



Southeast Asian
Ministers of Education
Organization



SEA-PLM

Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics



In cooperation with UNESCO - United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)

SEA-PLM 2019: Discussing New Evidence on Learning | Policy Roundtable: Girls' and boys' Learning (Virtual)

**Thursday 23 September 2021
09.30 – 11.30
(Bangkok time)**



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SEA-PLM 2019: Discussing New Evidence on Learning Policy Roundtable: Girls' and Boys' Learning (Virtual)

Thursday, 23 September 2021

From 09:30 to 11:30 hrs (Bangkok time, GMT+7)

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Executive Summary

As Southeast Asian countries continue to respond to the demands of education during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and plan sustainable system and school level policies and practices for addressing the learning crisis, it is more critical than ever for the policymakers to understand the inequities in learning that were driving the learning crisis before the pandemic and reflect on new evidence to improve future.

The Secretariat of Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) programme, co-chaired by Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) and UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and Pacific (UNICEF EAPRO) in cooperation with the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) organised a policy roundtable discussion on girls' and boys' learning in Southeast Asia across basic education.

The virtual policy roundtable was attended by 70 participants who are education officers, researchers, specialists from SEAMEO Member Countries, SEAMEO Centres, as well as partner organisations including Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE), United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), UNICEF country offices, UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education and Aide et Action International, Cambodia.

As part of the discussion, the SEA-PLM Secretariat launched the first SEA-PLM 2019 regional secondary analysis report - SEA-PLM 2019 latest evidence in basic education: *Boys' and Girls' Learning in 6 Southeast Asian Countries*. The report delves deeper into the SEA-PLM data to look at important patterns and inequities between girls' and boys' learning. Quantitative methods were used to examine learning and context disparities between boys and girls, and their differential effects in the participating countries. It examines the differences between gender in various factors, namely Low-performing and high-performing students, socioeconomic background and school location and school experiences, attitudes towards school, and household responsibilities.

Comprehensive findings from the Secondary Analysis were provided with comments and insights from distinguished experts from KICE and UNGEI.

The discussion highlighted the reflection of five SEA-PLM participating countries including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam on the learning trends of girls and boys as well as the policy implications in accordance with the new evidence from SEA-PLM 2019 results. Two SEAMEO Member Countries, namely Brunei Darussalam and Timor-Leste also shared country experiences in developing gender policies and improving equity in learning for girls and boys.

The policy webinar extended our effort in using SEA-PLM 2019 results for paving the way towards the more inclusive and better quality of education for all children by providing findings for developing evidence-based policy to ensure that countries can actively develop, implement, monitor, and report the quality of learning at the national level.

Welcome Remarks



Dr Ethel Agnes Pascua Valenzuela
Director, SEAMEO Secretariat, Thailand

As the Co-Chair of SEA-PLM Secretariat, Dr Ethel Agnes Pascua Valenzuela welcomed all esteemed co-organisers, experts, panelists and participants to the policy roundtable discussion on girls' and boys' learning in Southeast Asia across basic education.

The policy roundtable started with the Overview of New SEA-PLM Evidence: Girls' and Boys' Learning by the SEA-PLM Secretariat.

Dr Valenzuela expressed her appreciation to distinguished experts from partner organisations: KICE, OECD, UNGEI for comprehensive comments and providing insights on findings from the Secondary Analysis, based on the new SEA-PLM Evidence on Girls' and Boys' Learning. Dr Valenzuela expressed her appreciation to the SEAMEO Member Countries for the continuing support SEA-PLM programme with emphasised that the highlight of the policy roundtable is the meaningful reflection from distinguished speakers representing the Ministries of Education from either SEA-PLM participating countries and non-participating countries on gender policy implications. Additionally, Dr Valenzuela underlined that from the plenary discussion on how the SEA-PLM community, SEA-PLM Secretariat can tackle and learn from the challenges addressed in the report and continue to support better explicit policies and practices in basic education for promoting quality school learning environments for boys and girls.

SEA-PLM Secretariat has been learning and providing from the commitments and suggestions to making a systemic change to primary learning development. Developing quality education is central to SEA-PLM as the programme has not only been designed for countries to participate in the assessment but also to build the capacity of human resources to improve primary learning assessment systems.

Particularly, by providing findings for developing evidence-based policy, Dr Valenzuela highlighted that SEA-PLM 2019 results would allow us to address challenges to children's learning and assessment systems development. It will also provide a strong foundation for ensuring the right to education quality as enshrined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Quality Education.

