

# Educational Centers in ASEAN Countries and Their Implications for Thai Higher Education Institutions

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## Abstract

The purposes of this article are as follows: 1) to explore educational centers in the member countries of ASEAN and their missions and 2) to explore their implications for Thai higher education institutions. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is established in 1967 as a regional intergovernmental organization with members comprising 10 countries in Southeast Asia, namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The three main purposes of the establishment of ASEAN are to promote cooperation among member countries in 1) politics and security, 2) economy, and 3) socio-culture. Prior to the establishment of ASEAN, the Southeast Asian countries signed an agreement to establish the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO, 1965). The main purpose of this organization is to promote regional cooperation in education, science, and culture. Under the agreement, each of the SEAMEO member countries is responsible to set up and manage at least one educational center. At present, there are 26 educational centers in the member countries all of which must have their names starting with SEAMEO. Of these 26 centers, six centers have programs and activities specifically relevant for higher education institutions in member countries. These centers are the following: INNOCH, RECSAM, RELC, RIHED, SEARCA, and TROPMED. They are explored and described in more details.

**Keywords:** Educational Center, ASEAN, SEAMEO

## Introduction

### Background Information of ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, 1967) was established in August 1967 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration by the five founding countries of ASEAN, namely, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Then, ASEAN was joined by Brunei Darussalam in January 1984; by Vietnam in July 1995; by Lao PDR and Myanmar

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in July 1997; and by Cambodia in April 1999; making up the present ten ASEAN member states. The ASEAN Secretariat, or headquarters office of ASEAN, is located in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The main purposes of ASEAN are briefly stated as follows:

1. To promote the acceleration of economic growth, social progress, and cultural development in the Southeast Asian region through joint endeavors and collaboration;
2. To enhance regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among member countries;
3. To enhance active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific, and administrative fields;
4. To provide assistance in terms of training and research facilities to each other;
5. To create more effective collaboration for the greater utilization of member countries' agriculture and industries, the expansion of their trade, the improvement of their transportation and communications facilities, and the raising of the living standards of their peoples;
6. To enhance Southeast Asian studies; and
7. To create and sustain close and beneficial cooperation with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of ASEAN Affairs, 2013).

### **ASEAN Community**

As a result of the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in 2003, the ASEAN member country leaders agreed that an ASEAN Community should be established; and at the 12<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in January 2007, the leaders affirmed their strong commitment to accelerate the establishment of the ASEAN Community by 2015 and then signed the Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of the Establishment of the ASEAN Community by 2015.

The ASEAN Community comprises three pillars as follows:

1. The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). This pillar aims to create a single market and production base characterized by the free flow of goods, services, investment, capital, and skilled labor; thus promoting regional competitiveness, prosperity, and attractiveness to foreign investors.
2. The ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). This pillar aims to ensure peace and security for development in ASEAN Community through enhancing the political-security cooperation by its members.
3. The ASEAN Social-Cultural Community (ASCC). This pillar aims to contribute to realizing an ASEAN Community that is people-centered and socially responsible with a view to achieve enduring solidarity and unity among the peoples and member states (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2018: 53).

It can be seen that both ASEAN and ASEAN Community put emphasis on solidarity and unity of ASEAN member countries in terms of economic community, political-security community, and social-cultural community, with the notable exception of cooperation and collaboration on educational matters. This is, of course, understandable because two years prior to the establishment of ASEAN, an organization directly dealing with the promotion of regional cooperation in education, science, and culture in the Southeast Asian region was established. This organization is the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO, 2020).

## Background Information of SEAMEO

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO, 2020) is a regional intergovernmental organization established on November 30, 1965 by the seven countries of Southeast Asia, namely Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Then, SEAMEO was joined by Cambodia in 1968, by Brunei Darussalam in 1984, by Myanmar in 1998, and by Timor-Leste in 2006, making the present 11 member states of SEAMEO. The SEAMEO Secretariat, or the headquarters office of SEAMEO, is in Bangkok, Thailand.

