

ASEAN and Disaster Management Cooperation through AADMER in Southeast Asia

Mohamad Ichsana Nur^{1*}, Asyifa Amani Fatihah², Fawwaz Indra Fatta³, Muhammad Miftah Babil Yasar⁴, Zahra Azmi Lestari⁵, Amni Umniatussyarifah⁶

¹University of Manchester, United Kingdom

²⁻⁶UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

*E-mail correspondence: mohamadichsana.nur@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

This study examines ASEAN's role in promoting disaster management cooperation in Southeast Asia through the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). The study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review to examine ASEAN's institutional role, the implementation of AADMER, and the challenges affecting regional disaster response. Relevant academic literature, institutional documents, and previous studies were analyzed thematically to identify patterns concerning regional coordination, institutional capacity, and implementation effectiveness. The findings indicate that AADMER provides an important normative and institutional foundation for regional disaster management cooperation, particularly through common procedures for coordination, information sharing, and emergency response. The establishment of the AHA Centre has further strengthened regional coordination by facilitating disaster information management, needs assessment, and the mobilization of assistance. However, the implementation of regional cooperation remains constrained by the principle of non-interference, disparities in national capacities, bureaucratic complexities, and dependence on member states' political and material commitments. These conditions demonstrate an implementation gap between ASEAN's normative framework and operational practice. The study concludes that strengthening institutional capacity, simplifying cross-border coordination, and improving operational integration are essential for advancing ASEAN disaster cooperation from coordination toward a more responsive and integrated regional response.

Keywords: ASEAN, AADMER, disaster management, regional cooperation, Southeast Asia

INTRODUCTION

Southeast Asia is highly vulnerable to a wide range of natural disasters, including earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, volcanic eruptions, and tropical storms. The region's geographical characteristics, including its location within the Pacific Ring of Fire, contribute to its exposure to recurrent and potentially large-scale disasters (Sari et al., 2020). The transboundary consequences of major disasters and the need for rapid humanitarian assistance make disaster management not only a domestic responsibility but also an important area of regional cooperation. Under such conditions, effective disaster response requires coordination in information sharing, resource mobilization, emergency assistance, and cross-border operations.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has developed a regional framework to address these challenges through the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). Agreed in 2005 and entering into force in 2009, AADMER provides a regional framework for strengthening cooperation in disaster management and emergency response among ASEAN member states (Maqfirah et al., 2022). The framework is further supported by the development of the AHA Centre and the regional principle of "One ASEAN, One Response," which seeks to strengthen coordination and collective action in responding to disasters (Secretariat, 2015, 2016). Through these mechanisms, ASEAN has sought to move beyond political dialogue toward more structured regional disaster management cooperation.

However, the existence of a regional framework does not necessarily guarantee effective implementation. Previous studies indicate that the implementation of AADMER remains influenced by differences in national institutional capacity, resources, and cross-border coordination mechanisms (Maqfirah et al., 2022). The principle of non-interference and the intergovernmental character of ASEAN may also constrain rapid regional intervention, particularly when emergency responses require coordination across national jurisdictions. In addition, procedural and bureaucratic complexities can delay the mobilization of assistance and the implementation of coordinated responses (Ramsi et al., 2025; Triyana et al., 2022). These conditions suggest the existence of a gap between the normative commitments established through AADMER and their operational implementation.

Several previous studies have examined ASEAN's role in disaster management. Maqfirah et al. (2022), for example, examined the role of AADMER in Indonesia's natural disaster management and showed that the agreement provides a regional framework for strengthening disaster risk reduction while facing limitations related to domestic capacity and cross-border coordination. Another study on the AHA Centre emphasized its role in information coordination, aid mobilization, and regional capacity building in disaster management (Risk et al., 2017). These studies provide important insights into specific aspects of AADMER implementation and the role of the AHA Centre. Nevertheless, the relationship between ASEAN's broader institutional role, the implementation of AADMER, and the factors that limit the transition from regional coordination to operational disaster response requires further examination.

This study therefore focuses on ASEAN's role in promoting disaster management cooperation through the AADMER mechanism. Rather than examining disaster management solely from the perspective of individual member states, this study considers ASEAN cooperation at the regional level by examining the institutional framework established through AADMER, the operational role of the AHA Centre, and the structural factors affecting implementation. The analysis is particularly concerned with the extent to which ASEAN's regional mechanisms can translate normative commitments into effective operational cooperation.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how ASEAN promotes disaster management cooperation in Southeast Asia through AADMER and what institutional and implementation factors constrain the effectiveness of this cooperation. The study contributes to the discussion of ASEAN regionalism and humanitarian cooperation by highlighting the relationship between regional institutional design and implementation capacity in disaster management.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a literature review to examine ASEAN's role in promoting disaster management cooperation in Southeast Asia through the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on understanding institutional processes, regional cooperation mechanisms, and implementation dynamics rather than statistically testing causal relationships. The analysis is based on the interpretation of relevant written sources to identify patterns and relationships concerning ASEAN's role in disaster management cooperation (Nugrahani, 2014).

