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ASEAN and Climate Change: Perceptions and the ASEAN Way (1981 to 2021)

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Locals and foreigners boarding the American military evacuation flight on Nov. 11, 2013



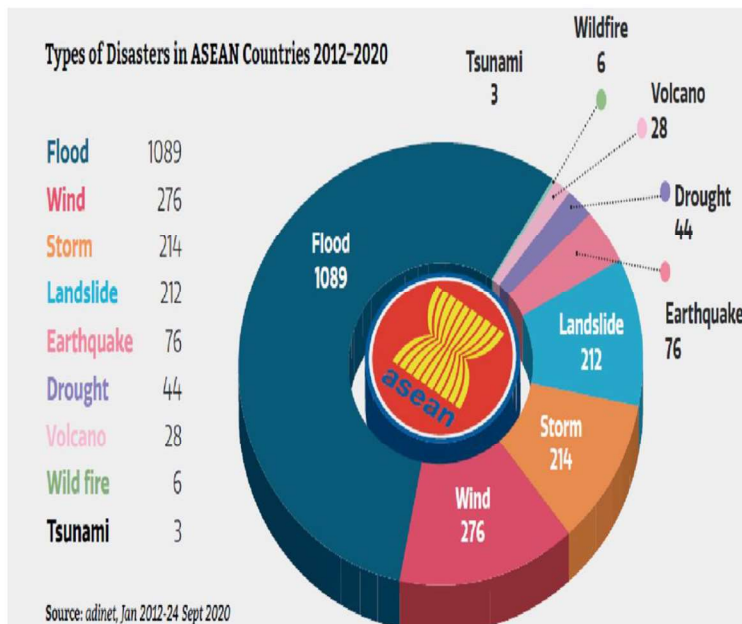
Source: **Bradsher, Keith**. "Struggle for Survival in Philippine City Shattered by Typhoon." New York Times. November 11, 2013.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/12/world/asia/philippines-storm-surge-leaves-scenes-of-devastation.html>



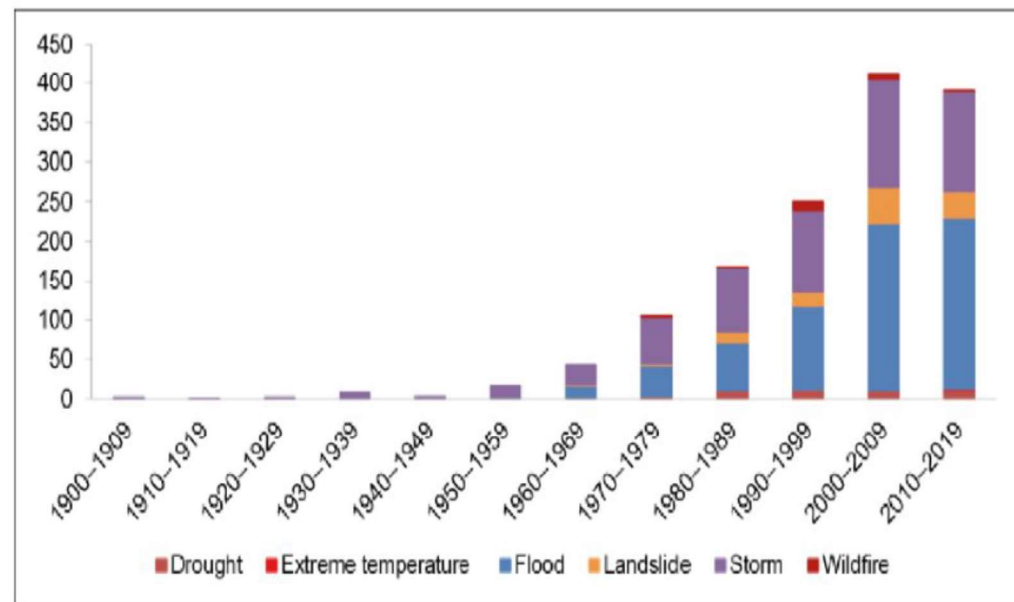
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Source: The ASEAN, 2020: 9 (as cited from ASEAN Disaster Information Network (ADINET) at <https://adinet.ahacentre.org/>).



Source: Beirne, et al.,: 8 (as data taken, organized, and cited by the authors from EM-DAT. 2020. EM-DAT – The International Disaster Database. https://www.emdat.be/emdat_db/).



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Argument and Questions

ASEAN views climate change as an urgent issue but the ASEAN Way hinders it from pursuing an aggressive response and this response is reflected in the documents.

Questions:

- How has ASEAN perceived climate change through the years?
Specifically, how has ASEAN's position on climate change evolved through time?
- How is the ASEAN Way reflected in the documents?
- How has it hindered the organization from pursuing an aggressive approach to dealing with the issue of climate change?



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Method

- This paper examined the existing documents of ASEAN on environment particularly on climate change as posted in the website of ASEAN from 1981 to 2021.
- ASEAN's Environmental declarations and joint statements until 2021
- In particular, this paper employed chronological analysis and content analysis methods whereby declarations/agreements are scrutinized in detail by paying particular attention to, counting, and tabulating, the words/phrases specifically on climate change and the environment since 1981.



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Findings

***Number of words
and/or related words
on climate change
and environment in
the documents
(1981-2012)***

Year	Climate change	Environment
1980s	-	95
1990s	-	76
2000s	80	104
2010s	200	114
2020s	24	3



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Findings

- In the 1980s' and 1990s' documents, ASEAN clearly stresses ASEAN Way in terms of 'sovereignty', 'rights', 'under their (respective ASEAN member states) jurisdiction', 'national level', 'national development' and 'respective country policies.'
- In the 2000s where climate change became a pressing global issue, ASEAN focused on the creation of, and support for, **Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs)** of each state.
- In the 2010s, NAMAs were added with **National Adaptation Plan of Actions (NAPAs)** or **National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)** and the **Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)** in the documents. Interestingly, what is further emphasized is the **Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC)** of each member state in their own efforts to curbing climate change.



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Findings

- First, ASEAN delegates the primary responsibility of addressing climate change issues on a “national rather than regional level” (Gerstl, 2010: 16) and even rallies support to it.
- Second, there is no leader that takes charge in proposing aggressive measures on climate change.
- Finally, due to ASEAN’s Way’s “lack of legal and political enforcement capabilities” (Gerstl, 2010:21), no sanctions can be given to any state that does not comply.



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Conclusion

- While it is true that ASEAN has ‘talked’ a lot about it among its member states but so far, its performance has been “slow and lackluster” (Trevisan, 2013) and “lags behind other regions” (Ding and Beh, 2022).
- ASEAN’s inability to formulate aggressive measures have resulted to slow actions against climate change. In part, this can be attributed to three things, namely, ASEAN’s priority on economic development, limited economic and technological capacities, and its unique way of negotiation, the ASEAN Way.
- So long as the ASEAN Way as an approach to combatting climate change prevails, the issue remains to be perceived as urgent as that. Sovereignty will always take precedence over other things.



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Thank you!



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