

Enhancing Transboundary Haze Pollution Cooperation in Southeast Asia (2003-2020): External Actors and ASEAN Supporting Mechanisms

Phurida Charusombat

Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, Waseda University, Tokyo 169-0051, Japan

Corresponding author's e-mail: charusombat.p91@fuji.waseda.jp

Abstract The ongoing and escalating crisis of transboundary haze pollution in Southeast Asia, primarily caused by peat fires in Indonesia, has caused regional and global concern. The ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP) was launched in 2002 as a joint effort to address this environmental issue, but its effectiveness has been questioned. This study examines the role of external actors working with ASEAN support mechanisms in implementing the AATHP to improve the implementation of the AATHP during the period 2003-2020. The study employed qualitative analysis, which thoroughly examined credible academic documents. Contrary to the prevailing views on the limitations of the ASEAN Way, the findings highlight the multiple roles of external actors as funders and implementers working with ASEAN support mechanisms, particularly about peatland management. Specifically, the European Union (EU), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Global Environment Centre (GEC) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) have played a pivotal role in shaping ASEAN's institutional framework, financial support and promotion of international cooperation. The study concludes that the engagement of external actors has had a positive impact on ASEAN's ability to tackle transboundary haze pollution and has promoted a more robust and collaborative regional environmental management approach.

Keywords External actors; ASEAN, Transboundary haze pollution; Regional agreement; Peatland management; Institutional change

Received: January 9, 2024

Revised: May 5, 2024

Accepted: May 14, 2024

Introduction

The persistent and escalating problem of transboundary haze pollution in Southeast Asia has become a major regional and global concern. Mainly caused by peat fires in Indonesia, which is a critical contributor to transboundary haze pollution in the ASEAN region, ASEAN member states, hosting 56% of the world's tropical peatlands, face significant challenges due to extensive peatland destruction, primarily in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). These fires cause environmental damage and pose serious health risks to people in the affected areas (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021c). Furthermore, it poses a major socio-economic and environmental challenge (Caballero-Anthony, 2018). Recognizing the severity of the problem, the ten ASEAN member states (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam), jointly signed the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP) in 2002 to combat and mitigate the effects of pollution (Varkkey, 2022). Although the AATHP has been in force since November 2003, it has struggled to achieve its environmental goals. In particular, Indonesia, the main source of hazardous haze, ratified the agreement in 2014 after a long delay of 12 years (Nazeer & Furuoka, 2017).

There is a widespread opinion among scholars that more than the mechanisms enshrined in the AATHP are needed to curb haze pollution effectively. This limitation is primarily attributed to the focus on the ASEAN Way — an approach that emphasizes the non-binding principles of state sovereignty and non-interference (Nguitragool, 2011; Heilmann, 2015; Alam & Nurhidayah, 2017; Varkkey, 2020; Muhammad, 2022). However, Charusombat (2023a) challenges this perspective and argues that ASEAN has made incremental institutional changes from 2003 to 2020 to improve its effectiveness in dealing with transboundary haze pollution. Her study applies Mahoney and Thelen's (2010) theory of incremental institutional change and emphasizes the concepts of institutional layering and institutional conversion.

In institutional layering, new elements are introduced into an existing institution without replacing it, gradually changing its status and structure (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; van der Heijden, 2011). In contrast, institutional conversion occurs when existing components of an institution are repurposed or reinterpreted by actors within or influenced by the institutional environment without fundamentally changing the institutions themselves (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

Charusombat (2023a) emphasizes that ASEAN as an institution and the AATHP as an existing framework employ institutional layering and conversion strategies to address transboundary haze pollution. These strategies serve as the preferred method of institutional change to strengthen environmental cooperation within ASEAN. Regarding the institutional layering from 2003 to 2020, all additional stakeholders, meetings, and initiatives added during this period to address haze pollution were decided by the ASEAN Member States' environment ministers during the Conference of the Parties to the AATHP (COP) (Charusombat, 2023a). In terms of institutional conversion, the reinterpretation of the articles of the AATHP through the Haze-Free Roadmap (2016-2020) in 2016 has resulted in the AATHP and all ASEAN committees working under the implementation of the AATHP gradually expanding their roles in terms of greater cooperation in tackling transboundary haze pollution from 2016 to 2020.

