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Humanitarian Diplomacy in ASEAN

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Abstract

Progress on regional cooperation in Southeast Asia is often punctuated by decades rather than years. The exposure of the wider Asia-Pacific to natural hazards renders it the world's most disaster-prone. Since the Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami in 2004 there are three significant broad trends that have shaped humanitarian diplomacy namely ASEAN as a platform for engagement, sectoral approaches and a diversifying multi-stakeholder environment creating a multi-level regionalism in Southeast Asia. States and societies in Southeast Asia have demonstrated a commitment to build humanitarian capacity which is often termed "nationally-led, regionally-supported and international as necessary" so that they can lead response to natural hazards. The experience of natural hazards offers an important reference for humanitarian work in other areas, notably health emergencies and conflict settings. However, the localisation of the global humanitarian system beyond the regional and national levels to local communities remains far from certain and progress made in this arena may yet come undone without sustained and substantive political commitment from ASEAN Member States.

Key Words: ASEAN, Humanitarianism, humanitarian diplomacy, disaster, natural hazards, regional cooperation, AHA Centre, conflict, Southeast Asia

Introduction

In 2016 the largest gathering of state and non-state actors in the field of humanitarian affairs was convened in Istanbul, Turkey, at the World Humanitarian Summit. The outcome of the gathering led to the publication of the UN Secretary-General's "An Agenda for Humanity". Those present at the gathering agreed the global humanitarian system was failing those most in need and committed to reform the system to a locally led humanitarian system. In ASEAN, leaders committed to the humanitarian reform process (ASEAN 2016b). However, developments in Southeast Asia in the realm of humanitarian affairs have been underway for much longer, spurred on by the devastating effects of the Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami on 26 December 2004. As the world's largest population and countries exposed region to natural hazards these developments have been of necessity.

How does the lived experience of natural hazards shape humanitarian diplomacy in Southeast Asia? This article will proceed to answer this questions in several parts. It will first review the literature on humanitarian diplomacy and how this ties into the region. Then the article will process trace the evolution of humanitarian diplomacy and its component parts highlighting the diverse and fluid nature of the humanitarian landscape in ASEAN. Finally, it will identify the implications and future trajectories that humanitarian diplomacy rooted in natural hazards has for broader humanitarian concerns in the region. This article concludes that while the humanitarian diplomacy experience in Southeast Asia illustrates a move towards a more locally-led humanitarian system, it has only begun this process. There are potential pitfalls ahead that need to be considered to ensure the

completion of the process to a needs-based, locally-led, regionally-supported and international-as-necessary humanitarian system in ASEAN.

Emergence of Humanitarian Diplomacy

At the end of the Cold War, the concept of 'humanitarian diplomacy' emerged as a shift away from the 'duty to interfere' (Guillot, 1994: 30). The concept of 'duty to interfere' had been recognised and defined as legal intervention in France by A. Rougier back in 1910. However, it was not until after the Biafra war of 1967-70 with the establishment of *Medicins sans Frontiers* and *Medicins du Monde* that the concept gained wider traction. There was resistance to the 'duty to interfere' from countries in the Global South who voiced concern that the concept would be used to justify 'western gunboat diplomacy' (Guillot, 1994: 31). This resistance laid the groundwork for what emerged as humanitarian diplomacy.

In leading criticism from the Global South, Guillot (1994) recalls that Lucette Michaux-Chevry representing Guadeloupe and a few days after being appointed French Delegate Minister for Humanitarian Action and Human Rights, argued that humanitarian action should be discreet, not be confused with political interference nor convey an image of the 'super powerful' and paternalistic white man (Guillot, 1994: 37). This led to a shift away from the 'right to interfere' towards a 'smoother diplomatic approach' to state-based Humanitarian Diplomacy in the early 1990s (Guillot, 1994: 40). However, state-based humanitarian diplomacy is not usually the first reference given when considering humanitarian affairs. Rather the establishment of the Red Cross by Henri Dunant as an

independent, neutral and impartial entity was inspired by the need to assist war victims at the Battle of Solferino in 1859 is often the starting point for the evolution of International Humanitarian Law grounded in the Geneva Conventions. It does have a bearing to start the discussion this way as an entry point to what has become a diverse field of state and non-state actors with a humanitarian and relief mandate that constitute the ecosystem of humanitarian diplomacy.

