



PERSPECTIVES FOR CLIMATE DIPLOMACY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Southeast Asia is a region highly vulnerable to near and long-term climatic changes. In order to jointly address emerging climate risks and to complement multilateral negotiations through enhanced regional cooperation, a more comprehensive climate diplomacy approach is needed. On 29 November, more than 40 representatives from Southeast Asian Foreign Ministries and Think Tanks met in Singapore to discuss the potential next steps in this direction.

adelphi and the RSIS Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies organized this workshop, which was funded by the German Federal Foreign Office. The workshop is part of adelphi's cooperation with the Foreign Office to explore climate diplomacy narratives in different regions to improve the prospects of international climate protection.



ASEAN member states are in various phases of development and have a differentiated approach to climate change. This should not stand in the way of joint action. It can build upon existing cooperation in areas such as disaster management and humanitarian relief, the forestry sector, and green technologies. Some countries will need to lead to create the necessary momentum. To promote initiatives for a green economy and sustainable development in the region, foreign policy can, for example, be informed by the rich experiences of coastal cities. Climate policy will work best through a multi-layered governance approach, so vertical linkages are important to make best use of initiatives and fora such as the ASEAN governors and mayors' meeting, mayors' meeting, the Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network (ACCCRN) or UN Habitat's Cities and Climate Change Initiative (CCCI). Diplomats are best placed to take a whole-of-government approach, and foreign policy is well-positioned to play a catalyst role.





The Concept of Climate Diplomacy and Its Relevance for Southeast Asia

Developing a foreign policy perspective on climate change is one of the main aims of the joint activities of the German Federal Foreign Office (FFO) and adelphi. This partnership reflects the interest of the FFO in collaborating with non-governmental actors, thus bridging the gap between diplomacy and the sphere of expert knowledge on climate change.

The concept of Climate Diplomacy, as outlined by Alexander Carius, Executive Director at adelphi, has gained increasing importance as a foreign policy issue. Climate change has the potential to worsen already existing conflicts and to contribute to generating new ones. It increases the need to establish or update trans-boundary agreements to ensure the peaceful sharing of scarce resources. Domestic policy alone will not be able to address climate change effectively. Thus, as climate change enters the foreign policy agenda, it presents opportunities for renewed cooperation and effective efforts at the national and international level. In order to prevent conflict and limit security risks, climate change and its impacts on human security have to be discussed within the context of regional and international cooperation, both at the bilateral and multilateral levels. Coherent and powerful climate diplomacy can create awareness and identify joint solutions for preventive action and peace-building.



For Asia, two main entry points for successful foreign policy engagement can be highlighted:

- International cooperation can help to address climate risks, such as global warming, glacial melt, sea-level rise, changing precipitation patterns, salt water intrusion and extreme weather events, sometimes exacerbated by demographic and economic factors affecting the region.
- Ambitious national climate policy frameworks in many Asian countries, combined with the trends of growing energy demand and overall consumption, present an opportunity for regional collaboration to help shape more sustainable and environmentally responsible economies; particularly regarding the potential contribution of renewable energy and resource efficiency.

ASEAN discussed the security implications of climate change for the region with the European Union during the meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum in Phnom Penh in 2009 and in Brussels in 2010. The topic, therefore, was already on the ASEAN agenda, but convincing individual states to engage actively in a discussion that is followed by enhanced climate policies and regional cooperation proves to be challenging. Hence, the question of how to frame the issue has arisen. Possible narratives include:

- Climate change poses a threat to livelihoods and is a destabilizing factor for societies.
- Green technologies and approaches to tackle climate change present opportunities for sustainable development and green growth.



- Climate change has geostrategic dimensions. Sea-level rise, for example, could lead to implications such as altering sea borders and exclusive economic zones, thus affecting national sovereignty.
- It is the responsibility of the present generation to preserve the heritage of humankind and nature from adverse impacts of climate change.

While there may be different perspectives on climate change as a foreign policy issue, it has become increasingly clear that thinking in terms of opportunities for international engagement and cooperation is indispensable for a sound response to the climate challenge the international community presently faces.

