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## Domino Effect: SDGs and ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

By Keith Paolo C. Landicho

The United Nations Statistical Commission will convene its 56<sup>th</sup> session in March 2025. The meeting will discuss outputs of the [Comprehensive Review](#) conducted by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal (IAEG-SDGs) Indicators to optimise global monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. Yet for ASEAN, that has faced an [increasing number of disasters caused by natural hazards](#) in the last five years, this review carries urgency. A 2023 report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) reveals that [the Asia-Pacific region has only achieved 14.4% of the SDG targets](#), far below the expected 50% at the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda. This slow pace threatens not only the region's development and sustainability progress but also disaster management, most importantly Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR).

Considering ASEAN's escalating risks: [sinking cities](#), [intensifying cyclones](#), chronic vulnerabilities like [poverty](#) and [the present condition of infrastructure](#), strengthening resilience is more urgent than ever. These intersecting crises deepen the implications of slow SDG progress.

The SDGs are not mere checklists or metrics but a prerequisite for sustainable disaster resilience. When societies remain in poverty, and clean water, quality healthcare, and education remain inaccessible, HADR becomes a stopgap rather than a solution. The IAEG-SDGs' indicator review must prioritise metrics that reflect these realities or risk being trapped in a cycle of reactive disaster management where HADR will be under pressure from simultaneous operations and lack of resources.

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## Implications for HADR

The achievement of SDG targets is linked to improving disaster resilience. A study by [Cook et al. \(2025\)](#) names specific SDGs—such as SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 4 (Quality Education), 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action)—as related to disaster risk reduction. Progress in these areas could mean the enhancement of preparedness, the addressing of vulnerabilities, and overall improving propensity for HADR.

Weak progress on the SDGs not only hinders overall development but also deepens the vulnerabilities communities face when disaster strikes. This further heightens demand for short-term reactive responses rather than more proactive, longer-term solutions. For instance, persistent poverty (SDG 1) and inadequate healthcare (SDG 3) may hinder communities' ability to build the resilience needed to withstand shocks. Non-climate adaptive infrastructure (SDG 9) could exacerbate these challenges if essential services such as schools, hospitals, and transportation networks remain to be ill-prepared to cope with or recover from disaster impacts. Moreover, the lack of access to clean water (SDG 6) leaves communities particularly vulnerable to waterborne diseases like cholera in the aftermath of disasters, further stretching overburdened HADR systems. [SDG 11](#) and [SDG 13](#) directly influence disaster resilience by aiming at making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable and taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Additionally, despite experiencing less overall warming compared to global averages, sea levels in Southeast Asia are rising at a faster rate than elsewhere. According to a [2021 report by the World Economic Forum](#), 450 million people live in coastal areas where shorelines are retreating, increasing the risk of large-scale displacement and placing even greater pressure on regional HADR. The interconnectedness of these goals and the cascading risks that may ensue underscore the importance of advancing SDG progress to build resilience, shifting towards proactive disaster management, and reducing dependence on HADR that is unsustainable in the long run.

## A Race Against Time

Without substantial progress in these SDGs, the ASEAN member states face an [increased risk of more frequent and severe disasters](#), which will inevitably exceed national HADR capacities. As disasters become more frequent and extensive, the demand for more regional HADR will rise. For example, more ASEAN Emergency Response and Assessment Team ([ERAT](#)) missions will need to be organised to assist affected member states, and more disaster relief from the Disaster Emergency Logistics System for ASEAN ([DELSA](#))

will need to be mobilised. The need to fund and replenish these resources places additional strain on already limited budgets, further testing the region's capacity. This heightened demand risks trapping ASEAN in a cycle of reactive HADR, where attention and resources will continually be directed toward immediate response instead of proactive, long-term strategies aimed at reducing vulnerability, and building resilience.

The 2025 SDG Review presents an opportunity to disrupt this domino effect. ASEAN's vulnerabilities—sinking cities, coastal populations at risk of being displaced, and overlapping climate hazards, demand indicators that can more realistically reflect regional problems. Without substantial revisions or a recognition of the urgency at hand, the region risks a vicious cycle of delayed SDG progress, heightened disaster impacts, overwhelmed HADR systems, and further delay in SDG achievement.



