Chapter 8
Subregional Collaboration in Higher Education: Harmonization and Networking in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)

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Introduction

Southeast Asia is being rapidly integrated through market-driven trade and foreign direct investment activities toward the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Community starting from 2015. In this process, the region is also witnessing greater mobility of the people within ASEAN and between ASEAN and other regions. This emerging context places higher education in a pivotal role in developing human resources capable of creating and sustaining globalized and knowledge-based societies and promoting "brain circulation" in and outside Southeast Asia. In particular, in order to facilitate student and academic mobility, the region's diverse higher education systems and institutions need to share more harmonized frameworks, standards, and mechanisms by developing and introducing a permeable and transparent quality assurance (QA) and credit transfer system (CTS) in Southeast Asia.[1]

Encouraging and supporting students to study abroad is arguably the best way to foster the development of a well-trained international workforce, which can improve the quality and quantity of human resources in the economy as well as the national education sector (OECD/World Bank 2007). This is also true for academic staff, who would be able to access international academic networks, in which many developing countries have little involvement. When Europe was

[1] For an overview and recent trends in cross-border collaboration in higher education across Asia, see, for example, ADB (2012a), JICA (2012), Aphijanyatham (2010), and Hirosato (2011, 2012).

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integrated, the European Union created a European Higher Education Area (EHAE) by adopting a program called "Erasmus" as part of the Bologna process to facilitate the mobility of university students and academic staff.[2] Should ASEAN be more integrated as one ASEAN Community, it is necessary for Southeast Asia to have a similar vision and program but adapted to much more diverse contexts and unique regional characteristics, as well as supported by acceptable standards among universities in Southeast Asia. Such a harmonization process can be facilitated by building upon and strengthening the existing higher education forums, institutions, and networks. There also are increasing interests with the harmonization process among regional organizations and higher education institutions and at emerging regional economic architectures comprising ASEAN, ASEAN+3, and/or East Asia Summit (EAS) countries (ADB 2010).[3] These increasing interests offer the Asian Development Bank (ADB) a potentially unique opportunity, as a regional development bank, to contribute to promote such harmonization process and university networking by collaborating with government ministries and agencies, regional organizations, and higher education institutions and networks in Southeast Asia under a broader umbrella of ADB's support to the GMS program (ADB 2013a).[4]

This chapter discusses the GMS program in higher education, by highlighting the ADB's unique role in supporting higher education harmonization and networking. Following the Introduction (section "Introduction"), section "ASEAN's common challenge and the GMS program" outlines challenges faced by ASEAN and highlights salient contributions by the GMS program toward an integrated ASEAN Community starting from 2015. Section "Higher education harmonization in the GMS" discusses the importance and need of higher education harmonization to pave the way for greater student and academic mobility in the GMS in light of linkages with ASEAN. Section "ADB's support for higher education harmonization" introduces ADB's support for GMS higher education harmonization, and section "Higher education networking in the GMS" discusses GMS university networking. Section "A Proposal for the Greater Mekong Regional University"

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[2] For more details on the EHEA and the Bologna process, see, for example, Tomusk (2005), Kehm, et al. (2009), Dhirathiti and Yavaprabhas (2008), and the website of EHEA (http://www.ehea.info). The "Erasmus" program is a student exchange program inside Europe, while "Erasmus Mundus" is a student exchange and academic cooperation program between Europe and other regions of the world.

[3] Kuroda et al. (2013) provide an excellent empirical analysis for cross-border higher education in the context of East Asian regional and ASEAN integration.

[4] ADB sponsored and the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (Myanmar) hosted the 11th Working Group Meeting on Human Resource Development (WGHRD-11) on 1–2 November 2012 in Yangon, Myanmar, which endorsed a draft GMS Human Resource Development Strategic Framework and Action Plan (GMS HRD SFAP) (2013–2017). The GMS HRD SFAP (2013–2017) was formally endorsed at the GMS Ministerial Conference held in Nanning, People's Republic of China, on 11–12 December 2012, and published by ADB (ADB 2013a). Key activities of the GMS HRD SFAP (2013–2017) will be supported by ADB's technical assistance (TA): Implementing the GMS HRD SFAP (Phase 2), which was approvad in December 2013 for $1.75 million (ADB 2013b).

presents a proposal for establishing a "Greater Mekong Regional University" as a regional platform, which would help GMS countries to improve quality and relevance of their universities and accelerate the process of higher education harmonization and networking in the GMS and beyond. Finally, section "Concluding Remarks" provides concluding remarks.

ASEAN's Common Challenge and the GMS Program

ASEAN leaders have set a vision to build an integrated ASEAN Community starting from 2015.[5] The ASEAN Community comprises the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), and the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), and each Community has its own Blueprint as an action plan (ASEAN 2008, 2009a, b). These are three equally important, independent, and interrelated pillars of the ASEAN Community, of which the primary goal of the ASCC is to contributing to realizing an ASEAN Community that is people centered and socially responsible (ASEAN 2009a). On the other hand, ASEAN leaders have also launched the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) since 2000 to narrow the development divide and enhance ASEAN's competitiveness. To accelerate the progress made so far, ASEAN leaders adopted the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) in October 2010 (ASEAN 2010), which is envisaged to connect ASEAN through enhanced physical infrastructure development (physical connectivity), effective institutional arrangements (institutional connectivity), and empowered people (people-to-people connectivity). The MPAC, whose primary aim is to increase connectivity, also seeks to help narrow development gaps in ASEAN especially by implementing capacity building cooperation arrangements which seek to help Cambodia, Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic (PDR), Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV) meet ASEAN-wide commitment in building the ASEAN Community. Another common challenge that the ASEAN region faces is to align its education, science, and technology policies to build capable human resources toward an integrated ASEAN Community and better link their education and skills development with the ASEAN-wide labor market demand.

