

ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program (AADCP)

Case Study

An Australian Government and ASEAN Initiative

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND MOBILITY WITHIN ASEAN (A Program Stream Project: *Enhancing Skills Recognition Systems in ASEAN*)



Improving Labour Mobility and Skills Recognition in ASEAN

ASEAN countries are at different stages in the level of development of their Skills Recognition Arrangements (SRA). In some members of ASEAN, skills development lags behind the demands of the economy and society and they want to improve their training and recognition systems. In others, the pace of economic and social development is outstripping the domestic supply of skilled labour. These shortages create an opportunity for the increased mobility of skilled workers within ASEAN countries to support the objective of developing ASEAN as a single production base.

The Project for Enhancing Skills Recognition Arrangements (SRA) in ASEAN Moves Forward

The concept for a project to enhance countries' SRA arose when ASEAN Labour Ministers were determining a work-plan for 2000-2005. The basis of the work-plan was issues relating to human resource development and labour

mobility. These had initially been highlighted in ASEAN's Hanoi Plan of Action 1999-2004 (HPA) and reaffirmed in Vientiane Action Programme 2004-2010 (VAP).

The development of SRAs is normally a lengthy process as institutions evolve to meet identified needs. Many countries have taken decades and invested millions of dollars to put in place the legislation, government bodies, industry structures training curricula and assessment packages required. For ASEAN countries there are opportunities to enhance their skills recognition arrangements by learning from each other and from lessons learned in other regions, saving both time and funding resources.

The Project Approach: a collaborative network for SRA policy development.

The AADCP Program Stream *Enhancing Skills Recognition Systems in ASEAN Project*, funded by AusAID, was designed to assist ASEAN countries keep their SRA under review in order to meet emerging industry and employment needs across the region. The project aimed to contribute to the broader and longer-term goal of improving

labour market flexibility and thus the integration of ASEAN goods, services and Human Resource Development (HRD) policies.

Project activities focused on a cooperative research program with counterparts from Departments of Labour to identify issues, barriers and the status and future directions of each country's skills recognition arrangements. The purpose of this work was primarily to provide a regional overview of each country's arrangements. However, the cooperative approach also served to establish a common understanding of SRA concepts, organisational responsibilities in the process, and the potential for some harmonisation of skills recognition procedures.

Working Groups (WGs), chaired by Departments of Labour were formed in each country and drew upon representatives from other relevant agencies and industry. They served as counterpart review groups for implementing the project and were the focus of data collection, analyses and workshops. With their input, the project team completed a set of eleven reports. The reports:

- summarised the experiences of countries and regions elsewhere in managing skills recognition



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Construction occupations



Reviewing the national competencies



One of the key issues concerning the enhancement of ASEAN skills recognition systems concerns official certification and recognition of the competencies acquired during training.

arrangements;

- reviewed the key components of skills recognition systems and qualifications frameworks;
- investigated the role of industry in skills development, and outlined a series of policy options for future action in the area of skills recognition arrangements; and,
- outlined strategic options to further the work through to 2015.

Piloting a Sub-regional Approach for a Qualifications Framework: sharing common occupation competency standards

The initial stage of the project identified uneven development of national skills frameworks across the newer ASEAN member countries as a major barrier to achieving an ASEAN wide skills recognition system. Through 2006 the project was extended to establish a sub-regional skills recognition framework specifically for the CLMV group of countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam) plus Thailand. This part of the project trialled a short-cut method for developing national qualifications frameworks, a regional qualifications framework and regional and national competency standards in five occupations.

A novel collaborative approach was adopted to complete this work. Firstly, the project team in collaboration with the working groups established draft competencies for five occupations. These were drawn from existing sets of competencies already in

place in other ASEAN countries or elsewhere in the region. Secondly, occupational experts were recruited from ASEAN countries that had already made good progress toward establishing national occupation competencies. The experts then worked with the project team and 'technical review groups' in each country to draft a set of competencies for each occupation. Thirdly, agreement was reached, via a workshop, on regional sets of competencies for the occupations of welder, air condition technician, poultry farm worker, tour guide and concreter. The pilot trial has demonstrated that this process works and suits the CLMV/T sub-region.

Results and Way Forward

Building an ASEAN Network of SRA Practitioners

Participation through the project has led to the formation of a network of SRA practitioners across the ASEAN countries, but in particular within the new member countries. This has led to enhanced SRA analytical capability within the CLMV group of countries. They have gained valuable practical experience in drawing up common sets of sub-regional competencies by sharing skills and experience with colleagues in other ASEAN countries and drawing on labour and training agencies' skills and knowledge. Their work has contributed to the overall program objectives through capacity-building for improving institutional regulatory arrangements, economic

integration and ASEAN capacity-building policies.

A key output from the project was a sub-regional qualifications framework designed for the CLMV plus Thailand group of countries. The framework is complementary to national frameworks already in place in some of the ASEAN countries.

Through 2007 a final extension phase successfully piloted a model for developing common regional curricula based on sets of shared occupational competencies.. This approach, if it is carried out more widely, has the potential to deliver considerable cost savings, particularly for CLMV countries over the coming years.

Building on the Project Process and Outcomes: a way forward for enhancing the mobility of skills

The *Enhancing Skills Recognition Systems in ASEAN Project* has produced bench-mark information concerning skills recognition structures across all ten countries. There are now formal structures in place to steer future development and a strategic options to guide this work. Outputs and discussion at ASEAN labour officials meetings demonstrate there is now a greater common understanding of many new concepts such as SRAs, RQFs, competency standards and competency based training. ASEAN now stands on the brink of developing a regional approach to managing the development of skills and the mobility of skilled workers.



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