

**Ninth Session of the Regional Committee Meeting for the  
Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and  
Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific**

*in conjunction with the*

**Regional Seminar on Regional Harmonization: Establishing  
a Common Higher Education Area**

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**Country Report  
PHILIPPINES**

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## **A b s t r a c t**

This paper presents an overview of the Philippine higher education system. The following topics are discussed: (1) brief background of higher education in the Philippines; (2) national policies and practices on quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications in higher education; (3) situation analysis of cross border education; (4) international cooperation, bilateral and multilateral agreement; (5) emergent issues on mutual recognition programs; and (6) suggestions for the Ninth Session of the Regional Committee.

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## **7. I n t r o d u c t i o n**

Higher education in contemporary Philippines is guided by philosophical orientations that put primacy on pursuit and formation of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary to make the Filipino a productive member of the society. It is geared towards the pursuit of better quality of life for all Filipinos. Philippine higher education also endeavors to harness productive capacity of the country's human resource base towards international competitiveness. Philippine higher education goals include the following:

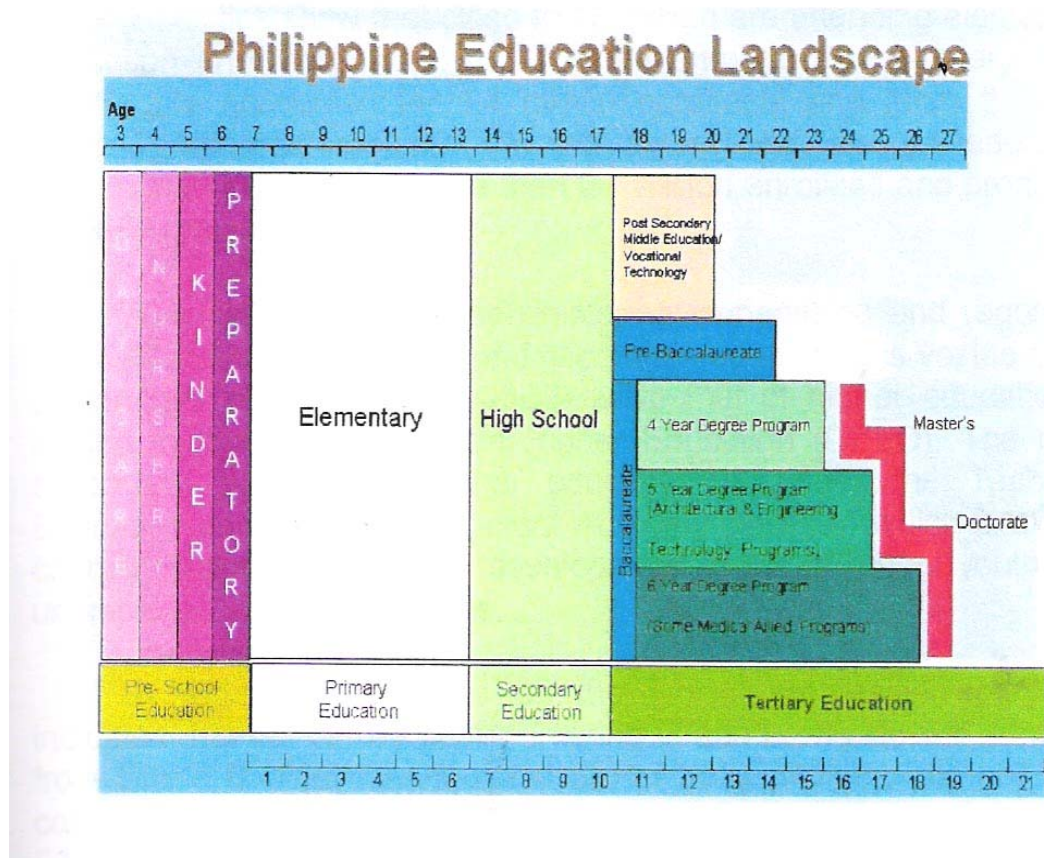
- ⇒ Provision of undergraduate and graduate education with international standards of quality and excellence;
- ⇒ Generation and diffusion of knowledge in a broad range of disciplines relevant and responsive to the dynamically changing domestic and international environments;
- ⇒ Provision of educational access for deserving and qualified Filipinos to higher education opportunities; and
- ⇒ Optimization of social, institutional and individual returns and benefits derived from the utilization of higher education resources.

