

NTS Bulletin March 2015**Enhancing ASEAN Regional Capacity for Disaster Response Operations**

*By Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
Singapore*

Major disasters that typically hit Southeast Asia illustrate the immensity of the tasks involved in undertaking disaster relief operations. With the establishment of the ASEAN Community by the end of 2015, it is crucial to institutionalise regional response plans that support and synergise the governments' national disaster response mechanisms and facilitate international responses in the region.

Regional cooperation on humanitarian assistance

The Hyogo Declaration and the Hyogo Framework for Action stressed the need to strengthen and develop regional mechanisms to ensure rapid and effective disaster response in situations that exceed national coping capacities. As such, with the increased frequency of natural disasters, the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) was fully ratified by all member-states in 2009. It is a legally binding agreement that promotes regional cooperation in intensifying joint emergency response, among others. The Agreement established the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) to facilitate cooperation and coordination among member-states, and with relevant U.N. and international organisations. A pool of trained and rapidly deployable experts on emergency assessment, the Emergency Rapid Assessment Team (ERAT) has been established. ASEAN, since 2005, has been regularly conducting the ASEAN Disaster Emergency Response Simulation Exercises (ARDEX) to simulate and practice disaster response situations, and review information sharing, search and rescue coordination, and disaster emergency response.

Capacity gaps

ASEAN's disaster response mechanism faced its first major test in 2008 when Cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar. ASEAN, with support from partners, demonstrated that it can provide an effective coordinating mechanism to facilitate the delivery of international assistance. In 2013, in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, the AHA Centre deployed its team members and the ASEAN-ERAT in Manila and Tacloban City to coordinate with the Philippine government to provide international relief support for the victims.

But ASEAN had received criticisms that its role in relief efforts was limited to basic information-sharing functions, without substantial logistics and funds, while international aid was spearheaded by the U.S and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), among other actors.

However, it should be pointed out that it is not ASEAN's aim to supplant international humanitarian actors. Despite the existence of these regional mechanisms and institutions, the primary responsibility of responding to disaster-hit areas still lies with the national government as the first responder.

Strengthening regional capacity

In order to further enhance ASEAN's response mechanism through a network of specialised services, Singapore established the Changi Regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Coordination Centre, which seeks to contribute to more effective multinational military responses to disasters, by enhancing operational coordination among military responders. The Disaster Emergency Logistic System for ASEAN was set up in Subang, Malaysia to ensure a quick availability of emergency relief items that can be accessed by member-states in the aftermath of major disasters.

There are also other ASEAN-initiated multilateral ad-hoc exercises in disaster management. The ADMM-Plus HADR/Military Medicine Exercise and the ARF Disaster Relief Exercise (ARF DiREx) gather military assets and emergency teams from ASEAN members and dialogue partners, conducting table-top exercises and joint drills on the evacuation of casualties, humanitarian civil-military coordination, and delivery of aid to affected communities.

ASEAN has come a long way in building its regional disaster response capacity. However, while regional capacity has increased since AADMER was ratified, many programmes are still in their early stages. For ASEAN to become a capable and recognised primary humanitarian actor in the region, it will need to expand, requiring greater financial and resource commitment by its members. Though regional efforts are being institutionalised, attention also needs to be focused on improving capacity at the national level. ASEAN member-states need to rethink and improve their own national strategies for disaster management and humanitarian assistance.

Recommended Readings

- Daniel Petz, 2014, Strengthening Regional and National Capacity for Disaster Risk Management: The Case of ASEAN, Washington: Brookings Institution.
- Mely Caballero-Anthony and Julius Cesar I. Trajano, 2014, Lessons of Two Disasters: Building Resilience from Within, RSIS Commentaries, 9 December, Singapore: S Rajaratnam School of International Studies.
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News & Commentaries

- Thai crops to suffer worst drought in 15 years, Reuters, 5 February 2015.
- Tiger nations to set up anti-poaching network, AFP, 7 February 2015.
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- Green Freight Projects underway in the GMS, Greater Mekong Subregion Core Environment Program, 25 February 2015.
- Indonesia and Netherlands launch large coastal safety initiative in Java, Wetlands International. 3 March 2015.
- EU adopts climate change targets for Paris conference, Channel News Asia, 7 March 2015.
- Vietnam, Philippines review cooperation in tackling oil spills, Vietnam Plus, 10 March, 2015.
- Andy Extance, Conservation gets low share of tourist income, Science and Development Network, 10 March 2015.

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Events & Announcements

- Regional Forum on Climate Change (RFCC) – Low Carbon and Climate Resilience Societies: Bridging Science, Practice, and Policy, 1–3 July 2015, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand.
- The 14th China International Environmental Protection Exhibition and Conference, 9–12 June 2015, Beijing, China.

