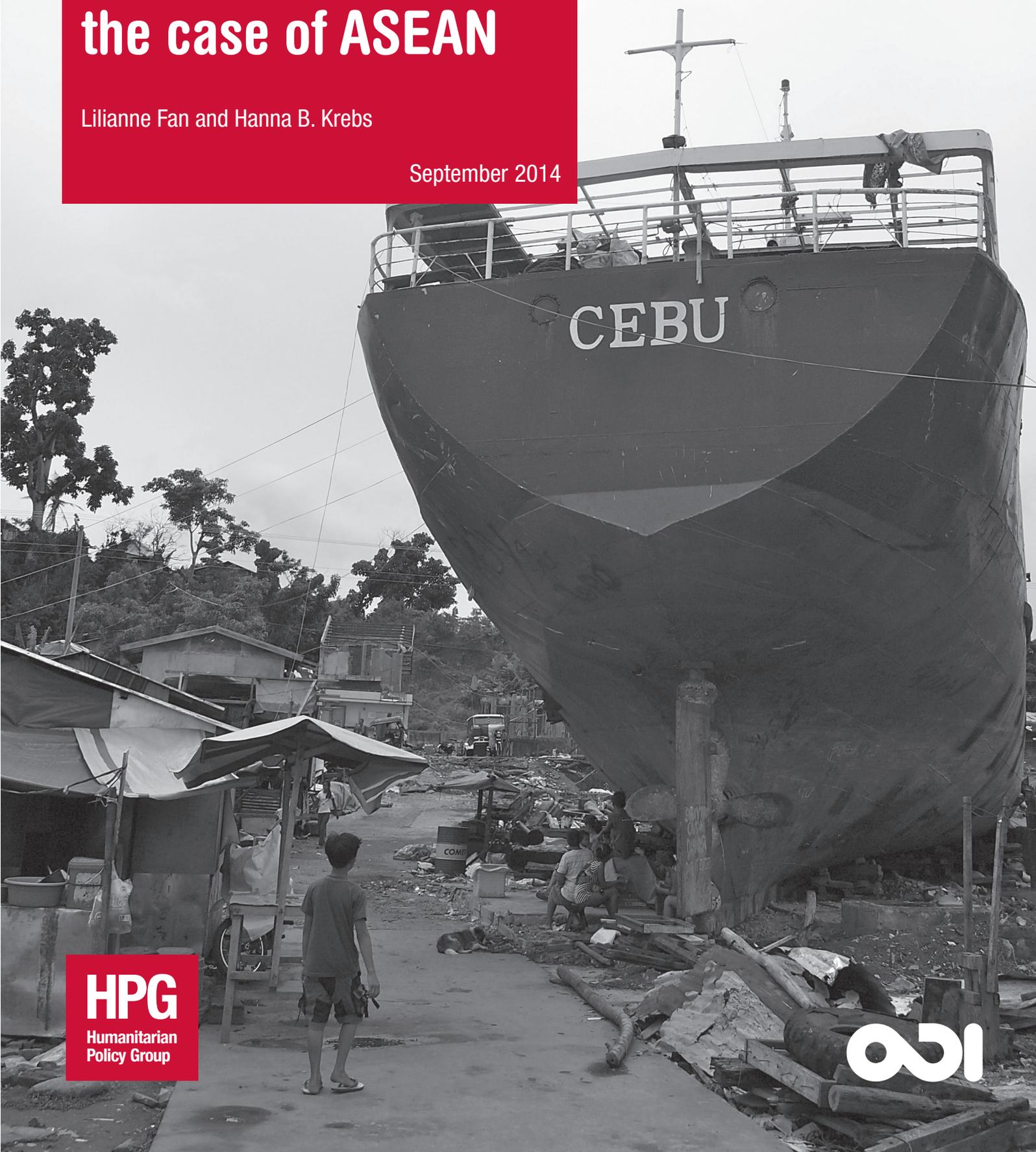


HPG Working Paper

Regional organisations and humanitarian action: the case of ASEAN

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1 Introduction

Since its inception in 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has pursued a comprehensive approach to regional security, encompassing political, military, economic and social spheres. However, although disasters and crises, including environmental, health and financial crises, were also regarded as security issues, and despite established regional agreements on natural disaster management dating as far back as 1971, disasters were handled primarily at the national level, and ASEAN's work in this area largely involved convening expert meetings.

This began to change in the 1990s with the end of the Cold War, and in particular after the Asian financial crisis in 1997, when ASEAN began to engage more proactively on issues regarded as 'non-traditional' security threats. These included natural disasters, environmental hazards, the impact of financial crises, epidemics, transnational crime and, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, terrorism (Sukma, 2010). Emergencies and crises, including massive forest fires in Indonesia in 1997, the SARS epidemic in 2003 and the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, generated greater appreciation within ASEAN of the need for regional solutions to regional problems, as well as foreshadowing the myriad problems that would emerge as sovereign states, regional organisations and supranational institutions such as the United Nations attempted to negotiate their relationships with one another.

Recurrent crises in South-east Asia joined with a global move towards 'regionalism' – the devolution of multilateral responsibilities to regional organisations – the growing adoption by regional organisations of international norms and frameworks such as the Hyogo Framework for Action and the rise of South–South cooperation to lead to the creation of institutions, policies and interventions which have enabled ASEAN to become a recognised leader in regional humanitarian action. Generally, the UN has long recognised the role of regional organisations in the maintenance of peace, security and stability in their regions, dedicating parts of Chapter VIII (52–54) of its Charter to 'regional

arrangements or agencies'. Such understanding has allowed for regional organisations to conduct humanitarian interventions in conflicts, as was the case with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Sierra Leone in the late 1990s (Paliwal, 2010: 210). With regard to the role of regional organisations in natural disasters, the Hyogo Framework on disaster risk reduction (DRR) explicitly engages regional capacities and mechanisms (HFA, 2005). The practical involvement of regional organisations in humanitarian affairs, however, is a relatively recent phenomenon, though it has grown over the past two decades. Regional organisations have begun to establish humanitarian mandates and dedicated humanitarian capabilities only over the past ten years.

ASEAN, founded with the primary aim of tempering the influence of Communism, preventing interstate conflicts in the region and promoting regional security, is today often cited as a model for regional organisations engaged in humanitarian affairs. The ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) was the first legally binding agreement on disaster risk reduction in the world, and ASEAN played a historic role in facilitating and coordinating the response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008. The Association established the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (the AHA Centre) in 2011, cementing its institutional engagement in humanitarian action.

