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Policy Brief

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Navigating the climate crisis together

EU-ASEAN cooperation on climate adaptation

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The environmental, economic and security implications of climate change are unmistakably evident in both the ASEAN and the EU. As building climate resilience is an area where the EU has a solid track record and international outreach, this creates an avenue for closer cooperation with ASEAN. Water management and disaster governance are two promising areas within the field of climate adaptation. This policy brief argues for closer EU-ASEAN cooperation on climate adaptation, emphasising the need for robust institutions, better access to information and improved water infrastructures to increase resilience. To achieve these objectives, currently successful bilateral initiatives could be elevated into broader regional collaboration and the EU could encourage investments in water infrastructures and disaster risk information technologies. Furthermore, the EU could support the creation of regulatory frameworks for improved water management and institutional alignment by providing financial support and technical advice. In the context of US-China rivalry, a strengthened strategic partnership could also serve as a counterbalance to current regional geopolitics.

Introduction

Cooperation between the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) dates back to 1972 and has grown stronger and closer over the past 40 years, paving the way for renewed engagements. The longstanding relationship between the EU and ASEAN was elevated in 2020 when the two blocs became strategic partners and committed to targeting political-security issues, socio-cultural cooperation, investment and capacity building.[1] While the EU has enhanced its interest in the Indo-Pacific and has stepped up its efforts to work with ASEAN on the green energy transition and the digital agenda through the Global Gateway, its efforts are not widely recognised in comparison to the influence of other players, such as China, the United States (US), Japan, South Korea and Australia.

Building climate resilience is a notable area where the EU has a solid track record and international outreach, which could facilitate closer cooperation with ASEAN, where rising temperatures and sea levels, prolonged droughts and flash floods adversely affect water security. However, rapid urbanisation and economic growth, growing water, food and energy demands, and hydro politics pose obstacles to climate adaptation endeavours. Yet, the implications of leaving climate change impacts

1 European External Action Services, "European Union and ASAEAN: A Strategic Partnership", 2022.

insufficiently addressed call for concerted action. In a context of greater geopolitical tensions in the Greater Mekong subregion and the South China Sea, as well as US-China rivalry, strengthening cooperation between the EU and ASEAN renders a good counterweight.

The Clingendael Institute and the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) organised a series of dialogues in 2023 touching upon the management of water resources and disaster risk in the Mekong Region. This policy brief presents the key findings of those dialogues, but also goes beyond the Mekong subregion and considers ways to operationalise EU-ASEAN cooperation in the field of climate adaptation, notably by focusing on water management and disaster governance. It focuses on water as the primary medium through which both slow- and rapid-onset climate change impacts affect environments, economies and security. This policy brief underscores the significance of water resources management as a critical factor in climate adaptation efforts, but recognises that water problems might also be the result of other factors, such as demographic and lifestyle changes as well as local pollution and industrial activities. Water management interventions hold a distinctive potential to promote climate resilience, provided there is a focus on reinforcing institutions, improving access to information, and creating better water infrastructures.[2]

Southeast Asia as a strategic frontier in the Indo-Pacific

Southeast Asia is a strategic frontier in the Indo-Pacific, comprising both the South China Sea and the Mekong subregion as arenas for competition among major powers. Territorial claims in disputed waters and China's increasing maritime presence in the South China Sea concern not only the US but also ASEAN and the EU. Since about a quarter of the entire global trade volume passes through the South China Sea, any obstruction, from political coercion to extreme weather events, could disrupt supply chains and have severe economic consequences.[3] Hence, avoiding any escalation and maintaining stability is crucial to ASEAN and the EU as they are both their third-largest trading partner.[4]

Although the strategic significance of the Mekong region has been somewhat neglected in comparison to for instance the South China Sea, it is slowly turning into yet another geopolitical playing field for external actors and US-China competition.[5] In 2020 the US reinforced its engagement by upgrading the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) to the US-Mekong Partnership, increasing investments in the Mekong subregion. This upgrade could be viewed against the backdrop of the Chinese Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC), which was initiated in 2016 and has since changed the game in the region.[6] China on the other hand engages via the LMC and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with trade, connectivity, strategic investments and integration of regional supply chains.[7] China's main interest in Mekong River development is hydropower generation, improvement of river navigability and development of Yunnan Province.[8]

With energy demand on the Lower Mekong Basin projected to grow at 6-7% annually, exploiting the river's hydropower potential is of strategic interest to many ASEAN member

2 Claudie Sadoff and Mike Muller, "Water management, water security, and climate change adaptation: early impacts and essential responses", Global Water Partnership, 2009.

