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Catalysing Adaptive Social Protection for Sustainable Resilience in Southeast Asia: Gaps, Stakeholders, and Policy Mechanisms

Abstract

Ten years have passed since ASEAN declared its commitment to strengthen social protection: it should be adaptive toward multivarious risks — be it individual, social risk, or emerging and existing vulnerabilities. The stance was strengthened with the publication of the *ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025*, which specifically addressed the need for more adaptive social protection. To consolidate this knowledge, the ASEAN Secretariat issued *Guidelines on Disaster Responsive Social Protection* that entail disaster and climate risks as part of social protection. It discussed the Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) concept in ASEAN — a combination of the traditional social protection concept with disaster and climate considerations — that increases the resilience of vulnerable communities. This article aims to identify the existing gaps and potential recommendations to achieve a resilient future. Regional findings indicate that national and local implementations have met multifaceted challenges that prevent optimal development of ASP: policies on the national and local level often exclude disaster and climate factors, do not target the right groups, and are not based on sufficient data. These inhibitions resulted in miscoordination with local stakeholders as well as inefficient and ineffective distribution mechanisms toward those in need. This research argues that current measures do not reflect the flexibility and adaptability of ASP; rather, they are rigid and inflexible. To enhance the adoption of ASP, we need to address gaps in policy frameworks, institutional capacities, and data availability at both the national and regional levels, promoting synchronised efforts, resource allocation, and collaborative initiatives for a sustainable, resilient ASEAN.

Keywords: ASEAN, Adaptive Social Protection, Sustainable Resilience

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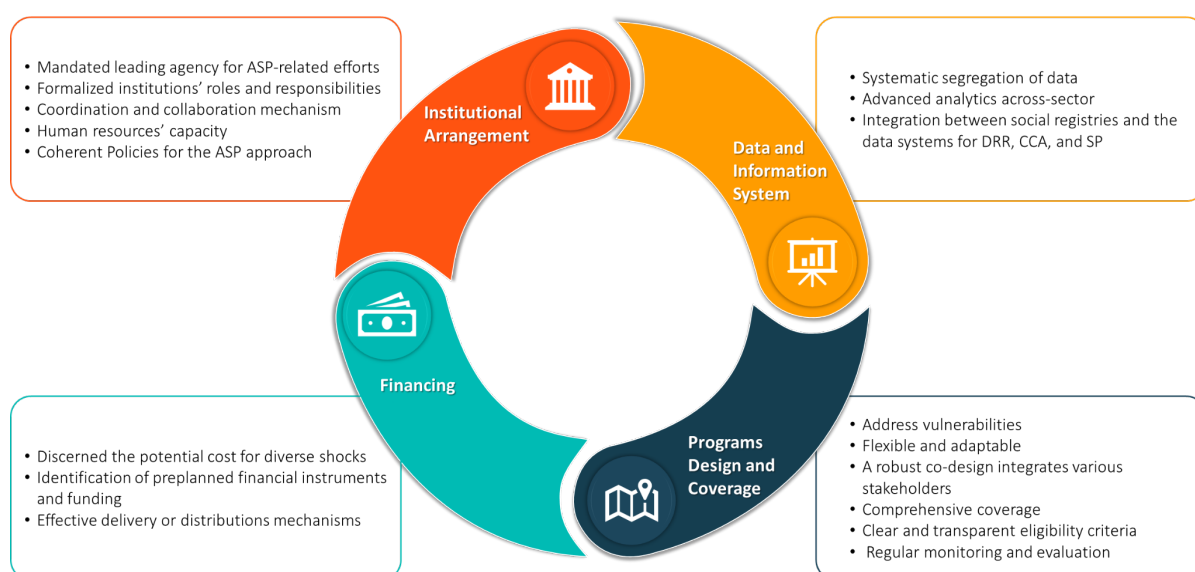


Figure 6.1 *The ASP framework and building blocks* (Source: Authors, 2023. Adapted from Bowen et al., 2020; Johnson & Walker, 2022).

[...]

1.1. ASP in Southeast Asia

The economic impacts of natural hazards are severe. They could wipe out decades of human development investment, pushing numerous households into poverty. ASEAN needs to have an explicit focus on the poor and the most vulnerable to preserve previous investments and further reduce poverty (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). At the regional level, several commitments related to cooperation on social protection systems in the context of disasters have been agreed upon by ASEAN, which include the following:

- The *ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection* in 2013 and the *Regional Framework and Action Plan* in 2015 emphasise the necessity for social protection to be adaptive in responding to various hazards like disasters and climate change (ASEAN Secretariat, 2018).
- The *ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme 2016 – 2020* acknowledges the significance of social protection at all phases of disaster risk management (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016a).
- The 2016 *ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025* is ASEAN's commitment to strengthening social protection for those who live in climate-sensitive areas and reducing vulnerability in times of crises, disasters, and other environmental changes.