Furthermore, Charusombat (2023b) addresses the transition from ASEAN's institutional layering to conversion in 2015-2016. She uses the dynamic theoretical framework of gradual institutional change by Koreh et al. (2019) to illuminate the circumstances and key actors behind ASEAN's transition in 2015-2016. The study of Charusombat (2023b) highlights that ASEAN committees, particularly the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze Pollution in the Mekong Sub-Region (MSC-Mekong) led by Thailand, and the ASEAN Ministers responsible for the environment under the COP were considered as change agents. Two critical situations in 2015, notably the Haze Crisis in the region, acted as catalysts that prompted these change

agents to alter ASEAN's institutional framework, leading to the launch of the Haze-Free Roadmap (2016-2020) in 2016.

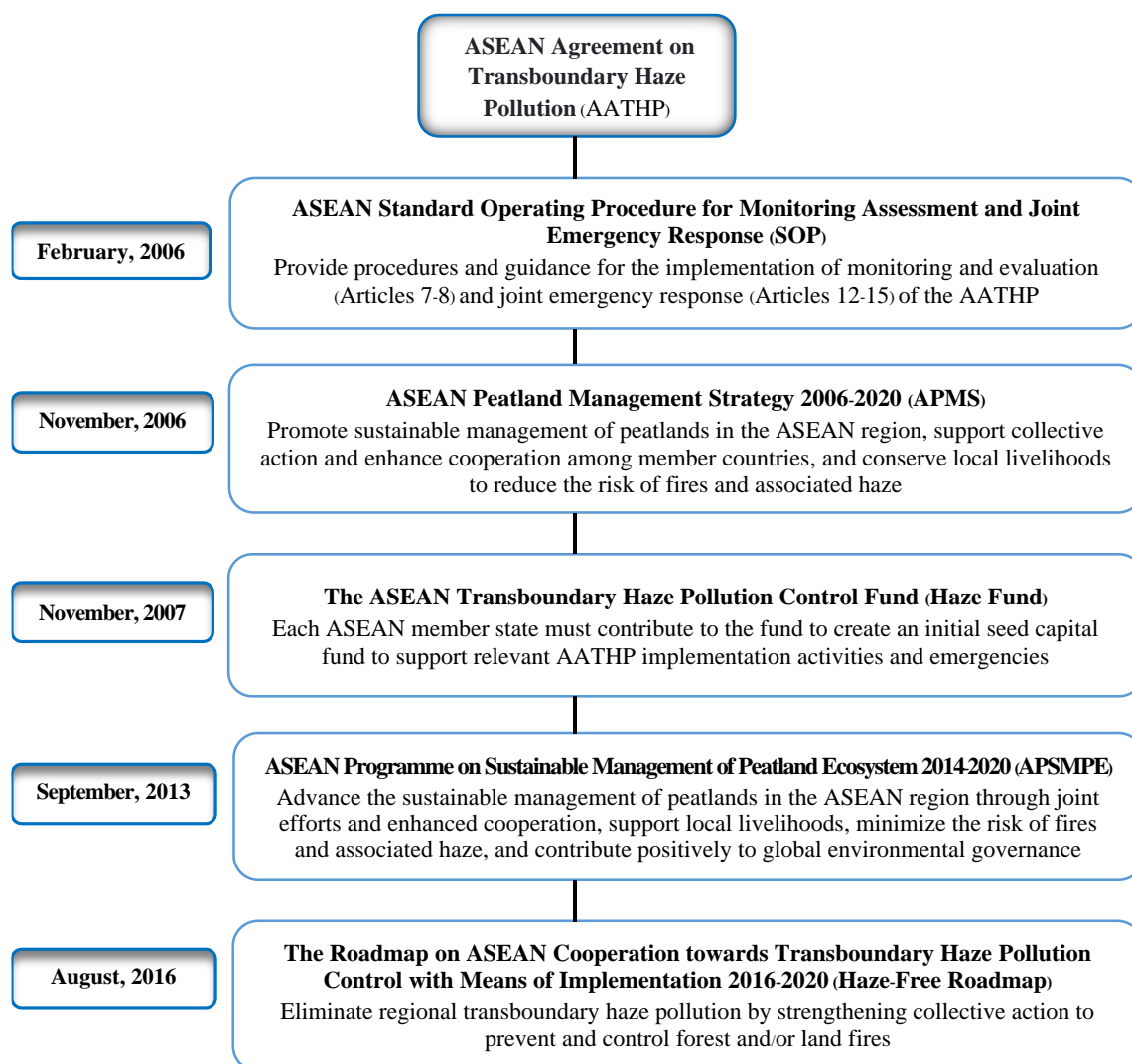


Figure 1 The supporting mechanisms added in the period 2003-2020 through institutional layering to support the implementation of the AATHP

Sources: Caballero-Anthony (2018) and Charusombat (2023a)

However, both of Charusombat's previous studies overlook the examination of external actors supporting and collaborating with ASEAN's support mechanisms, as shown in Figure 1, to improve the AATHP implementation in addressing the region's transboundary haze. This omission is notable as Article 2 of the AATHP emphasizes the need to prevent and monitor transboundary haze pollution from land and forest fires, which should be mitigated through concerted national efforts and enhanced regional and international cooperation (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016). Furthermore, Nguitragool (2011) claims that the AATHP provides a platform for the development of cooperation. Varkkey (2017) also highlights that ASEAN cooperation on haze has long involved stakeholders from academia, business, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in stakeholder engagement.

