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# Environmental Management in ASEAN

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# Environmental Management in ASEAN

Perspectives on Critical Regional Issues

*edited by*  
MARIA SEDA



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*Dedicated to the memory of*  
*Professor K.S. Sandhu*  
*Director of ISEAS, 1972–1992*



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# INTRODUCTION

The majority of the papers in this volume were originally presented at a Workshop on The Environment and Economic Development in Southeast Asia, organized by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and held in Singapore in September 1990 with financial assistance from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. While the papers have been considerably revised and edited for this volume, the original logic of the meeting still unites the collection. Essentially, the workshop addressed two major questions. What are the current environmental problems and underlying issues in the Southeast Asian region? What are the main conceptual-institutional issues hampering current research efforts on the problem of environmental degradation in Southeast Asia?

In the vast and increasing literature on environment and development, relatively little attention has so far been paid to the links between social and environmental phenomena in Southeast Asia. All too often, even where the importance of the social dimension of environmental degradation is recognized, the real focus of concern is on the physical or biological effects of human activity on small natural units (such as plants, animals or specific natural habitats) on the one hand, or the global biosphere on the other hand. More recently, in focusing on the links between sound development management, social development and environmental management, many authors have focused narrowly on the techno-economic aspects of environmental degradation, ignoring the socio-political and cultural dimensions of these linkages. Yet, the absence of theoretical research and detailed empirical studies on these social linkages no doubt undermines the current search for innovative

approaches that will foster an environmentally sound and socially meaningful form of development.

The structure of this volume responds to two major concerns. First, in presenting papers on environment and development in Southeast Asia, we highlight some of the common environmental issues or “pressure points” (such as waste disposal, fishery management, rain forest conservation, and industrial air pollution) faced by Southeast Asian countries. Second, since we present a wide swath of the different perspectives that emerged from the workshop, we have chosen to publish papers with themes that address different environmental concerns at different levels: international, regional, national, and local. Most papers, however, follow a common format — they outline the environmental and social problems raised by a given human activity, analyse relevant environmental policy, discuss the scope and nature of current research efforts, and provide a conclusion that suggests future prospects and policy proposals.

Seda outlines how growing concerns about alarming environmental problems of global dimension such as ozone depletion and the greenhouse effect, as well the growing political importance of environmental lobbies and non-governmental groups have raised fears that the Southeast Asian countries may find themselves in some sense “hostage” to environmental controversies and programmes in other countries, particularly the United States and Europe. Environmental groups in the United States and Europe already appear to wield some influence over development assistance policy and procedure at the World Bank and the regional multilateral development banks via the donor-nation contribution process. It is also apparent that trade and investment practices are increasingly at the centre of environmental campaigns, particularly in Europe. In short, Southeast Asia can expect to be drawn into an increasingly complicated, intractable and urgent set of questions about what constitutes “acceptable risk” and “prudent” environmental action — particularly in relation to energy policy, agricultural and forestry practices, and urbanization and industrialization trends.

Drawing on Indonesia’s experience, Mochtar Kusuma-Atmadja identifies certain aspects of contemporary fishery development and management that have undesired consequences. Fishery management in

Indonesia, he argues, has not been sufficiently sensitive to the social and cultural contexts in which fishing occurs. Improvements in the national capability for policy development, institutional structures, administrative competence, and ability to train management, monitoring and enforcement personnel, are also needed if Indonesia is to achieve its fishery development goals. And, at a multilateral and bilateral level, still wanting are fishing agreements that are well-adapted to the new challenge of environmental management.

Sham Sani, on the other hand, provides an overview of the main urban environmental problems, caused by the affluence and poverty that ASEAN shares as a region. While the last two decades have witnessed a rapid increase in the urbanization process in the ASEAN region, infrastructure and public services remain inadequate; problems such as slums, congestion, inadequate sanitation services, and pollution beset most major cities in the region. Weak environmental controls and poor land use planning have, moreover, the greatest direct effect on the poor who often live in areas exposed to industrial pollution or natural hazards. The need for regionally-based research or efforts to find sustainable approaches to urbanization is one of the major underlying themes of this paper. This is not to say that prefabricated models can be applied to the variety of urban ecosystems in ASEAN, but that it is possible to identify those elements and methods common to all poorly and well-designed urban management decision-matrices or approaches in the region. The need to adopt "holistic", cross-disciplinary methods that view urban management as a comprehensive process of human and physical resource management, informed by urban ecosystemic knowledge, and integrated with economic development planning is a second underlying theme.

Finally, in their paper on forestry management practices in Sabah, Malaysia, Murtedza Mohamed and Ti Teow Chuan demonstrate the need to increase the level and accuracy of information on deforestation and its effects in Sabah. Research so directed can help us pinpoint spaces where policy intervention may be possible. Having outlined Malaysia's legislative approach to forestry management and discussed problems relating to inadequate technical know-how and managerial capabilities,

pricing and subsidy policies, they conclude that new institutional arrangements and policies which address legal, research, financial, economic and ecological concerns are needed for improved forest management.

While by no means comprehensive or exhaustive, the present collection points to gaps in our current approach to research on the dynamics of environmental degradation, and paints in broad strokes a picture of some of the common and main environmental problems and underlying issues of the region. We need to move, however, to research which explores in greater depth the institutional, political, economic, technological and cultural causes of environmental degradation. This research task is immense. It will demand an unprecedented meshing of expertise from the natural and social sciences.