She expressed her sincere appreciation to all distinguished experts from partner organisations and all national representatives including SEA-PLM technical teams for attending the policy discussion, many of whom have embarked on this SEA-PLM journey from the very beginning of its inception phase up to now.

Overview of new SEA-PLM evidence: Girls' and Boys' Learning



Mr Antoine Marivin, SEA-PLM Manager, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF EAPRO), shared some insights and implications for systems' and schools' level policies and practices to reduce boys and girls disparities from the first SEA-PLM 2019 regional secondary analysis report: latest evidence in basic education, boys' and girls' learning in 6 Southeast Asian countries. He mentioned that the SEA-PLM Secretariat encouraged stakeholders at various levels to voice decision-makers and practitioners while not forgetting boys and girls' opinions, perceptions, and beliefs. Better empowering children may boost the system and school policy accountability and changes for reducing learning disparities over time between boys and girls. The report explored the learning performances between and amongst boys and girls in the 6 participating countries in 3 areas of interest, a summary of the key findings is shared below.

1. Low-performing and high-performing boys and girls;

In the majority of the countries, low-performing boys outnumbered girls and high-performing girls outnumbered boys in all 3 learning domains. In writing, a high level of disparities between boys and girls were observed across all countries among low performing and high performing children. This difference, which is likely linked to the greater complexity of tasks in the writing domain, may signify that girls outperform boys on productive tasks. Boys on average might have more difficulty producing an original response than girls regardless of the task difficulty and the content domain.

2. Boys and girls socio-economic background and performances;

On average in the 6 participating countries, when boys and girls come from similar SES (socio-economic status) backgrounds, girls outperform boys in reading, mathematics, and writing. While comparing the level of differences, disadvantaged boys or girls were far below advantaged boys or girls - equivalent to more than one nay almost 2 proficiency levels depending on countries. This issue goes beyond boys and girls and affects generations of boys and girls in all countries.

3. Boys and girls differential in school experiences, attitudes towards school, and household responsibilities.

Boys and girls from the same socioeconomic background, have on average, an equal probability of attending preschool in previous years of education in 4 out of the 6 countries. Boys were, on average, more likely than girls to report having repeated a grade at least once in primary education, even when Grade 5 learning performance was constant among students. On average among countries, parents had the same level of expectation regarding access to university whether their child was a boy or a girl. In 4 out of the 6 countries, differences were observed between girls' and boys' levels of interest in global citizenship education topics as captured by SEA-PLM 2019 questions. Regular engagement in outside-school household responsibilities, such

as house chores and physical work was very likely to be related to sex in most countries, even when controlling for socioeconomic status. SEA-PLM 2019 data revealed few significant, large and constant differential effects of background effects differential learning scores when comparing boys and girls across the 6 countries. When gender differences exist, they are related to specific variables, gender or countries. However, when boys and girls are combined in the same analysis, some variables remain good predictors of children's success or failure, as reported in the main regional report as preschool attendance and positive attitude toward learning and schools.

The report and appendices are published on the SEA-PLM website. (www.seaplm.org)

Panel 1: Expert Commentary on findings from Secondary Analysis



Professor Tae-Joong Gahng, President, Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE), presented his comments on findings from secondary analysis with three main parts 1) overall impression of SEAPLM studies 2) selection biases and 3) policy implications.

Firstly, he stated that girls outperform boys on average in schools, especially at the secondary school level, and as obtained from the current findings, the primary school level. Based on the previous findings on gender gaps, the interesting point is that the dominance of female students seems to be more eminent in SEA-PLM study than in other international studies. In Mathematics and sciences, boys often achieve higher learning outcomes than girls and girls outperform boys in language areas.

Secondly, he shared his thoughts about this study. For the Possibility of Selection Biases, he mentioned that sampling of boys and girls might not be equivalent. Based on the fact that girls' attitudes to a school or school experience are consistently more positive than boys'. Therefore, the girls' sample was more likely from the family of valuing education than boys. He also stated that there might be different results if the girls' and boys' achievements are compared with narrow intervals. He also suggested that writing may not be simply more complex cognitive tasks. The gap in writing may only be an aspect of a general phenomenon of excellence in a language only. He also mentioned the assumption of the causality between "context" variables and achievement which might need to be verified.

For further discussion, he suggested having a closer review of the sampling and re-examine the data and analysis before making the conclusions about the gender gap in achievement. In addition, the measurements based on children's responses may need to be validated by a more rigorous method. Many previous studies have shown that children may not be knowledgeable enough of the status of their families and parents, even their teachers. Previous studies also indicate that the core variables included in the SEA-PLM study might not be sufficient and we might get different findings if we put more variables.

