

# Institutional Dynamics of Climate Change Adaptation in Southeast Asia: The Role of ASEAN

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## Abstract

There is an increased interest in institutions and the role they play in the context of adaptation to climate change. The present chapter contributes to the growing debate by providing an analysis of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The chapter shows that while member states originally made use of the institutional framework of ASEAN to generate a common understanding of climate change mitigation and to apply it externally, the association is now becoming increasingly accepted for internal framing of adaptation processes. Yet while ASEAN has undoubtedly 'come to terms' with climate change, the notion of sustainability, which is a key concept for any adaptation strategy, remains on a broad rhetoric level only. Results thus show that without elaborating more fundamental linkages between sustainability and the overarching topic of economic development, any adaptation strategy will be prone to fail.

## 1 Introduction

The rapid rise in warming of the Earth's surface over the last fifty years is well accepted among scientists. Arguably, there still are uncertainties about the degree to which the climate is changing and some debates whether the experienced warming of is entirely due to the 'greenhouse effect'. But the fact that the climate is changing is not in doubt.<sup>1</sup> Two of the central messages of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s Third Assessment Report

<sup>1</sup> Levine, Simone, Eva Ludi, and Lindsey Jones, *Rethinking Support for Adaptive Capacity to Climate Change: The Role of Development Interventions* (London: ODI, 2011); Schelling, Thomas, "Climate Change: The Uncertainties, the Certainties, and what they Imply About Action," published by The Berkeley Electronic Press, 2007, accessed May 31, 2012. <http://are.berkeley.edu/courses/EEP131/fall2007/ClimateChange/Climate%20Change%20The%20Uncertainties...%20%28Schelling%29.pdf>; Oreskes, Naomi, "The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change," *Science* 306.3 (2004): 1686.

(TAR) in 2001 – and which were reinforced in the Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) in 2007 – were that, first, climate change is already having observable and adverse impacts and, second, that due to time lags in natural and physical systems, mitigation measures alone cannot avoid climate change entirely any more.

The TAR has demonstrated the importance of adaptation,<sup>2</sup> a topic that then received extensive coverage and was demonstrated in its complexity also in the AR4.<sup>3</sup> Over the past decade, the discussion on adaptation to climate change has therefore truly started.<sup>4</sup>

While the projected consequences of climate change remain highly uncertain, they have been spreading unequally across regions so far, and will continue to do so. Evidently, the impacts of climate change will affect developing countries to a disproportionately high degree.<sup>5</sup> But response options are said to be limited as they possess only a limited degree of human, institutional, and financial capacity to anticipate and respond to the changing conditions.<sup>6</sup> Climate change, therefore, as a risk, is particularly seen as exogenous to ‘peripheral’ countries, and to those “that have little capacity for control and much greater potentiality for catastrophe”.<sup>7</sup> Climate change will add another layer of complexity to existing development challenges and to economic growth. Hence, there is a strong need for starting now to carefully think about, and to respond adequately to, the challenges posed by a changing climate.

The adverse consequences of climate change are increasingly observed and witnessed in many places in South East Asia, particularly among many if not most of the member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

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2 Smit, I. Barry, and Olga Pilifosova, “Adaptation to Climate Change in the Context of Sustainable Development and Equity,” in *Climate Change 2001: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, ed. IPCC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 877–912.

3 Working Group II, “Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability,” in *Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC Technical Summary*, ed. Martin L. Parry et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 23–78.

4 Berkhout, Frans, Dave Huitema, and Katrien Termeer, “The Governance of Adaptation” (paper presented on an international symposium, Amsterdam, March 22–23, 2012), accessed May 31, 2012. [http://www.ivm.vu.nl/en/Images/The%20Governance%20of%20Adaptation%20Call%20for%20Abstracts\\_tcm53-227922.pdf](http://www.ivm.vu.nl/en/Images/The%20Governance%20of%20Adaptation%20Call%20for%20Abstracts_tcm53-227922.pdf).

5 See, for example, Stern, Nicholas, *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review* (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Sachs, Jeffrey D., *The End of Poverty: How We Can Make It Happen in Our Lifetime* (London: Penguin Books, 2005).

6 Sperling, Frank, ed., *Poverty and Climate Change – Reducing the Vulnerability of the Poor through Adaptation* (Washington, D.C.: AfDB et al., 2003).

7 Beck, Ulrich, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 42.