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Climate Maladaptation: Climate Action and Challenges in Southeast Asia

By Julius Cesar Trajano

Climate change has emerged as the central issue of our time. Over recent decades, public recognition of its imminent dangers has grown significantly, especially as the window for effective action narrows, while the impacts of climate change are increasingly evident worldwide. This escalating situation is underscored in the [Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2023](#), which describes the "increasingly serious threat" posed by climate change-induced disasters across the Asia-Pacific. Notably, Southeast Asia faces heightened risks, with Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam ranking among the top 10 nations for the number of disasters recorded in 2022.

Climate action has increasingly become central to discussions about climate change, focusing especially on how individuals, communities, and nations can both adapt to and mitigate the swiftly escalating impacts of climate change globally. However, it is equally important to discuss the potential negative outcomes of these climate actions, known as [climate maladaptation](#) and [malmitigation](#). These terms denote actions that not only fall short of mitigating climate change and adapting to climate risks but could also inadvertently worsen them.

Hydropower and water storage dams

Hydropower and water storage dams are key components of climate action projects in Southeast Asia, a region that seeks sustainable solutions to meet its growing energy demands and manage its water resources amidst the challenges posed by climate change.

Southeast Asia has heavily invested in hydropower as a renewable energy source to

IN THIS ISSUE

CLIMATE CHANGE

ENERGY SECURITY

FOOD SECURITY

HEALTH SECURITY

HUMANITARIAN
ASSISTANCE AND
DISASTER RELIEF

MIGRATION

reduce reliance on fossil fuels and decrease greenhouse gas emissions. Countries like Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia have developed extensive hydropower facilities, capitalising on their river systems. Hydropower projects, such as those on the Mekong River, supply substantial energy to the region, supporting economic growth and regional energy needs. However, these projects are not without controversy, as they can disrupt local ecosystems, displace communities, and alter river flows, affecting downstream agricultural activities.

For example, the human security impact of the collapse of the [Xe Pian-Xe Namnoy Dam](#) in 2018 sparked debate anew on risks associated with Mekong dams as thousands of indigenous and local communities were displaced. The construction of [Lower Sesan 2 Dam](#) caused the displacement of nearly 5,000 people, mostly indigenous peoples and other ethnic minorities who have lived in villages along the Mekong riverbanks for generations.

The operation of massive upstream dams has resulted in the decline of water flow, according to scientists and environmentalists. The lack of vital sediment would be felt severely in the future when all mega-dams being built in the Upper Mekong River Basin are completed. The inadequate water flow to the agricultural plains of the Mekong Delta, known as Vietnam's rice bowl, means decreasing level of rice production. This has severely affected agricultural productivity in the delta, illustrating the negative, compounding consequences of both mega-hydropower dams and climate change effects.

Beyond energy production, water storage dams in Southeast Asia play crucial roles in water supply and flood management. These dams help manage water resources, ensuring steady supply during dry periods and mitigating flood risks during rainy seasons. For instance, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam use dams to address water supply shortages and regulate water for agricultural irrigation, which is vital for food production and rural livelihoods. Like hydropower, the construction and operation of water storage dams must balance environmental and social impacts, particularly concerning the displacement of local populations and impacts on local wildlife and natural habitats.

Stakeholder involvement and environmental and social safeguards

As part of climate action efforts, both hydropower and water storage dams are seen as dual-purpose solutions that address energy security and water management. They contribute to national goals of reducing carbon footprints and enhancing resilience to climate variability. Nevertheless, the deployment of these projects in Southeast Asia generate

multifaceted challenges, including environmental degradation, social resistance, and cross-border water governance issues. The success of these projects as sustainable climate action initiatives depends on careful planning, stakeholder engagement, and adherence to environmental and social safeguards.

In order to fully understand the impact of a planned climate action measure, it is important to engage and consult with communities on the ground who would likely endure unintended consequences. There is a critical need to incorporate the diverse perspectives and agency of stakeholders including local communities in planning, implementing and building climate action projects. By gathering insights from diverse stakeholders, policymakers can better anticipate the impacts, thus enhancing the likelihood of successful outcomes in climate action endeavours.



