

## **Beyond Relief!**

Singapore Humanitarian Network

https://rsis.edu.sg/research/idss/research-programmes/humanitarian-assistance/

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Photo credit: Reinhold Möller via Wikicommons

We are pleased to bring you the eleventh issue of Beyond Relief!

In our *Feature Article*, Mr Kosta Antonopoulos discusses the need to upgrade climate - humanitarian action in Southeast Asia

This issue's *On the Ground* features some of the initiatives and projects that members of the Singapore Humanitarian Network (SHN) have been participating in. Ms Nia Kaul has contributed her insight into one of the key humanitarian events in the region, the ASEAN Strategic Policy Dialogue on Disaster Management (SPDDM). It also features a snapshot of the monthly gatherings of the SHN.

Our members from the academic community have also been keeping themselves busy. This issue includes several commentaries and journal articles,

covering a diverse range of topics including the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the changing face of humanitarian aid - and the actors who make up the sector.

In the Spotlight features the Regional Humanitarian Partnerships Week (RHPW) Asia-Pacific, which will take place in Bangkok later this year. The upcoming Humanitarian Futures Forum (HFF) is also featured. The HFF is a high-level platform that brings together regional stakeholders to deliberate on the humanitarian dynamics of the crises we face in the Indo-Pacific.

Finally, we welcome your ideas, feedback and input and look forward to supporting joint efforts in research, networking and knowledge sharing. Do get in touch with either Nanthini (isnanthini@ntu.edu.sg) or Al (iscook@ntu.edu.sg).

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

### From Symbolic Solidarity to Sustained Commitment: Upgrading Climate-Humanitarian Action in

#### Southeast Asia

By Kosta Antonopoulos



Photo Credit: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)

In Southeast Asia, climate disasters are no longer seasonal anomalies, they are the predictable heart beats of the region's cardiac rhythm. The 2013 devastation of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, the 2018 Sulawesi earthquake and tsunami. catastrophic dam collapse in Laos the same year, and recurrent Mekong Delta flooding are not isolated tragedies; they are markers of an escalating climate-humanitarian crisis. This is an ecological and a profoundly human reckoning measured in stories of uprooted families, fractured livelihoods, and the erosion of socio-cultural identity.

Yet, the international humanitarian cycle often follows a predictable script: prominent global figures fly in, deliver speeches about resilience, pose with disaster-affected communities, and then redirect their organisation's focus elsewhere usually toward regions with higher donor visibility. This episodic engagement leaves Southeast Asian communities stranded between the urgency of their needs and the volatility of international attention.

To move beyond symbolic solidarity, climate-related humanitarian action must be embedded in long-term, regionally anchored commitments

that blend technical expertise with locally led approaches.

#### A Regional Shift in Approach

Transformation requires rejecting rigid, top-down aid models in favour of adaptive partnerships. Many postdisaster programmes, designed in distant capitals, fail to match local realities. After Cyclone Haiyan, prefabricated housing projects went they unused because incompatible with local livelihoods. In Myanmar's Cyclone Nargis recovery, grassroots networks outperformed large-scale interventions, precisely because they understood the delta's rhythms, crops, and waterways.

Community-based actors, including informal local committees, faith-based networks, and cooperatives, managed to mobilise quickly, navigate local waterways, and deliver aid efficiently, while externally-led interventions were slower and often mismatched local needs. Field reports from the Humanitarian Practice Network, Tearfund's Local to Global Protection report, and ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force evaluations document these patterns clearly.

An alternative model, rooted in regional leadership

should/could/would:

- Prioritise locally-led response frameworks, where earliertrained community organisations design, implement, and evaluate programmes.
- Integrate environmental restoration into humanitarian aid, e.g., pairing flood-relief infrastructure with mangrove regeneration and watershed protection.
- Make room for flexibility in programme design, allowing adaptation as climate impacts shift over time.

### Accountability for Donors and Philanthropy

Current donor practices often incentivise short-term, high-visibility interventions over sustained, context-driven commitments, undermining both resilience and trust.

