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NTS Insight Special Series: 'Climate Change and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda'

## Engaging WPS in Climate Security – ASEAN Perspectives

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### Abstract

Climate change processes are acknowledged as critical components of regional and international security, and there is scope for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (henceforth, ASEAN) to mobilise all segments of its population and existing plans of action addressing climate change to confront this challenge. The role of women in ASEAN's peace and security and their role climate change mitigation can and should be acknowledged and strengthened systematically. The ASEAN Women, Peace and Security Regional Plan of Action (WPS RPA) offers such an opportunity for increased regional cooperation to build resilience and enhance resourcefulness of women's formal, but in particular, informal networks. Although climate change does feature in the RPA, it is not within the specific focus of how the WPS framework might work in addressing the need for gender sensitive responses to the effect of climate change. This Insight discusses possible advantages of using the RPA in this manner.

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## Introduction

Climate change poses significant challenges to Southeast Asia, a region highly vulnerable to its impacts due to its geographical location and socio-economic characteristics. Within this context, women in Southeast Asia face unique vulnerabilities and are disproportionately affected by climate change. Women are taking risks to fight the climate crisis in the region by increasingly bearing the brunt of climate change effects when compared to men.<sup>1</sup> As a corollary to this, the first ever meeting of the Security Council examining the linkages between climate change and human insecurity happened in April 2007.<sup>2</sup> Since then, the UN body has increasingly taken steps that effectively acknowledge that the two issues are related. Climate security – the relationship between climate-related risks and conflict – is complex and often intersects with political, social, and economic factors. Climate security is understood as climate change possessing significant threat to global and national security. To ‘unpack’ this, there is an absolute need to recognise the impacts of climate change such as extreme weather events, human displacements, and food and water scarcity as having the potential to affect both human and national securities. Climate security is in fact the clear indication of how human insecurities are tied to national and global security, and why human security is a vital component in international peace and order. Closely tied to this is the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda – provenanced in conflict yet rooted in human security. UN Security Council resolution 1325, passed in 2000, reinforced the WPS agenda, and marked women’s place in international peace and order.

While the WPS agenda has been recognised as addressing women’s safety and insecurities in conflict, and climate change has increasingly been recognised as a vital security threat, the connection between the two based on climate change and threats to women has not been firmly established. Climate change has been proven by research to have disproportionately greater impact on women, with one statistic showing that women are 14 times more likely to die in a natural disaster<sup>3</sup> such as droughts and floods that will increase in frequency and intensity under new climate regimes. Despite given this gendered scenario of such disasters, which undoubtedly will have a compound effect, the language/approach of disaster response has not translated *fully*, this gender effect. Additionally, there is not enough uptake on how the WPS agenda might play a role in the mitigation of climate change effects.

This Insight and the rest in this special series arise from an RSIS webinar on *Climate Change and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda*. The webinar itself sought to understand the connection between the WPS framework and the (human) security implications of climate change, with a particular interest in how the WPS agenda can assist in recognising and addressing the specific challenges faced by women, empowering them through gender-responsive policies and programs, and promoting their leadership and participation. These are essential steps towards achieving climate justice and human security.

This first Insight will deliberate the various and distinct ways climate change impacts women in the region. It will also focus on why it is important to move beyond a ‘victim narrative’ where discussions on women and climate change are concerned. In addition, the Insight will discuss how ASEAN’s recent WPS RPA might provide possible entry points to include gender as a positive/value-add component in climate change narratives in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> LaMattina, L (2022) *Women are key to Climate Action in Southeast Asia*. Stimson Centre. Commentary. 23 June 2022. <https://www.stimson.org/2022/women-are-key-to-climate-action-in-southeast-asia/#:~:text=Women%20are%20often%20viewed%20only,was%20only%2022%20years%20old>.