For ASEAN to be a more integrated community, the biggest challenge is to narrow development gaps between original ASEAN member countries which have become high- or middle-income countries (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) and relatively new ASEAN member countries (CLMV). In order to realize a bigger market, greater economic scale, and more effective division of labor, ASEAN leaders took a subregional approach in addressing development gaps by launching the GMS economic cooperation program in 1992

[5] See "Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of the Establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015" at the 12th ASEAN Summit held in Cebu, Philippines, in January 2007. It should be noted that references to ASEAN and Southeast Asia in this chapter refers to 10 out of 11 Southeast Asian countries excluding Timor-Leste which is not yet an ASEAN member country and has not been part of higher education harmonization and networking process, while Timor-Leste is geographically included in Southeast Asia.

with the ADB as a coordinator.[6] The GMS program is a foremost example and a unique attempt in Southeast Asia and has become a model of subregional cooperation in Southeast Asia.[7] The GMS program encompasses CLMV, Thailand, and the People's Republic of China (Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), constituting an economic bloc of some 250 million people that has a huge capacity for potential growth. The GMS program, which has been implemented over two decades since its launch in 1992, comprises nine priority sectors relating to (1) agriculture, (2) energy, (3) environment, (4) investment, (5) telecommunication, (6) tourism, (7) transport infrastructure, (8) transport and trade facilitation, and (9) human resources development (HRD).

Education is treated as one of the subsectors of HRD (health, labor migration, and social development, among others) (ADB 2013a). A little over half the population of GMS is regarded as potential labor, but a large part of it is currently idle, and there is a shortage in all sectors of human resources that can keep up with the scale and speed of growth. In addition, the low level of literacy among the youth, the inadequate provision of primary and secondary education, and poor health mean that labor productivity cannot be high. CLMV has not yet achieved universal completion of primary and lower secondary education, which is one of the reasons for low employment. To provide people with actual employment, more advanced technical education and vocational training are needed at secondary and tertiary education levels. Education and HRD are and will continue to be the core component of the GMS program (ADB 2012b) and are expected to contribute to narrow development gaps within GMS countries and between GMS countries and the rest of ASEAN, by producing capable human resources on a sustainable basis (ADB 2013a).

Higher Education Harmonization in the GMS

As emerging priorities in the GMS program, ADB and Education Subgroup in the GMS Working Group in HRD (WGHRD) comprising senior officials of GMS countries agreed to support higher education harmonization and networking in the GMS as part of a new program in 2012.[8] The WGHRD recognized that more

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[6] The goal of the GMS program remains as sustained economic growth, reduced poverty, and social development in GMS countries, while so-called middle-income traps have been recognized as a serious constraint for furthering growth in middle-income countries in ASEAN.

[7] Other subregional cooperation programs in Southeast Asia are Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines-East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), and Indonesia-Malaysia- Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT).

[8] This agreement was reached at the 10th GMS Working Group in HRD (WGHRD) held in Vientiane, Lao PDR, in May 2011, and this activity has been included in an ADB funded regional TA project as "GMS Higher Education and Networking (Phase 1)" by a procedure called "changing the TA scope during implementation" (ADB 2009).

harmonized higher education systems and deeper networking among universities will help GMS countries to achieve more mobility of students and academic staff and hence promote knowledge sharing and dissemination.[9] This activity has to be expedited in view of upcoming ASEAN Community starting from 2015, by supporting a process that builds country and stakeholder engagement in building the capacity in university QA system and building a common CTS across universities in GMS countries. More concretely, this activity is divided into two components:

1. Strengthen the capacity of university QA system and personnel in less developed GMS countries such as CLMV, in collaboration with the ASEAN University Network (AUN)[10]
2. Provide GMS counties with options for harmonizing existing credit transfer arrangements in higher education initially in a few selected fields to ensure applicability across Southeast Asia, in collaboration with the Southeast Ministers of Education Organization-Regional Center for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO-RIHED).[11]

AUN and SEAMEO-RIHED are expected to play complementary roles in (1) harmonizing higher education systems by developing and implementing a common platform for university QA framework and CTS in the GMS, which can be linked with ASEAN and other regions and (2) strengthening regional higher education networks in GMS, Southeast Asia, and beyond the region. An assumption is that more harmonized higher education systems and strengthened higher education networks will help narrow development gaps and contribute to shape the ASEAN Community from 2015 and beyond.

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[9] "Harmonization" is usually grouped into four aspects: degree systems, quality assurance (QA) systems, credit (transfer) systems, and academic calendar systems. This chapter is concerned with university QA and credit (transfer) systems. For more detailed discussions on definition and rationale of "harmonization," see Yavaprabhas (2014). Hotta et al. (2010) also compared credit systems, grading policies, and their actual implementation among 13 East and Southeast Asian countries. Furthermore, Knight (2012) provided a conceptual framework for the regionalization of higher education in Asia, according to functional, organizational, and political (will) approaches.