3 Vera Kranenburg and Nick Bontenbal, "Rising South China Sea tensions and concerns for Europe", Clingendael Spectator, 2023.

4 European Commission, "Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)".

5 Frederick Kliem, "The geopolitics of the Mekong and a radical proposal for ASEAN to navigate it", RSIS, 2020

6 Sebastian Strangio, "How meaningful is the new US-Mekong Partnership?", The Diplomat, 2020.

7 Hoang Thi Ha, "Is the US a serious competitor to China in the Lower Mekong", ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2023.

8 Susanne Schmeier, "Regional Cooperation Efforts in the Mekong River Basin: Mitigating River-Related Security Threats and Promoting Regional Development", Austrian Journal for Southeast Asian Studies, Vol. 2(2), pp. 28-52, 2009.

states. While hydropower generation has obvious environmental and social impacts on downstream countries, the perception that downstream countries unilaterally bear these consequences is only partially justified. Upstream-downstream interests are not clear-cut because all riparian countries are engaged in regional power trade. For example, Thailand and Vietnam are the biggest importers of hydropower, funding projects in China, Myanmar and Lao PDR. Since downstream countries import upstream-generated hydropower, it is predominantly local populations who bear the brunt of these repercussions.[9] Yet, a growing power asymmetry is unfolding, as China's geographical location allows it to operate 11 out of 13 dams.

China's growing influence and its rivalry with the US shape geopolitical dynamics in the region, making it increasingly complex for ASEAN to take a forward-leaning approach. China not only plays a significant role in Mekong's upstream waters but also holds considerable economic and strategic influence within the ASEAN region. With the exception of Vietnam, all ASEAN member states remain reluctant to put Mekong issues on ASEAN's agenda for fear of disappointing China, which is ASEAN's biggest trading partner, largest investor and donor of loans to downstream countries.[10]

Another actor with strategic interests in the region is Japan, which acts as a counterbalance to China by supporting development initiatives. Moreover, Australia, India and South Korea are engaged in the region to support freedom of navigation for civilian and military vessels between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. As nearly 40% of EU foreign trade runs through this area, the EU has increasingly recognised the importance of supporting development and maintaining stability in the region, illustrated in its 2021 Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.[11] France, Germany and the Netherlands followed suit with their own Indo-Pacific strategies. Cooperation with ASEAN is critical to addressing the EU's quest for economic security and to reduce risk from China. Yet, Brussels is comparatively less present than other external actors. A key area of extensive untapped potential is EU engagement in the Mekong subregion.[12]

Increasingly frequent and intense extreme weather events...

Southeast Asia is one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change, as much of its population and infrastructure is located in coastal and river delta areas, leaving hundreds of millions of people extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.[13] Sudden-onset hazards such as cyclones, tsunamis and floods are becoming more frequent, damaging critical infrastructure, affecting farmland, forcing displacement and causing economic loss. Since 2012, floods, cyclones, and tsunamis have accounted for more than 72% of sudden-onset hazards in the region, damaging critical infrastructure, affecting farmland, forcing displacement and causing economic loss up to 3,3 billion USD.[14] Figure 1 illustrates the number of extreme weather events from 2012 to February 2024.

9 Claudia Kuenzer et al., ''Understanding the impact of hydropower developments in the context of upstream-downstream relations in the Mekong River basin'', Sustainability Science, 8, 565-584, 2013.

10 Ibid; Hoang Thi Ha, ''Is the US a serious competitor to China in the Lower Mekong'', ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2023.