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

SUGGESTED READINGS

Mely Caballero-Anthony, Julius Cesar Trajano, Alistair D. B. Cook, Nanthini D/O T Sambanthan, Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros, Keith Paolo Landicho, and Danielle Lynn Goh. 2023. *Climate Change and its Impact on Peace and Security in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: RSIS-Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies.

Mekong River Commission. 2022. *Joint Environmental Monitoring Programme at two Mekong Mainstream dams: The Don Sahong and Xayaburi hydropower projects*. Vientiane: MRC Secretariat.

Brahma Chellaney and Frederick Kliem, Eds. 2021. *Disrupted Trade, Labour, and Politics in the Mekong River Basin*. Tokyo: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Japan.

CLIMATE CHANGE



NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Extreme weather events due to climate change threaten future of tourism in Australia

Global warming is raising big questions for the future of tourism and how to handle extreme weather conditions. The issue is particularly urgent in Australia where its natural environment attracts tourists by the droves. A report by the Centre for Integrated Sustainability Analysis in Australia found that the so-called Black Summer of bushfires, which started in 2019, wiped US\$1.8 billion from tourism supply chains.

Roger Maynard and Louisa Tang

Channel News Asia | 29 April 2024

What a years-long probe of Big Oil reveals about its climate strategy

Some of the world's largest oil companies have privately expressed scepticism of the Paris agreement, federal climate regulations and their own goals of reaching "net zero" emissions by mid-century, even as they publicly voiced support for these efforts.

Maxine Joselow

The Washington Post | 30 April 2024

UK's new climate action plan unlawful due to delivery risk, High Court rules

Britain's latest climate action plan is unlawful because ministers were not told of the risk that key policies could not be delivered. The judgment by London's High Court – that carbon budgets set by the government in 2023 to meet the UK's target of net zero emissions by 2050 were set without evidence they could be achieved – means Britain will have to submit a new plan for a second time.

Sam Tobin

Reuters | 4 May 2024

Are we communicating climate change wrong?

Here are five ways to improve

Taking on the role of a climate change translator, making it human, adding a dash of hope, co-creating the message, and getting the sources rights are some suggestions to better communicate climate change to diverse audience.

Fernando Andrade

United Nations Development Programme | 6 May 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

State of the climate in Asia 2023

Asia remained the world's most disaster-hit region from weather, climate and water-related hazards in 2023. Floods and storms caused the highest number of reported casualties and economic losses, whilst the impact of heatwaves became more severe.

World Meteorological Organization

2024

The economic commitment of climate change

Climate change is projected to affect the world's economy, resulting in an income reduction of 19 percent within the next 26 years.

Maximilian Kotz, Anders Levermann and Leonie Wenz

Nature, Vol. 628, 552-557 | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

World Oceans Day

With the theme "Awaken New Depth" the 2024 UN World Oceans Day will take us on a journey of discovery through the ocean's vastness, tapping into the wisdom and expertise of global policy-makers, scientists, managers, thought leaders, and artists to awaken new depths of understanding, compassion, collaboration and commitment for the ocean and all it sustains. The program will expand our perspectives and appreciation for our blue planet, build new foundations for our relationship to the ocean, and ignite a wave of action toward necessary change.

Worldwide

7 June 2024

ENERGY SECURITY



NEWS & COMMENTARIES

The case for Vietnam's Mekong energy diplomacy

Despite mounting evidence of social and environmental harms associated with Mekong hydropower dams, hydropower remains a key component of Southeast Asia's energy security and green transition. In recent years, Vietnam has pursued Mekong water diplomacy by increasing cooperation with regional actors and development partners.

Phan Xuan Dung

Fulcrum | 17 April 2024

Indonesia's burning coal dilemma

The government has set a goal of net-zero emissions by 2060, but it will be a challenge to reach that goal without significant changes to one of the world's biggest producer and user of coal.