The main purpose of SEAMEO is to enhance regional cooperation in education, science, and culture in the region. Its vision is to be the leading organization for enhancing regional understanding and cooperation in education, science, and culture for a better quality of life in Southeast Asia. Its mission is to enhance regional understanding, cooperation and unity of the purpose among member countries for a better quality of life through the establishment of networks and partnership, the provision of forums among policy makers and experts, and the promotion of sustainable human resource development.

Based on its mission, SEAMEO has formulated the following nine strategic goals (SEAMEO Secretariat, 2020):

1. To establish regional centers of excellence in education or culture;
2. To offer relevant and responsive programs that concern national and regional issues in SEAMEO's areas of specialization;
3. To enhance the organizational capability to initiate and manage change and development to meet the challenges of globalization;
4. To ensure and maintain continued financial viability;
5. To promote research and development (R&D) studies in education, science and culture and improve their dissemination;
6. To promote collaboration among member countries and relevant organizations;
7. To be ASEAN's strategic partner for the development and advancement of education, science and culture;
8. To facilitate the creation of harmonized education standards; and
9. To be a regional leader in the development and advancement of education, science and culture.

## SEAMEO Educational Centers

Based on the first strategic goal to develop regional centers of excellence in education or culture, the SEAMEO Council has authorized member countries to establish SEAMEO educational centers, which is called SEAMEO regional centers to enhance regional cooperation in specific aspects of education, science and culture. At present, there are 26 SEAMEO regional centers established in 10 member countries with the exception of Timor Leste, the newest SEAMEO member that still does not host any SEAMEO regional center. All of the regional centers have their names starting with SEAMEO, for example, SEAMEO BIOTROP, SEAMEO INNOTECH, etc. Of these 26 regional centers, seven are located in Indonesia, seven are located in Thailand, three are located in Malaysia, three are located in the Philippines, two are located in Vietnam; while each of these member countries: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar hosts only one regional center. The names and brief descriptions of all SEAMEO regional centers are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Names and Brief Descriptions of SEAMEO Regional Centers

No.	Name and Full Name	Country	Established Year	Specialized Areas of the Regional Center
1	SEAMEO BIOTROP (SEAMEO Regional Center for Tropical Biology)	Indonesia	1968	Tropical biology
2	SEAMEO CECCEP (SEAMEO Regional Center for Early Childhood Care Education and Parenting)	Indonesia	2017	1. Early childhood education 2. Parenting
3	SEAMEO CED (SEAMEO Regional Center for Community Education Development)	Lao PDR	2000	Community education development
4	SEAMEO CELLL (SEAMEO Regional Center for Lifelong Learning)	Vietnam	2011	Lifelong education
5	SEAMEO CHAT (SEAMEO Regional Center for History and Tradition)	Myanmar	2000	1. History 2. Tradition
6	SEAMEO INNOTECH (SEAMEO Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology)	Philippines	1970	Educational technology and innovation
7	SEAMEO QITEP in LANGUAGE (SEAMEO Regional Centre for Quality Improvement of Teachers and Education Personnel in Language)	Indonesia	2009	1. Language teaching 2. Foreign language teaching
8	SEAMEO QITEP in Mathematics (SEAMEO Regional Centre for Quality Improvement of Teachers and Education Personnel in Mathematics)	Indonesia	2009	Mathematics education
9	SEAMEO QITEP in Science (SEAMEO Regional Centre for Quality Improvement of Teachers and Education Personnel in Science)	Indonesia	2009	Science education
10	SEAMEO RECFON (SEAMEO Regional Center for Food and Nutrition)	Indonesia	2010	Food and nutrition
11	SEAMEO RECSAM (SEAMEO Regional Center for Education in Science and Mathematics)	Malaysia	1967	1. Science education 2. Mathematics education
12	SEAMEO RELC (SEAMEO Regional Language Center)	Singapore	1968	Language teacher education
13	SEAMEO RETRAC (SEAMEO Regional Training Center)	Vietnam	1996	Training center for educational management and research
14	SEAMEO RIHED (SEAMEO Regional Center for Higher Education and Development)	Thailand	1993	Higher education and development
15	SEAMEO SEAMOLEC (SEAMEO Regional Open Learning Center)	Indonesia	1997	Open and distance learning
16	SEAMEO SEARCA (SEAMEO Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture)	Philippines	1966	1. Agriculture 2. Rural development
17	SEAMEO SEN (SEAMEO Regional Center for Special Education)	Malaysia	2009	Special education
18	SEAMEO SEPS (SEAMEO Regional Center for Sufficiency Economy Philosophy for Sustainability)	Thailand	2019	Sufficiency economy philosophy for sustainability
19	SEAMEO SPAFA (SEAMEO Regional Center for Archeology and Fine Arts)	Thailand	1978	1. Archeology 2. Fine arts 3. Cultural resource management
20	SEAMEO STEM-ED (SEAMEO Regional Center for Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics Education)	Thailand	2019	STEM Education
21	SEAMEO TED (SEAMEO Regional Center for Technical Education Development)	Cambodia	2017	Technical education development

