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Authors

Emma Fingler
Queen's University

Anticipating Climate-Induced Instability: Analysing the Intersection of Security and Disasters in Southeast Asia

ABSTRACT

The association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a governance actor in the most climate vulnerable affected region in the world, has employed exceptional awareness and attention to natural disaster resilience and response (UNESCAP 2019). In 2020, ASEAN introduced a new Disaster Management Framework (ASEAN, 2020), which provides an opportunity to align disaster governance with security governance at the regional level. The intersection of disasters and security (the climate-conflict nexus) has become increasingly relevant as global warming affects the severity and frequency of disasters, creating a variety of unconventional security challenges. However, the climate-conflict nexus in Southeast Asia remains surprisingly understudied and is often lacking gender-based analysis as a core component. Thus, this paper asks, how can ASEAN effectively align disaster governance with security governance to decrease risks and promote opportunities for peace? It argues that ASEAN has demonstrated a vested interest in expanding its role in disaster governance, but it must establish greater attention to the matter with a GBA+, which can greatly enhance and strengthen its regional security framework and stability of the region. To demonstrate this, the paper examines ASEAN security and disaster policies and uses the climate-conflict nexus to provide policy-oriented recommendations. These recommendations are based on an understanding that disasters and security are connected, and that gender, which is commonly overlooked, is a required component of effective disaster risk reduction and response. Finally, the role of the Women, Peace and Security agenda is highlighted, arguing that this agenda has a role to play in disaster response, especially as climate change increases the frequency of major disaster events that pose security risks. Thus, this paper aims to improve our understanding of how disaster and security governance can be combined, complemented by a GBA+ approach, to increase opportunities for peace and stability in Southeast Asia.

KEYWORDS:

Disaster response; security; gender; women, peace and security; non-traditional security; Southeast Asia; ASEAN

About the Authors



Emma Fingler, Queen's University

15ejf@queensu.ca / @emmafingler

Emma Fingler is a PhD candidate in the Political Studies Department at Queen's University, specializing in disaster response, humanitarian aid and security with a focus on Southeast and South Asia. Prior to joining Queen's, she was the Special Assistant to the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in Nepal. She holds an M.A. Global Governance from the University of Waterloo's Balsillie School of International Affairs and a B.A. Hons Political Studies from Bishop's University.

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Introduction

In Southeast Asia, 6, 576, 000 people were newly displaced by disasters in 2020 alone (IDMC 2021). Adding to these difficulties, Southeast Asia incurs an average economic loss of \$676 billion annually from disasters (UNESCAP 2019). Situated in the most climate affected region in the world, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has employed exceptional awareness and attention to resilience and response (UNESCAP 2019). This interest has begun to be translated into policy change at the regional level, particularly with ASEAN's introduction of a new Disaster Management Framework (ASEAN 2020c), which presents an opportunity to align disaster governance with security governance at the regional level. The intersection of disasters and security has become increasingly relevant as global warming affects the severity and frequency of disasters, creating a variety of unconventional security challenges. However, the climate-nexus in Southeast Asia remains surprisingly understudied and could be a useful framework to understand these issues (OCHA 2016). Furthermore, when disasters and security are studied in tandem, gender-based analysis is often lacking as a core component, resulting in inadequate policies.

This paper asks, how can ASEAN effectively align disaster governance with security governance to decrease risks and promote solutions that offer stability in the wake of climate emergencies? It argues that ASEAN not only has a vested interest in expanding its role in disaster governance, but if done effectively and with gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) can greatly enhance and strengthen its regional security framework and stability of the region. GBA+ uses analysis that considers how gender impacts experiences and how policy and programs may affect groups differently as a result (Government of Canada 2021). To demonstrate this argument, this paper undertakes a systematic overview of ASEAN security and disaster policies and uses the climate-conflict nexus to provide recommendations of policies and greater collaboration on these combined issue areas. In particular, the GBA+ approach can help to encourage stability in the wake of climate change and natural disaster, by recognizing the importance of contextual social cleavages and underlying discrimination that can lead to further issues, including gender-based or even instigation of conflict. This paper aims to improve our understanding of how disaster and security governance can be combined, complemented by a GBA+ approach, to increase opportunities for stability in Southeast Asia.

