

SEAMEO: Its Role in Public Health and Infectious Diseases Control

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Let me first express my thanks to the organizers of this symposium for giving me this chance of sharing with you some information pertinent to the theme of the symposium. I am, indeed, glad that I happen to be around and at the last few days of my stay here. I should also publicly thank NEKKEN and all the staff for the cooperation extended to me during these two months of my residency here as a JSPS-DOST participant. The Department of Protozoology head and all the staff have been most helpful in making me finish the work I came here for. The Department of Molecular Epidemiology has provided me with invaluable assistance. Indeed, my stay here has been most fruitful both academically and socially. I have met old friends and established new acquaintances which I will treasure for a long time to come.

When I was requested to give a paper, I decided immediately that I could not talk about my research on the molecular mechanism of the pathogenicity of *Entamoeba histolytica* as there is not much to say as yet. However, I have just completed a six-year stint as the Deputy Director for Programmes and Marketing at BIOTROP based in Bogor, Indonesia. As an organization, it does have activities that pertain to public health and disease control. More than that, the umbrella organization, SEAMEO, has other centres that are directly related to the concerns in public health and diseases control. It is in this connection that I am talking about the entire organization and how it relates with the theme of the symposium.

The SEAMEO or Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization is chartered non-governmental organization which was established to promote regional cooperation among member countries in the areas of education, science and culture. The member countries include: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao Peoples Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The Associate member countries are Australia, Canada, France, Germany, New Zealand, the Netherlands.

Under the umbrella organization whose secretariat, SEAMES, is located in Bangkok, there are twelve Southeast Asian regional centres distributed in the different member countries. BIOTROP is the centre for tropical biology which hosted by Indonesia and located in Bogor. The centre for innovative technology, INNOTECH, is hosted by the Philippines and

located in Diliman, Quezon City. RECSAM is the centre for Science and Mathematics located in Penang, Malaysia. RELC is the English language centre located in Singapore. RIHED is the centre for higher education based in Bangkok, Thailand. The Philippines is also host to SEARCA, the regional centre for graduate studies in agriculture, which is based in Los Baños, Laguna. SPAGA is the centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts which is based in Bangkok, Thailand. There are four regional centres for Tropical Medicine are each hosted by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand. Brunei Darussalam is hosting VOCTECH, the regional centre for vocational technology. A SEAMEO centre was recently established in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam, which caters to the various needs of the other centres.

The various centres are each funded by the host government and are governed by the policy-making body, the Governing Board, which consist of one member each from the member countries. The Governing Board meets normally once a year and decides on the programs and activities of the centre which in turn are endorsed to the SEAMEO Council (SEAMEC) through their High Officials. There is an annual SEAMEC conference, attended by the Ministers/Secretary of Education of various countries, representatives of the associate-member countries, representatives of the various centres, and other invited guests. The year-long activities of all the centres are discussed and approved as the case maybe.

Directly related to the health and disease problems in Southeast Asia are the four TROPMED centres. In addition, SEARCA and BIOTROP are undertaking activities pertinent to the quality of life and its sustainability through concerns about the environment.

TROPMED Malaysia is also the WHO Regional Centre for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases and Nutrition. It is also the collaborating centre for Taxonomy and Immunology of Filariasis, as well as the Ecology, Taxonomy and Control of vectors of malaria, filaria and dengue. It offers degree and non-degree programs in the fields of Microbiology, Parasitology, and Entomology together with the host institution, the Institute for Medical Research, Kuala Lumpur. It has also been identified as a JICA collaborative centre for research on tropical diseases.

TROPMED Philippines is concerned with public health, rural medicine, hospital administration, environmental and occupational health, as well as health policy and management. All these are offered as non-degree and degree programs under the College of Public Health, University of the Philippines. Moreover, the centre is also tasked with research, training and extension services in pertinent are of health concern.

TROPMED Thailand has programs and activities on endemic tropical diseases, community and preventive medicine, innovations on alternative control measures of diseases, promotion of clinical care of patients of tropical diseases, and trials of new chemotherapeutics and vaccines. All activities are in conjunction with the programs of Mahidol University, in-

cluding the non-degree and degree programs.

TROPMED Indonesia is concerned mainly with community nutrition and offers degree and non-degree programs in nutrition. The courses include nutritional epidemiology, nutritional planning and management, public health system and nutrition, nutrition in later life, food safety and control, and micronutrients. All activities are tied up with the University of Indonesia.

In addition to the TROPMED centres, SEARCA and BIOTROP are concerned with activities, research and training, that are closely related to public health and diseases that are aimed at providing information in their control. Both SEARCA and BIOTROP have projects and activities concerned with terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems for the purpose of determining the impacts of their utilization on the well-being and quality of life SEARCA's programs consist of human resource development through its graduate degree programs as well as its short training courses and their research projects with emphasis on community-based activities. On the other hand, BIOTROP is concerned primarily with activities involving sustainable use of natural resources, in particular the forest ecosystem. BIOTROP-based Impacts Centre for Southeast Asia (IC-SEA) is tasked to undertake studies on (1) land cover and land use change, (2) greenhouse gas emission, and (3) climate change such as global warming. The methodology employed in the studies make use of modeling techniques making use of data provided by remote sensing and the geographic information system (GIS). These methodologies are finding their ways into the studies on epidemiology and control of diseases not only in the tropics but in other parts of the world too. IC-SEA's goal is to build the capabilities of countries in the region through its training and research activities, equipment grants, and collaborative researches through an extensive networking system. It undertakes studies that assist policy makers in decision-making. A world-wide web on science policy advisory network ([www>ICSEA.or.id](http://www.ICSEA.or.id)) has been doing very well with increasing number of participants from all over the world. IC-SEA is three-year project funded by AusAID through the Global Change and Terrestrial Ecosystems (GCTE).

If only to emphasize the role BIOTROP IC-SEA in public health and disease control, let me remind the group that the changing weather pattern affecting the entire world does affect the range and distribution of infectious diseases, such as malaria and cholera. There are more than enough data to support the statement and no further justification is needed as to the importance of environmental studies. Indeed, there is a need to determine the interactions among the physical planet system, the world's ecological systems that incorporate disease transmission mechanisms, and the human systems on the planet. In short, there is a need for concerted, interdisciplinary and coordinated effort at public health and infectious disease control activities.

Thank you very much and good day.