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6th NTS-Asia Consortium Annual Conference: Planetary Health and Managing Converging Risks in Asia



Source: NTS Centre (2022).

The NTS Centre hosted the 6th NTS-Asia Consortium Annual Conference on 6th April 2022 in Singapore. It brought together members of the Consortium to exchange views on different interpretations of and responses to the concept of planetary health, specific risks to planetary health in each country, and existing and/or hypothetical measures to operationalise the concept.

As scientists and scholars attempt to explain the start and spread of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of planetary health has started to gain more attention. The [concept](#) focuses on how human-induced changes in our Earth's systems impact human health and well-being. It encourages systemic change that focuses on environmental protection and conservation as the overarching guiding

principle across different sectors.

The pandemic has reinforced the relevance of the environment-human health nexus. The emergence and spread of zoonotic viruses can be traced back to [activities](#) such as habitat fragmentation, deforestation, biodiversity loss, intensive agriculture and livestock farming, uncontrolled urbanisation, pollution, climate change, and bushmeat hunting and trading. Biodiversity loss arising from climate change and environmental degradation also enables easier transmission of pathogens from animals to humans.

How then can we improve the health of our ecosystems and prevent the next global pandemic?

Recognising converging risks that pose threats to the health of the planet becomes an important starting point.

Aside from existing environmental issues such as pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and biodiversity loss, other activities such as wars, international trade, urban development, pandemic response, and humanitarian action, among others, likewise affect the environment. These need to be managed simultaneously to mitigate their overall impacts on planetary health.

As the adage goes, prevention is better than cure. Scholars have suggested that it [costs substantially less to implement pandemic preventive](#) efforts as compared to the economic and mortality costs of responding to these pathogens once they have emerged. The estimated spending needed over the next 10 years to prevent a future pandemic is just 2% of the total costs accrued during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence,

instead of implementing reactive policies and initiatives after a crisis event, governments and policymakers should adopt a more proactive approach towards managing future risks.

The COVID-19 crisis has further underscored the need for a system-level thinking approach towards planetary health. A multi-sector, multi-scalar, and multi-stakeholder approach that brings together different nodes of environmental and health policies should be prioritised. This can take the form of co-production and sharing of knowledge, joint monitoring and review, and networking and integration between different levels of governance. Epistemic communities, civil society, businesses, health providers all have important roles to play in pushing forth this agenda and operationalising the planetary health concept in their respective

fields.

There should be increased efforts to educate populations on the importance of environmental protection. This can be complemented by more robust urban planning and population (movement) management, with such efforts targeted at reducing habitat loss, promoting sustainable land-use, and decreasing deforestation.

Policymakers also need to [strengthen climate resilience](#) in our societies by promoting greater synergies between climate, biodiversity, and health initiatives. This involves working towards decreasing carbon emissions, addressing socioeconomic inequalities to improve health and well-being of populations, and ensuring that [planetary boundaries](#) are not crossed.

Suggested Readings

- Andrew Dobson et al, 2020, 'Ecology and Economics for Pandemic Prevention', *Science*, Vol 369, Issue 6502, pp. 379-381, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abc3189>.
- Nicole de Paula and Liz Willetts, 2021, 'COVID-19 and Planetary Health: How a Pandemic Could Pave the Way for a Green Recovery', IISD, <https://www.iisd.org/articles/covid-19-and-planetary-health-how-pandemic-could-pave-way-green-recovery>.
- Jitendra Mishra, Priya Mishra, and Naveen Kumar Arora, 2021, 'Linkages Between Environmental Issues and Zoonotic Diseases: With Reference to COVID-19 Pandemic', *Environmental Sustainability*, Vol 4, Issue 3, pp. 455-467, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8005368/#:~:text=Despite%20having%20a%20difference%20in,pollution%2C%20climate%20change%20and%20bushmeat>.
- Margareth Sembiring, 2021, 'Planetary Health: A More Resilient World Post-COVID-19?', *RSIS Commentary*, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/nts/planetary-health-a-more-resilient-world-post-covid-19/#.YIZ8VedByzU>.
- Stockholm Resilience Centre, 'The Nine Planetary Boundaries', accessed 21 April 2022, <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>.