## **G o v e r n a n c e        i n        P h i l i p p i n e        H i g h e r E d u c a t i o n**

Higher education is at the apex of the Philippine educational system. College students enter higher education normally at the age of 16 to 18 years old. Students come from the basic education level for about ten years to include six years of elementary education and four years of secondary education.

The structure of the Philippine educational system is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Philippine Education and Training Landscape**



*Source: EO 358, TESDA 2006*

**The Commission on Higher Education (CHED).** The administration and supervision of the Philippine higher education rests on the Commission on Higher Education or CHED as mandated by the Higher Education Act of 1994, while basic education is with the Department of Education or DepED as stipulated in the Basic Education Act of 2001.

CHED presently oversees the **1,599** higher education institutions in the country. Of these, 111 are State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), **1,431** are private HEIs; **47** are Local Colleges and Universities (LCUs); and **10** are other government-run school (OGSs). Presently, there are **2,438,855** higher education students enrolled in these colleges and universities. Majority of these students are enrolled in the following top three courses: 1) Business Administration and related courses; 2) Education (teacher training); and 3) Engineering and Technology.

**Public Universities and Colleges.** State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) are funded by the national government and are governed by their own charters. There are increasingly rising LCUs, whose funds are coming from their local government and whose policies and programs are governed by elected Local government officials.

SUCs charters ensure their autonomy and academic freedom. They are empowered to develop their own curricula, introduce competitive institutional programs, and award their own degrees. CHED ensures that SUCs adhere to the Higher Education Modernization Act (Republic Act

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8292), which provides among others, the uniform composition of Governing Boards of SUCs with CHED as the Chairman.

**Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs).** PHEIs are owned and administered by private individuals, groups or organizations. They are classified as **sectarian** and **non-sectarian**. Sectarian schools are usually non-stock, non-profit educational institutions owned and operated by religious orders (Catholic and Christian schools), while non-sectarian refers to those operated by private corporations, which are not affiliated to any religious organizations. Majority of the non-sectarian schools are stock corporations and only a few are non-stock, non-profit corporations, while a number of them are registered as foundations.

Private higher education institutions experience some degree of freedom, only when their programs are given CHED recognition and when they have attained accreditation by FAAP. Recognition of academic programs is awarded to PHEIs who complied with the minimum requirements prescribed by CHED. About eighty (80) PHEIs were granted autonomous and deregulated status of the Commission.

## **R e c e n t   R e f o r m s   i n   H i g h e r   E d u c a t i o n**

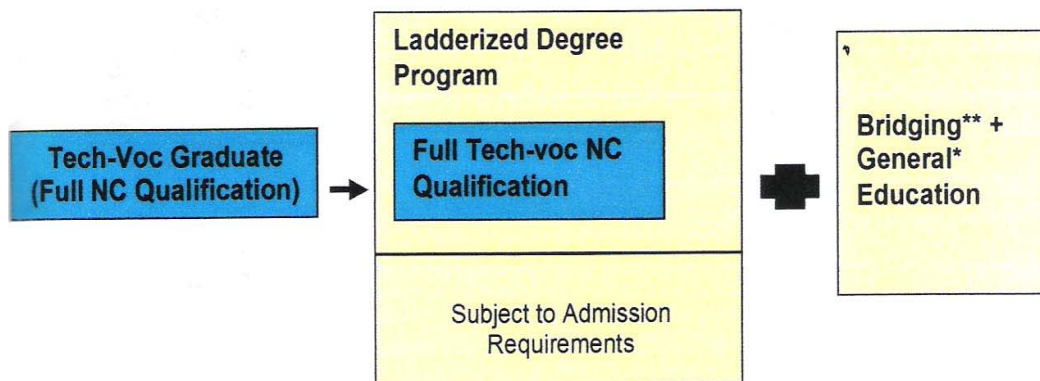
**Executive Order 358 – Ladderization Program.** Executive Order (EO) 358 *“Institutionalizing a Ladderized Interface between Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Higher Education (HE)”* stipulates that the unified and articulation mechanism by Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) constitutes the following:

- Credit transfer which involves recognition and carrying forward of credits constituting overlapping learning from as tech-voc program to degree program or vice versa
- Post TVET bridging program
- System of enhanced equivalency
- Adoption of a Ladderized curricula
- Modularized Program approach
- Competency-based programs
- Network of dual sector Colleges and Universities
- Accreditation of prior learning

In the field of nursing a LADDERIZED education program means two (2) years of Tech-Voc courses (e.g. care-giving etc) and then two (2) more years of Nursing Proper. In Engineering, it is two (2) years of Tech-Voc (drafting, surveying) and three to four years of Engineering Proper. In HRM, it is three years of Tech-Voc and one year to one-and-a-half years of HRM Proper. Figure 2 presents illustration of ladderized scheme.

**Figure 2. Illustration of Ladderization Strategy**

a. **Tech-Voc to Ladderized Degree Program**



*Source: EO 358, TESDA 2006*

**Centers of Excellence (COE) and Centers of Development (COD).** CHED is strengthening the higher education institutions not only by instituting reform and monitoring quality standards through program accreditation, but also by awarding incentives and titles of COE and COD. Programs which have consistently exhibited excellent qualities in instruction, research and extensions are evaluated and rated. For programs which meet highest level of quality, a **Center of Excellence (COE)** title is awarded and a financial assistance is given to further improve the programs and activities of the field of study. **Centers of Development (CODs)** are programs that have the potentials to be the Centers of Excellence. Some selection criteria for COE and CODs include the following:

- Instructional Quality (Accreditation, faculty qualification and educational resources).
- Research and Development
- Extension, Outreach and Linkages
- Institutional Qualifications

At present, there are 275 academic programs awarded as CHED COEs and CODs. These programs have proven excellence in teaching, research and instructions all over the country. CHED has awarded them with scholarship grants, faculty development programs, laboratory and library upgrading and support for extension and instructional materials development.

