3. The UNESCO SchoolNet project

The UNESCO SchoolNet project, "Strengthening the use of ICT in Schools and SchoolNet in the ASEAN Context," was launched in July 2003 and was of four years’ duration. It was implemented by the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, in co-operation with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foundation and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), and was funded by Japanese Funds-in-Trust (JFIT) and the ASEAN Foundation.

Goal
The overall aim of the project was to support the development of local and national SchoolNets in the ASEAN region and to facilitate the creation of a regional (ASEAN) SchoolNet.

Objectives
The UNESCO SchoolNet project was initiated with the following objectives in mind:
- To explore and demonstrate how ICT could be used in schools to improve the quality and reach of education so as to better prepare youth for the demands of knowledge societies.
- To implement innovative models of ICT use in schools, and encourage better ICT-based teaching and materials development.
- To improve connectivity and access to online educational resources, and to encourage sharing of resources.

Target group
UNESCO recognizes that teachers are at the heart of education and that one of the key factors in the success of any initiative that utilizes ICT in education is the teacher. UNESCO also recognizes that to facilitate students’ learning using modern forms of ICT, teachers must themselves become familiar with these ICT. In addition, a teacher needs to have a clear vision of how the use of technology can improve his or her existing classroom practices. The SchoolNet project therefore focused on in-service teachers.

“Teachers are the heart of the education system. There can be no viable long-term solution to our education challenges and teacher shortages without investment in training and measures to promote respect for the teaching profession. It is essential to support teachers professionally, boosting their determination and motivation through decent employment and working conditions and adequate remuneration.”

ILO and UNESCO, 2006, Joint Message on the Occasion of World Teachers’ Day, 5 October 2006

10 Roblyer, 1993
UNESCO has observed that teachers’ efforts to utilize the Internet and other forms of ICT in the classroom are often limited by a lack of access to equipment and of appropriate teaching materials and technical support. Also, teachers are hindered in efforts to utilize ICT by the rapid developments in ICT and a lack of time and experience in planning ICT-based instruction. The SchoolNet project therefore focused on providing ICT tools and developing teachers’ capacity to utilize modern forms of ICT in teaching. In particular, teachers were trained in how to utilize computers and the Internet, how to prepare appropriate lesson plans, teaching materials and learning resources, and how to use the Internet to enhance teaching and learning.

...we ... have (to) champion teachers out there, as well as inspired administrators, driving quality education in disadvantaged communities, (and) we must find solutions that incentivize and reward such champions for their performance in improving educational outcomes."

Joris Komen, Director, SchoolNet Namibia, 2005

The project targeted teachers in the countries making up the ASEAN region. It was implemented in 24 schools in eight participating countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam. In the three participating schools in each country, the focus was put on three subject areas: English, Mathematics and Science.

The countries were divided into two groups based on their 2002 level of integration of ICT-readiness11 and on whether or not the countries already had a SchoolNet. Group One was made up of: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand and Group Two was made up of Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao PDR and Viet Nam.

11 UNESCO Bangkok, 2003 (ii)
Key activities and outcomes

- Schools and selected Ministries of Education were supplied with ICT tools, including servers and computers.
  - This equipment gave the recipients access to these modern technologies and enabled them to participate more fully in the project and make use of computer skills gained during the project.

- In-service teachers were trained in integrating ICT into education.
  - Teachers from the participating schools gained skills in four areas: computer and internet operational skills; preparation of teaching materials using ICT; appropriate pedagogy for utilizing ICT in teaching; and implementing telecollaboration activities.

- Useful teaching and learning materials were compiled and distributed.
  - Teachers and schools received copies of CD-ROMs containing useful digital educational programs and resources (applicable to the curricula of the ASEAN countries participating in the project).

- Telecollaboration activities were organized and implemented.
  - Aside from receiving training in how to implement telecollaboration activities, teachers and students from the 24 participating schools gained hands-on experience in taking part in telecollaboration activities with peers from networked schools.

- Lessons-learned were compiled and distributed.
  - Project activities, results and feedback were analyzed, summarized and published in a series of “Lessons Learned” publications. In addition, a technical guide titled “SchoolNet Toolkit” was produced. These publications were distributed widely, enabling educators, policy makers and researchers from across the Asia-Pacific region to benefit from the knowledge gained through the project.

Further information about the UNESCO SchoolNet project can be found on the project website: [www.unescobkk.org/education/ict/schoolnet](http://www.unescobkk.org/education/ict/schoolnet)