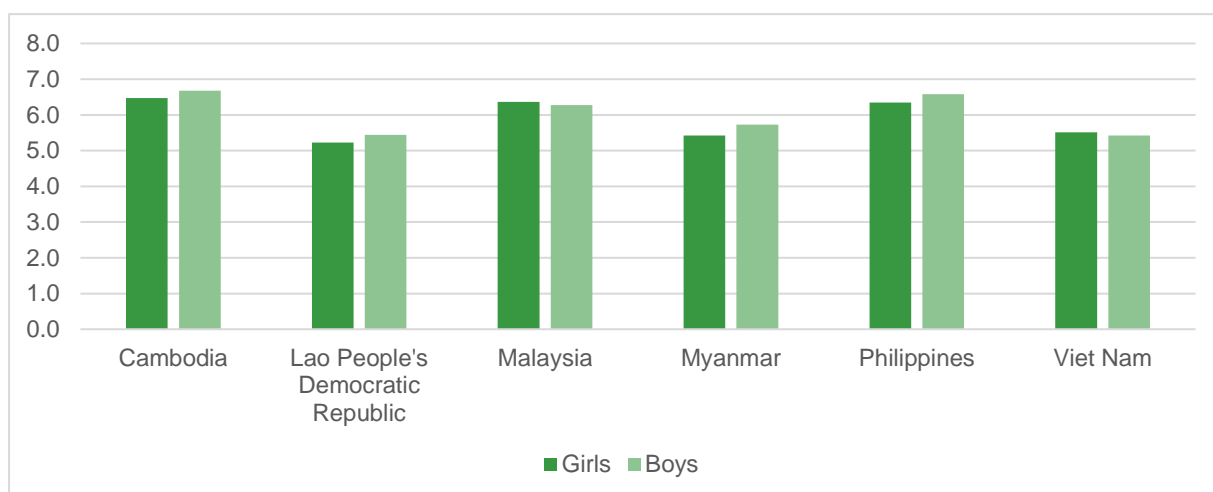
[23] Source UIS

[24] Source UIS

Figure 19 Survival rate to the last grade of primary education, by gender[25]
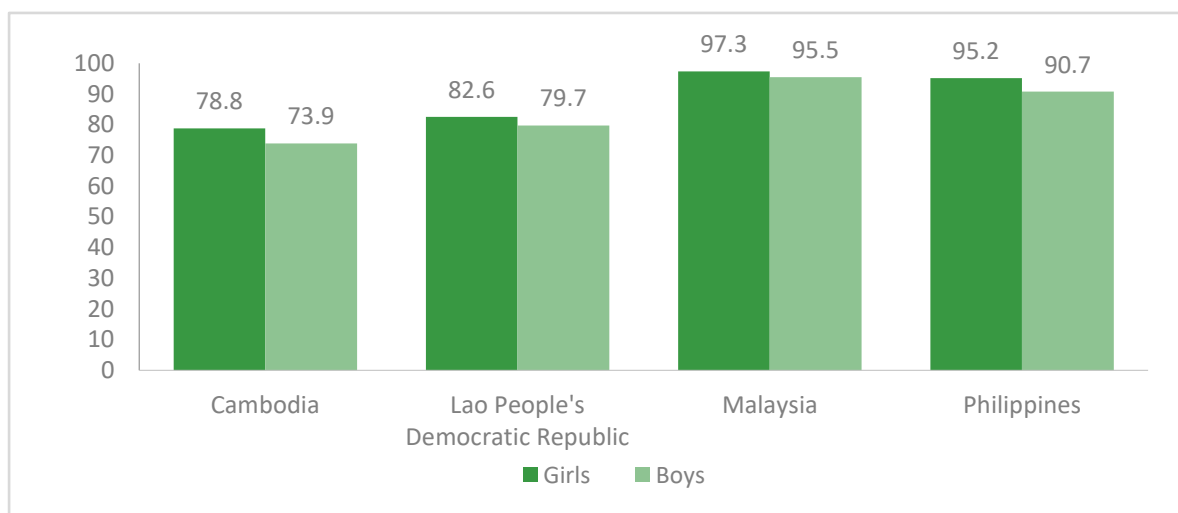
Figure 20 Number of repeaters across primary grades, by gender[26]
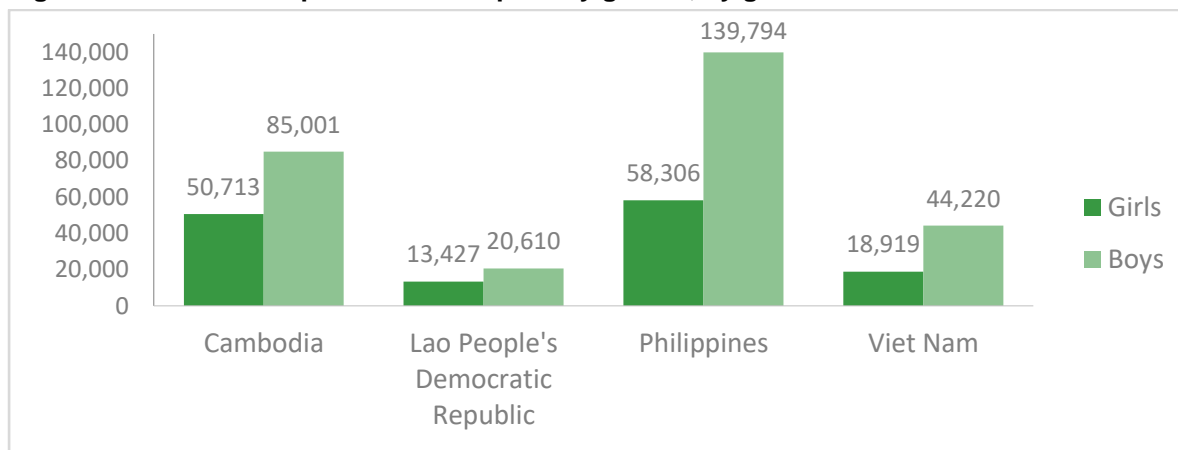
In Myanmar, Philippines, PDR Lao and Cambodia more than ten percent of the students enrolled in primary school are overage for their grade (Figure 21).

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[25] Source UIS

[26] Source UIS

Figure 21 Percent of enrolled primary school students who are overage and underage[27]

Annex C SEA-PLM logframe

Programme Impact	ASEAN and SEAMEO Member countries have an enhanced understanding of factors affecting learning achievements in primary education and take actions to ensure that all children achieve meaningful learning outcomes.	
Programme Outcome 1	Enhanced capacity to generate and analyse assessment data at regional, national and sub-national levels	
Outputs	**Indicator**	**Assumptions/Risks**
Output 1.1: National officials have necessary capacity to conduct SEA/PLM surveys		
Activity areas 2015- 2016: Assessment tools developed, tested, and finalised for use in national surveys Key staff trained at regional and national levels in item development, test design and administration	Assessment tools ready for use in main survey Key staff have required competences to carry out survey effectively	Process at country level includes key experts and decision-makers Trained staff will be utilised in actual survey exercise.
Output 1.2: SEA/PLM surveys meet expected standards of efficiency and effectiveness		
Activity areas 2015-2016: Field testing of SEA/PLM instruments **Activity areas 2017:** National surveys completed	Instruments field tested in at least 6 countries (2 rounds of field testing planned) National surveys completed in at least 6 countries Final reports meet global standards for assessments	Funding is sufficient to ensure that national surveys are carried out efficiently and effectively.

Programme Impact	ASEAN and SEAMEO Member countries have an enhanced understanding of factors affecting learning achievements in primary education and take actions to ensure that all children achieve meaningful learning outcomes.	
Programme Outcome 2	**Enhanced capacity to utilise assessment data for education improvement and more equitable learning outcomes at regional, national and sub-national levels**	
Outputs	**Indicator**	**Assumptions/Risks**
Output 2.1: Future national sector policies and plans respond to SEA/PLM findings	**SEA/PLM data cited in sector policies and plans**	
Activity areas 2015 - 2016: **Country visits by SEAMEO, ACER and UNICEF to explain how SEA/PLM can contribute to enhanced learning and equity.** **Dissemination workshops at national level with key stakeholders** **Policy briefs developed based on SEA/PLM field trial findings**	# advocacy visits to potential SEA/PLM countries and visit reports as shared with SEA/PLM Steering Committee # and quality of workshops # and quality of policy briefs	High level political buy in at Ministerial level to accept, share and utilise survey findings Inclusion of all key stakeholders in the planning and dissemination processes Timing of SEA/PLM surveys in relation to education reform opportunities
Output 2.2: Regional analyses on progress in education include data from SEA/PLM surveys	**SEA/PLM data cited in regional analyses of education**	
Activity areas 2017: **Regional meetings to discuss and compare SEA/PLM findings across Member Countries** **Regional analytical briefs developed.**	# of meetings and quality of recommendations # of briefs developed and evidence of impact	Regional education co-ordination structure for Post 2015 remains strong and harmonious Regional analyses must not lead to negative competition and league tables that shame low performers but to collaborative approaches to enhancing learning for all children

Programme Outcome 3	Enhanced ASEAN integration in the education sector in terms of common approaches to assessment and enhancement of learning, quality and equity	
Outputs	**Indicator**	**Assumptions/Risks**
Output 3.1: SEA/PLM endorsed as regional priority by most ASEAN and SEAMEO Member Countries	**# of states agreeing to engage in SEA/PLM increases (Baseline. July 2015: 4)**	
Activity areas 2015 -2016: **Regional SEA/PLM meetings hosted by SEAMES include advocacy around regional assessment** **Advocacy for SEA/PLM during SEAMES regular meetings and visits abroad** **Communication strategy for SEA/PLM, including brochure and web portal, developed and shared across all SEAMEO Member Countries** **Regional SEA/PLM country communication package** **Advocacy with ASEAN to ensure inclusion of SEA/PLM in ASEAN workplan** **Resource mobilisation for SEA/PLM through SEAMEO and ASEAN structures and through engagement of additional donors** Activity areas 2016 - 2017 **Review of 2015 field trials shared at key meetings** **Formative external evaluation of SEA/PLM progress and impact**	# of regional meetings on SEA/PLM/Assessment #number of SEAMEO meetings and visits where SEA/PLM was presented # of people using new portal and #of brochures distributed # and quality of adapted country communication documents SEA/PLM cited in ASEAN plan # of new donors Level of funding raised Level of national investment in SEA/PLM Key findings enhance survey design Key findings used to shape development of SEA/PLM	SEAMES advocacy with member states will be critical Some countries may resist due to commitments to other surveys ASEAN yet to engage with SEA/PLM as regional priority. Need ensure SEA/PLM is not seen to be donor driven Donor resistant to investing in less tangible areas

Annex D Reconstructed ToC evidence

D.1   Impact

Various documents refer to the impact of SEA-PLM, but often statements combine outcomes and impact statements. For example the SEA-PLM (2015) Background, Rationale and Programme Logic states that the desired programme impact is: *"Countries from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) have an enhanced understanding of factors affecting learning achievements in primary education and take actions to ensure that all children achieve meaningful learning outcomes"* (SEA-PLM, 2015, p. 4).