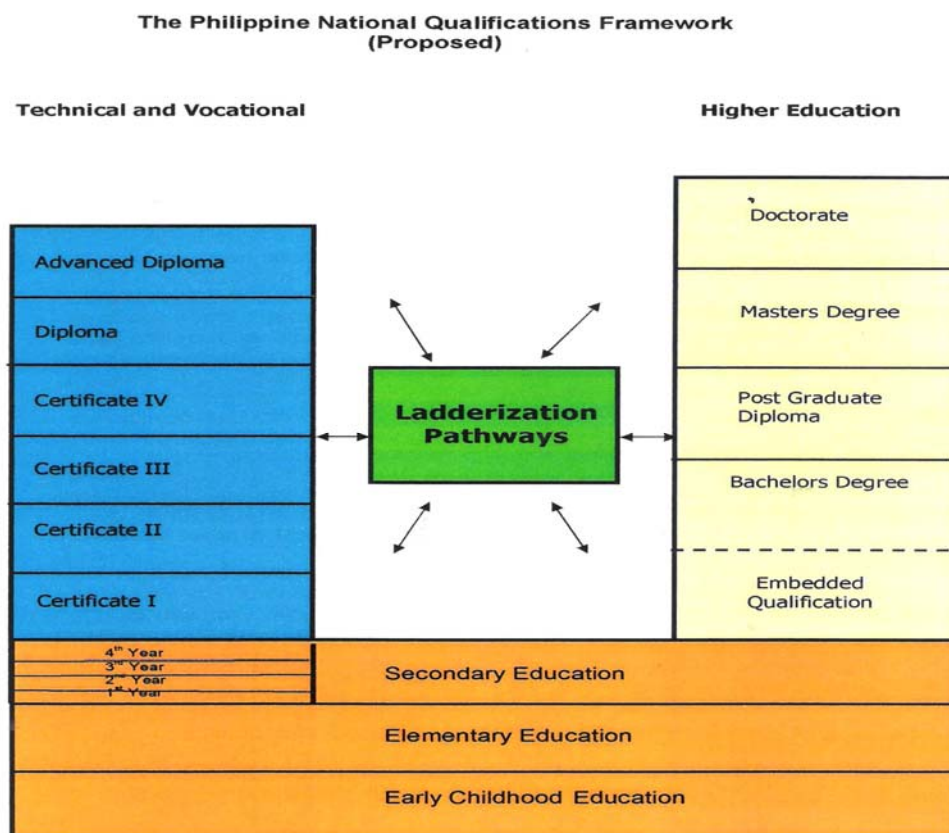
**Autonomous and Deregulated Status.** CHED also recognizes the enormous contributions of private higher education institutions in the growth and development of tertiary education in the Philippines in 2001. CHED rationalized supervision of PHEIs by introducing autonomous and deregulated status. **Autonomous** institutions are those with Level III accreditation of programs, outstanding performance of graduates in licensure examinations, and a long tradition of integrity and untarnished reputation in the field of higher education. **Deregulated** status is of a lower category but leading to autonomous status. Both of these types of institutions are free from normal monitoring and evaluation of CHED offices. There are around 44 autonomous and 40 deregulated higher education institutions in the Philippines.

## 2. National Policies and Programs on Quality Assurance and Mutual Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education

### ▪ The Philippine National Qualifications Framework (PNQF)

The Philippines has recently issued EO 358 that establishes equivalency pathways and access ramps for a Ladderized system allowing for easier transition and progressions between tech-voc and degree programs between and among all levels of education in the country. The Department of Education (DepED), TESDA and CHED jointly approved in principle the Philippine National Qualifications Framework (PNQF). The PNQF has been developed to establish a unified national system of all recognized qualification in the country. It covers all levels of formal education from their completion of the high school diploma; to accreditation and certification for initial entry to the workplace through doctoral degrees. The PNQF is in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The Philippine National Qualifications Framework



Source: EO 358, TESDA 2006

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## ▪ Degree Conferring Agencies

Undergraduate and graduate programs are clustered under the following groupings: 1) Agriculture; 2) Business and Management Education; 3) Engineering and Architecture; 4) Medical and Health Related Professions; 5) Humanities, 6) Social Sciences and Communication; 7) Information and Communications Technology; 8) Maritime Education; 9) Science and Mathematics Education; 10) Teacher Education and 11) Legal Education.

College students complete a required number of academic credits of normally 120 to about 190 units. The minimum number of years of completion of a Bachelors degree is 4 years, some 5 to six years as in Engineering and Dentistry and eight years for medicine and Law. Philippine higher education institutions award qualified graduates of any of these courses, degrees, diplomas or certificates after completion pursuant to the policies and guidelines set by the Commission on Higher Education.

## ▪ Recognition of Qualifications Awarded by Higher Education Institutions

**CHED Recognition of Minimum Standards.** The Commission on Higher Education is the agency of the government, which is mandated to set and enforce the minimum standards for programs and institutions of higher learning. It monitors, evaluates, and awards appropriate incentives to higher education institutions. It also imposes sanctions such as a diminution or withdrawal of subsidy and revocation of of CHED permit and recognition. CHED issues permits and recognition of academic programs of higher education institutions according to its policies, standards and guidelines.

