

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background**

Southeast Asia Region stands out as one of the most susceptible areas globally to disasters (ASEAN Disaster Risk Management Initiative, 2010). This region faces exposure to various natural hazards, encompassing tsunamis, floods, typhoons, cyclones, droughts, landslides, and volcanic eruptions. Calamities over the past five decades include the loss of close to 450,000 lives, with approximately 525 million people adversely affected (UNESCAP, 2021). The report also forecasts that climate change will heighten the risk of natural hazards by amplifying their frequency and severity. Additionally, data from the ASEAN Disaster Information Network (ADINET) reveals that from 2012 onwards, the region has experienced over 5,000 disasters, predominantly characterized by floods and tornadoes (ADINET, 2023).

Furthermore, the issue of disaster risk is increasingly emerging as a noteworthy transboundary concern. When a country experiences a disaster, the impact can extend to other countries, leading to broader macroeconomic consequences. These effects have the potential to disrupt trade and impede economic growth within the region. Simultaneously, the humanitarian landscape is also evolving. The stakeholders in disaster management are expanding not only in terms of numbers but also in their capacities and roles.

ASEAN is progressing towards prioritizing the inclusion of people in development. The humanitarian response and assistance underscore the importance of community resilience. It is also employing collaborative and people-centric approaches in times of planning and emergencies. Therefore, it is crucial to have a set of guidelines for disaster prevention and mitigation that can respond to various hazards. This is particularly important given the wide range of disasters and their potential impacts that need to be addressed in a collective manner.

It commenced with a mega-tsunami that hit the Indian Ocean in 2004 as a tragedy of historical and global significance. Numerous ASEAN Member States, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand, suffered severe damage from the impact of the Indian Ocean Tsunami, leading to substantial loss of life and property. This calamity prompted ASEAN leaders to discuss ways to enhance their actions by convening an urgent meeting in Jakarta on 6 January 2005 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005). The policy statement supports the decisions to set a framework for disaster prevention and mitigation in the region, to involve civilian and defence personnel in disaster relief efforts, to create an entity for assisting the humanitarian in ASEAN, to develop a network for the exchange of disaster's information and communication in ASEAN, and to set up a management mechanism in the regions (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005).

On 26 July 2005, the leaders of ASEAN formalised the Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). It provides a binding regulatory framework aimed at reducing losses in the region and fostering a cooperative response to disaster-related situations. This covers a wide range of disaster management themes, including risk assessment, mitigation, preparation, emergency response, recovery, technological cooperation and scientific study. It also sets the ground for the setting up of the Coordinating Centre for ASEAN on Humanitarian Assistance (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005).

Following the approval of AADMER by ASEAN leaders, Myanmar was struck by Cyclone Nargis in 2008, resulting in 140,000 casualties or individuals reported as missing and affecting a total of 2.4 million people (ASEAN Secretariat, 2010). This calamity served as a momentum for ASEAN's unity as a regional entity. Given the intricate nature of the disaster, a well-coordinated response was imperative. ASEAN was called upon to spearhead the coordination of assistance to alleviate the suffering of the affected population. Collaborating with the Myanmar government and working jointly with the global community, ASEAN actively participated in supporting the response efforts.

The response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar is marked as a significant success. Acting as a crucial intermediary, ASEAN effectively facilitated coordination between the international humanitarian community and the affected country, enabling the much-needed humanitarian assistance to flow in. There was an established task force for humanitarian assistance which successfully streamlined and expedited the entry of many humanitarian workers through the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) mechanism (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008). The mobilisation of first responders as a first-time initiative resulted in a swift assessment report was crucial in establishing the ASEAN-led response mechanism. ASEAN took the lead in orchestrating a collaborative assessment involving all stakeholders, including the government, resulting in a singular assessment report that served as a unified reference for identifying disaster-related needs and gaps. After the joint assessment, ASEAN continued to lead periodic reviews of humanitarian needs, effectively coordinating the mobilisation of additional resources for both response and recovery.