[10] The AUN was formed in 1995 and is coordinated through a Board of Trustees representing member institutions and its secretariat is located at the campus of Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. The AUN facilitates close interactions between its member universities including through students exchange and scholarship scheme. For more details on the AUN, see AUN website (http://www.aun-sec.org/) and Yavaprabhas (2014).

[11] SEAMEO-RIHED was established in 1993, as one of Regional Centers of SEAMEO, to foster efficiency, effectiveness, and harmonization of higher education in Southeast Asia through system research, empowerment, and development of mechanisms to facilitate sharing and collaborations in higher education. See SEAMEO-RIHED website for more details (http://www.rihed.seameo.org/).

Table 8.1 Member institutions of ASEAN University Network (AUN) and ASEAN+3 University Network (UNet) (as of February 2014)

Country	No. of institutions	Member institutions	[a]
AUN			
Brunei	(1)	University of Brunei Darussalam	
Cambodia	(2)	Royal University of Phnom Penh	
		Royal University of Law and Economics	
Indonesia	(4)	University of Indonesia	[a]
		Gadjah Mada University	[a]
		Bandung Institute of Technology	
		University of Airlangga	
Lao PDR	(1)	National University of Laos	
Malaysia	(2)	Universiti Malaya	[a]
		Universiti Sains Malaysia	[a]
		Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	[a]
		Universiti Putra Malaysia	[a]
		Universiti Utara Malaysia**	
Myanmar	(2)	University of Yangon	
		Institute of Economics	
		University of Mandalay**	
Philippines	(3)	University of the Philippines	
		Ateneo de Manila University	
		De La Salle University	
Singapore	(3)	Singapore National University	
		Nanyang Technological University	
		Singapore Management University	
Thailand	(4)	Chulalongkorn University	[a]
		Mahidol University	[a]
		Burapha University	
		Chiang Mai University	
		Prince of Songkla University**	
Vietnam		Vietnam National University, Hanoi	
		Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City	
		Canthu University**	
Total	*(26)*		
ASEAN+3 UNet			
People's Republic of China	(5)	Guangxi University	
		Guizhou University	
		Peking University	
		Xiamen University	
		Yunnan University	
Japan	(3)	Kyoto University	
		Keio University	
		Tokyo Institution of Technology	
Republic of Korea	(2)	Seoul National University	
		Daejeon University	
Total	*(10)*		

Source: Author
[a]Member institutions of ASEAN International Mobility of Student (AIMS) Program
**New member institutions which joined the AUN in 2013.

Harmonization in Quality Assurance System

ASEAN University Network for Harmonization in Higher Education

The AUN is composed of 30 leading or major universities from 10 ASEAN countries that have worked closely to achieve the higher education development toward the ASEAN community building. On November 1, 2012, AUN signed the Memorandum of Understanding at Peking University, People's Republic of China (PRC), for establishing ASEAN Plus Three University Network (ASEAN+3 UNet) by extending its network initially with five universities in PRC, two universities in the Republic of Korea, and three universities in Japan. Member institutions of AUN and ASEAN+3 UNet are in Table 8.1.

University QA is an internal mechanism for ASEAN to ensure quality education toward achieving a harmonization in higher education.[12] The AUN realizes that QA is the bedrock for maintaining, improving, and enhancing teaching, research, and the overall academic standards. To strengthen quality higher education in ASEAN countries, AUN has established the AUN Quality Assurance Network (AUN-QA) since 2000 that successfully developed AUN-QA system including the preparation of AUN-QA Guidelines and Manual for the Implementation of the Guidelines (AUN 2007). Since 2007, the AUN-Assessor teams have conducted the actual quality assessment at program level for 26 undergraduate programs of 7 AUN member universities (AUN, 2011). This quality assessment is one of important activities under AUN-QA for ensuring the quality of program at regional recognition level as well as benchmarking among the universities in ASEAN.

The Need for Strengthening University Quality Assurance System in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar

University QA in CLMV is still a new development in terms of both QA system and QA professional competencies due to the varied background and development stage of QA in each country. AUN member institutions from CLMV (namely, Royal University of Phnom Penh, Royal University of Law and Economics, National

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[12] It should be noted that there are internal and external QA systems to ensure quality of higher education institutions. QA agencies are in charge of external QA system development at the country level, while universities are in charge of internal QA system development. This chapter is concerned with internal QA system. External QA is also promoted and strengthened by regional networks of QA agencies such as the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) with its secretariat located at Malaysian Qualifications Agency (http://www.mqa.gov.my) and the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) with its current secretariat located at Shanghai Education Evaluation Institute in the People's Republic of China (http://www.apqn.org). See Aphijanyatham (2010) for definition and comparison of internal and external QA frameworks and systems in Southeast Asia and Vroeijenstijn, Ton. "Internal and external quality assurance: why are they two sides of the same coin?" (www.eahep.org/web/ images/Bangkok/28 _panel_ton.pdf).

University of Laos, University of Yangon, Yangon Institute of Economics, Vietnam National University of Hanoi, and Vietnam National University of Ho Chi Minh City) have been involved in AUN-QA activities, but some universities still need more training and assistance to set up their QA leadership and professionals for the establishment of QA system at their universities. A brief description of the status of university QA system of each country is provided as follows[13]:

Cambodia. A law on accreditation has been established in Cambodia, and the establishment of Accreditation Committee of Cambodia in March 2003 has formulated a set of criteria to regulate legally on the quality of higher education institutions. However, it is still difficult for the universities to develop the QA system because of the lack of QA personnel. Therefore, to assist and prepare the universities to be recognized among ASEAN leading universities, there is a clear need to support QA personnel development.