To address this research gap, this study attempts to answer the following question: **How has the involvement of external stakeholders helped ASEAN improve the AATHP implementation to combat transboundary haze pollution from 2003 to 2020?** The main objective is to examine the specific external actors involved in the implementation of the AATHP during the period of gradual institutional change, 2003-2020, as presented in Charusombat's (2023a, 2023b) work. Additionally, the study will examine the impact of the external actors' engagement in shaping ASEAN's institutional framework about transboundary haze pollution. The study aims to provide comprehensive insight into the dynamics of cooperation between external actors and ASEAN in tackling transboundary haze pollution within the given timeframe. Ultimately, the overarching goal is to contribute valuable knowledge that enriches our understanding of the intricate interplay between external actors and regional environmental governance that led to institutional change.

Therefore, the paper is organized as follows: Section 1, Literature Review, establishes an analytical framework by explaining the definition of external actors in environmental policy and providing a definition tailored to the author's language. This section clarifies the definition of external actors in the context of this study and is followed by the research method and scope. Section 2, Results and Discussion, examines the involvement of external actors participating in and supporting the five ASEAN mechanisms in the context of AATHP implementation using the analytical framework developed in Section 1. The concluding section summarizes the findings and discusses implications for ASEAN environmental cooperation by explaining how the involvement of external actors influences ASEAN institutional change and strengthens coordination in addressing regional environmental problems.

Literature review

Analytical framework

Regional environmental governance: The involvement of external actor

According to Hass (2016), regional institutions are expected to address regional environmental problems in three ways. First, existing regional organizations can be used to address newly identified problems by leveraging their respective resources and powers. The second approach involves the development of organic regional institutions to address these problems. The third strategy is for regional institutions to seek the help of global organizations because they lack the resources to address environmental problems effectively. For example, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), one of the global environmental institutions, has played the dominant institutional role at the regional level, such as river basin management, marine or regional seas management, air pollution, and fisheries policy (Hass, 2016). UNEP, with its focus on promoting international cooperation and guiding environmental policies within the UN system, UNEP has achieved significant success through Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and regional initiatives (Kumar, 2020). The landmark Kyoto Protocol, a significant international collaboration related to climate change was the Kyoto Protocol. This landmark agreement saw 37 industrialized countries and the European Union commit to reducing emissions to 5 percent below their 1990 levels for 2008-2012. This Protocol, which entered into force on February 16, 2005, and has since been ratified by 192 parties, marked the first systematic approach under the UN climate regime to address global warming (Kumar, 2020).

In the case of Northeast Asia, the study by Otsuka and Cheng (2022) provides empirical evidence for the emergence of new forms of private governance based on three case studies: transboundary air pollution, green supply chains and energy transition. The study underscores the significant role played by various non-state actors, such as epistemic communities, NGOs, and businesses, play a role in building transboundary cooperative networks in this region highlighting the importance of diverse participation in environmental governance.

The earlier study by Varkkey (2017) emphasizes that collaborative efforts within ASEAN to address the haze issue have historically involved various stakeholders, including academia, businesses, and NGOs. This involvement has been characterized by various sectors' active participation and collaboration, highlighting the comprehensive nature of stakeholder engagement in ASEAN initiatives to address the haze problem. A significant example, is the ASEAN Peatland Management Initiative (APMI), launched in June 2002 through a collaboration between the Global Environment Centre (GEC) and the ASEAN Secretariat. The APMI, proposed during the 9th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Haze in 2002, played a crucial role in addressing the haze issue even before the signing of the AATHP. As an NGO, the GEC provided technical and operational support to the APMI and actively contributed to the implementation of the project. In addition, the GEC facilitated the mobilization of resources to support the various activities related to the initiative (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005; Varkkey, 2017). This joint effort underscores the proactive engagement of NGOs such as the GEC in addressing environmental issues in the ASEAN region.