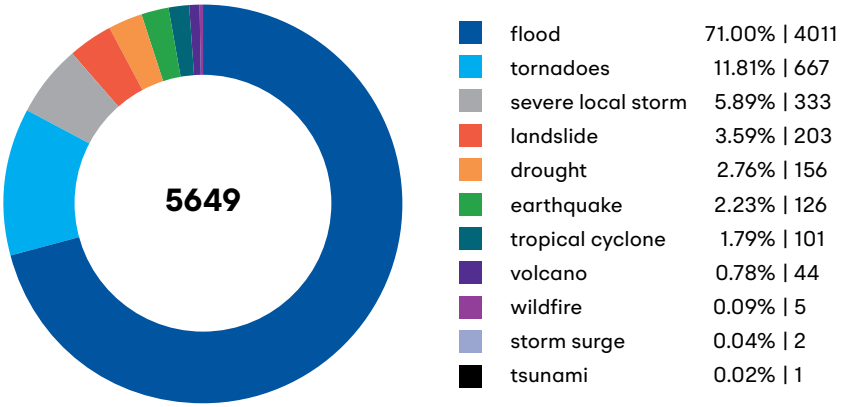
11 Vera Kranenburg and Nick Bontenbal, ''Rising South China Sea tensions''.

12 Delegation of the European Union to Vietnam, ''EU-Mekong Cooperation Conference'', EEAS, 2022.

13 Asian Development Bank, ''Climate Change in Southeast Asia: focused actions on the frontlines of climate change'', 2010.

14 ASEAN Disaster Information Network, ''AIDNet''.

Figure 1 **Number of disasters in the ASEAN region from 2012 to February 2024**[15]



Slow-onset hazards such as droughts and sea level rise also have major ramifications. In ASEAN member states, more than 60% of agricultural production relies on rain and/or irrigation, so changing precipitation patterns make agriculture highly vulnerable to crop failure and imperil food security. Climate change caused agricultural production losses of USD21 million due to extreme weather events between 2008 and 2018.[16]

Melting Himalayan glaciers put Southeast Asia's coastal populations in archipelagic countries like the Philippines and Indonesia, and river populations in the Mekong Basin, at immediate risk of sea level rise, especially those employed in the agricultural and fishing sectors. Coastal cities like Jakarta, Manila, Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City are at risk of inundation, which could force millions to flee their homes.[17] In the past ten years, North Jakarta has sunk 2.5 metres, and it is estimated that the city will be almost entirely submerged by 2050.[18] A lack of sound infrastructures and efficient flood management systems exacerbate the implications of flooding.

Table 1 presents an overview of 2030 projections for the impact of sea level rise and flooding.

Due to an increase in rural to urban migration combined with unprecedented economic growth, cities are rapidly expanding but urban planning is struggling to keep up, particularly in terms of climate-adaptive schemes and disaster preparedness. Moreover, nearly 15% of the ASEAN population live in informal urban settlements without safe and adequate access to water.[19] By 2030, it is expected that there will be a shortfall of 40% between water supply and demand in the region.[20] Water scarcity and pollution (i.e., industrial waste and untreated sewage) are especially prevalent in urban areas, which in turn affects water quality and health standards.

Table 1 **2030 projections for the impact of sea level rise and flooding, listed in the order of total city size in km².**[21]

City	Impacted area in km²	Impacted GDP (PPP) in US$ billion	Impacted population in million
Bangkok	1,512.94	512.28	10.45
Jakarta	109.38	68.20	1.80
Manila	37.29	39.24	1.54