The same document refers to a vision, stating "*SEA/PLM will contribute towards improving and redefining learning outcomes by providing a regional culturally appropriate metrics and thereby towards a more equitable and meaningful education for all children across the region*".

In the 2019 SEA-PLM Communication Strategy the overall goal of SEA-PLM is expressed as *"by 2025, all Southeast Asia countries have regional standardized quality measures to assess learning outcomes for grade 5 students in the domains of reading, writing, math and global citizenship and consistently use these to inform improvement within the education sector"* (SEA-PLM SEAMEO UNICEF, 2019b, p. 16).

Both of these statements combine impact, outcomes and process. However, taken together, the three phrases confirm that the desired impact of SEA-PLM is:

> *Improved, and more equitable, relevant student learning outcomes across Southeast Asia.*

D.2   Longer term and intermediate Outcomes

The ToC mapping included in the Communications Strategy (2019) indicates that the three goals of SEA-PLM are:

- Enhanced capacity to generate and analyse assessment data at regional, national and sub-national levels
- Meaningful utilization of assessment data for education improvement and more equitable learning outcomes; and
- Enhanced ASEAN integration in terms of approaches to assessment.

When SEA-PLM was initiated in 2012, its key objectives were to develop a regional learning metric to allow for a common approach to assessing learning outcomes at age 10 or Grade 5, which countries would adopt over time across the Southeast Asia region. It was assumed that the initiative would take shape through the combination of SEAMEO's political leadership, technical input from an expert contractor (ACER), and programmatic support of UNICEF, in conjunction with SEAMEO member countries (Ahmad, 2015, p. 4).

Similarly, the SEA-PLM Assessment Framework (2017) states that the 'SEA-PLM initiative has three core goals:

- To provide policy makers with relevant, sound and comparable data on contextual and learning outcomes that can directly inform local education policy development.
- To develop indicators of educational outcomes that enable meaningful comparisons of quality.
- To enhance the existing capacities of participating countries to design data collection activities that will assist all aspects of the policy cycle: to develop and implement a

reliable, valid and rigorous survey-based assessment and reporting program; and to appropriately analyse, interpret and disseminate assessment data with a view to informing education policy through relevant evidence.' (UNICEF and SEAMEO, 2019a, p. 5)

Other desired outcomes include utilizing the data towards policy priorities. These include informing teaching practices, informing curriculum scope and sequence and informing community based programs (Spink, 2019). The intended use for the data is explicated in Spink (2019); "*Assessment results must help us understand where children are at, so we can best understand where we want children to move to next. Regional and global reporting requires us to compare but we must also be able to understand if we are to make a change.*"

The desire for data to be used for decision-making is also reflected in UNICEF's global Education Strategy 2019-2030. The Strategy highlights systems strengthening in partnership with governments and also that '*the generation and use of data and evidence will be (further) enhanced, particularly related to levels of learning, to generate a better understanding of the children being left behind, and the effectiveness of education systems in meeting the learning needs of every child*'. (UNICEF, n.d.)

These goals and outcomes expressed within the documentation cover outputs, intermediate outcomes and longer-term outcomes. In order to use the ToC for evaluation purposes, the logical results chain must link longer term outcomes to impact and intermediate outcomes to longer term outcomes etc. For this reason, it is important that the sequencing of the logical chain follows the theory of how change occurs. For example, to link longer term outcomes to impact, the longer-term outcome would need to be able to be directly linked to how improved, and more equitable, relevant student learning outcomes across Southeast Asia would take place. "*Enhanced ASEAN integration in terms of approaches to assessment*" is not an outcome that can logically directly lead to improvements in learning outcomes. For this reason, the outcomes and goals referred to in SEA-PLM documentation have been reordered in the reconstruction, to take account for the need for logical sequencing along the results chain.

The longer-term outcomes of SEA-PLM, as expressed in the documentation, and the mechanism by which impact can take place is:

> ***Sustainable, effective, efficient, responsive and more equitable education systems at the regional and national levels, able to meet the needs of all children, including those left behind across Southeast Asia***

Many of the objectives referred to in the documentation are theorised to lead to the longer-term outcome of sustainable, effective, efficient, response and more equitable education systems. Therefore, the intermediate outcomes of SEA-PLM are:

1. Policy makers use data to meaningfully support decision-making;
2. Enhanced capacity to generate and analyse assessment data at regional, national and sub-national levels;
3. Sustainable regional integration of relevant large-scale assessment and outcomes;
4. Enhanced ASEAN integration in terms of assessment; and
5. SEA-PLM is on the regional agenda and national government support is re-enforced.

D.3   Outputs

There are many specific outputs within the SEA-PLM programme that span the technical, political, logistical and partnership aspects of the programme. Within the ToC the broad

and most important outputs have been identified, as referenced in the SEA-PLM conference paper (Ahmad, 2015), technical reports (SEA-PLM, 2019a), work plans (SEA-PLM SEAMEO UNICEF , 2019a and ASEAN Secretariat, 2016), communication strategy documentation (SEA-PLM SEAMEO UNICEF, 2019b), program rationale and logic documents (SEA-PLM, 2015), ToR (UNICEF EAPRO and UNICEF, 2019) and the SEA-PLM Assessment Framework (UNICEF and SEAMEO, 2019a).

These broad outputs are:

1. Reliable, valid, relevant and rigorous learning and contextual data;
2. A regional common learning metric;
3. SEA-PLM alignment to the global UIS learning outcomes scale;
4. Regional and national workshops and Learning and Development (L&D) products;
5. Strategies for analysing and disseminating data;
6. Common tools, protocols and standards to generate and utilize assessment data across ASEAN countries; and
7. Funding agreements with donors and participant countries.

D.4   Activities

SEA-PLM ToC mapping documentation identifies four main areas of activities to achieve SEA-PLM goals, including:

- **Capacity building:** to improve procedures and capacities at individual and institutional levels for completing standardized assessment of grade 5 learner achievement
- **Data production**: to improve the common design of tools, protocols and standards to generate and utilize assessment data across ASEAN Member States
- **Information use:** so, data can be analysed, understood, and used by skilled decision-makers who take and promote evidence-based actions to improve education policy and curricula
- **Regional integration:** to ensure sustainable regional integration of large scale assessment to monitor achievements towards the ASEAN Community Blueprints and SDG 4.

In many ways, these activities articulate four groups of activities and then describe how they lead to outputs and outcomes. Therefore, in reviewing the range of SEA-PLM regional documentation, the main activities were identified. These activities are presented in **Error! R eference source not found.**. This information was used to categorise and articulate the broad categories of activities for the ToC. These are:

1. Field studies and main survey data collection;
2. Assessment framework development, item development, sampling, analysis and reporting;
3. Technical capacity building activities;
4. Develop and disseminate communications strategy;
5. Regional endorsement activities;
6. Fundraising with donors and countries.

Table 10 SEA-PLM Activities

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Inception	Research paper on education curriculum s	Formal collaboration established between SEAMES and UNICEF for the realization of SEA-PLM	Audit of all SEAMEO countries curricula completed	Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines confirm their participation in the field trail	First round of field trial results in Brunei, Cambodia and Laos	Planning and budgeting for main survey	First in country review of regional and national activity plan for 2020 prepared by SEA-PLM Secretariat and reviewed by the TAG	Regional report of cross-country findings launched
Working group established	Research paper on assessment programmes	ACER contracted to develop tools for regional assessment	Assessment Framework developed	Remaining participating countries trained several technical areas	Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam complete their field trials	Completion of Governance Analysis	Regional Steering Committee in-person meeting to initiate reflection and strategize on a second version of regional and national activity plan for 2020.	Technical delivery: Creation of one provisional regional database with weighting.
Conceptuali zation	Regional Seminar held to agree key features and scope of SEA-PLM	Brunei, Laos and Cambodia signed up for field trail	Assessment Framework reviewed at regional workshop	Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar complete the field trial		TOR and Contracts for implementation of main survey at national and regional levels	In-country consultation on national activity plan for 2020	One regional technical meeting or webinar to share psychometric conclusions
		Formal launching ceremony with high-level representation and endorsement of national governance structure	Country visits from SEAMES and EAPRO to meet with High Officials to discuss SEA-PLM	SEA-PLM is included in ASEAN 2016-2020 Education Work Plan		Regional Consultation on next steps for SEA-PLM	Final validation of regional and national activity plans for 2020 comprising work plan, timeline, and budget	Technical support: one psychometric report
			Regional item development workshop			Main Survey Orientation and Sampling workshop held in 6 countries	New communication strategy, including newsletter diffusion, publication edition and first step new branding and program design for 2020	Technical support: one competency scale by domain

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
			Regional Orientation workshop (up-start of field trails)			Code of Practice drafted	Implementation of the regional work plan and nationals' work plan in countries	Technical support: one analysis plan
			Myanmar confirms their participation in the field trial			National Sampling design completed in 6 countries	Regional report of cross-country findings launch (SEA-PLM SEAMEO UNICEF , 2019a)	Technical support: one provisional outline for the main regional report
			Brunei D completes their field trial			Key findings from the Governance Analysis presented-Regional SEA-PLM Consultation		Technical support: one data analysis user manual
						Accuracy of life skills learning assessment workshop		Technical support: one methodological report.

D.5   Inputs

The inputs to SEA-PLM fit into four broad areas:

1. Technical Assistance;
2. Data collection costs;
3. Regional and country governmental human resources; and
4. UNICEF coordination.

The financial inputs for SEA-PLM are complex and not easily traced. However, several documents made available for the Desk Study, provided some information on historical costs and future budgetary figures.

Technical support contracted through the UNICEF Long Term Agreement (LTA) totalled US $2,127,623.20 between February 2017 and December 2019 (UNICEF, 2019). Overall institutional contracts established to date total just over $5 million (UNICEF, 2019).

Data collection costs are not easily identifiable as discreet costs; however, documentation indicates that country implementation for field trials in 2018 totalled US $1.66 million across Cambodia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and the Philippines. This doesn't include technical support for field trails or other institutional contracts associated with field trails.

Regional costs for 2020 are currently costed at US $715,176 and country costs are US $727,794. In addition, Secretariat staff costs (not counting existing staff) are estimated at $1.5 million over 2019-2021.

Of course, in addition to the direct costs associated with implementing SEA-PLM, human resources make up a large contribution of inputs from across various partners. For example, according to documentation from 2018, the SEAMES and UNICEF staff assigned to SEA-PLM included a Deputy Director, a Finance Manager, a Programme Officer, a Programme Coordinator, a Programme Assistant, a Regional Education Advisor, Education Specialist, a Senior Expert and a Programme Manager (UNICEF EAPRO).