**Table 1** Names and Brief Descriptions of SEAMEO Regional Centers (Cont.)

No.	Name and Full Name	Country	Established Year	Specialized Areas of the Regional Center
22	SEAMEO TROPMED Network (SEAMEO Tropical Medicine and Public Health Network)	Thailand	1966	Coordination of programs and projects of tropical medicine regional centers
23	SEAMEO TROPMED/Malaysia (SEAMEO TROPMED Regional Center for Microbiology, Parasitology and Entomology)	Malaysia	1967	1. Medical microbiology 2. Parasitology 3. Entomology
24	SEAMEO TROPMED/Philippines (SEAMEO TROPMED Regional Center for Public Health, Hospital Administration, Environmental and Occupational Health)	Philippines	1967	1. Public health 2. Hospital administration 3. Environmental health 4. Occupational health
25	SEAMEO TROPMED/Thailand (SEAMEO TROPMED Regional Center for Tropical Medicine)	Thailand	1967	1. Tropical medicine 2. Tropical pediatrics 3. School health
26	SEAMEO VOCTECH (SEAMEO Regional Center for Vocational and Technical Education and Training)	Brunei Darussalam	1990	Vocational and technical education

As can be seen from Table 1, the 26 SEAMEO regional centers cover wide areas of specialization. Many newly established regional centers have areas of specialization almost duplicating the specialization areas of the older and more established regional centers. Out of these 26 SEAMEO regional centers, six original regional centers have their functions more relevant to the functions of higher education institutions in Thailand and other SEAMEO member countries, so they will be described in more details; also, the word SEAMEO will be omitted from their names in order to avoid repetition. These six regional centers are INNOTECH, RECSAM, RELC, RIHED, SEARCA, and TROPMED. Readers who want to acquire more information concerning the rest regional centers can retrieve information about each of them from Wikipedia under the topic of SEAMEO Centers.

### **INNOTECH**

The full name of INNOTECH is SEAMEO (SEAMEO, 2020). Regional Center for Educational Innovation and Technology. It was established in 1970 and is located within the campus of the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City, the Philippines. Its mission is to provide innovative and technology-oriented learning services and research-based solutions to enable the education communities in Southeast Asia to effectively respond to current and emerging needs and concerns. Based on this mission, it initiates and disseminates innovative and technology-oriented educational programs that help the member countries identify and solve common or unique educational problems and address anticipated needs.

