

GRIPS Policy Research Network on Contemporary Southeast Asia (PRN-SEA)
Research Cluster on the Environment
Building Resilient Communities: Managing Waste and Climate Change Impacts in Southeast Asia

CONCEPT NOTE [DRAFT]

Time Table

2019

- December/ January 2020: Kick off meeting
- December: Book proposal

2020

- January 31: Deadline to submit chapter title and draft abstract
- February: Co-editors finalize book proposal
- September: deadline to submit the draft of each chapter
- October: co-editors summarize the chapter and write a draft concluding chapter with policy recommendation
- November: Second meeting where we discuss each chapter draft and concluding chapter draft and set up the schedule ahead

Background

Mega cities in Southeast Asia are experiencing rapid economic growth, which entails various environmental problems. Expanding population leads to increase in consumption of energy and goods, ultimately resulting in inadequate waste management as well as urban development unprepared for natural disasters.

Plastic pollution and international waste trade is an area where research is gaining political attention in recent years. In 2017, China, which had become the world's largest importer of recyclables, decided to severely restrict the imports of solid waste from overseas. The impact of this was that most of the waste was channeled to Southeast Asia. For example, within months of the import restrictions implementation, Malaysia had replaced China as the world's largest importer of plastic scrap. At its peak in March 2018, Malaysia had imported about 139,000 tons of plastic waste per month, up from 22,000 tons per month a year earlier.

While this subject has developed mainly as an environmental issue, it also contains other aspects that need to be examined thoroughly. From an international trade perspective, blanket bans on imported materials potentially risks damaging the business of good recyclers which may in turn affect supply chain in other industries such as cement where cement kilns utilize plastic waste as replacement for fossil fuel. These bans also risk customs and trade disputes between different countries especially between Southeast Asia and mainly Western and developed nations. This may then potentially spark other disputes in other areas, further perpetuating the current wave of populist and protectionist trends globally. From an institutional perspective, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal ("the Basel Convention") has been in effect since 1992. Further to that, 187 countries agreed to control the movement of plastic waste between national borders by adding plastic to the Basel Convention. Additionally, there is the World

Customs Organization which has taken steps to fight against illegal transboundary movements of waste such as through Operation DEMETER IV. However, more needs to be done to establish harmonized custom codes that accurately classify waste materials.

Domestically, the challenge is dependent on the capability of local waste governance to address the issue. As importing countries, governance of waste is often mired in fragmentation with different agencies responsible for different parts of the waste cycle. Towards building resilient communities, applying best practices for a holistic management of waste is required. More broadly, the need for countries to transition towards a circular economy and a sustainable form of consumption and production needs to be investigated.

[RSIS to add section on smart cities]

Another urgent topic is risks related to impact of climate change. Climate change has been one of the most serious threats at the global level. Recently, an increasing number of extreme weather events have been observed all over the world. Southeast Asia has been hit by strong hurricanes that have led to floods and displacement of the people. There has already been much research on the likely increase in extreme weather events in the region, but there are much less studies on the socio-economic aspect of such events. After being hit by typhoons or floods, the region suffers for months due to social disruptions arising from physical damages. These include loss of settlements, loss of jobs, displacement of the people, and plausible conflict caused by these social instabilities.

The Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group 2 set a chapter on human security, which dealt with the socio-economic aspect of climate change. A similar chapter is to be included in the next assessment report as well. Much literature can be found for case studies conducted in Africa and the Middle East on climate security – or climate fragility risks – but little is found for Southeast Asia. There are tremendous needs for such literature to be published for the next IPCC report to be comprehensive in terms of regional distribution.

Objectives

As this research cluster is established for the purposes of identifying key policy challenges in Southeast Asia, gathering and harnessing regional expertise, raising public awareness on the said issue, and providing policy recommendations, hence we have identified three key objectives that need to be met in order to better ensure a stable and peaceful Southeast Asia:

- Understand the current situation and governance challenges within the Southeast Asia region;
- Understand the international dynamics including key institutions, trade and security; and
- Produce policy recommendations for a regional response to the issue of waste in Southeast Asia.

As for research on waste management, adding the governance perspective into the picture, there are two levels that need to be examined. While international governance has been highlighted through the Basel Convention and the World Customs Organization, there is also a need to consider the importance of local governance on the management and movement of waste. Local governments and municipalities play a major role in implementing the import bans

and ensuring that illegal waste dump sites do not mushroom. However, these remain to be prevalent challenges for governments and authorities at all levels to manage.

Therefore, this emerging issue of waste in Southeast Asia brings forth important questions that need to be answered in order to develop appropriate responses for the region:

- Why has Southeast Asia become the go-to place for exporting waste from developed nations?
- What are the local and international challenges faced by each country in Southeast Asia in dealing with waste?
- What are the current actions being taken by countries in Southeast Asia to mitigate the issue of waste and transition towards a circular economy?
- Who are the key actors, institutions and sectors involved in the movement and dumping of waste between different countries?

As for climate change risks, experts in climate change risks in Southeast Asian countries should be gathered to discuss research questions as follows:

- How can Southeast Asian countries prepare for climate change-related risks, which are not only physical risks but also could be social, economic, or political?
- What are the current actions being taken by countries in Southeast Asia to mitigate the issue of climate change risks, and have they been successful?
- What are the local and international challenges faced by each country in Southeast Asia in dealing with climate change risks?
- Who are the key actors, institutions and sectors involved in building resilience against climate change risks? How can Japan get involved in such activities?

[RSIS to add questions on smart cities / building resilient communities]

Collaborators

- ISIS Malaysia (as lead coordinator of the environment cluster)
- GRIPS
- RSIS
- CSIS

Proposed Authors (Managing Waste component)

- Alizan Mahadi, Senior Fellow, ISIS Malaysia
- RSIS (To be identified by RSIS)
- CSIS (To be identified CSIS)
- Dr. Michikazu Kojima, Senior Economist, Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA)

Projected Output

- 1 internal coordination meeting between collaborators and contributors
- 1 roundtable/workshop
- 1 book or report that includes policy recommendations