The literature review focuses on academic sources discussing regional cooperation, disaster management governance, ASEAN institutions, and the implementation of AADMER. The sources examined in this study consist of journal articles, academic books, and relevant institutional publications, particularly documents related to ASEAN and its disaster management mechanisms. The literature was selected based on three considerations: (1) substantive relevance to the research topic, (2) credibility and academic relevance of the source, and (3) relevance to the research objectives. This selection was intended to ensure that the literature analyzed directly contributes to understanding ASEAN's institutional role and the implementation of regional disaster management cooperation. A literature review

enables the researcher to identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing scholarly discussions in order to construct an analytical understanding of the research problem (Ramdhani et al., 2014; Zed, 2003).

The analysis was conducted through thematic analysis and comparative synthesis. First, the selected literature was examined to identify recurring themes related to the institutionalization of disaster management cooperation, the implementation of AADMER, the role of the AHA Centre, and the challenges affecting regional coordination. Second, relevant findings from different sources were compared to identify similarities, differences, and patterns in the existing literature. Third, the identified themes were synthesized to explain the relationship between ASEAN's institutional framework and the practical implementation of regional disaster management cooperation. This process was used to develop the arguments presented in the Results and Discussion section.

Two complementary theoretical perspectives were used as the analytical framework. First, international cooperation theory is employed to explain why ASEAN member states develop collective mechanisms to address disaster risks that may exceed the capacity of individual states. From this perspective, AADMER represents an institutional arrangement through which member states establish shared rules and mechanisms for addressing common disaster-related challenges (Keohane, 1984). Second, institutionalism is used to examine how ASEAN institutions, norms, rules, and organizational mechanisms shape regional cooperation and implementation. This perspective is particularly relevant for analyzing AADMER as a formal regional framework and the AHA Centre as an institutional mechanism for coordinating disaster response (March & Olsen, 1989).

To strengthen the consistency of the analysis, information concerning ASEAN's institutional role, regional cooperation mechanisms, and AADMER implementation was compared across different types of sources. This source comparison was used to identify converging evidence and differing interpretations in the literature rather than relying on a single source. The study is limited to the regional and institutional dimensions of disaster management cooperation. It does not examine in detail the technical aspects of disaster management at the national level of individual ASEAN member states and does not employ quantitative analysis to measure the policy impact of AADMER. These limitations are maintained to keep the analysis consistent with the study's objective of examining ASEAN's regional role and the institutional implementation of AADMER.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

AADMER as a Regional Framework for Disaster Management Cooperation

The analysis of the reviewed literature indicates that the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) has become an important institutional foundation for disaster management cooperation in Southeast Asia. Rather than functioning only as a statement of political commitment, AADMER establishes common arrangements for coordination, information exchange, assistance, and emergency response among ASEAN member states. Its development therefore represents an institutionalization of disaster management cooperation at the regional level.

From the perspective of international cooperation, the establishment of AADMER can be understood as a response to a collective-action problem. Disaster risks in Southeast Asia frequently generate consequences that extend beyond national boundaries, while the resources and expertise required for effective response are unevenly distributed among member states. Regional rules and coordination mechanisms can consequently reduce uncertainty and coordination costs by providing common procedures for states that need to cooperate during emergencies (Keohane, 1984). In this respect, AADMER provides an institutional framework through which ASEAN member states can coordinate their respective capacities rather than responding to disasters solely through separate national mechanisms.

The reviewed literature also indicates that AADMER has contributed to the development of common disaster-management practices, including cooperation in early warning, disaster-related information exchange,

joint exercises, and emergency assistance. The principle of “One ASEAN, One Response” further reflects an effort to strengthen regional solidarity and coordination in disaster situations (Secretariat, 2016). These developments suggest that ASEAN’s role has gradually expanded from providing a diplomatic forum toward facilitating more structured forms of operational cooperation.