Courses/programs offered by INNOTECH are in the following specialization areas:

- Educational management, research and evaluation
- Curriculum and instruction
- Educational technology
- Non-formal education, literacy and community development

### **RECSAM**

The full name of RECSAM is SEAMEO. Regional Center for Education in Science and Mathematics. It was established in 1967 as one of the founding sister centers of SEAMEO (SEAMEO, 2020). It is located in Penang, Malaysia. Its mission is to enhance the development and advancement of science and mathematics education at the primary and secondary school levels for the member countries. Its specialization areas are the following:

- Pedagogy in science and mathematics (i.e., science and mathematics teaching methods, inquiry-based science, problem-based learning, etc.)

- Higher order thinking skills
- Assessment in science and mathematics
- ICT in science and mathematics teaching
- STEM Education
- Curriculum development/learning standards in science and mathematics

RECSAM fulfills its mission by performing the functions of training, research and development, and serving as a clearing house for information on science and mathematics education with the following details:

### **1. Training**

RECSAM offers training to enhance knowledge and skills of science and mathematics teachers and educators in four types of courses and programs. They are specified as follows:

#### **1.1 Regular courses**

The center offers regular courses for development of knowledge and skills of key science and mathematics teachers and educators of member countries. There will be 27 regular courses for the next three fiscal years, nine courses for each fiscal year. Each course will be of 4 week duration. The contents of regular courses are determined based on the current and future trends of science and mathematics education and the needs of SEAMEO member countries.

#### **1.2 In-country courses**

Besides regular courses, the center conducts in-country courses whereby the professionals from the center will train participants from the respective countries at their own country.

#### **1.3 Diploma and master's programs**

The center started this program in 2006 with Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. This program is a Post Graduate Certificate of Education in ICT leading to a Master of Education in IT and Resource. It takes 11 months to complete. It is also a twinned program with Deakin University in Australia.

#### **1.4 Customized courses**

The center also offers training courses to respond to the needs or demand of local, regional and international participants. For example, in 2005, the center was requested by JICA (Japanese International Cooperation Agency), the sponsor, to train Kenyan science and mathematics teachers. It is likely that more customized courses will be offered in the future.

### **2. Research and development**

RECSAM plans to conduct not more than two research studies each year which will include a classroom-based research and a long-range research. The possible research topics are clustered along the following major areas:

- Effective teaching and learning strategies
- Assessing teaching and learning strategies
- Classroom learning environment in science and mathematics
- ICT in the science and mathematics classrooms
- Thinking and meaningful understanding in science and mathematics

### **3. Clearing house for information on science and mathematics education**

RECSAM performs this function by convening international conferences, seminars, and workshops. Also, it issues a journal in science and mathematics education.

## **RELC**

The full name of RELC is SEAMEO Regional Language Center. It was established in 1968 as one of the founding sisters of SEAMEO (SEAMEO, 2020). It is located on 30 Orange Grove Road, Singapore 258352, Singapore. Its mission is to be dedicated to the development and advancement of language education in the region and the promotion of international cooperation among language professionals. Its specialization areas are the following:

- Teaching English to speakers of other languages
- Applied linguistics
- Assessment of English proficiency
- Teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages

RELC fulfills its mission by taking action according to the three mottos: We Teach, We Assess, and We Host, which can be further specified as follows:

### **1. We Teach**

This motto means that the regional center designs and offers training programs and courses on language teaching to enhance knowledge and skills of language teachers and language educators. The training programs and courses comprise two categories of programs/courses as follows:

#### **1.1 Language Teacher Education Courses**

The language teacher education courses are aimed at facilitating the professional growth of educators and teachers and supporting them at their various stages of teaching career. They comprise the following programs/courses:

- Master of Arts Program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
- Master of Arts Program in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages
- Blended Postgraduate Diploma Program in Applied Linguistics
- Advanced Specialist Certificate Courses
- Specialist Certificate Courses

#### **1.2 Customized Courses**

The customized courses are English language courses that the regional center designs to meet the needs of client countries either within or outside the region. They can be offered either in those client countries or at the regional center itself. They comprise the following programs/courses:

- Teacher training courses to train master trainers in English teaching
- Language proficiency courses from the beginner to advanced levels
- Language testing consultancy services
- Workshops in English or Chinese languages
- Examination preparatory courses
- Research fellowship programs to serve the needs of SEAMEO member Countries

### **2. We Assess**

This motto means that the regional center performs its function as the official test center of English language examinations for various work agencies and universities both within and outside Singapore. Examples of English language examinations/tests being administered by the regional center are the following:

- English Language Entrance Proficiency Test
- Cambridge Assessment English
- Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE-A)
- University of London examinations
- University of Oxford Admissions tests

### 3. We Host

This motto means that the regional center provides complete facilities for all academic activities within its premise. RELC is a unique regional center in a sense that its premise is an 18-storey international hotel called RELC International Hotel that it owns and runs. The regional center office is on the third floor while the library is on the fourth floor of the hotel. It fulfills its second mission of the promotion of international cooperation among language professionals by providing facilities and hosting of activities as follows:

- The provision of RELC Library which is considered to be the best applied linguistics library in the world
- The issuing of RELC Journal and other printed English language lessons
- The hosting of various workshops, seminars, national conferences and international conferences

### RIHED

The full name of RIHED is SEAMEO (SEAMEO, 2020) Regional Center for Higher Education and Development. It was established in 1993. It is located on the fifth floor in the Office of the Higher Education Commission, Bangkok, Thailand. The regional center's mission is to foster efficiency, effectiveness, and harmonization of higher education in Southeast Asia through system research, empowerment, development of mechanisms to facilitate sharing and collaboration in higher education. The regional center's main activities, in line with other regional centers, include training, research and development, and information dissemination with a special focus on advancing cooperation, alignment, and development across higher education systems in the region through the following:

- Policy Platforms, including the annual RIHED Governing Board Meeting (GBM) and Southeast Asian Higher Education Senior Officials Meeting (SEA-HiEd SOM)
- Regional Seminars and Forums conducted in conjunction with the GBM and SEA-HiEd SOM
- University Networks, including RIHED's ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Program and the Greater Mekong Sub-region University Consortium (GMS-UC)
- Rotational and Thematic Seminar and Study Visit Programs to Partner Countries
- Developmental Programs, including the Academic Credit Transfer Framework for Asia (ACTFA) Project
- Capacity Building in the Greater Mekong Sub-region
- Regional and Global Engagement with Partners
- Technical Workshop on e-Learning Course Development
- Leadership and Development
- Policy-oriented Research; and Development of a Regional Higher Education Information Portal

### SEAMEO SEARCA

The full name of SEARCA is SEAMEO Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture. It was established in 1966 as one of the founding sisters of SEAMEO. It is located on the campus of the University of the Philippines Los Banos, Laguna 4031, the Philippines. Its mission is to strengthen institutional capacities in agriculture and rural development in Southeast Asia to address poverty and food insecurity. It carries out its mission through provision of graduate study programs in agriculture, short-term training, research and development, information dissemination, and consultancy services. They are specified as follows:



### **1. Graduate Study Programs in Agriculture**

SEARCA offers graduate study programs in both the master's degree and doctoral degree levels to nationals of the member countries. In addition to offering those study programs, the regional center also offers graduate scholarships, Ph.D. research scholarships, and visiting research fellowships to them.

### **2. Short-Term Training Programs**

The regional center offers short-term training programs on various topics of agriculture, natural resource development, and anti-poverty rural development. Examples of the short-term training programs are the following:

- Executive Forums on Natural Resource Management
- Assessing Impacts of Development Projects on Poverty

### **3. Research and Development Programs**

The regional center conducts and promotes research and development programs on agriculture and natural resource management. Examples of the research and development programs are the following:

- Policy Roundtable on Agricultural Competitiveness and Natural Resource Management
- Sustainability Science Program

### **4. Information Dissemination**

The regional center performs its role as a clearing house for information dissemination on agriculture and natural resource development by issuing the Asian Journal of Agriculture and Development and other publications such as the Southeast Asian Agriculture and Development Primer Series; Policy Briefs; and Discussion Papers.