It also discusses sustainable risk management financing mechanisms for social protection, particularly for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016b).

[...]

1.2. The Concept of Sustainable Resilience and ASP

The concept of sustainable resilience integrates three concepts: vulnerability, resilience, and sustainability. The synergy between the three allows sustainable resilience, the ability to respond to expected and unexpected outcomes over time. This concept is highly relevant for reference in the development of an integrated framework to guide informed risk-based decision-making for sustainable and resilient systems (Gillespie-Marthaler et al., 2019).

In the 2022 Global Platform of Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) forum in Bali, the concept of sustainable resilience was introduced as the approach that ensures the existing properties of a system are maintained to respond to systemic risk challenges. During the 2023 ASEAN Summit in Jakarta, the *ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Sustainable Resilience* was also highlighted as a strategy to enhance collaboration in strengthening climate and disaster resilience for sustainable development. Beyond resilient infrastructure planning, another crucial part of achieving sustainable resilience is the social capital aspect, as the core of achieving resilience revolves around people. Considerations of community resilience components are needed to ensure the achievement of community-focused sustainable resilience. This community level of sustainable resilience can be achieved by identifying the need to survive, achieve a certain level of well-being, and be prepared for emergency conditions as a form of preparation, response, and recovery from occasional shocks (Gillespie-Marthaler et al., 2019). The implementation of ASP can contribute to the increase of adaptive capacity to achieve sustainable resilience.

2. Current Conditions of ASP in AMS

2.1. Brunei Darussalam

Brunei has a low disaster-risk level based on the INFORM RISK Index ("INFORM Country Risk Profile," n.d.), such as thunderstorms, monsoon rains, smog, flash floods, landslides, and rising surface-level temperatures (Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance [CFE-DM], 2022b). In response to these threats, the government aims to strengthen social protection through various actions, such as building public schools and providing access to health systems, affordable housing, retirement benefits, and pensions

for the elderly and disabled. According to Sainah and Saim (2010), the budget for social protection can be obtained from the public sector, private firms, charities, and self-funding. Brunei mainly relies on government coordination between actors to finance these services (“Indonesia to build resilience,” 2021). While the Brunei Government has yet to formally embrace ASP within its social protection policy, the measures it has undertaken via the National Disaster Council (NDC) seamlessly integrate disaster risk protection (CFE-DM, 2022b). This aligns with the ASP approach, underscoring their commitment to ensuring comprehensive protection for vulnerable groups, particularly those impacted by disasters.

2.2. Cambodia

Cambodia has a medium disaster risk level based on the INFORM Risk Index (“INFORM Country Risk Profile,” n.d.). It is also projected to experience a rising surface temperature and other sudden-onset disasters, such as storms, floods, and droughts (CFE-DM, 2020; Phy et al., 2022; USAID, 2019). The government specifically addressed ASP in the *Cambodian Climate Change Strategic Plan* and implemented a national social protection policy called the Social Protection Policy Framework (SPPF). The manifestation of ASP is seen through several aspects: the promotion of micro-financing that makes credits more accessible for local communities, the proliferation of insurance schemes for climate and disaster risks, the integration of gender aspects in climate change response plans, and the surge in collaboration with local institutions on climate adaptation (National Climate Change Committee, 2013).

2.3. Indonesia

Indonesia ranks 48th in the INFORM Risk Index for medium disaster risk (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana [BNPB], 2022; “INFORM Country Risk Profile,” n.d.), including floods, droughts, sea level rise, and others. Currently, Indonesia’s social protection system is divided into contributory and non-contributory schemes. The former refers to health and employment insurance, while the latter refers to social assistance programmes from the government (Rahayu Kusumastuti et al., 2018). The government included the ASP concept in the National Medium- and Long-Term Development Plans (Maliki, 2021). Indonesia is currently developing a roadmap, which covers the four pillars of ASP: encompassing strong coordination and partnership, integrated data and information, programme enhancement and coordination, and financing (“Indonesia to build resilience,” 2023). The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) has previously designed an Adaptive Family Hope Programme/*Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) Adaptif* that specifically targets victims of “natural disasters, social disasters, and remote indigenous communities” (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2021). Other ministries, in tandem with the MoSA, started ASP-related initiatives such as the Disaster

Resilient Village/*Desa Tangguh Bencana* (Destana), a community-based disaster risk reduction programme run by the National Disaster Management Agency/*Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana* (BNPB), and the Climate Village Programme/*Program Komunitas Untuk Iklim* (ProKlim), a national programme to enhance local stakeholders' knowledge of climate change adaptation and mitigation (BNPB, 2012; Rijhwani & Singh, 2019).

