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Achieving Water Security in Disaster Situations: The ASEAN Experience



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Southeast Asia is not a stranger to numerous types of natural calamities including earthquakes, typhoons, and volcanic eruptions. Among the wide range of disaster events that have battered the region, hydro-meteorological catastrophes accounted for more than 80% of the total number of natural disaster events. These include floods, droughts, and landslides. As in all disaster situations, water security becomes an immediate critical issue. Clean water supply, hygiene and sanitation are instantly affected.

In a water security index study published in 2014, ASEAN ranked the first and the second in the world in terms of average flood and drought damages respectively. The figures stood at US\$ 6,002,888 and US\$239,512. In light of such hefty costs brought about by hydro-meteorological disasters, the vital question will be: *“is ASEAN well-prepared to respond to water security concerns in disaster situations?”*

ASEAN and Water Security

At the ASEAN level, collaborative efforts aimed at building water resilience

in non-disaster settings have been on going. This is exemplified in the ASEAN Cooperation on Water Resources Management. The ASEAN Strategic Plan of Action on Water Resources Management focuses on four key areas namely (i) supply; demand and allocation; (ii) water quality and sanitation; (iii) climate change and extreme events; and (iv) governance and capacity building. The ASEAN member states have acknowledged the importance of the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approach in achieving water security and are currently working on six key water management issues including (i) water supply management, (ii) irrigation management, (iii) stormwater management, (iv) flood management, (v) water pollution management, and (vi) sanitation management, at the national level.

While efforts to ensure water security in normal circumstances are taking place, the extent of countries' water security preparedness during disaster situations is less clear. Some countries such as Brunei Darussalam and Lao PDR, however, have explicitly identified climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction in their IWRM

efforts. Such acknowledgment suggests that their national IWRM initiatives may have gone beyond business-as-usual scenarios. It also implies that they are better prepared to respond to water security concerns in times of natural disasters.

Moving Forward: Technology and Water Security in Disaster Settings

ASEAN has realised the need to look into water security in disaster scenes. The ASEAN Working Group on Water Resources Management, the ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology, and the ASEAN Disaster Management and Humanitarian Association Division have got together to work on the issue. The primary objective of this collaborative setup is to build water management capacity in the face of the changing climate. This is a very pertinent issue considering ASEAN's susceptibility to natural disasters.

The use of technology is instru-

mental in the overall efforts to build water security. Real time data, remote sensing data and satellite images greatly help countries to understand on-the-ground situations and create targeted solutions. SERVIR-Mekong initiative is a case in point. Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in partnership with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and implemented by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, SERVIR-Mekong employs space technology to provide data and analysis for disaster risk reduction and environmental management, including water resources, in Lower Mekong areas.

At the regional level, ASEAN has also tapped into science and technology for disaster risk reduction and water management. In October 2016, ASEAN put forward the idea of establishing the ASEAN Hydroinformatics and Climate Data Center (AHC). The AHC will provide an institutional support for the ASEAN Water Resource Man-

agement System. It is expected to serve as a hub for strategic data sharing and management, capacity building and sharing of good practices, including community water resource management and climate change adaptations, among the ASEAN member states. In so doing, ASEAN is in the right direction in addressing water security concerns during floods, droughts and landslide events.



Image Credit: Workshop on Establishing ASEAN Hydroinformatics Center (AHC), www.aseanwater.net

Suggested Readings:

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25-29 September 2017
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Nuclear Safety and Security Culture: Powering Nuclear Governance in East Asia– RSIS Roundtable at Singapore International Energy Week 2017

27 October 2017
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The Economist
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North Korea's provocations leave Japan, allies short on options

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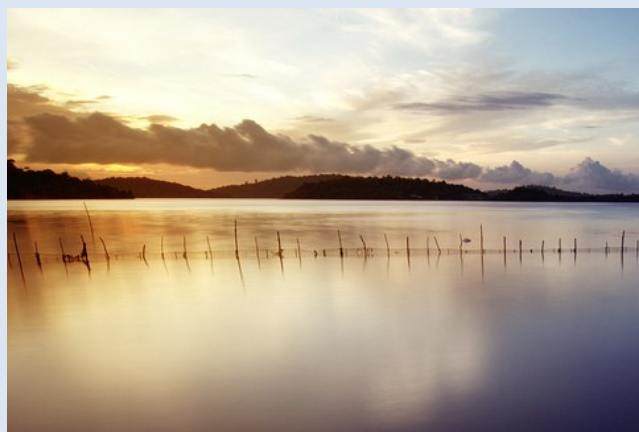
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