However, the existence of common rules does not automatically produce uniform implementation. The literature shows that the implementation of AADMER remains strongly influenced by the capacity of individual member states. Differences in human resources, technology, logistics, and financial resources affect the ability of countries to translate regional commitments into national and operational practices. This finding is consistent with the policy implementation perspective of Pressman and Wildavsky (1984), which emphasizes that policy effectiveness depends on the ability of implementing actors to translate formal policy objectives into concrete action.

This implementation dimension is important because it reveals a central tension in ASEAN disaster cooperation. At the regional level, AADMER provides a relatively coherent framework for collective action; at the national level, however, implementation depends on the institutional readiness and resources of individual member states. The regional framework therefore creates common expectations without completely eliminating differences in implementation capacity. The findings reported by Maqfirah et al. (2022), which identify limitations in domestic capacity and cross-border coordination in the implementation of AADMER, support this interpretation.

The experience of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013 further illustrates this implementation gap. The literature reviewed in this study indicates that ASEAN was able to coordinate regional assistance through the AHA Centre, but the distribution of assistance and synchronization among institutions continued to encounter logistical and coordination challenges. The case therefore demonstrates that the existence of a regional mechanism can facilitate collective action, but its effectiveness remains dependent on the capacity and readiness of actors responsible for implementing the response.

Taken together, these findings indicate that AADMER has been effective in institutionalizing the principle and framework of regional disaster cooperation, but its effectiveness at the operational level remains conditional. Its main contribution lies in establishing common rules, coordination mechanisms, and expectations among member states. The main limitation lies in the uneven capacity to translate these regional arrangements into rapid and integrated action.

The AHA Centre and the Operationalization of Regional Cooperation

The establishment of the AHA Centre represents a further step in translating AADMER from a normative framework into an operational coordination mechanism. The reviewed literature identifies the AHA Centre as a regional hub for disaster information management, situation monitoring, communication, and the coordination of assistance among ASEAN member states (Secretariat, 2015). Its institutional position is therefore important because it provides an organizational mechanism through which regional cooperation can be activated during disasters.

From an institutionalist perspective, the importance of the AHA Centre lies not merely in its existence as an organization but in the rules, procedures, and routines through which it facilitates cooperation. March and Olsen (1989) argue that institutions influence political behavior by establishing structures and procedures that guide interaction among actors. Applied to the ASEAN disaster-management context, the AHA Centre provides an institutional channel through which information and requests for assistance can be coordinated across member states.

One important function is the management and dissemination of disaster-related information. Rapid information exchange is essential during emergencies because decisions concerning assistance, logistics, and resource mobilization depend on timely assessments of the situation. The AHA Centre therefore contributes

to reducing information gaps among member states and creates a common regional basis for decision-making. This function is consistent with the findings of Risk et al. (2017), which highlight the AHA Centre's importance in information coordination, aid mobilization, and regional capacity building.

The AHA Centre also contributes to the development of more coordinated operational responses through mechanisms such as the Emergency Operations Centre and ASEAN Emergency Response and Assessment Team (ASEAN-ERAT). These mechanisms facilitate regional needs assessment and support the coordination of emergency response activities. The development of such mechanisms suggests that ASEAN's disaster cooperation has moved beyond purely administrative interaction toward the development of practical capabilities for collective response.

Nevertheless, the analysis also reveals an important limitation: the AHA Centre's operational capacity remains dependent on the resources and political commitment of ASEAN member states. Its ability to coordinate does not mean that it possesses fully autonomous resources for conducting regional disaster response independently. Financial contributions, logistical resources, emergency assets, and national cooperation remain important to its operational effectiveness. Caballero-Anthony (2018) similarly emphasizes the continuing importance of member-state capacity and commitment in ASEAN disaster management.

This creates an important distinction between coordination capacity and response capacity. The AHA Centre can facilitate communication, information sharing, and coordination, but the actual deployment of resources remains substantially dependent on national authorities. Consequently, the establishment of a regional coordinating institution has strengthened ASEAN's ability to organize collective action, but it has not completely removed the dependence of regional response on national capacities.

The finding is significant for understanding ASEAN institutionalism. The regional institution does not replace the authority of member states; instead, it operates by connecting and coordinating them. The effectiveness of the AHA Centre is therefore determined by the quality of institutional coordination as well as the willingness and capacity of member states to provide the resources necessary for collective action.

Institutional and Implementation Barriers to Regional Disaster Cooperation

Although AADMER and the AHA Centre provide important institutional foundations, the literature identifies several structural barriers that continue to constrain the effectiveness of ASEAN disaster cooperation. Three barriers are particularly prominent: the principle of non-interference and state sovereignty, disparities in national capacity, and bureaucratic complexity in cross-border coordination.