However, many questions remain about ASEAN's humanitarian role, ranging from the practical to the more theoretical. What prompted the development of humanitarian action within ASEAN, and how has its approach to crisis preparedness and response evolved? How does ASEAN conceptualise humanitarian action? How do ASEAN's principles of non-interference and consensus – as well as notions of development and regional security – apply to its humanitarian efforts? How has ASEAN actually responded to humanitarian crises, and how were these responses perceived by other actors? These are some of the questions asked in this paper.

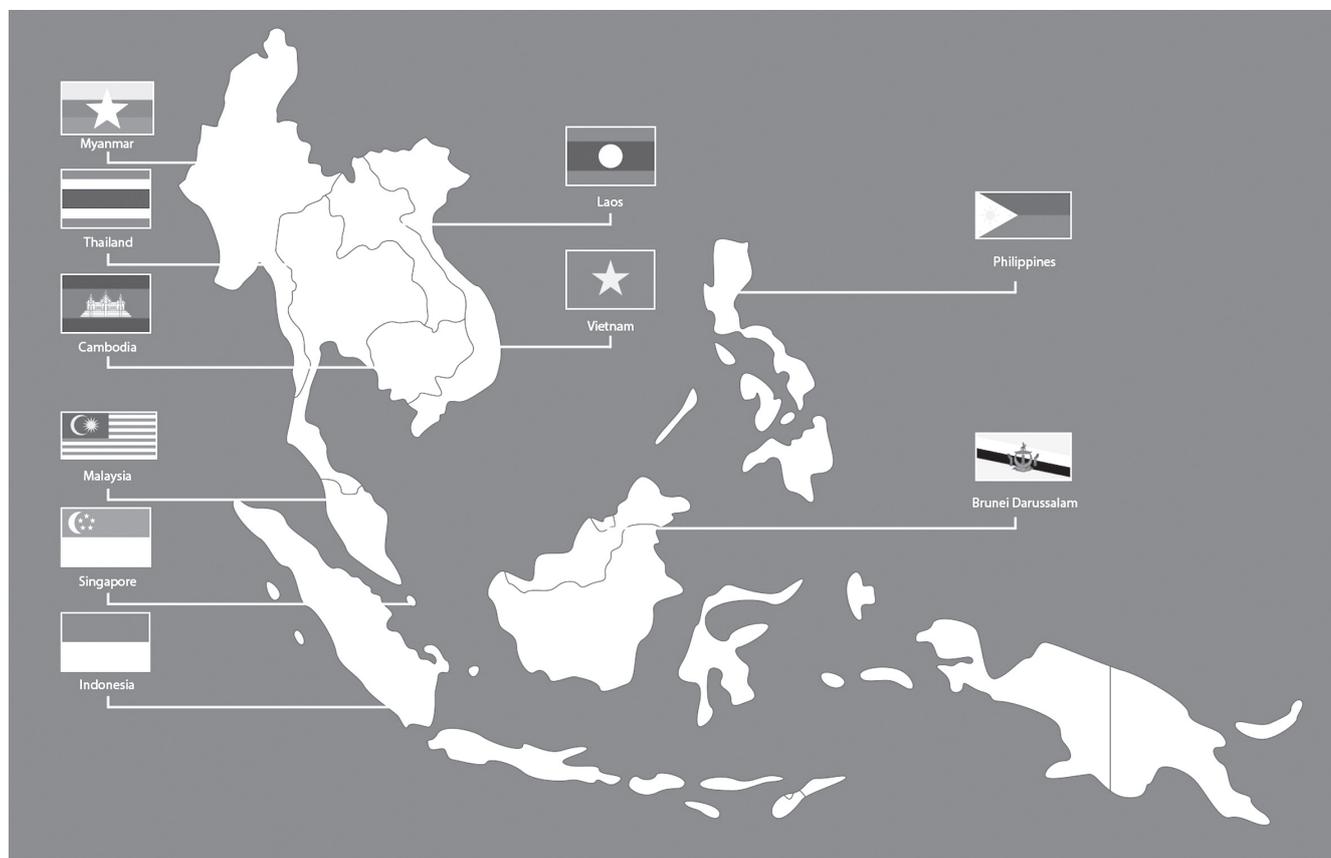
1.1 Methodology

In addition to a comprehensive literature review, field research was conducted in four countries: Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines. The researchers met key individuals from ASEAN, including representatives of the AHA Centre and ASEAN Secretariat, as well as representatives of ASEAN member states, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, academics, journalists and others. Semi-structured interviews were conducted alongside

a closed-door roundtable with ASEAN and other humanitarian actors from the region, co-organised with the Centre for Strategic International Studies (CSIS) in Jakarta in March 2014.

Following this introduction, Section 2 of the paper provides an overview and background for ASEAN's humanitarian institutional framework, institutions and mandate. Sections 3 and 4 take a closer look at how ASEAN responded to humanitarian crises in two countries, Myanmar and the Philippines. Section 5 concludes by synthesising the findings from the study and offering some recommendations on ways forward.

Figure 1: Map of the ASEAN region and member states



Source: EAS Pocket Guide to ASEAN

2 ASEAN's approach to humanitarian assistance

ASEAN was founded by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand on 8 August 1967. Since then, its membership has expanded to include Brunei (1984), Vietnam (1995), Myanmar (1997), Laos (1997) and Cambodia (1999). According to ASEAN's founding document, the Bangkok Declaration, the organisation's main objectives are maintaining regional stability and peace, promoting economic growth and regional integration and protecting social and cultural development. More recently, ASEAN has also played a growing role in responses to humanitarian crises in South-east Asia. This should come as no surprise considering the frequency and severity of disasters in Asia: from 2001 to 2011, the region has experienced a large proportion of the world's natural disasters, affecting millions of people a year (Guha-Sapir et al., 2012: 29). In its bid to play a leading role in regional disaster management efforts, ASEAN has adopted a comprehensive disaster management approach that seeks to expand its disaster policy beyond emergency response and relief to encompass DRR, preparedness, prevention and mitigation. Natural disasters are seen as a developmental as well as a humanitarian concern. Disasters are also conceptualised as a security challenge, alongside issues such as maritime security, infectious diseases and climate change (ADMM-Plus, 2011).

