

**NTS Bulletin April 2015****Women in Southeast Asia: From Equality to Development**

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2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995. While the world takes stock of how far we have come in terms of acknowledging women's rights as human rights, and there have been many achievements in this, there still remain considerable gaps. 20 years ago the Beijing platform for action focused on 12 crucial areas where more work needed to be done including addressing inequalities in education, health, in employment opportunities, and in the sharing of political power and decision-making.

**Women of ASEAN**

In Southeast Asia, much has been done to promote and protect and rights of women through various mechanisms and institutions, not in the least by ASEAN itself. In addition to all 10 member states ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) has become a platform to engage in dialogue with civil society partners on issues and challenges of great concern in the region – violence against both women and children. In addition, the Southeast Asian Women's Caucus on ASEAN, a network of organisations, engages ASEAN to advance the rights of women in the region as a means of ensuring their fundamental human rights. Membership covers all 10 member states and includes East Timor.

Through the implementation of new laws and policies and by revamping older ones, governments of the region have taken concrete, actionable steps to protect women and children against forms of violence such as sexual harassment, human trafficking and domestic violence. A recent survey by MasterCard on gender equality in Asia saw Singapore placed 4th among 16 Asia-Pacific nations. Other countries in the region, including Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand have also registered vast improvements from 2007 to 2015. Vietnam has even declared International Women's Day a Public Holiday.

**Still quite a way to go**

Despite the acknowledgement of issues of inequality, and acting upon these through legislation, policies and programmes, ASEAN still has quite a way to go before gender-related discrimination can be abolished. Examples include Cambodia's very low numbers of female parliamentarians due to the lack of suitable candidates, a fact that has its roots in low female literacy levels. The absence of effective representation that addresses specific gender-related issues, including food, health and economic securities of women, will have adverse effects on the country's development. The US First Lady, Michelle Obama's recent visit to the country was targeted at addressing the issue of female illiteracy. For those that have found a means of establishing financial security and freedom, misguided patriarchal values and political motives, disguised as issues of national dignity surface, throwing a wrench in their financial stability. Indonesian President Joko Widodo's plans to stop sending women to work as maids will have negative effects not only on the families

of these women but on the economy as well, considering how the remittance of funds from foreign domestic workers is quite substantial. According to an International Organisation for Migration study, remittances from Indonesian migrant workers (of which three-quarters are women) reached USD\$6.6 billion in 2008 and this figure has steadily increased over the years, according to the World Bank, to more than USD\$7 billion in 2012.

### **A more focused direction**

The way for ASEAN countries to stay competitive and on track with their development goals is to promote gender equity. This is especially so for equality in education. It has been proven that increased female literacy has resulted in better maternal health, reduced malnutrition in children, and increased economic development, especially at local levels. Perhaps in this, newly developing member states can learn from the experiences of other member states that have provided equal opportunities in education, for example Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore. By promoting equal opportunities in education and encouraging parents to send their girls to school in an early fledging state, then Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, and his team created a skilled labour force that still stands as the backbone of the nation's social cohesiveness and economic strength.

The shared vision of a people-oriented and socially responsible ASEAN community cannot come to fruition unless violations to half the region's population are put to rights. Gender equity is not just about women and girls. It's about us as human beings. It is about shared ideas of social justice. The empowerment of women in a way empowers all of us. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon put it succinctly when he stated this in his message for International Women's Day this year "...when we unleash the power of women, we can secure a future for all".

### **Recommended Readings**

- ASEAN Secretariat, 2014, Joint statement of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Violence against Children, Manila, the Philippines, 17 January 2012.
- Sara E. Davies, Kimberly Nackers, and Sarah Teitt, 2014, Women, peace and security as an ASEAN priority, Australian Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 68, No. 3, pp. 333–355.
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## **CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY**

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- Erik Meijaard, Commentary: The final blow for Indonesia's forests?, The Jakarta Globe, 9 March 2015.
- Gardiner Harris, Plan to verify Delhi pollution data raises suspicions, The New York Times, 11 March 2015.
- Edward Wong and Chris Buckley, Chinese premier vows tougher regulation on air pollution, The New York Times, 15 March 2015.
- Zachary Davies Boren, Earth Hour: The world turns off the lights in call for climate change action, The Independent, 28 March 2015.