Context

The Climate-Conflict Nexus: Security and Disaster Governance

Security risks go beyond simplified understandings of state-centric conflict (Matthews 1989). As consideration of unconventional security issues – including human and climate security – has grown and the pool of actors involved has expanded, it has become clear that disasters play a role in this evolved understanding of security (Matthews 1989). Disasters can re-ignite pre-existing tensions, exacerbate strains on resources, and produce opportunities for greater corruption and control, even be “used as weapons to worsen relations” (Kelman 2006, 233). If handled improperly, disasters can instigate violent events, such as cause food scarcity that leads to tension between opposing groups, expose high levels of corruption and present opportunities for opposing groups to strengthen or regroup, all of which can ultimately increase the probability of armed conflict incidents within the context of an existing conflict (Ghimire & Ferreira 2015).

The climate-conflict nexus is situated at the intersection of climate-induced vulnerability and pre-existing societal weaknesses including weak institutions and social fragility (OCHA 2016). Natural disasters can

exacerbate pre-existing security issues, which can lead to a breakdown in relations, instability or economic and resource insecurity that can escalate. Scholars examining disaster politics, have similarly argued that natural hazards influence political change through sociological tipping points. For instance, Pelling and Dill (2010) explain that following large earthquakes in Nicaragua in 1972, high levels of corruption undertaken by the autocratic government caused a lack of humanitarian aid, which resulted in a reaction to these forms of insecurity and led to into an armed revolution (Pelling and Dill 2010). Without proper governance in place, instability can be produced or exacerbated through cataclysmic events. In anticipation of worsening annual disasters and catastrophic climate events, countries across Southeast Asia have joined together to better prepare and maintain state and regional stability.

ASEAN Disaster Governance

In 2003, the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM) was established, recognizing the need for coordination and communication to govern natural hazards across the region. Following, ASEAN adopted its Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) in 2005, shortly after the 2004 Sumatra tsunami that devastated Southeast and South Asia (Simm 2018). The result of a 9.1 magnitude earthquake, the Sumatra tsunami is notable not only for its destruction – more than 230,000 people died and immediate material losses amounted to over \$10 million – but also for how it spurred urgency in the creation of disaster response and risk reduction policies worldwide (World Vision 2019). The AADMER continues to be the most significant disaster governance policy for ASEAN, with the Work Programme 2021-2025 adopted on November 30, 2020. Canada was a key supporter of AADMER's development and adoption (ASEAN 2020a). In a media release, ASEAN (2020c) highlighted the importance and necessity of coordinating these kinds of policies, stating that “ASEAN ministers in charge of disaster management agreed on the strategic direction of regional cooperation in mitigating disaster losses and responding to emergencies for the next five years.” The significance of this statement should not be minimised; regional and international cooperation can greatly enhance the effectiveness of a response and resilience to disasters (Aldrich et al. 2014).

The AADMER was established both as an agreement between ASEAN countries to improve coordination, resilience, and response, and, remarkably, it is a legally binding agreement (ASEAN 2020a). The legally binding nature of this policy is significant as it reinforces the severity of disasters and understanding that these events affect a wide variety of sectors, particularly economic markets and human security (Aldrich et al. 2014). Furthermore, it remains unusual in disaster governance for agreements or policies of any kind to be legally binding; even major international agreements on humanitarian assistance such as the Grand Bargain¹ remain voluntary. However, ASEAN's use of international law suggests that this may be changing, as explained by Simm (2018, 118) who notes that “soft law” in the form of guidelines and recommendations are positively impacting the international law of disasters. ASEAN's commitment to response coordination through policies, guidelines, and long-term plans, such as the guidelines and recommendations are positively impacting the international law of disasters. ASEAN's commitment to response coordination through policies, guidelines, and long-term plans, such as the “One ASEAN One Response” declaration

¹ The Grand Bargain is a “unique agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organizations who have committed to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action” (IASC 2021).

(2016a) is a notable advancement in this area.