ASEAN's focus on natural disasters partly reflects the region's propensity for them. But it is also a function of the organisation's history and culture. Concerns about domestic stability in ASEAN's formative years and its overriding preoccupation with security have resulted in a doctrine of state sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs: the so-called 'ASEAN Way', a 'decision-making process that favours a high degree of consultation and consensus' and a 'process of regional cooperation and interaction based on discreteness, informality, consensus-building and non-confrontational bargaining styles' (Acharya, 2001: 64). Enshrined in the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia, these norms dominate much of the Association's modus operandi, and mean that it has no mandate or dedicated

mechanism to address conflict-induced crises. The preoccupation with sovereignty and non-interference also leaves ASEAN's members reluctant to delegate even small amounts of power to regional institutions, and makes ASEAN's stance towards disaster relief particularly state-centric, marginalising the role of civil society organisations (Leviter, 2010). This state-centric approach is reflected in the prominent part the region's militaries play in disaster response. Essentially, ASEAN is intended as a regional platform for strengthening the region – but only as long as it does not violate the national interests of individual members.

2.1 ASEAN's humanitarian institutions

Although ASEAN does support humanitarian action, it is not considered a donor institution in a traditional sense as it does not provide humanitarian assistance to communities outside of the region. Even within the region, ASEAN rarely provides significant amounts of financial assistance; instead, it focuses primarily on technical assistance, diplomatic engagement, volunteer programmes and other 'soft' and non-monetary forms of engagement.

Although regional agreements on disaster management and institutional mechanisms in the form of expert groups have existed since the 1970s, they were strengthened in 2003 with the creation of the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM), the main platform for ASEAN's policy-making on humanitarian issues. The Committee, which meets annually, is governed by the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management (AMMDM), and consists of the heads of the ten member states' national disaster management organisations. The ACDM is responsible for the overall coordination and implementation of regional activities on disaster management, and acts as the primary forum for exchanges on humanitarian issues with external actors, including outside governments, the UN,

the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the Pacific Disaster Centre (PDC) and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) (Labbé, Fan and Kemp, 2013: 11).

The policy framework establishing ASEAN's humanitarian mandate is embodied in the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER), conceived in the wake of the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 (Sawada and Zen, 2014: 18; HFP, 2014: 8). The AADMER was the world's first legally binding instrument on disaster response, and the first multilateral agreement committing a region to the Hyogo Framework.¹ It was ratified by all ten ASEAN member states and entered into force in 2009 as a framework for reducing disaster losses in the region and supporting member states in disaster mitigation, prevention, preparedness and response through closer regional cooperation. Related mechanisms involved in ASEAN disaster management are expected to synchronise their policies using AADMER as a common platform to safeguard the principles of 'ASEAN Centrality' – the concept of an ASEAN-led regional architecture in which the region's relations with the wider world are conducted with the interests of the ASEAN community in mind.²

The AADMER represents a policy agreement to support ongoing and planned national initiatives, programmes and capacities; although programmes are developed at the regional level, the primary responsibility for implementing the AADMER remains with member states. The agreement works within a regional framework targeting all aspects of DRR and disaster risk management (DRM), including risk identification, monitoring and assessment, prevention and mitigation, disaster preparedness, emergency response, control of assistance, rehabilitation, technical cooperation, scientific research and institutional arrangements such as simplified customs and immigration procedures (HFP, 2014: 8).

The AADMER also provides for the establishment of an ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (the AHA Centre) to undertake operational coordination of activities. Established in 2011 in Jakarta as an operational engine for the AADMER's implementation and with the ACDM as its governing

board, the AHA Centre is aimed at facilitating 'co-operation and coordination among the Parties, and with relevant United Nations and international organisations, in promoting regional collaboration' (ASEAN, 2005). Although supported by equal annual contributions by member states of \$30,000 each, for a total of \$300,000 annually from the ten member states, the majority of its funding comes from other bodies, including the Australian, Japanese, New Zealand and US governments and the European Union (EU). The Centre works on the basis that the affected party will act first to manage and respond to a disaster. In the event that an affected country's national capacity proves insufficient to cope with the disaster by itself, it may ask the AHA Centre to facilitate requests for outside assistance.

To enhance leadership on humanitarian response, the Centre launched the AHA Centre Executive (ACE) Programme in January 2014 to provide capacity-building training over six months for prospective ASEAN leaders in disaster management. It is aimed at strengthening the disaster management capability of ASEAN as a whole, and of member states' national disaster management agencies. Since then, ASEAN and the PDC have co-developed a Disaster Monitoring and Response System (DMRS), which became operational in January 2013. Complemented by other tools, such as the ASEAN Disaster Information Network (ADInet), the DMRS provides monitoring services and disaster information to national disaster management organisations (OCHA, 2013: 17).

The introduction of these systems was part of the 'Risk Assessment, Monitoring and Early Warning' component of Phase 1 of the AADMER Work Programme 2010–2015³ (ASEAN, 2013: 17). The Programme is conducting a series of regional projects, activities and workshops designed to institutionalise the AADMER. Phase 1 (2010–2012) also saw the promotion of civil–military coordination in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief through increased joint exercises, as well as the finalisation and institutionalisation of the *ASEAN Standard Operating Procedures for Regional Standby Agreements and Coordination of Joint Disaster Relief and Emergency Response Operations* (SASOP) (ASEAN, 2013: 23). The SASOP is intended to facilitate regional

1 Although the agreement is legally binding, it has no punitive measures.

2 ACDM members are also the AADMER National Focal Points.

3 Its four strategic components are risk assessment, early warning and monitoring; preparedness and response, prevention and mitigation; and recovery.

cooperation through the establishment of joint operations in providing relief to disaster-affected areas in line with the AADMER. Signed by member states in 2005, it was used for the first time in response to Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and entered into force in 2009.

Phase 1 also saw the establishment of the AADMER Partnership Group (APG), a partnership framework between ASEAN and civil society organisations. Between 2012 and 2013, the APG reached out to a total of 194 civil society organisations to promote understanding of AADMER at regional, national and subnational levels. The APG's policy research was used to review Cambodia's National Emergency Management Policy to accommodate the provisions of the AADMER. In the Philippines, a series of multi-stakeholder consultations using the AADMER as a starting point have facilitated the selection of four civil society representatives to the NDRRMC.

Alongside the ACDM and AADMER-related instruments, a number of platforms complement ASEAN's role in regional disaster response. The annual ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which assembles foreign ministers and other senior officials from the Asia-Pacific region, including the United States, provides an opportunity for dialogue on regional security issues (Kurlantzick, 2012: 6). ASEAN Plus Three (APT), linking ASEAN with China, Japan and South Korea, serves as a regular platform for cooperation between South-east and East Asia. Initially, meetings were primarily concerned with economic and financial matters,⁴ but their focus has increasingly shifted to issues such as sustainable development, the environment and disaster management.