He concluded that statistical significance or the absolute size of the gap does not ensure the existence or non-existence of equity. We may need to pay attention to qualitative differences as well as quantitative ones and overall, we still need to study further into the question of what to discover differences between girls and boys.

Lastly, he emphasised that the more accurate answers we get about the gender gap, the more policies will be able to imply.



Ms Jenelle Babb, Regional Advisor, Education for Health and Wellbeing Section for Inclusive, Quality Education, UNESCO, Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, representing United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), shared about policies and the implications of these policy approaches for girls. She mentioned the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Reports 2018 including the title "Achieving gender equality in education: Don't forget the boys" to look at the effect of gender norms on boys schooling, in this case at the secondary level and amongst those from the poorest families. The GEM Paper notes that boys' lower attainments or learning achievements are often linked to social disadvantage, standing for poverty that places demands on them to search for work, disaffection with school, and a sense of not belonging to the school community.

She observed that in the SEA-PLM secondary analysis, in three of the six countries, girls have more positive attitudes of envoys to school, with factors analysed in relation to the learning domains between boys and girls. The analysis also concludes that on average in the six participating countries, girls outperform boys in reading even though they come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

She stated that there is a need for further research that incorporates other contextual variables impacting school experience, school connectedness, and learning performance. She emphasised how to cross-reference and triangulate the findings of the SEA-PLM with other data sources that can help further investigating its results, especially at the country level, in consideration of both qualitative and quantitative data sources.

She also noted the factors of labor markets and school community. The global literature identifies several policies to address the voice of those under performance in education, which includes laying a foundation for learning through early childhood care and education, developing the reading skills of boys through care learning support.

She addressed the importance of training teachers on gender-response pedagogy based on the principle of gender quality and teachers need to be consistent, fair, and supportive. Teaching and learning strategies should be enhanced to focus on transferable skills, foster active learning, boost individual mentoring and target setting as these have been shown to have positive effects on both boys' and girls' educational outcomes. These strategies can be effective if implemented within a school environment that promotes respect and cooperation. All teachers should be prepared to teach all students. Teachers need more training on inclusive approaches as a core element of teacher education. Teachers' exceptions about the capacities of their male and female students can influence students' performance; thus, teachers should apply high exceptions of both boys and girls. Teachers should help both boys and girls to increase their self-confidence in order to be able to perform at their best.

Learning performance can also be enhanced by adopting a whole school approach that creates an inclusive school culture. Extra curricula which focus on gender equality issues are an important space where girls and boys can discuss and challenge gender norms and stereotypes including those associated with gender-based violence and school progression. We need approaches to ensure that girls and boys have the opportunity to learn

and achieving gender equality in education. Education sector plans should be supported by accompanying policies to build systems that promote gender equality. National curricula should include gender-responsive context and concepts so that girls and boys can learn about gender equality at all levels in order to change their attitudes, values, and behaviours.

She concluded her presentation with differentiated learning and physician's education. The teacher education workforce needs sufficient well-trained male and female teachers in all subjects areas and at all levels of education and more female teachers are needed in this. Learning can also be fostered through the provision of school meals, and facilitates in schools, including single-sex toilets, mental hygiene management facilities, and programmes to adjust related gender-based violence, as well as the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education that teaches girls and boys to be safe and healthy, how to protect themselves and how to respect each other.

Panel 2: SEA-PLM Country Reflections



Mr Ung Chinna, Director, Education Quality Assurance Department (EQAD), Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Cambodia, addressed that as reflected in the results of SEA-PLM 2019, Cambodian girls' learning achievement outperformed boys' in reading, writing, and mathematics.

He highlighted some inter-related issues including attendance rate of pre-school education, grade repetition rate among boys and girls, variation in student age, parental engagement with schooling, child-friendly schools (CFS) versus basic and medium level schools, and classroom climate created by teachers.

Based on the SEA-PLM 2019 results, the Minister of Education, Youth and Sport, Cambodia had issued 10 policy responses to optimise as well as strengthen the existing activities and the new activities with the concrete policies. The relevant departments, such as the Department of Primary Education (DPE) and the Department of Curriculum Development (DCD), are starting to improve and strengthen policy and the existing activities. For example, DPE invited EQAD to share the regional results and Cambodia snapshot of findings with their department and line-offices across 25 provinces.