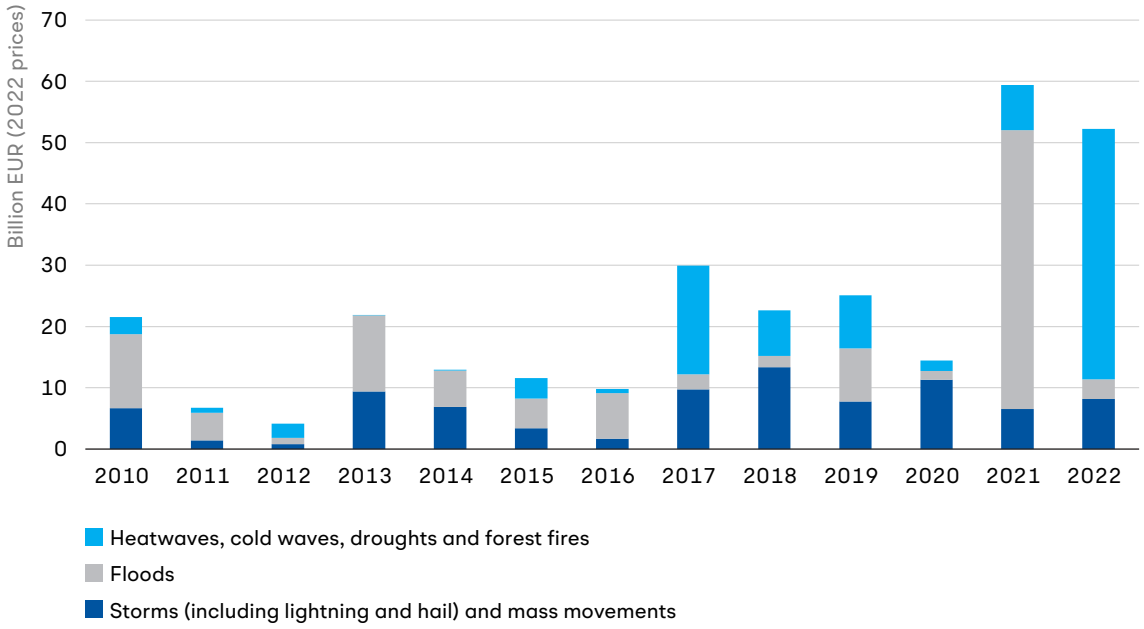
15 ASEAN Disaster Information Network, "AIDNet".
16 Pushpanathan Sundram, "Food security in ASEAN: progress, challenges, and future", Frontiers Sustainable Food Systems, 7, 2023.
17 Murray Hiebert and Danielle Fallin, "Security Challenges of Climate Change in Southeast Asia", CSIS, 2021; Henrike Brecht et al., "Sea-level rise and storm surges: high stakes for a small number of developing countries", The Journal of Environment and Development, 21(1), 120-138, 2023.
18 Mayuri Mei Lin and Rafki Hidayat, "Jakarta, the fastest-sinking city in the world", BBC News, 2018.
19 Corinne Ong et al., "Key challenges to urban water management in ASEAN", Urban Water Demand Management, 3-14, 2023.
20 International Monetary Fund, "Southeast Asia: Region on the Rise", 2018.
21 Greenpeace East Asia, "Sea Level Rise Poses Economic Threat to Asia Coastal Cities", 2021.

In the EU, both slow- and rapid-onset hazards such as droughts, heatwaves, sea level rise, forest fires and floods are increasing in frequency, duration and intensity, raising the number of casualties and economic losses. See Figure 2 for an overview of annual economic losses caused by weather- and climate-related events. Both rising ocean temperatures and land ice in Greenland and Antarctica melting much faster than previously assumed are putting coastal areas in the EU at risk through growing coastal erosion, higher storm surge levels and saltwater intrusion in ground- and surface water.[22] As 26% of the Netherlands is below sea level and 59% is vulnerable to river flooding, floods in the densely populated delta could affect critical facilities such as transport, energy and communication and might lead to forcible displacement. Extreme droughts in recent years have resulted in more fire risks, reduced agricultural productivity and made some parts of the Danube River unnavigable.[23]

In 2023, floods hit southern and central eastern European countries, and this same year broke the record of largest wildfire ever recorded in the EU, burning 94,000 hectares of natural land.[24]

Both ASEAN and the EU are at risk as too little, too much or too polluted water negatively affects social, environmental and economic development. Since water is central to food security, poverty alleviation, economic growth, energy generation and human health, tackling these water-related challenges is crucial to safeguard the region's environmental sustainability and economic growth.[25] Hence, sustainable water management and disaster governance play a crucial role in improving the resilience of societies and ecosystems.

Figure 2 Annual economic losses caused by weather- and climate-related extreme events in the EU Member States[26]



22 National Delta Programme, "What's happening with sea level rise?", Rijksoverheid.

23 Copernicus, "Strong impact of the droughts on the Danube River", 2022.

24 Joint Research Centre, "Wildfires in the Mediterranean: EFFIS data reveal extent this summer", European Commission, 2023.

25 Leadership Group on Water Security in Asia, "Asia's next challenge: Security in the region's water future", Asia Society, 2009.

26 European Environment Agency, "Annual economic-losses caused by weather and climate-related extreme events in the EU Member States", 2023.