Humanitarian response systems are being steadily eroded, with real consequences for people in need. As humanitarian demand rises, our collective capacity to respond is shrinking. This has accelerated investment in regional approaches, anticipation, early warning, and prevention, and innovations that are important in reducing risk and building

resilience. Yet, the growing enthusiasm of donors for these forward-looking models can sometimes slide into exclusionary funding what looks practices: transformative while underresourcing the unglamorous, lifesaving work of response. Anticipation and prevention should not become substitutes for humanitarian action but rather complement it. If response capacity continues to be deprioritised, we risk a system that excels in theory yet fails in practice, unable to deliver timely, principled assistance when and where it's needed.

To address these challenges, Southeast Asia could champion a Regional Climate-Humanitarian Accountability Compact, drawing for example- on the precedents of:

- The Grand Bargain (World Humanitarian Summit, 2016) and Charter for Change (C4C), on localisation
- Climate finance tracking mechanisms in the Paris Agreement
- Regional compacts that evolve further the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER)

This Compact would be a regionspecific, enforceable donorphilanthropy accountability framework, ensuring commitments are sustained, locally led, and transparent.

#### Suggestions for Key Mechanisms:

Regional Needs-First Allocation:

At least 50% of pledged disaster response funding should go directly to local actors. This target is ambitious but feasible: most current allocations are below 15%, and while up to 40% would be an improvement, 50% symbolically and practically establishes local actors as primary implementers while leaving space for technical and specialized support from international partners with relevant expertise.

 Multi-Year Funding Commitments:

Transition (new year)

Transition from one-off grants

to three- to five-year rolling commitments to ensure continuity between response, recovery, and resilience-building.

- Local Impact Verification:
   Build on existing ASEAN structures, such as the AHA Centre and AADMER frameworks, to establish independent, Southeast Asia-based monitoring mechanisms that ensure funds reach intended communities and generate sustainable outcomes.
- Public Performance Dashboards: Require donors and INGOs to publish annual metrics on local spending, project longevity, and community satisfaction.
- Expand both the size and predictability of funding to enable local actors to sustain operations, investing in long-term and adaptable initiatives of evolving climate impacts.

#### A Call to Regional Leadership

The climate-humanitarian crisis in Southeast Asia cannot be solved by episodic interventions or decisions made in distant capitals. ASEAN member states, regional philanthropies, and local civil society coalitions should lead in shaping a Southeast Asia Climate-Humanitarian Action Framework, supported by:

- A regional disaster resilience fund financed jointly by governments and private philanthropy, ringfenced for locally led initiatives
- Stronger cross-border emergency response agreements amongst ASEAN states
- A public registry of donor pledges and fulfilment rates to discourage "promise-and-pivot" behaviour

Lastly, a note on the intersectional, public-private approach. This has been on the books for years, but it still remains hampered by the relative inaction of major private actors. With some promising exceptions, many private actors have not yet fully translated their presence into meaningful, sustained action - despite long being offered a seat at the table and opportunities for inclusion. The next step is for the private sector's participation to move beyond symbolic engagement toward genuine

partnership, contributing resources, logistics, and innovation in ways that reinforce, rather than replace, public and community leadership.

### From Episodic Charity to Enduring Solidarity

The tides of climate change will not wait for the next donor conference or diplomatic mission. They are already reshaping coastlines, uprooting families, and eroding the social and cultural fabric of communities. True solidarity is not measured by speeches or photos, but by persistent presence navigating the river of change alongside the communities most affected and ensuring that every commitment made in Southeast Asia remains until resilience is a lived reality, not a slogan.

September 2025 - Beyond Relief!

