

# Understanding gaps and opportunities in ASEAN humanitarian systems: A critical reflection as ASEAN ‘citizen’

[A draft for AHA Center - RSIS Policy Discussion on  
World Humanitarian Summit - Implications for the Asia-Pacific]

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## 1. Introduction

World Humanitarian Summit 2016 calls for a more comprehensive humanitarian reform. One of the calls is to “Honouring our commitment to leave no one behind requires reaching everyone in situations of conflict, disaster, vulnerability and risk” (Core Responsibility #3). This suggests that the exercise of humanitarian imperatives betray humanitarian values and principles.

Humanitarian responses have been often trapped in reactive humanitarianism (i.e. a kind of systematic delay of humanitarian action and intervention that often made soon after catastrophic events). While proactive humanitarianism could be best represented by the recent endorsement of Sendai Framework for Action (SFA) 2015 where countries are pushed to once again invest in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and to some degree it also calls for the creation of alternative model of anticipatory humanitarian system that seriously invest in pre-disaster arrangements in order to mitigate future losses.

As some observers have already highlighted the fact that Southeast Asia has emerged as one of the most populated humanitarian communities in the world, the question is what does Humanitarian Reform means in the context of ASEAN regionalism? And who should lead humanitarian reform and DRR reform in ASEAN? Can ASEAN play a role in humanitarian reform in ASEAN? If Yes, how? How ASEAN humanitarianism take shape in the last decade?

The UN General Secretary rightly noted that the summit has been “a first test of the international community’s commitment to transforming the lives of those most at risk of being left behind.”[1] In the context of ASEAN, there are at least three paradigms that currently dominate the debates on what model of humanitarian reform needs to happen in the future of ASEAN.

An **idealist view** suggests that ASEAN needs to **firstly get the principles and the mandates right**. This suggests *principles before resources*. It would require ASEAN to play to some degree a supranational role [2] to be able to scale up and scale out the present model of ASEAN humanitarian imperatives under the auspicious of AHA-Center and AADMER implementation. This view suggest a typical ‘utopian vision’[4] where ASEAN needs to take some revolutionary steps to ensure that “no one is left behind” and “no crisis is discriminated”.

A more **realist perspective** suggests **resources before the mandates**. This view suggests that the most fundamental problem of ASEAN in exercising its humanitarian imperatives is fundamentally constrained by resources and financial capacity. Once this logistical hurdle is fixed, its humanitarian imperative can be scaled up and scaled out beyond ‘natural disasters’ response as recently demonstrated by AHA humanitarian system. Therefore, this camp often takes an “unproblematising approach” to AADMER Implementation in the last 5 years. Rather than asking what is missing, it takes stocks of what have been achieved by ASEAN. And much has been said about the relative success of AHA-Center as an ‘implementing machine’ of AADMER.[5]

Finally, I take the third approach namely **critical realist perspective**. This approach is critical but it does justice not only to realists and idealists perspectives. The successes of AHA/AADMER as explained by the key stakeholders [I assume the remarks and the first session will tackle this] must be seen from following viewpoints: First, it should be seen from the fact of limited endogenous resources and the existence of competing priorities of its member states as well as the ASEANSEC and AHA Centre. Second, it should be seen not only from regional context of ASEAN but should also be seen from macro scale, especially the fact that regional mechanism does not always work consistently in this planet. One should note that AADMER success is an extension of success of ASEAN regional governance as we have seen in other mechanism such as ASEAN Transboundary Haze Agreement and others. Third, one should recognize that the First 5th anniversary of AHA has been largely focus on institutional, logistical as well as infrastructural setup. Fourth, however, there are still gaps to be solved and it should also be noted that much can still be achieved in the future.