Lao PDR. Implementing university QA in Lao PDR faces problems. There is no independent quality assurance agency, and instead, the Ministry of Education and Sports has set up "Educational Standard and Quality Assurance Center" to tackle QA issues. The National University of Lao has established a "QA Office" to promote and regulate quality of education; however, they face several obstacles due to the lack of resources, lack of understanding of QA concept, motivation, and quality culture. It is clear that for QA implementation to be effective, Lao PDR needs not only capacity building of QA personnel but also both policy support and resource.

Myanmar. Like Lao PDR, there is no independent quality assurance agency to regulate and ensure the quality of higher education institutions. Myanmar Maritime University considers the QA system to be a very important step toward recognition at national, regional, and international level. Myanmar Maritime University is the only university that has established the quality management system and certified to ISO 9001 standard in 2007–2010. The university also aims to develop further alignment of its QA system with AUN-QA System. Other universities are also interested in establishing QA system at their universities. It is essential to equip their personnel with the capacity for establishing their QA systems in the near future.

On the other hand, universities in Vietnam have QA personnel that are more knowledgeable and experience in QA issues. QA at higher education institutions in Vietnam is well supported by some development partners such as the World Bank. Vietnam established the General Department of Education Testing and Accreditation under the Ministry of Education and Training and has developed a national policy on QA implementation at university level.[14]

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[13] The description draws on a proposal by AUN submitted to ADB, which has been supported under the "GMS Higher Education and Networking (Phase 1)" the ADB funded regional TA project (ADB 2009).

[14] It was decided that Vietnam will be excluded from "GMS Higher Education Harmonization and Networking (Phase 1)" of the ADB funded regional TA project (ADB 2009).

Harmonization in Credit Transfer System

Credit transfer is the process of evaluating the components of one qualification for the purpose of determining the equivalence with the components of another qualification to establish credits for individuals. This may take place whether during a course or when enrolling for a new course at a different institution. Credit transfer avoids duplication of studies and saves time and money. An appropriate CTS is a key facilitator of student mobility and cooperation among higher education institutions.

The Need for a Common Credit Transfer System

Harmonization of higher education and increasing transnational student mobility require a common CTS as an enabling mechanism to create so-called higher education "common space." An effective system of academic credit transfer has long been recognized as a key element in promoting student mobility and cross-border educational cooperation. Several systems of credit transfer are operating among different subgroups of countries and higher education institutions in Southeast Asia. Although the systems have some features in common, differences in their governance, scope and administration mean that, depending on their locations and fields of studies, students and institutions may be required to deal with more than one system. This can end up with consuming scarce resources and become a barrier to student mobility and cross-border cooperation. Although differences in approach to credit transfer are to be expected in a diverse Southeast Asia, there would be much to gain from harmonizing existing systems of credit transfer for greater region-wide applicability.

Examples of Credit Transfer Arrangements

Among several credit transfer arrangements operating the region, the most notable examples are as follows.[15] University Mobility in Asia and Pacific (UMAP) has supported a student exchange scheme within the region since 1993. UMAP is a voluntary association of government and non-government representatives of the higher education sector. At present, UMAP has 31 member countries, including 10 ASEAN member countries, and uses the UMAP Credit Transfer System (UCTS). A pilot project to enhance student mobility between Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand (M-I-T pilot program) using the UCTS was initiated in 2009 by SEAMEO-RIHED with support from government ministries and agencies in charge

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[15] The description draws on a proposal by SEAMEO-RIHED submitted to ADB, which was supported under the "GMS Higher Education and Networking (Phase 1)" of the ADB funded regional TA project (ADB 2009).

Table 8.2 Member institutions of ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Program (as of September 2013)

Country	No. of instuitions	Member institutions	
AIMS program			
Indonesia	(12)	Ahmad Dahlan University	
		BINUS University	
		Bogor Agricultural University	
		Maranatha Christian University	
		Gadjah Mada University	[a]
		University of Indonesia	[a]
		Bandung Institute of Technology	[a]
		ISI Denpasar	
		ISI Surakarta	
		Sebelas Maret University	
		Sriwijaya University	
		Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia	
Malaysia	(7)	Universiti Malaysia	[a]
		Universiti Sains Malaysia	[a]
		Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	[a]
		Universiti Putra Malaysia	[a]
		Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	
		Universiti Teknologi MARA	
		Universiti Utara Malaysia	*
Thailand	(7)	Chulalongkorn University	[a]
		Mahidol University	[a]
		Kasetsart University	
		Thammasat University	
		King Mongkut's University of Technology, Thonburi	
		Mae Fah Luang University	
		Prince of Songkla University	*
Vietnam	(9)	Foreign Trade University	
		Nong Lam University	
		Hue University	
		National Economics University	
		Thai Nguyen University of Technology	
		Vietnam Maritime University	
		University of Transport and Communications	
		Water Resource University	
		Hanoi Agricultural University	
Total	(35)		

Source: Author

[a]Member institutions of ASEAN University Network

of higher education in three countries. Vietnam joined the "M-I-T" pilot program in November 2012, which was renamed to the "ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS)" Program (SEAMEO-RIHED 2012). The AIMS program also uses the UCTS. Member institutions of the AIMS program are in Table 8.2.[16]