### **5. Consultancy Services**

The regional center provides consultancy services on agriculture and natural resource development to various organizations, institutions, and work agencies in the member countries.

## **TROPMED Network**

The full name of this network is SEAMEO (SEAMEO TROPMED, 2020) Tropical Medicine and Public Health Network. The network has three regional centers in Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. The network's Central Office is hosted by the Thai government and is located in the Faculty of Tropical Medicine, Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand. The Central Office coordinates the programs and projects of the regional centers, executes regional projects and activities, and publishes the Southeast Asia Journal of Tropical Medicine and Public Health. Details of information on the three regional centers are specified as follows:

### **TROPMED/Malaysia**

The full name of this regional center is SEAMEO TROPMED Regional Center for Microbiology, Parasitology and Entomology. It was established in 1967 and is located in the Institute for Medical Research, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Its stated missions are to conduct research on the prevention and control of diseases and to provide specialized training, diagnostic, consultative and advisory services.

Examples of courses/programs offered by the regional center are the following:

- Diploma in Applied Parasitology and Entomology
- Diploma in Medical Microbiology

### **TROPMED/Philippines**

The full name of this regional center is SEAMEO TROPMED Regional Center for Public Health, Hospital Administration, Environmental and Occupational Health. It was established in

1967 and is located in the College of Public Health of the University of the Philippines Manila. Its stated mission is to conduct research and training in the fields of public health, hospital administration, environmental and occupational health.

Examples of degree programs offered by the regional center are the following:

- Doctor of Public Health
- Master of Public Health
- Master of Hospital Administration
- Master of Occupational Health
- Master of Science in Public Health
- Bachelor of Science in Public Health

Examples of short-term courses offered by the regional center are the following:

- Assessment of Nutritional Status
- Basic health Promotion
- Biosafety and Biosecurity
- Dental Public Health
- Diagnostic Parasitology
- Food Safety

### **TROPMED/Thailand**

The full name of this regional center is SEAMEO TROPMED Regional Center for Tropical Medicine. It was established in 1967 and is now located in the Faculty of Tropical Medicine, Mahidol University, Bangkok 10400, Thailand. Its stated missions are to offer training on endemic tropical diseases, parasitology, community and preventive medicine, and to conduct research on alternative control measures of diseases and the promotion of healthy life styles including trials of new chemotherapeutic compounds and new vaccines.

Examples of degree programs offered by the regional center are the following:

- Graduate Diploma Program in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene
- Master of Clinical Tropical Medicine
- Master of Science Program in School Health
- Doctor of Philosophy Program in Clinical Tropical Medicine
- Doctor of Philosophy Program in Tropical Medicine

Examples of short training courses offered by the regional center are the following:

- Management of Malaria
- Epidemiology and Management of HIV/AIDS
- Diagnosis and Management of Tropical Diseases
- School Health and Nutrition Programs in Asia

In addition to provision of training programs/courses and conducting research on alternative control measures of diseases and the promotion of healthy life styles, the regional center also conducts meetings/conferences on tropical medicine and related topics. An example of such meeting is the Joint International Tropical Medicine Meeting.

## **Implications for Thai Higher Education Institutions**

The existence of the 26 regional centers will have benefits for Thai higher education institutions in the following matters:

### **1. Training**

Since most regional centers offer many types of training programs in their specialization areas, such as graduate study programs, short-course training programs, and customized training

programs, Thai higher education institutions can benefit from all of those training programs from relevant regional centers. For example, the higher education institutions that have Faculty of Agriculture can send their staff members to enroll in the master's degree program or doctoral degree programs of SEARCA; or the higher education institutions that have the Teaching English as a Second Language Program can send their staff members to enroll in the various Language Teacher Education Programs/Courses offered by RELC such as the Master of Arts Program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, and the Blended Postgraduate Diploma Program in Applied Linguistics.