## **2. Identified Gaps and Guiding Questions for Future Research Agendas**

The rest of this paper asks the following questions that can be all: **practical and existential questions but can guide a more systematic study and documentation of regional humanitarian systems in Southeast Asia.**

### **2.1. How the process of humanitarian reform gain regional ownership in ASEAN? Who should lead the humanitarian reform in SEA?**

Hypothesis #1: Implementation of humanitarian reform agenda at regional level requires leadership commitment of ASEAN. AHA can lead humanitarian reform process through endogenous mechanism of AADMER.

### **2.2 Can AADMER targets a more result oriented and less activity oriented outcomes?**

How ASEAN response to the fact that half of global disaster mortality is from Southeast Asia during 2004-2014? How ASEAN brings down the mortality rate from 61 deaths per 100,000 people (during 2004-2014) to half of it by 2030? How ASEAN reduce its total economic loss from US\$ 33.6k per 100,000 people during 2004-2014 to half by 2020-2030? And how ASEAN reduces the damages of schools from a total of 15,000 during 2008-2013 to by half in 2020-2030?

Outcome-based targets of AHA/AADMER need to be focused on real loss reduction of human and assets in ASEAN. In this case, AADMER's machines (AHA+ACDM) can play bigger roles to facilitate AADMER Ministerial Meeting to set target on disaster mortality reduction and economic loss reduction at regional, national and local DRR strategy. Lets say that AHA will still have 5 year to prepare itself to play bigger roles in DRR and resilience building, can AHA Centre up to these tasks starting 2020?

### **2.3 Can AHA-Centre adopts all-hazards approach?**

AADMER recognised an all-hazard approach to include "disaster risk" as an outcome of an "interactions between natural or human-induced hazards and vulnerable conditions." AADMER's Work Programmes (2010-2015 and 2015 and beyond) adopted the spirit of Hyogo Framework (2005-2015) and Sendai Framework 2015-2030. These frameworks promote all-hazard approach. AADMER Agreement even recalled the agreements such as Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (2002) Agreement for the Facilitation of Search for Aircrafts in Distress and Rescue of Survivors of Aircraft Accidents (1972) and Agreement for the Facilitation of Search of Ships in Distress and Rescue of Survivors of Ship Accidents (1975), Agreement on the ASEAN Food Security Reserve (1979) and Hyogo Declaration and the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005).

Therefore, humanitarian reform requires ASEAN to take all-hazard approach beyond the more 'peaceful' approach to humanitarian crisis and disaster emergencies arise from natural hazards. Table 1 illustrates the fact (or a perceived fact) that de-facto, AHA does not take inclusive approach to all types of hazards.

**Table 1 - Mandates of Institutions Operate in SEA**

	All-hazards approach	All Natural hazards approach	Conflict and civil war	Remarks
United Nations	X	X	X	
AADMER/AHA		X		
NDMOs	X			
CSOs	X			
Dialogue partners		X		

#### 2.4 How can ASEAN Invest more in DRR?

Unfortunately, the most dominant discourse and validated by its spending allocation of ASEAN intervention is still largely ex-post response. Grounded on the evidence of financial spending and annual agendas, Disaster Risk Reduction is still a step child in AHA-Centre. (See for example AHA Centre Annual Report 2015) "For the AHA Centre, our first priority is providing emergency response at the regional level. Disaster Risk Reduction can be done internally by each ASEAN member states." [8] I therefore believe that AHA can take a more balanced approach for ex-ante and ex-post disaster management intervention.