The East Asia Summit (EAS) supplies the region with an annual high-level forum for exchange on similar

4 The APT has been credited with the success of the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI), which provided emergency liquidity through multilateral currency swap arrangements following the Asian financial crisis of 1997.

issues. First convened between ASEAN member states and Australia, India and New Zealand in 2005, it has since expanded to include the United States and Russia. It is also notable that the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting has grown to include eight non-ASEAN countries, Australia, China, Japan, India, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea and the United States. This forum, known as 'ADMM-Plus', acts as a platform for collaboration on transnational issues, including humanitarian and disaster response, military medicine, counter-terrorism and peacekeeping. In June 2013, a disaster response and military medicine exercise was mounted involving more than 2,000 troops from 18 member states in the ADMM-Plus. At the April 2014 Shangri-La Dialogue, an annual inter-governmental security forum attended by government representatives of 28 Asia-Pacific states, Singapore proposed a regional humanitarian and disaster response coordinating centre under the ADMM framework. If established, the centre could complement the AHA Centre, with a focus on strengthening regional civil-military capacity and cooperation in areas such as search and rescue.

Regional integration in South-east Asia, although consistently caught between preserving state autonomy on the one hand and fostering economic growth and maintaining security on the other (Wright, 2013: 1), has been steadily growing. Against this backdrop, ASEAN's role in responding to natural disasters in the region is becoming both more regular and more recognised. ASEAN has been involved in the response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, Typhoon Ketsana in 2010, Typhoon Bopha in Mindanao in 2012 and Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Regional policy debate and institutionalisation through instruments such as the ADMM indicate that ASEAN states are willing to commit to their sovereign obligation to provide for their people, and to pursue international assistance in developing their national and regional capacities to that end. However, the region's characteristic preoccupation with state sovereignty is an impediment to this process.

3 ASEAN in Myanmar: from Cyclone Nargis to the Rakhine State crisis

Of all recent emergencies in South-east Asia, ASEAN's humanitarian role has been most visible in Myanmar. Following Cyclone Nargis in 2008, ASEAN succeeded in breaking the deadlock between the government of Myanmar and the international community, successfully brokered humanitarian access to affected areas and oversaw the recovery effort for a period of two years. A few years later, however, and, ironically, after the beginning of Myanmar's historic reform process in 2011, ASEAN has chosen not to play a significant role in responding to the violence-induced humanitarian crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State. Both Cyclone Nargis and the crisis in Rakhine are addressed in this section.

3.1 Cyclone Nargis

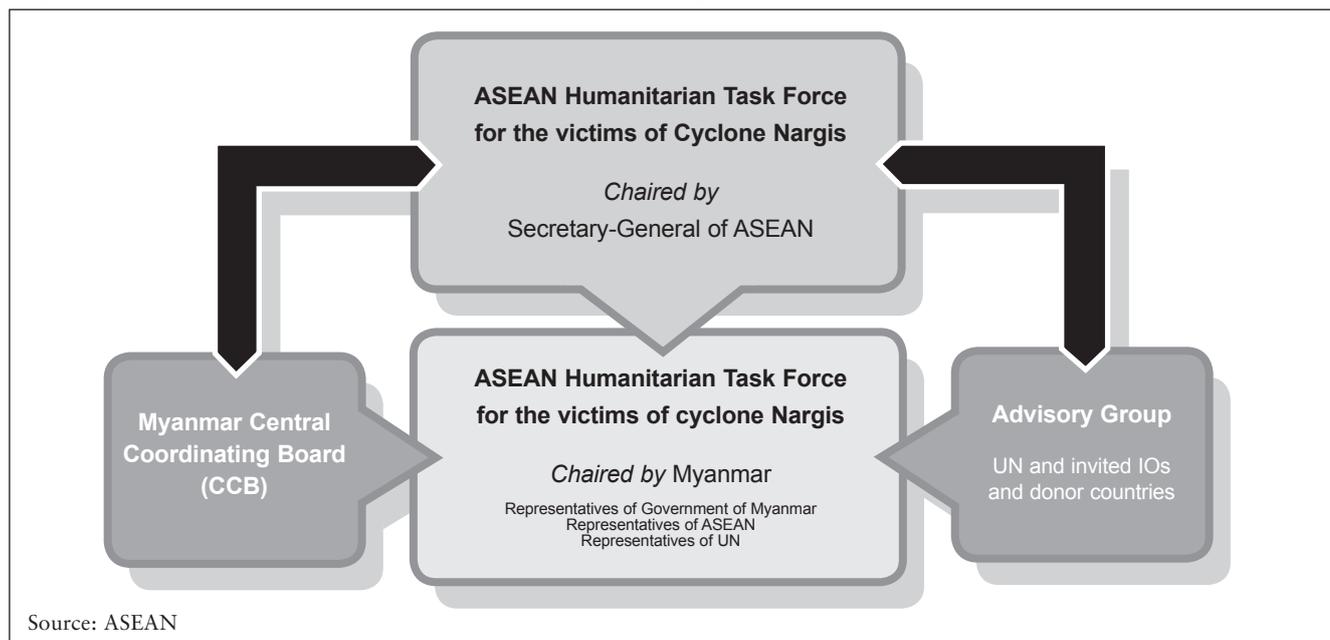
Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar in early May 2008, causing widespread destruction and devastation across the Ayeyarwady Delta. The cyclone, the deadliest ever recorded in the North Indian Ocean Basin and the second-deadliest named tropical storm of all time, left more than 140,000 people dead or missing and more than 800,000 homeless. An estimated 2.4m people – one-third of the entire population of Ayeyarwady and Yangon divisions – were affected by the disaster. The cyclone devastated fishing and farming communities, destroying around 700,000 homes and causing severe damage to critical infrastructure, including the destruction of three-quarters of the hospitals and clinics in the area. Damage was estimated at \$4 billion, with total economic losses amounting to approximately 2.7% of Myanmar's projected gross domestic product (GDP) in 2008 (TCG, 2008a).

In the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, the government of Myanmar was reluctant to allow access to international assistance and aid workers. While some bilateral aid, including from neighbouring countries, was accepted, the majority of international

humanitarian workers were prevented from entering the country. Pressure mounted from the international community, with some diplomats calling for life-saving assistance to be delivered without the consent of the government. As evidence of the scale of devastation and needs started to trickle out, expectations grew for ASEAN, as the leading regional organisation, to become involved. Many hoped that its behind-the-scenes, non-confrontational style could help to break the impasse which had developed between the government and the international community.