**Voluntary Accreditation and Conferring Agencies.** To attain standards of quality over and above CHED requirements, CHED supports voluntary accreditation under the umbrella organization-the Federation of Accrediting Association of the Philippines (FAAP). The various accrediting bodies are: Association of Christian Schools, Colleges and Universities Inc., the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU), the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACU-COA), and the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACUP). The accreditation process involved 4 major steps such as: 1) Institutional Self-Survey; 2) Preliminary Visit; 3) Formal Survey; 4) Awarding of a decision by the governing board of the accrediting agency concerned.

**Table 3. Levels of Accreditation and their Meaning**

<b>Levels of Accreditation</b>	<b>Description and Meaning</b>
<i>Level 1-</i>	Applicant status. This level is for programs which have undergone a preliminary survey visit and certified by the FAAP as being capable of acquiring an accredited status within two years.
<i>Level 2-</i>	This level is awarded to programs, which have been granted, accredited status by any of the member agencies of the FAAP and whose status the latter certifies.

Level 3-	This level is awarded to programs, which have been granted accredited status and have met additional requirements based on criteria and guidelines set by FAAP.
Level 4-	The highest level of institutional accreditation for those who have distinguished themselves in a broad area of academic disciplines and whose programs are comparable with international standards.

Source: **Philippine Higher Education: A Brief Guide (2000)**

### 3 • S i t u a t i o n   A n a l y s i s   o f   C r o s s - B o r d e r E d u c a t i o n

Cross border education (CBE) can be aptly described as the “movement of individual education and training courses and programs across national borders through face to face, distance and combination of these modes. CBE makes great contributions to technology transfer in direct way, and economic development, more or less indirectly. It provides:

- Value-added investment to education in order to build knowledge-led nation.
- Staff exchange and in-bound study program is inexpensive way for earning degrees with achieving knowledge and skills;
- Facilitation of the technology transfer;
- Educational exchange through university plays significant role in the process of technology transfer in R & D; and
- Sharing of knowledge in science and technology as a result of collaborative research and professional development programs in order to accomplish overall national development

Quality assurance of CBE programs has been the main issue among the academic people. There are countries without any regulations on CBE, which result to students not given guarantee that their educational degrees, studies and diplomas will be recognized.

In the Philippines, CBE regulations are covered by the **CHED Policies, Standards and Guidelines on Transnational Education** or CMO No. 6 s. 2003. The CHED’s transnational education policies defined the scope, procedures, the extent of regulation as well as mechanics of recognizing foreign higher education providers and their courses of study. Transnational education refers to the real or virtual movement of teachers, students, courses of study, and academic programs from one country to another. Transnational education is categorized in the following modes: distance education and the conventional forms.

As a general rule set in the guidelines, all foreign higher education providers and their local representative/partners/franchisers and training institutions with intentions to operate programs in the Philippines should seek permit and approval from the Commission on Higher Education. CHED Memorandum Order No 6 s.2003<sup>1</sup> states that:

*Only Foreign Higher Education Providers recognized by their respective governments as quality higher education providers and accredited by a recognized accrediting body in their country of origin or its equivalent maybe given government authority where it is required to offer undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate degrees.*

<sup>1</sup> CMO No 6 s 2003 “Policies and Guidelines on Transnational Education. <http://www.ched.gov.ph>

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*“No foreign higher education providers shall be allowed to establish its branch without approval of the CHED and appropriate registration required in the Philippines”*

Foreign higher education institutions with CHED recognition, shall be entitled to give students due recognition for course certificates, degrees or studies and will entitle its graduates with professional as well as employment recognition in the country. However, transnational education providers are subject to existing Philippine laws, rules and regulations and shall be subject to regulation and supervision by the Commission on Higher Education.

