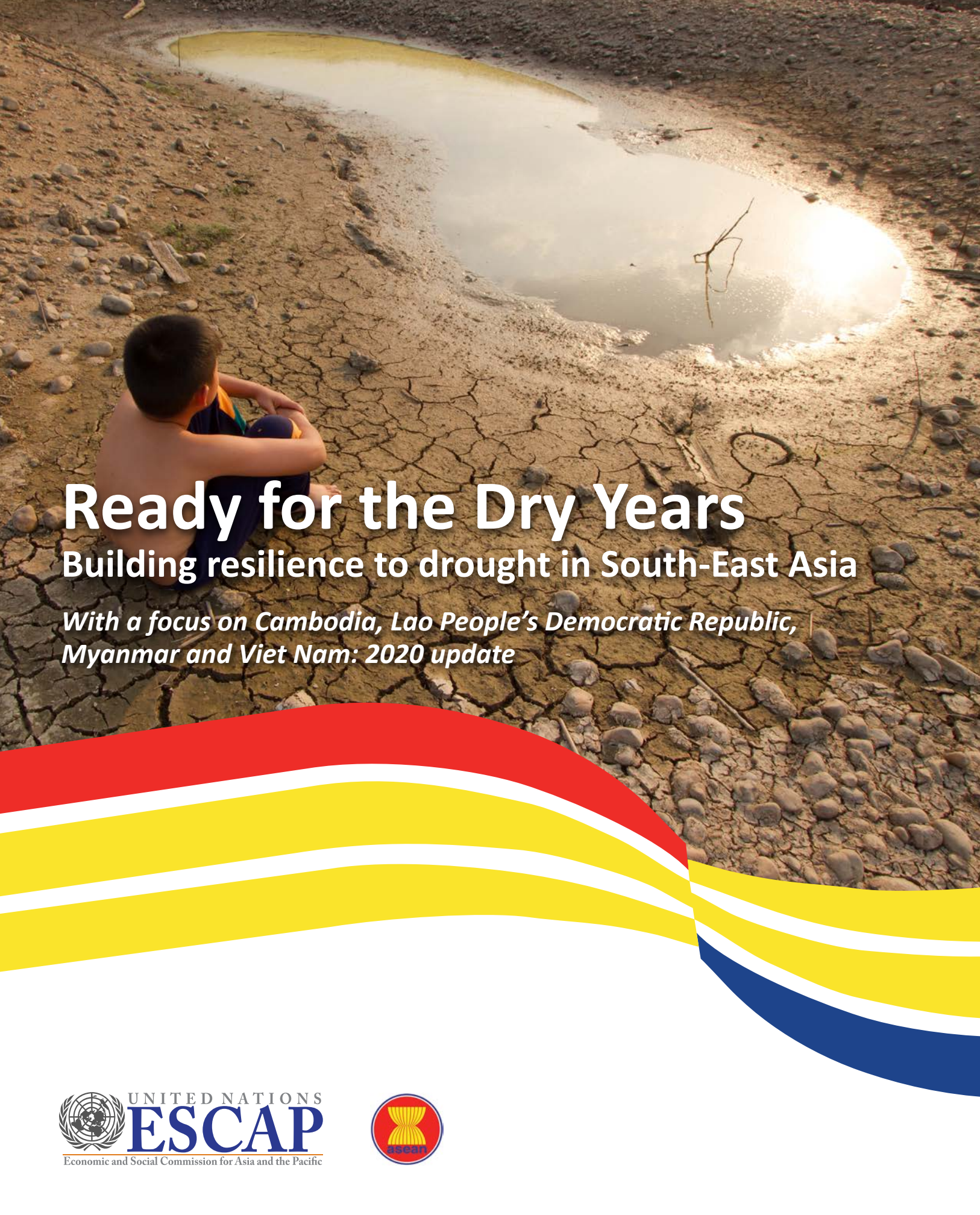




Ready for the Dry Years

Building resilience to drought in South-East Asia

*With a focus on Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic,
Myanmar and Viet Nam: 2020 update*



The dark grey areas of the map indicate ESCAP members and associate members.*

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) serves as the United Nations' regional hub promoting cooperation among countries to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. The largest regional intergovernmental platform with 53 Member States and 9 associate members, ESCAP has emerged as a strong regional think-tank offering countries sound analytical products that shed insight into the evolving economic, social and environmental dynamics of the region. The Commission's strategic focus is to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is reinforced and deepened by promoting regional cooperation and integration to advance responses to shared vulnerabilities, connectivity, financial cooperation and market integration. ESCAP's research and analysis coupled with its policy advisory services, capacity building and technical assistance to governments aims to support countries' sustainable and inclusive development ambitions.

The ESCAP office is located in Bangkok, Thailand. Please visit the ESCAP website at www.unescap.org for further information.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967. The Member States of the Association are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

The ASEAN Secretariat is based in Jakarta, Indonesia. Please visit the ASEAN website at www.asean.org for further information.

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Forewords



South-East Asia has many dry years ahead. This should come as no surprise. Many parts of the region have regularly been stricken by droughts that have destroyed crops, heightened fire risks, and led to acute shortages of drinking water. The hardest hit are the poor, especially farming communities that rely on regular rainfall for their annual crops and who have few resources to fall back on during periods of rain shortfall. They are already likely to live on the degraded land that is most vulnerable to the effects of drought.

