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One Year After the Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Plastic Debris: Managing Competing Priorities



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ASEAN leaders adopted the Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Plastic Debris in ASEAN Region in June 2019. Countries in the region have since taken various measures at national level to curb plastic pollution. One year on, it is timely to review the progress and reflect on the ways forward. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant implications for almost every sector of our societies, including the campaigns to reduce plastic use. The challenges facing the efforts to tackle plastic pollution highlight the need to balance between the immediate priority and longer-term target.

Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam are among the world's top contributors of marine plastic debris. The Bangkok Declaration reflected the seriousness of the

challenge and the commitment of ASEAN countries to address it. Thailand banned single-use plastic bags from January 1, 2020. Indonesia was to impose a similar ban in Jakarta by June 2020. The Philippine government is considering this option too.

At the regional level, Norway provided US\$ 3 million in November 2019 to support the implementation of the Bangkok Declaration through the ASEAN-Norway Cooperation Project on Local Capacity Building for Reducing Plastic Pollution over three years. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in partnership with Japan, launched a project in May 2020 to support local implementation of the ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris. These developments show that the work to reduce marine

plastic debris is gaining momentum in Southeast Asia.

However, the positive trend has been affected by the outbreak of the COVID-19 since the disease began to spread globally in February. The pandemic affects efforts to reduce marine plastic debris in several ways. First, the response to the COVID-19 leads to substantial increases in the use of plastic products. For instance, some disposable protective equipment like face shields are plastic. Food delivery has become popular and necessary during the outbreak as most people are confined at home but this new normal has increased the use of plastic packaging. It is pointed out in a news report that the plastic waste generated in Bangkok has been up from 5,500 tonnes to 6300 tonnes daily. Moreover, due to the consideration for hygiene, businesses have to suspend the effort to encourage customers to bring their own reusable containers.

Second, the enforcement of lock-down affects waste management in Southeast Asian cities, particularly those relying on individual waste collectors. Effective waste management is key to the efforts to tackle marine plastic debris, as land-based waste is a primary source of marine plastic debris. The significant increases in the consumption of single-use plastics for various purposes, from daily life to medical protection, put further pressure on waste management. However, the COVID-19 outbreak has reduced the mobility of waste collectors in the informal sector and threatened the livelihood of this community.

Third, the pandemic has inflicted significant impacts on global economy. As countries are moving to the phase of reopening, national governments and the private sector face the dilemma between the more urgent need to revitalise economic activities and the longer-

term target of reducing marine plastic debris significantly, such as whether to loosen the restrictions on single-use plastic products to boost consumption.

Given the imminent threat posed by COVID-19, it is understandable that prevention and containment measures have been prioritised, even at the expense of other socio-economic activities. However, as the situation has been gradually under control in many parts of the world and countries are to re-boost economic development, the political and financial support for reducing marine plastic debris should be maintained. Moreover, as the outbreak has catalysed transformation in many aspects of people's lifestyle, it is important that reducing reliance on single-use plastic products and increasing reuse and recycling are included in this transformation process, so as to achieve the sustainable development goal of preserving the marine environment.

Suggested Readings

- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2020, "Changing Sails: Accelerating Regional Actions for Sustainable Oceans in Asia and the Pacific," Bangkok, 13 May.
- Chrispin Petro Kapinga and Shing Hin Chung, 2020, "Marine Plastic Pollution in South Asia," SSWA Development Paper, Bangkok: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 26 May.
- Nguyen Thi Xuan Son, 2020, "Policy on Marine Plastic Waste in Asean and Viet Nam," *Environmental Claims Journal*, doi:10.1080/10406026.2020.1775347.
- Youna Lyons, Theresa Linting Su, and Lin Neo, 2019, "A Review of Research on Marine Plastics in Southeast Asia: Who does what?"
- United Nations Environment Programme and CA Circular, 2019, "The Role of Packaging Regulations and Standards in Driving the Circular Economy," Bangkok and Singapore, 13 November.