ASEAN's engagement began in the days immediately following the disaster. Two days after the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team (UNDAC) was assembled in Bangkok, ASEAN's then secretary-general, Dr Surin Pitsuwan, called on all ASEAN member states to provide urgent relief assistance to victims of the cyclone (Renshaw, 2014: 181). To that end, an emergency fund was created with an initial donation of \$100,000 from the Nippon Foundation (Amador, 2009: 8). The ACDM was convened for the second time, and the AADMER was invoked for the first time in its history. After obtaining the agreement of the government, an ASEAN Emergency Rapid Assessment Team (ERAT) comprising government officials, disaster management experts and NGOs from ASEAN member countries – the first ever for ASEAN – was deployed from 9–18 May 2008. ASEAN's collective response to Nargis was reinforced on 19 May when an emergency meeting of foreign ministers in Singapore decided on an ASEAN-led coordinating mechanism. This agreement was based on the ERAT recommendation that a humanitarian coalition be formed to 'facilitate effective distribution and utilisation of assistance from the international community, including the expeditious and effective deployment of relief workers, especially health and medical personnel' (ASEAN, 2010a: 20). Over the following week, the ASEAN Secretariat, in

Figure 2: Structure of the ASEAN-led coordinating mechanism



consultation with experts from member states, worked on designing an appropriate mechanism, drawing on Indonesia’s experience in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami recovery effort.

A two-tiered structure with a two-year mandate, the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force (AHTF), was agreed. The AHTF was a diplomatic and policy-level body comprising 22 members: two from the ASEAN Secretariat, including the secretary-general as chair, and two officials (one senior diplomat and one technical expert) from each of the ten ASEAN countries. Following the first AHTF meeting on 25 May, the second institution, the Yangon-based Tripartite Core Group (TCG), was established, consisting of nine representatives, three each from ASEAN, the Myanmar government and the United Nations. The TCG was chaired by Myanmar’s deputy foreign minister; ASEAN was represented by an ambassador from an ASEAN country based in Yangon and the ASEAN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Post-Nargis Recovery. The UN system was represented by the Humanitarian/Resident Coordinator and the head of a UN agency on a rotating basis. The TCG is recognised as having achieved early successes. For instance, it facilitated access for humanitarian workers through the granting of nearly 4,000 visas during the emergency relief period. Aid workers’ requests for visas, visa extensions and permits to travel were channelled through the TCG’s fast-track process. Other procedural and bureaucratic issues including exchange rate or tax problems were also addressed.

ASEAN also worked with the government of Myanmar and international partners to establish benchmarks to monitor progress in the recovery effort. The Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) was launched on 8 June 2008, involving staff and volunteers from the government of Myanmar, ASEAN, the UN, international and local NGOs, the Myanmar Red Cross and the private sector. The Asian Development Bank and the World Bank also took part.⁵ Divided into 32 teams, more than 300 people spent ten days assessing cyclone-affected areas that had previously been effectively closed to foreigners. The results of the needs assessment were published in July 2008, and the report became the main official document on the effects of the cyclone.

To guide recovery efforts, the TCG also facilitated the formulation of the Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan (PONREPP), which set out a three-year recovery strategy running from 2009 to 2011. To share information and review progress, the TCG set up three coordinating mechanisms consisting of ASEAN and UN staff: the Recovery Forum, which focused on strategy and policy; the Recovery Coordination Center, which acted as a technical coordinating unit at the operational level; and the Recovery Hub at field level (ASEAN, 2010a: 34). As these new mechanisms were established the UN cluster coordination system was gradually phased out.

⁵ The World Bank provided an \$850,000 grant, sourced from the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, to the ASEAN Secretariat for use during the relief operation (Amador, 2009: 9).

According to interviews with actors involved in the response to Nargis, ASEAN's engagement was critical in building a bridge between the government of Myanmar and the international community to facilitate humanitarian assistance. This engagement helped to open up an unprecedented level of humanitarian space in the country, and allowed for the establishment of a more permanent humanitarian presence. Following a visit to cyclone-affected areas in late July 2008, then UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Sir John Holmes remarked that 'Nargis showed us a new model of humanitarian partnership, adding the special position and capabilities of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to those of the United Nations in working effectively with the government'. ASEAN leadership, Holmes continued, was 'vital in building trust with the government and saving lives' (Creac'h and Fan, 2008). Local organisations also felt that ASEAN had played a much-needed role in opening up humanitarian space and establishing platforms through which local groups could interact with both the government and the international community (Trócaire, 2011; Fan, 2013).

Nargis was the first humanitarian mission in which ASEAN played a coordinating role, and set an important precedent for the organisation's role in crisis management in the region, as well as providing a test for its relevance. As Pitsuwan, ASEAN's secretary-general at the time, put it, Cyclone Nargis had 'baptised' ASEAN (Pitsuwan, 2012). Certainly, the crisis occurred at a defining moment, as member states had adopted the first ASEAN Charter only months earlier. Nargis thus provided ASEAN with an opportunity to make progress on the Charter's commitment to 'place the well-being, livelihood and welfare of the peoples at the centre of the ASEAN community-building process' (ASEAN, 2007).

3.2 The crisis in Rakhine State

In the Nargis response ASEAN successfully acted as an intermediary between Myanmar and the international community, and its focus on humanitarian aid effectively depoliticised its engagement, allowing it to obtain consent to establish the AHTF (Roberts in Sakai et al., 2014: 94). Four years later, however, ASEAN found itself unable to respond to another major humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. In June and October 2012, two waves of violence between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine State left 167 people dead, more

than 140,000 displaced and thousands of homes and businesses damaged or destroyed. While both communities were affected by the violence, an estimated 95% of the displaced were Muslims.

Even before the 2012 violence, Rakhine State was Myanmar's least developed region, with high rates of malnutrition, infant and maternal mortality and food insecurity. It is also the poorest state in the country (McCarty, 2014). The displacement crisis and deteriorating humanitarian conditions compounded an already protracted statelessness problem faced by Rakhine's largest Muslim ethnicity, the Rohingya.⁶ Not recognised under the 1982 Citizenship Law, the Rohingya have for decades been subject to systematic discrimination, including limitations on freedom of movement, rights to family life and access to health and education services. Such conditions have forced many Rohingya to leave Rakhine State and seek refugee abroad, resulting in large numbers of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand and Saudi Arabia.