Meanwhile, the AUN implements the ASEAN Credit Transfer System (ACTS) among AUN 30 member institutions and with the extended network of ASEAN+3 (Table 8.1). Based on enrollment in one or two semesters and academic quality recognition, the ACTS ensures that credits and grades offered by the host AUN universities will be recognized by the home university. University of Indonesia hosts the secretariat for the ACTS.[17]

SEAMEO-RIHED has documented a range of credit transfer arrangements in Southeast Asia and concludes that such initiatives tend to proceed independently of each other and do not constitute harmonization as in the European (Bologna process) sense. One of SEAMEO-RIHEDS's key conclusions is that it is vital for governments to agree that the region has much to gain from harmonization process in higher education and to recognize that harmonization does not necessarily imply standardization (Dhirathiti and Yavaprabhas 2008).

ADB's Support for Higher Education Harmonization

In July 2011, ADB hosted an International Conference on Higher Education in Dynamic Asia in Manila, Philippines, which emphasized a neutral role of the ADB in the harmonization process of higher education in Southeast Asia. This neutral role is perceived to avoid competition among higher education institutions and networks and instead to promote collaboration among stakeholders to be facilitated by the ADB. To follow-up with the above International Conference, ADB published a report in which one of the recommendations is to provide a clearinghouse of information on models of regional cooperation and cross-border collaboration in higher education and on regional experience with these models (ADB 2012a).

With this background, ADB has begun to support "GMS Higher Education Harmonization and Networking (Phase 1)" as part of the regional TA project (footnote 8 and ADB 2009). The TA intends to build capacity in university QA system and conduct a policy action research on building a common CTS in Southeast Asia. More specifically, the TA brings together policy makers and experts from all Southeast Asian countries to (1) develop capacity in university QA system in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar (CLM) and (2) ensure that a common CTS to be emerged would have GMS and then ASEAN-wide applicability. Methodology and key activities of the TA are as follows:

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[16] From 2014, selected 7 Japanese universities will join the AIMS program under the "Re-Inventing Japan Project" sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, Japan.

[17] For more details, see the website of ACTS (http://acts.ui.ac.id/) and Hotta et al. (2010).

Methodology and Key Activities of Technical Assistance

Capacity Building in University QA System

The TA supports a process that builds country and stakeholder engagement and draws on national and international expertise in QA. Specifically, the TA aims to (1) enhance and strengthen the knowledge on QA system and management particularly based on AUN-QA system, (2) build up qualified university QA personnel teams in CLM, (3) establish QA system to leverage the quality of higher education management in CLM, and (4) provide counties with options for harmonizing university QA system in GMS which would have applicability across Southeast Asia.

Capacity building workshops in university QA system is open to CLM participants from both AUN and non-AUN member universities. A maximum of 25 participants attends each workshop and has been trained by AUN-QA experts from AUN member institutions in middle-income ASEAN countries in close cooperation with the AUN secretariat. Participants who already joined and trained at the "Training on Enhancing Quality Assurance in CLMV" in 2010–2011 or the new participants who also have had some experiences on QA is a prerequisite for attending these capacity building workshops. Another requirement is that they have to establish the university QA system in their countries and conduct Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for Internal Quality Assessment (IQA) after the workshop.

Capacity building activities are conducted in the form of "training the trainers of university QA personnel." Both the "AUN-QA Manual" and "AUN Actual Quality Assessment at Program Level" are the main documents that are used during capacity building workshops (ANU 2007, 2010). Participants are expected to obtain adequate knowledge of QA so that they are able to conduct in-house training at their own institution as well as to establish QA system and write SAR for IQA. Some assistance from the AUN secretariat and AUN-QA experts may be provided upon request. It is expected that an AUN-QA network would be established in CLM which will have linkages with the rest of GMS countries and the ASEAN region.

Building a Common Credit Transfer System

A policy action research on a common CTS is conducted by taking four steps as follows: (1) explore, (2) experiment, (3) experience, and (4) expand.[18] The "explore" phase has been implemented in the period of 2012–2013, and other three phases will be implemented under the GMS HRD SFAP (2013–2017) (footnote 54 and ADB 2013b). The policy action research would involve government

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[18] This research is entitled "Harmonization and Networking in Higher Education: Building a Common Credit Transfer System for GMS and Beyond." See the website of SEAMEO-RIHED (http://www.rihed.seameo.org/?page_id=353).

ministries and agencies that are responsible for higher education, representatives of higher education institutions in the GMS, and regional organizations and networks currently involved with different aspects of credit transfer. Initial steps are underway for the development of a proposed Academic Credit Transfer Framework for Asia (ACTFA) including a common CTS for higher education institutions in Southeast Asia. SEAMEO-RIHED discussed the proposed ACTFA at the stakeholder meeting which was held in Siem Reap, Cambodia, on 8 April 2013.[19] SEAMO-RIHED plans to conduct a pilot project to implement the proposed ACTFA in the region ("experiment" phase), to evaluate and share lessons learned from the pilot project ("experience" phase), and then to widely disseminate the research results and make them available the ACTFA for adoption by higher education institutions ("expand" phase).

