



## Agile and Innovative International Relations Officers for Internationalisation in a New Context

IRO Capacity Building Workshop held in conjunction with the  
17<sup>th</sup> Annual Review Meeting of the AIMS Programme

10 November 2023  
Taal Vista Hotel, Tagaytay, Philippines

### Workshop Report

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#### 1. Background

International Relations Officers (IROs) play a vital role in promoting internationalisation of higher education and preparing learners to be competent global citizens. Among all internationalisation activities, mobility of learners has been identified as a high impact programme as it contributes to an enhancement of a learning experiences of students and also prepare students for sustainable learning and living in the future. In addition, the mobility programme is also perceived as a tool for institutions to improve their own management and expedite the internationalisation process. To facilitate a successful and smooth mobility programme for students, IROs are required to acquire the right mindset and skills, that is, IROs must 1) understand the relevant global and regional contexts and the needs for internationalization amidst higher education transformation process, 2) recognise the role of mobility in a big picture of university's vision and wider context of national development, 3) be equipped with the skills necessary to provide the best learning experiences and maximize the impacts of mobility programmes. In addition to the skills, IROs need to have the growth mindset, be resilient and innovative to adjust quickly to an ever-changing context.

With reference to SEAMEO RIHED's Southeast Asian Higher Education Senior Officials Meeting (SEA HiEd SOM), organised in April 2022, the meeting highlighted the recent global multiple challenges of the pandemic, climate change, and rapid digital transformation and called for a transformation of learning. Learning in the new contexts needs to be more learners-focused, outcome based and relevant to societal needs. Learning needs to be transformed to be focused on skills, competencies and credentials and providing the ecosystem for lifelong learning to a wider group of learners. Recognising the transformation of learning, exchange programmes also need to be innovated and that can be achieved by more agile and innovative IROs.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Review Meeting of the Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Programme in 2022, Seoul, Republic of Korea, hosted by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Council for Education (KCUE), the IRO breakout group discussed and identified the capacity building needs to support IROs in the changing times. Some topics identified include leadership management, coaching and mentoring for students, mental wellness and communication skills.

The Capacity Building Workshop **“Agile and Innovative International Relations Officers for Internationalisation in a New Context”** was held back-to-back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Review Meeting, by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Philippines in collaboration with SEAMEO RIHED on 10 November 2023, in Tagaytay, Philippines. The workshop aims to provide the big picture and address some of these topics to prepare and equip IROs and university faculty and staff involved in internationalisation of AIMS member universities with the mindset and skills to be resilient to the new and current challenges, as well as strengthen the regional community of IROs through the sharing of good practices and opportunities for future collaboration.



## 2. Objectives

1. Enhance capacity and cultivate new mindset and skills for IROs to support internationalisation activities and mobility in a new context.
2. Strengthen the community of IROs through learning and sharing good practices, including exploring opportunities for future collaboration and collective intelligence.
3. Expedite the harmonisation and internationalisation process of higher education in the SEAMEO region.

## 3. Expected Outcomes

The IROs understand the current contexts and needs for higher education internationalisation, cultivate the growth mindset, able to see the big picture and linking internationalisation activities to the university's vision, and be equipped with necessary skills to successfully facilitate exchange programmes with maximized outcomes.

## 4. Participants

A total of 101 participants attended the IRO Workshop, including IROs (Director, Deputy Directors, Officers, Coordinators, and Administrators of International Relations Offices), as well as academic and administrative staff involved in their institution's international relations and internationalisation from AIMS member universities, CHED representatives and SEAMEO RIHED staff, experts and facilitators.

## 5. Workshop documents

## 6. Workshop Summary

### *Opening*

During the Opening, Atty. Lily Freida Macabangun-Milla, Officer in Charge, Office of the Deputy Executive Director, Director III, International Affairs Service, Commission on Higher Education, Philippines, Dr. Virginia D. Akiate, CESO IV, Regional Director, CHEDRO IV, and Asst. Prof. Dr. Romyen Kosaikanont, Centre Director, SEAMEO RIHED, welcomed the participants and stressed the importance of IROs in supporting the internationalisation process and in fostering future and inclusive learners.

Atty. Lily Freida Macabangun-Milla highlighted the importance of community building, not only for the students but also for IROs as well. Asst. Prof. Dr. Romyen Kosaikanont provided the background that the initiation of the IRO workshop arises from the expression of interest by CHED Philippines during SEAMEO RIHED's 31<sup>st</sup> Governing Board Meeting in 2022. She emphasised that internationalisation could make a difference in making learning more successful and relevant in the changing world and IROs play a crucial role in supporting the internationalisation process.