According to the documentation, the funding gap for 2020 is significant, at approximately 75 percent of the regional and national costs (not accounting for any further institutional contracts) (Marivin, 2019).

D.6   Assumptions to be tested

Assumptions form the underlying beliefs about how a project will work, about the people involved in the programme and about the stakeholders. Assumptions help to explain the ToC process and the connections along the logical results chain. They help explain how and why proposed activities are expected to bring the desired changes about. Assumptions are often taken for granted and they may be based on opinions or beliefs.

Assumptions are often implicit but by stating them explicitly, the extent to which they hold can be assessed. Where assumptions do not hold, the causal chain is at risk and a new pathway to impact can be identified.

The following assumptions have been identified from inputs to activities, activities to outputs, outputs to intermediate outcomes, intermediate outcomes to longer term outcomes and longer-term outcomes to impact.

D.6.1 Inputs to activities

- Stakeholders have the opportunities (resources, time, conducive environment) to engage in SEA-PLM activities;
- Stakeholders have the motivation and incentives to participate in SEA-PLM activities; and
- The Secretariat has sufficient leverage within SEA countries to influence SEA-PLM participation and monitor SEA-PLM activities.

D.6.2 Activities to outputs

- Donors and participating countries have sufficient resources to invest in SEA-PLM and consider SEA-PLM Value for Money (VfM);
- Technical and capacity building inputs are sufficient to result in the desired outputs;
- There is sufficient common ground between countries to find agreement on the analysis and dissemination of SEA-PLM results;
- There is sufficient domain coverage, international and regional data and political will to support a common regional and global metric; and
- The data generated by countries is of sufficient quality to support a regional common learning metric.

D.6.3 Outputs to intermediate outcomes

- There is sufficient national capacity (technical capabilities, political will, resources) to analyse available data;
- Policy makers have sufficient capacity, incentives and political space to access and utilize data to inform decisions;
- The reach, fidelity and dose of capacity building activities are sufficient at national and regional levels;
- The costs of SEA-PLM are sustainable during integration into regional systems and beyond; and
- ASEAN countries see the value of a common approach to regional assessment and believe SEA-PLM is sustainable.

D.6.4 Intermediate outcomes to longer term outcomes

- The use of SEA-PLM data leads to the improvements of previous shortcomings in relation to relevance, equity and learning in the education system;
- Stakeholders have the capacity and incentives to solve education sector issues; and
- Stakeholders have the opportunities (resources, time and a conducive environment) to solve education sector issues.

D.6.5 Longer term outcomes to impact

- Changes in the education system positively affect relevant learning outcomes and equity.

Annex E Evaluation matrix

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation question	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Research methodology	Source of information	Link to the ToC
Relevance	1. To what extent is SEA-PLM aligned to i) the national development policies and priorities of national education stakeholders and ii) UNICEF's national, regional and global objectives and intended impacts?	1.1 Evidence of national development policies and priorities alignment with SEA-PLM objectives 1.2 Evidence of UNICEF global, national and regional objectives aligning with SEA-PLM intended impacts	National stakeholder support for SEA-PLM Country and national institutional needs against programme delivery UNICEF policy and programme documentation aligns with SEA-PLM ToC There is sufficient domain coverage, international and regional data and political will to support a common regional and global metric	Desk research, QCA	Country policies, UNICEF national, regional and global documentation, Programme documentation, KIIs	Context, inputs and activities
	2. What are the programming gaps or unaddressed needs? What could be done better?	2.1 Evidence of any activities do not work within the context/s 2.2 Evidence that needs (regional, national or sub-group), as identified by stakeholders, are not covered by SEA-PLM	Programme delivery is not on track against work plans When delivery is on track, additional needs are identified by stakeholders Programme delivery does not cover the needs of specific stakeholders or beneficiaries Programme activities do not lead to expected outputs Stakeholders have the opportunities (resources, time, conducive environment) to engage in SEA-PLM activities	Desk research, QCA	Programme documentation, KIIs	Context, inputs, activities and outputs

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation question	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Research methodology	Source of information	Link to the ToC
			Stakeholders have the motivation and incentives to participate in SEA-PLM activities The reach, fidelity and dose of capacity building activities are sufficient at national and regional levels			
Effectiveness	3. To what extent have the objectives and expected outcomes of SEA-PLM been achieved or are likely to be achieved?	3.1 Evidence that policy makers are preparing to use SEA-PLM data to inform decisions 3.2 Evidence of improved regional and national capacity to produce, analyse and disseminate data 3.3 Evidence stakeholders are aligning national assessments with SEA-PLM 3.4 Evidence that SEA-PLM is supported by national governments and is on the regional agenda	Data is on track to be available to policy makers Policy makers have sufficient capacity, incentives and political space to access and utilize data to inform decisions Policy makers are aware of when the data will be released and how it can be used There is sufficient common ground between countries to find agreement on the analysis and dissemination of SEA-PLM results The data generated by countries is of sufficient quality to support a regional common learning metric There is sufficient national capacity (technical capabilities, political will, resources) to analyse available data	QCA	KIIs	Outcomes and impact

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation question	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Research methodology	Source of information	Link to the ToC
	4. What have been the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of SEA-PLM objectives and activities? What were the enabling factors, barriers and bottlenecks?	4.1 Strength of evidence linking activities to outputs to outcomes 4.2 Evidence of triangulated perceptions regarding enabling factors, barriers and bottlenecks from key stakeholders	Current programme implementation status against workplans Progress against activities and outputs listed in the developed ToC Stakeholder perspectives on programme activities, outputs and outcomes Secretariat leverage within SEA countries and influence re SEA-PLM participation and SEA-PLM activities	Desk research, QCA	SEA-PLM programme documentation KIIs	Activities, outputs and outcomes
	5. What can UNICEF and its partners do to ensure the objectives of SEA-PLM are met in the future? What kind of initiatives should UNICEF prioritize at the country and regional?	5.1 Evidence of particularly useful mechanisms of change along the results chain	A particular set of links in the ToC are stronger and able to be replicated A particular set of links in the ToC are weaker and require strengthening and an alternative pathway to impact	Desk research, QCA	SEA-PLM programme documentation KIIs	Complete results chain
Efficiency	6. How well have SEA-PLM activities been managed by UNICEF in terms of the technical and financial resources? Have SEA-PLM activities been implemented in the most cost-efficient way compared to	1.1 Evidence UNICEF technical and financial support has been provided on time and within scope 1.2 Evidence of VfM principles embedded within SEA-PLM activities	Value for Money principles are embedded in SEA-PLM activities Management structure and partnership engagement approaches support efficiency	Desk research, QCA	SEA-PLM programme documentation KIIs	Inputs to outputs

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation question	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Research methodology	Source of information	Link to the ToC
	alternative approaches?					
	7. What were the strengths and weaknesses of SEA-PLM management processes? How could management of SEA-PLM activities be improved? To what extent and how did the UNICEF Regional Office contribute to efficiency of SEA-PLM in education programming?	7.1 Evidence that SEA-PLM inputs were converted to outputs in the most efficient way possible 7.2 Evidence that inputs could have been converted to outputs more efficiently 7.3 Evidence of triangulated stakeholder perspectives and programme documentation regarding activity and output efficiency	Planned against actual costs Inputs were managed to achieve planned outputs within the resource envelope Planned activities led to planned outputs	Desk Research, QCA	Cost data and unit prices SEA-PLM programme documentation Official documentation on partner engagement KIIs	Inputs to outputs
Likely Impact	8. How has SEA-PLM contributed to national education systems and assessment practices and policies and discourses thus far? And at the regional level, what positive and negative changes has SEA-PLM brought about?	8.1 Evidence of changes in the topics, focus and amount of education dialogue at the country and regional levels 8.2 Evidence in changes to national assessment practices	The use of SEA-PLM data leads to the improvements of previous shortcomings in relation to relevance, equity and learning in the education system Stakeholders have the capacity and incentives to solve education sector issues ASEAN countries see the value of a common approach to regional	Desk Research, QCA	SEA-PLM programme documentation Country engagement in regional and international activities Country education plans	Outputs to outcomes

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation question	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Research methodology	Source of information	Link to the ToC
			assessment and believe SEA-PLM is sustainable. Stakeholders have the opportunities (resources, time and a conducive environment) to solve education sector issues		Education Sector Analysis reports KIIs	
Sustainability	9. To what extent can SEA-PLM activities, plans and strategies be fully integrated and implemented by the government (s), both technically and financially? To what extent are they likely to continue?	9.1 Evidence of capacity expectations to implement future rounds being achievable within TA budgets 9.2 Evidence of national technical capacity to undertake expected technical tasks 9.3 Evidence of funding availability and SEA-PLM affordability for future rounds	Costs of participating in SEA-PLM against other education expenditure in country Turnover of staff in participating countries Technical and capacity building inputs are sufficient to result in the desired outputs The costs of SEA-PLM are sustainable during integration into regional systems and beyond Donors and participating countries have sufficient resources to invest in SEA-PLM and consider SEA-PLM Value for Money (VfM)	Desk Research, QCA	SEA-PLM programme documentation Country education budgets KIIs	Inputs to impact
	10. What are the key barriers and bottlenecks towards achieving sustainability	10.1 Evidence countries do not plan to participate in the future 10.2 Evidence of reasons for non-participation				

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation question	Judgement criteria	Indicators	Research methodology	Source of information	Link to the ToC
	of SEA-PLM activities?					
	11. How can SEA-PLM attract other countries in Southeast Asia and better link other international and regional initiatives?	11.1 Evidence of ways to overcome barriers and bottlenecks from other regional experiences	N/A	Desk research, QCA	Literature review KIIs	N/A
Equity and gender equality	12. To what extent is SEA-PLM conducive to supporting the most marginalized populations and genders (including those furthest left-behind)?	12.1 Evidence that equity and inclusion has been mainstreamed into programme activities 12.2 Evidence the data will be used to inform equity decisions	Items are checked for differential performance (DIFF analysis) by gender or location Policy makers are considering equity, inclusion and gender in their policy concerns SEA-PLM data is able to capture inequalities and countries know how to disaggregate analysis by social group	Desk research, QCA	Programme documents KIIs Data analysis plans	Outputs to impact

Annex F Evaluation Framework and Methodology

F.1   Conceptual framework

We propose to undertake a non-experimental, theory-based Process Evaluation to answer the evaluation questions. Therefore, the principal organising structure and framework for the evaluation is the ToC, however we will follow the key functions of process evaluation.

Process Evaluation does not make use of a comparison group, seeking to make causal inferences, but rather seeks to make credible claims about the SEA-PLM programme's progress along the inputs, activities, outputs and initial outcomes of the ToC. This is important during the early stages of an intervention, to inform the final implementation model.