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

'Now or never': World has climate solutions but must act fast to avoid overheating, says UN panel

Global greenhouse gas emissions need to peak before 2025 to limit dangerous climate change. Solutions are at hand and nations are taking action. Some key green technology costs have plunged in recent years. There is hope, and climate policies can be positive for economic development.

David Fogatry

The Straits Times

5 April 2022

War in Ukraine is scrambling the world's ability to fight climate change

Countries are scrambling to meet near-term energy needs — in some cases doubling down on coal — in their efforts to reduce dependency on Russian exports. Such a move should only be used as a stopgap and a rapid acceleration toward renewable energy should follow.

Alicia Wallace

CNN Business

7 April 2022

More dams will threaten Goa's water security: Greens

Environmentalists said that the construction of more dams will not solve the water shortage issue. Instead, water harvesting and conservation carried out in an eco-friendly manner backed by traditional wisdom should be mainstreamed

Rajendra P Kerkar

The Times of India

8 April 2022

Climate change action can't wait for Ukraine war and pandemic to pass

The latest IPCC report on the increasing severity of climate change appears to have come and gone with barely any mention. While the war in Ukraine, the pandemic and local politics might hold our attention, the need for meaningful action on climate change grows greater.

David Dodwell

South China Morning Post

10 April 2022

Mangroves thrive in UAE desert to help fight climate change

During the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow last year, the UAE pledged to plant 100 million more mangrove trees by 2030 - to soak up more planet-warming carbon dioxide and guard against sea-level rise.

Shabana Begum

The Straits Times

11 April 2022

Proposed deep-sea mining would kill animals not yet discovered

Several companies hope to begin mining the seabed on an industrial scale in the coming years, perhaps as early as 2024. Some are touting the seabed as a sustainable source of the metals needed to produce batteries for electric vehicles or smartphones. Scientists predict seabed mining will do much ecological damage.

Sabrina Weiss

National Geographic

11 April 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

ASEAN Regional Action Plan for combating marine debris in the ASEAN Member states (2021-2025)

Given that land-based sources account for approximately 80% of marine plastic debris, integrated solutions can be identified across the plastic waste value chain. Three key stages are (1) to reduce inputs into the system, (2) to enhance collection and minimise leakage, and (3) to create value for waste reuse.

Jakarta: The ASEAN Secretariat

2021

Plastic Pollution in the Arctic

Although some pollution is from local sources — fisheries, landfills, wastewater and offshore industrial activity — distant regions are a substantial source, as plastic is carried from lower latitudes to the Arctic by ocean currents, atmospheric transport and rivers. Mitigation is urgently needed at both regional and international levels to decrease plastic production and utilisation, achieve circularity and optimise solid waste management and wastewater treatment.

Melanie Bergmann, et al.

Nature Reviews Earth & Environment

2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

International Day for Biological Diversity

This year's theme of the International Day for Biological Diversity is "building a shared future for all life". Biodiversity remains the answer to several sustainable development challenges. From nature-based solutions to climate, health issues, food and water security, and sustainable livelihoods, biodiversity is the foundation upon which we can build back better.

Worldwide

22 May 2022

World Environment Day

This year's World Environment Day advocates for transformative environmental change on a global scale. The campaign shines a spotlight on climate action, nature action and pollution action while encouraging everyone, everywhere to live sustainably. While our individual consumption choices do make a difference, it is collective action that will create the transformative environmental change we need, so we can advance to a more sustainable and just Earth, where everyone can flourish.