The role of the Red Cross movement became the standard-bearer of humanitarian work against which much humanitarian action is discussed and evaluated today. So, it is a key component to consider when thinking about the ethics and practice of humanitarian work. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how the ICRC defines humanitarian diplomacy. The ICRC considers humanitarian diplomacy to consist of four specific traits: it consists of relations with a wide range of contacts, including non-State players; limited to the humanitarian sphere and promotion of peace is not its primary objective; it is independent of State humanitarian diplomacy; and takes the form of a series of representations which may remain confidential or require the mobilization of a network of influence (Harroff-Tavel. 2005: 76).

So then, how does this apply to natural hazards? After the First World War, national Red Cross societies led by the American Red Cross believed that their activities should continue during 'peacetime' to motivate their members and volunteers, such as natural hazards which are an area that is common across all national societies. This move led to the foundation of the League of Red Cross Societies, today known as the International

Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to coordinate activities between the national Red Cross Societies during peacetime (Bugnion 2011).

Every four years, the International Conference of the Red Cross is held and representatives of the National Societies, the ICRC, and the Federation meet together with representatives of the states party to the Geneva Conventions within the framework of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. This conference is a unique forum since it brings together the representatives of governments and organizations borne out of private initiative (Bugnion 2011). The conference illustrates well the involvement of two significant groups of humanitarian actors, states and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Added to these are other non-state humanitarian actors including civil society organisations, NGOs and the private sector, all together encompass the humanitarian community. Within Southeast Asia, the Red Cross Movement most notably used its humanitarian diplomacy to raise awareness of international humanitarian law through representations to ASEAN Member States in the negotiations of the ASEAN Charter, which contributed to its eventual inclusion in the legally binding document.

Humanitarian diplomacy can therefore be construed as a 'strategy of influence employed to prevent and resolve humanitarian problems through dialogue, negotiation and the preparation of rules.' This strategy involves a 'series of representations planned over time, each stage of which comprises options that depend on the reaction of the other party' (Harroff-Tavel, 2005: 79).

In terms of the functionality of humanitarian diplomacy, it is the art of facilitating optimal relief, engaging the most effective actors and communication lanes, to avoid unnecessary delays and to reach those in most need (Egeland. 2013). Humanitarian diplomacy also acts as a preparedness strategy to address system blockages ahead of time, particularly when considering natural hazards. This preparedness activity takes place in the forms of training exercises or simulations, familiarity with standard operating procedures, adherence to sectoral standards, investment in capacity building of national mechanisms and the professional development of bureaucrats, as well as strategic policy dialogues, exchanges and networking activities.

However, the evolution of the humanitarian landscape to include different sectors, local and international NGOs has not led to a formalisation of humanitarian diplomacy. Indeed, there is no cadre of humanitarian diplomats, but rather humanitarian diplomacy operates informally to leverage inter-personal and inter- and intra-institutional arrangements to facilitate reaching those most in need (Regnier. 2011: 1217). Rather humanitarian diplomacy is often the result of cultivating trusting relationships ahead of crises to lay the foundations for more formal agreements made by governments to access populations affected by natural hazards.

These formal agreements are conducted by official diplomats for humanitarian purposes subordinated to political and security interests of the state which may conflict with the needs of the affected population. However, humanitarian diplomacy seeks to minimise

tension between these two considerations of the state and affected population by socialising humanitarian norms and standards within national frameworks and legislation (Regnier 2011: 1218). Humanitarian diplomacy becomes all-the-more important when considering disasters that occur solely within a country to negotiate with government and non-government relief providers to ensure that those most in need receive the necessary support and communicate those needs to those best able to provide them (Regnier 2011: 1220). Humanitarian diplomacy therefore is not the realm of any individual sector, agency or organisation but is the collective effort by those committed to providing and protecting those most in need.