Photo Credit: Flickr.com

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Cook, A. D. B., Lassa, J., & Caballero-Anthony, M. (2025). Missing targets: Reforming disaster policy in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 1–19.

Tay, C., Lindsey, E. O., Chin, S. T. et al. (2022). Sea-level rise from land subsidence in major coastal cities. *Nat. Sustain.*

Wignaraja, K., & Schellekens, P. (2023). *How to tackle the last miles of poverty in Asia and the Pacific*. World Economic Forum, 26 October.

UN ESCAP. (2023). UN lauds Asia-Pacific countries for championing sustainability, but warns that 2030 goalpost remains decades out of reach. *UN ESCAP Website*, 22 March. Retrieved from <https://www.unescap.org/news/un-lauds-asia-pacific-countries-championing-sustainability-warns-2030-goalpost-remains-decades>.

# CLIMATE CHANGE



## NEWS & COMMENTARIES

### **US exit from Paris Agreement raises questions about Indonesia's clean energy goals**

Indonesia has questioned the fairness of the Paris climate agreement after the US announced its withdrawal from the pact, even as green groups in Indonesia look to China to take the lead in climate issues. Indonesia's special climate change and energy envoy Hashim Djojohadikusumo said that he considered the Paris Agreement no longer relevant for the country.

**Stania Puspawardhani**

The Straits Times | 7 February 2025

### **Most countries miss UN deadline for new climate targets**

Many of the world's biggest polluter nations have missed a UN deadline to set new climate targets. As of Monday morning, many of the world's biggest polluters - including China, India and the European Union - had not done so.

**Kate Abnett**

Reuters | 11 February 2025

### **IN FOCUS: Can Singapore's multibillion-dollar flood-proofing efforts keep up with climate change?**

Since 2011, the country has spent about S\$2.5 billion (US\$1.85 billion) upgrading infrastructure and will be injecting another approximately S\$150 million for the 2025 financial year. There is now an 8,000 km network of interconnected drains, canals and rivers, capturing rainwater landing on two-thirds of the land and conveying it to 16 reservoirs on the mainland. But further down the line, Singapore will have to turn to increasingly innovative solutions to deal with floods.

**Koh Wan Ting**

Channel News Asia | 12 February 2025

### **Singapore's 2035 climate target: A commitment to act now despite waning global interest**

Singapore has pledged to reduce its emissions to between 45 million tonnes (Mt) and 50 Mt by 2035, down from the 60 Mt it expects to emit in 2030. This new emissions target was submitted to the UN on February 10, the deadline the global body had set for new climate pledges.

**Audrey Tan**

The Straits Times | 15 February 2025

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

### **Climate change in the American mind: Beliefs & attitude, Fall 2024**

Drawing on a nationally representative survey (n = 1,013) conducted from December 11 – 22, 2024, this report describes Americans' beliefs and attitudes about global warming. Among the key findings: Americans who think global warming is happening outnumber those who think it is not happening by a ratio of more than 5 to 1 (73% versus 14%); 60% of Americans understand that global warming is mostly human-caused. By contrast, 28% think it is caused mostly by natural changes in the environment; 57% of Americans understand that most scientists think global warming is happening. By contrast, 21% think there is a lot of disagreement among scientists about whether it is happening.

**Anthony Leiserowitz, et al.**

Yale Program on Climate Change Communication | 2024

### **National interdisciplinary climate risk assessment**

This report outlines the risks to Germany's national security resulting from climate change up until 2040. It discusses economic, financial, and health-related burdens, conflict risks, the geopolitics of energy transition and associated opportunities and risks, and urges the implementation of decarbonisation at national and European levels, ambitious climate policy, climate adaptation in all social spheres, and support for international stability and resilience.

**Consortium National Interdisciplinary Climate Risk Assessment**

2025

## EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

### **International Day of Zero Waste**

This year's International Day of Zero Waste emphasises the need for action in the fashion and textile sector to reduce waste and advance circular solutions.

**Worldwide**

30 March 2025

# ENERGY SECURITY



## NEWS & COMMENTARIES

### Indonesia leads race to build SMRs in Southeast Asia

Indonesia is expected to deploy the first small modular reactor (SMR) in Southeast Asia in as early as 2030, according to an energy analyst, as part of its plan to meet its climate and energy security goals.