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Carbon emissions fall 17% worldwide under coronavirus lockdowns, study finds

The major slowdown of movement has led to an "extreme" decline in carbon dioxide emissions — with daily levels 17% lower compared to averages from last year. Lockdowns could lead to an annual carbon emissions decline of up to 7% — the biggest drop since World War II.

Sophie Lewis

CBS News

20 May 2020

EU pledges coronavirus recovery plan will not harm climate goals

The European Commission argues it can raise €150bn in public and private money, up from a pre-crisis goal of €100bn, to help fund greener transport, cleaner industry and renovated homes. At the heart of the plan, the EU proposes to significantly increase its transition fund aimed at moving coal-dependent regions away from fossil fuels.

Jennifer Rankin

The Guardian

28 May 2020

Is climate action about to take a back seat to COVID-19?

The COP26 summit has been delayed until late 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic. It is easy to see how climate change policy could be pushed down the priority list during a global recession as lawmakers reach for short-term solutions.

Colm Quinn

Foreign Policy

29 May 2020

World Environment Day: COVID-19 crisis demands fundamental rethink

COVID-19 has revealed the vulnerability of global systems to protect the environment, health and economy. Now is the time to appreciate the vital role of the health of our planet and to take immediate action to conserve nature.

United Nations News

5 June 2020

COVID-19 is telling us that it's time for global systems change—starting with water

If humanity really is to "build back better" to prevent and preempt future shocks, then governments, companies and civil society must value and invest in water security worldwide.

Claudia Sadoff and Mark Smith

Eco-Business

5 June 2020

How face masks, gloves and other coronavirus waste is polluting our ocean

Coronavirus waste has become a new form of pollution as single-use personal protective equipment (PPE) floods our ocean. Governments need to act now to ensure a green recovery that incentivizes sustainability.

Charlotte Edmond

World Economic Forum

11 June 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Implications of the COVID-19 crisis for the energy sector and climate change in ASEAN

The spread of the COVID-19 and the resulting reduction in demand for products and services will likely cut total annual carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, but this will be temporary. ASEAN should seize new investment opportunities with stimulus packages for enhancing regional energy security, resilience, and climate change objectives.

Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, Jakarta: ERIA

2020

A government roadmap for addressing the climate and post COVID-19 economic crises

COVID-19 could well exacerbate climate change impacts as governments divert some of the resources tagged for climate change to address the pandemic. In the worst-case scenario, economic stimulus will be obtained at the expense of already-achieved climate policies. How the economic recovery is designed remains crucial in shaping the long-term pathways for reduced emissions and determining whether the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C temperature limit can be achieved.

Climate Action Tracker

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Going Forward with Climate & SDG Synergies

The webinar will seek to advance the application of synergies in practice by illustrating the potential of synergistic approaches to recover better and faster from COVID-19 and accelerate enhanced climate action and transition to sustainable development. The discussions will seek to feed into the July 2020 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Webinar

25 June 2020

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2020

In the 2020 HLPF, participants will debate where we stand on the SDGs in light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. They will reflect on how the international community can respond to the pandemic in a way that puts us back on track to achieve the SDGs and accelerate progress during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

New York, United States (Virtual)

7-16 July 2020

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

Developing Vietnam's renewable energy industry

Given the country's huge potential for renewable energy, the Vietnamese government should consider doing more, such as cutting red tape in business and easing regulatory infrastructure, in order to make the country even more attractive to renewable developers.

Thoi Nguyen
The Diplomat

6 June 2020

ADB, IEA discuss scaling up collaboration in energy systems

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the International Energy Agency (IEA) are discussing areas of potential collaboration, including how to boost the resilience of energy systems in Asia and the Pacific to better cope with extreme weather as a result of climate change or pandemic-induced supply interruptions, and the use of new technologies such as green hydrogen.

ANI
Yahoo News
9 June 2020

Indian firm to invest \$6 billion in solar power as country targets lofty renewable energy goals

India's Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL) has won a major contract to generate 8 gigawatts (GW) of solar power over the next few years, as the country aims to boost capacity to meet ambitious renewable energy targets.

