Towards Development of Competency Standards of Agricultural Workers in Selected ASEAN Countries

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW
Agriculture is the backbone of most Southeast Asian economies --- about 450 million people depend on it for livelihood. Thus, in more than half of the ASEAN Member States (AMS), agriculture has been declared as a development priority as it plays a critical role in food and nutrition security and poverty alleviation. Agriculture remains to be the predominant provider of job opportunities in most AMS. Developing the competencies of agricultural workers is therefore essential in raising agricultural productivity to adopt innovative farming processes and technologies, particularly with the aim of upgrading and greening the sector.

The on-going ASEAN economic integration is expected to promote freer mobility of skilled workers within the region. Labor mobility therefore is likely to continue to increase, dominated by low- and middle-level skilled workers particularly from the agriculture sector. As pointed out by the 2014 Asian Development Bank (ADB)-International Labour Organization (ILO) Study, skills recognition under multilateral frameworks could promote a more sustainable and legitimate mode of managing labor mobility while offering benefits for both sending and receiving AMS. There is therefore a need to focus efforts on enabling agricultural workers to have equitable access to high quality learning and skills recognition that make them competitive in the growing and changing ASEAN labor markets.

RATIONALE
In 2010, the ASEAN Leaders enunciated their commitment to “develop national skills frameworks in the AMS through sharing of experiences and best practices as a strategy to strengthen human resource development and management and to enable member states to raise their respective levels of skills standards, as an incremental approach towards an ASEAN skills recognition framework” (ASEAN 2010).

During the Roundtable Meeting at the Second High Officials Meeting (HOM) on Southeast Asia – Technical Vocational Education and Training (SEA-TVET) held on 12-14 May 2016 in Bali, Indonesia, it was agreed that a regional and national qualification reference framework and assurance framework are necessary to harmonize and internationalize TVET in Southeast Asia. This includes developing competency standards for various TVET skills among the AMS including those in agriculture, which ironically compared to other sectors, have not been given enough attention and priority.

The SEAMEO Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA), mandated to promote agricultural and rural development in Southeast Asia, has been tasked by SEAMEO to assist in developing competency standards for agricultural workers in Southeast Asia as part of its efforts to promote TVET under its education priorities in the region.

A review of literature reveals that in 2016, the ILO developed, in consultation with governments and employers, Regional Model Competency Standards (RMCS) for major industries including agriculture and aquaculture. The RMCS is designed to serve as regional reference for the AMS that are in the process of developing their national competency standards or reviewing their existing standards. However, it remains unclear how individual AMS are faring, and where they are in their efforts to develop and administer their national competency standards for agricultural workers.

More recently, a document titled ASEAN Guiding Principles for Quality Assurance and Recognition of Competency Certification Systems (Bateman 2016), was presented and agreed upon during the Twenty-Fourth ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting (24th ALMM) on 15 May 2016 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) is a regional common reference framework, which enables comparisons of qualifications across countries.
ABOUT SEARCA

The Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) is one of the 21 regional centers of excellence of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO). Founded on 27 November 1966, SEARCA is mandated to strengthen institutional capacities in agricultural and rural development in Southeast Asia through graduate scholarship, research and development, and knowledge management. It serves 11 SEAMEO member countries, namely: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. SEARCA is hosted by the Government of the Philippines on the campus of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) in Laguna, Philippines. It is supported by donations from SEAMEO member and associate member states, other governments, and various international donor agencies.

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the AMS. The AQRF provides for a common language to be used for the referencing process and for mutually understanding each other’s qualification and competency certification systems. As stated in the Guidelines, competent bodies (i.e., one ultimately responsible for all or some aspects of the competency certification system; may be a qualifications authority, a body responsible for occupational standards development/endorsement; an awarding body or a competency certification body) will need to provide the link between the terms that are used within their competency certification systems and that of the AQRF as they participate in the referencing process.

In the Third SEA-TVET HOM (convened by SEAMEO and the Brunei-based SEAMEO Regional Center for Vocational and Technical Education (VOCTECH) held on 22-24 May 2017 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, SEAMEO SEARCA’s proposal to assess the development of competency standards for agricultural workers in ASEAN region was supported.

The project, taking into account the RMCS for agriculture and aquaculture developed by the ILO, and the Bateman Document approved at the 24th ALMM, will assess the current situation among the AMS in their efforts to develop and administer competency standards for agricultural workers. It will also identify gaps, challenges, and recommendations for action of the ASEAN Secretariat, SEAMEO, and individual AMS.

OBJECTIVES

The project has two-pronged objectives: (1) to map out, review, and assess the current state of play among the AMS in developing competency standards for agricultural workers; and (2) to identify gaps, challenges, and recommendations to be addressed.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

Given the diversity and complexity of the development and implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks, as well as of TVET provision, the project will help jumpstart the recognition of competency certification systems for agricultural workers. It will facilitate the adoption and implementation of the “Guiding Protocols for Recognition” of competency certification systems specifically for agricultural workers through a regional workshop that will be co-organized by SEAMEO SEARCA with TESDA.

The Regional Workshop on Competency Certification for Agricultural Workers in Southeast Asia took place on 9-10 May 2018. During the workshop, a mutual recognition of competency certifications issued by the AMS to its agricultural workers was initiated. Recommendations pertaining to the promotion of skills recognition of agricultural workers in the region were also developed for the SEA-TVET High Officials.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

1. Assessment Report on the current situation, gaps, and challenges of the AMS in developing competency standards for agriculture;
2. Set of recommendations to address gaps and challenges;
3. Regional Workshop Summary Report; and
4. Report on “State of Competency Certification for Agricultural Workers in Southeast Asia” to serve as guide for other AMS intending to put up competency certification for agricultural workers.