**Asian Power**  
1 February 2025

### Southeast Asia looks to nuclear power to supercharge its energy transition

Now the Philippines and other countries in fast-growing Southeast Asia are looking to develop nuclear energy in their quest for cleaner and more reliable energy. Nuclear energy is viewed by its proponents as a climate solution since reactors don't emit the plant-warming greenhouse gases.

**Victoria Milko and Aniruddha Ghosal**  
Associated Press | 3 February 2025

### Three ways Asia can bridge the energy divide

Asian countries have to adopt clean energy and enhance regional connectivity to catalyse a new, sustainable development model; shift investment focus from risk aversion to opportunity; and de-risk from not one, but multiple perspectives.

**Anderson Tanoto**  
World Economic Forum | 10 February 2025

### Japan approves new climate, energy and industry policies through 2040

Under the new climate policy, Japan aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent from 2013 levels by 2035 and by 73 per cent by 2040, extending its 2030 goal of a 46 per cent cut.

**Reuters**  
Channel News Asia | 18 February 2025

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

### Renewable energy benefits: Leveraging local capacity for concentrated solar power

This latest report highlights the job potential of concentrated solar power (CSP). The analysis shows that a 100 MW CSP plant with 10-hour thermal storage can generate around 1.16 million person-days of work.

**International Renewable Energy Agency**  
2025

### Market perspective on climate actions and clean energy transition

The study provides valuable insights into the interconnected nature of energy sectors, emphasising the role of policy in shaping market responses and the broader energy transition.

**Qinqin Xia**  
Energy Policy, Vol. 198 | 2025

## EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

### International Conference on Stakeholder Engagement for Nuclear Power Programmes

The conference will provide a global platform to exchange good practices, experiences, challenges and lessons learned related to stakeholder engagement for nuclear power programmes.

**Vienna, Austria**  
26-30 May 2025

# FOOD SECURITY



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

## NEWS & COMMENTARIES

### A new life for empty offices: Growing kale and cucumbers

As more companies embrace hybrid and remote work following the COVID-19 pandemic, landlords are struggling to fill vacant office spaces. Some start-ups are giving them a second life by converting them into indoor farms that grows crops such as kales and cucumbers. This article highlights some examples of successful conversion projects and explores the advantages as well as the structural challenges of such converting such spaces into indoor farms.

**Vittoria Traverso**

BBC | 28 January 2025

### Philippines declares 'food security emergency' to tame retail prices

The Philippines has declared a food security emergency to stabilise rice prices, which has remained high despite the efforts to reduce tariffs last year. The declaration would allow the government to release rice buffer stocks held by the National Food Authority to stabilise prices and is expected to remain in effect until the situation improves.

**Karen Lema**

Reuters | 3 February 2025

### More rice, less gas: Chinese and Swedish scientists create hybrid to cut methane emissions

A team of Chinese and Swedish researchers have developed a hybrid high-yield rice variety that emits up to 70 per cent less methane than normal rice. In the face of climate change and increased food demand due to a growing global population, this new discovery could offer a promising strategy to address a future rise in rice-related emissions.

**Victoria Bela**

South China Morning Post | 5 February 2025

### Protecting food security in the face of tariffs and trade wars

Increases in geopolitical tensions, including tariffs and trade wars, will undermine the best plans to maintain global supply chains. National strategies to ensure food security are needed to support consumers in Southeast Asia, as even though far from the geographic areas of dispute, these consumers will ultimately suffer from interruptions in food availability and price hikes.

**Paul S. Teng**

RSIS Commentaries | 10 February 2025

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

### Seaweed: Prospects for decarbonisation and food security in Southeast Asia

This article explores seaweed's potential for decarbonisation and being a substitute for fossil-fuel-derived fertilisers, fuel and plastics. Given the increasing threat that coastal communities' land-based agriculture faces, seaweed farming can provide alternative opportunities for local development and resilience, which aligns with the ASEAN Blue Economy Framework (ABEF). The author argues that given the promising potential of the seaweed industry, Southeast Asian nations can and should do more to leverage the growing industry to reap its immense benefits for its people.