Ramdlaningrum and Yekti Pratiwi

East Asia Forum | 24 April 2024

China's floating nuke plants up South China Sea ante

The sea-based nuclear plants would help to solidify China's occupation of various artificial islands it has built up and militarised in recent years in the maritime area.

Gabriel Honrada

Asia Times | 6 May 2024

DOJ clears way for possible ratification of landmark PH-US nuclear deal

The Philippines' Department of Justice says provisions of the 123 Agreement are not in conflict with existing laws, as well as pending nuclear-related bills before Congress.

Rappler

Rappler | 12 May 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Is pivoting offshore the right policy for achieving decarbonisation in the state of Victoria, Australia's electricity sector?

This article is the first quantitative study of the policy on the Victorian electricity system and finds that total system costs are higher due to the pivot from onshore to offshore wind.

Tahlia Nolan

Energy Policy, Vol. 190 | 2024

Balancing the needs of energy security, economic growth, and climate sustainability in ASEAN

This paper provides an integrative review of the energy landscape and cross-sectoral energy-related policies in the ASEAN Member States (AMSs) in balancing the needs of energy security, economic growth, and climate sustainability.

Rika Safrina

ADB Working Paper Series | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

International Conference on Nuclear Security 2024

The Conference is organised by the International Atomic Energy Agency. ICONS 2024 will provide a global forum for ministers, policymakers, senior officials and nuclear security experts to discuss the future of nuclear security worldwide, whilst providing opportunities for exchanging information, sharing best practices and fostering international cooperation.

Vienna, Austria

20-24 May 2024

FOOD SECURITY



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Commentary: How worried should we be about bird flu in US cows and milk?

The author highlights how highly pathogenic avian influenza, or HPAI, “became a zombie scourge that, unlike seasonal predecessors, never really disappeared.” She further shares how H5N1 (which causes HPAI), has since jumped into species including mink, sea lions, dolphins, porpoises, otters and cats - and now cattle. Such a jump “is not to be taken lightly, given that every infection offers the chance to mutate”.

Anjana Ahuja

Channel News Asia | 2 May 2024

India's export restrictions propel global rice prices: Asian exporters brace for Indonesia tender surge

A confluence of factors has led to rising global prices, important among which was India's rice export restrictions started in 2022-2023 whose impacts persist today. More recently, Indonesia has been tendering an increasing amount of rice since early 2024, totaling 1.4 million tonnes, thus adding further to upward pressures on international rice prices. Prolonged dry conditions amidst the warmer El Nino season have also been among the factors leading to tighter global supplies.

Asia News International

The Economic Times | 7 May 2024

Tweaks in rice tariffication law urgent, says Marcos

The Philippines, which previously had import quotas on rice, previously liberalised its rice sector in 2019 by converting these into tariffs instead. The law which allowed this, widely referred to as the “rice tariffication law,” is today being questioned however, as it has removed the powers of the National Food Authority to influence rice import prices from bulk purchases.

Jeannette Andrade and Melvin Gascon

Inquirer.net | 8 May 2024

The Sino-Russian Land Grain Corridor and China's quest for food security

Amidst sanctions on Russia which hinder its ability to export its agricultural products, and China's growing demand for food from diversified sources, the two countries have established a corridor which allows for expanding food trade between them. While such a development softens some of the impacts of sanctions on Russia, it increases trade between both countries, and allows for greater grain exports to Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

Genevieve Donnellon-May and Zhang Hongzhou

Asia Society Policy Institute | 8 May 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Geostrategic aspects of policies on food security in the light of recent global tensions: Insights from seven countries

Have the recent events, in particular the COVID-19 crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, led to a general geo-strategic shift in food trade policy? This report examines this question in the case of six countries (Brazil, China, Nigeria, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and the United States) and the European Union. It analyses whether and how the relevance of food security as a national policy goal has changed, and the role of underlying geopolitical considerations in such changes.