Ready for the Dry Years offers a clear analysis of this subject, assessing prospects for the decades ahead and highlighting the principal risks. This Report points out that the future could be even worse. With climate change, many more areas are likely to experience extreme conditions with severe consequences. Droughts not only exacerbate poverty, inequality, and food insecurity, they also heighten the risk of conflict. As droughts degrade the natural environment, people find themselves competing for increasingly scarce land and water resources.

Building resilience will be fundamental for the continued development of ASEAN countries. In this context, the Report identifies the priorities for increasing resilience to drought and helping communities adapt. Most of the responsibility rests with national governments, and ASEAN member States already have many institutions and programmes that focus on drought. But there is also an important opportunity to provide a regional response among neighbouring countries.

Ready for the Dry Years, proposes three priority areas of intervention for ESCAP and ASEAN. The first is to strengthen drought risk assessment and early warning services, for example, by sharing data from space-based technologies. The second is to foster risk financing instruments that can insure communities against slow-onset droughts. The third is to enhance people's capacities to adapt to drought, thereby reducing the potential for conflict.

ESCAP and ASEAN are two organisations in the region that are well placed to support regional action on drought. For ESCAP, the guiding principles are embodied in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. For ASEAN, they are embodied in the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. More recently, the two organisations have worked together to align these complementary visions and have developed a joint Framework for Action.

More dry years are inevitable, but more suffering is not. Timely interventions now can reduce the impacts of drought, protect the poorest communities, and foster more harmonious societies. I hope that this report will serve as a valuable source of information on this important subject and help stimulate necessary debate and action.

A stylized black ink signature of Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana

Executive Secretary

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP



Humanitarian challenges due to natural disaster in South-East Asia has changed significantly in recent decades. In addition to rapid-onset natural disasters (such as earthquakes, tsunamis, cyclones and typhoons), the region is also facing the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, which are considered as slow-onset disasters but cause considerable damages and disruption to human life.

As reported in the ASEAN Statistical Yearbook 2018, approximately 34 per cent of the South-East Asian population work in the agricultural, fisheries, and forestry sectors. These sectors are the region's largest source of employment based by industry and are vulnerable to the effects of drought, a major impact of climate change. Drought could bring about severe economic losses for ASEAN Member States through crop damage or failure, as agriculture contributes up to 25.9 per cent of GDP share in the region. Drought also threatens food security and limits access to water for consumption and domestic use which affects people's livelihood. There are also potential social impacts of drought, including human health problems due to limited and poor water quality, public safety threat by increasing forest and range fires, and changes in lifestyle through urbanization. In this light, understanding and monitoring drought becomes important through investment into research and development.

Consequently, tackling the impact of drought in South-East Asia has become the priority that ASEAN in 2016 agreed to conduct a thorough study on the drought situation in the member states to come up with solutions and preventive measures. This commitment expressed the solidarity and commitment among ASEAN Member States to facilitate the collective solution and actions to overcome the drought situation.

Slow-onset disasters, such as droughts, tend to receive less attention from policymakers and the media compared to the rapid-onset ones. Therefore, knowledge of what to do and how to react in these situations is fundamental, especially for ASEAN people living in disaster-prone areas. There is a need to establish a robust developmental approach by analyzing how resources are distributed within states, and how governments should be allocating more finance and personnel to risk reduction and capacity building for droughts.

I am pleased that ASEAN and ESCAP have jointly worked together in sharing experiences of drought management through identifying challenges and opportunities, particularly in the low capacity and high risk countries of Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam. It is essential for ASEAN to continue to advance local, national and regional systems by adopting a whole-of-society approach in addressing the issues of drought. The findings of the study shall foster an integrated and collaborative drought management plan for the governments and also increase awareness of ASEAN peoples that the severity of droughts will increase in the future and will require more robust mitigation and adaptation plans.

The priority areas of intervention highlighted in this report will contribute to the development of policy responses to mitigate the impact of future drought and eventually will strengthen efforts on building the ASEAN Community that is resilient to drought. These priorities are in line with the ASEAN Vision on Disaster Management 2025, and ongoing efforts to promote complementarities between the ASEAN Vision 2025 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Dato Lim Jock Hoi

Secretary-General

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

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Contents

Forewords	3
Acknowledgments	5
Executive Summary	12
CHAPTER 1. Slow but devastating – droughts in South-East Asia	14
Three decades of droughts	16
Box 1-1 – Drought hotspot: Myanmar	18
Box 1-2 – Drought hotspot: Viet Nam	20
Crises caused by 2015/2016 El Niño	23
Box 1-3 – The El Niño signature	24
An extensive risk	25
Impact on poverty	26
Heightening inequality	28
Box 1-4 – The dissimilarity index	29
Links between drought and conflict	30
Correlations between conflict risk and drought	31
Forecast changes in drought intensity and geography	32
Scenario 1 – Less severe El Niño	33
Scenario 2 – More severe El Niño	34
Nexus between drought, poverty, inequality, hunger, land degradation and conflict	36
Facing up to a widespread threat	37

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