Prior to the adoption of the most recent version of the AADMER, ASEAN introduced the “One ASEAN One Response: ASEAN Responding to Disasters as One in the Region and Outside the Region” declaration, which was signed by leaders at the 28th ASEAN Summit in September 2016 (ASEAN 2016a). While these declarations and programmes are a necessary component – and significant step – in disaster governance, the introduction of the ASEAN Coordination Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA) was the catalyst that set this type of harmonious cooperation in motion. Established in 2011, AHA has three priority areas: disaster monitoring, preparedness and response, and capacity building (AHA Centre n.d.) AHA works with all of ASEAN’s member states, but also coordinates with other Dialogue, Development and Sectoral Partners through multilateral cooperation, including with Australia, Japan, and Canada, among others (AHA n.d.). For example, a Memorandum of Intent between the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and AHA in 2017 resulted in the appointment of an Australian Disaster Response Coordination Specialist being seconded to AHA (AHA Centre 2017). The appointee’s role included creation and formalization of a joint coordination mechanism, emphasizing the importance of a strong central response mechanism and international support in its creation (AHA Centre 2017). AHA also provides a significant opportunity for further centralization of policy at both regional and state levels, as well as expansion of disaster governance at the intersection of other issue areas, including security.

Notably, ASEAN’s Secretariat specifically mentions the need for a holistic approach to security that includes all three of ASEAN’s pillars, including security. The identification of “a multi-layered and cross-sectoral governance approach” is relatively new to ASEAN but is an important step in forming a sustainable nexus of security and disaster (ASEAN 2016b, 2). Unfortunately, while the ASEAN Vision 2025 on Disaster Management (ASEAN 2016b) outlines a cross-cutting approach, gender is not included in the policy framework. Regardless of the steps taken by ASEAN around disaster governance, the inclusion of gender and diversity considerations (including socio-economic status, disabilities, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, etc.) are critical. Scholars have discussed the impact that racial and ethnic bias can have on the effectiveness of humanitarian response activities, including incredibly important activities such as the distribution of local aid to local communities (Fink & Redaelli 2011; Kruks-Wisner 2010; Strömberg 2007). Foreign political interests – both positive and negative – can be considered a determinant of the amount of aid a donor government provides, in addition to a media “relief bias,” which leads to greater focus on disasters in Europe or North America as opposed to Asia or other regions, regardless of severity (Strömberg 2007, 215).

Disasters are not without baggage. They are accompanied by historical grievances including failing infrastructure due to corruption and racism, which was on prominent display in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as predominantly black neighborhoods were hit harder than any other (Bradley 2017). Furthermore, ongoing discrimination of vulnerable groups like women and minorities and inequitable distribution of resources contribute to insecurities that can result in long-term instability and further vulnerability of both people and states (Leon 2004; Benevolenza & DeRigne 2019). Drabo and Mbaye (2011, 6) provide evidence for the recurrence of a “poverty trap” in less-developed Southeast Asian countries due to the increasing frequency of disasters and inability to mitigate as a result. Thus, effective policies must include these aspects of identity and considerations of diversity. ASEAN calls for such development of ideas by 2025, highlighting the ability of disasters to “exacerbate pre-existing non-traditional security issues” and the need for coordination and greater preparedness in this area (ASEAN 2016b, 4). Without this, the risk to

security at individual, local, state and regional levels will continue to raise concern.

ASEAN Security Governance

Mirroring disaster governance, security governance in ASEAN is extensive, particularly as the issues range widely from state to regional levels. ASEAN has three main pillars. Its Political Security Community (APSC) pillar aims for greater cooperation in the domain of political security in the region. Yet, even with an extremely broad set of goals – including comprehensive security coordination across traditional non-traditional security realms – the varied issues present across ASEAN are extremely diverse, sometimes causing tension between members (Kuok & Huzley 2021). In the traditional security realm, maritime issues, nuclear disarmament, defence cooperation and preventative diplomacy are the main areas of cooperation (ASEAN 2022). Non-traditional security issues range from arms smuggling, to cyber security and border management, along with four other related areas. Meetings and updates in these sectors include regular ASEAN Defence Minister Meetings, and policies such as the ASEAN Plan of action in Combating Transnational Crime (2016-2025), among many others. The most cohesive document is the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025 (2016c), which has been updated with the 2022 APSC Outlook. The purpose of this outlook is to showcase ASEAN's adaptability and awareness of new and engaging issues. Altogether, the APSC intends to bridge gaps in understanding and policy-choice, aiming to align resilient security goals and overall governance by ASEAN member states.