He also suggested approaches are taken to increase learning support for low-performed boys and girls toward improvement in their learning equality: encouraging pre and post-test for low-performed students, promoting pre-school, strengthening the packages of early grade reading and mathematics, reinforcing CFS implementation, efficient school community strategy with the engagement of parents, communities and local authorities in school management. Some measures for improving the quality of reading and writing comprehension are also introduced: the inclusion of dictation, short essay writing, and composition in the curriculum at the primary level.



Mr Kadam Vongdeuane, Acting Director, Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation (CERE), Research Institute for Educational Sciences (RIES), Ministry of Education and Sports, Lao PDR, shared that the differences between low-performing boys and girls reflected in the results of SEA-PLM 2019 are not significant in reading and mathematics in the case of Lao PDR, except in writing domain where the low-performing boys outnumber girls which are also observed across all participating countries

He highlighted that in the high-performing group of boys and girls, the differences between boys and girls are also not significant in all three domains. He addressed the big challenge for Lao PDR is how to reduce the overall percentage of low-performing students and support them to reach the minimum abilities and skills by completing the complex cognitive task in three domains.

He agreed with the findings of the secondary analysis and suggested the concrete policy implication, especially the recommended consideration in both overall context and the differences between boys and girls to increase

the number of students reaching the high level of proficiency with the parity of learners, and continuing investments in developing the higher cognitive skills of students in primary education by ensuring the effectiveness of materials, teaching and learning activities.

He concluded his presentation with the recommendations on approaches taken to address the learning challenges of girls and boys in basic education as follows:

- Community and family engagement in their children's learning at school is one of the key factors associated with the parity in school enrolment and better learning outcome of their children; and
- Improving the quality environment of the school and providing a good toilet and sanitation for both boys and girls at school equally can also help to reduce the gap between the boys and girls performance.



Dr Nor Saidatul Rajeah Binti Zamzam Amin, Deputy Director (Research and Evaluation), Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education, Malaysia, discussed Malaysian students' performance in SEA-PLM 2019 in comparison to their performance in TIMSS and PISA with a highlight on the similarities and differences. As shown in the findings of the SEA-PLM 2019, the gap between boys and girls in Malaysia among high and low performers is wide in all domains, the widest gap is in the writing domain where girls outperform boys by 20%. The gap in performance by gender in TIMSS 2019 and PISA 2018 were similar to SEA-PLM 2019, in which girls perform better than the boy in reading and mathematics at the secondary level. However, after comparing and considering all three assessments, it can be concluded that the difference by gender in mathematics among Malaysian students is not significant and students' performance by gender tends to improve as they approach secondary level.

She stated that both boys and girls enjoy equal opportunities and access to education at all levels from pre-school to secondary school in Malaysia. All initiatives and efforts by the Ministry of Education place emphasis on three major areas which are access, equity, and quality in education to prepare both girls and boys for the challenges of the future. The Gender Parity Index of Malaysia over the period 2016 – 2020 indicates the trend of equal rate of attendance at pre schools and secondary schools for boys and girls in 2019 and 2020.

She introduced five Policy Implications that Malaysia further addressed to improve students' performance and skills:

1. Addressing the low performers by reviewing pre-school and primary education to improve students' literacy and numeracy, exploring different learning methods to suit the need of students and the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Resources: Although Malaysia is reported by PISA to have equal resource distribution to all students, there is a need to review the quality of resources provided and how resources are optimised.

3. Curriculum is designed to emphasise 21st-century skills including communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking.
4. Assessment will be developed with higher cognitive skill test items across all subjects.
5. Teacher's professional development is promoted to provide a sound foundation in subject content knowledge and pedagogical skills.
6. She also briefed about Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013 – 2025) which demonstrates the commitment of Malaysia to fulfill the potential of students in the Malaysian education system via long-term policy direction. Students will all be equipped with the tools that they need to unlock their future, regardless of their genders, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background.



Ms Gretchen G Cordero, Chief Education Programme Specialist, Education Research Division, Department of Education, Philippines, informed that girls outperform boys in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics literacies in the Philippines according to the result of SEA-PLM 2019.

She shared some perceived reasons for the higher performance of girls compared to boys, including the more economic pressure on boys in economically disadvantaged families which forces them to withdraw from schools for employment, a higher percentage of female teachers in the Philippines making teaching strategies more applicable for girls than boys, gender bias in favor of girls, traditional Philippines' culture keeping girls at home with more focus and time on study, parents' tendency to rely more on their daughters during old age.