Worldwide

5 June 2022

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

Singapore explores tapping nuclear energy by 2050

To prepare Singapore for adopting nuclear technology when it becomes viable, a report commissioned by the Energy Market Authority recommends that the nation chart out required capabilities, regulations, resources and a timeline for Singapore to become a fast adopter of new reactor technologies.

Ang Qing
The Straits Times
22 March 2022

Nuclear energy: Political will most crucial

Southeast Asia does not operate any nuclear power plant, but the landscape is about to change as the region grapples to meet global targets of greenhouse emissions. While the region has pushed strongly for renewables in the form of solar energy, it is inevitable that nuclear will feature as an alternative option to replace fossil fuels as a sustainable baseload generation of electricity.

Alvin Chew
RSIS Commentary
25 March 2022

Measures to enhance Singapore's energy security extended to Jun 30 amid global volatility

First introduced in October last year, these measures include the establishment of a standby LNG facility which generation companies can draw from to generate electricity when their natural gas supplies are disrupted.

Ahmad Zhaki Abdullah
Channel News Asia
31 March 2022

No electricity shortage in Thailand, says Energy Ministry

The Energy Ministry said the country is unlikely to face electricity shortages such as those being experienced in Vietnam and Sri Lanka. It said Thailand has secured a long-term coal purchasing contract to guarantee coal supplies.

New Straits Times
7 April 2022

Why Japan will struggle to do without Russian energy

Japan "will aim to stop importing coal from Russia" as a longer-term goal, according to its trade minister. Longer term, a drive to cut Japan's dependency on coal could accelerate the transition to renewable energy and the restarting of nuclear power plants that were taken offline following the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

Bloomberg
Channel News Asia
11 April 2022

Philippine RE capacity up 9% in 2021, in line with global growth

Earlier this year, the Department of Energy issued bid invitations for 2,000 MW worth of RE capacity, with 1,400 MW to be built in Luzon, 400 MW in the Visayas, and 200 MW in Mindanao.

Ram Christian S. Agustin
Business World
12 April 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Charting the energy transition to 2050: Energy 2050 Committee Report

This report includes scenarios to describe several possible futures through which Singapore could achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, depending on how the uncertainties unfold. It also includes signposts that provide indications of macro energy trends that can be used to guide Singapore's decision-making process along the way.

Energy 2050 Committee
Singapore: Energy Market Authority
2022

SDG7: Data and projection

The International Energy Agency is at the forefront of global efforts to assess and analyse the persistent lack of full energy access, providing annual country-by-country data on access to electricity and clean cooking (SDG 7.1) and the main data source for tracking official progress towards SDG targets on renewables (SDG 7.2) and energy efficiency (SDG 7.3). This data set is updated as a part of the IEA's role as co-custodian for tracking progress on SDG 7.

International Energy Agency
Paris: IEA
2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

ACE - UNEP Renewable Energy and Gender Workshop

This event explored the latest findings of relevant studies towards establishing gender-responsive policy approaches and provided insights to the ongoing development of Accelerating ASEAN Renewable Energy Deployment through Gender-Responsive Energy Policy Roadmap.

Recorded Webinar
22 March 2022

International Conference on Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources – Accomplishments and Future Endeavours

The purpose of the IAEA conference is to foster the exchange of experiences and anticipate future developments related to establishing and maintaining a high level of safety and security of radioactive sources throughout their life cycle.

IAEA, Vienna, Austria
20-24 June 2022

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

COP26's dilemma: Sustainability vs food security?

In the midst of the "coal crunch" of rising coal/energy prices on one hand, and the "green push" to phase down coal production, this commentary argues that there are important food security trade-offs to consider in pursuing sustainability objectives. It presents Sri Lanka's sudden ban on chemical fertilizer imports in April 2021 as a cautionary tale, and presents the need for caution in India's ongoing push to increase ethanol-related cash crop production.

Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros

RSIS Commentary

23 March 2022

Invasion of Ukraine – Asia's food security in trouble?