Humanitarian Diplomacy in ASEAN

Southeast Asian humanitarian diplomacy has developed most effectively in disaster response which is hardly surprising in the worlds most exposed region to natural hazards. This significant exposure has led to the development of frameworks and a community of practice in response to these devastating events. With the seeming apolitical nature of natural hazards it is an avenue that has borne the most fruit in terms of regional cooperation and institutional development in ASEAN.

The Indian Ocean Tsunami and Earthquake in 2004 caused the deaths of an estimated 228,000 people and massive societal and economic disruption across the Asia – Pacific. The international community launched its largest humanitarian assistance effort for a natural hazard which exposed the weaknesses in the global humanitarian community and provided an impetus for new ways of engagement for states, UN agencies, NGOs, Red

Cross and Red Crescent movement, and the private sector. In response to the disaster, Australia, India, Japan and the USA forged the Tsunami Core Group.

The Tsunami Core Group was an organisation that never met in the recognised global humanitarian centres, “never issued a communique, never created a secretariat, and took as one of its successes its own demise”. It was referred to as a “new style of diplomacy”, “transformed” or “transitional” diplomacy. The Tsunami response engaged militaries, gave rise to a ‘new kind’ of diplomacy with the widespread engagement of the public and NGOs to respond to the challenge to the security of citizens. The Tsunami Core Group was not only an effective mechanism to respond to a humanitarian disaster but had broader implications for diplomacy (Grossman 2005). Indeed, the Tsunami Core Group laid the foundations for the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue of Australia, India, Japan and the USA (Samaranayake 2020). The Core Group format was used again four years later to bring together the Myanmar government, ASEAN and the United Nations under the Tripartite Core Group to facilitate the humanitarian response to Cyclone Nargis that devastated the Irrawaddy delta region in Myanmar.

The Tripartite Core Group differed from the earlier Tsunami Core Group in that it brought together the affected state, regional organisation and international community to facilitate a humanitarian response. Rather than being a coordination mechanism for donor countries, it provided an ASEAN platform to build trust between the national government and the international community. The national government was deeply sceptical of the motivations of ‘western’ relief providers and so ASEAN, as the regional organisation,

provided a bridging mechanism between these otherwise two hostile parties to negotiate access to those most in need in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis (Cook 2010). The Tripartite Core Group was initiated by a call by the ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan who urged member states to provide relief assistance through the framework of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (Creach and Fan 2008). What the two core groups had in common was that they were reactive, issue-specific, and relied on informal relationships. What differed between the two core group experiences was that the former laid the groundwork for wider engagement in other issue areas and in the latter, deeper engagement in regional disaster management and emergency response in ASEAN. It showed the international community that ASEAN can be an effective mechanism in a humanitarian emergency (Cook 2010).

Beyond the core group format, the experiences of the Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami and Cyclone Nargis saw the emergence of a regional humanitarian community in ASEAN with a number of people who formed part of the response in the Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami responding again four years later to Cyclone Nargis. Whilst these were by no means the only natural hazards experienced in the region, they were the most significant during the 2000s in terms of scale of devastation and number of people affected. Neither is this to say that the emerging community of practice was limited to experience solely within the region. A number of those that formed part of these humanitarian responses gained experience outside Southeast Asia and other people from outside the region gained experience inside the region as part of a variety of humanitarian responses in different scenarios. What is notable is that a core community of practice

began to emerge in the region which was catalysed by these two significant natural hazards.

In the Cyclone Nargis response, the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force (AHTF) was chaired by the ASEAN Secretary-General and consisted of two people from each member state to oversee the work of the Tripartite Core Group which was a Yangon-based operational entity to oversee the coordination of resources, operations, monitoring and reporting and consisted of three personnel each from the Myanmar Government, ASEAN Secretariat and the United Nations. The Tripartite Core Group oversaw the Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) which was one of two major demands by donors at the pledging conference and the unfettered access for humanitarian personnel to affected areas (Creach and Fan 2008).