She presented the significant implications for policy that the nature of the school environment itself is not gender-neutral, and stereotypes or gender biases impede boys' potential and achievements. Therefore, programmes and activities appear to actually put boys at an educational disadvantage as gender-neutral programmes that are being employed favors girls more than boys. Integration of gender-sensitive teaching strategies remains to be a challenge among educators. She suggested that the Philippines needs to have a more in-depth study especially in the classroom setting, which will enable teachers and educators to appropriately develop teaching-learning strategies to fully achieve its applicability, effectiveness, and efficiency in improving academic outcomes.

She ended her presentation by recommending some actions that can be taken:

- Education leaders must look *beyond theories* and assess how existing social trends, patterns, norms, and standards of programmes/activities affect the learning conditions of both genders.
- By identifying and understanding the potential results, school managers and educators can better design programmes and activities that are appropriate to both boys and girls, and not making one gender get more or less benefit.

- Conducting empirical and analytical researches, developing evidence-based strategies, and establishing policy tools to determine and address the varying issues and concerns that hinder academic performance and gender equality.
- Undertaking more studies on the gender gap issue from the lens of the educational development of Filipino boys who are quite placed at disadvantaged.
- Providing interventions to develop appropriate attitudes, standards, and practices to eliminate unfair gender biases that hinder children's right to quality education.
- Conducting a systematic study of the effects of female teacher dominance of Filipino classrooms and other aspects of the school and class environment that might unintentionally and adversely influence the boys' educational performance.
- Promoting gender-based differentiated instruction (GBDI) and/or integrating gender-responsive teaching approaches in the classroom to effectively teach and meet learners' specific needs based on gender, intelligence, interest, and learning style.



Mr Phong Hoang, Expert, Centre for Educational Quality Evaluation, Department of Quality Management, Ministry of Education and Training, Vietnam, highlighted that there is no difference between Vietnamese boys and girls in Mathematics and there is a minor gap in Reading. However, girls outperform boys significantly in writing. He elaborated on the results in three domains of Vietnamese students by gender with the variation of school location, socioeconomic status, and parents' academic level. He noted some different findings from Vietnam that:

- There is no difference between boys and girls with the results of Mathematics and Reading, except in the Writing domain.
- There is no difference between boys' and girls' academic results in urban and rural areas, but a big gap in urban and remote areas.
- There is a big difference in learning outcomes between average and wealthy families in all three domains, which are much higher than those from poor families.
- Parents' academic level has a big impact on students' learning.

For policy implications, he stressed the importance of developing the economy of the country to improve the learning and teaching conditions, living conditions for families, and investing more in compulsory educational background development for Vietnamese citizens to improve parents' academic level and mindset. He also emphasised providing support to improve living and learning conditions with more school materials for students in remote areas, and those who have disadvantaged situations.

Plenary Discussion 1



The plenary discussion is chaired by **Ms Erin Tanner**, Education Specialist, UNICEF EAPRO, and is open for questions from participants to panelists.

A representative from the Ministry of Education of Malaysia requested Cambodia to share further on how the country strengthened the programme of early grade reading.

Mr Ung Chinna, Director, Education Quality Assurance Department (EQAD), Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Cambodia, responded that early grade reading and mathematics are under the Department of Primary Education (DPE) while EQAD is responsible for the assessment of all grades. According to the report from DPE, Cambodia is trying to conduct a pile of interventions in early grade reading and mathematics in some provinces. EQAD has a plan to conduct the assessment in this aspect as well which has been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He emphasised that early grade reading in Cambodia is different from other countries due to the local language which requires a traditional pedagogical approach.

Dr Faryal Khan, Head of Quality Education Team, UNESCO, Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, mentioned that the focus of the previous discussion on new evidence in learning is proficiency in cognitive domains. She inquired how SEA-PLM 2019 defines learning and if the programme includes skills, values, and competencies in the non-cognitive domain or considers including non-cognitive domain in the future since it is interesting to see the differences between boys and girls learning in the non-cognitive domain.

Mr Savy Lach, Deputy CEO, Aide et Action International, Cambodia highlighted that the evaluation mainly focuses on the three dimensions (reading, writing, and math and inquired about including other social dimensions which are crucial, especially in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, for resilience.

On behalf of the SEA-PLM Secretariat, **Mr Antoine Marivin**, SEA-PLM Manager, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF EAPRO), responded that the SEA-PLM 2019 was not originally designed to cover the non-cognitive domains. However, based on the inputs today, the SEA-PLM Secretariat might consider capturing the other social (non-cognitive) domains in the next cycle of the SEA-PLM programme. There will be a chance to explore some possibilities from the survey conducted to be included in data collection. However, it is important to consider the comparative methodology at the national and international levels.