The process evaluation will be informed by Pawson and Tilley's Realist Evaluation (1997)*.* Realist evaluation understands change as the results of actions of agents operating in a specific context whereby the action leads to outcomes by triggering mechanisms. It emphasises that mechanisms are contingent on the context and that outcomes are produced by the interactions of context and mechanisms. Therefore, evaluations are based on Context-Mechanism-Outcome configurations.

The aim of the process evaluation is to explain how SEA-PLM works and will examine the processes through which the programme generates outcomes in different contexts. Figure 22 illustrates schematically key functions of process evaluation.

Figure 22 Key functions of process evaluation, from Moore et al, 2014
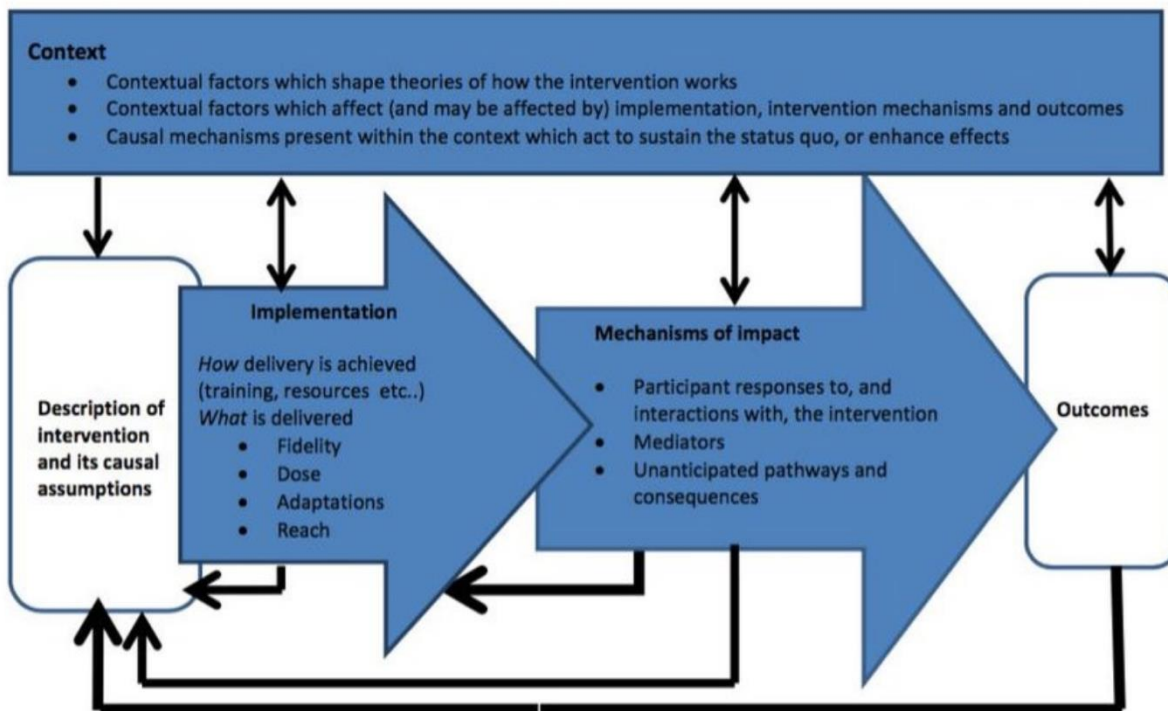
F.2   Evaluation approach

The evaluation will explore the interactions between context, SEA-PLM design and causal assumptions, how delivery was achieved, how participants responded to and interacted with SEA-PLM and will assess the validity of the results chain, as described in the ToC.

The evaluation team will:

1. Identify barriers to delivery, uptake, individual change and institutional reform.

2. Review how delivery is achieved, by (1) identifying how the programme has been established, including institutional factors, partnership factors and resourcing; (2) Identifying what contextual factors affect implementation; (3) Identifying any adaptations that might be required to improve implementation, take up and individual and institutional change; and (4) Checking the fidelity of the programme against the ToC and programme documentation28.

3. Identify the likely mechanisms of impact29, including exploring country responses to, and interactions with SEA-PLM and exploring any unanticipated pathways and consequences of the programme.

4. Identify any contextual issues that shape theories of how the intervention works, contextual factors which affect (and may be affected by) implementation, intervention mechanisms and outcomes and any causal mechanisms present within the context which act to sustain the status quo or enhance effects and the mechanisms for impact.

5. This will be done by empirically verifying activities, outputs, and outcomes and assumptions posited along the causal chains in the ToC and draw conclusions about what is working and what is not working in SEA-PLM and likely impact.

F.3   Data

In this section of the report, we outline the data collection methods, data collection instruments and our approach to data collection consistency and quality.

F.3.1   Data collection methods

F.3.1.1   Inception report development and Desk Research

The process undertaken to develop this inception report has been outlined in Section 1.2. This report has been developed to outline the key approach, methodology and workplan for the evaluation. It includes a reconstructed ToC which has been developed based on SEA-PLM programme documentation and an evaluation matrix based on the final evaluation questions, and outlines the judgement criteria, indictors, data sources, and links to the ToC.

The ToC has been developed to inform the evaluation and provide the evaluation team and programme participants with a common language regarding how change is theorised to take place through the programme. An inception workshop will take place during the inception period and will include a validation of the ToC.

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28 Fidelity evaluation is the "extent to which delivery of an intervention adheres to the protocols and program model originally developed" (Mobray, Holter and Teague, 2003)

29 It is recognised that as the programme has not completed a full cycle yet, impact of student learning cannot be assessed. However, the likely mechanisms for impact can be explored by testing the assumptions that exist along the results chain.

As part of the inception period, the team reviewed available programme materials including strategic planning documents, any programme logic models, implementation work plans, and available data from the programme.

In addition, a review of literature on international and regional assessments has been undertaken during the inception period. This includes a review of the types and history of large-scale assessments, evidence of the impact of assessments and the enablers and barriers to achieving impact.

F.3.1.2   Qualitative data collection

Our evaluation methods are predominantly qualitative in nature, allowing us to understand what change is occurring, how and why. The project has a focus on capacity development, which is not readily quantifiable and many of the evaluation questions are 'how' and 'why' questions (rather than 'how much'). The purpose of the qualitative analysis will be to enable the evaluation team to answer evaluation questions related to participation barriers, the extent to which individual and institutional capacity interacts with achieving programme outcomes and the validity of the ToC in different settings. The main focus will be to collect data along the results chain from inputs, activities, outputs to outcomes, and identify any weak links in the ToC.

A country case study approach will be utilized, and qualitative data collection will be conducted in three of the six participating countries through virtual or face-to-face country visits.[30] Consultations with countries other than those featured as case studies will be light touch and limited to a conversation with one government and one UNICEF respondent for each country. The purpose of these interviews is to situate the SEA-PLM experience of the three case studies within the wider context of the five SEAMEO countries yet to participate and the three participating countries with which case studies are not conducted.

F.3.1.3   Country selection for case studies

The selection of case study sites is informed by consideration of a theorised sampling approach that will produce data from a diverse set of countries that are collectively likely to produce data on a range of experiences to inform future decisions.

Sampling '*is a core design issue because the purposeful sample will determine what you learn about*' (Patton 2015). Through a carefully chosen sampling strategy, the most relevant sample can be selected, and rigour can be ensured. The chosen approach to sampling for the country case studies is designed to generate responses from small numbers of individuals and groups that are representative (though not statistically) of groups relevant to SEA-PLM and which allow some identification of heterogenous contributions and experiences.

Purposive sampling can serve this purpose. Purposive sampling involves selecting a sample of 'typical' and 'extreme' cases based on available data. In essence, the aim is to select countries that cover the range of national and education system features.

Therefore, our proposed selection for the three case studies is:

1. Lao PDR;
2. Cambodia; and
3. Malaysia.

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[30] See Section 7 on Risk Management and COVID related scenarios

Lao PDR represents a small education system with relatively less experience in large scale assessments. Cambodia is a larger system, with somewhat more established experience and Malaysia is a country with significant previous participation in international surveys.

Additionally, as has been outlined in Section 2 of this report, Cambodia has seen a deterioration in many education indicators, Laos has had some very positive progress but remains challenged in some areas and Malaysia has shown progress and very little deterioration across the range of education indicators. This sample also represent the countries with the highest (Cambodia) and the lowest (Malaysia) pupil-teacher ratios of the SEA-PLM participating countries, the highest (Cambodia) and the lowest (Lao) primary school life expectancy, the highest (Malaysia) and the lowest (Cambodia) survival rates to the last grade of primary education and the highest (Cambodia) and lowest (Malaysia) percentages of enrolled overage children.

We propose that the country for the first case study is Malaysia. This will also serve as a pilot for the other two. That first case study will be undertaken by our Team Leader and evaluation methodology lead.

F.3.2 Data collection instruments

The qualitative research tools will consist of Key Informant Interviews. Semi-structured questionnaires will be designed in alignment to the evaluation questions, will be informed by the evaluation matrix and will be conducted with a broad variety of stakeholders. Instrumentation will be tailored according to the category of respondent to ensure the most relevant and valuable insights are obtained.

Instruments will follow the results chain from inputs to outcomes but will use the language of SEA-PLM activities and SEA-PLM expected outcomes rather than the language of evaluators. Instruments will begin with requesting information on the informant's role and previous roles in order to ascertain early in the interview where the participant's input will be most valuable to the evaluation. Evaluators will then focus on those questions.

F.3.3 Data collection consistency and quality

Data collection instruments will be standardised across the three countries, by sets of informants.

The first country study will act as a pilot to inform tool finalisation. After each interview, the evaluator will reflect informally on the tools and process and identify areas for improvement. The data collection tools will thus be refined iteratively within the first of the case study visits.

F.4 Data analysis

The evaluation team will use qualitative comparative analysis and synthesis techniques, carefully ensuring non-bias using triangulation and informed judgements.

F.4.1 Qualitative Comparative Analysis

Within the structure of the overarching ToC, the evaluation will use elements of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). QCA is a useful method to identify different factors or combinations of factors that are likely to have led to a specific outcome, in a given context.[31] In line with Contribution analysis, the report will not claim to reliably identify which, of the factors

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[31] See, for example: Baptist, C. and Befani, B. (2015): Qualitative Comparative Analysis: A Rigorous Qualitative Method for Assessing Impact. Available at: http://www.coffey.com/assets/Ingenuity/Qualitative-Comparative-Analysis-June-2015.pdf . See also: *Qualitative Comparative Analysis and the Study of Policy Processes*. Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis, Research and Practice Volume 19, 2017 - Issue 4: Special Issue: Validating methods for comparing public policy: Perspectives from academics and "pracademics".

tested, are necessary or sufficient to obtain envisaged results, rather it assesses the factors that are *likely* to have facilitated or hindered achieving the desired results.