Perspectives on Sustainable Development and Layers of Governance

“Cities will be on the front lines of the battle for sustainable development. Not only do they face direct threats; they also have the best opportunities to identify and deliver solutions.” – Jeffrey Sachs, 28 November 2013, Bangkok Post

Cities and local actors play a crucial role in climate change and resilience responses for tackling some of the root causes of climate vulnerability. As outlined by Liam Fee from UN Habitat in his input statement, climate change and environmental sustainability are one of the core issues of his organisation. The reason is obvious: cities are drivers of economic growth in Asia and Pacific. They are home to 50% of the population, but produce 80% of regional GDP. At the same time, these cities are highly vulnerable to climate change. Natural disasters cost an estimated 300,000 lives and 250 billion USD of damage between 2001-09, while one hundred million were affected in South East Asia alone. About 54% of the Asian urban population lives in low-lying coastal zones exhibiting high vulnerability. These cities could be inundated by even small increases in sea level. Secondary cities are often equally exposed to impacts of climate change, but they have less autonomy or capacity to respond. This is why they should be the focus of enabling actions, particularly by national governments.

In response, UN Habitat launched its Cities and Climate Change Initiative (CCCI), which works in over 30 cities in the Asia Pacific. Its aims are:

- to build cities' capacities in developing comprehensive climate strategy and action plans
- to integrate good climate response, sustainable urban development practices, international policy strategies and legislative reforms
- to establish CCCI regional partners knowledge advocacy capacity building platform.

Local government capacity is central to climate change responses, as resilience measures need to be more relevant to the people. In fact, cities themselves need to be a community of communities (i.e. neighbourhoods and stakeholders) and to do so, use participatory processes that represent a broad population base of the city. Investment for major infrastructure development in small and medium sized cities is similarly crucial. It then follows that planning climate-resilient infrastructure from the start is much more cost-effective than upgrading existing infrastructure. Among Asian countries, only Nepal conducts climate sensitive planning for urban development. Uncertainty is a problem, and better



awareness of risk management is needed through evidence from climate science and effective climate finance. International financial resources should be leveraged for city adaptation and mitigation needs.

Recommendations

- Factor urban needs and vulnerabilities into climate policy and diplomacy but do not overly rely on socioeconomic forecasts.
- Address as part of climate policy short- and long-term needs and use the potential to be informed through broad stakeholder engagement.
- Pay attention to institutional roles as well as scales and sectors of action because large scale implementation can provide disincentives at the local level.
- Develop multi-scale and multi-level action plans, considering the need for vertical coordination.

The ensuing discussion raised the following points:

- The transboundary nature of the challenges brought about by climate change requires a more holistic approach in the allocation of resources and infrastructure development. The guidance of political or geographic boundaries is only of limited value for such an approach. While the role of cities is important, rural areas will also need new and additional climate finance. The Philippines and Indonesia have the longest coastlines worldwide, and that is a key factor for adaptation and resilience policies. Resilience building has to focus on the cities' interface with the sea as well and utilise the city-archipelagic network of these countries to develop the potential for transnational planning in the region.
- It is crucial to ensure vertical coordination of climate policies. Currently, some countries have detailed plans at the national level, but not so at subnational levels. There may be the need of some kind of coordinating agency to consolidate efforts at different levels within a country. Regarding capacities, cities have fewer options to borrow money from banks. They may need national-level support on this issue. See, for example, the Rockefeller Foundation's programme on the Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network (ACCCRN) in this regard.
- The role of foreign policy in the dynamics between climate diplomacy and urban development is not yet fully defined. Nonetheless, it may be well-positioned to





become a catalyst for urban development in relation to adaptation and disaster-resilience. Moreover, climate diplomacy is not only about state level interaction, but should also include actors from different levels of governance.

- At the 2013 COP in Warsaw, UNFCCC recognized the role of cities in this regard. Even though they are not usually at the climate negotiating table, cities are important drivers when it comes to formulating national climate change policies. Cities have specific adaptation and resilience needs, and mayors often have significant experience in adapting to climate impacts. This points to the notion that competition among cities cannot be completely eliminated, but can be reduced to make way for collaboration. It is vital to find a way to harmonize the intense cooperation of cities in a common mutually-agreed upon framework. At a recent, first-of-its-kind meeting among ASEAN governors and mayors in Jakarta, it became clear that it is also necessary to find ways for cities to better influence national policies. The EU's powerful Council of the Regions could possibly provide some useful lessons in this regard.
- Singapore's unique position as a city state enables it to take part in UNFCCC negotiations while also recognising that it is an important country among the alliance of small island states. Singapore could be a good candidate to show much-needed leadership with regard to urban climate adaptation policies. The city state already hosts the World City Summit every other year – and has been using it to incentivize, recognize and promote other sustainable urban solutions. Regional cooperation is possible despite the heterogeneous state of development among ASEAN states. ASEAN could also generate knowledge about cooperation and export its model to other regions.