Authors argue that the Ukraine-Russia conflict can have important food security implications in many countries, through ripple effects from reduced wheat and fertiliser exports.

Genevieve Donnellon-May and Paul Teng

RSIS Commentary

5 April 2022

GT investigates: Western media bad-mouths China's food security amid Ukraine crisis, while blaming Chinese for global supply strain

Staff writers at Global Times (GT) China argue that so-called "Western Media" such as US-based CNN and Japan-based Nikkei-Asia, among others, are hyping up food insecurity and rising grain prices in China, in other words "creating crises without a basis." They claim that China's grain imports are not only to supplement domestic production, but also to "promote the stability of the international market and encourage a trade balance."

GT Staff Writers

Global Times

6 April 2022

Ukraine crisis threatens global food security

The protracted Russia-Ukraine war could lead to worsening food prices, which were already on the rise even in 2021, with high-food import countries including the Philippines and Indonesia within Southeast Asia, as well as Iraq and Bangladesh, likely to suffer first. He notes that protests are already ongoing in countries like Iraq and Sri Lanka.

Devinder Sharma

The Tribune

8 April 2022

'China didn't hoard grains': Stockpiling to ensure domestic food security has global implications

Amidst Russia-Ukraine war, growing instability in international trade, and China's renewed struggle with COVID-19, some are accusing Beijing of "hoarding grains." This article collates insights from China-based experts, who argue that imports and stockpiles are "a necessary supplement on top of domestic production."

Frank Tang and Orange Wang

South China Morning Post

11 April 2022

Xiplomacy: How Xi offers solution to ensuring global food security

This article describes China's international collaboration approaches to food security under President Xi Jinping's regime. Examples include food aid to South Sudan, as well as China's sharing of its technologies such as "Juncao" for producing edible mushrooms in Papua New Guinea, hybrid rice in Madagascar, and Moringa varieties in Cuba, among others.

Zhao Wencai

Xinhua News

12 April 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Pandemic, poverty, and inequality: Evidence from India

Despite significant COVID-19-induced job losses in urban areas and migration of individuals returning to their home cities, the Indian government's food transfer programmes kept extreme poverty to a minimum.

Surjit Bhalla, Karan Bhasin and Arvind Virmani

IMF Working Paper No. 2022/069

2022

IPCC 6th Assessment Report Chapter 10: Asia

This chapter highlights the integrated impacts and direct costs of climate change within ecosystems, coastal habitats, food security, and water systems in Asia. It supports greater use of climate-smart agriculture, ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction, and urban blue-green infrastructure to meet adaptation, mitigation, and sustainable development goals simultaneously.

Rajib Shaw et al.,

Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

IFPRI Policy Seminar: Retail Food Prices at the Country Level and Implications for Food Security

This policy seminar discussed how rising food prices, further aggravated by the invasion of Ukraine, are being transmitted at the country level, with special attention to countries suffering from acute food insecurity and those with a high dependence on imports.

Recorded Webinar

29 March 2022

2nd Global Food Security & Sustainability Summit 2022

This event seeks to address the critical issues of food security from the local level to the global level, from an interdisciplinary and systemic food systems perspective. Discussions will include the growing roles of technology adoption; multi-stakeholder perspectives on food supply chain stability; and sustainable solutions across the food chain.

Virtual

30 June -1 July 2022

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Finding the next pandemic virus before it finds us

Mapping out the ominous viruses lurking at the reaches of human civilization will take time. Countries will likely spend years hammering out rules to govern how they share research on diseases. Given the perpetual risk of a new virus emerging, the world needs to act now.

Umair Irfan

Vox

4 April 2022

Thousands of new viruses discovered in the ocean

More than 5,000 new virus species have been identified in the world's oceans, according to a new study.

Rachael Rettner

LiveScience

10 April 2022

Zika virus may be one step away from explosive outbreak

A new outbreak of Zika virus is quite possible, warn researchers, with a single mutation potentially enough to trigger an explosive spread.