Non-interference and the limits of regional intervention

The first barrier is embedded in the institutional character of ASEAN itself. ASEAN cooperation continues to be strongly influenced by respect for national sovereignty, non-interference, and consensus-based decision-making. These principles have historically helped ASEAN maintain political cohesion among states with different political and institutional systems. However, they can become problematic in emergency situations where rapid decision-making and cross-border intervention are required.

Emmers (2003) notes that ASEAN's cooperative approach places considerable emphasis on political consensus and respect for sovereignty rather than on supranational mechanisms. In disaster situations, this institutional characteristic may limit the speed with which regional assistance can be mobilized because intervention and assistance remain closely connected to the consent and procedures of affected member states.

The problem is therefore not necessarily that ASEAN lacks a regional framework. Rather, the regional framework operates within an intergovernmental institutional structure that limits the autonomy of regional mechanisms. This helps explain why AADMER can establish common expectations and procedures while still encountering difficulties in translating those arrangements into rapid operational action.

From an institutional perspective, this represents a tension between two functions of regional cooperation. ASEAN institutions are designed to facilitate cooperation while simultaneously preserving the sovereignty of member states. In ordinary circumstances, this balance can support political stability. During fast-moving disasters, however, the same arrangement can create procedural constraints.

Uneven national capacity

The second barrier is the substantial variation in national disaster-management capacity. ASEAN member states differ in their preparedness, technology, early-warning systems, logistics, human resources, and ability to mobilize emergency resources. The literature reviewed in the article indicates that countries such as Singapore and Malaysia possess relatively stronger disaster-management capacities than some other member states.

These differences have direct consequences for regional implementation. A common regional standard does not produce identical outcomes when member states possess different institutional and material capacities. Countries with stronger administrative and technological capabilities are generally better positioned to implement regional arrangements, while countries with more limited resources may face greater difficulties.

This finding reinforces the policy implementation argument introduced earlier. Pressman and Wildavsky (1984) emphasize that implementation involves multiple actors whose capacities and coordination affect whether policy objectives can be realized. In the ASEAN context, AADMER is implemented through a network of national and regional actors rather than through a single centralized authority. Consequently, variation in national capacity becomes a structural factor affecting the consistency of regional implementation.

The implication is important: regional disaster cooperation cannot be strengthened solely by improving ASEAN-level institutions. Strengthening national preparedness and interoperability is equally important because regional mechanisms ultimately depend on national actors for much of the operational response.

Cross-border bureaucratic coordination

The third barrier concerns administrative and bureaucratic procedures. Cross-border humanitarian assistance may require customs clearance, entry permits for personnel and equipment, coordination among multiple government agencies, and the synchronization of information across institutions. In an emergency, such procedures can become significant obstacles when rapid deployment is required.

From the perspective of policy implementation, these administrative processes represent an implementation gap between the formal objectives of AADMER and the practical conditions under which regional assistance is delivered. Even when member states agree on the principle of regional cooperation, implementation can slow down when multiple institutional procedures must be completed before assistance can be deployed.

The experience of the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami is relevant in this regard. The disaster became an important catalyst for strengthening ASEAN disaster cooperation, while also revealing limitations in regional coordination during the early emergency phase. The experience therefore illustrates how major disasters can expose institutional weaknesses that are less visible during routine cooperation.

Taken together, these three barriers demonstrate that the central challenge facing ASEAN is not the absence of regional institutions but the difficulty of connecting regional rules with rapid operational implementation. This is the central implementation gap identified across the literature.

Strengthening Capacity and Moving from Coordination to Operational Integration

The literature also identifies several efforts undertaken by ASEAN to address these limitations. These efforts include strengthening the Emergency Operations Centre, developing ASEAN-ERAT, conducting joint exercises, and expanding cooperation with international organizations and humanitarian partners (ASEAN Secretariat, 2015).

The development of these mechanisms is significant because it addresses a key weakness identified in the preceding discussion: the gap between regional coordination and operational capacity. Joint exercises, for example, can improve interoperability by allowing member states to become familiar with common procedures, communication systems, and operational expectations. Similarly, ASEAN-ERAT can strengthen regional capacity to conduct rapid needs assessments, thereby improving the information available for subsequent response coordination.

These measures also demonstrate that institutional development within ASEAN is not static. Rather, ASEAN has attempted to gradually transform its disaster-management cooperation from a primarily administrative arrangement toward a system with stronger operational capabilities. This is consistent with the institutionalist perspective because institutions can evolve as actors develop new procedures and mechanisms for addressing recurring collective problems.