On the Green Economy

The prospects for a green economy in the context of ASEAN are good. Dr. Bach Tan Sinh from the National Institute for Science and Technology Policy and Strategy Studies in Vietnam provided some evidence in this regard as part of his input statement. He also addressed the main issue of what ASEAN can do to apply the principles of sustainability to economic development. One important pathway is the decoupling of growth from fossil fuel use, which requires significant investments in low carbon development. This decoupling thus provides an opportunity for companies involved in the development and implementation of sustainable energy solutions.

Governments still need to play an active role to overcome incentive gaps between short-term investment costs and long-term benefits, as well as between market prices and those accounting for environmental externalities. Possible instruments include assessment tools, low carbon studies, and a green fiscal policy to manage investment allocation within the economy. Such investment can internalise the environmental costs and promote innovations, e.g. develop a financially viable low carbon growth or green production initiative.

With its relatively large population and GDP, ASEAN as a community should cooperate on science and technology – and does so in particular through the Advisory Body on ASEAN Plan of Action on Science and Technology (ABAPAST). Among other programmes, ABAPAST deals



with early warning and disaster risk reduction, climate change, and biofuels, and thus may provide useful entry points for regional climate diplomacy. Furthermore, the ASEAN Krabi Initiative is a milestone for regional cooperation on innovation. It has thematic tracks regarding energy security, water resource management, food security, and green technology, each of them with one member state taking the lead. These were endorsed by ASEAN science and technology ministers in December 2010. The involvement of the private sector and strong public-private partnerships are crucial for the success of the Krabi Initiative.

Among the major trends in ASEAN in this sector include: (1) the shift from state- and institution-oriented to a people-oriented perspective; (2) moving away from the state as the only player towards more involvement of both state and non-state players, including local governments, private sector and international organisations and; (3) transitioning from knowledge generation towards knowledge transformation. Further cooperation should build upon existing initiatives such as the German-ASEAN conference on innovation in Bangkok in July 2012, "Promotion of innovation-based growth".



Recommendations:

- Show empirically that green growth contributes to the overall well-being of a society.
- Establish a definition that illustrates the progress towards sustainable development beyond traditional measures such as gross domestic product (GDP).
- Emphasize the leading role of regulation to support green growth activities.
- Illustrate how innovative examples of cooperation can strengthen overall climate diplomacy objectives.

The ensuing discussion raised the following points:

- The growth component of "green growth" must be ensured, and there is a need to demonstrate that green economic growth is real. A long-term view allows for recognition of the benefits of collaborative and multi-stakeholder green economic development, which may sometimes run counter to incentives of (shorter) election cycles. In Myanmar, the government promotes green growth by convening the Myanmar Green Energy Summit. The Summit's theme, 'Green Energy as Strategic Drivers for Sustainable Growth', emphasised green development and public-private partnerships for a green economy. The discussion also drew attention to the need to



evaluate the role fossil fuel subsidies play in national development plans as a counterincentive to green economic growth.

- There is a need to move beyond traditional measures of GDP, which do not capture all elements of sustainable development, to a green GDP that can account for negative externalities such as the impact of manufacturing. The study on the economic value of the environment and biodiversity by The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) is one effort to make these benefits more visible. A local TEEB study for businesses can similarly be proposed to incentivise the private sector and allow for public recognition of their green development efforts. For example, it would be useful to measure resilience as a positive factor for investment. Moreover, raising awareness through pilot projects to demonstrate the viability of green development models can engage the private sector. This is where Germany provides a good litmus test in the shift away from nuclear to renewable energy.
- The role of regulations and standardisation such as in building codes, and the function of incentives for commercially viable strategies are both important in fostering green growth. In this regard, although UN Habitat's main role is in post-disaster response and capacity-building, it has also launched i-HOUSE: a Housing Sustainability initiative, drawing on the EU SWITCH Asia funding mechanism.
- Bilateral initiatives, also at the sub-state level, can play an important role in advancing green growth. The strength of bilateral cooperation at this level can advance climate diplomacy at the same time. For example, the South Korea-based Global Green Growth Institute supports the green growth planning in ASEAN countries, with particular emphasis on water, green technology and food security.