Figure 1a. Variation in DRM Capacity of ASEAN Member States

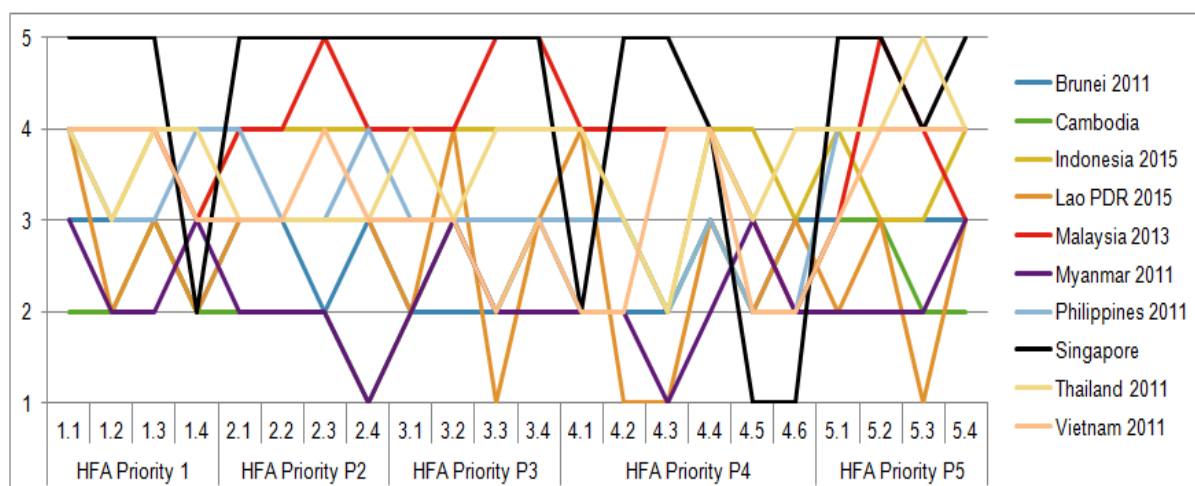
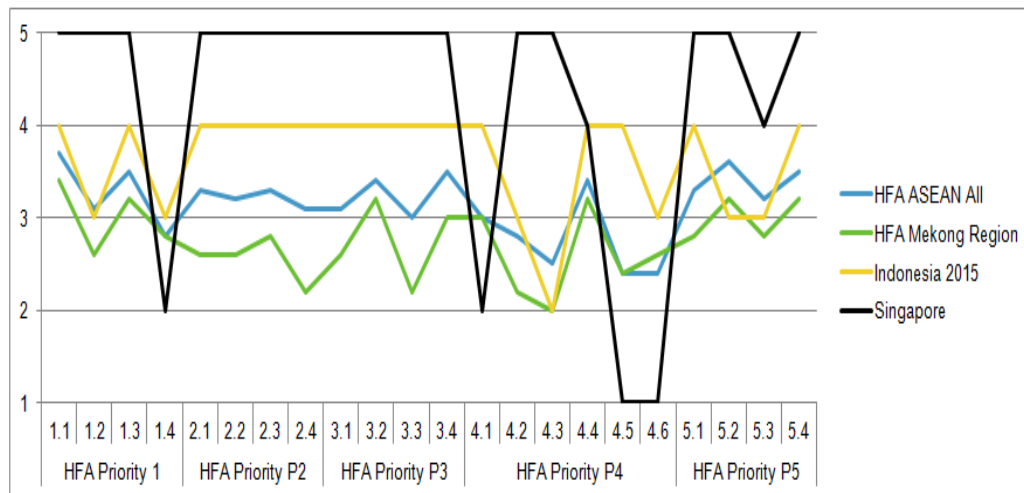