...call for immediate measures

The EU has a solid track record on climate policy, with member states such as the Netherlands possessing in-house expertise in water management. Accelerating climate adaptation by increasing its international efforts is a key objective of the EU's climate strategies and its Green Deal. As the EU's current geographical focus is on its neighbourhood, untapped potential remains to bolster adaptation efforts in the ASEAN region. The EU's intention to become a *global* climate leader must be translated into implementation and meaningful action so that it can meet its own raised, yet unmet, expectations.

Considering the different priorities of the two blocs is important when strengthening the EU-ASEAN Partnership. For ASEAN, economic growth is a major priority but cannot be separated from climate adaptation. For the EU, a stronger partnership helps to boost its positioning as credible international partner, and is linked to its general climate diplomacy objectives, as ASEAN member states are perceived as reliable partners. Closer cooperation on climate would indirectly help the EU to strengthen its presence in the Indo-Pacific as a credible alternative to other powers. To kill two birds with one stone, cooperation between the EU and ASEAN should take the form of stronger engagement through consistent dialogues and increased investments.

In a context where climate change creates uncertainty about future water availability and quality, adequate water resources management and disaster governance are essential and could be two areas through which the EU and ASEAN could strengthen their cooperation. To enhance strategic responses to rapidly changing circumstances, neither water management nor disaster governance should be treated as separate areas of engagement. Integrating disaster governance into water management policies is key. Water management interventions are uniquely positioned to build resilience, if attention is directed towards creating stronger **institutions**, better access to **information** and improved water **infrastructures** to bolster resilience.[27]

Institutions

Institutions are crucial to deal with climate variability. Their instruments and mechanisms manage supply and demand through water allocation, conservation, efficiency and land-use planning.

Following from its Strategic Plan of Action on Water Resource Management, ASEAN established the ASEAN Working Group on Water Resources Management (AWGWRM) to strengthen regional cooperation by promoting integrated water resources management, and exchange of expertise and technology among its member states. However, ASEAN's influence on environmental matters is relatively limited as

Figure 3 Three core elements for water resources management and disaster governance

27 Claudie Sadoff and Mike Muller, "Water management, water security, and climate change adaptation: early impacts and essential responses", Global Water Partnership, 2009.

there are no concrete instruments or mechanisms able to translate regional ASEAN commitments into national implementation of projects.[28]

In the Mekong Basin, water management has been dominated by energy objectives in an uncoordinated manner by riparian countries and by a number of non-binding regional initiatives with overlapping efforts that have resulted in degraded water resources (see Box 1).[29] The problem of fragmented water governance structures is not limited to the Mekong Basin. Indonesia's river basin organisations face obstacles in the coordination of basin plans, as responsibilities are dispersed among various bodies. Responsibilities for monitoring water quality are decentralised, and monitoring stations and systems to collect data are lacking. Low technical capacity hinders the formulation and operationalisation of basin plans, and inadequate funding and budget allocation mechanisms exacerbate these obstacles.[30] But, to collect, analyse and act on information, strong institutions are needed.

This is where the EU could play a bigger role, given its commitment to improve transboundary cooperation across water basins to strengthen regional integration.[31] For the EU, water remains a national competence. Yet, there is a solid legislative framework which ensures protection and management of waters, requiring EU member states to develop river basin and flood risk management plans such as the European Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Flood Directive (FD).[32] The EU could share its regulatory know-how to help ASEAN develop climate adaptation regulations. Drawing on its experience as an institution and expertise in water management, the EU could support ASEAN with greater institutional alignment of regional policies on water management and could enhance the technical and institutional capacity of river basin organisations. This already occurs at bilateral level, where the Netherlands works with Indonesia via the Dutch Training and Exposure Programme (DUTEP) to enhance capacity building that focuses on integrated water management in Indonesia.[33] Such bilateral programmes could be elevated to region-to-region cooperation.

Following a study visit by the MRC to the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), research was conducted on applying the European WFD to the Mekong Basin in relation to pressures from hydropower on ecologically sensitive areas. It concluded that this framework could be applied if adapted to the regional context.[34] Experts also raised the point that the EU could learn about dealing with drought from the ASEAN region, as the EU has less experience of how drought, which is becoming more prevalent, affects river navigation and water supply. This is an example of how enhanced cooperation could be mutually beneficial for both blocs. A platform through which best practices could be exchanged is the Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (E-READI).[35]

Information

Data (e.g., hydrological, geomorphological, agricultural, land cover, etc) is essential for monitoring trends in water availability and quality, and serves as the cornerstone for informed decision making, policy development and disaster risk information (e.g., forecasts and multi-hazard early warning systems).

