

Climate Change Policy Memo



SUBJECT: Policy Recommendations for Addressing the Impact of Climate Change on Southeast Asia

TO: US-ASEAN Policy Makers, Influencers, and Stakeholders

FROM: Climate Change Working Group, US ASEAN Futures Symposium

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Executive Summary

As Southeast Asia assumes greater economic, political, and security significance for the United States, there is a pressing need to improve people-to-people engagement and relationship-building between the United States and ASEAN partners on climate change and environmental protection. To increase U.S.-ASEAN climate policy cooperation, we recommend **(1) co-developing green infrastructure, (2) strengthening governance, and (3) furthering capacity-building activities and programs**. We also emphasize the importance of ensuring these capacity-building engagements prioritize diversity and inclusivity, aiming to make them as relevant and applicable to the specific context as possible. Our recommendations seek to enhance collaborative policymaking and regulatory efforts that mitigate climate change between the United States and Southeast Asian partners.

Problem Statement

U.S.-ASEAN cooperation on climate change is moving forward, but is not adequately reaching the grassroots level. [A joint statement](#) of the ASEAN-U.S. Ministerial Dialogue on Environment and Climate stressed the “importance of continued capacity building in enabling improved implementation of climate actions.” Local regional stakeholders need clear and implementable directives for how to translate shifting policies into local action. Without support for local-level implementation, climate directives stand little chance of widespread adoption in Southeast Asia.

Just this year, [the White House announced](#) the establishment of more localized and community-based learning exchanges between the United States and Southeast Asia such as through the inaugural U.S.-ASEAN Institute for Rising Leaders and the upcoming Coalition for Climate Entrepreneurship (CCE) ASEAN workshop on eco-entrepreneurial ecosystem advancement with the ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (ACCMSME). While these new initiatives show promise, we propose more two-way climate change and environmental technical exchange activities on the ground in Southeast Asia as opposed to programs bringing ASEAN environmental leaders and trailblazers to the United States.

Background

Southeast Asia faces the dual challenge of slowing emissions in its own borders while disproportionately bearing the costs of climate change. Climate cooperation between U.S. and ASEAN stakeholders is growing, but still in a nascent phase. With the introduction of the [U.S.-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership \(CSP\)](#), there is new momentum for problem-solving on environmental and climate issues. Promoting cross-sectoral dialogue and action will directly contribute to regional responses to climate change impacts. We consider capacity building as a means to achieve climate, environmental, and sustainability goals built on the CSP's principles of human-to-human connectivity and commitment to climate and sustainable development.

Policy Recommendations

1. Energy and Infrastructure

- a. Launch **microgrid projects** in developing countries, supported by investments from higher-income countries such as Singapore, Japan, and the U.S.
- b. As U.S. and ASEAN senior officials continue to engage in dialogue on **transportation infrastructure and development**, ensuring development of green transportation as well as retrofitting current transportation infrastructure to utilize sustainable energy-efficient materials is critical.

2. Governance

- a. ASEAN leaders should **change the narrative** on the energy transition such as focusing on opportunities like job creation, potential new foreign investments, and the increasing affordability of renewable energy.
- b. **Expand Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETP) participation** of other ASEAN countries to provide energy transition financing while expanding the JETP network. c. Build upon the U.S.-ASEAN CSP by utilizing the \$600 million granted to encourage public-private sector partnerships - spurring economic development in ASEAN member countries.

3. Capacity-building, two-way knowledge transfer and equitable participation

- a. Equitable participation means the inclusion of marginalized and underrepresented populations such as indigenous and ethnic minorities, rural community members, LGBTQ-identifying peoples, persons with disabilities, etc. In discussions and exchanges of knowledge, prioritization should be given not just to inclusion, but value and respect given to each ideology.
- b. **Person-to-person exchanges, workshops, and training in Southeast Asia** on topics for engagement include but are not limited to: environmental education, environmental justice, electronic and solid waste management and recycling, marine debris and litter mitigation, plastics, air quality, mercury monitoring, enforcement and compliance, clean energy technologies.
- c. **Localized capacity building on the ground in ASEAN Countries**
 - i. Establish participation by saving a “seat at a table” for marginalized stakeholders in any future U.S.-ASEAN collaborative spaces.
 - ii. Promote inclusivity, equity, and citizen participation in the local capacity building process as core tenets of capacity building.
 - iii. Involve local leaders, sustainability of the program, creating localized knowledge and governance networks between communities, communes, cities and provinces.
- d. **Promote inter-regional cooperation within ASEAN through technical sharing, investing in sustainable and continuous support and engagement**
 - i. Strengthen ongoing local practices and institutions of environmental governance that have shared climate goals.
 - ii. Institute sustained programming and collaboration between ASEAN partners (for example, recently signed climate change-related cooperative agreements with Southeast Asian countries such as with [Indonesia](#) and with [Vietnam](#))