**Elyssa Ludher, Wei-Li Woo**

ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute Perspective | 2024

### How can digitalisation support transformation towards sustainable agri-food systems? Scenario development in Lower Austria

In the face of climate change and agricultural pollution, food systems of today are in need of transformation to be more environmentally and resource friendly. This paper explores how Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) could provide solutions to address the climate challenges and facilitate the transformation of agriculture and the food value chain. By using Lower Austria as a case study, it identifies widely applicable solutions to support the digital transformation towards sustainable agri-food systems.

**Beatrix Wepner et al.**

Agricultural Systems, Science Direct | 2025

## EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

### GreenFoodTech 2025 International Conference

This conference will gather key players in the food sector (research, industry and government) to discuss scientific and technological advances dedicated to sustainable food processing, producing emerging, healthy and nutritional foods and ingredients, and reducing losses and waste. It will also focus on the assessment of the sustainability of food systems using multi-criteria methods.

**Saint-Malo, France**

9-11 April 2025

# HEALTH SECURITY



## NEWS & COMMENTARIES

### **New obesity benchmark adds body fat, organ health to BMI**

The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology Commission put forward a new definition for obesity that included measurement of body fat and heart health. The framing moves away from looking at body mass index (BMI) which is criticized as too simplistic and incapable of distinguishing fat and muscle mass. It will also impact how obesity drugs are prescribed.

**The Straits Times**

21 January 2025

### **Human brain samples contain an entire spoon's worth of nanoplastics, study says**

Researchers found microplastics in human brains by taking samples from dead people, revealing that those who had died in 2024 had more nanoplastics in their brains than those who died in 2016. People with documented dementia had even higher levels of nanoplastics in their brain samples.

**Cable News Network (CNN) Health**

3 February 2025

### **Javier Milei announces Argentina to leave World Health Organization**

After US President Donald Trump left the World Health Organization, Argentina reported that it will pull out of the global health alliance as well, citing significant differences in health management during the pandemic and intervention in its sovereignty.

**The Guardian**

5 February 2025

### **Over 100 deaths a day: UN warns of air pollution's toll on young children in East Asia, Pacific**

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported that more than 100 children under the age of five die every day in East Asia and Pacific, calling for urgent action to cut deadly air pollution caused by toxic air at dangerously high levels, including from haze and PM2.5

**The Straits Times**

6 February 2025

## SELECTED PUBLICATION

### **Benefits of physical exercise through multivariate analysis in sedentary adults and elderly: An analysis of physical fitness, health and anthropometrics**

A study employing multivariate analysis on multicomponent training exercise program on sedentary adults and elderly revealed that agility was the most significant intermediate variable. Variables such as body mass and waist circumference continued to have an important relationship with fitness outcomes.

**da Silva Rodrigues, G., et al.**

*Experimental Gerontology*, Vol. 200 | 2025

### **Impact of UK National Clinical Communication guidelines on adults' perceptions of doctors and treatment commitment**

As study measured the impact of following, or violating, UK National Clinical Communication guidelines by general practitioners (GP) on how much the healthcare professional is respected, liked, or trusted. The study revealed that violations of guidelines reduced patients' respect for GPs and consequently patients' commitment to following treatment advice.

**Prestwich, A., Flanagan, C., and Khan., S.**

*Health Communication* | 11 February 2025

## EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

### **HealthTechX Asia 2025**

The first healthcare and digital agencies partnership platform brings more than 70 expert speakers and 1500 key stakeholders on the digital transformation of the healthcare continuum. The event will take place at Sands Expo & Convention Centre, Singapore, on 21 - 22 May 2025. Applications to speak, sponsor, exhibit and registrations to attend are now open.

**Singapore and Asia**

21-22 May 2025

# HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF



Photo Credit: DFID - UK Department for International Development via Flickr.com/Creative Commons

## NEWS & COMMENTARIES

### **A US Shutdown on foreign aid is hitting world-wide. Rubio adds more exemption**

*US-funded aid programs around the world were firing staff and shutting down or preparing to stop operations, as the Trump administration's unprecedented freeze on almost all foreign assistance brought their work to a sudden halt.*