B. Rudloff, K. Mensah, C. Wieck, J.M.L. Montesclaros, et al., IATRC Commissioned Paper No. CP-32

International Agricultural Trade Research Consortium | 2024

Domestic and international impacts of rice export restrictions: The recent case of Indian non-basmati rice

Have India's rice export bans contributed to reduced domestic prices in India? This study explores this question, focusing on four key rice producing zones in India, namely, the East, North, South and West Zones. It finds, surprisingly, that prices for non-basmati rice (i.e., lower-priced products) tended to increase in the North, South and West zones amidst the export bans. Some plausible explanations for the discrepancy between outcomes, and the goal of the export ban of reducing domestic prices, is that traders potentially limited their release of rice in domestic markets during the export ban period, anticipating the ban would be short-lived.

H. Valera, A. Mishra, V. Pede, T. Yamano and D. Dawe

Global Food Security | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Policy Options for Asia and Global Community in the Face of Export Bans

Food export bans have increased in frequency amidst COVID-19 and the Ukraine War (including Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain deal), and prices have also been rising owing to recent searing heat waves and unravelling geopolitical challenges from the Hamas-Israel conflict and larger ongoing proxy conflicts. This seminar will discuss: “Is Asia's food security at risk, and what multilateral approaches are available to address such risk?”

Webinar (click here to register)

29 May 2024

HEALTH SECURITY



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

New Singapore-based think-tank Asia Centre for Health Security to prepare region for biological threats

The Asia Centre for Health Security (ACHS), aims to prepare Asia for current and emerging biological threats, as well as improve health security in the region. The centre will work on health systems, global health law and regulations, and global relations that pertain to health security issues.

Joyce Teo

The Straits Times | 29 April 2024

Governments near agreement on package of amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005)

The eighth meeting of the Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations (WGIHR) has reached a major step towards agreeing on a package of amendments for submission to the World Health Assembly. The amendments, proposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, aim to strengthen the international community's ability against pandemic threats.

World Health Organization

27 April 2024

WHO advisory group convenes its first meeting on responsible use of the life sciences in Geneva

Members of the technical advisory group held their first hybrid meeting at WHO headquarters in Geneva to discuss the responsible use of life sciences and dual-use research.

World Health Organization

2 May 2024

Guidance for One Health field epidemiology workforce development

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) released the global guidance to develop One Health field epidemiology competencies.

World Health Organization

14 May 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Climate change and its impact on infectious diseases in Asia

Climate change affects the transmission of infectious diseases, particularly in Asia, the world's most populous continent. This review emphasises the urgent need for intersectoral collaboration and health sector actions to mitigate its impact.

Amanda Zain et al.

Singapore Medical Journal, 65(4): 211-219 | 2024

Navigating time equity: Balancing urgency and inclusivity in pandemic treaty negotiations

The urgency for a Pandemic Treaty to address equitable access to vaccines and health systems strengthening has intensified since COVID-19. However, the accelerated timeline risks marginalising LMICs, hindering fair negotiations. Balancing expediency with inclusivity is vital.

Sharifah Sekalala et al.

PLOS Global Public Health 4(4): e0003118 | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Geneva Healthcare Forum Conference 2024

From May 27 to 29, 2024, the Geneva Health Forum Conference will take place alongside the World Health Assembly (WHA). The GHF Conference provides a unique platform conveying the perspectives of scientists, medical practitioners and field actors on the main challenges and opportunities for global health.

Geneva, Switzerland

27-29 May 2024

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF



Photo Credit: EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid on Flickr.com/Creative Commons

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Lessons learned during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic: Localisation is the key to programme adaptation during shocks

During COVID-19, humanitarian organisations who needed face-to-face interaction were forced to find new ways to adapt to the pandemic, particularly localisation. However, localisation initiatives need pre-planning to lay the groundwork to ensure success.

Bharathi Radhakrishnan and Ryan Sheely
Humanitarian Practice Network | 22 April 2024

The UN envoy, the controversial aid plan, and Myanmar's fast-changing war

Born out of the frustration that local actors had with big humanitarian actors, the Inclusive Humanitarian Forum was meant to open a space to deliver aid through all available channels. However, this plan eventually failed, falling afoul of territorial urges and a lack of support among major players.