Within Myanmar, conditions in the IDP camps in Rakhine State have become increasingly dire, with overcrowding, lack of water and sanitation, inadequate shelter and inadequate health services. Access to communities in isolated villages in Northern Rakhine State, where the majority of Rohingya live, has also become more difficult. Providing assistance to the Rohingya is especially challenging, as aid workers, long perceived as being biased towards Muslims, face difficulties in securing access to some areas, and are targets of intimidation by local communities. Reconciliation efforts have been piecemeal and unsuccessful: distrust runs high between communities, and there is deep hostility towards Muslim countries and organisations that have offered assistance. For instance, Buddhist demonstrators vehemently opposed attempts by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to set up an office in Myanmar and commence operations in Rakhine. Killings, torture, sexual violence and other human rights violations against Rohingya continue to be reported, while systematically discriminatory policies, such as a two-child limit, marriage restrictions and enforced birth control, remain in place (OHCHR, 2014; Fortify Rights, 2014).

In February 2014, the Myanmar government ordered Médecins Sans Frontières-Holland (MSF-H) to halt

6 The term 'Rohingya' is not recognised by the Myanmar government, which designates the population as 'Bengali'.

its activities in Rakhine, after the medical agency had reported that it had treated 22 patients affected by violence in Du Char Yar Tan village in January, where up to 40 people were reportedly killed. The government denied that the killings took place, and the state authorities and local Rakhine politicians accused MSF of spreading false information. The suspension of MSF, which had worked in Myanmar for 22 years and was the largest medical aid provider in Rakhine, left tens of thousands without access to life-saving health services, a gap that no agency, government or international agency had the capacity to fill (Fan, 2014).

Several ASEAN countries have responded to the Rakhine crisis, but they have done so bilaterally rather than through ASEAN mechanisms and institutions. In August 2012, for example, then President of Indonesia Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono wrote to Myanmar President Thein Sein asking for Myanmar to allow observers to travel to the affected area. He also appointed Jusuf Kalla, the former vice-president and head of the Indonesian Red Cross, as Indonesia's Special Envoy for the Rohingya (Jakarta Globe, 2012) making it one of the first regional humanitarian agencies to respond to the crisis in Rakhine State. In January 2013, Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa announced a pledge of \$1m for humanitarian assistance ahead of a visit to Rakhine State in January 2013, at the invitation of the government of Myanmar, and a state visit by Yudhoyono in April 2013 (Antara News, 2013). The Malaysian government also supported several Malaysian relief organisations in their response in Rakhine, and has been involved for many years in discussions with Myanmar over Rohingya refugees.

While the situation has drawn outrage from the international community, ASEAN's direct engagement in the humanitarian crisis in Rakhine has been all but non-existent; where ASEAN members have raised concerns on the situation they have chosen not to do so through the regional organisation but bilaterally. The contrast between ASEAN's involvement after Cyclone Nargis and its lack of any direct engagement in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State could hardly be more stark. This underlines the extent to which, for ASEAN, as in other regions around the world, domestic and political considerations are

placed before humanitarian concerns. That said, some heads of state, ministers and senior diplomats have voiced concern and called for reconciliation and humanitarian assistance. Pitsuwan, for example, made several statements calling for Myanmar to allow an ASEAN role in the months following the violence. In general, however, it is clear that ASEAN member states have not taken advantage of ASEAN's growing humanitarian institutions and role.

Interviewees consulted in the course of this study had different views on the role that ASEAN should or could play in Rakhine. Some felt the need for a stronger role for ASEAN in putting pressure on the Myanmar government to allow humanitarian access, with some suggesting that a TCG-type mechanism would be the best approach in Rakhine. Some local Muslim organisations felt that ASEAN should play less of a humanitarian role and more of a diplomatic one in encouraging Myanmar to abide by international norms and standards on the protection of minorities and religious freedom. Another suggestion was for ASEAN to work more closely with civil society within Myanmar and across the ASEAN region. Others felt, however, that ASEAN's newly established humanitarian role, with its focus on disasters, should be protected and could be undermined if the organisation overtly mixed humanitarian concerns with diplomatic activities. A more innovative suggestion was for ASEAN to engage with the private sector in Myanmar to highlight the economic risks that the country could face if the situation in Rakhine deteriorated further, or if violence escalated. Ultimately, however, all stakeholders recognised the sensitivity of the situation and conceded that ASEAN's avenues for effective engagement on Rakhine remained limited (Zyck, Fan and Price, 2014).

With ASEAN's mandate limited to addressing natural disasters, it faces serious constraints in addressing emergencies of a political nature, such as the Rakhine crisis. ASEAN's remarkable role during Cyclone Nargis has often been credited with inducing Myanmar's historic and ambitious reform process, which began in 2011 when U Thein Sein began his term as the country's first civilian president in decades. However, problems in Rakhine State have hindered this progress, and ASEAN as a regional organisation remains very constrained in its capacity to intervene.

4 ASEAN and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines

4.1 The impact of Typhoon Haiyan

Typhoon Haiyan, locally known as Typhoon Yolanda, struck the central Philippines with full force on 8 November 2013. Devastating communities across six provinces in the central Philippines and affecting a total of 14m people, the typhoon left at least 8,000 dead and over four million homeless. As one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, the Philippines sees an average of 20 typhoons per year, yet few had foreseen the full scale of what became the strongest storm ever recorded at landfall anywhere in the world. The sheer ferocity of the typhoon quickly created a humanitarian crisis, which was compounded by damaged infrastructure, insecurity and the remoteness of many affected areas. Aid workers faced severe access challenges in disaster-affected zones.

In the months since the disaster, encouraging progress had been made largely due to the remarkable resilience of the survivors and the strong international and government-led response in the emergency phase. Eight months after the storm, 4.5m Filipinos had received food assistance, and more than 100,000 people had been provided with short-term employment and livelihood support.⁷

4.2 ASEAN's involvement in the Haiyan response

ASEAN member states all responded to the humanitarian needs created by Haiyan. Apart from monetary contributions, some provided bilateral military aid and several deployed military assets to help distribute emergency supplies to affected areas. This assistance was largely provided on a bilateral basis rather than through a regional body such as ASEAN, although several regional news agencies explicitly mentioned ASEAN when reporting on bilateral aid. Assessing the extent to which member

states' aid efforts were motivated by ASEAN is extremely difficult, as ASEAN's behind-the-scenes role is not always visible. Despite its limited visibility, one major NGO deemed the ASEAN military component to have worked efficiently, showing good cooperation between the ASEAN nations.

From its base in Jakarta, the AHA Centre monitored the movements of the typhoon before it made landfall, and disseminated information to actors in the region through flash updates and social media, using the recently deployed Disaster Management Response System. The day before the disaster, the Disaster Emergency Logistic System for ASEAN (DELSA) was activated in Malaysia. The AHA Centre also dispatched a four-strong ERAT to Manila, consisting of an AHA Centre Field Team Leader, two ERAT members from Brunei and a representative from an international NGO within the APG, to monitor the storm and coordinate and discuss possible relief support with the Philippine government's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC).⁸ An ICT specialist was sent to Tacloban, a deployment which made the AHA Centre one of the first organisations present there prior to the disaster. It was also the first entity to establish emergency telecommunications between the local government and the NDRRMC. The day after the storm, the four personnel in Manila flew to Cebu Island, identified as the main staging area, and arrived in Tacloban on 10 November to assess immediate assistance needs.