28 Koh Keng Lian and Nicholas A. Robinson, "Regional environmental governance: Examining the ASEAN Model", in Global environmental governance – options and opportunities, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, 101-120, 2004.

29 Han Phounim and To Minh Thu, "Water resources management in the Mekong Basin", Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, 2020.

30 USAID, "Indonesia Water Resources Profile Overview".

31 European External Action Service, "Climate, Environment and Energy".

32 European Commission, "Water Framework Directive".

33 Nuffic, "DUTEP".

34 Susanne Schmeier, "Shared Basin – Shared Destiny", ICDPR, 2020; MRC. "MRC Study Visit to the Danube River Basin Final Report", Fresh-Thoughts Consulting, 2012.

35 Delegation of the European Union to ASEAN, "Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (E-READI)", EEAS, 2023.

Technologies such as big data, risk analysis and geospatial data have a crucial role to play in water management and disaster response.

Managing growing uncertainty and system-wide hydrological variability will increase returns to information and cooperation in water management at all scales. ASEAN has established multiple frameworks for disaster governance such as the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) and the ASEAN Framework on Anticipatory Action in Disaster Management. But to effectively map, forecast and manage (transboundary) water risks and disasters, it is imperative to monitor data, water levels, flow rates and water quality. However, a lack of accurate data, technical capacity and budget can impede not only effective policy making but also the adaptive capacity of local communities. This is further compounded by China's lack of full transparency in real- and near-time operational data on hydropower plants and water storage levels on the Mekong River. The EU launched an initiative in the Philippines to develop the Copernicus data centre hub utilising Copernicus satellite data[36] to enhance disaster risk management and climate change analysis.[37] This could become a model for wider EU-ASEAN cooperation on data for improved disaster and climate resilience.

However, having access to hydrological data is one thing; making it understandable to stakeholders who need it most is something different. Data that is available for early warning systems (EWS) is often highly technical and designed for higher-level decision making. EWS messaging is not always tailored to local needs, for example if it is not conveyed in non-national languages such as dialects and Indigenous languages. To ensure that EWS are comprehensive, the EU established MeteoAlarm, designed to visualise the current warning situation in Europe in an easily understandable way for the public.[38] ASEAN could establish something similar. The EU, on the other hand, could learn from ASEAN's community-based approach to risk reduction, where local residents actively participate in training, workshops and awareness campaigns.[39] Furthermore, ASEAN's emphasis on continuous public education and awareness could serve as a model for the EU in order to enhance preparedness of the population in the face of increasing extreme weather events. Sharing best practices between EU and ASEAN disaster centres could also be another area of cooperation.

Infrastructures

In a context where climate change impacts, a growing population and rapid urbanisation increasingly strain cities in their service provision, water infrastructures are needed to improve resilience. Natural and built infrastructures such as flood management systems and water treatment facilities are essential to safeguarding water availability and quality.

Environmentally sustainable cities are a strategic priority for ASEAN. Funded by the EU, the Smart Green ASEAN Cities Programme supports member states at national, regional and local levels in green and smart solutions for urban environmental governance. One of the most active EU member states in this regard is France, which supports Cambodia with the expansion of the Bakheng Water Treatment Plant in Phnom Penh and also Vietnam in its pursuit of climate-resilient urban investments.[40]

As sea level rise and flooding pose significant threats to the ASEAN delta population, improved flood risk management is essential. The Netherlands and Indonesia are building a stable coastline by restoring mangrove plantations,

36 The Copernicus Emergency Management Service (CEMS) provides geospatial data and images for informed decision making.

37 ASEAN, "ASEAN Leader's declaration on ASEAN as an epicentrum of growth", 2023.

38 MeteoAlarm, "Live map", EUMETNET.

39 ASEAN, "ASEAN Framework on Anticipatory Action in Disaster Management", 2024.

40 ASEAN, "ASEAN Leader's declaration".

which reduce erosion, can adapt to sea level rise and promote inclusive economic growth. This is done through a Building with Nature pilot in which a paradigm shift is triggered towards water infrastructure solutions aligned with both economic development and environmental conservation.[41] Another practice is the Dutch support to Vietnam in urban flood control in Ho Chi Minh City with multifunctional dykes, drainage canals and a 200-hectare rainwater reservoir. The aim is to design infrastructure with a self-sustaining income model.[42]

Investments in resilience outweigh the costs of not investing.[43] Protective infrastructures that improve water supply and quality, and concurrently prevent subsidence and flooding, are attractive investment opportunities for the private sector, as they can see a return on their investments. By creating incentives for the private sector, ASEAN and the EU could encourage investments in infrastructure, technologies and nature-based solutions for improved water security. Moreover, by bringing together the initiatives of the single EU member states, the EU could present itself as a stronger actor and valuable partner.