## **A c a d e m i c M o b i l i t y**

Academic exchanges between Philippines and foreign universities have steadily increased over the last two decades. Philippine Higher Education Guide (2000 and 2005) showed that most of the country’s COEs and CODs participate actively in academic mobility programs. Majority of the students who participate in exchange programs are in four courses: Science and Mathematics, Business and Economic, Computer Sciences and Liberal Arts.

Faculty exchange program is also becoming popular. There are initiatives on visiting professors programs; fellowships and doing sabbatical leave abroad. Majority of the college faculty involved in mobility programs are specialists in International Studies, Science and Technology, Engineering, Business Administration and Research.

Bilateral and multilateral agreements help facilitate the growth of academic mobility. Some of these programs include the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP), the Abroad in Komaba Program of the University of Tokyo, the Asia and the Pacific Forum, the Global Youth Exchange Program, the ASEAN Ship for Southeast Asia, the APEC Youth Network, and the Reciprocal Government of Canada Scholarship Program. Pls. see Table 1 on Growth of Philippine Academic Mobility Programs in higher education.

**Table 1. Growth of Phil Higher Education Academic Mobility, SYs 1999-2005**

<b>Region</b>	<b>SY 1998/99</b>	<b>SY 2000/01</b>	<b>SY 2004/05</b>	<b>Total</b>
Asia Pacific	50	380	2450	2880
North America/Canada	3	28	850	881
Europe	2	4	10	16
Middle-East and Africa	50	32	50	132
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>3360</b>	<b>3909</b>

*Source: Philippines: Higher Education Guide (2005) Valenzuela, Ethel Agnes P. Internationalization of Higher Education in the Philippines.*

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## Foreign Students in the Country <sup>2</sup>

Foreign students in the Philippines refer to those belonging or owing allegiance to a country other than the Philippines and studying in any educational institution recognized or owned by the government of the Philippines. The entry and stay of foreign students in the Philippines is covered by Executive Order (EO) 285 dated September 4, 2000. This EO spells out requirements for enrollment such as levels of accreditation for local higher education institutions. As a matter of policy, only those institutions with Level II accreditation or its equivalent may be allowed to enroll foreign students in the country. There is also a requirement for HEIs to get permit from Bureau of Immigration to admit foreign students in the country.

The Philippines has been the preferred destination of foreign students in early 1970's till late 1980's due to its high quality of education and the use of English as a medium of instructions in universities and colleges. However, there is a gradual decrease in the number of foreign students studying in the Philippines over the last ten years with the emergence of new global players and the rise of security concerns.

At present, majority of the foreign students studying in the Philippines come under a government scholarship program or an inter-university exchange agreement. Many are short-term students enrolling in crash English Language courses. A good number of students enroll in Medical and Health-Related Courses, Arts and Sciences, Commerce and Business Education.

## Foreign Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines

The Philippines placed high priority on global competitiveness and productivity. It supports the development of strategies and schemes to internationalize Philippine Higher Education. <sup>3</sup> However, the Philippine National Constitution sets limitations on the establishment of foreign higher education institutions in the Philippines. This limitation is also indicated in the Philippine Education Act of 1982 or the Batas Pambansa 232, which states:

*“Any private school established after September 11, 1982 shall be owned solely by the citizens of the Philippines or by corporations or associations at least sixty (60%) percent of the capital is owned by such citizens, except those allowed to be established by religious groups and mission boards pursuant to the Constitution and special laws.”*

CHED Memorandum Order No. 1 s. 2000s however allows or supports the development of joint-programs or twinning programs between a local and a foreign higher education provider. CHED Memorandum Order No. 1, series of 2005 encourages higher education institutions with level II accreditation to enter into academic linkages and establish joint-degree and twinning programs.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century brought changes, such as the influx of information and communications technology and in the way education is delivered. There are on-line and distance learning courses that promote borderless education. This type of educational programs literally cannot

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<sup>2</sup> Valenzuela, Ethel Agnes (2005). *Internationalization of Philippine Higher Education*. Philippines: Higher Education Guide. UNESCO Policy Series No.4

<sup>3</sup> Long Term Higher Education Development Plan (1995-2005). Commission on Higher Education. Philippines.