The PONJA team was notable because of the formulation of its team of over 300 people with 20 personnel seconded to ASEAN from the World Bank, as well as the technical expertise brought in from the United Nations, Asian Development Bank, and OXFAM. The medical NGO Merlin coordinated the assessment teams drawing on its pre-Nargis presence and training of community health workers for the majority of the assessment team with the remaining members made up of national staff (Campbell, Shafique and Sansom 2008). The secondment or lending of staff to ASEAN is an important recognition of the role ASEAN played in the humanitarian response, the acceptance of Merlin due to its pre-Cyclone programmes and the training of national staff are early signs of the shifts the humanitarian sector would need to undergo to remain relevant, adaptable and

predictable – embedded staff to surge capacity rather than competing organisations, long-term engagement over short-term demands, and local staff employment over dependence on international staff where possible.

Since the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami devastated parts of Southeast Asia, it provided a catalyst for more robust regional cooperation that led to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) in 2008. This legally binding regional agreement is the first of its kind and shaped the future trajectory of disaster governance in ASEAN. The legally binding nature of the agreement signals more the commitment of member states than it does offer an enforceable legal regime.

ASEAN Member States invested in institution building through the designation of national disaster management offices, the development of operational rules and procedures at the national level as both a potential recipient and a responder country. It further opened pathways for more inclusive disaster governance through the establishment of the AADMER Partnership Group (APG). The APG was formed by local and international NGOs to support regional efforts to implement a ‘people-centred’ agreement through an emerging humanitarian diplomatic community. The APG seeks to be the bridge between the disaster management and emergency response work in ASEAN and civil society to ensure the voices of those affected are heard. The APG has supported the AHA Centre by contributing to the Emergency Response and Assessment Team (ERAT) training initiatives and their disaster responses. Most recently the APG in consultation with the AHA Centre is developing a concept note on a Regional Alliance for Collective

Emergency Response (RACER) under the ASEAN CSO Partnership Framework (ACPF) and as part of the AADMER Work Plan 2016 – 2020.

Importantly, within the AADMER there are some notable references that point to the emergence of a broader regional humanitarian diplomacy that reaches beyond natural hazards that are considered disasters. The agreement defines a disaster as a ‘serious disruption to the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses’ (Article 1.4). While the agreement was the undoubted result of the region’s exposure to natural hazards, the drafters ensured that the relevance of the agreement would provide guidance for other scenarios like the COVID-19 pandemic in which humanitarian work would be required.

Most recently the operational reality of the AHA Centre and the implementation of AADMER has extended to ‘human-induced’ disasters (or conflicts) in Marawi in the Southern Philippines and Rakhine State in Myanmar. While breaking new ground in terms of finding operational space for the AHA Centre there was criticism that suggested the AHA Centre engagement in conflict scenarios did not meet humanitarian expectations. This criticism whilst justified in isolation often misunderstood the mandate and function of the AHA Centre as laid out in AADMER, its relative institutional youth and technical capacity. The AHA Centre is governed by the ASEAN Member States which activate the operational centre in terms of coordinating a disaster response. The AHA Centre therefore is beholden to ASEAN Member States and it remains the prerogative of an individual member state that has consented to be bound by the agreement, accepts or

requests assistance. It therefore qualifies as state-based humanitarian action at the strategic level with operational level independence within the confines of AADMER. The AHA Centre therefore cannot be viewed independently of these constraints but does offer an avenue through which to engage a broad range of stakeholders from civil society organisations and INGOs through the APG, UN, the private sector and ASEAN dialogue partners like Australia, EU, Japan and USA to name the most prominent.

The development of these relationships was conceptualised in One ASEAN, One Response - responding as One inside and outside the region as ASEAN 1.0, ASEAN 2.0, ASEAN 3.0 and ASEAN X.0 as part of the AHA Centre's long-term strategic vision. ASEAN 1.0 denotes the first phase where the coordinating centre would be established and forge links with the national disaster management offices. ASEAN 2.0 denotes ASEAN responding collectively to disasters i.e. offering one another assistance through the AHA Centre. ASEAN 3.0 denotes the AHA Centre coordinating beyond member states to include dialogue partners and the international community. ASEAN X.0 denotes ASEAN responding to disasters outside the member states. As a result of these formalised relationships, ASEAN has become directly or indirectly the pre-eminent site for humanitarian diplomacy in Southeast Asia under the aegis of a humanitarian system that is 'nationally led, regionally supported and international-as-necessary' (ASEAN 2016b).