Debate over ASEAN's role as a 'security community' are much discussed (Acharya 2001; Khoo 2004). A security community goes beyond the understanding that violence between states in the community is unlikely; it includes other non-traditional security actors including international institutions and civil society to cohesively form policies and agreements (Martel 2020). Yet, even with the constantly evolving nature of ASEAN's role in security in the region, the Covid-19 pandemic shifted nature of security in the region once again. Kuok and Huxley (2021) note that instead of leading to greater cooperation in the domain, at times Covid-19 aggravated issues and tensions between ASEAN member states on common issues areas that existed prior. The pandemic demonstrated the volatility of the current security system as member states' first instinct is to turn inward instead of communicating or participating as a community (Kuok & Huxley 2021). Indeed, the insecurity COVID-19 posed to ASEAN is similar to the effect that major disasters pose: an ability to drastically and suddenly increase instability. The onslaught of an unexpected tsunami, or an expected typhoon in a volatile region can lead to an outbreak of new conflict, exacerbate existing tension, or bring forth other security issues. As such, extreme hazards posed by climate change are projected to affect areas with ethnic fractionalization "characterized by high-vulnerability and low adaptive capacity," leading to a rise in the possibility of conflict (Schleussner et al. 2016, 9219). Indeed, long-term repercussions on the economy, infrastructure, livelihood, and overall security must be considered.

The aforementioned issues adversely affect the security of minorities and oppressed groups, including women. While all ASEAN member states are signatories of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the enforcement of CEDAW mechanisms are lacking across the region (Veneracion-Rallonza 2019). One of the key goals of CEDAW is to guarantee women's protection, however joint cooperation on CEDAW is deficient (Veneracion-Rallonza 2019). The introduction of the Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda as a targeted area of cooperation by ASEAN is a significant step to rectifying this gap, by considering the role that gender plays across all issue areas. Under the Political

Security Community pillar, the WPS agenda has been strengthened in recent years, with the formation of the WPS Advisory Group in October 2019 and the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry in 2018, which aims to bring in experts to support member states (ASEAN 2020b). Even with this type of cooperation, much of the work on WPS remains at the state level. The ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security (2021) was the first regional study and is intended to be a step towards a Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security. There is clear intent for an increased capacity of gender mainstreaming across ASEAN activities, but the report notes that there are gaps in the presence of WPS and gender-mainstreaming at the state and regional levels and a greater need for a regional framework and to scale up WPS directives (ASEAN 2021). The progress on gender mainstreaming continues to lag, resulting in a frustrating slow progression and a lack of urgency.

Analysis and Findings

A Gender-based Analysis Plus Approach to Security and Disasters

ASEAN is heading towards a cohesive and resilient nexus of security and disaster governance. Notably, the 2022 ASEAN Outlook mentions the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) as a point of cooperation with the ASEAN Defence Minister Meeting (6). However, gender as a necessary component of disaster response is missing. It is well established by policymakers, humanitarians, and academics alike that gender matters and that women are disproportionately affected by disasters (Enarson 2000). Furthermore, during and following disasters the risk women face is incredibly high, to the extent that the inequalities and resulting vulnerability women face can significantly lower women's life expectancy (Neumayer and Plümper 2007). Intimate partner violence, gender-based violence, and mental health illness following disasters must be considered by disaster management policies to reduce security risks and increase resilience (Bell and Folkerth 2016). In research undertaken in Sri Lanka following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, collected evidence determined that violence against women is exacerbated by disaster and that this increase in violence can occur for an extended period of time following a disaster (Fisher 2010). Fisher (2010) explains that this is a result of pre-existing conditions instigated by disaster, including unequal power relationships in society and the family that are based in misogynistic understandings of gender. While these issue areas are recognized in relation to conflict, this has not translated to disaster governance (Fisher 2010). The fact that this has not been considered to a large extent in disaster situations is extremely problematic, as the earlier discussion implies the risk women face is incredibly high (Neumayer and Plümper 2007). However, the focus on human security by ASEAN has created a framework that would easily allow for the intersection of gender, security and disasters to be taken into consideration and acted upon. This is echoed in the four pillars of the Women Peace and Security Agenda (prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery), which includes humanitarian response as a key issue area (UNDP 2019).