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be stopped by any country of the world as academic degrees are offered on-line and via distance by foreign higher education providers. At present, virtual higher education providers fully on-line are not regulated in the Philippines.<sup>4</sup>

## **T y p e s   o f   E d u c a t i o n a l   p r o g r a m s   a n d I n s t i t u t i o n s   i m p o r t e d   i n   a n d   o u t   o f   t h e c o u n t r y**

The Philippine Commission on Higher Education has recognized the importance of academic mobility programs. In 2003, it has issued CHED Policies and Guidelines on Transnational Education (TNE). The CHED transnational education policy provides a regulatory system for cross border or transnational education providers. CHED has ruled out that *“no foreign higher education provider can operate in the Philippines without getting permit and recognition from the agency.”* Foreign higher education institutions are required to go through similar process of permit and recognition system as approved by the Commission en banc.

Generally, all Philippine accredited programs may be offered for foreign students in the country and abroad. Quality assurance is a critical factor for participation in international linkages and mobility programs. Without it, internationalization initiatives may be limited to pure student exchanges and academic cooperation programs.

## **5. E m e r g e n t   I s s u e s   r e l a t i n g   t o   c r o s s - b o r d e r   e d u c a t i o n**

Being a developing economy, the Philippines faces enormous challenges on CBE. Some of these challenges are enumerated below:

- **Quality Assurance.** Cross border education promotes academic mobility. With this in mind, cross border education should meet the same high standards of academic quality no matter which country it is delivered to. It is important that students, teachers and higher education institutions have full information on the quality of academic programs to be given recognition.
- **Permits and Recognition.** Another issue on cross border education is the local requirement for proper authorization of academic program offerings. While cross border education can operate with representatives in the host country, the foreign higher education providers must have authority and the relevant government agencies and other competent offices.
- **Transparency.** One issue currently faced by most higher education institutions is the absence or the lack of information on the legal status of cross border education providers, accreditation schemes and relevant information on portability of academic credentials. CBE providers should be aware of the local regulations and avoid recruitment before a permit is obtained. There should be adequate procedures for CBE providers to support full mobility of students, teachers and programs.

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<sup>4</sup> CHED Memorandum Order No. 6 Series of 2003.

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Mutual recognition will be a priority in this decade not only because of globalization but also it assists in placing professionals in global workplace. The role of education agencies is to encourage and support transparency, quality assurance and participation in negotiating for mutual recognition of degrees and qualifications in Asia and the Pacific. The role of universities and colleges is to adopt their course syllabi and resources to the demands of globalization and borderless education.

The CHED over the years has experienced some difficulty in establishing mutual recognition of degrees outside of APEC, mainly due to the following reasons:

1. Lack of information materials from cross border education providers, which made it difficult for universities and colleges to establish equivalency of academic programs. It is important that UNESCO continues to develop books, references and other materials that will update national regulatory bodies in the region with appropriate policies and procedures governing mutual recognition of higher education degrees, studies and diplomas.
2. Lack of transparency on virtual education and CBE providers. This issue must be addressed to promote transparent educational programs across borders. The CBE providers must be encouraged to take into account local regulations and requirements to avoid non-recognition of their academic programs.