Multi-level Humanitarian Diplomacy

Beyond the formal developments at the ASEAN level, there have been some significant developments within ASEAN Member States. These are often now understood as being part-and-parcel of developments under One ASEAN One Response where domestic and regional developments are intertwined in a co-constitutive way to build capacity, engage affected communities and provide a reference point for humanitarian diplomacy in the region.

The most prominent development within an ASEAN Member State occurred in the Philippines after Typhoon Durian in 2006 caused multiple mudslides burying villages and the need for large scale humanitarian assistance. This was a key event that raised the need for a strong coordination system connecting the international, emerging regional and local humanitarian systems. After Typhoon Durian, the National Disaster Coordinating Council technical working group and the Philippines Humanitarian Country Team worked together to adopt the UN Cluster System and the 11 sectoral models designed by UN OCHA. The UN Cluster System was subsequently reduced to 8 clusters based on local needs (Abaya, Le Dé and Lopez 2020: 364 – 65).

Subsequently in 2009, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo signed Executive Order 831 to facilitate the processing of incoming disaster relief. It established the One Stop Shop model that brings together the Bureau of Customs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Energy, Department of Health, Department of Agriculture, and the Department of National Defense in one location, twenty four hours a day, seven days a week to provide a mechanism to expedite

clearance of foreign relief items in times of need. Executive Order 831 further mandates the Secretary of Finance to exempt foreign relief goods from tax and tariffs. When Super Typhoon Haiyan landed in the Philippines, it caused 6300 deaths, affected 14 million people and destroyed homes and livelihoods. This was the first major test for the Philippines Cluster System. The establishment of the One Stop Shop in theory provided a national level coordination mechanism to facilitate incoming aid. However, it did little to match humanitarian needs on the ground. Rather the mechanism cleared what was supplied rather than screening the offers of humanitarian assistance for needed humanitarian relief items and capacity (Howe and Bang. 2017: 72). Foreign militaries followed the directions from their national governments, or direct coordination with the Armed Forces of the Philippines, while apart from the Philippines Red Cross, few local or international NGOs utilised the platform adding to a mismatch between relief supplies and needs of the affected community (Ehrenfeld, Aanenson and Arcala Hall. 2015: 63; Howe and Bang. 2017: 72). There remains a gap between the needs of affected communities and the prioritisation and supply of incoming humanitarian relief and personnel.

Additionally in 2009, after several disasters, a further Executive Order 838 was signed to establish the Special National Public Reconstruction Commission (Public Commission) to lead post-disaster reconstruction efforts. The Public Commission then engaged the country's private sector to contribute to these efforts and later that year leaders from some of the country's private sector and NGO communities established the Philippines Disaster Recovery Foundation (PDRF). The Public Commission and the PDRF signed a cooperation agreement to facilitate these efforts. After successive disasters the PDRF

reconstituted to include disaster preparedness, relief and recovery. Later in 2015, it was renamed the Philippines Disaster Resilience Foundation to encompass the full spectrum of the disaster risk reduction and management cycle (disaster mitigation, preparedness, relief, recovery and rehabilitation) (PDRF 2020) and has become a key humanitarian actor within the Philippines. With the experience of Typhoon Haiyan, the Philippines developed the National Disaster Response Plan (NDRP) to minimise confusion of roles, responsibilities and parallel structures at and between the different humanitarian actors at the local, national and international levels (Abaya, Le Dé and Lopez 2020: 370). The NDRP was implemented at both the national and local government levels to facilitate a locally-led humanitarian response. However, there are challenges to implementing the NDRP most notably the different capacity levels between civil society organisations, local government units, national agencies, and international actors. That said, the framework for engagement has been established and remains a work-in-progress as the most advanced localisation effort of humanitarian action and site of humanitarian diplomacy in Southeast Asia.