Progress and Future Prospects

In 2012, AUN conducted two workshops in each of CLM on the university QA system. Each workshop was delivered for about 4 days and was led by AUN-QA experts. SEAMEO-RIHED also conducted a series of CTS workshops, a regional conference on CTS in November 2012, and the stakeholder meeting in April 2013. GMS countries endorsed the GMS HRD SFAP (2013-2017) in December 2012, in which "GMS Higher Education Harmonization and Networking (Phase 2)" is included. It is expected that ANU will continue the university QA capacity building in CLM, while SEAMEO-RIHED will conduct remaining phases of the policy action research on building a common CTS by piloting the proposed ACTFA.

It appears that both AUN and SEAMEO-RIHED are the two dominant actors in harmonizing QA and CTS systems in the GMS and Southeast Asia. On the QA system, AUN is playing a significant role in improving the internal QA system at the university level. On the CTS, SEAMEO-RIHED administers the AIMS program involving 35 universities in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, while AUN is promoting ACTS with leading 30 member universities in ASEAN.[20]

The findings of the policy action research on a common CTS in collaboration with SEAMEO RIHED will include recommendations on how two main CTSs, namely, ACTS and UCTS (being used for the AIMS program), could coexist or merge into a common platform. It is most likely that both ACTS and UCTS could coexist since both systems have mostly different member institutions, and in case there would be overlaps in terms of member institutions, courses offered can be

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[19] Prior to the stakeholder meeting in Siem Reap, such common CTS was envisioned as a "Southeast Asia Credit Transfer System (SEA CTS)."

[20] In addition to participation by selected 7 Japanese universities (footnote 16), SEAMEO-RIHED plans to expand its membership from 4 countries and 5 fields in 2013 to 10 countries and 10 fields by 2015, while AUN has expanded its membership up to 30 institutions in 2013.

different (see Tables 8.1 and 8.2). As Yavaprabhas (2014) suggests, AUN and SEAMEO-RIHED could cooperate to ensure strong commitment from politicians, education ministers, and high-level policy makers, in light of key characteristics of the European harmonization process, which started from shared vision by politicians and high-level policy makers on harmonization. "GMS Higher Education Harmonization and Networking (Phase 2)" could offer such opportunities for cooperation between AUN and SEAMEO-RIHED (ADB 2013b).

Meanwhile, SEAMEO, with funding support from ADB, established and is implementing the SEAMEO College[21] for education ministers, high-level policy makers, and education and youth leaders to regularly convene policy and strategic dialogues on ASEAN-wide issues on education and HRD. It is expected that the SEAMEO College would consider, among others, higher education harmonization as a priority agenda of the SEAMEO College (ADB 2013c), and as an outcome of the SEAMEO College, education ministers and high-level policy makers would agree to develop regional policies on higher education harmonization with regard to QA and credit transfer systems in the context of preparing for the ASEAN Community from 2015.

Higher Education Networking in the GMS

Rationale

University networking not only promotes academic and student mobility among universities but also contributes to building a sense of community by forming university association or league including activities on sports, culture, and music. Asia is arguably leading the world in university partnership activity including university networking (Kuroda et al. 2013). University networking is perceived as a mechanism for strengthening participating universities (ADB 2012a). In the GMS and ASEAN, there are a number of university networks in various fields of expertise or disciplines. ASEAN envisions the formation of ASEAN University as a long-term goal, and the AUN is expected to pave the way toward the establishment of ASEAN University in the future. However, in the GMS, university networking is still its early stage, and should there be a solid university network, it can benefit faculty members, academic staff, and students by enhancing their mobility and helping them to build their sense of a common GMS. This would in turn help universities in the GMS to extend their networks with universities in

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[21] The SEAMEO College was launched at the 47th SEAMEO Council Meeting held in Hanoi, Vietnam, on 20 March 2013. The SEAMEO College does not involve "physical" campus. A "college" is a company, group, or society, specifically an organized body of persons engaged in a common pursuit or having common interests or duties (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The term "college" also connotes a collegial body and not always an institution with a physical structure.

ASEAN including AUN member institutions. Such university networking in the GMS can be facilitated by establishing a "GMS University Consortium."

Objectives

The objectives of the "GMS University Consortium" are to (1) help strengthen and accelerate cross-border collaboration among universities in the GMS, especially universities located along the economic corridors (i.e., the North-South, East-West, and Southern corridors) and (2) promote student and faculty exchange, credit transfer, and research capacity building and collaboration, among universities in the GMS. The "GMS University Consortium" will also strengthen university governance and management, improve quality and excellence of universities in the GMS, and help universities in the GMS to reach ASEAN/Southeast Asian regional standards. The "GMS University Consortium" involves first tiered universities in the GMS (which are often located in national capital cities) by linking their academic and staff resources with second tiered universities in the GMS (which are mostly located in provincial capital cities). The proposed member institutions can initially include 3–4 institutions from each of six GMS countries, totaling to 18–24 institutions. It is proposed that SEAMEO-RIHED offers a secretariat or incubator function of the "GMS University Consortium" in view of its relationships with government ministries and agencies in charge of higher education and representatives of higher education institutions in the GMS.