The experience with Cyclone Nargis offered ASEAN valuable insights across various aspects of the operation, encompassing assessments, joint operations, monitoring and accountability, as well as resource mobilisation. Notably, it marked the inaugural collaboration between ASEAN, the United Nations, civil society, and on-the-ground volunteers. The response to Cyclone Nargis served as a learning opportunity for enhancing ASEAN's regional disaster management mechanisms. As ASEAN concluded its humanitarian efforts in Myanmar, AADMER commenced its function in December 2009 prompting ASEAN to prepare its initial work program under AADMER (ASEAN Secretariat, 2010).

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers put the AADMER operational engine into concrete form by endorsing the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance in Disaster Management (AHA Centre) in November 2011. This significant event took place during the 19th ASEAN Summit and was witnessed by the ASEAN Leaders (AHA Centre, 2018). Promoting regional cooperation by

facilitating cooperation with various stakeholders including international organisations was the main objective of establishing this entity.

The AHA Centre supports the National Disaster Management Organisations (NDMOs) of the ASEAN Member States in carrying out its role and functions. Additionally, this entity also cooperates with a range of agencies including international organisations, enterprises or companies, civil society organisations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the United Nations (UN) agencies and others. Engagement has been initiated with several sectoral partners from various countries to explore further cooperation. Many countries, including Japan, the European Union, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United States of America, and Australia, have established partnerships with this centre. Besides, AHA Centre will collaborate with the Secretary-General of ASEAN to provide essential assistance to the needy community. This will involve strategic coordination with ASEAN leaders and other agencies.

This coordinating agency has responded to over 40 emergencies in ASEAN Member States since its establishment, including both natural and human-induced disasters. The response to Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 provided valuable lessons in emergency response during the early stages of the AHA Centre becoming operational. Supporting the National Disaster Management Office of the Philippines, it played a crucial role in the coordination of humanitarian assistance provided by other member states in the aftermath of disasters. The assistance provided was diverse, including personnel, financial and in-kind contributions.

The AHA Centre's most significant response to date was to the earthquake and tsunami in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia last 2018. During that period, the coordination of international assistance by the affected state was undertaken by this centre. This response was a pivotal moment for the AHA Centre as it was a test and implementation of various ASEAN mechanisms and processes during the disaster. It also tested how national, regional and international humanitarian

partners could work together. Also, it tested the readiness to perform its function in managing the coming assistance from other member states and partners.

AHA Centre has been mandated by ASEAN leaders to coordinate humanitarian assistance in Myanmar under Point 4 of the Five-Point Consensus. Myanmar faces a multi-pronged crisis which includes political, economic, health and humanitarian challenges. Existing humanitarian needs across the country have been exacerbated since 1 February 2021. The conflict has intensified, leading to an increase in clashes in various ethnic regions and a significant deterioration in the overall security situation, with escalating confrontations between the security forces, armed groups and citizens taking part in the civil disobedience movement. Thousands of health workers have joined the protests. This has put severe strain on the health system and affected Myanmar's response to COVID-19.

The 2021 coup in Myanmar has had significant consequences. The escalating violence and the outbreak of COVID-19 have severely affected vulnerable populations and exacerbated existing humanitarian needs. One year after the coup, Myanmar continues to experience widespread violent civil unrest, an economic crisis, and the impact of poor COVID-19 preparedness and response. Poverty levels are rising as incomes fall, with many people losing their livelihoods and sources of income. It is also causing the collapse of public services, disruption to the health system, the banking system and the supply chain for essential commodities and increasing needs across Myanmar. This is exacerbating pre-existing humanitarian vulnerabilities and the impact of the pandemic.

The Humanitarian Response Plan, released by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA), identifies that more than 14 million people in Myanmar require life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection services in 2022. This is a significant increase from the 3 million people identified in 2021. The increase is attributed to the impacts of COVID-19 on social, economic, and health factors, exacerbating food insecurity (UN-OCHA, 2022). Additionally, displacement caused by conflict and protection needs since

the events of 1 February 2021 have contributed to this increase. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlighted in April 2021 that the pandemic and political crisis could result in close to half of the country living in poverty by the beginning of 2022 (UNDP, 2021).