The qualitative analysis will allow the evaluation team to identify the underlying assumptions related to the ToC and the extent to which these did or did not hold in the different contexts.

F.4.2 Synthesis

To ensure efficient analysis of the data, we will keep a running record of evidence against each evaluation question in an evidence matrix in an Excel document. The Desk Research outputs will be reviewed to populate the evidence matrix. In the case of the country case studies, immediately after each interview, the interviewer will add new evidence emerging from the interview to the evidence matrix. The evidence matrix will be reviewed and discussed by the full team regularly, with a particular focus on points where new or conflicting evidence is emerging that needs to be explored further. In some cases, a need for a short follow-up conversation or email with a respondent may be identified to clarify or follow-up on a response.

F.4.3 Triangulation, bias and informed judgements

With qualitative interviews, it is often likely that respondents will provide biased answers. This is why a range of respondents is needed for triangulation. The data of each respondent will be organised around the themes / questions which then provides an overview of the frequency and strength of responses for each theme. Furthermore, data from interviews and document reviews is triangulated in order to provide nuanced answers to the evaluation questions. In the case of contradictory and opposing views the evaluation team will represent these views in our analysis. Both for primary and secondary data, the evaluation matrix will help to structure the results and the findings.

In addition, when synthesising data, the evaluation team will be cognisant that SEA-PLM has been implemented only recently. So, it is likely to have involved activities and levels of resources and commitment associated with the introduction of an innovation, as distinct from its long-term continuation as an institutional programme. The data on the experience to date will thus not be reflective of what would apply in a longer-term continuation, in terms of resource, interest and commitment or technical capacity. Informed judgements will be made as part of the evaluation looking forward, which cannot be based simply on extrapolating experience to date looking backward.

A validation workshop will be held with stakeholders to review preliminary findings and conclusions and to prioritise recommendations. From this workshop and other meetings, the draft report will be revised and finalised.

F.5 Equity and gender

Our approach to mainstreaming equity and gender into the evaluation is captured in the Evaluation Matrix (Annex B). In order to answer the evaluation question "*to what extent is SEA-PLM conducive to supporting the most marginalized populations and genders (including those left behind)?*" the evaluation team will seek evidence that equity and inclusion has been mainstreamed into programme activities and that the data SEA-PLM produces will be used to inform equity decisions. The evaluation team will check if assessment items are checked for differential item functioning (DIFF analysis) by gender and location and will explore if SEA-PLM data is able to capture inequality. Furthermore, the evaluation team will explore country capacity to disaggregate data by social groups and explore if SEA-PLM policy makers are considering equity, inclusion and gender as an essential component of their policy questions.

F.6   Ethics

The design and conduct of this evaluation is guided by Cambridge Education's core values of integrity, respect and excellence as we constantly stretch our thinking to find extra value for our clients and their end-users.   These values also guide our rigorous internal ethical standards, which are aligned with the United Nations policies and standards for ethics and evaluations. Applicable ethical norms and procedures of UNICEF and Cambridge Education will be applied throughout the evaluation.

The evaluation methodology will be consistent with the UNICEF Evaluation Policy (2018), the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016), UN SWAP Evaluation Performance Indicator, UNEG Ethical Guidelines (2008), UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards and Research, Evaluation and Data Collection and Analysis (2015), as specified in the Terms of Reference. The final evaluation report will conform to the UNICEF-Adapted UNEG Evaluation Report Standards (2017), including consideration of a gender equality perspective and human rights based approach, including child rights.

Photographs, audio and video recording may be used for gathering and analysis of data and for presentation and dissemination purposes. Permission for using any photographic, video or audio recording as part of the evaluation will be sought in advance. Before conducting any interviews or group discussions, participants will be made aware of the extent to which the information they provide is confidential and will be given the opportunity to withdraw at any point.

Cambridge Education requires all its staff, suppliers and implementing partners to comply with the highest standards of ethical behaviour in all respects and at all times, as reflected in Cambridge Education's mandatory adoption of its Ethics Policy and engagement in relevant training. All Cambridge Education evaluation team members involved have satisfied Cambridge Education's due diligence process and prior to commencing any fieldwork will have signed Cambridge Education's Ethics Policy Statement.

In addition, any potential conflicts of interest are taken into account when engaging staff, suppliers and implementing partners on any assignment and issues of payment and compensation are clearly laid out in all contracts and managed by CE's Commercial experts. Cambridge Education has zero tolerance around issues of fraud, bribery, corruption, child safeguarding and harassment; and where necessary will cooperate with the appropriate authorities to investigate alleged transgressions, including sanctions where required.

The methodology underwent an internal ethical review. An external ethical review was not deemed to be required since the KIIs were undertaken with only staff of following organisations: UNICEF, Regional governance institutions; National governance institutions, ACER and TAG.

Annex G Data collection tools

1. Introduction and explanation of the evaluation
2. Informed consent information
3. Confirmed or not confirmed consent [if not end interview]

Table 11 Interview items by stakeholder group

[Questions to be tailored to the specific respondent.]	UNICEF	Regional governance	National governance	ACER	TAG
Relevance					
Can you please tell me about your role and how you've come to be involved in SEA-PLM?	X	X	X	X	X
How did you first come to know about SEA-PLM? When was this?	X	X	X	X	X
What were your first impressions about the need for SEA-PLM?	X	X	X	X	X
Have our views changed since that time?	X	X	X	X	X
Can you tell me more about your institution/unit and its goals and aims?	X	X	X	X	X
Do you think these goals and aims align with the aims of SEA-PLM?	X	X	X	X	X
Is programme delivery of track at the moment? [if no] What are the main barriers to keeping to SEA-PLM workplans?	X	X	X	X	X
Are there any activities that aren't included in SEA-PLM that you think should be?	X	X	X	X	X
Efficiency					
What SEA-PLM activities have you been involved in?	X	X	X	X	X
Are the activities and outputs of SEA-PLM achievable? [If no] Probes: What have been the challenges? Can you give me an example of a time when it was challenging to achieve the activities or the outputs for SEA-PLM? How did you solve the problem?	X	X	X	X	X
Do you feel the technical support within SEA-PLM is provided when needed and to a sufficient standard? [Prompt for information]	X	X	X	X	X
Do you feel the financial support provided by UNICEF has been provided when needed?	X	X	X		
Is the financial support sufficient to cover agreed SEA-PLM activities?	X	X	X		X
Do you feel UNICEF's technical support is sufficient for participating countries and delivered on time?	X	X	X	X	X

[Questions to be tailored to the specific respondent.]	UNICEF	Regional governance	National governance	ACER	TAG
What are some of the challenges with providing technical resources within SEA-PLM?	X			X	X
What are some of the challenges with managing financial resources to support SEA-PLM?	X				
What are your thoughts on the new governance structure for SEA-PLM?	X	X	X	X	X
Do you think there are ways UNICEF, regional government, national governments and contractors could work better together?	X	X	X	X	X
What stage is the country/region [depending on participant] on track to have the data from the main study clean and ready for analysis and dissemination?	X	X	X	X	X
Can you tell me more about the development of the common learning metric? Has this process been completed yet? Where there any challenges?	X	X	X	X	X
Can you tell me more about alignment of SEA-PLM to the UIS global learning outcome scale?	X			X	X
Have you participated in any technical or L&D workshops? [if so] Which ones?	X	X	X		X
What was your experience of the workshop/s?	X	X	X		X
What did you learn as a result of the workshop/s?	X	X	X		X
Have you applied what you've learnt in any other aspects of your work?	X	X	X		
In [country] have any of the approaches taken in SEA-PLM influenced the approach to national assessment?	X	X	X		
Can you tell me about the common tools and protocols that have been developed as part of SEA-PLM? Probe: Are they useful? Where are they available? Can you give me an example of when you've used them?	X	X	X		X
There has been a range of attempts to fundraise for SEA-PLM, what has been successful? What hasn't worked? What has the feedback from potential funders been?	X	X			
SEA-PLM aims to raise funds with donors and from participating countries. How does [country] currently contribute to the costs of participating in SEA-PLM? What do you think contributions will look like in the future?	X	X	X		
Effectiveness					
What are the main policy questions you think SEA-PLM can provide information on?	X	X	X	X	X
What questions do you have, that you think SEA-PLM data will shed light on?	X	X	X		

[Questions to be tailored to the specific respondent.]	UNICEF	Regional governance	National governance	ACER	TAG
Do you think there will be any challenges with disseminating the data and ensuring it is used?	X	X	X	X	X
What are some of the key decisions you intend to make, based on SEA-PLM results?		X	X		
Do you think that decisions in [country] are based on evidence? Probe: Why/why not? What enables or inhibits evidence-based policy making?	X	X	X		
Who will analyse the data if a policy maker or a minister has a specific question that SEA-PLM can answer? Probe: Will there be any challenges?	X	X	X		
The Secretariat seeks to influence SEA countries to participate in SEA-PLM. What kind of activities have you engaged in to achieve this? What kind of outcomes have you seen? What are the best challenging aspects of influencing SEA countries?	X	X			
Likely impact					
What do you think would be different in [country or region] if SEA-PLM didn't exist?	X	X	X	X	X
What do you think are the biggest challenges to achieving education quality for all in [country or region]?	X	X	X	X	X
How does SEA-PLM contribute to solving education sector issues in [country or region]?	X	X	X	X	X
What is the value-add of a common approach to assessment in SEA?	X	X	X	X	X
Sustainability					
Do you think [country] will participate in future SEA-PLM rounds? Probe: Why or why not?	X	X	X	X	X
What technical support will countries need to participate in the next round of SEA-PLM?	X	X	X	X	X
Has there been much turnover of staff who have received technical training in [country or region]?	X	X	X	X	X
What are the plans for meeting the funding gap for SEA-PLM in 2019 and 2020?	X	X	X		
What are the plans for meeting the costs of SEA-PLM in future survey rounds?	X	X	X		
Is SEA-PLM value for money?	X	X	X		
Equity and Gender items are mainstreamed into the other items					

Annex H Interview Guide

These guidelines are not intended as questionnaires. It will not be possible to cover all issues in all categories with all individuals or groups. The evaluation team members will use their judgement and focus on areas which are likely to add most to the team's existing knowledge, while allowing interviewees and groups to highlight the issues that are most important to them.

The evaluators will formulate questions in a (non-technical) way that respondents can easily relate to, while generating evidence that is relevant to the evaluation questions that the evaluators have in mind.

G.1   Approach to Interviews

Interviews will be a major source of information for this evaluation. These will be a means to extract evidence, as well as to triangulate evidence drawn from other interviews and the document review and will form part of the consultative process.

A stakeholder analysis as presented in baseline report will inform the selection of interviewees. Over the evaluation period the evaluation team aims to target a comprehensive range of stakeholders that fully represent all significant institutional, policy and beneficiary interests. The team will periodically review the list of those interviewed to ensure that any potential gaps are addressed and to prevent under-representation of key stakeholders.