To support the common space for learning, a definition of internationalisation for the region was proposed:

“Internationalisation for the region is a process in which key stakeholders working together to integrate international, intercultural dimensions into our shared regional purpose, functions and delivery of higher education in order to enhance quality of learning and research as its unique regional wisdom for sustainable future of our region and world community.”



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**INTERNATIONALISATION FOR THE REGION IS A PROCESS IN WHICH KEY STAKEHOLDERS WORKING TOGETHER TO INTEGRATE INTERNATIONAL, INTERCULTURAL DIMENSIONS INTO OUR SHARED REGIONAL PURPOSE, FUNCTIONS AND DELIVERY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ORDER TO ENHANCE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND RESEARCH AS ITS UNIQUE REGIONAL WISDOM FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE OF OUR REGION AND WORLD COMMUNITY**  
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SEAMEO RIHED, Agile and Innovative International Relations Officers for Internationalisation in a New Context (IRO Capacity Building Workshop), 10 November 2023, Tagaytay, Philippines

### **Keynote Address: Redefined Internationalisation in Transformative Higher Education**

Mr. Darren McDermott, Expert in Internationalisation, Former EU SHARE Team Leader, compared the internationalisation process with running a marathon. Both required energy, endurance, resilience, and the support of the community to be sustainable. He recommended the following: strategies, preparation, practice, commitment to continuous improvement, self-pace and the ability to adapt to the changing environment.

He shared his perspectives from his experiences as an expert in internationalisation. With the Thailand-EU Cooperation Facility, he provided recommendations on internationalisation policy and strategy. Internationalisation requires strong communities for policy, quality and strategy; diverse yet cohesive thematic working groups to support mobility; and policies and strategies that are relevant to the universities own contexts. As former SHARE Programme Team Leader, he highlighted the development of the ASEAN Working Group of Higher Education Mobility and the SHARE Community of Practice as the major change in SHARE's implementation in the second phase. He also shared the progress on the Joint Declaration on the Common Space in Southeast Asian Higher Education being developed by SEAMEO and the ASEAN Secretariat which will carry the regional internationalisation policy agenda forward. He encouraged participants to embrace the marathon spirit of camaraderie, learn from pitfalls and celebrate shared successes as we run towards our goals.

With some time for Q&A, a question was asked whether Mr. McDermott could share criteria, set of skills and milestones on internationalisation for developing countries. Mr. McDermott shared that the greatest skills would be adaptability and agility, ability to plan for initiatives and adapt when circumstances change. He encouraged participants to be engaged with peers and learn from each other and draw from regional collective intelligence.



### **Session 1: Regional Internationalisation efforts: RIHED-SHARE and Community of Practice (COP) network**

Ms. Christelle Agustin, Programme Officer, SEAMEO RIHED, shared about SEAMEO RIHED's Redefined Common Space in Higher Education, with emphasis on three areas: Learning for Skills, Competencies, and Credentials; Futuristic Leadership; and Regional Collective Intelligence. The RIHED-SHARE, a platform for regional collective intelligence to share knowledge and resources on



higher education in the region, was initiated to connect regional higher education stakeholders and support policy-making and research. The platform also supports the Community of Practice (CoP) on various areas such as internationalisation, gender equity, diversity and inclusivity, sustainable development and more. IROs of AIMS are invited to join the CoP in RIHED-SHARE to share competencies in internationalisation, connect with fellow peers, and be one of the experts in the field, contributing articles and resources.

Dr. Laurene Chua-Garcia, Vice-President, External Relations and Internationalization, De La Salle University, as a member of the Steering Group of the CoP, informed that the CoP is a community of people in the field of education, and operates on a voluntary basis, self-sufficient and self-supporting. The CoP is one of the outputs from the SHARE Programme. The old platform was closed, and the RIHED-SHARE was developed in July 2023. The CoP provides a space to share ideas, conversations and support on many different levels. The Committee's meetings include discussion on what would be interesting, relevant, helpful and even fun for the members of the community. Several talks were planned for 2023-2024. The CoP was officially launched.



### **Mind-setting Activities**

Ms. Porntip Kanjananiyot and Ms. Lakhana Dockkiao, Special Advisors of SEAMEO RIHED, led the activities which challenged the participants' mindsets.