The ASEAN Leaders' Meeting (ALM) took place at the ASEAN Secretariat on 24 April 2021 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). The meeting emphasised the immediate requirement to deliver humanitarian aid to Myanmar. As an outcome of the meeting, ASEAN leaders reached a consensus on the situation in Myanmar, as outlined in the Five-Point Consensus. Concerning humanitarian assistance, point 4 states that ASEAN will provide such assistance through the AHA Centre.

This thesis analyses the role of the AHA Centre in facilitating and coordinating humanitarian assistance through the three large-scale ASEAN emergency responses from its establishment in 2011 to 2023. In light of the emerging hazards in the region and the dynamics of disaster management in the region, ASEAN has responded to three large-scale disasters including the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, the 2018 Central Sulawesi Earthquake and Tsunami in Indonesia, and ongoing ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance to Myanmar. Through AADMER, it has a mandate as the principal regional coordinating entity for disaster management related. Furthermore, as per Point 4 of the Five Consensus, the AHA Centre has been mandated to facilitate humanitarian assistance in Myanmar. Accordingly, it is important to capture the key lessons and best practices of the AHA Centre in facilitating and coordinating the humanitarian response. It is also important to further analyse how the AHA Centre has evolved as an organisation in carrying out its function.

The role of the AHA Centre will be analysed from the perspective of Neoliberalism. This theory emphasizes the role of institutions or organisations in international politics. This includes how to have cooperation between countries including the involvement of non-state actors in the international system (Martin,

2007). Cooperation between countries and other actors that come from the region and dialogue partners will potentially benefit national interests during disasters or crises. Stakeholders in disaster management are not limited to government-related agencies. Non-government-related actors also have an important role and can contribute to joint disaster response. In this connection, the theory is further analysed by linking relevant concepts such as Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), International Organisations, Human Security, and One ASEAN One Response.

The three large-scale responses were selected due to their characteristics. All cases represent the acceptance of international assistance. The comparison of its core function with some set of parameters is essential, such as the scope of disaster hazards, type and value of assistance, coordination scope, and actors/stakeholders involved, and others. The development of its function in coordinating humanitarian assistance can be evaluated based on these parameters.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The research will address the following questions based on the problem identified:

1. What are the roles and lesson learned of the AHA Centre in the selected Southeast Asia's Large Scale Responses?
2. From these responses, in what way the AHA Centre learned and evolved its procedures from their best practices in facilitating and coordinating humanitarian assistance?

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

Below are the objectives of this research:

1. To capture the key lessons learned from the selected cases of the AHA Centre large-scale responses.
2. To understand the way the AHA Centre learned and evolved its procedures from the best practices in facilitating and coordinating humanitarian assistance.

## **1.4 Research Significance**

The purpose of this research is to contribute to disaster management in the region. The results of this research can provide valuable insights for readers and researchers interested in this topic. The study draws on lessons learned and best practices from large-scale responses in the region, enriching the disaster management sector. In addition, the study will inform the development and trends of disaster management.

In conclusion, emerging natural hazards in the region and the mandate of ASEAN leaders require the AHA Centre as a regional mechanism to perform the role of coordinating and facilitating international assistance to the affected state. Connecting to the perspective of neoliberalism, which emphasizes international cooperation and the roles of state and non-state actors, particularly in the context of disaster, this chapter poses two research questions that focus on the key lessons learned from the AHA Centre's large-scale response cases and how the AHA Centre has developed its procedures based on best practices in facilitating international assistance. The following chapter will provide a literature review and analysis of relevant theories and concepts to answer the research questions. This will include an examination of previous studies and an explanation of key assumptions and definitions relevant to the topic.

## **1.5 Thesis Outline**

This thesis will consist of five chapters that will be arranged as follows:

Chapter I contains Background, Research Question, Research Objectives and Significance.

Chapter II provides a literature review including the theoretical framework of the study and previous relevant study.

Chapter III will present the research methodology that guides the writer to the next chapter.

Chapter IV will analyse the topic to be linked with the theoretical framework.

Chapter V will conclude all the materials that are written above.