As evident from previous studies, the involvement of external actors is a crucial factor influencing cooperation in regional environmental governance to address environmental issues in the region. In the context of ASEAN transboundary haze pollution, this study acknowledges that ASEAN states can only address the issue with assistance from external actors. Therefore, for the analytical framework of this study, an external actor is defined as an actor that is not directly part of ASEAN but plays a critical role in influencing, participating in, or financially supporting the ASEAN mechanisms shown in Figure 1 during the implementation of the AATHP from 2003 to 2020. External actors can be a range of entities, including international organizations (IOs), NGOs, and multinational corporations; examples include the European Union (EU) and the GEC.

Research scope

This study aims to identify the external actors involved in and supporting the five ASEAN mechanisms shown in Figure 1. The primary objective is to identify and analyze the contributions of external actors under the ASEAN supporting mechanisms of the AATHP in combating transboundary haze pollution from 2003 to 2020.

Research methods

The primary research method employed in this study is descriptive research, based primarily on a comprehensive review of the existing literature. Data for this analysis was drawn from various documents, including officially published ASEAN reports. Publicly available materials were collected from various ASEAN websites, with primary documents sourced from ASEAN, other IOs, and national ministries with functional relationships with ASEAN. Peer-reviewed journals and book chapters on the topic were also examined. Using a descriptive research approach and various information sources, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the role of external actors implementing the AATHP. It focuses on their engagement with the ASEAN support mechanisms of the AATHP during the specified period.

Results and discussion

Despite the AATHP's mechanisms not being robust enough to significantly reduce haze pollution, they have played a crucial role in fostering cooperation within the constraints of the ASEAN Way. The AATHP, despite its limitations, serves as a platform for fostering cooperation, as highlighted by Nguitragool in 2011. From 2003 to 2020, the AATHP saw the engagement of external actors engaging with ASEAN mechanisms. These include the SOP, the APMS (2006-2020), the APSMPE (2014-2020), the Haze Fund, and the Haze-Free Roadmap (2016-2020), integrated through institutional layering as shown in Figure 1 (Charusombat, 2023a).

Notably, the SOP and the ASEAN Haze Fund are more likely to be utilized only across all ten ASEAN member states. The SOP serves as a regional procedure and guide for monitoring, assessment, and joint emergency response according to individual national procedures (Caballero-Anthony, 2018). Similarly, the ASEAN Haze Fund receives contributions from each member state, establishing an initial seed fund to support AATHP implementation activities and emergencies (Caballero-Anthony, 2018).

In contrast, the APMS (2006-2020), APSMPE (2014-2020), and the Haze-Free Roadmap (2016-2020) collaborate with external actors, particularly in the management of peatlands in Southeast Asia. This is crucial as peat fires significantly contribute to transboundary haze pollution in the ASEAN region (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021c). ASEAN member states, hosting 56% of the world's tropical peatlands, face primary challenges, with over 3 million hectares of peatlands in Southeast Asia destroyed by fires, Indonesia holds over 70% of the total peatlands, with the remainder distributed across Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021c).

Effective peatland management is a key factor in combating haze in the region. ASEAN's strategic positioning enables it to contribute significantly through the AATHP and its supporting mechanisms. However, addressing the challenges requires credible data, a strengthened coordination mechanism, and means to promote haze-free agriculture and sustainable peatland management. The need for credible data and a strengthened coordination mechanism is crucial in addressing these challenges. Many targets of the APMS (2006-2020), the APSMPE (2014-2020), and the Haze-Free Roadmap (2016-2020) necessitate ASEAN member states to implement national strategies on peatland and fire management, providing an opportunity for mutual learning and cooperation between states. The following section explains the involvement of external actors in coordination with ASEAN in implementing these mechanisms.

Programs under the implementation of the APMS (2006-2020)

The APMS (2006-2020) was launched to support ASEAN member countries in the sustainable management of peatlands and reducing fires and associated haze under the AATHP (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021c). This strategy focuses on four main objectives: (1) improving awareness and knowledge of peatlands, (2) addressing transboundary haze pollution and environmental degradation, (3) promoting sustainable management of peatlands, and (4) fostering collective regional cooperation on peatland issues. It outlines operational objectives to help achieve these goals and sets out specific actions and timeframes for ASEAN member states, implementing agencies and cooperating partners (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021c). The strategy also plays a vital role in formal cooperation among ASEAN member states to address regional issues related to peatlands.