In the first game, participants were asked to pick one card that resonates with them, then as a group, decide which card best answer the questions about AIMS, how they feel about AIMS' past, present and future. With the cards, AIMS was a curious rabbit in the past, evoke a sense of belonging in the present, and bring diverse people together to support internationalisation in the future.

In the second game, volunteers from each group were requested to walk around the bottles blocking their path without knocking them down. Then they were blindfolded and were asked to do the second walk. For some trips, the bottles were left as they were, and for some the bottles were removed. On both cases, participants walked with the mind that the bottles were present. The message from the activity was to get participants to realise that sometimes the rules and regulations are simply in our mind. To make changes for society, we should think and do what is right.

In the third and final game, participants had to save the paper being thrown around from falling on the ground. Lessons learned included getting to the source of the problem, figuring out different methods and working together collectively and with leadership to solve problems.

The key message for the mind-setting activities is that participants need to be aware, work together and be future ready, innovative, resilient and relevant.







## ***Session 2: Enhancing Growth Mindset and New Skills***

In this session, participants were divided into 3 groups and visited 3 stations for 30 minutes each on the 3 topics: IRO's role in the university, mentoring and coaching, and crisis management. Asst. Prof. Dr. Romyen Kosaikanont also helped to time keep and facilitate the session.

### *IRO's role in the university*

In the first group, led by Ms. Porntip Kanjananiyot and reported by Mr. Darren McDermott, the groups shared that IROs needed 3 aspects to work towards internationalisation: support, participation and infrastructure. The first aspect is support from university, senior management, external sources, CoP, international and regional organisations, and financial resources for activities. The second aspect is participation from faculty and senior leaders that support internationalisation, and participation from IROs in regional forums, and being a part of the community. The third aspect is infrastructure, including having an international relations office to carry out IRO functions, digital platform and infrastructure that support internationalisation, and university consortia.

Ms. Kanjananiyot also noted that the participants rated their understanding of internationalisation quite broadly, some as low and some high. She also added supporting IROs mentally and closing the gap between top management and IROs. She encouraged participants to look at the key stakeholders, such as schools and governments, to broaden their networks.

### *Mentoring and Coaching*

In the second group, led by Dr. Sergel I. Dacut, Linkages and International Affairs Supervisor, Lyceum University of the Philippines- Batangas, and reported by Ms. Christelle Agustin, the group shared the key points from the discussion on mentoring and coaching.

The group identified the difference between mentoring and coaching. Coaching is more short-term, skills or task specific, while mentoring is long-term, and career-development based. To be mentored requires the willingness of the mentees to learn and their discipline to continue with practice. Mentors need to be patient, be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the mentees and empower the mentees by giving them the opportunity to step up and rise to the challenges. Mentors should also be open to suggestions and teachings from mentees. Standardised forms and handbooks, introduction to the network and partners, would also help mentees be informed of the processes and know who to ask for information. The key words are growth mindset, support and lifelong learning. As long as we are alive, be open to being coached and mentored as we can improve ourselves.

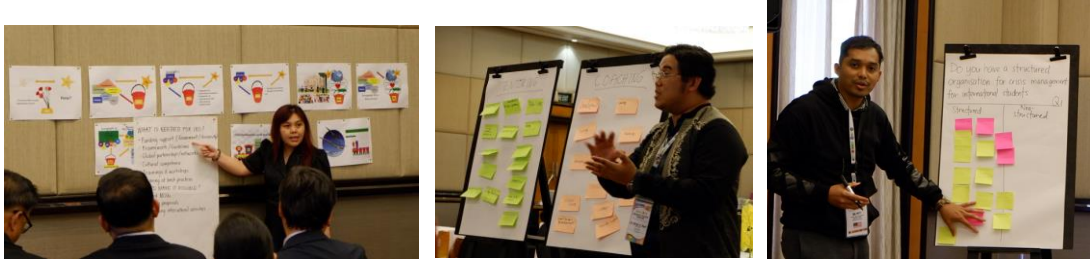
### *Crisis Management*

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> group, led by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mohd Hafizal Mohd Isa (Dr Pitt), Deputy Director of International Mobility and Collaboration Centre (IMCC), Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia, and reported by Mr. Yee Teng Low, Programme Officer, SEAMEO RIHED, the group shared the following findings.