On Foreign Policy and Disaster Management

Disasters do have major impacts on foreign policy. Daw Yin Yin Oo, Deputy Director-General of the Strategic and Policy Studies Department, from Myanmar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, focused on the foreign policy ramifications of Cyclone Nargis, which hit Myanmar in 2008. While climate change had not traditionally been high up on the foreign policy agenda in Myanmar, the 2008 cyclone acted as a game-changer. The high death toll and damages forced the government to take action on disaster relief, which was organized primarily as a people-to-people effort. Western countries, notably the U.S., offered urgently needed support. While the Myanmar government was unclear on the intentions of the international community and felt that warships and helicopters infringed upon the nation's sovereignty, there was no time for such deliberations, and eventually the cyclone triggered political and economic reforms.

The Myanmar foreign ministry had to be the catalyst to intervene between international humanitarian assistance and the government. One of the consequences of Cyclone Nargis is that it helped to build trust in Myanmar's foreign relations. The foreign ministry thus has an important role in climate diplomacy and can continue to serve as a catalyst in forming climate and environmental policy. The presence of high-ranking delegates to the sustainability summits (Rio, Johannesburg, Rio+20) shows the ministry's high commitment to the cause. The government engages in a dialogue with civil society and the private sector such as the Myanmar Climate Change Watch.



Despite the resource curse being currently debated in Myanmar and in the region in general as it opens up to foreign investment and slowly globalises, the duty of every citizen to protect the environment has been enshrined in the constitution since 2008. The government recognises that it would be counterproductive to sell off its natural resources, particularly in the mining and forestry sector.

Recommendations

- Build upon existing cooperation for disaster management and relief.
- Conduct joint vulnerability assessments as a prerequisite for joint action.
- Foreign ministries are well-positioned to be a catalyst for climate change responses more generally and disaster management and relief more specifically.

The ensuing discussion raised the following points:

- Myanmar is the 2014 ASEAN Chair, and one of its aims is an outcome document such as an ASEAN declaration on climate change at the ASEAN summit. This can build on already existing activities like the Singapore Declaration on Climate Change, Energy and Environment (2007) signed at the 3rd East Asian Summit. Toward this aim, Myanmar is developing a concept paper on climate change and disaster resilient societies, supported by the U.S., the EU and Australia. This provides Myanmar the opportunity to bring ASEAN together on strengthening and promoting climate diplomacy.
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- ASEAN has a concrete yet poorly implemented disaster management and response body that was enabled and established through the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). While this is not yet a completely coordinated approach, its development cannot be rushed because the question of sovereignty still stands in the way and countries' willingness to cooperate is necessary. The disaster in Banda Aceh was an example of national authorities being overwhelmed by a flood of foreign NGOs rushing into the country.



- The question remains why ASEAN could not respond earlier when Typhoon Haiyan hit Tacloban in the Philippines. The organisation needed several days to even issue a statement despite the typhoon having been announced days before it struck. ASEAN has had thirteen disaster emergency response simulation exercises and should be able to respond faster. To increase its effectiveness, ASEAN defence ministers could solidify its action plan for mobilizing the military for disaster management and relief. This is an item on the agenda under the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) mechanism. Nevertheless, the AADMER is the first legally-binding regional document obliging member states to provide emergency relief, and all countries have signed it. As such it is a milestone for regional collaboration more generally. Countries should also be encouraged to conduct joint vulnerability assessments, as this is a prerequisite for joint action.
- Health is among the priority topics to focus on in the future as far as climate change impacts are concerned. The IPCC's AR5 recognises the unequivocal and unprecedented threat of an increase in the climate change-related spread of vector-borne diseases. For example, climate change helps dengue fever and malaria spread at an unprecedented speed.

On Entry Points for Regional Cooperation

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation Plus (REDD+) is currently one of the most dynamic issues in COP negotiations and a common denominator in ASEAN with regard to climate change action. In his input, Mr. Iwan Wibisono of the President's Delivery Unit for Development, Monitoring and Oversight (UKP-PPP), Indonesia, highlighted that forestry sector involvement could serve as a useful entry point for regional knowledge exchange and to build common understanding. The process should be inclusive and involve non-state actors, i.e. the private sector and civil society. It is also critical that adequate safeguards are implemented and inclusion of other actors is helpful there. Negotiations should be seen as not only a government domain, but one belonging to civil society as well. This is already evident in REDD+ negotiations where civil society organisations started the discussion on safeguards. Such a strategy can set a good precedence for civil society to become part of the official negotiations in multilateral forms.

Recommendations

- ASEAN could provide a useful forum to consolidate climate policy related positions.
- Broadening interaction at the multilateral level should not be limited to regional forums but should include other alliances such as networks of cities to ensure a more effective climate action.
- Examine common but differentiated vulnerabilities as an entry point for regional climate diplomacy. Cooperation on a common policy can be brought about by adopting a common but grand narrative that can encourage coalitions among member states and/or regional partnerships.