<sup>2</sup> UN News. *Climate change recognized as ‘threat multiplier’, UN Security Council debates its impact on peace*. UN News: Climate and Environment. 25 January 2019. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/01/1031322>

<sup>3</sup> Chiu, C and Smith, J. *What Does Climate Change Have to Do With Women, Peace, and Security? A Lot*. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. March 03, 2022. <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/what-does-climate-change-have-to-do-with-women-peace-and-security/#:~:text=The%20WPS%20Agenda%20affirms%20the,recognized%20as%20a%20security%20threat>

## Gendered Effects of Climate Change

Climate change is the most pressing challenge of our time, with far-reaching consequences on human security. While its impacts are felt by all, social, economic, and cultural vulnerabilities experienced by women make them disproportionately affected by them. Women, particularly those in developing countries, bear the brunt of climate change impacts. They are more likely to be affected by extreme weather events, food and water scarcity, displacement, and health risks<sup>4</sup> for varied reasons stemming from social inequality, lack of education, and lack of economic opportunities to name a few that might be available to men. Such inequalities exacerbate vulnerabilities, as women often have limited access to resources, education, healthcare, and decision-making power.<sup>5</sup> Recognising these disparities is crucial for understanding the urgency of addressing women's needs in climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. In Southeast Asia, some key climate change effects specifically point to potential threats to regional peace and order, where women's safety and security are more challenged. This includes but is not limited to forced displacement, food insecurity, water and sanitation issues and potential health risks. These are discussed below.

Climate change-induced disasters, such as floods as a result of high intensity tropical storms very often result in forced displacement. Although all affected populations are moved from their homes and suffer from such displacement, women, particularly those in rural areas, are more likely to be affected due to their limited access to resources, education, and economic opportunities, particularly if this displacement is for an extended period. Sometimes such migratory concerns because of environmental factors even lead to increased deaths rates for women in certain parts of the world as a 'direct link to their socio-economic status, behavioural restrictions and poor access to information'.<sup>6</sup> Their lack of education and/or prevailing social norms sometimes prevent them from actively participating in meetings or discussions with local leaders or officials, around resource distribution or rebuilding efforts for their communities. This in turn prevents their needs being represented. These can include anything from the rebuilding of communities to reinstating some forms of economic security, post-disaster. Instead of these disasters being opportunities to build back better, such exclusion retains women in their vulnerable states.

Women play a crucial role in agricultural production and food security the world over and in Southeast Asia. However, climate change impacts, such as changing rainfall patterns and increased pests and diseases, which affect crops, pose significant challenges to their livelihoods and food security. For one, limited consultations with female food producers removes them from important decision-making 'spaces', which disempowers them in face of critical food insecurity.

Women are primarily responsible for water collection and sanitation in many rural communities, worldwide. Climate change exacerbates water scarcity, leading to increased workloads and health risks for women. And women, particularly pregnant women and those with limited access to healthcare, are more vulnerable to these health risks. This is especially so in the light of climate change contributing to the spread of vector-borne diseases such as dengue fever and malaria.

These are just some of the impacts of climate change on women's lives. Each of these, on its own, can be further dissected. For example, the intersectional impacts of climate change on urban women, or women of ethnic minority groups or indigenous women will be different. Such intersectionalities must be taken into consideration when planning for a just climate future.

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<sup>4</sup> UNWomen Watch (2009) *Fact Sheet: Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change*. [https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate\\_change/](https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

## The WPS Agenda and Climate Security

Climate security refers to the idea that climate change poses significant threat to national and global security, and to how the impacts of climate change, such as rising sea-levels, extreme weather events, food and water scarcity etc., can lead to social, political and economic instability. Therefore, it should, if not already, involve integrating climate considerations into national and international security strategies. The specific link between climate security and the WPS agenda lies in the acknowledgement that both concepts are interconnected and have significant implications for national and human securities.

This Insight suggests using the agenda of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) as a framework for addressing issues of gender inequality and systemic violence against women when we discuss climate security. The application of this framework goes beyond its provenance in armed conflict and draws on its roots in human security. The gendered impacts of climate change and their connection with peace and security is something that needs further exploring. As a matter of fact, a 2022 report published by DCAF-Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance stated that earlier mapping studies done in Columbia, the Maldives and Yemen revealed that women's rights organisations have already made the connection between climate change and security, and the extent to which climate policy and advocacy should recognise the importance of gender equality, gender mainstreaming and women's participation.<sup>7</sup>