Anmar Frangoul
CNBC
10 June 2020

Trump administration seeks to use global aid for nuclear projects

The US aid agency Development Finance Corporation proposed to use its funds to back overseas nuclear projects. It claimed that nuclear power will provide carbon-free electricity for developing nations seeing a growing demand for power.

Rebecca Beitsch
The Hill
11 June 2020

Nuclear power plant operations: Challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic

While operators have taken measures to reduce the risk of infection among employees and maintain day-to-day operations, lower electricity demand caused by restrictions on economic activity has led some plants to reduce power output.

Matt Fisher
International Atomic Energy Agency
11 June 2020

China curbs coal imports after 5 months of record inflows - sources

China has stepped up customs checks for coal imports, leading to lengthy processing delays at ports, as the country seeks to bolster the domestic coal industry.

Reuters
Yahoo News
11 June 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Gas 2020

This report provides a detailed analysis of recent natural gas market developments, assesses the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the natural gas industry, and discusses the main drivers and uncertainties to future gas supply and demand to 2025.

International Energy Agency
Paris: IEA
2020

The COVID-19 crisis and clean energy progress

This article takes stock of how the crisis has affected energy sectors and technologies thus far, and explores the potential implications for clean energy transitions over the medium and longer term.

International Energy Agency
Paris: IEA
2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Taking a Look Ahead: The Long-Term Impacts of a Crisis on Oil Demand

The speaker, Marie Fagan from London Economics International, will discuss how short-term crises have impacted long-term demand and what the historical lessons and economic impacts mean for oil demand after the crisis.

Webinar
29 June 2020

China's Draft Energy Law and its Implications for Power Market Reform

This webinar will examine a new draft Energy Law which outlines the direction for Chinese energy policy, amid recent power market reforms in China.

Webinar
1 July 2020

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Safeguarding food security with open trade policies

Collective efforts in food security are needed, such as through open trade, maintaining connectivity, and improving resiliency of food supply chains.

APEC Policy Support Unit

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

21 May 2020

Global Food Security Alert, May 28, 2020: COVID-19 pandemic drives global increase in humanitarian food assistance needs

Poor households' access to food and cash income remains constrained despite easing of movement restrictions in several countries.

Famine Early Warning System Network

ReliefWeb

28 May 2020

Food security and COVID-19

Amid the pandemic, countries and organisations are mounting special efforts to keep agriculture safely running as an essential business.

The World Bank

28 May 2020

FAO warns multiple impact of viruses, plagues and economic damage will fuel hunger in Asia and the Pacific

Food security challenges faced by farmers, such as African swine fever with over 5,000 outbreaks in the region, are coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic.

UN FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

28 May 2020

COVID-19 exposes vulnerability of Australia's food security

A shortage in staples demonstrated that Australia's supply chains have become increasingly vulnerable, prompting a rethink about how to protect the nation's food security.

Jonathan Pearlman

The Straits Times

14 June 2020

Tax attack? Philippines considers higher sugar levy and new 'junk food' tax to offset COVID-19 impacts

The Philippines is considering implementing higher sugar taxes and relevant measures to offset the costs incurred by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak this year.

Pearly Neo

Food Navigator Asia

15 June 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

COVID-19 and food security in Asia: How prepared are we?

This NTS Insight examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security in Asia and explores measures to prevent pandemic-induced food crises.

Mely Caballero-Anthony, Paul Teng and Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros, NTS Insight, No. IN20-03

Singapore: RSIS Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS Centre)

2020

Policy brief: The impact of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition

In the absence of large-scale coordination, a global food emergency can potentially emerge amid the COVID-19 pandemic and an emerging global recession.

United Nations

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

5th Annual Agriculture, Nutrition & Health (ANH) Academy Week

This will be a three-day conference involving researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from across the world working at the intersection of agriculture, nutrition and health to foster knowledge exchange, innovation, and learning, touching on COVID-19's impacts.

Online

30 June - 2 July 2020

4th International Conference on Global Food Security: Achieving local and global food security: At what costs?

The conference will facilitate interdisciplinary (science, business, policy and civil society) discussions on addressing the triple burden of malnutrition: hunger, micronutrient deficiencies and obesity.

