



Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Global Action on Marine Plastic Pollution: The role of Southeast Asia

By Lina Gong

Earlier this month, the second round of [negotiations](#) toward a legally binding global agreement on plastic pollution was concluded. This treaty represents an key step in the action to tackle the “epidemic” of plastic waste. Southeast Asia has a central role to play in this combat.

The theme of the World Environment Day on June 5 this year is “beat plastic pollution”, underscoring the severity of the challenge. Evidence is plenty about the [harms](#) of plastic waste to human beings, other creatures, and our environment and climate. The marine environment is a key venue where such damages occur, as [8 to 10 million metric tons](#) of plastic waste end up in the oceans.

Action to address the challenge gained momentum in recent years. Reducing “floating plastic debris density” is a target under the 14th Sustainable Development Goal of “Life Below Water” adopted in 2015. The World Oceans Day in 2018 was dedicated to cleaning up marine plastics.

Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic derailed the course. Global pandemic responses worsened the issue, due to the surge in the use of medical protective equipment and plastic packaging. Without decisive action, marine plastic debris is predicted to [quadruple](#) by 2050.

The aforementioned negotiations represent the trend that countries are emerging from the disruption of COVID-19 and hopefully back on track in the com-

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bat against plastic debris. Having to reconcile stark [differences](#) between countries, the negotiations will definitely be difficult. And it is still in question how much force will be granted to the final deal by the member states. However, the treaty will at least provide a legal basis for international co-operation and action.

As Southeast Asia hosts [top emitters](#) of marine plastic waste, progress in the region's action has critical bearing on the global campaign. In recognition of the threat of marine plastic waste to the region, the region has seen action at regional and country levels to address the issues from different perspectives.

In 2019, ASEAN member states adopted the Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in the ASEAN Region and the ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris at the 34th ASEAN Summit. These were followed by the ASEAN [Regional Action Plan](#) for Combating Marine Debris (2021-2025) released in 2021, which put forward a phased implementation plan to address the cross-sectoral issue.

Beyond making regional policies, ASEAN has collaborated with international partners to find practical solutions. In 2018, ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and Republic of Korea) Marine Plastic Debris Cooperative Action [Initiative](#) was adopted. In 2019, [Norway](#) provided US\$3 million of funding to support capacity-building in this area in ASEAN. In 2022, the [World Bank](#) provided US\$20 million grant to support ASEAN, in collaboration with the UN Office for Project Services, to implement the aforementioned Regional Action Plan. As this year marks the midpoint of the first cycle of the Regional Action Plan, it will be useful for ASEAN to carry out and publish a review of the implementation, so as to track progress and gaps.

Several Southeast Asian countries, including those suffering from serious plastic pollution in their territorial waters have released their respective national action plan or roadmap, such as [Indonesia](#), [Singapore](#), [Thailand](#), [the Philippines](#), and [Vietnam](#), which align with the region's overall commitment to tackling the problem. Although some people view these moves insufficient and call for more urgency, such progress which reflects increased awareness and commitment should be encouraged.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Chi Huey Ng, et al., 2023, Plastic waste and microplastic issues in Southeast Asia, *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, Vol.11

Lucy C.M. Omeyer, 2022, Priorities to inform research on marine plastic pollution in Southeast Asia, *Science of the Total Environment*, Vol.841

Avalon Diggle and Tony R. Walker, Environmental and Economic Impacts of Mismanaged Plastics and Measures for Mitigation, *Environments*, Vol.9, No.2

Yiming Peng, et al., 2021, Plastic waste release caused by COVID-19 and its fate in the global ocean, *Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences*, Vol.118, No.47



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

CLIMATE CHANGE



Photo Credit: freedomnaruk on Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Climate change and water security in Asia-Pacific

The region is one of the most water-stressed regions of the world. More than 95% of Asia's human population faces water stress (annual water availability less than 1,700 cubic meter per capita) and 75% of Asia is water scarce with annual water availability less than 1,000 cubic metres per capita.

Kumar Manish and Maharaj K Pandit

Hindustan Times | 19 May 2023

'The window is closing': Cop28 must deliver change of course on climate

This year will mark a significant milestone: the first assessment since 2015 of how countries are faring against the emissions-cutting commitments they made at Paris, a process known as the "global stocktake". With six months until UN summit in Dubai, can its oil executive president bring unwilling countries into line?