## **2. Scholarship**

In enrolling in degree programs in the relevant regional centers, the staff members from Thai higher education institutions can apply for scholarship from each relevant regional center.

## **3. Research and Development Projects**

As most regional centers perform their research and development function in their specialization area, Thai higher education institutions can collaborate in research and development projects in their relevant specialization areas. They can also propose research and development projects and apply for research fellowship from relevant SEAMEO regional centers.

## **4. Seminars, Workshops, National and International Conferences**

As most regional centers host various annual seminars, workshops, national and international conferences, staff members from Thai higher education institutions can participate and present their papers in the conferences relevant to their specialization area.

## **5. Information Dissemination**

As most regional centers perform their function of being a clearing house for information dissemination such as provision of resourceful libraries (for example, the RELC Library that is considered to be the best applied linguistics library in the world), issuing journals in their specialization area (for example, the RELC Journal from SEAMEO RELC, and the Asian Journal of Agriculture and Development from SEARCA), and issuing various printed materials, Thai higher education institutions can utilize the resources in all those libraries, subscribe to the journals, and acquire those printed materials. Of course, in order to receive full benefits from the relevant regional centers, Thai higher education institutions must closely follow and acquire information on new development and programs of the relevant regional centers.

Another important point for consideration is the cooperation and collaboration between Thai higher education institutions and the relevant SEAMEO regional centers in the new normal era. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused several limitations including free travelling between countries and face-to-face personal contacts among people in each country and in international circles. These limitations make it difficult for collaborative activities like staff exchange, student exchange, or study tours in large groups. However, the collaboration and cooperation can still be carried out via online social media such as the Internet and via online activities such as teleconference. Therefore, the cooperation and collaboration are still possible in the new normal era.

## **Conclusion**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional intergovernmental organization established in 1967 with members comprising 10 countries in Southeast Asia, namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines,

Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The three main purposes of the establishment of ASEAN are 1) to promote the cooperation among member countries in politics and security, 2) to promote the cooperation among member countries in economy, and 3) to promote the cooperation among member countries in socio-culture. Prior to the establishment of ASEAN, the Southeast Asian countries signed an agreement to establish the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO, 1965). The main purpose of SEAMEO is to promote regional cooperation in education, science and culture. Under the agreement, each of the member countries is responsible to set up and manage at least one educational center. At present, there are 26 educational centers in the member countries.

Of these 26 centers, six centers have programs and activities specifically relevant for Thai higher education institutions. These centers are the following: INNOCH, RECSAM, RELC, RIHED, SEARCA, and TROPMED. All of them perform the following five functions in their specialized area: 1) provision of training, 2) conducting research and development projects/programs, 3) provision of scholarships and research fellowships, 4) organizing seminars, workshops, meetings, national and international conferences, and 5) serving as a clearing house for information dissemination.

Implications for Thai higher education institutions are that the existence of the 26 regional centers will have benefits for Thai higher education institutions in all of the five following functions: 1) in provision of training, staff members from Thai higher education institutions can apply for enrollment in degree conferring programs or receive training from the offered short courses from the relevant regional centers; 2) in conducting research and development projects/programs, Thai higher education institutions can participate or collaborate in those research and development projects/programs; 3) in provision of scholarships and research fellowships, staff members from Thai higher education institutions can apply for those offered scholarships and research fellowships; 4) in organizing seminars, workshops, meetings, national and international conferences, staff members from Thai higher education institutions can participate in those seminars, workshops, meetings, national and international conferences; and 5) in serving as a clearing house for information dissemination, Thai higher education institutions can subscribe to the journals issued by relevant regional centers and acquire relevant publications from them.

In the new normal era that occurs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which put limitations on international travelling and face-to-face personal interaction, the cooperation and collaboration can still be carried out via the use of online social media such as the Internet and online activities such as teleconference.

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