Michele Roberts

BBC News

13 April 2022

Is a virus we all have causing multiple sclerosis?

Nearly three million people around the world have multiple sclerosis. Scientists think they have now uncovered a mystery cause of this incurable disease.

James Gallagher

BBC News

14 April 2022

US renews COVID-19 public health emergency

The United States renewed the COVID-19 public health emergency on 13 April, allowing millions of Americans to keep getting free tests, vaccines and treatments for at least three more months.

Reuters

Channel News Asia

14 April 2022

Omicron XE: How concerning is the so-called 'Frankenstein' Covid-19 variant?

The emergence of the XE is a frank reminder that the pandemic is not over yet.

Bruce Y. Lee

Forbes

16 April 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Global genomic surveillance strategy for pathogens with pandemic and epidemic potential 2022–2032

The WHO began a process in July 2021 to develop a strategy to drive a unified vision on global genomic surveillance for pathogens with pandemic and epidemic potential. The final version of the strategy was launched in March 2022.

Lisa L Carter et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 100, No. 4
2022

WHO recommendations for resilient health systems

Despite our collective experience with public health emergencies, COVID-19 has demonstrated that national health systems were poorly prepared for a pandemic of this scale. WHO calls on leaders and policymakers within health, finance and other sectors to act on the seven recommendations of its position paper on building health systems resilience.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 100, No. 4
2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Asia Pacific Immunization Policy Dialogues-- The Covid-19 East-West Divide: Is Asia too cautious?

The Omicron wave has led to a lot of uncertainty in terms of the contagion rate, as well as social and economic costs. While countries in the West have loosened restrictions, the Asia-Pacific region continues to take a cautious stance. Immunology and public health experts from Japan, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines discuss gaps, trade-offs and benefits of Asia's response to the pandemic.

Recorded Webinar

7 March 2022

Long COVID - Managing Long Term Health Consequences of COVID-19

This webinar explored the hospital experience of Long COVID in Israel; examined the likely burden and health system impacts of Long COVID and post-COVID illness in Australia; and discussed the development of Australian evidence-based clinical guidelines for Long COVID.

Recorded Webinar

23 March 2022

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Climate change: Less space between one disaster and the next

There is increasingly little breathing space between one disaster and the next. As such, governments must rethink their approaches to planning, infrastructure, taxation, emergencies, farming, foreign aid, public health, and national security.

Anthony Burke
The Interpreter

16 March 2022

Anticipatory action, shock-responsive social protection and cash transfers in ASEAN: What are we learning and where do we go next?

As technological advances make it easier to forecast natural hazards, two approaches – anticipatory action and shock-responsive social protection – are currently the topic of conversation in humanitarian and development discussions in ASEAN and the world.

Zoë Scott
Anticipation Hub

16 March 2022

Humanitarian technology: No excuse for complacency

As emerging technologies change the way humanitarian assistance is delivered, there also needs to be increased commitment to the sustained transformation of mindsets in order to build community awareness and resilience to future crises.

Christopher Chen
IDSS Paper

23 March 2022

The logistical challenge of responding to disaster

As climate change causes more frequent emergencies, it also threatens the safety and accessibility of infrastructure and facilities for emergency response relief. As such, existing logistical planning will need to be adjusted.

Lina Gong
The Interpreter

28 March 2022

Two years on: The need for gender-sensitivity in humanitarian protection

To mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 and other humanitarian crises for women, more gender-sensitive policies and programmes are needed.

S. Nanthini
IDSS Paper

29 March 2022

Strengthening the Philippines' post-disaster financial resilience through support at the national and local levels

After a disaster, countries need to immediately access funds to rebuild damaged infrastructure and re-establish critical government services. In order to overcome the liquidity constraints at this point, a Development Policy Loan with a Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown Option (Cat DDO) can provide financing.