According to Varkkey and Lupascu (2023), the APMS (2006-2020) comprised two programs funded by external actors. The first is the ASEAN Peatland Forests Project (APFP) (2009-2014), funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The second is the Sustainable Management of Peatland Forests in Southeast Asia 2011-2015 (SEApeat), funded by the EU. Both programs aim to demonstrate, implement, and scale up integrated peatland management in Southeast Asia. They focus on mainstreaming and improving governance, strengthening capacity and awareness, building multi-stakeholder partnerships, and applying innovative approaches to conserve and restore critical peatlands (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021b). The ASEAN Secretariat is the executing agency for the APFP. At the same time, the Global Environment Centre (GEC) is the regional project executing agency for both the APFP and the SEApeat project (ASEAN Secretariat & Global Environment Centre, 2015). More details on these programs can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 Programs under the implementation of the APMS (2006-2020)

Program/Period	Main Objective/Participating ASEAN member states	Funding Agency/Executive Agency/Budget	Outcome
1. ASEAN Peatland Forests Project (APFP) Year: July 2009-December 2014	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting the sustainable management of peatlands in Southeast Asia to preserve local livelihoods, alleviate poverty, minimize the threat of fires and the resulting haze, and positively contribute to global environmental protection, with a particular focus on biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation. <input type="checkbox"/> Country Involved: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Viet Nam	<input type="checkbox"/> Funded by the GEF through the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and implemented by the ASEAN Secretariat <input type="checkbox"/> Budget: USD 4.30 million	The combined outcomes of the two programs are as follows: <input type="checkbox"/> Strengthen the capacity and institutional framework for sustainable peatland management in Southeast Asia. <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce the rate of peatland degradation across the region. <input type="checkbox"/> Initiate comprehensive management and restoration measures for specific peatlands. <input type="checkbox"/> Actively engage local communities and the private sector in promoting sustainable management of peatlands.
2. Sustainable Management of Peatland Forests in Southeast Asia (SEApeat) Year: December 2010-January 2016	<input type="checkbox"/> Enhancing the capacity of selected ASEAN countries to manage and protect peatland forests by developing and implementing National Action Plans for Peatlands (NAPs) and incentivizing through pilot initiatives at the local level. <input type="checkbox"/> Country Involved: All ASEAN Member States	<input type="checkbox"/> Funded by the EU through the GEC <input type="checkbox"/> Budget: USD 2.06 million	

Sources: Ramirez (2013), ASEAN Secretariat & Global Environment Centre (2015), Giessen and Sahide (2017), ASEAN Secretariat (2021b), ASEAN Secretariat (2021c), Varkkey and Lupascu, (2023)

The Final Review Report of the APMS (2006-2020) submitted by the ASEAN Secretariat notes that the APMS (2006-2020) and its regional approaches have achieved remarkable success and ongoing progress. Implementing the APMS (2006-2020) not only plays a critical role in protecting the regional and global environment but also fulfills commitments under global environmental conventions and multilateral agreements. In particular, the program has promoted the protection and restoration of peatlands and effective fire prevention measures. The APMS (2006-2020) has shared

valuable lessons and best practices promoting regional and national actions. Although funding from national and international sources for implementing the APMS (2006-2020) has increased, significant gaps and challenges in resource mobilization still need to be addressed. Significantly, the APMS (2006-2020) has facilitated cost-effective action by promoting the exchange of cost-effective, appropriate techniques between countries and stakeholders (ASEAN Secretariat (2021c).

Programs as part of the implementation of the APSMPE (2014-2020) and the Haze-Free Roadmap (2016-2020)

Building on the success of the APFP (2009-2014) and SEApeat project (2010-2015) implemented under the APMS (2006-2020), ASEAN Environment Ministers approved the development of the ASEAN Programme on Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems 2014-2020 (APSMPE) in 2013 (Varkkey & Lupascu, 2023). This program, which was adopted at the ninth Conference of the Parties to the AATHP (COP-9) in Surabaya, Indonesia, in September 2013, aims to promote cooperation among the various stakeholders in the ASEAN region, including the government, private sector, communities, and civil society, to achieve the goals set by the APMS (2006-2020) (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020).

The APSMPE (2014-2020) has a comprehensive agenda that includes identifying and inventorying all peatlands in the ASEAN region. It advocates zero-burning, with controlled burning as an exception, to prevent forest fires and eliminate smoke haze. The plan also emphasizes the rehabilitation of fire-prone areas by addressing root causes. It focuses on the sustainable management of peatlands to improve living conditions and promote sustainable economic use. Efforts to conserve peatlands are intended to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase regional biodiversity (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020). Since its adoption, various initiatives have been launched to drive forward the implementation of the APMS (2006-2020). Numerous cooperation projects and programs are underway at the regional level involving various partners and stakeholders to achieve sustainable management of peatlands and reduce the haze frontier.