All interviews will comply with the team's commitment to the respective evaluation ethics. (The work of the evaluation team will be guided by: OECD-DAC Evaluation Quality Standards for Development Evaluation; UNEG Norms, Standards, Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System; the World Bank's principles and standards for evaluating global and regional partnership programs; ALNAP's Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Guide; the Sphere Handbook and Standards for Monitoring and Evaluation; and guidance on Ethical Research Involving Children.)

Interviews will be conducted in confidence and usually on a one-to-one or one-to-two basis (to enable note taking). Reports will not quote informants by name and will not include direct quotes where it could risk revealing the participant's identity or attribution without prior consent.

A protocol and standard format for recording interview notes is presented below. This will be used for all interviews and will ensure systematic recording of details, while allowing for flexibility in the specific questions asked. Interview notes will be written up, consolidated into an interview compendium and shared among team members via the internal team-only e-library. To respect interviewee confidentiality, the interview notes will be accessible only to team members. The compendium of interview notes will facilitate analysis across all interviews and will enable searches on key thematic terms, initiatives and so on. This will maximise the analytical potential of interviews and the possibilities for triangulation.

G.2   Focus group discussions

The evaluation team may also make use of focus group discussions (FGDs). Similar to the interview guides, the sub-headings and discussion guide points used are linked to the areas of enquiry and evaluation questions set out in the evaluation matrix, and are intended as a guide only, for the evaluation team to follow flexibly in order to maximise its learning from each discussion group.

Annex I   Case Study Country findings against the ToC

Table 12 Assessing inputs across case study countries

Inputs	Malaysia current status	Philippines current status	Lao PDR current status
Technical Assistance	While the provision of technical assistance is appreciated, it is considered to not entirely recognise the expertise already within the EPRD.. Country level stakeholders reported that a more collaborative approach between EPRD, ACER, UNICEF should be used in the analysis and reporting phase of the study by utilising the skills within the EPRD. This in turn will further enhance the capacity building within the department.	The coordination and delivery of technical support is seen as an effective mechanism in the Philippines. Technical assistance throughout the SEA-PLM cycle is provided by ACER, coordinated and financed by the UNICEF Country Office.	The stakeholders in Lao PDR were generally positive about the technical assistance (TA) aspects of SEA-PLM and view the engagement between Lao PDR technical staff and regional experts from SEAMEO and ACER as a critical feature of the SEA-PLM experience. The validity of the data (and findings) generated are acknowledged by key stakeholders, attesting to successful TA engagement.
Data collection costs	The funding arrangement for Malaysia is based on splitting costs between EAPRO, UNICEF Malaysia CO and the MoE. The actual cost for the main survey is reported as having been significantly higher than had been originally communicated. Stakeholders articulated this as a major issue, with the initial commitment having been made on the basis of the initial budget, but the time that had already been invested prevented Malaysia from pulling out of SEA-PLM. This demonstrates the critical importance of transparency and predictability in costing, particularly for the next cycle of SEA-PLM, where domestic education budgets are likely to be threatened by the COVID-19 economic downturn.	Data collection costs are covered by DepEd, and includes a commitment for the next round. Data collection costs are seen as provisionally sustainable and representing good VfM. However, there are concerns around the cost of Technical Assistance provision and sustainability due to the economic downturn resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic	The cost of SEA-PLM and other sample-based assessments is extremely high in comparison to available budgets in Lao PDR. These high costs include data collection and engagement in technical workshops. These costs are unlikely to be sustainable for Lao PDR.
Regional and country governmental human resources	Technical capacity in the MoE to deliver assessments is seen as being high. Assessments are the mandate of the EPRD (Education Planning and Research Division), who also coordinated the collection of data for PISA 2018 and TIMSS 2019. Assessments and the use of assessment data is a key priority for the MoE, as evidenced by the use of previous TIMSS	SEA-PLM coordinated by the Bureau of Education Assessment in the Department of Education (BEA). BEA has capacity to implement SEA-PLM, building on previous participation in PISA and TIMSS.	Overall RIES is favourable about the SEA-PLM experience, but there were aspects of SEA-PLM that put considerable pressure on the human resources within RIES.

Inputs	Malaysia current status	Philippines current status	Lao PDR current status
	and PISA data as a basis for the Malaysia Education Blueprint32.		
UNICEF co-ordination	Both UNICEF EAPRO and the UNICEF Malaysia CO have played a key role in facilitating conversations and relationships to deliver SEA-PLM. This includes hosting the launch and other meetings during the design phase, as well as facilitating the relationship with ACER to deliver training and the development of the country report.	UNICEF coordination takes place through both the country office and the East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), and has been well regarded in the Philippines.	A national consultant hired by UNICEF provided key support during SEA-PLM implementation in Lao PDR. Overall the feedback is positive from government counterparts, although there were some delays due to UNICEF systems for budget approval .

Table 13 Assessing translating inputs into activities

Activities	Malaysia current progress	Philippines current progress	Lao PDR current progress
Field studies and main survey data collection	Both the field trial and main survey activities were successful, with all intended schools and 95 percent of intended students being reached. There was a delay in reaching some schools as they had to be closed due to a haze phenomena. This forced some adaptations to the schedule but did not affect the overall timeline or reach of the survey.	Field study and main survey data collection, analysis and reporting have all been completed. Some delays and logistical complications have taken place, but overall, these activities are regarded as successful.	The field study (trial) and main data collection activities were successfully completed, with some delays and logistical complications.
Assessment framework development, item development, sampling, analysis and reporting	Training was delivered on data collection, coding and management, which were the responsibility of the EPRD. EPRD's role not including the sampling and analysis procedure represent a potential missed opportunity, both to increase the efficiency of the conversion of inputs to activities and to build capacity.	The assessment framework was developed by ACER. There has been significant debate over the decision by the DepEd to test in English. Many perceive that the complications this decision has introduced were foreseeable.	The core technical aspects of the work were led by ACER, especially for framework development, item development, sampling and regional report preparation. The local report was prepared by an international consultant.

Activities	Malaysia current progress	Philippines current progress	Lao PDR current progress
Technical capacity building activities	Training on test administration, coding and data management was delivered nationally and then cascaded to field teams and test administrators. Stakeholders report that the training was adequate to deliver on the requirements of administering SEA-PLM. However, there is a need for the technical assistance regarding analysis of data and reporting to be more comprehensive and given enough time, including enhancing the opportunity for capacity building among EPRD personnel (echoing the desire to be more involved in the analysis of data).	ACER led capacity building activities. These were seen as sufficient for current needs but limited in scope and design. Stakeholders see a significant gap in building sustainable capacity to analyse and interpret the results of assessments, with current activities focused on data collection and management.	ACER-led capacity development activities focused on sampling, data collection, data entry and data coding. RIES technical capacity was improved in these areas, although there are some concerns about this capacity being specific to the "ACER model".
Develop and disseminate communications strategy	Dissemination of SEA-PLM results is an ongoing process in Malaysia. ACER has been commissioned by UNICEF Malaysia CO to prepare Malaysia's country report. The final draft was received and approved by Malaysia in August. However, the report has yet to disseminated publicly pending the final copy (which will include design and infographics) which ACER plan to deliver by end of September 2021.	SEA-PLM is part of a wider participation in ILSAs, and dissemination of results was done in tandem with TIMSS 2019 results. Public appetite for results from ILSAs is strong, which supported the wide dissemination of results.	MoES communication and dissemination strategy is largely absent for SEA-PLM. Stakeholders mainly informed about SEA-PLM during the release of the final results. This is related to larger concerns about assessment dissemination and communication in Lao PDR.
Regional endorsement activities	No data.	The Philippines participated in the regional launch of SEA-PLM results. This was well received, though disappointment was expressed with the decision to visually rank participating countries in the regional report.	Lao PDR leadership participated in regional events, and there was positive feedback from stakeholders about participation in regional assessment.
Fundraising with donors and countries	While the proposal for participating in the next round has been approved by the Ministry of Education, it still requires final ministerial approval. The value of SEA-PLM is widely agreed upon as being an important data set for analysing primary school achievement, however cost effectiveness and availability of resources is the key area of concern.	SEA-PLM is currently jointly funded by UNICEF and the DepEd, with a similar arrangement expected for the next round.	Lao PDR SEA-PLM engagement is financed entirely by UNICEF.

Table 14 Accessing translating activities into outputs

Outputs	Malaysia current progress	Philippines current progress	Lao PDR current progress
Reliable, valid, relevant and rigorous learning and contextual data	The value of SEA-PLM is widely agreed upon as being an important data set for analysing primary school achievement. Reports from Malaysia indicate that SEA-PLM data quality is well regarded.	The results of SEA-PLM and of ILSAs in general have been well received and are regarded as robust by all parties.	There is widespread acceptance of the validity of results among MoES stakeholders and a strong sense that the SEA-PLM "seal of approval" ensures quality information. However, some concerns were expressed about the utility of Global Citizenship questions, as well as the efficiency of the background questionnaires.
A regional common learning metric	There is broad enthusiasm at the idea of having regional benchmarks and the opportunity to learn from neighbouring countries. However, this is tempered by a reluctance to be ranked by country.	There is broad enthusiasm at the idea of having regional benchmarks and the opportunity to learn from neighbouring countries. However, this is tempered by a reluctance to be ranked by country.	There was general agreement among stakeholders that one of the main purposes of participating is to compare Lao performance against a regional standard. No major concerns were expressed about development of Mathematics and language test questions, or relevance/applicability to Lao PDR curriculum.
SEA-PLM alignment to the global UIS learning outcomes scale	There was an acknowledgement from development partners that SEA-PLM fills a gap for the region in terms of international monitoring of student achievement and SDG goals.	There is a desire in some quarters for SEA-PLM to be comparable to other ILSAs. Options include technical linkages with other International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) studies.	There was an acknowledgement from development partners that SEA-PLM fills a gap for the region in terms of international monitoring of student achievement and SDG goals.
Regional and national workshops and Learning and Development (L&D) products		Transferability of L&D products were limited by the narrow scope of training conducted as part of SEA-PLM. Regional, and national dissemination workshops were well regarded.	Dissemination has begun mainly with high level discussions of SEA-PLM results.
Strategies for analysing and disseminating data	While the country report for Malaysia has not yet been released. However, there is a need for further explanations and discussions on how the data was analysed and to ensure stakeholders understand the national dataset.	There are many questions and priorities for supplementary analysis, but this has been hampered by poor strategic coordination, and a lack of advance agreement with ACER on what data would be made available to DepEd.	There is general agreement among government and development partner stakeholders that not enough is being done with analysis and dissemination of LSAs in Lao PDR, including SEA-PLM. There is no clear dissemination strategy in place (see above). Capacity limitations stand out as the main constraint in analysis and dissemination activities.
Common tools, protocols and standards to generate and utilise assessment data across ASEAN countries		Tools are seen as useful, and there is a desire to use the written questions and contextual questionnaires either directly, or to inform national assessment activities.	There was positive feedback about common tools for measuring student achievement, but much work remains in terms of using the results. An area where learning from other country experiences may be very helpful.