While there has been an effective connection built in UN policy literature concerning the link between climate change and conflict, this must be broadened to include women, and they should not be put in as an afterthought with scant mention of their role in natural resource management.<sup>8</sup> Their role (or in some cases, lack thereof) in, for example, energy transition, water management, climate technology and the green economy to name a few areas, must be accommodated and in some cases, emphasised. What we tend to see in reports on women and climate change has a likely focus on their involvement in food, water, and energy matters, for primary household use, often in rural areas. For example, the production of food for families, the collection of water for cooking and cleaning, and the collection of firewood or animal dung for cooking and /or heating. To persist with this type of thinking is to frame climate change adaptation techniques as falling under a larger masculinist corporatist approach that often leaves women's physical wellbeing, autonomy and the planet at threat.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, there has been much critique among feminist scholars of this type of approach.<sup>10</sup> Also, to not see the connection between the WPS agenda and climate change, unfortunately, has a lot to do with the overly militarized framing of the agenda, placing it squarely in 'armed conflict' narratives and preventing the expansion of its usefulness into other existing /emerging threats. This would include in areas of climate security, digital security and even, the use and abuse of Artificial Intelligence or AI.

The WPS agenda outlines four pillars – women's **participation** in all stages of decision-making in securing peace and stability, the **protection** of women from all forms of atrocities, violation of their rights, and inequalities and discrimination, the **prevention** of said atrocities, inequalities and discrimination, and lastly the involvement of women in any and all **relief and recovery** efforts, post crises – that will provide a right framing when we think of the intersecting

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<sup>7</sup> DCAF-Geneva Centre for Sector Governance (2022)

*WOMEN SPEAK: The Lived Nexus Between Climate, Gender, and Security.*  
[https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/WomenSpeak2022\\_EN\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/WomenSpeak2022_EN_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Yoshida, K. (2019). *The Nature of Women, Peace and Security: Where is the environment in WPS and where is WPS in environmental peacebuilding?* LSE Women, Peace and Security Working Paper Series. 22/2019.

<sup>9</sup> Yoshida, K. (2019). *The Nature of Women, Peace and Security.*

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

issues of climate change, gender equality and climate justice. Considering the impacts climate change will have on the lives of women, UN Women has identified four UN policy frameworks that include opportunities for integrated action on gender, climate, and security where the WPS agenda is specifically mentioned.<sup>11</sup>

There needs to be greater connections between gender, climate change and security issues by mainstream scholars and policymakers as well.<sup>12</sup> The issue of women and gender in emerging threats and challenges can no longer be seen as a 'special' interest' area. However, despite decades of research establishing the connection between gender, climate, and security arenas,<sup>13</sup> there is still no intersecting discussion with even less uptake from the policy makers. Security and climate policy committees, largely male dominated, have ignored much of this work and lack gender expertise often.<sup>14</sup> However, when considered, the WPS agenda allows for a specific framework to link the three areas of gender, climate, and security concerns, which becomes a valuable tool that can assist policymakers to move beyond siloed thinking and towards an integrated approach that not only feeds knowledge gaps and explores blind spots,<sup>15</sup> but also links climate justice, gender inequality, and peace and stability.

## The ASEAN Experience<sup>16</sup>

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) recognises the importance of addressing gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of climate change and security and in fact have spearheaded initiatives to address the specific challenges faced by women and promote their active participation in climate action. For example, ASEAN's gender mainstreaming strategy aims to integrate women's perspectives into all policies, programs and activities including those relating to climate change. This is mentioned in ASEAN's *Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025*.<sup>17</sup> This strategic framework is provenanced in the *Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of ASEAN Community Vision 2025* and the Sustainable Development Goals, which reaffirm the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

There are ongoing conversations that acknowledge that forms of discrimination, inequality, and violence that women face are a matter for deep concern<sup>18</sup> for the region's peace and stability. This undoubtedly includes disruptions as a result of climate change. While ASEAN has made progress in addressing women and climate security, there is still room for improvement. For example, one very glaring error is to use 'gender' and 'women' interchangeably. This results in women's issues being deprioritised in more patriarchal societies because such interchangeable use lends itself to token participation from women or simply to 'get women's views' as sufficient to address the issue.<sup>19</sup> The second, and in the author's opinion more damaging, is that of women being grouped with children, the 'Women and Children' trope, which shrinks women's autonomy and belittles their role.<sup>20</sup> Very simply, these two groups should be seen as separate entities altogether – one is an adult and the other, a child! How are their issues similar in a climate change context, apart from perhaps a relational connection? Such imaginings 'cement' women in a victim narrative and ignores their resilience and resourcefulness.