Le Corum, Montpellier, France

6-9 December 2020

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Global Health Security: COVID-19 and its impacts - peacetime SAF: Its evolving defence role

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has witnessed militaries worldwide activated to take part in national efforts. Both MINDEF and the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) have played a robust role in Singapore's fight against the disease. It is timely to examine their roles as part of the nation's repertoire of tools for crisis management and national resilience.

Eddie Lim and Benjamin Ho

RSIS Commentaries

18 May 2020

The global COVID-19 vaccine race

The severity of the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered an intense international race to produce the first effective and safe vaccine, with some governments taking early bets on prospective candidates.

Benjamin Seet and Laurent Renia

The Straits Times

6 June 2020

Global Health Security - COVID-19 and its impacts - pandemic response: the women, peace and security agenda

In this time of compounding global crisis, the world needs to come together to not only fight the pandemic but to also preserve our commitments to certain shared beliefs. One of these is the eradication of gender inequality even in the midst of this humanitarian crisis.

Tamara Nair

RSIS Commentaries

8 June 2020

New approach to reducing spread of mosquito-borne disease

Researchers working in rural Kenya have identified the most productive breeding habitats for mosquitoes that spread a range of untreatable viruses. Their findings point to more effective health interventions that focus on the purpose of water-holding containers.

Stanford University

Science Daily

8 June 2020

COVID-19 hitting the Americas hardest: WHO

The Americas are bearing the brunt of the global coronavirus pandemic at present, with North and South America currently having four of the 10 worst-hit countries in the world.

Reuters

Channel News Asia

13 June 2020

Fear of 'second wave' as new COVID-19 infections emerge at Beijing's biggest wholesale food market

A wholesale food market in south-west Beijing is in the spotlight after being linked to a spate of new COVID-19 cases, sparking fears of a second wave of infections.

Tan Dawn Wei

The Straits Times

13 June 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Investigation of three clusters of COVID-19 in Singapore: Implications for surveillance and response measures

This study examines epidemiological and clinical data from individuals with confirmed COVID-19, via interviews and medical records, as well as field investigation data to assess interactions and possible modes of transmission of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).

Rachael Pung et al.,

The Lancet, Vol. 395, No. 10229

2020

School closure and management practices during coronavirus outbreaks including COVID-19: A rapid systematic review

This study comprises of a systematic review of three electronic databases to identify what is known about the effectiveness of school closures and other school social distancing practices during coronavirus outbreaks.

Russell M. Viner et al.,

Lancet (Child and Adolescent Health), Vol. 4, No. 5

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

International Conference on Emergency Medicine and Healthcare

This conference will bring together academic scientists, researchers and research scholars to share their experiences and research results on all aspects of Emergency Medicine and Healthcare.

Lisbon, Portugal

16-17 September 2020

2020 - 22nd International Conference on Research in Life-Sciences and Healthcare (ICRLSH)

This conference will present research studies on Life Sciences and Healthcare.

Singapore

5-6 November 2020

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Linking social protection and humanitarian cash

Social protection to help people cope with shocks is vital during this pandemic. Humanitarian cash and voucher assistance could be another facet of this.

Paul Harvey et al.

The Cash Learning Partnership

15 May 2020

South Asia confronts a double disaster: Cyclone and COVID-19

The impact of natural hazards this monsoon season has been heightened by COVID-19. Preparedness and recovery measures for natural hazards will need to change and improve going forward.

Arivudai Nambi Appadurai

World Resources Institute

29 May 2020

This global pandemic could transform humanitarianism forever. Here's how

While some predictions of the deep transformations of the humanitarian sector due to COVID-19 may have proven overly optimistic, there are some changes likely to happen anyway.

Heba Aly

The New Humanitarian

8 June 2020

Innovative new platform tracks cities' readiness and response to COVID-19

UN-Habitat is launching a tracker platform to assess the readiness of the world's cities for the COVID-19 pandemic. It will use global metrics to gather often hard-to-get data for future responses.

UN Habitat

10 June 2020

Five ways humanitarian use technological innovation to deliver during COVID-19

COVID-19 has pushed already soaring humanitarian needs levels even higher. With stretched resources, humanitarian agencies are turning to technology to overcome gaps in their access.