# Insights into SPDDM 2025: Seizing Opportunities, Confronting Challenges for ASEAN's Future

By Nia Kaul, Intern, HADR Programme, RSIS



Photo credit: AHA Centre

This year's Strategic Policy Dialogue on Disaster Management (SPDDM) was especially significant, as it marked the 10th anniversary. Jointly organised by the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF), the ASEAN Secretariat and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre), SPDDM 2025 explored the theme: "Building Resilient Future: Advancing Post-2025 Vision for Disaster Management." SPDDM saw remarks by notable figures including H.E. Ma Norith, Deputy Secretary-General of the National Committee for Disaster Management, Kingdom of Cambodia, Mr Edwin Tong, Minister for Law and Second Minister for Home Affairs, Republic of Singapore, and H.E. Dr Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN.

The High-Level Panel and Thematic Panel discussions were instrumental highlighting the need cooperation, equity and capacity building in a time of compounding climate change risks. Reflecting on the Dialogue, it is important to look at the nature of the opportunities and challenges that ASEAN is presented with to achieve both the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Strategic Plan 2026-2030 and ASEAN Vision 2045. The AEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030 creates a roadmap for strengthening ASEAN's economic integration, and the ASEAN Vision 2045 outlines the long-term

ambition for a resilient ASEAN Community.

Contents of both the AEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030 and ASEAN Vision 2045 were echoed in the final session of SPDDM. This took the form of a town hall-style discussion where the floor was opened to audience contributions and several key themes of the dialogue were further spotlighted. In terms of opportunities, there references to technology and intersectoral collaboration. On the other hand, the increased risks due to climate change pose challenges to ASEAN, such as finding sustainable financing, and the localisation of disaster responses.

One theme highlighted during the forum was the need technological innovation. Clearly a topic of interest for speakers and audience alike, the push for technological innovation presents ASEAN with opportunities enhance disaster response mechanisms and strategies. Initiatives such as Indonesia's digital early warning systems, with support from the U.N., should be continued. ASEAN's focus on this goal to be at the "forefront of innovation" global is outlined in the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, as well as the AEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030 with "digital innovation" under Strategic Goal 3.

Inter-sectoral collaboration was additionally emphasised, as this unlocks a wide range of opportunities for knowledge and resource sharing. References to public-private partnerships were made, as well as the integration of local communities, youth groups and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) for disaster risk reduction.

Each sector can provide a unique skillset and knowledge foundation that can prove incredibly useful in a period of volatile climate risks.

Climate change is arguably the largest challenge to ASEAN in realising the AEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030 and ASEAN Community Vision 2045. Financial preparedness and innovation were labelled as a "toolbox" for ASEAN to face climate risks. Similarly, there is a need for anticipatory financing to become the regional norm. It was noted that devising innovative and sustainable finance mechanisms for disaster relief operations is essential, and should sit high on ASEAN's priorities.

Climate change was another additional theme highlighted. It was underscored that climate change may create challenges in enhancing localised disaster responses. Due to unknown climate hazards, it can be difficult to rapidly devise and implement tailored disaster risk reduction operations. The ASEAN Community Vision 2045 highlights the importance of "promot[ing] knowledge" of "culture and history of ASEAN Member States." Therefore, there is a need for the region to invest in conducting further research into local conditions and culture to ensure that all groups affected by climate risks are addressed, including women and children.

Overall, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SPDDM underpinned the importance of collaboration, inclusion and capacitybuilding. Only by continuing to come together in events such as the SPDDM to share ideas, and working to achieve the goals outlined in the AEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030 and ASEAN Vision 2045, can ASEAN become a regional and global leader for disaster management.

### ON THE GROUND

#### Gaza Conflict 2023 Relief

650 Days Impact Report

#### **Background**

Since October 7, 2023, the Gaza conflict has escalated into a catastrophic humanitarian crisis marked by extensive Israeli military operations, including airstrikes, ground offensives, and a blockade severely restricting aid access. Over 59,200 Palestinians have been reported killed, with more than 143,000 injured, and over 88% of the population displaced amid widespread destruction of homes and infrastructure. Food scarcity and malnutrition have surged, with recent reports of at least 111 deaths from hunger within 24 hours, while seeking aid has become increasingly dangerous, resulting in over 1,060 deaths since May 2025. Access to clean water, medical care, and sanitation remains critically limited, exacerbating disease outbreaks and psychological trauma.