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<sup>11</sup> UNEP, UNWomen, DPPA and UNDP (2020). "Gender, climate and security: Sustaining inclusive peace on the frontlines of climate change". pp 46. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Gender-climate-and-security-en.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Oudraat, C and Brown, M. (2022). *Gender, Climate Change, and Security: Making the Connections*. Wilson Centre. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/gender-climate-change-and-security-making-connections>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Parts of this section consist of ideas adapted and elaborated from a previously published work: Nair, T. *Climate Security and the Role of Women in ASEAN*. RSIS Commentary. 04 April 2023. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/nts/climate-security-and-role-of-women-in-asean/>

<sup>17</sup> ACW and ACWC (2021). *ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework 2021–2025*. September 2021. <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ASEAN-Gender-Mainstreaming-Strategic-Framework-endorsed-by-AMMW.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Oudraat, C and Brown, M. (2022). *Gender, Climate Change, and Security: Making the Connections*.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

The argument for more active participation by women in discussions on climate change and human security, particularly in food security, is borne out by the 2021 OECD report,<sup>21</sup> 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<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> This under-representation is partly due to sociocultural norms,<sup>24</sup> 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 must recontextualise our understanding of security and climate change to include gendered understandings of adaptation to and mitigation of the impacts of climate change.

While the region has developed strategies and frameworks, the *implementation and monitoring of gender-responsive policies and programs related to climate change remain limited, especially in areas of disaster response, the energy sector and food security, in areas of decision-making*.<sup>25</sup> There is a need for stronger commitment and accountability mechanisms to ensure that gender considerations are effectively integrated into climate change initiatives especially in terms of financial support. There is often a *lack of dedicated financial resources for gender equality and women's empowerment* in the context of climate change.<sup>26</sup> We need to see greater investment that supports capacity-building, research, and implementation of gender-responsive climate actions.

Women's *meaningful participation and representation in decision-making processes related to climate change also remain limited because there are too few of them at decision-making levels*.<sup>27</sup> There is a need to ensure that women, especially those from marginalized and vulnerable communities, have a voice and are actively involved in shaping climate policies and programs both at local and national levels. Therefore, strategies to include women's meaningful participation, which means not just having them attend meetings but ensuring that they are able to identify objectives, has to be decentralised to reach grassroots levels. There is also the need to *enhance awareness and capacity among policymakers, practitioners, and communities* on the gender-climate nexus. The 25<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP25) in 2020 has agreed to enhance knowledge of gender-responsive climate action and to report progress in COP29 in 2024.<sup>28</sup> A recent report by ADB has indicated that climate and environmental policies that explicitly address social exclusion and gender inequality to ensure a just transition to net-zero are currently lacking in Southeast Asia.<sup>29</sup> Many stakeholders may not fully appreciate the specific challenges faced by women in relation to climate change or the potential they hold in building climate resilience. This may be the result of the *lack of comprehensive and disaggregated data*.<sup>30</sup> Such a dearth in specific data on women and climate change is a huge blind spot in the region and counts as an obstacle to enhancing adaptation strategies.

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<sup>21</sup> OECD and ASEAN (2021). *Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in Agriculture in ASEAN Countries*. OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/southeast-asia/regional-programme/networks/OECD-strengthening-women-entrepreneurship-in-agriculture-in-asean-countries.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> ESCAP (2022). *APSPD Side Event: Accelerating Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture Value Chains*. 31 March 2022. <https://www.unescap.org/events/2022/apspd-side-event-accelerating-womens-economic-empowerment-agriculture-value-chains>

<sup>23</sup> USAID (2023). *USAID Enhancing Equality on Energy for Southeast Asia*. May 2023.

