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## **Climate Security and Role of Women in ASEAN**

*By Tamara Nair*

### **SYNOPSIS**

*Climate change processes are acknowledged as critical components of regional and international security, and ASEAN should mobilise all segments of its population and existing plans of action to tackle this challenge. The role of women in ASEAN's peace and security including climate change should be acknowledged and strengthened systematically. The ASEAN Women, Peace and Security Regional Plan of Action offers such an opportunity for increased regional cooperation and resilience.*

### **COMMENTARY**

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) calls on the international community to incorporate gender perspectives in frameworks analysing international security issues. There is growing debate on the relationship between climate security and women that is merging with existing literature on women and armed conflict.

An understanding of women's vulnerabilities in climate change is essential to understanding the magnitude and urgency of the issue and should be investigated and addressed as an integral part of ASEAN's climate security architecture. ASEAN could pursue this through its WPS Regional Plan of Action (RPA).

### **Women and Climate Change**

The UN has already begun to broach the intersection between [climate change, and women and security](#), arguing the connection between resource scarcity and violent conflicts and proposing the strengthening of women's networks to engage in dialogue and mediation processes around natural resources management. The effects of climate change have broad gendered implications due to the entrenched inequalities women face in accessing and managing key resources such as water, food and

energy. In understanding women's role in climate change, it is essential to understand their role in making decisions about natural resources and how these decisions manifest regionally.

Take the water sector for example. Successful and effective water projects are vital in a new climate reality. There is evidence that water projects designed and run with the inclusion of women to the maximum extent possible are more likely to succeed in the long term. However, the reality is that women across Asia and the Pacific [lack representation at the management level](#) in the water sector.

The argument for more active participation by women in discussions on climate change and food security is borne out by the 2021 [OECD report](#), which stated that over a quarter of the female labour force in Southeast Asia worked in the agriculture industry and in food production. And, according to the [Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development](#) held in March 2022, 48-75 per cent of employed women worked in the agriculture and agricultural value chains in Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao PDR and Vietnam.

Women are also under-represented in the [energy sector](#) in Southeast Asia. This under-representation is partly due to [sociocultural norms](#), which limit the presence of women in employment and hence impeding the move towards a gender-just energy transition.

It is this author's assessment that policymaking should include the participation of women and should cover all levels – from grassroots to corporations – to ensure equitable decision-making on vital resources. We have to recontextualise our understanding of security and climate change to include gendered understandings of adaptation to and mitigation of the impacts of climate change.

By not integrating gender analysis into every level of security discourse, climate security policies will continue to miss the crucial inputs of women in analysing the catalysts of social fractures, like increasing gender and class divisions, and discrimination, as well as seizing opportunities for innovative adaptation and mitigation strategies.

## **WPS Regional Plan of Action in ASEAN**

The WPS RPA is a result of [decades of political engagement](#) in the ASEAN region as expressed by the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region (2004), and the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women (2015).

ASEAN leaders also adopted the Joint Statement on Promoting WPS in the region in 2017. In addition, the ASEAN Ministerial Dialogue on Strengthening Women's Role for Sustainable Peace and Security in 2020 further drove the integration of WPS across the three ASEAN community pillars, which are: Political-Security Community, Economic Community and Socio-Cultural Community.

The ASEAN WPS RPA, launched in December 2022, is the latest regional effort to

further acknowledge and increase sensitivity to women's role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

While we applaud the launch of a regional plan on WPS in ASEAN, we should not lose sight of this opportunity to make the agenda work for the region by including new threats, such as climate change. Adopting ASEAN's own version of a WPS RPA independently without emulating RPAs from elsewhere, most of which focus on the threat of armed conflict, would go a long way to ensure the success of the agenda here. I take my cue from the growing global conversations on WPS and climate security.

Acknowledging the threats of climate change facing women is a start, especially in vital areas of economic, food, water, energy, and health securities, as well as complex emergencies that result from natural hazards and human insecurities. All of these will only be exacerbated by climate change.

One way of addressing these concerns in an inclusive manner would be through the integration of the four WPS pillars, i.e., protection, prevention, participation and women's active role in relief and recovery, as essential parts of the existing climate security architecture, and not to see women as an area of 'special interest'; subjective and analysed outside of existing climate adaptation and mitigation frameworks.

## **Beyond ASEAN Community 2025**

In planning to move beyond the ASEAN Community 2025 agenda, existing regional frameworks should look to merging concerns for a better appreciation of threats to different groups of people. One such merger should be that between frameworks that address violence against women and gender inequality, and those that address climate change.

Policymakers will need to adopt cross-cutting approaches to incorporate gender into their areas of expertise to mutually feed into their policy gaps. In this way, ASEAN will fully utilise and strengthen existing frameworks to address concerns around gender equality, climate security, and peace in the region. This would help to identify policy blind spots that might compromise the effectiveness and reach of climate change policies. This is also a good way to maximise the advantages of having an ASEAN WPS RPA.

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