ASEAN has also sought to strengthen capacity through cooperation with international organizations and external humanitarian partners. The reviewed literature identifies cooperation with organizations such as the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and international humanitarian agencies as a means of supporting knowledge transfer, technological development, and human-resource capacity in disaster risk reduction. Such partnerships can compensate, at least partially, for differences in national capacity and expand the resources available for regional disaster preparedness.

Nevertheless, these initiatives do not eliminate the underlying structural constraints. Joint exercises and regional response teams can improve interoperability, but their effectiveness still depends on the willingness of member states to participate and provide resources. Similarly, external partnerships can provide knowledge and technical assistance, but they cannot substitute entirely for domestic institutional capacity.

The literature therefore suggests that ASEAN's future challenge is to strengthen the operational integration of existing mechanisms rather than simply create additional institutional frameworks. Three areas are particularly important.

First, cross-border coordination procedures need to become more streamlined, particularly for emergency personnel, equipment, and humanitarian assistance. Second, resource pooling needs to become more predictable, so that regional mechanisms do not depend entirely on ad hoc national contributions during emergencies. Third, interoperability among member states needs to be strengthened through regular joint exercises, shared procedures, and information systems.

These measures are directly related to the implementation gap identified in this study. If AADMER establishes the regional framework and the AHA Centre provides the coordination mechanism, then stronger operational integration is necessary to connect these institutional arrangements with actual emergency response.

From Normative Commitment to Operational Cooperation: An Analytical Synthesis

The analysis of the reviewed literature reveals a consistent pattern. ASEAN has made substantial progress in institutionalizing disaster-management cooperation, but institutionalization has not yet resulted in fully integrated regional operational capacity.

At the normative level, AADMER establishes common rules and expectations for disaster management cooperation. From the perspective of international cooperation theory, this institutional arrangement helps member states address a collective problem by reducing uncertainty and providing mechanisms for coordination. At the organizational level, the AHA Centre translates these commitments into practical coordination through information management, communication, needs assessment, and assistance mobilization. At the implementation level, however, the effectiveness of these mechanisms remains constrained by sovereignty concerns, uneven national capacities, bureaucratic procedures, and dependence on member-state political and material commitments.

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This synthesis is important because it shifts the assessment of ASEAN's role away from a simple question of whether ASEAN has succeeded or failed. The literature instead indicates partial institutional effectiveness. ASEAN has succeeded in creating rules, institutions, and mechanisms for regional cooperation, but the implementation of those mechanisms remains uneven.

Consequently, the principal challenge is not necessarily to establish another regional framework. It is to strengthen the connection between regional institutional commitments and national operational capabilities. This is where the principle of "One ASEAN, One Response" faces its most significant test. The principle has provided a normative direction for regional solidarity, while the continuing implementation gap demonstrates that solidarity must also be supported by interoperable capabilities, predictable resources, and sufficiently streamlined procedures.

The findings thus support the argument that the effectiveness of ASEAN disaster cooperation depends on the interaction of institutional design, national capacity, political commitment, and operational integration. AADMER has created the institutional foundation, while the AHA Centre has strengthened regional coordination. The next challenge is to ensure that these institutional achievements can consistently produce rapid and integrated responses when disasters occur.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ASEAN has played an important role in institutionalizing disaster management cooperation in Southeast Asia through the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). AADMER provides a regional framework that facilitates cooperation through common procedures, information sharing, emergency coordination, and mechanisms for collective response. The establishment of the AHA Centre has further strengthened this framework by providing an institutional platform for disaster information management, needs assessment, communication, and coordination of regional assistance.

However, the analysis also demonstrates that the existence of regional institutional arrangements does not automatically ensure effective operational cooperation. The implementation of AADMER continues to be affected by the intergovernmental character of ASEAN, respect for national sovereignty and non-interference, disparities in national disaster-management capacities, and bureaucratic challenges in cross-border coordination. These factors create an implementation gap between ASEAN's normative commitments and the practical delivery of coordinated disaster responses.

The study therefore argues that strengthening ASEAN disaster cooperation requires more than maintaining or expanding regional institutional frameworks. Greater attention should be given to

strengthening national and regional operational capacities, improving interoperability among member states, streamlining procedures for cross-border assistance, and ensuring more predictable resource mobilization. The effectiveness of the “One ASEAN, One Response” principle ultimately depends on the capacity of ASEAN institutions and member states to translate regional commitments into coordinated and timely action. In this regard, AADMER has provided an important institutional foundation, while the continuing challenge for ASEAN is to transform that foundation into stronger and more consistently integrated operational cooperation.

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