Figure 1b. Selected Variation in DRM Capacity of ASEAN Member States



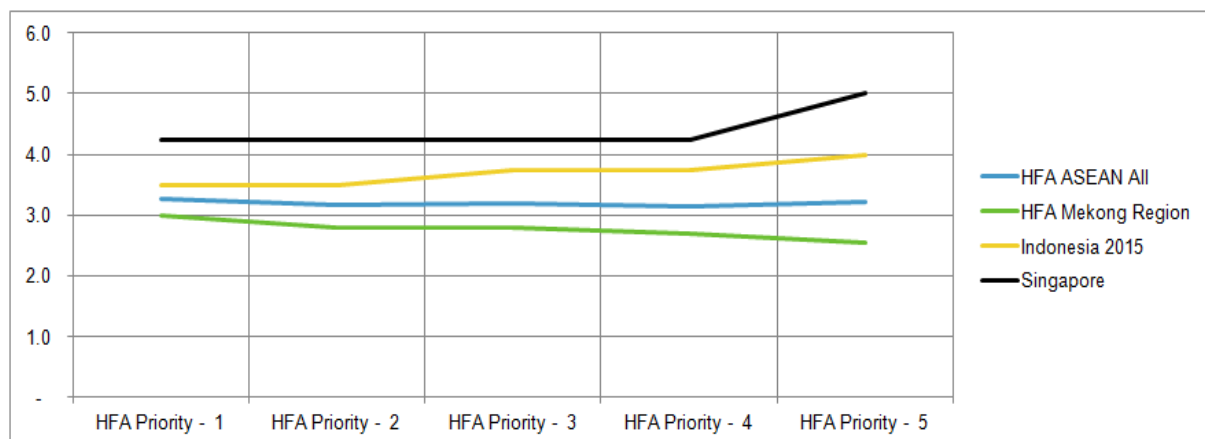
What are ASEAN imperatives for disaster risk reduction for increased resiliency of women, children and senior citizens amongst other vulnerable group?

Should the future financial spending of AHA follows the terrain of disaster risks and vulnerabilities? Or Should it follows the present business model?

AHA can join hands with the UN, CSOs and AHA’s dialogue partners to build stronger commitment to build resilience in more vulnerable states in ASEAN-Mekong region (See Figure 1b) to develop by country level strategy that set the target for 2030 informed by the baseline of losses and damages during 2005-2015.

[I will explain the figures during discussion]

Figure 1C. Variation in DRM Capacity of ASEAN Member States



## 2.5 How can ASEAN realign with global-regional goals?

AADMER can catalyse processes that promote the integration of SFDRR, CCA and SDGs at regional, national and local levels. Therefore, ASEAN HADR system needs to realign with the multiple global goals emanating from SDGs, World Humanitarian Summit, Habitat III, Sendai Framework and Post Paris Agreement as well as relevant international frameworks such as Loss and Damage Assessment as stipulated by UNFCCC COP 2013?

Fortunately, AHA has been mandated to bring value addition to member states on strategic disaster management components such as Pre-disaster management measures: Risk Assessment, Early Warning and Monitoring; And Prevention and Mitigation; as well as Post-disaster management measures namely Preparedness and Response; and Recovery. The question is how such a streamline of multiple global/regional goals?

## 2.6. How to measure the Humanitarian Economy of AADMER Investment?

In the future, we will be asking harder questions: Where the money goes? How much the allocated spending reach the people on the ground?

It is acceptable that in the last 5 year, AHA has largely focus on building the vessel while sailing. So the spending largely focus on setup costs namely strengthening the logistical infrastructure and AHA Secretariat.

But lets build a clear baseline - at this moment, AHA has received fund of at least US\$ 37 million (total during 2011-2016<sup>1</sup>). How much have been reaching the people in need? Haiyan Operation in 2013/2014 plus total operation in 2015 could be only 4.5%. If this trend continues, the question is do we need the present business model of AHA-Center that is more cost effective? In this case, I propose a research agenda on how to build a people-center business model of AADMER financing and spending?

Funders	US\$ Received by AHA	Remarks
Members	2,700,000	Annually US\$ 540,000
Australia	4,564,930	Accumulated
China	8,109,890	Accumulated
EU	3,016,836	Accumulated
Japan	17,710,036	Accumulated
NZ	420,744	Accumulated
Total accumulated	36,522,436	Total 2011-2016
0.0405405405405405		

Source: AHA Report 2015, [published in 2016]

## 2.7 Can OAOR vision be inclusive?

Empowering ASEAN beyond the states as state centric approach not only limit the opportunity of non-state actors to participate but also making OAOR sounds rhetorical. So, lets begin to honestly discuss these terms of One ASEAN, One Response that emanates from the ASEAN Declaration on ONE ASEAN, ONE RESPONSE: “ASEAN Responding to Disasters as One in The Region and Outside The Region inspired by One vision, one identity and one community.”[7]