#### **4. International Cooperation, Bilateral and Multilateral Agreements**

Philippine higher education providers are increasingly participating in bilateral and multilateral programs brought about by enhanced trade cooperation and economic partnership agreements. Some of the on-going international cooperation programs relevant to mutual recognition of degrees are as follows:

##### **▪ Multilateral Agreements governing mobility and recognition of degrees**

1. **University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP)** -The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) established UMAP in 1991 to promote discussion on educational cooperation in the region. The program has helped encourage governments within the region to support the participation of students and academic staff in UMAP programs since its inception. Currently, UMAP activities are jointly coordinated by the AVCC and the Thailand Government. The Philippines officially joined UMAP in 2000 and to support the work of UMAP, it has established its UMAP Philippines council composed of Presidents of Universities, deans and directors of international linkages.
2. **APEC Human Resource Development Working Group Mutual recognition Program-** The Philippines is one of the pioneering members of APEC. In terms of mutual recognition programs, the Philippines has been an active player in the promotion of mutual recognition programs. It participated in the APEC Engineer Mutual Recognition Program and a signatory to many other mutual recognition initiatives under APEC. It supported APEC Architect Mutual Recognition and on its way to developing mutual recognition of nursing professionals. The APEC mutual recognition program adopted a dynamic approach in matters of screening and

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accrediting educational programs of member countries, attesting the engineering degrees, certificates diplomas and studies are given due evaluation and recognition. The roles of the Commission on Higher Education, the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) have been very crucial in this initiative. The Philippine Technological Council (PTC), an umbrella organization of engineering professionals has also been very important in this mutual recognition project.

## ▪ **Philippine Policies on International Cooperation**

1. **CHED Memorandum Order No. 1 s 2000** entitled Policies and Guidelines on International Linkages and Twinning Programs provides implementing guidelines for local and foreign colleges and universities in establishing international linkages such as faculty and student exchanges, twinning programs and overseas extension classes. CMO No. 1, series of 2000 also specifies that higher education institutions must have accreditation of programs of at least level 2 to make them eligible for establishing international linkages, specifically in establishing twinning or joint-degree programs. It also allows HEIs to pursue faculty and student exchange including cultural exchange and exchange of academic information. This policy also ruled that it might authorize the establishment and operation of educational institutions with foreign equity in special economic zones consistent with national economic development policies.
2. **CMO 27 s. 2005- Policies on Distance Education.** This policy rationalizes Distance Education (DE)<sup>5</sup> programs in the Philippines and provides policies, standards and guidelines promulgated by the Commission on Higher Education. As defined in the policy, degree programs with at least 25 percent of total courses offered via the distance mode are classified as DE programs. It also indicated that undergraduate programs should not be offered fully by distance mode and only those programs with Level III accreditation shall be allowed to offer distance education programs.

## ▪ **Bilateral agreements governing mobility and recognition of degrees**

The Philippines has been pursuing bilateral agreements with regional as well as neighboring countries to promote mutual recognition of higher education degrees and diplomas. It has signed agreements of academic cooperation with the following countries:

- RP-China
- RP-India
- RP-Malaysia
- RP-Saudi Arabia
- RP-Croatia

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<sup>5</sup> Distance education as defined in the policy is a mode of educational delivery whereby teacher and learner are separated in time and space, and instruction is delivered through specifically designed materials and methods using appropriate technologies, and supported by organizations and administrative structures and arrangements.

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## **6. Suggestions for the Ninth Session of the Regional Committee**

UNESCO Regional Office in Asia and the Pacific plays a lead role in encouraging member states to ratify the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific. The treaty is important in facilitating access to quality education, training and research in higher educational institutions in other states, with due regard for domestic regulation.

To facilitate the active exchange of students, teachers, researchers in the region and the relevance of academic mobility programs with the changing paradigms and contexts of higher education in the region, the 1983 Regional Convention should be revisited. Government agencies must be encouraged to develop their Implementing Guidelines on the 1983 Regional Convention on Mutual Recognition of Degrees, Diplomas, and Studies in Asia and the Pacific.

Moreover, it should continue to encourage member states to submit information materials on its academic programs, particularly those that are offered on line, under CBE and transnational, education modes.

Finally, UNESCO Bangkok should continue to encourage the implementation of the Diploma Supplement for easy recognition of degrees and studies in higher education across the region.

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