Fiona Harvey

The Guardian | 2 June 2023

Global climate change policy still failing women despite 50 years of meetings

Even after 50 years of efforts to preserve the environment, the effects of climate change are disproportionately felt by women. Female mortality rates from heat exposure have increased significantly since the 1970s. And inequalities in gender mortality rates from natural disasters have risen continuously from the 1970s to the 2000s.

Syed Munir Khasru

South China Morning Post | 4 June 2023

Climate change: How is my country doing on tackling it?

Every year countries pledge to cut their greenhouse gas emissions in an effort to curb the impacts of climate change. So which countries are on track with their climate commitments to help stick to 1.5C and which are not?

Jana Tauschinski

BBC | 5 June 2023

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Our common agenda policy brief 4: Valuing what counts: Framework to progress beyond gross domestic product

Discussions on going beyond GDP have been under way for decades. We need a paradigm shift in what we measure as progress. The framework should be designed to achieve three main outcomes: well-being and agency, respect for life and the planet, and reduced inequalities and greater solidarity.

United Nations

2023

Climate and readiness: Understanding climate vulnerability of U.S. joint force readiness

Many U.S. joint force readiness-related decisions occur at the operational and tactical levels, but climate-related decisionmaking will need to occur primarily at the strategic level. Near-term climate impacts may be small and locally addressed using tools currently available to operational and tactical decisionmakers; it remains possible to view climate change mainly as a "training condition" related to short-term weather events.

Katharina Ley Best, et al.

RAND Corporation | 2023

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

SDG 6 Water Action Agenda Special Event

The event will provide an analysis of water-related progress, across sectors and other SDGs and global frameworks, showcase the success stories and lessons learned and generate new commitments to the Water Action Agenda. It will also allow for an in-depth discussion on the findings of the SDG 6 Synthesis Report 2023.

New York, USA

17 July 2023

ENERGY SECURITY



Photo Credit: frimufilms on freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Asia water, energy supplies at risk as climate woes mount

As much as 865 gigawatts (GW) of power capacity along the 10 major rivers is considered vulnerable to climate risk, with most of it reliant on water.

David Stanway

Reuters | 25 May 2023

China Energy starts operations at Asia's largest coal carbon capture facility

Carbon capture has become a focus area for China's major power generators, as the country pursues a plan to hit its carbon emissions peak by 2030.

Reuters

CNA | 2 June 2023

Renewable energy main draw for green investments in South-east Asia

A report notes that the nature and energy sectors, which contributes 85 per cent of South-east Asia's total emissions reduction targets, will be most critical to the region meeting its NDC targets.

Rosalind Ang

The Straits Times | 6 June 2023

Did affordability measures help tame energy price spikes for consumers in major economies?

Early numbers for 2023 show that wholesale energy prices may have passed their peaks and have largely returned to 2021 levels.

International Energy Agency

IEA News | 2 June 2023

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Safety report on applicability of safety standards to non-water-cooled reactors and small modular reactors

The report claims that like conventional, large nuclear power plants, small modular reactors should also be tightly governed, i.e., regulated, to attain the goal of protecting people and the environment from radiation and minimizing the possibility of accidents.

International Atomic Energy Agency

Vienna: IAEA | 2023

The role of critical minerals in clean energy transitions

Clean energy technologies – from wind turbines and solar panels, to electric vehicles and battery storage – require a wide range of minerals and metals. The type and volume of mineral needs vary widely across the spectrum of clean energy technologies.

International Energy Agency

Paris: IEA | 2023

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Workshop on the Application of the IAEA Safety Standards on the Design of Nuclear Power Plants, including Water Cooled Small Modular Reactors

This IAEA workshop will provide a forum for discussion, exchange of experience and dissemination of knowledge related to the consideration of requirements and recommendations for the design of SMRs.

Vienna, Austria

24 – 28 July 2023

FOOD SECURITY



Photo Credit: user6702303 on Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

China won't Let Russia starve the world

Russia has at times expressed doubt on renewing the Black Sea Grain deal, which the author argues Russia has used as a means of extracting new concessions. Doing so would go directly against the interests of China and Turkey, allies whose political and economic support Russia needs.

Christine Lu

Foreign Policy | 17 May 2023

SC seeks to transform agri sector via fintech, alternative financing

Malaysia's Security Commission (SC) has encouraged broader adoption of digital financial technologies or fintech to contribute to the country's food security agenda, in particular, by enabling the modernisation as well as mobilising capital for "agri-preneurs."

