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## Empowering Women through Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction



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The 8<sup>th</sup> of March marked International Women's Day. Although the day is meant as an international celebration of women it also acts as a reminder that women still suffer disproportionately from gender-based inequalities and vulnerability.

Some of the factors that create greater susceptibility to vulnerabilities and inequality are the lack of education, denial of rights and limited involvement in decision-making processes. Humanitarian crises and natural disasters can create fertile ground on which these underlying factors grow into severe vulnerabilities for women. A greater involvement of women in decision-making is believed to be key in ensuring good governance and societal stability.

### Southeast Asia and the ACWC

Violence against women and gender inequalities are serious problems in Southeast Asia. An example is the ongoing Rohingya crisis in Myanmar where women are increasingly exposed to sexual violence and human trafficking. Other forms of inequality

such as disparities in education, poverty, resource allocation, and lack of access to health and sanitation facilities create exposure to risks and a general low quality of life for many women in the region. According to UN Women, in East and Southeast Asia, violence against women mainly occurs in the form of domestic violence, marital rape, child marriages and human trafficking. In order to tackle these challenges the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) established the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) in 2010.

The ACWC kicked off the year of 2017 with its fourteenth meeting on 28 February. The scope of the meeting was to review the status of projects and activities under the ACWC Work Plan 2012-2016 and to agree on new programmes and projects to include in the ACWC Work Plan 2016-2020. It was agreed to continue the work on the previously established thematic areas such as, among others, gender equality in education and gender mainstreaming, and to agree on additional focus areas especially related to the issue of Trafficking in Persons (TIPs) in the ASEAN region. ACWC's agenda also includes the relation between women, climate change and disaster relief. However, the link made between those is limited to regarding women as victims affected by disasters and climate change rather than as them being part of the solution.

## Women and Disaster Risk Reduction

Unequal treatment among different genders is rooted in the assumption that women represent the 'weaker sex' and must be protected for their own wellbeing. This undertone of a strong patriarchal mindset, unfortunately, creates vulnerabilities, which are exacerbated during and after disasters.

Activists and scholars are therefore calling for a paradigm shift, namely, to see women not only as victims but as a powerful resource in building good governance, resilience and sustainable development. In Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) there is a need for greater involvement of women. According to The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for DRR, Mr. Robert Glasser, "too few countries in disaster-prone parts of the world have a clear understanding of how gender inequality contributes to higher death rates among

women and girls in disasters and this has to change". He further stressed that it is impossible to reduce disaster losses without a more inclusive approach to DRR.

### The Way Forward

Southeast Asia, one of the most disaster prone regions in the world, has the responsibility to make its populations less vulnerable and more resilient to disasters. The involvement of women in disaster risk management will create the opportunity to tackle underlying risks of inequality and build resilience towards future disasters. An example of such is to involve women in the design of early warning systems. During the Bangladesh floods following Cyclone Gorky in 1991, many women died because they were not able to access information due to the fact that the warning was transmitted over mobile phones which were mostly in the possession of the men.

The way forward is to include an understanding of DRR, climate change adaptation and women's rights into school curriculum at an early stage and to actively make women part of the solution by including them in decision-making processes. A more inclusive approach to DRR and climate change adaptation would not only make women less vulnerable but empower them as actors of change and resilience.

With the commitment to the ACWC Work Plan 2016-2020, the Southeast Asian region continues its efforts to end any type of violence against women. The empowerment through women's education and their involvement in decision-making processes is vital to making Southeast Asian women and their communities more resilient.

## Suggested Readings:

- ASEAN, 2017, Press Release of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC)
- ASEAN, 2013, ACWC Work Plan 2012–2016 and Terms of Reference
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*The Diplomat*  
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#### Government wins in forest fire case

Hans Nicholas Jong,  
*The Jakarta Post*  
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#### S'poreans willing to fork out 1% of income to ensure no more haze: Study

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#### Scientists highlight deadly health risks of climate change

Jacqueline Howard,  
*CNN*  
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#### The case for collaborating on climate change

Ed Davey,  
*Aljazeera*  
17 February 2017

#### Budget 2017: Singapore to impose carbon tax on large direct emitters

Monica Kotwani,  
*Channel NewsAsia*  
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### EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

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#### FCPF 16th Carbon Fund Meeting

19–22 June 2017  
Paris, France

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#### Building gender into climate finance: ADB experience with the climate investment funds

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### NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

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*Malay Mail Online*  
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#### Six years on, Fukushima child evacuees face menace of school bullies

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*The Japan Times*  
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Motoko Rich,  
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#### Editorial: Divisions still haunt residents of Fukushima on 6th anniversary

*The Asahi Shimbun*  
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#### China continues to lead on the road to clean energy

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**2017 Global Energy Conference**  
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Houston, the USA

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**ASEAN ESCO report: Executive summary**  
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10 March 2017

**EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Launch: 2017 Global Food Policy Report**  
23 March 2017  
Washington D.C., United States

**Call for papers: 8th Annual Conference of the AESOP 'Sustainable food planning' group, 2017**  
7-8 November 2017  
Coventry, United Kingdom

## HEALTH SECURITY



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**RCEP and Health: This Kind of 'Progress' is Not What India and the World Need**

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Kajal Bhardwaj,  
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**Global Health and Innovation Conference**

22-23 April 2017  
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**ICECCHH: 19th International Conference on Environment, Climate Change and Human Health**

14-15 May 2017  
Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands

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**Deadly clashes hit Kokang in Myanmar's Shan state**

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**"License to kill" Philippine police killings in Duterte's "war on drugs"**

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*Jason Miklian, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo*  
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**2017 Third International Conference on Social Protection**

10 - 11 October 2017  
Petaling Jaya, Malaysia

**International Interdisciplinary Conference on Minority Studies**

10 - 11 November 2017  
Istanbul, Turkey

**TRANSNATIONAL CRIME**



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**19 indicted in international fraud and money laundering schemes**

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**2nd General Conference of the Standing Group on Organised Crime**  
7 - 8 July 2017  
Bath, United Kingdom

**4th Asian Symposium on the Humanities & Human Rights Education**  
6-8 August 2017  
Hiroshima, Japan

**HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF**



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**Japan Provides Timely Food Support As WFP Steps Up Efforts To Prevent Famine In Yemen**  
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**UNICEF announces collaboration with telecommunications giant in drive for 'Big Data' for social good**  
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**3rd Global Summit of Research Institutes for Disaster Risk Reduction: Expanding the Platform for Bridging Science and Policy Making**  
19-21 March 2017  
Kyoto, Japan

**2017 Disaster Preparedness Forum**  
28 March 2017  
Bangkok, Thailand

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*Martin Stavenhagen, Joost Buurman and Cecilia Tortajada*  
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#### As water scarcity deepens across Latin America, political instability grows

*The Guardian*  
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*The Straits Times*  
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#### Why running out of water can be a good thing for Singaporean innovation

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#### Form committee to resolve water scarcity, sanitation issues, SC tells Sindh govt

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#### Renewable hydropower generation as a co-benefit of balanced urban water portfolio management and flood risk mitigation.

*Sahin, Oz, et al.,*  
*Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* 68, pp. 1076-1087.  
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### EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### Sustainable Water Management Conference

19-22 March 2017  
New Orleans, Louisiana

#### Water Resources Management 2017 Conference

18 - 20 July 2017  
Prague, Czech Republic