ASEAN's role in establishing a communication link between the local government in Tacloban and the national government was especially well received, according to aid workers based in Manila and Tacloban. It is evident, however, that many of the AHA Centre's programmes are still developing, and

⁷ See www.unocha.org/roap/top-stories/typhoon-haiyan-six-months.

⁸ There was coordination between the OCHA regional office in the Asia-Pacific and the AHA Centre before deployment to the Philippines, so that each was aware of the other's response plans, and the UN United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) and ERAT team leaders coordinated at the NDRRMC headquarters in Manila.

its activities are limited to logistics and assessment in preparedness and response, technical support for early warning, risk assessment and monitoring and capacity-building. In interviews for this study there was a consensus that, apart from the AHA Centre's contribution in monitoring the storm and deploying logistics and communications personnel to Manila and Tacloban, ASEAN has not played a notable part in humanitarian relief in the aftermath of Haiyan. According to one interviewee, the scale of Haiyan was simply too great to allow for a coordinated response from ASEAN given its institutional limitations and resource constraints. One local government representative commented that relief goods from ASEAN member states, notably Indonesia and Malaysia, were provided bilaterally to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) at the national level, but there were considerable delays in the supplies reaching local governments, suggesting the need for AADMER to be institutionalised at the local level, where suitable.

This reduced role may also reflect the fact that, unlike in Myanmar, the Philippines has been much less dependent on ASEAN involvement given the country's own disaster management capabilities and the scale of the international response. Although some interviewees were critical of the government's response, citing slow or unequal provision of aid to affected communities, inefficiency and bureaucracy, unlike Myanmar the Philippines is generally credited with having a robust disaster management system, underpinned by the need to deal with the frequent and intense natural hazards the country is exposed to. Effective early warning and evacuations helped reduce losses and saved lives ahead of Haiyan, and during the response the government established an efficient civil–military coordination model, reducing duplication of effort (OCHA, 2013). It has also been praised for its leadership and coordination of what has been a very large and

complex relief operation (*ibid.*). Also unlike Myanmar the country is open to foreign assistance, which flowed into the country on a massive scale. Within the first three weeks of the response, \$391m had been given in humanitarian assistance from international donors and multilateral organisations, including the Asian Development Bank, the EU, the OIC, the UN and the World Bank; by the end of January 2014, international donors had channelled a total of \$663m to relief efforts (Congressional Research Service Report: ii). Against this, the \$500,000 pledged by ASEAN seems somewhat paltry.

Some of the communities devastated by Haiyan will take years to repair, and ASEAN still has the chance to prove its capabilities in reconstruction efforts. Indeed, the organisation has recently intensified its commitments to post-Haiyan recovery: in August 2014, ASEAN representatives and partners from the Philippine government convened a High-Level Conference on Assistance for the Recovery of Yolanda-Affected Areas (ARYA) in Manila. ASEAN Secretary-General Le Luong Minh pledged continued collaboration with the Philippine government, UN agencies, and the private sector in mobilising support and assistance, while Panfilo Lacson, the Philippine government's representative for post-Haiyan rehabilitation, has made similar statements about unity and support within the ASEAN community.

Typhoon Haiyan has tested the cohesion of ASEAN as well as its disaster response capacity. The AHA Centre supported the Philippines before and immediately after the typhoon through its early warning system, the establishment of initial communication links and by facilitating coordination. But it remains difficult to quantify the extent of ASEAN's relief and recovery efforts. Whether or not the promises made at the High-Level Conference on ARYA will be carried through will become clearer in the coming months and years.

5 Conclusion

ASEAN played a historic role in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis by acting as a coordinator within the Tripartite Core Group. While this success, followed by the ratification of the AADMER in 2009 and the establishment of the AHA Centre in 2011, boosted confidence among regional leaders regarding future disaster responses in South-east Asia, this optimism has since waned, and the organisation's role in the response in the Philippines was much less extensive than it had been following Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar. This may be inevitable given the differences in the two countries' domestic situations and international standing. Myanmar, with a history of foreign interventions and internal conflict, holds a xenophobic worldview which led it to block international aid after Cyclone Nargis. ASEAN became a crucial interlocutor between the international community and Myanmar's military junta, resulting in unprecedented and often praised humanitarian engagement. The Philippines, on the other hand, has traditionally been open to foreign aid in times of disaster, and immediately after Typhoon Haiyan accepted bilateral aid from neighbouring and distant countries alike. As such, the unprecedented role ASEAN played in Myanmar was possible only at that time, and in that place; in the Philippines, there simply was no similar mediatory role for the Association to play. ASEAN's strength there lay in its role as coordinator, as evinced by its support to the Philippines NDDRC.

Budgetary limitations have been another serious constraint on ASEAN's regional operations. During Cyclone Nargis, for example, most of the funding for ASEAN's engagement did not come from its member states but from international donors, with some contributions from private foundations. When assessing ASEAN's pledge after Haiyan of \$500,000, therefore, one needs to be conscious of the Association's limited resources. Staffing limitations also need to be borne in mind when considering the scope of ASEAN's humanitarian capacity. With a staff one-tenth the size of the European Commission's, the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta does not have sufficient manpower to address critical regional issues or conduct detailed research (Kurlantzick, 2012: 1, 14–15).

ASEAN's insufficiencies become especially clear when it comes to man-made crises. With its humanitarian mandate limited to disasters, there is no agreed mechanism to address humanitarian crises such as the one in Rakhine. Compared to the Organization of American States (OAS), it lacks a strong mechanism for enforcing human rights, and a new ASEAN human rights body established in the late 2000s has proved too weak to address these issues (Kurlantzick, 2012: 1, 3–4). While the constitution of the African Union (AU) allows it to intervene in countries where atrocities are being committed, ASEAN has no such power (Amador, 2009: 5–6). With regards to human rights or conflict resolution, therefore, ASEAN still lags behind other regional organisations.