Outside the Philippines, Malaysia has recently developed a formalised humanitarian hub in April 2020. Malaysia KitaMATCH is a national humanitarian coordination hub to match humanitarian supply (Government donors, Humanitarian organisations) with demand (those in need) through data-driven insights, provide capacity building programmes to increase community resilience, and raise awareness of humanitarian issues in the country. It is an independent entity in line with global humanitarian principles and built on a public-private partnership model led by the private sector with close collaboration with

the government and civil society. KitaMATCH is a component of Malaysia's COVID-19 Coordination & Action Hub (MATCH).

Its founding members are Tan Sri Dr Jemilah Mahmood (Special Advisor to the Malaysian Prime Minister), Malaysia Red Crescent Society and Mercy Malaysia (humanitarian organisations), Yayasan Hasanah and Yayasan Petronas (Corporate Foundations), Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM) and Majlis Keselamatan Negara (MKN) (Government Agencies), and the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) (private sector) – a notably civilian character to the platform unlike the Philippines where the Department for National Defence houses the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council. The national humanitarian platform seeks to increase transparency through a national database exchange, offer real-time cloud-based solutions and insights to speed up delivery, and standardise terms and requests (KitaMATCH 2020). Through a transparent multi-sectoral model, the Malaysia MATCH humanitarian hub is well-placed to lead national level coordination. Yet, how the regional and international mechanisms will feed into the coordination structure during a disaster is undetermined. While a similar experience to the Philippines where parallel structures existed and led to a confusion of roles and responsibilities appears unlikely due to Malaysia's relative shelter from natural hazards, other and overlapping crises such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and potential flooding during monsoon season, will likely prove a test for KitaMATCH.

Aside from the developments in the Philippines and Malaysia, Indonesia offers a different example of the development of the regional humanitarian diplomatic community in

ASEAN. In the aftermath of the 2018 Sulawesi Earthquake, Tsunami and Liquefaction the Indonesian government accepted the offer of assistance from the AHA Centre and mandated it to be the interface between Indonesia and the international humanitarian community and private sector. With the asserted role of the national government and AHA Centre, the United Nations OCHA adapted to the new reality by embedding staff within the AHA Centre's Emergency Operations Centre to offer their expertise.

Whilst this was resisted by UN Headquarters, the local and regional OCHA presence was more adaptable to the situation and in line with commitments to localisation made at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and recognised the changing humanitarian landscape in ASEAN. It underlined the importance of humanitarian diplomacy undertaken by long serving practitioners to ensure continued relevance through their agency's technical expertise. This development effectively saw ASEAN activate AADMER and its operational arm, the AHA Centre, as the entry point for humanitarian diplomacy in the region and its link to the wider international humanitarian community.

However, the national level humanitarian response to the Sulawesi disaster caused a number of national policy changes. The Indonesia National Disaster Management Organisation (BNPB) was established in Jakarta in 2008 as a national 'firefighting' agency unlike its ministerial counterparts which have a presence at the provincial and local government levels. This was a notable challenge in the aftermath of the Sulawesi disaster when it was criticised for taking a financial role rather than significantly deploying to the field (Trias and Cook 2021: 6). This subsequently led to Presidential reforms of the agency

which controversially included allowing serving military officers to be deployed to run the civilian BNPB blurring the lines between civilian government and the military.

The prominence of the militaries in humanitarian affairs in Indonesia and the Philippines have caused concern for the militarisation or securitisation of humanitarian assistance in the region. While military surge capacity primarily in logistics is an established area of activity, the utilisation of military officers on the front line of humanitarian response needs to be approached with caution. Military engagement impacts the perception of humanitarian assistance to those most affected (Cook and Yogendran. 2020: 46). This is of particular importance if the emerging ASEAN humanitarian diplomatic community is to more substantively expand its activities into conflict settings where militaries may be party to the conflict.