Digital News Asia

1 June 2023

Japan adopts concept of farming policy overhaul to boost food security

The government of Japan is making plans to "overhaul" its agriculture policy so as to reduce import dependence and maintain a stable stockpile of food. Among others, it seeks to increase the domestic production of wheat, soybeans and feed grains, and to allow farmers to pass on more of the costs to companies and consumers.

The Japan Times

4 June 2023

Indonesia stresses food security synergy in ASEAN commitment

During the ASEAN Food Reserve Board (AFSRB) meeting, Indonesia emphasised the need to synergise and cooperate among ASEAN members, in pushing through with the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Food Security to be adopted in September 2023. This will follow a multi-sector including the agriculture, trade, finance and transportation sectors.

Kuntum Khaira R and Fadhli Ruhma

ANTARA News | 7 June 2023

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Urban and peri-urban agriculture for strengthening pro-poor resilience in Asian cities: Investment needs and opportunities

This report explores the roles of urban agriculture in confronting the increased stress on food systems brought about by COVID-19 and the vulnerability of low-income population groups. This can potentially complement existing food sources while also creating income opportunities. Such "resilience-building investments" can be promoted through the creation of an Asian funding facility for urban and peri-urban agriculture, among others.

Yves Cabanes et al.

Technical Assistance Consultants' Report, Asian Development Bank | November 2022

Inequality in the Arab Region: Food insecurity fuels inequality

This report addresses growing food insecurity in the Arab region owing to the war in Ukraine and the global cost-of-living crisis. Among others, it suggests the need for greater regional solidarity in redistributing resources to those that need them more, and to explore digital technologies and food production, and to maintain free and open trade.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Republished in ReliefWeb | 2023

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

WTO Trade Dialogues on Food (Black Sea Grain Initiative)

During this webinar, World Trade Organisation (WTO) Director-General Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala emphasised the critical role of open trade in stabilising food prices and energy prices, in solving problem of food access, and in building resilience amidst international disruptions. This aligns with the Ministerial Declaration on the Emergency Response to Food Insecurity adopted at the WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) in June 2022.

Recorded Webinar

1 June 2023

HEALTH SECURITY



Photo Credit: DC Studio on Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

How the World Health Organization could fight future pandemics

Member states of the World Health Organization started negotiations on global pandemic treaty. The new pact will be more wide-reaching than the International Health Regulations, and member states agreed that it should be legally binding.

Emma Farge

Reuters | 23 May 2023

The European Commission and WHO launch landmark digital health initiative to strengthen global health security

The World Health Organization (WHO) and European Commission entered into a digital health partnership. The initiative will facilitate close collaboration between the two organisations in the development, management and implementation of the WHO Global Digital Health Certification Network.

WHO

5 June 2023

Indonesian doctors, nurses protest proposed changes to healthcare laws

Hundreds of Indonesian doctors and nurses staged a protest against the parliament's deliberation on revisions to the country's healthcare laws. Proposed changes include making it easier for patients to sue healthcare workers for malpractice and allowing foreign talent to make up for staff shortages.

Reuters

5 June 2023

China's rolling COVID waves could hit every six months — infecting millions

China is seeing a new wave of COVID-19 cases, which can amount to hundreds of millions of infections. But experts said the country's healthcare system is unlikely to be overwhelmed by the latest surge.

Yvaine Ye

Nature | 7 June 2023

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

WHO regional committee for South-East Asia – report of the seventy-fifth session, Paro, Bhutan

This report summarises the discussions the 75th Session of the Regional Committee for South-East Asia on 5–9 September 2022. The Committee discussed a range of relevant public health issues, such as the control of noncommunicable diseases, health emergency preparedness and response, and health-related SDGs. It adopted the Paro Declaration on universal access to people-centred mental health care and services.

WHO

25 May 2023

Evaluation of the WHO community engagement research initiative

WHO launched the Community Engagement Research Initiative to fill critical research gaps and accelerate action in mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable populations. This report provides the findings and recommendations of four country research teams that conducted evaluative action-based research in Cambodia, Laos PDR and Malaysia.

WHO

25 May 2023

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Strategic Roundtables: Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly

This series of Strategic Roundtables brings together delegates, experts from WHO, partner agencies and civil society to discuss current priorities and next solutions on vital issues for global public health.