- United States submits its climate action plan ahead of 2015 Paris Agreement, UN Climate Change Newsroom, 31 March 2015.
- Oliver Milman, Climate change making droughts in Australia worse as rain patterns shift, The Guardian, 31 March 2015.
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### **Selected Publications**

- Climate-smart agriculture: Towards sustainable landscapes and food systems mobilizing science for transitions, 2015, Declaration from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Science Conference on Climate-Smart Agriculture in Montpellier, France.
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- Robert N. Stavins, 2015, What can an economist possibly have to say about climate change?, Policy brief, Harvard project on climate agreements, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School.

### **Events & Announcements**

- South Asian Conference on Climate Change: Risk & Actions, 28–30 April 2015, Jamshoro, Pakistan.
- 2015 Regional Forum on Climate Change, 1–3 July 2015, Bangkok, Thailand.

## **ENERGY SECURITY**

### **News & Commentaries**

- Jane Nakano, Looking toward nuclear expansion, China works with U.S. on safety, The Network for Climate and Energy Information, 18 March 2015.
- Justic Scheck and Selina Williams, Non-U.S. shales prove difficult to crack, The Wall Street Journal, 18 March 2015.
- Reuters, US shale oil firms brace for more pain as crude resumes slide, Channel NewsAsia, 19 March 2015.
- Reuters, Oil and gas industry groups sue over US fracking rules, Channel NewsAsia, 21 March 2015.
- Dickon Pinner and Matt Rogers, Solar power comes of age: How harnessing the sun got cheap and practical, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2015 issue.
- Gideon Rose, Energy's hottest sector, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2015 Issue.
- Reuters, Jordan signs US\$10 billion nuclear power plant deal with Russia, Today, 25 March 2015.
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- Qinnan Zhou, Can US energy exports 'pivot to Asia'?, The Diplomat, 27 March 2015.

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- Benjamin K. Sovacool, Roman V. Sidortsov, Benjamin R. Jones, 2014, Energy Security, Equality and Justice, Routledge.
- Michel Berthélemy, Lina Escobar Rangel, 2015, Nuclear reactors' construction costs: The role of lead-time, standardization and technological progress, Energy Policy, Vol. 82, pp. 118–130.

## **Events & Announcements**

- The Women in Energy and Resources Leadership Summit 2015, 12–13 May 2015, Sydney, Australia.
- The Second Annual United Nations Sustainable Energy for All Forum, 17–21 May 2015, New York, The United States of America.

## **FOOD SECURITY**

### **News & Commentaries**

- Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros, It's not the size but how it's used: Lessons for ASEAN rice reserves, Eurasia Review, 9 March 2015.
- Expect agriculture GDP growth to be zero to marginal in current calendar year: Ashok Gulati, ICRIER, The Economic Times, 17 March 2015.
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- Chris Stowers, Statement calls for action on climate-resilient farming, Scidev.net, 30 March 2015.
- "Enable small scale farmers to contribute to food security" says ILEIA to Dutch minister, Agri Cultures, 2 April 2015.
- Daniel Speckhard, Global Food Security Act a critical step forward in ending hunger, Roll Call, 7 April 2015.
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## **Events & Announcements**

- Global Food Security Consortium and the Leroy and Barbara Everson Seed and Biosafety Symposium 2015: Interlocking the Pieces for Global Food Security, 14–15 April 2015, Ames, The United States of America.
- 2015 Global Food Security Symposium, 16 April 2015, Washington D.C., The United States of America.
- 15<sup>th</sup> International Cereal and Bread Congress, 17–21 April, 2015, Istanbul, Turkey.

## **HEALTH SECURITY**

### **News & Commentaries**

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- Miranda Yeo, Compound could lead to cheaper skin cancer treatment, The Straits Times, 3 April 2015.
- Francesca Happé, Myths and realities of mental health, The Guardian, 5 April 2015.
- Men Kimseng, Maternal mortality rates remain high, despite UN goals, VOA Khmer, 7 April 2015.
- Charles Parkinson, Thais expand health benefits for migrant workers, The Phnom Penh Post, 7 April 2015.
- The Star/ Asia News Network, Malaysia clinics found using outdated sterilising equipment, Your Health, 7 April 2015.