World Bank

5 April 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Framing volunteers: Identifying and integrating volunteers in crises response operations

Taking the perspective of civil society, the study aims to examine how different volunteers are framed both by others and themselves and indicates the need to develop and apply various strategies for efficient use of different volunteers' resources to ensure crisis preparedness.

Kerstin Eriksson and Erna Danielsson
International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, Vol.

74
2022

What do emergency services and authorities need from society to better handle disasters?

The authors conducted an empirical study to identify what European emergency responders and authorities needed and expected from society to better handle a disaster.

Sahar Elkady et al.
International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, Vol.

72
2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

HHI ENP Thematic Briefing Webinar: Humanitarian Engagement and Local Leadership

This webinar examined the following questions: How are local practitioners involved in technical and strategic decision-making in humanitarian operations? How do they participate in negotiations and dialogue with state actors, non-state armed groups, and other relevant actors? What concrete steps are needed to fully recognize national organisations' and practitioners' leadership of humanitarian operations?

Recorded Webinar

22 March 2022

AI-powered Vehicles for Humanitarian Help Deployment

This webinar explored how robotic systems can be put in place to provide an efficient humanitarian aid response that saves lives and restores dignity to individuals while ensuring that humanitarian care providers are able to safely and effectively do their work.

Recorded Webinar

31 March 2022

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Migration and climate change in Asia

While Asian countries are part of the various climate change-related treaties and instruments, there is a particular need to link those commitments with human rights standards and obligations regarding the humane treatment of migrants.

Vitit Muntarbhorn
The Bangkok Post

17 March 2022

The EU should treat all refugees like it is treating Ukrainians

The EU's activation of its Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainian refugees provides a new model for the bloc's refugee policy moving forward.

Joel Hernández
The New Humanitarian

23 March 2022

How talking about 'humanity' and not 'crisis' can aid all refugees right now

Rather than using language highlighting the numbers of refugees from Ukraine and fueling crisis, the narrative should be focused on bringing people together and building resilience.

Thomas Coombes
The New Humanitarian

29 March 2022

Indonesia, Malaysia sign agreement on protection of migrant workers

A memorandum of understanding has been signed by Malaysia and Indonesia, aiming to put in place initiatives which include applications designed to strengthen wage protection and complaint mechanisms.

Kate Lamb
Reuters

1 April 2021

To mitigate human trafficking in Nepal, increase financial inclusion

The Nepal government needs to integrate financial inclusion and literacy into its policies and programmes, targeting people who have been historically excluded such as women, rural residents, and other sectors vulnerable to human trafficking.

Suswopna Rimal and Prashamsha Simkhada
Asia Foundation

13 April 2022

World first partnership to tackle global migration crisis

Under the Migration and Economic Development Partnership, the UK government is investing £120 million into the economic development and growth of Rwanda, in return for their processing of refugee claims of those coming into the UK 'illegally'.

Home Office of the UK Government

14 April 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Migration in post-coup Myanmar: A critical determinant in shaping the country's future?

Since the February 2021 coup in Myanmar, both external and internal migration has increased, creating a "Myanmar migration moment". As it continues, this trend is likely to shape the socioeconomic elements of the country, in particular its role in shaping the political landscape.

Aung Tun
ISEAS Perspective

2022

The Migration Governance Indicators (MGI): A key tool for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration implementation – Guidance Note

This report illustrates the ways in which governments and other relevant stakeholders can use the MGI in the implementation, follow-up and review of progress towards achieving the goals of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

International Organization for Migration

2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Missing Migrants, Missing Solutions?

This webinar aimed to raise awareness about the missing migrant issue. Experts advocated for greater efforts to come up with concrete measures to prevent and resolve cases of missing migrants and address the needs of their families.

Recorded Webinar

9 March 2022

Asian Immigration and Religious Diversity

This webinar will look at religious diversity among the Asian migrant population in the US.

Webinar

22 April 2022