The APSMPE (2014-2020) comprises three ongoing programs: 1. Sustainable Use of Peatlands and Haze Mitigation in ASEAN (SUPA). 2. Measurable Action for Haze-Free Sustainable Land Management in Southeast Asia (MAHFSA). And 3. Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems in Mekong Countries (Mekong Peatlands Project). One of these programs aims to achieve the implementation of the Haze-Free Roadmap (2016-2020). See Table 2 for more details on these programs.

Table 2 Programs under the implementation of the APSMPE (2014-2020)

Program/Period	Main Objective/Participating ASEAN Member States	Funding Agency/Executive Agency/Budget
1. Sustainable Use of Peatland and Haze Mitigation in ASEAN (SUPA) Year: 2018-2023	□ It consists of two components. The main objective of the first component is to enhance regional cooperation within ASEAN by integrating peatland strategies and facilitating knowledge sharing at local, provincial and national levels to promote sustainable peatland management. The second component, which is directly managed by the EU, focuses on increasing the involvement of non-state actors in the	□ Funded by the EU and the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB), with the Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) or the German Development Cooperation responsible for implementing this program

Program/Period	Main Objective/Participating ASEAN Member States	Funding Agency/Executive Agency/Budget
	sustainable management and use of peatlands. <input type="checkbox"/> Country Involved: All ASEAN Member States	<input type="checkbox"/> Budget: USD 29.04 million
2. Measurable Action for Haze-Free Sustainable Land Management in Southeast Asia (MAHFSA) Year: 2019-2024	<input type="checkbox"/> To organize data and information, create a flexible coordination platform, and build capacity to standardize programs, coordinate stakeholders, and secure funding to address the haze problem. In addition, this program supports the assessment and implementation of the Haze-Free Roadmap (2016-2020) and the development of a 10-year investment framework to coordinate projects and programs for a haze-free ASEAN. <input type="checkbox"/> Country Involved: All ASEAN Member States	<input type="checkbox"/> Funded by the IFAD and implemented by the GEC and the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). <input type="checkbox"/> Budget: USD 3.50 million
3. The Sustainable Management of Peatland Ecosystems in Mekong Countries Project (the Mekong Peatlands Project) Year: 2019-2023	<input type="checkbox"/> The project aims to achieve the sustainable management of peatland ecosystems in the target countries focusing on biodiversity conservation and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This includes assessing and mapping peatland ecosystems, strengthening institutional capacity, and creating policy frameworks at different levels. In addition, the project demonstrates sustainable practices that benefit local communities. At the regional level, the project aims to promote cooperation between ASEAN officials, facilitate knowledge sharing, and create standardized guidelines for the sustainable use of peatland resources. <input type="checkbox"/> Country Involved: Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar	<input type="checkbox"/> Funded by the GEF, with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) being the GEF partner agency responsible for the implementation of this project <input type="checkbox"/> Budget: USD 2.90 million

Sources: Giessen and Sahide (2017), ASEAN Secretariat (2020), ASEAN Secretariat (2021a), ASEAN Secretariat (2021c), ASEAN Secretariat (2021d), Varkkey and Lupascu, (2023)

While the three programs mentioned above are ongoing and still need to have a record of success or an official report, Varkkey and Lupascu (2023) emphasize that these initiatives focus primarily on monitoring community and agribusiness activities in peatlands and controlling associated fires. In particular, little attention is paid to mitigating degradation or fires related to infrastructure. Furthermore, these projects were supposed to follow on from the activities seamlessly started in the first two phases of APMS implementation (2006-2020) (see Table 1). In reality, however, a three-year gap between the two project groups led to significant challenges, a lack of continuity, and a loss of

momentum in key ongoing activities. In addition, the three-year period without support affected capacity at both country and regional levels (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021c).

As expected, the results described in the previous sections show that a wide range of external actors were involved in implementing the AATHP from 2003-2020. In particular, external actors include various entities involved in projects that fall under the purview of ASEAN support mechanisms, including the APMS (2006-2020), the APSMPE (2014-2020), and the Haze-Free Roadmap (2016-2020). These external actors take on different roles as funders and implementers of the above programs (see Table 1 and 2). This study pays particular attention to four prominent actors in Table 3. These external actors have longstanding relationships with the Southeast Asian region on environmental and other issues.

Table 3 Significant External Actors Involved in Implementing Programs under the AATHP

Lists of External Actors	Type of Actors
EU	International Organization (IO)
GEF	International financial organization
GEC	NGO
IFAD	International financial organization

Firstly, the EU is comprised of 27 European countries and pursues a uniform economic, social and security policy. It plays an important role in promoting interregional diplomacy at the global level, with a particular focus on the Asia-Pacific region. The EU has a long history of cooperation with ASEAN and has extended its engagement to the whole region since the mid-1990s. The EU has established formal and informal institutional links and extensive relations in various fields with interlocutors and partners in the Asia-Pacific region (Song & Wang, 2019).