<https://www.usaid.gov/asia-regional/fact-sheets/enhancing-equality-energy-southeast-asia>

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2021). *Energy and Gender in Asia: A Regional Review*. Downloadable at: <https://energija.org/document/energy-and-gender-in-asia-a-regional-review/>

<sup>25</sup> Han, J. Yi-Chen, C. Pross, R. Agarwal, and A.R. Torre. (2022). *State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in ASEAN*. Jakarta: ASEAN and UN Women. [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/State-of-Gender-Equality-and-Climate-Change-in-ASEAN\\_FINAL-1.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/State-of-Gender-Equality-and-Climate-Change-in-ASEAN_FINAL-1.pdf) pp5-7

<sup>26</sup> Han, J. Yi-Chen, et al (2022). *State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in ASEAN*. p9

<sup>27</sup> ADB. (2023). *Women's Resilience: How Laws and Policies Promote Gender Equality in Climate Change, Environment, and Disaster Risk Management in Asia and the Pacific*. ADB Briefs. No 252 August 2023. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/901776/adb-brief-252-women-gender-climate-change-asia-pacific.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> UNFCCC (2020). *Report of the Conference of Parties on its twenty-fifth Session*. Decision 3/CP. [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2019\\_13a01\\_adv.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2019_13a01_adv.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> ADB (2022). *Integrating Gender and Social Inclusion Dimensions in Climate Change Interventions in Southeast Asia*. Project No: 56295-001. December 2022. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-documents/56295/56295-001-tar-en.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> ADB (2022). *Integrating Gender and Social Inclusion Dimensions in Climate Change Interventions in Southeast Asia*

*Indigenous women possess valuable traditional knowledge and practices that contribute to climate resilience.*

There are around 100 million people who identify as indigenous in Southeast Asia, although no accurate data is available.<sup>31</sup> However, there is often limited integration of indigenous knowledge and practices into climate change policies and programs, although there are several ASEAN statements and documents that mention the incorporation of indigenous communities.<sup>32</sup> In the recent COP28 meetings, indigenous communities have been considered vital agents in combating effects of climate change.<sup>33</sup> Indigenous women, in particular, possess unique knowledge and skills that are vital for climate adaptation. They have a deep understanding of local ecosystems, biodiversity, and weather patterns, enabling them to develop innovative strategies for resilience. Women-led initiatives in sustainable agriculture, water management, and disaster risk reduction have proven successful in enhancing community resilience to climate change impacts. Integrating these women's perspectives and expertise into adaptation planning is crucial for building climate-resilient communities.

Addressing climate security involves taking measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change, promoting international cooperation and diplomacy to prevent and manage potential conflicts arising from climate-related challenges, **and** doing these with a gendered approach in mind. It also involves integrating climate considerations into national and international security strategies and policies. As will be discussed below, one way to do this is to use existing regional frameworks or plans such as ASEAN's regional plan on WPS.

## The ASEAN WPS RPA and Climate Security

Women are not just victims of climate change, they are also powerful agents of change and play a crucial role in climate security. If we are to approach a new climate future with resilience and resourcefulness, we must explore and appreciate the intersection of women's empowerment and climate change adaptation, harnessing women's potential to build a sustainable and resilient future. 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. 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. The WPS agenda provides a framework for this to happen.

The discussion below takes a different trajectory to what current WPS and climate security scholarship takes. The focus here is not on the traditional understanding of the role of women in peacebuilding and mediating in armed conflict situations. Rather, this Insight seeks to open the WPS agenda to further expand into considerations of human security that is relevant to current times, especially in the areas of economic security, digital security and, as in this writing, climate security.<sup>34</sup> Adopting the WPS narrative as it stands, created and propagated by mostly North America and Europe, means it does not allow a regional interpretation, which might be what is necessary when it comes to ASEAN. Currently the agenda is bereft of a cultural context, which is vital to its realisation in other parts of the world. Not all ASEAN member states recognise experiences of armed conflict, whether ongoing or in recent history. A human security approach, especially in the light of global climate change and its many impacts, however, allows for greater investment in the regional

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<sup>31</sup> IWGIA (2024). *The Indigenous World 2024: Association of the Southeast Asian Nations*. 25 March 2024. <https://www.iwgia.org/en/association-of-southeast-asian-nations-asean/5403-iw-2024-asean.html>

<sup>32</sup> Here are a few examples: Advancing Forestry Cooperation in the International Year of the Forest (2011), Media Release of the 13<sup>th</sup> Informal ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment (2011), Joint statement of ASEAN Environment Ministers for the Eleventh Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (2012), and, The AADMER Work Programme 2021-2025.