Will Worley
The New Humanitarian | 24 April 2024

The challenges of the increasing institutionalization of climate security

While recognition of the climate crisis by security actors as a serious threat to humanity is long overdue, it is imperative that this be critically scrutinised for the dangers that accompany this institutional mainstreaming of climate security.

Judith N. Hardt et al
PLOS Climate | 25 April 2024

Space technology for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in ASEAN

Space technology plays a crucial role in disaster management for the world's most disaster-exposed region. ASEAN states with access to this should consider coordinating the use of these resources, especially for the benefit of (HADR) in a region where disaster risk is outpacing resilience.

Keith Paolo Catibog Landicho
IDSS Paper | 3 May 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

NATO and anthropogenic strategic security

This article explores the role and readiness of NATO and its capacity to integrate anthropogenic risks such as climate change and pandemics into the Alliance's standard mode of operations. It examines the Alliance's experience dealing with anthropogenic risks and how member and non-member states are being affected.

Amar Čaušević
Stockholm Environment Institute | 2023

Humanitarian AI revisited: Seizing the potential and sidestepping the pitfalls

Focusing primarily on how AI is being integrated within existing humanitarian systems, this article examines some of the recent artificial intelligence (AI) hype and offers suggestions on how AI can be safely and ethically adopted and deployed in support of humanitarian action.

Sarah W. Spencer
Humanitarian Practice Network | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Operationalizing New Ways of Working in the Humanitarian Sector with Digital Tools

This webinar discusses how digital tools can be used by humanitarian actors to improve collaborative practices and implement new ways of working across organisations. Panelists will discuss how digital solutions can support resource sharing, logistics, and cross-organisational networking.

Recorded Webinar
2024

MIGRATION



Photo Credit: UN Women on Flickr.com/Creative Commons

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

'I could not protect her': A dad mourns his child killed in the Channel

On the family's fourth attempt at crossing the Channel, seven-year-old Sara did not survive this latest ordeal. Among others, five people died during the same incident, as the crossing turned into chaos, caught between smugglers and the French police.

Andrew Harding

BBC | 1 May 2024

Injured migrant workers living in uncertainty with broken bodies and spirits

More work injury claims in Singapore were awarded in 2023 than in 2022, however NGOs like TWC2 say that most migrant workers wait about one year for their compensation, while some wait for two years or longer. In addition, workers cannot work during this time as their work permits are cancelled.

Christine Tan

The Straits Times | 6 May 2024

India, Japan dismiss Biden's 'xenophobic' comment

India and Japan have refuted President Joe Biden's comments claiming that the two countries, along with China and Russia, have lagged behind economically as they are "xenophobic" and do not welcome immigrants.

Al Jazeera | 4 May 2024

Rwanda won't guarantee how many migrants it will take from UK

Rwanda signed a five-year deal with the UK, in which migrants arriving in the UK without permission would be sent to Rwanda to claim asylum. However, Rwanda's government spokesperson has cautioned that it cannot guarantee how many migrants it can grant asylum to.

Laura Kuenssberg

BBC | 6 May 2024

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Local Migration Governance Indicators Profile 2024 | Central Java Province (Indonesia)

This report assesses the local Migration Governance Indicators (MGIs) in Central Java, outlining the developed areas of migration governance structures, and areas for further development, such as a lack of a regulated reporting system of local authorities on their counter-trafficking activities, as well as the need for measures to address the exploitation of migrant workers.

International Organization for Migration
2024

Civil society organisations and the healthcare of irregular migrants: The humanitarianism-equity dilemma

This study examines the role of civil society organisations in providing medical services to vulnerable populations such as irregular migrants and explores the ethical dilemmas that arise when delivering them particularly in countries with universal healthcare.

Lorenzo Piccoli and Roberta Perna
Comparative Migration Studies | 2024

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Mapping Global Human Mobility in an Increasingly Complex World

This webinar is based on a research collaboration between the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), on human movement in a post-pandemic world. The presentation includes findings from the report, and how cross-border mobility has been disrupted by the pandemic.

Recorded Webinar

25 April 2024