Secondly, the GEF is an independent and international financial organization (Giessen & Sahide, 2017). It is a global alternative asset manager with around USD 1 billion in assets under management, which emerged from the World Bank's pilot program established in 1990. Since then, GEF has become one of the world's most successful investment firms in the energy, environment and natural resources sectors (GEF, 2023b). The GEF Secretariat is based in Washington, D.C., and reports directly to the GEF Council and Assembly to ensure their decisions are translated into practical action (GEF, 2023b). In addition, GEF funds are provided by 40 participating donor countries. There are made available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to achieve the goals of international environmental conventions and agreements. Surprisingly, Indonesia, one of the ASEAN Member States, is one of the countries acting as a donor to the GEF (GEF, 2023a).

Thirdly, the GEC is an NGO focusing on peatland conservation in Southeast Asia. It was established in 1998 to address global environmental issues. The Centre is registered as an NGO in Malaysia, but works directly and through numerous partners at regional and international levels. It supports information sharing and capacity building and implements strategic projects, particularly in developing countries. The GEC works with other like-minded organizations worldwide (GEC, 2023). This NGO has had a long-standing relationship with ASEAN since 2002. The GEC worked with the ASEAN Secretariat to launch a project called the APMI before signing the AATHP (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005; Varkkey, 2017). The GEC provided technical and operational support to the APMI and helped raise resources to support its activities (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005).

Finally, IFAD, an international financial institution and a specialized agency of the United Nations, has been headquartered at the United Nations (UN) Center for Food and Agriculture in Rome since 1997 (IFAD, 2023). As a specialized agency of the UN and an international financial institution,

IFAD has been at the forefront of the fight against poverty and hunger in rural areas for more than 40 years. Its mandate is particular: it invests in the poorest rural communities to create opportunities, food security, and resilience. IFAD has formed a good partnership with the GEF, and together, they have launched many projects around the world (Chakrabarti, 2018). In the case of ASEAN, IFAD and GEF have worked together to help ASEAN tackle transboundary haze pollution by launching regional coordination mechanisms to facilitate a more harmonized response to the problem of transboundary haze pollution and to promote sustainable forest management and peatland conservation (Chakrabarti, 2018), such as the APFP (2009-2014) and the MAHFSA project (2019-2024), as mentioned in the section above.

In addition, a significant portion of ASEAN's funding for the implementation of the AATHP comes from international actors, underscoring the financial support ASEAN receives through its environmental initiatives. The significant contributions of these external actors play a central role in strengthening ASEAN's fiscal capacity to effectively implement the AATHP and demonstrate the remarkable international support ASEAN receives in its efforts to address environmental challenges.

Conclusions

In summary, regarding the research question posed above, this study finds that external actor's engagement has significantly contributed to ASEAN's improved implementation of the AATHP to combat transboundary haze pollution from 2003 to 2020. The study provides a comprehensive examination of the pivotal role of external actors in supporting ASEAN's environmental initiatives, focusing on implementing the AATHP during the period. The proactive involvement of organizations such as the EU, GEF, GEC, and IFAD has been crucial in shaping ASEAN's institutional framework and promoting coordinated efforts to address complex regional environmental issues. Substantial contributions to the ASEAN budget, particularly in peatland management, underscore the global recognition and support for ASEAN's commitment to tackling environmental problems. The engagement of these external actors leads to institutional change within ASEAN and promotes a more robust and collaborative approach to regional environmental governance. Beyond financial support, this engagement strengthens ASEAN's ability to address and mitigate transboundary haze pollution effectively. For example, various divisions, task forces, and working groups within ASEAN, including those under the ASEAN Food Agriculture and Forestry Division and Ministries of Forestry, Agriculture, and Environment in member states, have integrated peatland management into their agendas (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). However, it is imperative to establish financing mechanisms at both national and international levels to conserve, restore, and sustainably utilize peatlands as crucial nature-based solutions for climate change adaptation and mitigation, as peatlands continue to be drained and degraded, resulting in biodiversity loss and persistent haze pollution issues in the ASEAN region (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023).