<sup>33</sup> COP28UAE (2023). *COP28 Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue*. <https://www.cop28.com/en/schedule/cop28-indigenous-peoples-dialogue>

<sup>34</sup> It must be noted that the author does not wish to indicate that armed conflict is not relevant to present times in the region. Rather, such conflict is not a regional occurrence or national occurrence for most of the member states.

plan by all member states. The year 2025 will mark the 25<sup>th</sup> year of UNSCR1325 and it seems timely that the agenda itself should mature and move into new terrains to address gender equality in new spheres of operation.

The ASEAN WPS Regional Plan of Action (or RPA) is a result of years 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 threats arising from 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. The author takes her 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 regional 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.

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.

## Conclusion

Enhancing women's participation, preventing atrocities against them, creating 'safe spaces' against all forms of violence against women, and establishing and providing for the realisation of their rights can have a correlation with a better climate response. Following from this, actions to boost inclusion in such climate responses are addressing the barriers to inclusion, providing women access to education and information concerning climate change, promoting women leadership to tackle the crisis, targeting the knowledge gaps in this area and leveraging existing frameworks as much as possible.<sup>35</sup> Considering that the WPS agenda seeks to do the same as well, it makes sense to merge the climate security and women, peace and security agendas in the region, in order to address climate justice and women's rights.

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<sup>35</sup> UN News. *Climate change recognized as 'threat multiplier', UN Security Council debates its impact on peace.* UN News: Climate and Environment. 25 January 2019. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/01/1031322>

The WPS agenda recognises the importance of including women in decision-making processes related to peace and security. Similarly, in addressing climate security, involving women in decision-making and policy formulation is crucial. Women's unique experiential knowledge and perspectives can contribute to more effective and sustainable climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Empowering women and ensuring their participation in climate-related decision-making processes can lead to more inclusive and resilient responses to climate change.

## About the Author

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She graduated from the National University of Singapore (NUS) with a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and Geography and went on to train at the National Institute of Education (NIE). She obtained a Masters in Environmental Management, a Graduate Diploma in Arts Research and a PhD in Development Studies from the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. She also possesses a Professional Certificate in Project Management by the Institute of Engineers, Singapore and Temasek Polytechnic. She is also the coordinator of centre publications and Research Integrity Officer for RSIS, as well as the Head of the Research Integrity and Data Management Unit of the School.

Dr Nair's current research focuses on issues of power and the biopolitics of labour and technology, and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the region. She is Singapore's representative of the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry and is also the representative for Nanyang Technological University for the ASEAN University Network on Human Rights and Peace Education. She has published in Development Studies journals, writing on marginalised communities and sustainable development, issues of gender, and power and subject creation.

## About the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies

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The **S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)** is a think tank and professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. An autonomous school, RSIS' mission is to be a leading research and graduate teaching institution in strategic and international affairs in the Asia Pacific. With the core functions of research, graduate education, and networking, it produces cutting-edge research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-Traditional Security, Cybersecurity, Maritime Security, and Terrorism Studies.



**NTS Centre** conducts research and produces policy-relevant analyses aimed at furthering awareness and building the capacity to address non-traditional security (NTS) issues and challenges in the Asia Pacific region and beyond. The Centre addresses knowledge gaps, facilitates discussions and analyses, engages policymakers, and contributes to building institutional capacity in Sustainable Security and Crises. The NTS Centre brings together myriad NTS stakeholders in regular workshops and roundtable discussions, as well as provides a networking platform for NTS research institutions in the Asia Pacific through the NTS-Asia Consortium.

For more details, please visit [www.rsis.edu.sg](http://www.rsis.edu.sg) and <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/research/nts-centre>. Join us at our social media channels at [www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-social-media-channels](http://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-social-media-channels) or scan the QR code.