United Nations OCHA

Medium

11 June 2020

Financing increased for early warning systems in Small Island Developing States

Climate Risk & Early Warning Systems (CREWS) member states have announced US\$4.8 million in funding for the delivery of early warning systems and services for severe weather events for small states in the Pacific.

World Meteorological Organisation

12 June 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

From the ground up: It's about time for local humanitarian action

This report looks at how humanitarian action is always stronger with local action and discusses how effective local humanitarian action. This is not a zero-sum game of reduced roles for international humanitarian organisations and increased roles for local action.

Larissa Fast and Christina Bennett,

Humanitarian Policy Group

2020

The triple nexus - threat or opportunity for the humanitarian principles?

This discussion paper argues that as humanitarian principles are flexible, compromise and negotiation are therefore necessary to make the triple nexus (Humanitarian-Development-Peace) work.

Marc DuBois, Centre for Humanitarian Action

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

16th International Conference on Structures under Shock and Impact

This conference will promote the need to enhance protection of civilian infrastructure and industrial facilities from natural disasters technological accidents, and attacks.

Lisbon, Portugal

22-24 June 2020

5th World Congress on Disaster Management

The World Congress on Disaster Management (WCDM) will bring researchers, policy makers and practitioners from around the world in the same platform to discuss various challenging issues of disaster risk management.

New Delhi, India

9-12 December 2020

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

The disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on migrant workers in ASEAN

Migrant workers make up a significant percentage of all ASEAN labour force, as well as contribute substantial amounts to their country's GDPs. However, the region's response to COVID-19 has revealed the weakness of the response mechanism.

Camille Bismonte

The Diplomat

22 May 2020

Will COVID-19 change how we think about migration and migrant workers?

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the inclusion of health security in the migration conversation. The hardening of policies and stigmatisation of migrants may be hard to undo once the pandemic subsides, leading to problems regarding the essential work that they perform.

Abhinav Chugh

World Economic Forum

22 May 2020

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang promises greater job security for migrant workers

China's migrant workers have been hit hard by the lockdown, leading to a spike in the number of people living on the edge of poverty. With elimination of poverty being a goal, officials have been working to create more jobs for domestic migrants.

Mandy Zuo

South China Morning Post

23 May 2020

Why working together on global migration is vital to pandemic recovery

Migration and migrants' rights have been particularly affected by COVID-19. Unless governments invest more deeply in multilateral cooperation now, managing migration in a post-COVID world will be too little, too late.

Ian M. Kysel

The New Humanitarian

9 June 2020

Coronavirus: A window of opportunity for action on migration?

COVID-19 has magnified already existing inequalities in access, particularly for migrants. As such, this pandemic could be an opportunity to drive the adoption of evidence and rights-based policies for migration forward.

Eric Reidy

The New Humanitarian

10 June 2020

More than dormitory space: A chance for reform

With the current spotlight on Singapore's treatment of migrant workers, there is a general agreement that action needs to be taken to address this issue. But there is also a need to ascertain the most appropriate reform.

John Gee

The Straits Times

11 June 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Situation analysis of migrant health in Viet Nam

This report looks at the relationship between health and migration in Vietnam. It outlines the current situation and steps to be taken to promote migrant health via the development of a national action plan.

International Organisation for Migration, Hanoi: IOM Green One- UN House

2020

Policy brief: COVID-19 and people on the move

The impact of the COVID-19 has been disproportionately hard on groups who were already vulnerable, including irregular migrants. This presents itself as three crises - a health crisis, a socio-economic crisis and a protection crisis.

United Nations

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Early Evidence on COVID-19, Mobility, and Migration

This webinar is centred on COVID-19, mobility and migration. It discusses return migration as a possible factor in the spreading of the pandemic.

Recorded Webinar

June 2020

UN Global Compacts: Governing Migrants and Refugees

This webinar will cover three landmark agreements on migrants and refugees: the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the Global Compact on Refugees, and the Global Compact for Migration.

Webinar

30 June 2020