Water management and disaster governance as impetus for closer EU-ASEAN cooperation

As both blocs are alarmed by China's growing influence and its rivalry with the US, there is a window of opportunity to enhance and strengthen cooperation. Amid US-China competition in the region, ASEAN's preference to engage with the EU has strengthened. The region's positive attitude is predominantly attributed to the EU's leadership in advocating for human rights and climate change.[44] At the same time, the EU recognises the strategic significance of strengthening cooperation with ASEAN. Climate adaptation also presents an opportunity to operationalise the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy, which sets tackling climate change and disaster preparedness as priorities for engagement.[45] Despite differing levels of development, institutional capacity and regional integration, both blocs share a vision to develop the ASEAN-EU partnership based on an international rules-based order, mutual interests and mutually beneficial cooperation.

In this context, where climate change adaptation is a topic of mutual concern, ASEAN and the EU have an opportunity to enhance their cooperation. The EU and its member states could engage with their ASEAN counterparts on those issues where they have technological capacity and know-how, which are the areas ASEAN sees as an added value in cooperating with the EU, next to China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and the US. This policy brief recommends the following steps towards greater EU-ASEAN cooperation.

- **Elevate successful bilateral programmes:** Following joint initiatives such as the EU/Philippines programme to utilise Copernicus satellite data to enhance disaster risk management or the Netherlands/Indonesia project for stronger coastal infrastructure through nature-based solutions, the EU and its member states could expand these to other ASEAN member states. The EU could consider launching a dedicated Team Europe Initiative focusing on water management and disaster risk reduction.

- **Ensure institutional alignment:** To ensure institutional alignment among the plethora of river basin organisations in the region, water management could be integrated into international law. The EU could support the creation of legal and regulatory frameworks (e.g., apply the WFD and FD to the ASEAN region) as well as strengthening ASEAN bodies through its long experience as an institution.

41 EcoShape, "Building with Nature: Indonesia", 2024.
42 Kingdom of the Netherlands, "Water and Climate".
43 OECD, "Climate-resilient infrastructure", 2018.
44 Sharon Seah et al., "The state of Southeast Asia: 2023 survey report", ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2023.
45 European Commission, "Questions and Answers : EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific", 2021.

- **Launch an EU-ASEAN-MRC Partnership:** To enhance the institutional and technical capacity of the MRC, the EU and ASEAN could launch a collaborative trilateral partnership. It could increase efforts to contribute to the Mekong Fund in order for the MRC to engage in capacity building and encourage constructive dialogue between lower, middle and upstream countries.

- **Encourage investments in water infrastructures and disaster risk information technologies:** The EU and ASEAN could stimulate risk reduction rather than risk management by framing financial support as an investment in resilience. Both public funding and private financing in infrastructure and knowledge systems are needed to manage water resources and disaster risk. Incentives are needed for private sector investments in technologies and infrastructures aimed at improving water security.

- **Improve accessibility to disaster risk information:** The EU and ASEAN could enhance data availability, accessibility and understandability, and create basin-wide standardised data sources. Through big- and geospatial data and remote sensing the EU – via Copernicus Emergency Management Service – could provide additional data to bridge the current data gap. To enhance understandability, ASEAN could establish something similar to MeteoAlarm. The EU could learn from ASEAN's efforts in public education and awareness campaigns to enhance the disaster preparedness of the EU population.

- **Establish joint track 1.5 working groups:** Working groups could be established to tap into each other's expertise and exchange best practices on integrating water management and disaster governance. These could include EU and ASEAN disaster centres and river basin organisations such as the MRC and ICPDR to identify lessons learned and exchange best practices to seek common solutions to the water problems they both face. A forum through which this could take place is E-READI.

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