### **Selected Publications**

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- Étienne Langlois et al., 2015, Inequities in postnatal care in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis, Bulletin of the World Health Organisation, Vol. 93, No. 4, 259–270G.

## **Events & Announcements**

- Annual International Conference on Public Health, 4–7 May 2015, Athens, Greece.
- 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Global Healthcare Conference, 29–30 June 2015, Singapore.

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- Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2015, Asian development outlook 2015: Financing Asia's future growth, Manila.

### **Events & Announcements**

- WIPO/ESCAP Regional Forum "Towards Sustainable Development: Partnerships for Innovation and Technological Capacity Building in the Least Developed Countries of Asia and the Pacific Region", 28–29 April 2015, Bangkok, Thailand.
- International Summer School in Forced Migration, deadline for applications: 1 May 2015, Oxford, The United Kingdom.

## **TRANSNATIONAL CRIME**

### **News & Commentaries**

- Thesa Vance Nuansyah, Quo vadis ASEAN's war on transnational crime, The Jakarta Post, 20 March 2015.
- Sunan J. Rustam and Rayyanul M. Sangadji, IUU fishing as transnational organised crime, The Jakarta Post, 27 March 2015.
- Dan Oakes and Sam Clark, Australian man sentenced to death in China for trying to smuggle methamphetamine to Australia; second man awaiting trial, ABC News, 1 April 2015.
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- Hezri Adnan, Growing threat of wildlife threat, New Straits Times, 7 April 2015.
- Kathy Quiano and Tim Hume, Death row appeal fails: Australian 'Bali Nine' drug smugglers face execution, CNN, 7 April 2015.

### **Selected Publications**

- US Department of State Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2015, International narcotics control strategy report: Volume II money laundering and financial crimes, Washington D.C.
- Christopher Smith, 2015, Report on human trafficking issues to the 2015 Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Vienna.

## **Events & Announcements**

- Freedom Summit 2015, 9 May 2015, San Francisco, The United States of America.
- Interdisciplinary Conference on Human Trafficking, 1–3 October 2015, Lincoln, Nebraska, The United States of America.

## **HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RESPONSE**

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- Mark Kinver, UN report: Agriculture bears brunt of natural disaster, BBC News, 17 March 2015.
- Sendai: UN conference adopts new, people-centred disaster risk reduction strategy, UN News Centre, 18 March 2015.
- Denia Djokic, Southeast Asia's nuclear push: the need for better regional communication and nuclear accident response capabilities, NAPSNet Policy Forum, 30 March 2015.
- Christopher Hobson, Disaster preparedness: A missed opportunity in Sendai, The Diplomat, 1 April 2015.
- Agence France Presse, State of emergency as super typhoon batters Micronesia, Yahoo News, 2 April 2015.

### **Selected Publications**

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- The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), 2015, Disaster risk reduction private sector partnership: Post 2015 framework- private sector blueprint, Geneva.

## **Events and Announcements**

- Regional Meeting on International Humanitarian Assistance Mechanisms, 5–7 May 2015, Guatemala.
- NADI Workshop on "The Role of Military in Enhancing ASEAN HADR Cooperation in Responding to Crisis", 6–10 July 2015, Chiangmai, Thailand.

## **WATER SECURITY**

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- Nafeez Ahmed, Global water crisis causing failed harvests, hunger, war and terrorism, Ecologist, 27 March 2015.
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- Ahmad Melhem, Palestine's lingering water crisis, Al-Monitor, 31 March 2015.
- Rob Curran, How on earth are the two of the most water-rich nations having H2O crises?, Fortune, 6 April 2015.

### **Selected Publications**

- UN-Water, 2015, World water development report 2015: Water in a sustainable world, Paris.
- Ramesh A. Vaidya and Eklabya Sharma, 2014, Research insights on climate and water in the Hindu Kush Himalayas, Kathmandu: ICIMOD.

### **Events & Announcements**

- The 5<sup>th</sup> World Hydropower Congress, 19–21 May 2015, Beijing, China.
- World Water Congress XV, 25–29 May 2015, Edinburgh, Scotland.