The humanitarian response faces a severe funding gap; estimated needs exceed \$6.6 billion for 2025, with aid deliveries severely disrupted. Mercy Relief calls for a humanitarian ceasefire. Countless more civilians will lose their lives without an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, as well as safe, uninterrupted, and regular humanitarian access to deliver aid throughout the Gaza Strip.

#### **Summary Numbers**

Total Funding received in SGD as of 17 July 2025: \$1,028,080

Total Funds accrued/expended in SGD as of 17 July 2025: \$979,885.15

Total Beneficiaries to date: 340,000 affected individuals.

#### Mercy Relief Tranches of Relief to Gaza

#### First Tranche

Mercy Relief was engaged by our local partner, UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), to coordinate and deliver \$110,216.40 worth of emergency relief aid. The first tranche comprises emergency Food, Shelter, Hygiene Packs, Cash Donations, Sanitation Facilities and Education efforts for more than 114,000 beneficiaries. This provides crucial support to the many Palestinian Refugees who were displaced by the military operations.

#### **Second Tranche**

In Collaboration with Changi Regional HADR Coordination Centre (RHCC)



and other humanitarian agencies in Singapore, Mercy Relief coordinated \$63,515 worth of humanitarian aid. The second tranche comprises 5 Tonnes of medical supply to benefit 100,328 Palestinians in Gaza. This medical supply is crucial to support a battered medical infrastructure to provide emergency medical support to Palestinians.

#### Third Tranche

Mercy Relief partnered with Gazze Destek Dernegi (GDD) to deliver a series of humanitarian aid projects worth \$187,110. In March, we distributed food baskets and Iftar meals to over 51,000 individuals. This food aid hopes to alleviate hunger, especially during important religious days in Ramadan.

#### Fourth Tranche

Despite severe constraints on humanitarian aid entering Gaza imposed by Israel, we continued to persevere in ensuring that crucial aid enters Gaza. In June, we delivered \$58,022 worth of food baskets and Iftar meals to more than 60 Palestinian families. This food aid hopes to temporarily alleviate hunger and combat malnutrition in Children.

#### Fifth Tranche

Following the announcement of a ceasefire, Mercy Relief and RHCC have joined forces to deliver essential food aid to 530 displaced households. The aid package, to be delivered on February 12, 2025, comprises vital food items including wheat flour, canned tuna and tomatoes, infant/children supplement cereals, dry lentils and chickpeas.

#### Sixth Tranche

During Ramadan this year, Mercy Relief deployed a team to the West Bank to hold four Iftar celebrations with 240 refugees, visit project sites, and assess opportunities for follow-up initiatives aimed at supporting Palestinian refugees in agricultural resilience, livelihood recovery, and WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) rehabilitation.

#### Seventh Tranche

Mercy Relief completed a food relief initiative, providing 1,800 hot meals daily and reaching up to 49,000 beneficiaries over the course of the project. Through our collaboration with Anera and World Central Kitchen, we sourced rice and canned vegetables from local aid warehouses to prepare and distribute nourishing hot meals.

#### Eighth Tranche

Concurrently, Mercy Relief, in partnership with Youth Without Borders, has provided clean drinking water to 300 households in Khan Younis, Gaza, over two months, and distributed 200 hygiene kits to families lacking adequate sanitation facilities.

#### Ninth Tranche

To help alleviate food insecurity in Gaza, Mercy Relief has collaborated with 75 farmers in Khuzaa, Khan Younis, to distribute food parcels supporting their households. Additionally, Mercy Relief is developing a plan to bolster agricultural capacity and production, aiming to enhance the local food supply within Gaza.

#### Tenth Tranche

Mercy Relief has partnered with 90 local farmers to provide fresh vegetables for our soup kitchens and deliver hot meals to 440 households over two weeks. By sourcing supplies from local farmers and cooperatives, the project not only ensures food security for vulnerable families but also supports and strengthens local livelihoods amid the ongoing crisis.