In 2018, leaders from the various National Disaster Management Organizations of ASEAN member states committed to “pursue new initiatives on women, peace, and security and [to] strengthening efforts in promoting gender mainstreaming on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation” (Relief Web 2018). However, in the ASEAN Vision 2025 on Disaster Management report, gender is mentioned only once, referring to the need to ensure women and girls can “act as agents in their own response,” yet the consideration of structural barriers, unequal power structures or discrimination remains unmentioned (ASEAN 2016b, 5). The lack of gender mainstreaming and/or GBA+ – which is “an analytical tool to advance gender equality

and diversity outcomes for all policies, programs and services” (Eichler et al. 2020, 1) – signals a significant link missing from what aspires to be an effective and productive disaster response system. While this may have been done at the individual level, AHA’s strengths lie in its role as a centralized coordination and policy hub, of which gender mainstreaming is a critical component.

Foresight Considerations

Each of the below recommendations are based in the understanding that disasters and security are connected, and that gender is a required component of effective disaster risk reduction and response. The earlier discussion has provided examples of how disasters can contribute to greater amounts of instability and insecurity, particularly in a region so focused on joint coordination and response. This is an issue that will simply increase in urgency as the climate changes. Thus, the recommendations are as follows:

1. Greater integration of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda into all disaster policies, including consideration of the increased security risks facing women and oppressed groups following disasters. This includes recognition of the importance of the WPS agenda in human security issue areas more broadly. Additional encouragement for this could be done through targeted support for women’s organizations in the Asia Pacific region who are advocating for the expansion of the WPS Agenda.
2. Recognition and inclusion of GBA+ and gender mainstreaming generally as a necessary component in all policies, actions, and aspects of disaster and security governance undertaken by ASEAN, its member states and Dialogue Partnership countries.
3. Consideration of the impact of disasters on Southeast Asian security, at local, state and regional levels, including human, economic, and climate security. This research, analysis and resulting policy must include considerations of immediate, short and long-term needs and risks. This is especially important for ASEAN’s dialogue and development partners, including Canada, whose investment and mutual interests in the region is maintained through stable partnerships and cooperation in a variety of areas including disaster risk reduction (Government of Canada 2022).
4. Consideration and expansion of security risks in disaster policy, including plans to respond to disasters effectively while recognizing contextual risk and security threats, specifically recognizing the importance of gender and how this affects effective responses. This is echoed in Canada’s defence plan, Strong, Secure, Engaged (Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces 2017), which could provide a useful example as a dialogue partner to ASEAN’s policies and programming.

Conclusion

The WPS agenda has a role to play in disaster response, especially as climate change increases the frequency of major events that pose security risks. What makes the WPS agenda exceedingly useful is its recognition that women are overlooked and marginalized although they play a critical role in security (UNDP 2019). The high frequency of disasters coupled with security tensions throughout Southeast Asia bring these issue areas close together. The climate-conflict nexus excels in explaining the importance of these two issue

areas, however gender must be considered for preparedness and resiliency planning to be effective. The Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2016, 5) highlighted this as a key part of their research on the climate-conflict nexus, noting that in the face of climate emergencies, gender inequality should be considered “a root cause of fragility at all levels.” Without GBA+ policy is incomplete and ultimately ineffective, particularly when striving for long-term stability. Without consideration of cross-cutting issue areas and a lack of GBA+ there is a greater risk to social, economic and political structures. Ultimately, ASEAN not only has the infrastructure – especially with the prominence and opportunity presented with the AHA and its many components – but also the need for the development of this nexus of governance. Disaster, security and gender are a natural fit, one that will become more clear as climate change leads to larger and more frequent emergencies and greater risk of instability at the local, state and regional levels.

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Primary Case Study

Myanmar's Coup d'état 2021

On February 1, 2021, the military junta took control of Myanmar and reverted the new democracy into a violent authoritarian regime. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's military took control of the country as the military refused to accept the landslide victory of the National League for Democracy led by Nobel Peace Prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi (Goldman 2021). Several major world leaders, including US President Joe