Fluidity in ASEAN Humanitarian Diplomacy

In Southeast Asia, governments have often sought to justify their positions of authority through the logic of 'performance legitimacy' (Alagappa 1995 in Tan 2017). In other words, they maintain their power through demonstrating their ability to effectively govern and provide for their citizens. This logic is further conceptualised by viewing them as 'Responsible providers' (Tan 2017) or as 'security governor' (Caballero-Anthony 2018). As regional cooperation has evolved, this logic has regionalised to the field of humanitarian affairs where ASEAN Member States have organised themselves in such a way to reduce the barriers of entry for one member state to another to provide humanitarian assistance to those affected by natural hazards. Although recent trends

have highlighted that the logic of performance legitimacy is under increasing strain (Welzel and Dalton 2017). Indeed, the relationship has further developed to find a 'face-saving' work-around in that one member state can offer to provide humanitarian assistance to another, and in turn the affected state is less likely to refuse such humanitarian assistance. This contrasts with an affected state articulating that they need help or need to ask for help in times of a disaster. There is an inherent difficulty here which is that it reinforces a supply-driven humanitarian system rather than moving it to a demand-driven system by those most in need of humanitarian assistance.

Most recent developments in ASEAN have seen the increasing professionalisation of the humanitarian system which seeks to de-securitise the provision of humanitarian assistance to affected communities. Rather than decisions being made at the foreign ministers level, the development of a regional humanitarian system have allowed for the reduction in barriers to entry and the proceduralising of humanitarian assistance through the AAMDER which standardises requests for assistance and is now framed in terms of engaging friends in areas where additional technical capacity is needed in a disaster scenario. At the regional level, the role of the military remains focused on its logistical expertise and assets. Through the successful desecuritisation of natural hazards, the ongoing professionalisation of the disaster management sector, and trust-building through a community of practice, Southeast Asia has built the foundations for a regional humanitarian system albeit limited in scope to natural hazards at present and in a multi-stakeholder environment that engages governments, UN agencies, private sector, NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement through an ASEAN mechanism.

The development and experience of regional humanitarian diplomacy in disaster management and emergency response has important implications for other non-traditional security threats like pandemics. Most recently the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted governance systems globally. Within ASEAN this is a catalyst to further regional efforts in health emergencies as witnessed by the initiation of a feasibility study led by Malaysia and Vietnam and supported by Japan on the establishment of an ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases agreed in June 2020. Later in 2020, member states launched the ASEAN Strategic Framework for Public Health Emergencies. The experience of humanitarian diplomacy in natural hazard response offers an important reference to develop effective regional mechanisms to respond to health emergencies.

The expectations that dominant global understandings of humanitarianism to encompass conflict settings often cloud the developments in natural hazard scenarios that dominate the regional experience in Southeast Asia. This is not to discount the needs of those affected by conflict but allows for more informed understandings of the genesis of humanitarian diplomacy in a region exposed more than others to natural hazards. Given this starting point the concept of humanitarian diplomacy in Southeast Asia is more comprehensive in recognising the myriad humanitarian providers active in the humanitarian landscape as a result. This necessarily results in more diverse humanitarian diplomacy that essentially leads from behind to remove the barriers to entry and reduce

the reasons why ultimately national governments would restrict or refuse humanitarian access to those most in need during disasters.

Future Trajectories for ASEAN Humanitarian Diplomacy

How does the experience in providing humanitarian assistance in disasters inform expectations for the region in conflict settings? Recent statements from ASEAN Foreign Ministers collectively have activated AADMER in the conflict settings of Marawi in the Southern Philippines and in Rakhine State in Myanmar so it is timely to consider this development. Given the genesis of the regional humanitarian system in disaster settings it is unsurprising that humanitarian assistance provided through AADMER is through national governments. This inevitably poses a significant challenge for the regional humanitarian system on two levels. First is that in these scenarios are contextually different where conflict settings often involve a national government as a party to an internal conflict. The second is that the regional humanitarian system is built upon the disaster management sector which has professionalised around the technical expertise needed for geohazards and meteorological hazards. Whilst those affected by disaster or conflict ultimately need the basic essentials of food, water, shelter and healthcare, beyond the material provision of these items is a need to ensure they can access these without discrimination and do so in safety and security.

Recognising these restrictions to the provision of humanitarian assistance can inform how the system can develop to better respond to the humanitarian needs of those affected by conflict. First, the regional humanitarian community of practice needs to more

systematically engage beyond the disaster management sector. Whilst it does engage different types of organisations within the disaster management sector from government, UN agencies, NGOs, private sector and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, there is less engagement from other sectoral bodies and mechanisms in ASEAN, particularly in terms of substantive links to the ASEAN Political Security Community. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on countries in ASEAN has provided a catalyst to develop more effective regional mechanisms for health emergencies and emerging diseases.