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- Arthur Neslen, Germany moves to legalise fracking, The Guardian, 14 February 2015.
- Krista Mahr and Sanjeev Miglani, India seals nuclear energy pact with Sri Lanka, hopes to push back China influence, Reuters, 16 February 2015.
- Japan nuclear regulator advisers fear loss of its 'essential' independence, Reuters, 18 February 2015.
- Agence France-Presse, Philippines to send home Chinese energy experts, The Jakarta Post, 25 February 2015.
- Gideon Rose, Energy's hottest sector, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2015 Issue.
- Michael T. Klare, Hard power, soft power, and energy power, Foreign Affairs, 3 March 2015.

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- Stewart Patterson, 2015, Indonesia's energy requirements – Part one: Current energy dynamics, Dalkeith: Future Directions International.
- Stewart Patterson, 2015, Indonesia's energy requirements – Part two: Current energy demands, Dalkeith: Future Directions International.
- Michael Ratner, Paul W. Parfomak, Linda Luther, Ian F. Fergusson, 2015, U.S. natural gas exports: New opportunities, uncertain outcomes, Washington DC: Congressional Research Service.

Events & Announcements

- Women in Energy and Resources Leadership Summit 2015, 21–22 April 2015, Perth, Australia.
- The 5th World Hydropower Congress, 19–21 May 2015, Beijing, China.

FOOD SECURITY

News & Commentaries

- Reviving agriculture in Ebola-hit Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, The World Bank, 12 February 2015.
- A map of hunger in 2015 - where to watch, IRIN News, 17 February 2015.
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- Dr Luca Alinovi, Kenya: Regional integration key to Kenya's food security, Interview by Agatha Ngotho, The Star, 9 March 2015.

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- David Blandford, 2015, The World Trade Organization Agreement on Agriculture and world food security, Penn State Journal of Law and International Affairs, Vol. 3, Iss. 2.
- Palak Gupta, Kalyani Singh, Veenu Seth, Sidharth Agarwal, and Pulkit Mathur, 2015, Coping strategies adopted by households to prevent food insecurity in urban slums of Delhi, India, Journal of Food Security, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 6–10.

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- 2nd International Conference on Food Security and Nutrition (ICFSN 2015), 19-20 March 2015, Florence, Italy.
- Call for papers: Fifth International Conference on Food Studies (Deadline 7 April 2015), 18-19 September 2015, Virginia, The United States of America.

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News & Commentaries

- Lawrence Solomon, Public health's scary century, Financial Post, 6 March 2015.
- Re-routing the HIV focus to women, The Star/Asia News Network, 8 March 2015.
- Jackie Tumuheirwe, International women's day: the battle for better maternal health care in Uganda, The Guardian, 8 March 2015.
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Events & Announcements

- Healthcare, Management, & Technology 2015 Conference, 8 April 2015, Washington DC, The United States of America.
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PEACE, HUMAN SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

News & Commentaries

- Raman Letchumanan, What is the ASEAN community 2015?, RSIS Commentaries, No.028, 11 February 2015.
- Australia's asylum policy, The Economist, 17 February 2015.
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- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2015, Achieving development results in Asia and the Pacific 2013-2014, New York.

Events & Announcements

- The Third Conference on Human Development in Asia, 26–28 April 2015, Hiroshima, Japan.
- Call for applications – 2016 Rotary Peace Fellowships, Deadline for applications: 31 May 2015.

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- Japan and ASEAN to start dialogue on transnational crime and terrorism, The Japan Times, 12 February 2015.
- Mirko Bagaric, Transnational effort should influence Bali Nine sentences, The Australian, 13 February 2015.
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Events & Announcements

- 13th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, 12–19 April 2015, Doha.
- 7th International Conference on Digital Forensics & Cyber Crime, 6–8 October 2015, Seoul.

WATER SECURITY

News & Commentaries

- Nita Bhalla, World has not woken up water crisis caused by climate change: IPCC head, Reuters, 3 February 2015.
- Sandra Postel, India's food security threatened by groundwater depletion, National Geographic, 3 February 2015.
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- C.J. Schuster-Wallace and R. Sandford, 2015, Water in the world we want, United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health and United Nations Office for Sustainable Development.
- UN-Water, 2015, Wastewater management – A UN-Water analytical brief, Geneva.

Events & Announcements

- 7th World Water Forum – Water for Our Future, 12–17 April 2015, Daegu – Gyeongbuk, Republic of Korea.
- HydroEco'2015 International Conference, 13–16 April 2015, Vienna, Austria.