Outputs	Malaysia current progress	Philippines current progress	Lao PDR current progress
Funding agreements with donors and participant countries	Reaching a funding agreement for the next cycle of SEA-PLM is in process and will present a significant challenge. While the proposal for participating in the next round has been approved by the Ministry of Education, it still requires final ministerial approval. Cost effectiveness and availability of resources is a key area of concern.	Continued funding for data collection agreed with DepEd.	Consistent with previous LSAs, development partners (UNICEF) are supporting all costs for SEA-PLM. Given the Lao PDR government budget situation this support will be necessary for the next round of SEA-PLM, but is yet to be confirmed.

Table 15 Assessing progress towards achieving outcomes

Outcomes and impact	Malaysia current progress	Philippines current progress	Lao PDR current progress
Policy makers use data to meaningfully support decision-making	**There is some suggestion that SEA-PLM could be used to help teachers develop their own assessment approaches and measure learning loss due to the pandemic** Using SEA-PLM items to encourage teachers to teach and assess critical thinking and the application of knowledge (rather than more rote approaches) is potentially a valuable contribution of SEA-PLM.	There are strong, consistent intentions to use SEA-PLM data to inform decision making in DepEd. DepEd joined SEA-PLM as part of a departmental strategy to use ILSA data to inform policy. While the results of the first round have only been released recently, there does not seem to be a clear strategy to deliver on this strategy.	Policymakers are aware of the SEA-PLM findings, and there is evidence that they are having more of an effect on the dialogue than previous student assessment survey results. Nevertheless, the use of the information has been limited to sharing the main findings. What is largely missing is a process that effectively translates results into actions, with coordination across departments.
Enhanced capacity to generate and analyse assessment data at regional, national and sub-national levels	Capacity for the generation and analysis of assessment data ais strong in Malaysia. As a long time participant in both TIMSS and PISA, it is hard to attribute any change in the assessment capacity of the ministry of education to SEA-PLM at this stage.	BEA is adapting national assessment approaches based on participation in SEA-PLM. However, capacity to analyse assessment data to inform policy is constrained and still largely supported by external actors.	RIES technical capacity has been enhanced in the areas of data collection, data entry and data coding, however capacity is still limited in key areas of data analysis and report writing. MoES stakeholders also face challenges in using results from SEA-PLM and previous assessments, which includes reaching down to districts, schools and teachers with useful findings. This is a major area for improvement, and could be supported through peer-to-peer learning regarding the experiences in other countries.
Sustainable regional integration of relevant large-scale assessment and outcomes	No data	There are mixed views on the feasibility or desirability of greater regional integration. While the regional nature of SEA-PLM is valued, there are concerns around the use	Government respondents were positive about the SEA-PLM experience, and are eager to continue, however there are some concerns from development partners about costs and overall value for money.

Outcomes and impact	Malaysia current progress	Philippines current progress	Lao PDR current progress
		of assessment data to rank and compare countries.	
Enhanced ASEAN integration in terms of assessment	The ASEA "flavour" of the GC content was viewed positively by stakeholders in Malaysia. While the same concerns around the ranking of countries exist in Malaysia as in other countries, participants are generally positive about further integration of assessments in the region.	Stakeholders agree that there is an opportunity for greater ASEAN integration in terms of knowledge exchange around assessment data and policy implications. Several stakeholder felt SEAMEO could be a stronger advocate for regional integration on the back of SEA-PLM.	There is strong commitment from government to the overall mission of SEA-PLM, and recognition of the validity of regional data. However, work remains to develop capacity to the regional standard.
SEA-PLM is on the regional agenda and national government support is re-enforced	The Ministry of Education of Malaysia has publicly affirmed its intention to participate in future rounds of SEA-PLM. However, there is a process of budget allocation which needs to be undertaken before the final support can be confirmed. This process is viewed as presenting a challenge for the team seeking to confirm the participating in future rounds.	National government support is strong at present, but threats remain. Firstly, it is not absolute that budget will remain available for future rounds in the current fiscal environment. However, more importantly, government support will wane if the learning from SEA-PLM is not translated into improvements in scores.	There is strong support from government stakeholders for SEA-PLM engagement, and evidence that SEA-PLM results are generating more discussions about student learning than previous assessments. Again, there are some concerns from development partners about costs, but also recognition that SEA-PLM has raised the profile of the education sector in the region, and will also support future assessment work across the region.

Annex J Documents related to ethical clearance

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Ethics

Purpose

This policy sets out our commitment to maintaining the highest ethical standards in the conduct of our business.

Commitment

The Group is committed to promoting the highest standards of ethical behaviour in all that we do. This is reflected in our PRIDE values of Progress, Respect, Integrity, Drive and Excellence.

We are committed to providing a working environment underpinned by our values, where everyone who works for or with us respects the values we live by.

We support the proactive position our clients take on assignment delivery with good business ethics.

We are prohibited from offering, giving, soliciting or accepting any bribe (cash or other inducement) or facilitation payment, or from engaging in any corrupt practice.

We work to continually improve our anti-bribery systems and practices.

We prohibit the payment of donations to political parties or charities to obtain a business advantage.

We obey the law and respect the customs and culture of the countries in which we work and comply with national and international trade restrictions.

We compete fairly, respecting the laws and ethical practices of the jurisdictions in which we work.

Adhering to this policy is a condition of employment and breaches will result in disciplinary action.

We are committed to achieving these standards within our supply chain and working with partners and clients who share our ethical standards.

Responsibility

The Executive Chair is responsible for this policy and for its effective implementation.

The Group ethics and compliance officer is responsible for providing an independent framework for implementing this policy.

General managers ensure we meet our ethical standards on a day-to-day basis and are responsible for monitoring and reviewing their implementation.

Project principals are responsible for assessing and treating the ethics risks within their projects.

All of us are responsible for meeting our ethical standards and for promoting our PRIDE values.

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Ethics

Approach

Our relationships with suppliers, subcontractors and other business partners based on mutual respect and good governance.

We carry out due diligence to evaluate the bribery risk and ethics of clients, suppliers, subcontractors and other business partners and will withdraw from contracts when unethical business practices are suspected – we seek clauses in our contracts which permit us to do this.

We monitor the conduct of independent agents to ensure compliance with our policies. Agents' remuneration is always appropriate for the work they do and is justifiable at market value.

Our business management system is certified to ISO 37001 anti-bribery management quality standard.

We all receive training on the Group's ethics policies and processes as part of induction and throughout our employment.

While business entertainment and gifts can generate goodwill and improve working relationships, we avoid situations that could interfere, or appear to interfere, with the impartial discharge of the Group's duties. We take great care when considering providing gifts or hospitality to government officials to ensure we do not breach their working regulations.

We identify and manage actual and suspected conflicts of interest as soon as they arise.

We encourage colleagues to seek help and advice from line management if they suspect our ethical standards are being breached and provide confidential resources to report concerns when violations occur.

We are committed to making our communications, marketing and publications factually correct, ethical and fair. We compete vigorously but do not seek to misrepresent our competitors.

Mike Haigh
Executive Chair

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CODE OF BUSINESS CONDUCT

This Code of Business Conduct sets out the conduct which the Group expects of all our staff, whether permanently employed or on temporary contract.

By complying with this Code, staff can ensure that the group adheres to the principles of the Group Policy Statement on Business Ethics.

The Group's **Policy Statement on Business Ethics** is available to persons outside the Group, but **this Code of Business Conduct** is an internal document. It can be issued to persons who will be working for or with the Group and are being asked to accept an obligation to comply with the Code (or with substantial sections of it). It may be issued to other persons outside the Group only with the specific approval of the Group General Counsel.

1. COMPLIANCE WITH RELEVANT LAW

1.1 Proper business conduct begins with compliance with domestic and international laws, rules and regulations. All Group staff must make themselves aware of the laws, regulations and standards applicable to their work and seek advice from their line manager or the relevant Territory Manager/Representative or Group Chairman if in doubt or where a local law apparently conflicts with any provision in these guidelines.

2 BRIBERY

2.1 Offering or accepting a bribe:-

- is damaging to the social structures, welfare and prosperity of the community
- is a criminal offence in almost every country - even countries where such activity is common
- would expose the group to prosecution in the relevant country and under the UK's Bribery Act 2010, wherever the act takes place
- would be extremely damaging to the group's reputation and seriously jeopardise its future
- would be a gross breach of trust by any employee, who would probably be dismissed from the group's employment without notice.

2.2 The above applies whether a bribe is offered directly or indirectly, for example through use of an agent, joint venture partner or another intermediary.

2.3 The UK's Bribery Act 2010 requires the Group to maintain adequate procedures to ensure that no party offers, pays or receives bribes on its behalf. The Group has procedures designed to comply with this obligation:-

- Our Group Chairman personally leads our efforts to maintain monitor and enforce our procedures to combat bribery
- Training on ethics is mandatory for all our staff, and additional training is given where appropriate (e.g. to those operating in higher risk situations)
- Staff are required to notify line managers or the Ethics Hotline "Speak Up" of any evidence of bribery
- Adherence to group policies on ethics is audited by or under the direction of the Head of Compliance (Business Ethics) after discussion with the Group's Risk Management Committee

Bribery Due Diligence

2.4 Staff must ensure that appropriate due diligence is performed on acquisitions, agents, clients, partners and suppliers. The appropriate level of due diligence depends on all relevant risk factors including:-

- the reputation of the party both in the market and within the Group (a well known party with a long track record and a good reputation for ethics is a lower risk)
- the location and market sector (some countries, and some markets within certain countries, experience more bribery than others)

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- the type of work being performed by the party (parties employed to market or lobby on the Group's behalf are often more exposed to ethics risk than say suppliers of technical services whose costing is well understood).
- The financial rewards being offered to the party (the larger the consideration due to the party, the greater the scope for ethics breach, but any sign that the rewards are higher than the proper rate for the services offered would be a major warning sign)

2.5 Staff in doubt about issues of due diligence can consult line managers, legal departments or the Head of Compliance (Business Ethics).

ETHICS CONDUCT GENERALLY

3 Customers

3.1. In all dealings with existing and potential customers and business partners, staff must always act:-

- Professionally;
- With integrity;
- With due skill, care and diligence;
- In good faith; and
- In compliance with all applicable laws.

3.2. When acting for a customer, staff must not be influenced by any other internal or external interest:-

- Staff must avoid direct or indirect conflict between personal interests, including those of family members, and those of the Group and its customers. In particular, staff must not use their positions or confidential information received on behalf of the Group for personal profit or benefit of any kind.
- Staff should apply the procedures in Group Directive 7.05 "Conflict of Interest" to avoid or deal with actual or potential conflicts of interest.