Some crises that the international students faced while on campus include issues such as physical health, mental health, cultural, academic, visa, sexual harassment, crime, and financial issues. Around 70% of the participants indicated that their universities have a structured organization for crisis management for international students as well as policy/guidelines in managing crisis for international students. For the ones that do not have policies in place yet, a majority reported that they are in development. Structured organization with clear policies/guidelines in place provides clarity and guidance on the responsibilities. However, it could also be a top-down approach which takes longer process than the one with less structure. The group identified the departments that may form a part of the managing team on crisis management: IRO, student affairs, faculty/school/academic office, risk management office, health centre, counselling, centre/committee that deals with sexual harassment cases, administration office, security department, legal department, registrar's office, residences office/housing department. Many agreed that IROs should take lead in crisis management but it also depends on the amount of responsibility. For some IROs with many mandates, it may be better to



delegate some tasks to other departments to achieve the shared goals of the university. It is important for universities to strategise crises management to ensure that the students are safe and well taken care of.



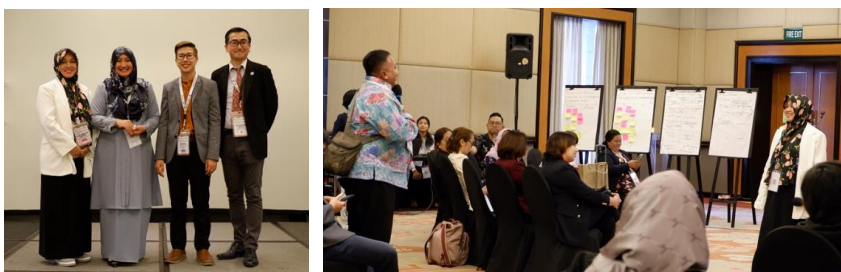
### **Session 3: Networking (Scenario Analysis)**

Three perspectives from 3 IROs in utilizing and strengthening networking to support higher education internationalisation were shared in this session. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fiffy Hanisdah Saikim, Executive Secretary AIMS Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia, moderated the session.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nakao Nomura, Regional Director for Southeast Asia and Taiwan, Office of Global Initiatives, Director for Division of International Exchange Support, University of Tsukuba, Japan shared tips on how to strategise networking, especially to be aligned with government policy for a win-win relationship and approach. Japanese government encouraged inbound and outbound students through various plans: International students 100,000 Plan, 300,000 Plan, and the latest J-MIRAI, launched in 2023, to strengthen support for outbound students, career support for inbound students and promote cooperative degree/short-term programmes. He also shared University of Tsukuba's strategy and initiatives on internationalisation. He also encouraged research collaboration with Japan universities, on curiosity and problem-driven research.

Ms. Warunee Kaewbunruang, AIMS Programme Coordinator, Global Relations Division, Mae Fah Luang University, Thailand, had a role play to illustrate usual cases she has encountered with international students. She emphasised empathy, patience and understanding, effective communication, asking help from our network as needed, and responsible actions in supporting international students. Mr. Yee Teng Low, Ms. Siti Sarah binti Mohammed Suhaimi, Mr. YU Sungjun, and Mr. Kenneth Bryan M. Bandao, AIMS Alumni, also participated in the role play.

Ms. Ida Puspita, Head of International Office, Ahmad Dahlan University, Indonesia, shared the importance of networking through her experiences as IRO in building networks. She highlighted that new networks impact many people and institutions, strengthen the capacity of the IROs and institutions, and open more opportunities. She encouraged a strong network of IROs for internationalisation, to share resources and have peer discussions.



### **Session 4: Reflecting on the Big Picture**

In the final session, participants reflected on what they have learned and worked together in groups to design space shuttles to map out what the new internationalisation ecosystem looks like to support the university's vision and mission and the region. Ms. Lakhana Dockiao, Special Advisor, SEAMEO RIHED



led the session. Some common words that were chosen in the process include diversity, inclusion, and growth mindset. The key takeaway from this activity is that internationalisation requires synergy, teamwork and togetherness to help each other, be inclusive, and rely on the team and institution, and awareness of what we are doing and mindfulness of the Asian context. Last but not least, to have fun!



### Closing

Mr. Jhun C. Labang from CHED Regional Office IV of the Commission on Higher Education Philippines shared that internationalisation is in every higher education institution's vision, guiding the direction of higher education. He urged the participants to continue to innovate their practices and shape higher education in the region. On behalf of CHED, he expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to host the workshop for everyone and wished the participants a safe return journey.