**Ellen Knickmeyer, Samya Kullab, Farai Mutsaka and Matthew Lee**

AP News | 29 January 2025

### **Demining to democracy: How Trump's foreign aid freeze will affect Southeast Asia**

*US-funded aid programs around the world were firing staff and shutting down or preparing to stop operations, as the Trump administration's unprecedented freeze on almost all foreign assistance brought their work to a sudden halt.*

**Rebecca Ratcliffe**

The Guardian | 30 January 2025

### **How Trump's hobbling of USAID cedes Southeast Asia to Chinese influence**

*The Trump administration's "America First" focus lets China fill the vacuum in Southeast Asia and set the rules for engagement in the region.*

**James Borton**

South China Morning Post | 9 February 2025

### **Sudan scene of world's worst humanitarian crisis: African Union**

*The conflict between the Sudanese military government and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is hampering the delivery aid to a population suffering attacks and the threat of famine.*

**Al Jazeera**

11 February 2025

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

### **Public discourse narrative: From 'Secret aid worker' discontent to shifting power in humanitarian systems**

*This journal article discusses in depth the personal challenges of humanitarian life, characterisation of stakeholders, and systemic issue within the humanitarian sector.*

**Hannah Strohmeier, Unni Karunakara, and Catherine Panter-Brick**

Disasters, Vol. 49 | 2025

### **Tacit engagement in humanitarian action: Making sense of silence and secrecy in humanitarian negotiation**

*This journal article delves into secrecy and silence regarding the compromises and trade-offs made by frontline humanitarians in order to achieve access, protection, efficiency and legitimacy.*

**Ayse Bala Akal, Kristina Roepstorff, and Kristoffer Liden**

Journal of International Humanitarian Action, Vol. 10 | 2025

## EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

### **Funding Health Research at the Nexus of Humanitarian Crises and Climate Change**

*The webinar will explore issues and challenges related to health research at the nexus of humanitarian crises and climate change. Panellists will include experts on climate change, humanitarian crises, and global health.*

**Webinar**

February/March 2025 (date is to be updated via this website [link](#))

# MIGRATION



Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

## NEWS & COMMENTARIES

### Trump's sweeping immigration crackdown targets some legal means to enter US, too

The Trump administration has clamped down on illegal immigration and has moved further by issuing bans and restrictions on programs for refugees displaced by violence, closing pathways to admitting those fleeing the war in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Haiti and Venezuela.

**Camilo Montoya-Galvez**

CBS News | 28 January 2025

### Migrant workers in Canada exposed to 'shocking abuse and discrimination,' Amnesty says

A new report by Amnesty International has highlighted that migrant workers in Canada under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), are highly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The TFWP allows employers to hire migrant workers for primarily low-paying jobs in sectors such as agriculture, construction, hospitality and food processing.

**Caitlin Danaher and Max Saltman**

CNN | 30 January 2025

### Migrant workers trapped by casino debt

According to the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) about 10 percent of the 1.5 million foreign workers in Singapore in 2023 were on casino self-exclusion, an initiative that allows the applicant to restrict themselves from entering casinos in a bid to curb addiction.

**Ravi Singaram**

The New Paper | 7 February 2025

### US Aid agency's climate programs aimed to curb migration. Now they're gone.

The initiative under Biden administration to share satellite data with Central American countries to help families prepare for extreme weather events and adjust to climate shocks without migrating, will likely be halted after Trump signed an order freezing USAID spending.

**Christopher Flavelle**

The New York Times | 8 February 2025

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

### IOM regional strategy for Asia and the Pacific 2025 – 2029

Migration in the Asia-Pacific is a dynamic and diverse phenomenon driven by factors such as labour-market demands, shifting demographics, ongoing conflict and the impact of climate change. The Asia-Pacific region is also the main region of origin of international migrants as at mid-2020, where the UN's International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimated 82 million workers from the region.

**IOM**

2025

### Care work and labour migration in ASEAN

This report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) is a technical background paper to inform discussions at the 17<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML) on care work and labour migration in ASEAN. The discussions revolved on what can be done to enhance protection and promotion of the rights of migrant care workers.

**ILO**

2024

## EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

### Preparing for the Trump Administration's Immigration Policies

In this webinar organised by the Center for Migration Studies of New York (CMS), experts discussed the expected immigration policies of the Trump administration, and guidance in terms of policy, advocacy and organising responses to the policies.

**Recorded Webinar**

28 January 2025