3.3. Information from a customer should be treated as confidential unless the customer clearly does not expect or require this, and must not be revealed to parties outside the Group unless:-

- We have the customer's permission; or
- We are compelled by law to reveal it.

3.4. Assisting clients by providing training or "study tours" can infringe our ethical standards unless this is a paid service under our contract. Prior approval of the Group Managing Director will be required before staff offer to provide any "study tours".

4. Suppliers, Agents and Business Partners

4.1. The Group seeks to develop mutually profitable long-term relationships with suppliers and business partners (such as partners in a joint venture) on the basis of mutual respect and fair dealing. Staff should undertake appropriate due diligence in evaluating business partners to assess risk and avoid dealing with prospective partners where we have reason to suspect involvement in corrupt practices.

4.2 All significant business partners must be made aware of Group policies on ethical business dealings and undertake to comply with them. Contractual arrangements with major suppliers must allow us to withdraw from the contract in the event of unethical business practices.

4.3. We use independent agents in a number of countries to represent us and promote our services and reputation. Staff should undertake due diligence before appointing agents and document all contractual relationships with agents, which in any event requires the approval of the relevant Regional General Manager.

4.4 Copies of all current agent/advisor agreements shall be held by the Regional General Manager for the territory in which the services are to be performed.

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4.5 Agents should be made aware of Group policies on ethical business dealings and formally undertake to comply with these. Staff should monitor the conduct of agents and consider terminating the agent's contract in the event of unethical business practice (taking legal advice where necessary to assess the implications of termination).

4.6 All payments to agents must represent proper, appropriate and justifiable remuneration, at market value, for legitimate services rendered. Payments to agents other than under contracts authorised by the relevant Regional General Manager are unacceptable. Agents should undertake to confirm in writing when requested to do so that no part of the commission paid has been passed on to any other party in support of Group business. Payments to agents being made to a bank outside the country of operation will only be authorised under exceptional and fully justified circumstances.

4.7. Staff must not use confidential information from suppliers and business partners for any purpose beyond the legitimate uses contemplated by the relationship under which it was provided.

4.8. Staff should not withhold payment from suppliers, Agents or business partners without a sound justification, clearly communicated to the party concerned.

4.9. Staff must comply with the conditions of use imposed by and agreed with suppliers. Staff must not make unauthorised copies of software or other intellectual property, whether for the Group, themselves or anyone else.

5 Managers

5.1. Ethics is a standing item on Board agendas and managers are required annually to confirm that the parts of the business for which they are responsible comply with this Code of Business Conduct and the Anti-fraud Policy (Directive 7.03) as they relate to corrupt practices.

5.2. When preparing proposals for assignments that the Group might undertake, managers are required to certify that such proposals comply with this Code of Business Conduct.

5.3. Managers will promote an ethical business culture by ensuring that staff members understand Group ethics policies and that they adhere to these policies. Managers have a duty to discuss any concerns relating to unethical business practices with the staff member involved and to consult his or her own line manager where the importance or sensitivity of the issue warrants this.

5.4. The Group, through its managers, will comply with applicable employment and equal opportunity legislation/regulation wherever it works in the world. It will implement fair employment policies in accordance with Group standards wherever it works but always within the framework of local culture and sensibilities. Detailed procedures relevant to the foregoing are addressed under Group Directive 1 – Employment.

5.5. Managers will treat all employees with fairness, dignity and respect.

5.6. Managers are responsible for implementing the Group Equality and Diversity Policy, see group Directive 3.03. The Group is committed to a 'neutral' working environment, in which there are equal opportunities for all staff and no current (or prospective) employee is disadvantaged because of age, colour, disability, gender, marital status, national / ethnic origin, race, religious belief or sexual orientation. It is a fundamental belief of the Group that talent, capacity for hard work and merit are the only determinants for selection and personal progress within the organisation.

5.7. Managers will show that the company cares for employees through words, actions, company policies and benefits.

5.8. The Group aims to ensure effective communication with and between all staff. Managers will keep their staff informed of the aims and performance of the Group and their business unit. Managers will communicate face to face whenever possible and encourage employee feedback within their business unit.

5.9. Managers will communicate clearly their standards and time frame for delivery of work. Managers will

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communicate clear priorities so that staff can make appropriate decisions when scheduling and allocating time.

5.10. Managers will make every effort to promote good morale amongst their staff.

5.11. Managers will promote a performance culture by effective use of the principles and processes of the Performance Development Review recognising good performance and providing honest constructive feedback on poor performance.

5.12. Managers will be role models for staff in terms of confidence and pride in Mott MacDonald.

6 Employees

6.1. The Group expects all staff to be diligent, hard working and self-reliant

6.2. Staff are required to carry out their duties with personal integrity. They must be honest and truthful in all dealings with customers, business partners and colleagues.

6.3. Staff should value different disciplines, cultures and backgrounds, and should comply with the Group Equality and Diversity Policy (Group Directive 3.03).

6.4. Staff should be flexible and responsive to our business needs

6.5. Staff are expected to take an interest in and contribute, where they can, to the business of the Group as a whole, beyond their own unit or division. In particular, they should make active use of the available information to keep abreast of the development of the Group beyond their own sphere of activity.

6.6. No employee may engage in and no manager may tolerate any physical, mental or sexual harassment or bullying of colleagues. Staff must comply with the procedures in Group Directive 3.07 on this matter.

6.7. Employees must avoid situations that could interfere, or appear to interfere, with the impartial discharge of their duties. They must not give or receive payments or items of value or favours for a corrupt purpose, either in their own name or on behalf of the Group. Equally, members of family must not receive payments, favours or services in any matters that concern Group business. Giving or accepting gifts or hospitality that may be seen to conflict between personal interest and that of the Group or its customers is not acceptable. This also applies to gifts or hospitality given to family members.

6.8. No employee may accept any gift, favour or hospitality of significant value from outside the Group in connection with their employment. However, the Group recognises that appropriate business entertainment and gifts can generate goodwill and improve working relationships. Token gifts and hospitality are acceptable provided that they:-

- Are normal and appropriate hospitality in a particular market
- Can be reciprocated at the same level
- Do not place the Group or the individual employee under any obligation
- Cannot be seen by others as improper or corrupt

6.9. Furthermore, in certain circumstances, consideration may be given to cultural and local context when rejection would cause offence and potentially damage customer relationships. Decisions as to what is acceptable may not always be easy, and the application of the policy requires flexibility and judgement. In particular:-

- Staff must judge if the entertainment or gift is within accepted standards in society and in comparison with the behaviour of its peer companies. If in doubt, members of staff should consult their line manager and in any case should inform them in writing when a gift is received of value greater than 0.2% (i.e. 1/500th) of their own base salary.
- Entertainment may be accepted at a level that the staff member reasonably believes he or she would be able to reciprocate within company expenses reimbursement policies. Repeated entertainment by the same business partner is not acceptable without reciprocation.

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6.10. Facilitation payments are bribes paid to public officials to expedite actions they are already duty-bound to perform. Facilitation payments are not permitted unless personal safety or liberty is under threat. In the event that any such payment is made, staff and managers must notify the Head of Compliance (Business Ethics) as soon as practicable.

6.11. Staff must not use the Group's facilities, property or supplies for any purpose other than the group's legitimate business. A limited number of personal telephone calls and emails may be made where this is reasonably necessary and does not involve significant cost or loss of working time.

6.12. Employees must promptly disclose to their manager any situation in which their duty to the Group and its customers may conflict with their personal interest or that of their immediate family. Interests to be declared include:-

- A directorship of or significant shareholding or a family/personal relationship in a company with an interest that may conflict with that of the Group or its customer
- A family/personal relationship with someone whom the Group has offered or intends to undertake business with.

7 Health and Safety

7.1. All staff should be mindful of their responsibilities regarding health and safety and must have regard to all published health and safety guidelines, in particular the Group Safety Management System available on Compass.

7.2. All members of staff must report any concern they may have on safety matters to their manager. Managers must ensure that such concerns brought to them are dealt with properly and in a timely manner by the appropriate persons.

8 Environment

8.1. The Group has a responsibility in relation to the environment both in its operations on site and in its activities within offices. The Group's policy on the environment is set out in the Group Environmental Management System, which is accessed via the Intranet.

8.2. Advice to customers must not be distorted in favour of a particular view of environmental protection, but staff should where possible ensure that their advice gives full regard to relevant environmental issues.

8.3. Office managers and those responsible for the Group's operations on each site should, where practicable, implement and maintain policies to reduce and recycle any waste produced by the Group's activities.

9 The Community

9.1. Managers should aim to contribute positively to the economic and social well-being of the communities in which they do business. For example, where practicable they should:-

- hire local staff for the project, and
- respect local customs

9.2. The Group does not seek to influence the political process of any country or community. Staff should act in conformity with this policy.

9.3. The Group, like every business, can sometimes be subject to national or international restrictions on trade. Managers must ensure that such restrictions are observed.

9.4. The Group's success depends on its good reputation as a member of the national and local communities in which it operates. Staff must not act in a way which jeopardises that good reputation, ensuring that they act in a professional and ethical manner.

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10 Compliance

10.1. The Group places great importance on this Code. Any member of staff contravening it may be subject to disciplinary action.

10.2. Preventive measures are the first line of defence against unethical practices and this Code is the keystone of the Group's preventive measures. The Group takes its ethical policies seriously and provides secure and accessible channels, including an Ethics Hotline "Speak Up" through which employees and others can raise concerns in confidence and without fear of reprisal. These channels are also available for employees and others to seek advice or suggest improvements to policies and procedures.

10.3. A manager has additional duties where a matter under this Code is referred to him or her for approval or resolution. In considering each matter the manager should exercise his or her judgement but must consult his or her own manager where the importance or sensitivity of the issue warrants this.

10.4. The Group provides mandatory training on its ethical policies and as part of the induction for new staff and procedures to members of staff, through e-learning courses and, where appropriate, face-to-face training. Members of staff who require clarification of this Code, further guidance on a course of action or who have concerns on any ethical issue may raise the matter with the Ethics Hotline "Speak Up" confidential team.

10.5. The company's auditors may be asked to report on any practice that they discover in the course of their work that appears to be in breach of this Code.

10.6. The Group Board will keep this Code under review and welcomes suggestions on how it might be improved and developed.

This is to confirm I have read, understood and agree to abide by the Mott MacDonald Ethics Policy and Code of Business Conduct

Name:	Rachel Outhred
Signature:	*[signature]*
Date:	5 February 2020

Singed document available for all team members. Please contact following to obtain copies of these documents.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office
Evaluation Section

unicef | for every child
East Asia and Pacific

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**CAMBRIDGE
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