Panel 3: Country Experience in Developing Gender Policies



Mr Zainal Abidin Hj Kepli, Acting Director of Schools, Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam, presented about the education system in Brunei Darussalam. Ministry of Education of Brunei Darussalam has set out its mission “to deliver holistic education to achieve the fullest potential for all”; with its vision, “Quality Education, Dynamic Nation” in “The Strategic Plan 2018-2023”. Brunei Darussalam's education aims to nurture every child to help all students to discover, maximise their talent and develop a passion for life-long learning.

He introduced the Compulsory Education Act which has been enacted and enforced since 2017 with two types; a) general education which consists of pre-school to upper secondary or vocational and technical education; and b) religious schools where Muslim students attend. Brunei Darussalam provides accommodation including meals for those who do not attend schools and make sure that no one is left behind.

He stated that Brunei Darussalam provides equal opportunities for education for all. In Brunei Darussalam, female is doing better than male in education, which be seen in the enrolment into the pre-university programme and higher education.

He also shared the statistics of male and female students in the government sector and private sector, in which female students outperform males in higher education and sixth form education while male students outperform females in Vocational-Technical Education.

He concluded his presentation that female students are doing better not only in higher education but also in other education systems. Brunei Darussalam's strategy for policy implementation is to provide a quality learning support programme focusing on literacy and numeracy.



Mr Afonso Soares, Director of Planning and Inclusiveness, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Timor-Leste (MoEYS), reported that the Timor-Leste Gender Equality Programme has been implemented by MoEYS. He stated that the Legal framework was set up to protect and to empower gender equality in Timor-Leste as well as to prevent violence against the gender.

According to the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor Leste (RDTL) Article 16 and 17, the Timor-Leste government committed to promoting gender equality. Article 16 in the Constitution RDTL reveals that “all people are the same in front of the law. There will be no discrimination against anyone in the colors, race, villages, social statutes or economic, education and condition of physic or mental. Article 17 also reveals on “men and women have the same obligation in all areas in the family, politic, economic, social and culture”. The national strategic development plan also adopts a gender integration approach as a strategy to achieve gender equality by 2030.

He mentioned that MoEYS implements the programme of PAN-GBV 2017-2021/PAN-VBG 2017-2021 recognise the importance of investing in the endeavor of preventing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) to promote gender equality between girls and boys. Timor-Leste ratified the convention of CEDAQ 2002 and reaffirmed the commitment on article 17 to eliminate the discrimination of women in all aspects from education up to professional life.

Timor-Leste provides a balance between men and women to have the same right and opportunity to access and benefit from all strategic programme implementation. To gain the principle of gender equality, everyone has the same fundamental right to enjoy their life with dignity and to preserve the integrity of life both physically and mentally.

Mr Afonso stressed that it is very important for all teachers to understand and encourage gender equality by providing the same rights to all children in the school environment and eliminating all forms of discrimination for students. Timor-Leste is determined to empower and protect all from sexual harassment practices and other violence in public and private places. This is aligning with the aim that people of all genders can have access to jobs of good quality in alignment with the United Nations' Sustainability Development Goals (SDG).

He concluded that the MoEYS implements gender awareness at the secondary schools' level based on the action planning stipulated. The provided gender training content includes gender equality and equity, prevention of GBV and sexual harassment, promotion of health reproduction, and inclusive education.

With the aim to transform students with positive attitudes, behavior, and social forms, teachers should create a secure learning environment in schools and parents should develop a better understanding within the family. He recommended the authorities to create a good political environment, clear guidance on violence against women and girls in the school with more support provided to the legal framework.

Plenary Discussion 2



The plenary discussion is chaired by **Ms Erin Tanner**, Education Specialist, UNICEF EAPRO, to address the inquiries from all panelists and participants.

Mr Ung Chinna, Director, Education Quality Assurance Department (EQAD), Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Cambodia, inquired how Vietnam can maintain the same quality of education for both genders.

Mr Phong Hoang, Expert, Centre for Educational Quality Evaluation, Department of Quality Management, Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), Vietnam, responded that MoET implements many policies on equality on learning between boys and girls but he would like to highlight three points as shown below:

1. Government and MoET's policies on ensuring learning equality for genders in schools, particularly for pre-school aged children, who are encouraged to fully attend pre-school;
2. Family learning tradition by providing support to both genders, particularly for those in disadvantaged settings; and
3. Girls' characteristics, particularly their diligence, leading to their better performance.

Ms Teresita Felipe, Education Specialist, UNICEF, Philippines, inquired how Malaysia delivers to meet the needs of boys and girls within the six attributes of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013 – 2025).