[...]

2.4. Myanmar

Myanmar is highly vulnerable to natural and human-caused hazards, having the highest hazard and exposure risk level based on the INFORM RISK Index ("INFORM Country Risk Profile," n.d.). It is estimated that 17.6 million people will require humanitarian assistance (Mangahas & Lynn, 2023). Myanmar has yet to create any policies specifically mentioning the ASP approach. Fortunately, several initiatives are aimed to improve resilience, such as the Myanmar Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction (MAPDRR). An inter-agency task force was also established to ensure the AADMER's execution. To support implementation, the government created the *Costed Social Protection Sector Plan, Myanmar Medium-Term 2018 – 2023* — policy structures that link social protection and disaster risk management (Social Protection Sub-Sector Coordination Group, 2018). A few examples of interventions to face climate change are the promotion of cash assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction activities, provision of public works programmes to increase livelihoods in vulnerable areas, creation of resilient communities, and formulation of climate infrastructure plans and livelihood diversification plans (Dutta, 2015). However, Myanmar still faces issues in ensuring the availability of good quality data and effective information systems, fulfilling funding gaps, and creating more proactive programmes for resilience. Notably, the country is also faced with challenges derived from hierarchical and top-down policymaking approaches when dealing with disparities, underscoring the importance of expanding democracy through increased institutional involvement and strengthened consultative approaches. With no specific ASP approach strategy, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation must also be further mainstreamed into social protection efforts (Perwaiz et al., 2020).

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2.5. Singapore

Singapore faces climate risks from its coastal geography and urban setting. The threat encompasses rising sea levels leading to erosion and flooding, heat stress from urban heat islands, intense rainfall causing flash floods, and other potential impacts from extreme weather (“Singapore,” n.d.). The nation is equipped with comprehensive and universally available social protection mechanisms, ensuring access to health care, housing, education, and targeted assistance for marginal groups (ADB, 2021; Waring et al., 2022). Nevertheless, similar to other AMS, the concept of ASP is not explicitly enshrined in its laws, leading to a lack of well-defined policies that effectively address disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation efforts (Perwaiz et al., 2020). The financial resources allocation for these endeavours and future funding for developments remain uncertain and unclear.

[...]

2.6. Institutional Arrangements

ASP requires well-built institutionalised support involving each AMS's diverse government and non-governmental institutions. As mentioned in Table 6.1, some of the AMS (e.g., Indonesia, Thailand, and Cambodia) have appointed leading agencies for ASP-related efforts and developed collaborative mechanisms to implement them. This condition supports coordination and collaborative mechanisms as stated by Bowen (2015). Unfortunately, most AMS have not formally adopted the concept in their laws and policies. Furthermore, it is crucial to have clear guidelines in order to facilitate coherent policy (Johnson & Walker, 2022); however, most AMS are still lacking in this category. To respond to the problem, ASEAN could address this issue by developing a standardised ASP framework endorsed by ASEAN, which can be developed from the DRSP and *ASEAN Framework and Action Plan* on social protection. Those two existing documents could provide a common foundation and guidelines for AMS. This effort can then manifest into an ASEAN-level council dedicated to ASP in facilitating coordination and supporting collaboration amongst AMS.

[...]

Nevertheless, the integration of a social protection, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation financing strategy has yet to be undertaken by most AMS due to the complexity of integrating the existing system, lack of baseline regulation to support the ASP efforts, or lack of resources to implement the integration. Efficient financing for ASP involves not just securing funding but also establishing pre-arranged mechanisms for Disaster Risk Financing (DRF), Public Financial Management (PFM), and Shock-Responsive Social Protection (SRSP) (UNICEF-EAPRO, 2023). For instance, these mechanisms may involve upscaling of the Forecast-based Financing/Early Warning Action (FbF/EWEA) and Disaster Responsive Social Protection (DRSP) programmes by ASEAN that optimise the awareness for financing and incorporate the risk data for SRSP. By incorporating these pre-arranged mechanisms, exploring innovative financing aspects, and providing impetus for regional cooperation to enhance the national capacity in upscaling ASP, ASEAN could create a more holistic and integrated approach to addressing both the ASP needs and financial challenges associated with disasters and climate change in the region.

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