Recording

22 - 27 May 2023

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF



Photo Credit: EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid on Flickr.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

President Marcos Jr.'s disaster policy: Is a new disaster agency in the works?

In the face of devastation wreaked by Tropical Storm Nalgae, President Marcos has moved to institute new legislation. However, with insufficient awareness and capacity among some local governments, there is still more to be done.

Cherry Ann Madriaga

Fulcrum | 26 May 2023

Protecting small businesses: The case for closing the protection gap for natural disasters

Despite the region's significant vulnerability to natural hazards, emerging economies remain underinsured, particularly Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises. There is a need to improve awareness and availability of the importance of disaster insurance.

Roland Eckl

The Jakarta Post | 29 May 2023

Generative AI may be the next AK-47

While AI has been enthusiastically adopted by some, the political realities of using AI should be worrying to humanitarians. Not only can this be used as tool to increase misinformation, it can also erode neutrality, a guiding principle to humanitarian organisations.

Sarah W. Spencer

The New Humanitarian | 30 May 2023

New tool tracks military deployments to climate disasters

The Center for Climate and Security has come up with a new web-based data tool that tracks military deployments in response to disasters around the world.

Daniel Cusick

E&E News | 5 June 2023

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Multilateralism and disaster management in the Global South: A case study for the G20

Disaster risk reduction is now an area of cooperation for the G20. This report uses BIMSTEC and ASEAN – as multilateral organisations made up of disaster-prone countries- as case studies to generate recommendations for the G20 Working Group for improved future collaboration.

Sohini Bose and S. Nanthini

2023

Atlas of mortality and economic losses from weather, climate and water-related hazards

While economic losses have soared, proved early warnings and coordinated disaster management has slashed the human casualty toll over the past half a century. This atlas provides an updated look at the status of mortality and economic losses from weather, climate and water extremes.

World Meteorological Organization

2023

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

What Should We Change for Greater Accountability to People in Crisis?

This webinar will explore findings from a review of various donor commitments on accountability to affected populations and examine the progress made. It will also look at the perspectives of people affected by crisis and what they think needs to change, as well as the barriers that need to be addressed.

Recorded Webinar

24 April 2023

MIGRATION



Photo Credit: UN Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid on Flickr.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

How racial profiling within the EU's free travel zone harms asylum seekers and migrants

Racial profiling is affecting the way in which border crossings are being handled, particularly for refugees. Not only does this go against regulations, it has also increased the likelihood of dangerous crossing attempts.

Riley Sparks

The New Humanitarian | 31 May 2023

Business must help protect ASEAN children affected by migration

With millions of children across the Asia-Pacific affected by climate change, there is a need for stakeholders including businesses to respect children's rights. This can be done both by eliminating child labour and supporting parents who are migrants.

Debora Comini

Nikkei Asia | 3 June 2023

Fears about migrant workers in Thailand unfounded, Cambodian PM admits

Thai government-hopefuls, the Move Forward Party has categorically denied claims that it might expel Cambodian migrant workers from the country en masse. Considering over a million Cambodians working in Thailand, this is likely a relief to Cambodian officials.

Sebastian Strangio

The Diplomat | 9 June 2023

Rohingya repatriation: Caught between state failure and armed resistance – Analysis

Despite a recently initiated repatriation programme for Rohingya refugees in the camps in Bangladesh to return to Myanmar, there is little hope for its success. This is due in part to the lack of any significant change in Myanmar's policies and resistance from Rohingya groups.

Krishna Kumar Saha

Eurasia Review | 10 June 2023

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Labour migration in Asia: What does the future hold?

Based on a qualitative assessment of the identified trends driving labour migration in Asia, this report presents forecasts on various destination countries and areas in the region. This will support policymakers in preparing for future labour migration dynamics in the region.

International Organization for Migration

2023

Climate change and migration: An omnibus overview for policymakers and development practitioners

With the impacts of climate change intensifying across the world, migration is a valuable tool for adaptation. There is therefore a need for a robust policy to ensure the benefits of this approach is shared among the internal, regional and international levels

Center for Global Development

2023

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

New Naratif I01: The Contours of Human Displacement in Malaysia

This webinar aims to explore human displacement in Malaysia by discussing the different forms migration may take such as a refugee, a migrant worker, a stateless person, a human trafficking survivor, and an internally displaced person. It also will look at the forces that shape their lives in Malaysia, and conversely, their effect on Malaysia.

Webinar

24 June 2023