The ensuing discussion raised the following points:

- There is a need to identify key proponents or leaders in ASEAN to champion and frame climate change as a foreign policy agenda item among member states. The ASEAN Committee of Permanent Representatives is already engaging in a close dialogue with development partners, including the EU, with climate change being one of its focus topics. The main problem lies in expediting implementation due to difficulties and delays in coordination. In the case of ASEAN and its regional partners, pandemic preparedness elicited a proactive response in ASEAN when pandemics became a national security threat and thus expedited the implementation of necessary guidelines.
- Climate diplomacy cannot be limited to diplomats or foreign ministries alone. There is a need to broaden the state of negotiations in the UNFCCC and, for example, to push an agenda that is beyond a country's traditional national interests. Any progress in the negotiations necessitates multiple actors. There are, however, notable initiatives between foreign ministries, such as the 2013 trilateral consultations between Myanmar, Thailand, and Lao PDR to deal with transboundary haze issues brought about by forest fires and burning from Myanmar's side of the border. On the other hand, the role of multilateral development banks for example cannot be ignored, particularly with the Asian Development Bank and the International Finance Corporation now integrating social and environmental impact assessments before funding any infrastructure development project. An open question is which actors will drive the paradigm shift on climate change – governments, the private sector, or civil society?
- How is climate diplomacy different from traditional development cooperation, or "aid diplomacy", and what can it learn from failures? Both concepts go hand in hand especially now that, increasingly, development assistance is being channelled as climate finance. However, the moral hazards brought about by aid cooperation should provide critical lessons for the conduct of climate diplomacy. For example, German International Cooperation (GIZ) is working with ASEAN to develop region-wide regulatory framework on climate change. Where "aid diplomacy" tends to fail, such as in short-term emergency relief and humanitarian assistance, climate diplomacy can work to achieve long-term objectives for adaptation, responsible resource management and resilience.



Climate Diplomacy in Southeast Asia: The Way Forward

The closing discussion - inspired by some introducing reflections of Dr. Hinrich Thölken, Head of Division "Climate and Environmental Foreign Policy, Sustainable Economy" at the German Federal Foreign Office - highlighted some main findings of the workshop and sketched out possible ways forward for climate diplomacy:

- Prevention is a key issue in climate diplomacy, given that foreign policy focuses on the ramifications of global warming for international relations. As the climate changes, governance structures need to be revisited and designed to be more resilient. Part of managing global and geopolitical change is for climate diplomacy to conduct global contingency planning.
- Diplomats have to move beyond state-to-state interaction and adopt a whole of society approach, including engaging in Track Two activities. Other government actors such as those on the sub-state level should engage as well. Cities are also key actors in addressing increasing vulnerabilities, as they are well-positioned to adapt to climate change.
- Diplomats should not only work to protect national interests, but also towards peace and stability as an overarching goal. Climate change will compromise the sovereignty of states more than agreeing on joint action. Agenda management in regional and international bodies is relevant in this regard. As time is of the essence, courageous efforts are needed to advance concrete action from and by ASEAN.
- Green growth asks for better communication, in particular with large institutional investors such as insurance companies and state funds. This means adopting a more long-term approach to the benefits in order to translate them into short-term action. Reference to greener versions of GDP, such as the work of the Stiglitz Commission on revised ways for measuring economic performance, can serve as an example.
- Framework conditions for green investments need to be improved, be it building codes or other incentives. It is also important that a frank and transparent conversation take place about who the winners and losers are in this transition towards a greener economy.
- Building trust and confidence is a key objective in climate diplomacy. An example of trust building is through disaster relief cooperation, which gains significant traction and generates widespread awareness of the effects of climate change. We should use this momentum to advance climate diplomacy.
- ASEAN members are in different phases of development and have a differentiated approach to climate change. This should not stand in the way of joint action. It was suggested that some countries should take leadership here. Singapore may be well-positioned to do so.





- Climate diplomacy is a relatively new concept, and moreover a complex one. In Germany and Europe, there is no consensus yet on its definition. However, this should not discourage us as modern foreign policy needs to be open to new topics and issues if does not want to become irrelevant. This is particularly why it is important to engage with multiple stakeholders both within and outside government and not leave foreign policy solely in diplomats' hands, but instead encourage wider engagement.
- While the coalition of actors needs to be broad, diplomats, rather than particular ministries (environment, finance, trade, etc.), remain best placed to take a whole-of-government approach.



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