<sup>1</sup> There is a slightly differences in the math as shown in Annual Report 2015

There is a spirit of expansionism that allow AHA Center to response to disasters outside ASEAN region with good reasons.<sup>2</sup> Such spirit can be justified by universal humanitarian principles but this begs questions why such extension of mandates does not occur for human-made disasters such as conflicts/civil war and large scale emergencies (e.g. transboundary haze) within ASEAN? And Can the extension be (re)directed towards DRR?

Inclusiveness can overall be more efficient. However, what kind of OAOR business models be adopted by ASEAN? How present and future ASEAN DRM system promote the role of volunteers? How to create a business model of OAOR that can promote disaster voluntarism which can probably breed and emerge as praxis for imagined communities of ASEAN?

Present OAOR can be viewed as a system dominated by the perception from the state-centric responders and not from the people at risks. While a solid imagination of ASEAN communities needs to be built on efforts to form horizontal solidarity among ASEAN citizen - in that when one group of community in ASEAN get affected by a calamity, other groups are bounded by a shared humanitarian imperative to response to end or reduce the suffering of affected others?

State centric approaches to risk reduction and adaptation agenda are often subject to political dynamic. This requires not only CSOs<sup>3</sup> and other business actors who may have the influence to create legitimate supports, but also people especially volunteers' mobilisation.

Furthermore, as an 'ASEAN citizen' myself, I question the formation of solidarity of ASEAN people. Should when one get hurt, others must help? Yes, under the spirit of humanitarian and humanity. But is this administratively possible to be done formally when it comes to the cases such as Rohingya crisis?

## **2.8. How AHA move from asymmetric humanitarianism to deeper humanitarianism**

The practical question is why AHA had responded to natural hazard driven disasters but not to other humanitarian crisis? Is this because natural hazards are seen as more neutral and voluntary? At deeper level, one can ask how universal is ASEAN's humanitarian values, mandates and imperative? I would argue that ASEAN's asymmetric humanitarianism is the most criticised area and a source of confusion for most of the stakeholders.

ASEAN seems to be risk averse and play-safe when it comes to the way it exercise its humanitarian response by limiting only to natural hazards and very reluctant to human-made displacements, conflict and civil war as well as violence.

Some have argued about crisis legitimacy of ASEAN when it comes to non-natural hazards. This could be arising from the fact of existential gaps in the mandates of ASEAN.

## **2.9. How to solve AADMER legitimacy problem?**

The good news is that greater legitimacy of AADMER can be seen. At national planning level, hazard prone countries such as the Philippines have been complying with AADMER. For example, The Philippine Disaster Preparedness Plan 2015-2028 clearly mentions that it intends to "regularly inform AHA Centre of its available resources for the regional standby arrangements meant to

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<sup>2</sup> See The Declaration, point 10th (Page 4) <http://asean.org/storage/2016/09/Declaration-on-One-ASEAN-One-Response.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The recognition of CSOs in ASEAN Disaster Management System is formally acknowledged by the AADMER's Article 3 Principles 6 stated that "the Parties, in addressing disaster risks, shall involve, as appropriate, all stakeholders including local communities, non- governmental organisations and private enterprises, utilising, among others, community-based disaster preparedness and early response approaches."

address disaster relief and emergency response”.<sup>4</sup> Such a positive tone has been shaped by the recent positive engagement with AHA-Center during 2013/2014 super typhoons (e.g. Haiyan 2013 and Hagupit 2014).

## Conclusion

ASEAN is facing a great deal of tasks in reducing the rate of regional disaster mortality, the number of affected population and the consistent trend in per capita economic loss as stipulated by the Sendai Framework. Under all scenario, ASEAN Humanitarian and Disaster Management gaps will prevail: Financial resource gaps; human resource gap; institutional gaps (e.g. potential delays in DRR/CCA institutionalisation); Response gaps (lack of sound protocol for humanitarian crisis, struggled to be people-centric system), etc.