A Proposal for the Greater Mekong Regional University (GMRU)

Key Concepts and Principles

In further pursuing higher education harmonization and networking in the GMS and elsewhere, the following five key concepts and principles need to be emphasized (Table 8.3): First is to adopt permeability – from "rigid" standard or platform to "acceptable" standard or platform among key stakeholders (e.g., QA and credit transfer systems, and school calendars). Second is to promote transparency – from "invisible" systems (e.g., QA, credit transfer, and grading systems) to "visible" systems and educational contents.[22] Third is to maintain neutrality – from "competition" among networks, institutions, and universities to "cooperation/collaboration" to be facilitated by a neural entity. Fourth is to enhance mobility – from

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[22] The first two concepts and principles of permeability and transparency are advocated by Hotta et al. (2010), which conducted surveys and hearings in 13 countries in East and Southeast Asia.

Table 8.3 Key concepts and principles in higher education harmonization and networking

	Principles	
Key concepts	From	To
Permeability	"Rigid" standard or platform (e.g., QA and credit transfer systems and school calendars)	"Acceptable" standard or platform among key stakeholders
Transparency	"Invisible" systems (e.g., QA, credit transfer, and grading systems) and educational contents	"Visible" systems and educational contents
Neutrality	"Competition" among networks, institutions, and universities	"Cooperation" or "collaboration" to be facilitated by a neutral entity
Mobility	"Waiting for others' actions" or "too busy to take actions"	"Proactive" drive for change
Continuity	"Ad hoc" forum, conferences, or meetings	"Regular" actions to ensure the results

Source: Author

"waiting for others' actions" or "too busy to take actions" to "proactive" drive for change. Fifth is to ensure continuity – from "ad hoc" forum, conferences, or meetings to "regular" actions to bring about the results.

ADB is expected to play a neural role to facilitate higher education harmonization and networking in the GMS. However, ADB's headquarters is not located in "Bangkok hub" or "Chiang Mai-Vientiane hub" in higher education where several key regional agencies on higher education and higher education institutions are located,[23] which makes ADB difficult to be a facilitator for higher education harmonization and networking beyond its role as a funding agency. This may call for creating a regional platform as another neutral entity to be located in higher education "hub(s)" in the GMS, which can be a genuine facilitator of higher education harmonization and networking.

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[23] Knight (2010) defines the concept of regional education hubs and analyses cases of regional education hubs. Bangkok, Thailand, hosts the AUN secretariat and the AUN/Southeast Asia Engineering Education Development Network (AUN/SEED-Net) at Chulalongkorn University; SEAMEO secretariat, SEAMEO-RIHED at the Office of Higher Education Commission, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (UNESCO, Bangkok), etc., and it can be considered as "Bangkok hub." Chiang Mai, Thailand, hosts Chiang Mai University having close relationships with Mae Fah Luang University and National University of Laos, which can be considered as "Chiang Mai-Vientiane hub." Appendix 1 provides a landscape of main regional, intraregional, and subregional forums/institutions and higher education networks in East and Southeast Asia.

Mission, Main Activities, Location, Funding, and Timeframe

Such a regional platform can be tentatively called "Greater Mekong Regional University (GMRU)." Like the "SEAMEO College," the GMRU would not have a physical structure. The "GMS University Consortium" could be evolved into the GMRU in the future. The GMRU should be based on five key concepts and principles in pursuing higher education harmonization and networking. For example, it could continue to offer a forum for dialogue among key stakeholders such as AUN, SEAMEO-RIHED, and QA agencies at the country level, on internal and external QA systems, a common CTS, and university networking in the GMS and beyond. The GMRU can be considered as an equivalent regional platform such as the European University Institute in Europe and the East Asian University Institute (EAUI).[24] Mission and mandate, main activities, location, funding, and timeframe are summarized in Table 8.4 and presented as follows:

Mission and Mandate: to (1) help improve the quality of universities in the GMS by linking with existing/new higher education institutions and networks and (2) help harmonize higher education in the GMS by facilitating development an acceptable platform in areas such as QA, credit transfer, student exchange, research collaboration, etc.

Main Activities[25]: include university president/rector forum; leadership development programs in higher education; high-level dialogue on strengthening internal and external QA systems; building a common CTS; teaching support, research capacity building, faculty development (on-site and distance learning mode); support for cross-border delivery of instruction; and information clearing house (date base, matching university partners, etc.).

Location: The GMRU can be located in "Bangkok hub" and mainly liaises with regional university networks and regional higher education agencies and institutions based in Bangkok. It also can have a satellite office in "Chiang Mai-Vientiane hub" (footnote 23).

Funding: The GMRU can be established as an international NGO with funding from donor agencies, philanthropic foundations, and/or research grants and with staffing by like-minded international and national experts. The GMRU should be able to charge fees from the users of its services such as leadership development programs, teaching support, faculty development, and cross-border distance learning, to increase financial sustainability.

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[24] For more details, see the websites of the EUI (http://www.eui.eu/Home.aspx) and the EAUI (http://www.waseda.jp/gsaps/eaui/introduction/greeting_en.html).

[25] The secretariat function of the "GMS University Consortium" would remain at SEAMEO-RIHED as an incubator for the medium term, depending on the actual funding situation of the GMRU.