While the regional humanitarian system has a functional ability to assess need and organise the distribution of relief items, it will need to source the expertise for the contextual dynamics of conflict from outside the sector. This will require the development of other sectors and mechanisms in ASEAN to address these. Second, through observing the development of the regional humanitarian system to date, it has taken nearly twenty years to develop national capacities and regional mechanisms in humanitarian assistance in disaster settings with political will. The impacts of COVID-19 pandemic has garnered political will to further regional cooperation in health emergencies. At present there is limited political will in the region to move the AAMDAR beyond natural hazards to address conflict settings. That said, that does not mean there are no pathways forward. An important component throughout the development of humanitarian diplomacy in ASEAN has been the 'good offices' of the ASEAN Secretary-General and the office-holder's designation under AADMER as the mandated ASEAN Humanitarian Coordinator. In this role, the ASEAN Secretary-General Lim Jock Hoi has gained member state acceptance

to establish an ad hoc support team for the ASEAN Secretariat on the implementation of the preliminary needs assessment recommendations to support the repatriation process in Rakhine State in 2020. The recent attempted military coup in Myanmar in February 2021 has highlighted the important role ASEAN member states can play in developing an acceptable regionally led and internationally supported response to the political and humanitarian crisis. These developments offer a potential way forward to engage across the broader ASEAN Community in humanitarian affairs.

Conclusion

Humanitarian Diplomacy has for a long-time relied on the crisis framework to avoid sustainable action, skirt responsibility when things go wrong, and have lacklustre accountability mechanisms to those it seeks to help. All this remains prevalent in the development of humanitarian diplomacy in ASEAN. The developments in humanitarian diplomacy in ASEAN point to a dispersal of activity across sectors and actors without a solid framework of regulation and oversight. However, there are some concerns about the use of localisation as a guise to achieve other ends than a system that better engages and provides affected communities with the humanitarian assistance they need.

While on the one hand, localisation of humanitarian action is observable through the humanitarian diplomacy initiatives across ASEAN with the development of new national platforms such as KITAMatch in Malaysia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, there is no clear pathway to moving the humanitarian system beyond national capitals in the region toward levels of government closer to affected communities.

Rather the conversation begins to mirror a decades old development conversation starting in the 1960s about decentralisation and the benefits of strong local government. There are limited signs outside the Philippines that localisation means anything more than a nationalisation of the humanitarian system which has the potential to regurgitate traditional sovereignty and non-interference norms under the guise of localisation.

While the shift away from far-flung corridors of power in Geneva and New York are welcome, this should be met with consideration that the journey to a truly locally-led humanitarian system must move beyond national capitals and closer to those in need. It is likely that many of the same challenges that faced the world in times past on issues of development may well reappear in the humanitarian reform drive we see today. Further, the additional recognition of actors engaged in humanitarian work leads to a couple of questions for future research. Is this experience indicative of a broader trend to more complex networks of governance? Does the establishment of complex humanitarian governance networks push decision-makers away from direct performance legitimacy and accountability into an opacity of governance? If humanitarian diplomacy is to lead to a change of the structure of the humanitarian system towards one that is driven by people and need rather than interests and supply then it will require a sustained effort by many more people than those who are already engaged in the effort today.

While the developments made so far in building more proximate capacities and moving decision-making closer to affected communities are to be welcomed, this is only a first step in a long mile to reform. It will therefore be important to now move the localisation

debate beyond regional capitals and seek to move the conversation closer to affected communities and link these to wider concerns of accountability and transparency for stronger government mechanisms to implement humanitarian assistance in times of need. There is prospect to achieve this through the networked regionalism outlined in the ASEAN Vision 2025 on disaster management (ASEAN 2016a; Cook 2017a; 2017b). However, issues of transparency, accountability and suitability to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need must not be lost at the expense of an all-inclusive regional humanitarian diplomacy in ASEAN.

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