Dr Nor Saidatul Rajeah Binti Zamzam Amin, Deputy Director (Research and Evaluation), Educational Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education, Malaysia highlighted that girls and boys are treated equally in Malaysia. In all plans and initiatives implemented from the Blueprint, there are no specific activities for boys or girls. Instead, the focus is to fulfil the educational needs of both boys and girls without specific differentiation in the need of each gender. Both boys and girls are provided with equal support in financial, technological, instructional, and other aspects. In terms of curriculum, there is no content designed specifically for different genders and the educational needs of both genders are equally considered.

Ms Akina Ueno, Education Officer, UNICEF, Lao PDR, inquired if any country has evidence or examples of positive effects of teacher training on gender sensitivity on learning outcomes. She also shared a paper that might be useful for connecting with most of the findings, country experiences, approaches, and policy recommendations of the policy roundtable:

<https://negmap.bangkok.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Thematic-review-gender-equity-equality-and-LA.pdf> .

Due to time constraints, no evidence and example were shared in response to the question.

Ms Jenelle Babb, Regional Advisor, Education for Health and Wellbeing Section for Inclusive, Quality Education, UNESCO, Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, representing United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), highlighted that the implementation of curriculum-based programmes like Connect with Respect has demonstrated very positive and promising changes in terms of reducing peer violence among learners, between teacher and learners

and creating more respectful school relationships. It would be useful to add the dimension of any gendered changes in learning outcomes.

Mr Antoine Marivin, SEA-PLM Manager, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF EAPRO), concluded that the questions reflected the ideas for upcoming policy roundtable. As part of the new SEA-PLM programme, Pillar 2 - Strengthen collaboration and exchange to improve the system and school-level policy and practice in basic education through SEA-PLM surveys and other studies, SEA-PLM Secretariat will take advantage of this experience to better map, conceptualise and track regional and national challenges and innovation for boys and girls in basic education.