Table 8.4 Greater Mekong Regional University (GMRU): a proposal

| Items	Descriptions
Mission and mandate	To help improve the quality of universities in GMS by linking with existing and new higher education networks and foreign universities
	To help harmonize higher education in GMS by facilitating development of an acceptable platform in areas such as quality assurance, student exchange, credit transfer, research collaboration, etc.
Main activities	University president/rector forum
	Leadership development programs in higher education
	High-level dialogue on strengthening internal and external QA systems
	Building a common credit transfer system
	Teaching support, research capacity building, and faculty development (on-site and distance learning mode)
	Support for cross-border delivery of instruction
	Information clearing house (database, matching partners, etc.)
Funding and staffing	*International NGO* with funding from donor agencies, philanthropic foundations, and/or research grants and with staffing by like-minded international and national experts
Location	*Main office*: Bangkok ("Bangkok hub")
	Satellite office: Chiang Mai ("Chiang Mai-Vientiane hub")
Timeframe (Indicative)	2012: GMS HRD Strategic Framework and Action Plan (2009–2012) including "GMS Higher Education Harmonization and Networking (Phase 1)"
	2013: GMS HRD Strategic Framework and Action Plan (2013–2017) including "GMS Higher Education Harmonization and Networking (Phase 2)"
	2014: Launch of GMS University Consortium
	2017: Launch of Greater Mekong Regional University
	2020: Linkage with ASEAN University

Source: Author

Concluding Remarks

Higher education harmonization and networking in the GMS is a necessary step to harmonize between higher education in East and Southeast Asia. Most universities in GMS countries, especially CLM, need to upgrade their standards and hence to narrow gaps with universities in East Asian and middle-income ASEAN countries. Without strengthening capacity in the QA system in CLM and building a common CTS among universities in the GMS, any further harmonization with universities in East Asian and middle-income ASEAN countries would not be realistic. It is important to implement "GMS Higher Education and Networking (Phase 2)" which is approved by ADB, in collaboration with AUN, SEAMEO-RIHED, other regional agencies, and higher education institutions. Harmonization and university networking in the GMS would be complemented and reinforced by the functions of the proposed GMRU. The SEAMEO College would also contribute to regional policy making including higher education harmonization. These efforts will

accelerate the process of building the ASEAN Community from 2015, by narrowing development gaps within the GMS and between the GMS and the rest of ASEAN.

Appendix 1: Main Regional, Intraregional, and Subregional Forums/Institutions and Higher Education Networks in East and Southeast Asia
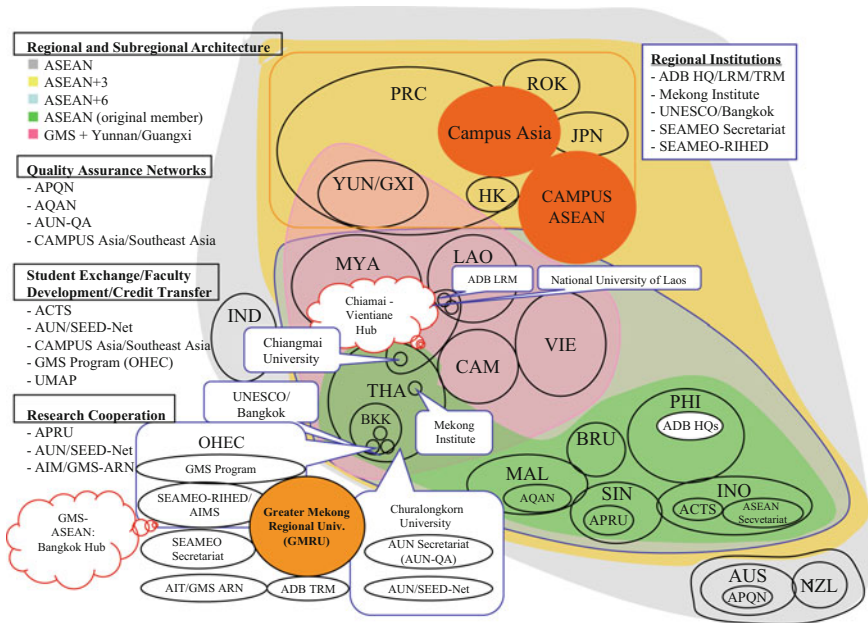
Source: Author (with assistance from Minori Yamada)

Abbreviations

A. Higher education harmonization and networking (institutions and networks)

ACTS = ASEAN Credit Transfer System, ADB HQs = Asian Development Bank Headquarters, ADB LRM = ADB Lao Resident Mission, ADB TRM = ADB Thai Resident Mission, AIT/GMS ARN = Asian Institute of Technology/ GMS Academic and Research Network, APQN = Asia Pacific Quality Network, AQAN = ASEAN Quality Assurance Network, APRU = Association of Pacific Rim Universities, AUN-QA = ASEAN University Network-Quality Assurance, AUN/SEED-Net = AUN/Southeast Asia Engineering Education Development Network, CAMPUS Asia/ASEAN = Collective Action for Mobility Program of University Students in Asia, and ASEAN, OHEC = Office of Higher Education

Commission, UMAP = University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific, UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, SEAMEO secretariat = Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organizations Secretariat, SEAMEO RIHED = SEAMEO Regional Center for Higher Education and Development

B. Regional and subregional frameworks, countries, and locations

ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, BKK = Bangkok, BRU = Brunei Darussalam, GMS = Greater Mekong Subregion, CAM = Cambodia, HK = Hong Kong, IND = India, INO = Indonesia, JPN = Japan, MYA = Myanmar, LAO = Lao People's Democratic Republic, PHI = Philippines, PRC = People's Republic of China, ROK = Republic of Korea, SIN = Singapore, THA = Thailand, VIE = Vietnam, YUN/GXI = Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

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