#### **Eleventh Tranche**

Since the ceasefire broke down, the Israeli military has intensified its occupation of Gaza, forcibly displacing tens of thousands more Palestinians. In response, Mercy Relief is actively manufacturing tents and strategically prepositioning them in Egypt poised for rapid deployment into Gaza as soon as the border reopens.

#### Looking Forward

Despite ongoing operational and security



Photo credit: Mercy Relief

challenges, Mercy Relief remains steadfast in supporting Palestinians in Gaza and the Occupied West Bank. In Gaza, we are preparing to launch four critical projects, including two focused on restoring hope through emergency food relief and improving water access by operating a soup kitchen and delivering clean drinking water to internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. These vital efforts aim to help Palestinians navigate the coming months of uncertainty and violence, addressing

urgent needs on the ground. Meanwhile, in the West Bank, we plan to initiate a sustainable livelihood program to help farmers rebuild their agricultural livelihoods and support their families. Additionally, we are partnering with refugee camps to restore educational opportunities for Palestinian children, fostering resilience and hope for the future.

Contributed by Mercy Relief

#### Airlink's 3rd Annual APAC Logistics Preparedness Workshop

Airlink conducted its 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Asia-Pacific Logistics Preparedness Workshop at the UN Humanitarian Response Depot in Kuala Lumpur. Held from August 11-13 2025, our own APAC Logistics Working Group were in attendance. This includes members from the Singapore Humanitarian Network from Airlink, UNHRD, WFP, DHL and HELP Logistics.

Contributed by Airlink



Photo credit: Airlink

#### Singapore Humanitarian Network Monthly Catch-Ups in Holland Village

On the 1st Thursday of every month, the Singapore Humanitarian Network holds an informal catch-up at Holland Village in Singapore. It has grown into a space for the humanitarian community in Singapore to meet others working in the field as well as for those simply interested in humanitarian affairs. Since then, colleagues and friends working in various organisations, agencies and inter-agency networks of the humanitarian system have taken the opportunity to show up month-after-month to eat, drink and chat with each other, sharing their experiences and lives.

For those interested to join these sessions, please contact S. Nanthini at isnanthini@ ntu.edu.sg.



### RECENT PUBLICATIONS

#### News Articles, Commentaries and Reports

#### Navigating Climate Security Amid Global Challenges

S. Nanthini IDSS Paper 28 March 2025

Click here to read more.

### Global Humanitarian Action at the Crossroads

Alistair D. B Cook IDSS Paper 31 March 2025

Click here to read more.

# Disasters and Disinformation: AI and the Myanmar 7.7 Magnitude Earthquake

Keith Paolo Catibog Landicho and Karryl Kim Sagun Trajano O1 May 2025

Click here to read more.

#### Southeast Asian Responses to the 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes

Alistair D. B. Cook and S. Nanthini RSIS Policy Report 02 May 2025

Click here to read more.

#### End of the Liberal Order? Multiplexity and International Disaster Laws

Lim Junli IDSS Paper 02 May 2025

Click here to read more.

### The State of HADR in Southeast Asia 2024: Militaries

Alistair D. B. Cook and Keith Paolo Catibog Landicho RSIS Policy Report 16 May 2025

Click here to read more.

#### The Privatisation of Humanitarian Aid and its Implications

Lim Junli IDSS Paper 24 June 2025

Click here to read more.

### Gaza's hunger crisis spurs a diplomatic gamble

Alistair D. B. Cook The Straits Times 23 August 2025

Click here to read more

#### Gaza: The Weaponisation of Food Kayven Tan and Keith Paolo Catibog Landicho RSIS Commentary CO25186 10 September 2025

Click here to read more.

#### Weathering the Storm: Navigating ASEAN Disaster Management to Sustainability Nia Kaul, Alistair D. B. Cook

IDSS Paper

11 September 2025

Click here to read more.