The core principles and components of the 'ASEAN Way' upon which ASEAN was founded, such as non-interference and the non-use of force, are unlikely to diminish in importance. Some believe that consistent adherence to the non-interference principle is precisely what has allowed the organisation to honour its primary purpose of preventing (or avoiding) interstate conflicts (Tan, 2011: 202; Smith and Jones, 1997). But this culture of non-confrontation and quiet diplomacy will also make it very difficult to achieve the fundamental institutional changes needed to enable ASEAN to actively engage in forms of humanitarian action that can be perceived as interfering in the domestic affairs of its members. That said, when dealing with the national leadership of an ASEAN member state ASEAN's institutions can be effective. In the case of Cyclone Nargis, for example, Indonesia and Singapore were the driving forces behind the establishment of the AHTF and TCG, and Indonesia was also instrumental in accelerating the establishment of the AHA Centre. ASEAN *does* have the ability to be responsive and flexible when driven by its member states to do so – even if ASEAN can only be effective as long as its member states allow it to be so (Amador, 2009: 14).

Some argue that ASEAN's political cohesion is best pursued intertwined with economic integration (Severino, 2007). Whatever the means, though, until there is sufficient political will to enforce fundamental

institutional change it will be important for ASEAN to preserve its present disaster management mechanisms, as they will prove critical in facilitating effective disaster management (Roberts, 2014: 86). This applies especially to Myanmar. Despite the constraints it faces, the AHA Centre has both the potential and opportunity to strengthen its role as an intergovernmental facilitator in disaster management, and ASEAN as a whole has undertaken many initiatives in recent years to improve its capabilities. It is not designed to function in the same way as operational aid agencies, and is not involved in distributing assistance on the ground. ASEAN should focus on its strengths, namely facilitating and coordinating, gap-filling, bridging divides, capacity-building and convening a wide range of actors to build a more coordinated humanitarian community in the most disaster-prone region of the world.

5.1 Ways forward

Public expectations of ASEAN as a leader in humanitarian response are growing in parallel with the increasing threat of natural disasters in South-east Asia. Between 2000 and 2009, the incidence of natural disasters increased by 368% compared to 1970–79, and an average of about 100 disasters per year are predicted in the next decade (Maramis, 2011). In the face of these imminent dangers, ASEAN has sought to operationalise the AADMER by developing a set of operating procedures drawn heavily from the International Disaster Relief Law (IDRL) Guidelines (Clement, 2014: 86).⁹ Adopted by the IFRC in 2007, the IDRL Guidelines are intended to reduce bureaucratic barriers to relief, such as visas, customs clearance and landing permissions, while also ensuring adequate systems of oversight and monitoring of the quality and coordination of relief efforts. ASEAN has also requested ongoing assistance from the IFRC in relation to IDRL matters, such as participation in annual simulation exercises and relevant ASEAN disaster cooperation meetings (IFRC, 2011: 9; Clement, 2014: 86 n65). Initiatives such as these will be vital to ASEAN's efforts to strengthen its humanitarian role. This research, alongside discussions with key stakeholders at a

⁹ ASEAN is not unique in doing so: as the IFRC reports, 'on every continent, at least one regional or sub-regional organization has taken up the issue [of legal preparedness for international disaster response] and has started to make use of the IDRL Guidelines' (IFRC, 2011: 15; Clement, 2014: 85 n62).

roundtable event in Jakarta, have produced several concrete suggestions.

- Create a technical information-sharing system with policy and operational resources. ASEAN could enhance its knowledge management initiatives through the establishment of a repository of technical documents from member states and agencies on a variety of technical issues, such as cash transfers in emergencies and emergency shelter. In doing so it should capitalise on existing national capacities. For instance, typhoon information which the Philippine government reports online, which is often praised as best practice among ASEAN nations, could be extremely useful for other ASEAN member states in determining what specific kinds of assistance are most needed.
- Fast tracking for humanitarian access. ASEAN could play a role in facilitating negotiations on aid access, including visas for aid workers and customs clearance for aid materials, both before a crisis and in response to one. Lessons from the TCG's procedures in Myanmar would serve as a good basis for this. In the Philippines, the government introduced an innovative entry system in the shape of 'one-stop shops' at the airports of Manila and Cebu manned by key government staff, to expedite custom clearances for humanitarian cargo.¹⁰ This could be an equally useful precedent, as it significantly improved aid inflows by streamlining customs procedures for humanitarian agencies. Strengthening the implementation of the IDRL Guidelines throughout the ASEAN region will also be important in providing technical assistance for such access-improving systems.
- Continue military–military coordination. Joint training in the shape of the ASEAN Regional Disaster Emergency Response Simulation Exercise (ARDEX) should continue. SASOP should strengthen interoperability among national militaries.
- Improve civil–military coordination by building on existing military–military coordination exercises. Increased civil–military communication could, for example, help in facilitating the deployment of ERATs by preventing delays or accelerating procedures.
- Map the military and civilian assets of member states. The AHA Centre is in the process of mapping the military and civilian assets of ASEAN

¹⁰ Internal NGO report.

member states. It is also planning to expand coordination to include all aspects of ASEAN governments' donations in disasters, including health and relief items. Such efforts would strengthen the foundation for further coordinated regional relief efforts.

- Strengthen relations with civil society organisations. Partnerships with the many civil society organisations across South-east Asia should be strengthened. The AADMER Partnership Group is a promising initiative. Further increasing its outreach to local civil society organisations will play an instrumental role in institutionalising the AADMER within local governments, as local CSOs and local governments tend to collaborate closely.
- Support governments in taking the lead in humanitarian coordination. With ASEAN governments increasingly taking the lead in disaster response in their own countries, it was suggested that ASEAN could provide temporary in-country technical support when required, especially in the face of large-scale emergencies.
- Establish standard regional needs assessment, monitoring and impact evaluation tools. Building on the experience of the PONJA and PONREPP in Myanmar, ASEAN could establish standard post-disaster needs assessment and evaluation tools that could be used to monitor the progress of recovery against needs. Training could be given to member states and agencies in this regional methodology. It could also ensure that aid agencies are subjected to periodic impact evaluations to ensure effectiveness and accountability.
- Establish a roster of national and regional experts. ASEAN should create a roster of skilled and vetted humanitarian experts in the region and make it available to member states, businesses and aid organisations.
- Increase humanitarian coordination during pandemics. As demonstrated by the Ebola crisis in West Africa, there is a growing need for regional responses to pandemics. Following the global SARS epidemic in 2003, ASEAN member states have tended to adopt more state-centric and less region-wide responses (Wright, 2013: 7). A shift of focus from national to regional capacity-building and coordination in public health may be necessary to counter future pandemics.
- Increase resources from member states and businesses in the region. ASEAN should begin discussions on increasing contributions to the AHA Centre, and develop a timeframe for it becoming self-financed. In doing so, it could source funding not only from member states but also from businesses in the region.

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