I propose some scenario for solution.

**First best solution.** The first ideal solution where ASEAN can reach a more symmetric approach in humanitarian reform as well as disaster risk reduction reform in ASEAN will not likely to occur in the near future. Our prediction suggests that in the future of ASEAN HADR/DRR will continue to diverge. Therefore, there is no first best solution!

**Second best solution.** ASEAN’s humanitarian asymmetric prevails as its humanitarian approach has been largely shaped by its constant avoidance of dealing with hard talks e.g. on issues such as humanitarian crisis resulted from displacement, discrimination, violence and human rights in member states. This assumes that ASEAN will likely to be able to take non-indifference approach but its non-interventionism approach will prevail [1]

This will continue to be the case given the “ASEAN Way”. In my view, the “ASEAN Way” has emerged as a discourse that allowed *business as usual* in humanitarian system in the region. Therefore humanitarian reform agendas implementation in SEA cannot be governed by regionalism but multilateralism [or at best, co-governed by both with multilateralism. This is partly due to the fact that UN still have much more capacity to play roles.

While endogenous financing for more DRR focus will be limited, recent experience have shown greater supports from its dialogue partners especially Japan<sup>5</sup> and China as well as Australia and EU. Volatility in HADR financing will prevail but overall there is a positive trend in the future especially under the scenario and vision of the world in 2030.

As a result, “second best” can be achieved where ASEAN will can still improve its focus on disaster monitoring, early warning and stronger response systems and the other post-disaster interventions while gradually investing in DRR more seriously.

**Third best** is AHA Center and AADMER to continue with the current trends. This assumes that value addition of AHA Center largely build on the existing gaps within the member states especially those in Mekong Region of ASEAN. The problem is that the way it is responding to risks in ASEAN will remain status quo.

## Reference

[1] One Humanity: Shared Responsibility - Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit - United Nations General Assembly A/70/709. See Page 20/62 point 72.

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<sup>4</sup> NDRRMC 2015. National Disaster Preparedness Plan 2015-2028. Volume 1. Page 16-19.

<sup>5</sup> See Thuzar, M. 200x, Disaster Management and Humanitarian Action in Southeast Asia: Opportunities for an ASEAN-Japan Coordinated Approach. In?

[2] Amador III, JS (2009) Community Building at the Time of Nargis: The ASEAN Response. Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, 28(4) 3-22.

[3] Pennisi di Floristella, Angela 2015: Building the ASEAN Center for Humanitarian Assistance and Emergency Response - Is ASEAN learning from the experience of the European Civil Protection Mechanism? KFG Working Paper Series, No. 62, December 2014, Kolleg-Forscherguppe (KFG) "The Transformative Power of Europe" Freie Universität Berlin

[4] I want to clarify about my perspective on utopia is often in positive sense. I in particular adopt the idea based on the Real Utopias Project - which to me it is important to gather ideas of radical social change - in this context ASEAN disaster management communities. see <https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/RealUtopias.htm>

[5] Vu Van Tu 2013 "Forward" AHA CENTRE Annual Report 2013

[6] See Statement from Said Faisal, cited from Habibie Center Report, Talking ASEAN "Disaster Relief in ASEAN: Sharing Experiences and Best Practices. Tuesday, 17 June 2014.

[7] ASEAN Declaration on the Declaration of ONE ASEAN, ONE RESPONSE: ASEAN Responding to Disasters as One in The Region and Outside The Region - 28th ASEAN Summit in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 6 September 2016

[8] Thuzar, M. 2015, Disaster Management and Humanitarian Action in Southeast Asia: Opportunities for an ASEAN-Japan Coordinated Approach in Sukma and Soeya Eds. Beyond 2015: ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership for Democracy, Peace, and Prosperity in Southeast Asia.