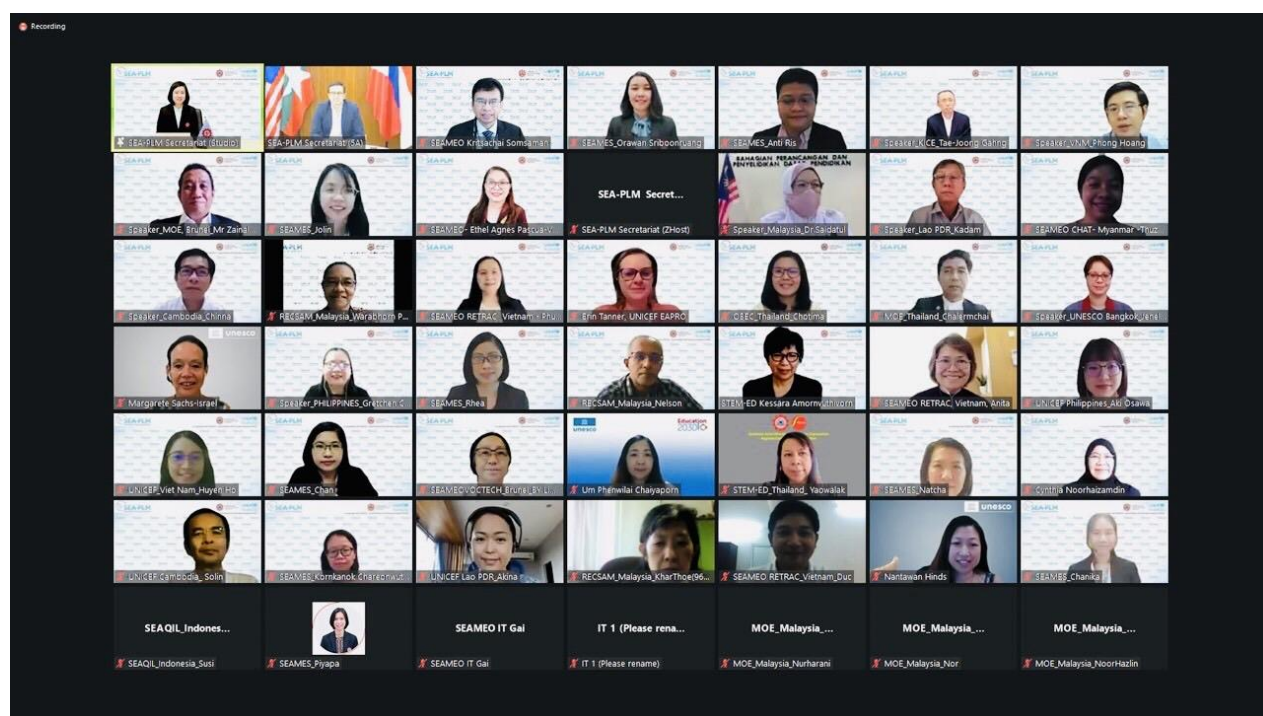
Closing Remarks

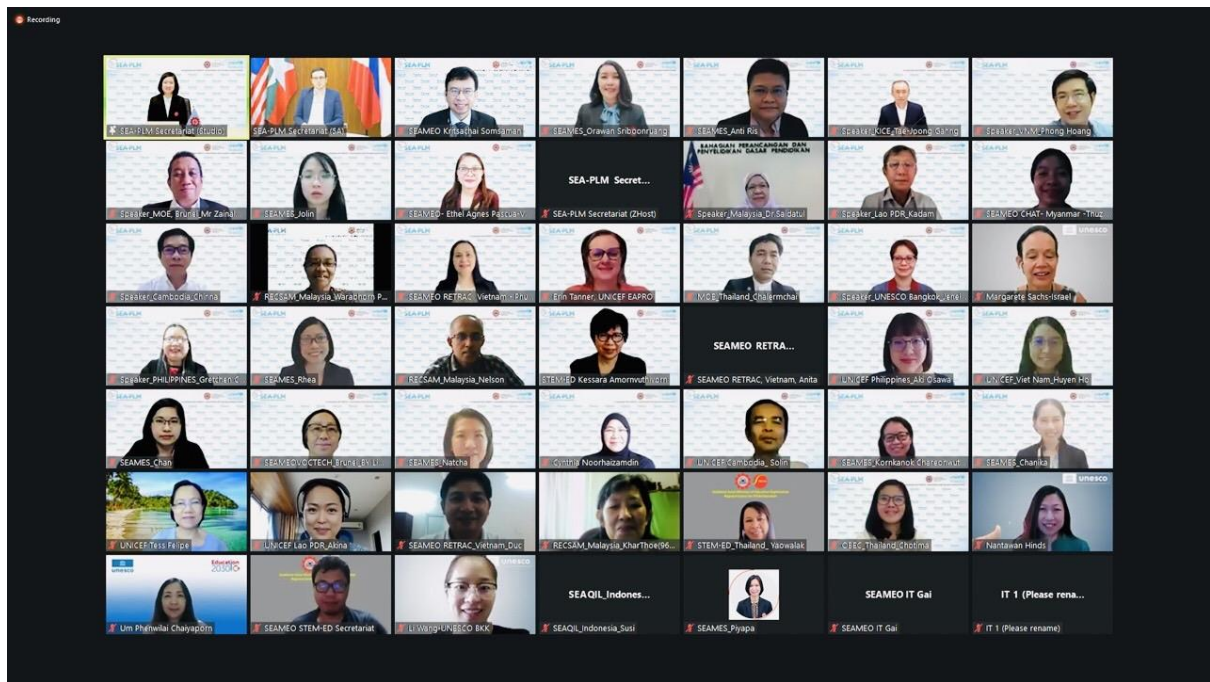


Ms Erin Tanner, Education Specialist, UNICEF EAPRO, expressed appreciation for the attendance and contribution of all experts, speakers, and participants to the rich policy discussion. On behalf of the SEA-PLM Secretariat, she shared three take-away points of the roundtable:

1. In light of the learning loss post-COVID-19 pandemic due to school closure, it is now more important than ever to invest in education policies, especially for low-performing children, in response to the specific needs of boys and girls. It is critical for schools to reopen and recover from the learning loss toward a better future.
2. There are quite a few recent researches on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which reinforces the findings of SEA-PLM 2019 that we need more support for boys and girls in education. More research is needed to understand the complexity of the learning patterns of boys and girls. Many countries have conducted some researches and shared various interesting findings in the discussion. The SEA-PLM Secretariat would like to encourage participating countries to continue this researches at the national level and analyse further in the country's dataset to find out why boys fall behind girls, why girls may face some specific challenges that may not appear in the learning outcome data. As SEA-PLM findings and datasets are very rich, the more we use them, the more our policies truly benefit.
3. UNICEF headquarter approved the new Global Gender Action Plan 2022 – 2025. UNICEF aims to continue to support countries to make education systems more gender response and hope we can continue working together to implement the action plan and learn further from our findings.

Group Photo







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