#### Climate disasters aren't natural – and calling them that makes things worse

Lim Junli The Interpreter 18 September 2025

Click here to read more.

#### Journal Articles, Chapters and Books

#### Rising to the Challenge: Advancing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Southeast Asia"

S. Nanthini and Lim Junli Asia Policy 20:3 (July 2025) pp.44 -54

Click here to read more.

### "Humanitarian Action in a Changing Global Order"

Alistair D. B. Cook and Keith Paolo Catibog Landicho

Asia Policy 20:3 (July 2025) pp. 55 - 65 Click here to read more

#### "Humanitarian Engagement with Myanmar in the wake of the 2021 Coup"

Alistair D. B. Cook, Ian Holliday, and Aung Kaung Myat Journal of Asian Public Policy 2025, pp. I - I 6.

Click here to read more.

#### "Enhancing Collective Indo-Pacific Response in the Indo-Pacific"

Lina Gong and S. Nanthini Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiatives: Frameworks to Implement and Integrate its Seven Pillars, 2025, pp. 89-120



### IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Preparedness is the plan. Logistics is the lifeline. Together, they save lives.

With this goal in mind, the Asia Pacific Humanitarian Logistics Working Group (APAC Logistics Working Group) is a group of over 20 organizations that contribute to emergency logistics response and coordination, mainly with a regional-level focus on Asia Pacific. Members of the working group come from various sectors, such as the UN, INGOs, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, donors, and the private sector.

#### Our efforts target coordination, collaboration and advocacy:

- Maintain regular coordination and information sharing to support strategic and operational decision making
- Forge partnership & collaboration on emergency logistics preparedness
- Advocate on strategic supply chain topics and represent the Logistics sector in the humanitarian community

Within the first year of its launch, the APAC Logistics Working group is collectively working on improving logistics in a list of priority countries, a regional corridor readiness initiative and strengthening the network through collaborative engagements.

You are invited to join us at the upcoming Regional Humanitarian Partnerships Week (RHPW) Asia Pacific 2025 that will be held from December 8-10, 2025, in Bangkok, Thailand. The APAC Logistics Working Group is planning an interactive session to turn principles into practical logistics actions that work across the region.

If you are committed to drive preparedness in humanitarian logistics to another level with the APAC Logistics Working group, feel free to reach out to Wipawa Chuenchit, Logistics Cluster Team Asia-Pacific (wipawa.chuenchit@wfp.org).





#### What is the Humanitarian Futures Forum (HFF)?

Hosted by the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Programme at the Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS), RSIS, and the Changi Regional HADR Coordination Centre (RHCC), the Forum serves as a key platform for engagement on humanitarian crises.

Held on 27<sup>th</sup> October, The Forum will feature a keynote address and three interactive panel sessions. Each panel session will have 3 - 4 speakers drawn from diverse sectors and geographies to discuss 3 thematic areas. Panel 1 will explore The Future of Digital Humanitarianism: Balancing Impact, Sustainability, and Resilience. Panel 2 will discuss the role of Dilemmas and Trends in the Emerging Humanitarian Landscape. Panel 3 focuses on Frontiers in Civil-Military Partnerships in Disasters.

The successor to a series of events focused on humanitarian futures held during the COVID-19 pandemic, the 4<sup>th</sup> Humanitarian Futures Forum brings together local and overseas participants from the military, government agencies, think tanks and academia, private sector, philanthropy, local civil society, regional organisations, International NGOs and International Organisations, and media.

At a time when global systems are stretched and future crises loom large, this gathering provides an essential space for collective reflection, strategic thinking, regional solidarity and exploring partnerships in the face of shared challenges.

#### Learn More About the HFF 2025

To Register Your Interest in attending the forum, please click here.

If you would like to explore this year's **Programme**, please visit our website to find out more: <u>Humanitarian Futures Forum - RSIS</u>.



For more details, please contact S. Nanthini (RSIS) at <a href="mailto:isnanthini@ntu.edu.sg">isnanthini@ntu.edu.sg</a>.