Despite the long-standing problems of transboundary haze pollution in the Southeast Asian region, ASEAN, as a well-institutionalized and centralized regional institution, together with the AATHP as an important regional agreement, facilitates cooperation among ASEAN member states and other stakeholders. ASEAN is characterized by the fact that overarching institutional agreements within regional mechanisms take precedence over haze. Each ASEAN mechanism related to haze builds on and complements the previous mechanisms to avoid overlap or contradictory regionalism. While the ASEAN Way remains prioritized with state sovereignty, the region's penchant for non-binding arrangements is gradually evolving into more legally binding ones as member states become more comfortable with and committed to each other, instilling a sense of optimism and hope in the audience.

Acknowledgment

The writer expresses deep appreciation and respect sincere gratitude to Professor Shunji MATSUOKA from the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies at Waseda University for providing essential guidance and encouragement throughout preparation and writing phases this paper's, making the audience feel appreciative and respectful.

References

- Alam, S., & Nurhidayah, L. (2017). The international law on transboundary haze pollution: What can we learn from the southeast asia region? *Review of European Community & International Environmental Law*, 26(3), 243-254.
- ASEAN Secretariat & Global Environment Centre. (2015). *APFP-SEAPEAT key achievements 2010-2015: Sustainable management of peatland forests in southeast asia (SEApeat project)*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/http://myagric.upm.edu.my/id/eprint/11337>
- ASEAN Secretariat. (2005). *The ASEAN peatland management initiative (APMI)*. Retrieved from <https://environment.asean.org/public/fresources/detail/the-asean-peatland-management-initiative-apmi>
- ASEAN Secretariat. (2016). *ASEAN agreement on transboundary haze pollution*. Retrieved from <https://hazeportal.asean.org/publications/asean-agreement-on-transboundary-haze-pollution/>
- ASEAN Secretariat. (2020). *ASEAN haze and peatland programmes*. Retrieved from <https://asean.org/speechandstatement/asean-haze-and-peatland-programmes/>
- ASEAN Secretariat. (2021a). *Measurable action for haze-free sustainable land management in southeast asia (MAHFSA)*. Retrieved from <https://hazeportal.asean.org/programmes/mahfsa/>
- ASEAN Secretariat. (2021b). *Past programme*. Retrieved from <https://hazeportal.asean.org/programmes/past-programme/>
- ASEAN Secretariat. (2021c). *Report of the final review of the ASEAN peatland management strategy (APMS) 2006-2020*. Retrieved from <https://hazeportal.asean.org/publications/report-of-the-final-review-of-the-asean-peatland-management-strategy-apms-2006-2020/>
- ASEAN Secretariat. (2021d). *The sustainable management of peatland ecosystems in mekong countries project*. Retrieved from <https://hazeportal.asean.org/programmes/mekong/>
- ASEAN Secretariat. (2021e). *The sustainable use of peatlands and haze mitigation in ASEAN (SUPA)*. Retrieved from <https://hazeportal.asean.org/programmes/supa/>
- ASEAN Secretariat. (2023). *ASEAN peatland management strategy 2023-2020*. Retrieved from <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/APMS-7-Nov-web.pdf>
- Caballero-Anthony, M. (2018). *Negotiating governance on non-traditional security in southeast Asia and beyond*. New York, The United States: Columbia University Press.
- Charusombat, P. (2023a). ASEAN cooperation on transboundary haze pollution: The perspective of institutional incremental change. *Journal of Environmental Information Science*, 2022(2), 1-12.
- Charusombat, P. (2023b). From layering to conversion investigating ASEAN's gradual shift in dealing with transboundary haze pollution (2015-2016). *Journal of Social Research*, 46(2), 99-132.
- Giessen, L., & Sahide, M. A. K. (2017). Blocking, attracting, imposing, and aligning: The utility of ASEAN forest and environmental regime policies for strong member states. *Land use Policy*, 67, 13-26.
- Global Environment Centre. (2023). *Who we are*. Retrieved from <https://www.gec.org.my/index.cfm?&menuid=61>
- Haas, P. M. (2016). *Regional environmental governance* (pp. 430-456). In Börzel, T. A., & Risse, T. (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism*. Oxford Handbooks.

- Heilmann, D. (2015). After indonesia's ratification: The ASEAN agreement on transboundary haze pollution and its effectiveness as a regional environmental governance tool. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 34(3), 95-121.
- International Fund for Agricultural Development. (2023). *About us*. Retrieved from <https://www.ifad.org/en/about>
- Koreh, M., Mandelkern, R., & Shpaizman, I. (2019). A dynamic theoretical framework of gradual institutional changes. *Public Administration*, 97(3), 605-620.
- Kumar, R. (2020). The united nations and global environmental governance. *Strategic Analysis*, 44(5), 479-489.
- Mahoney, J., & Thelen, K. (2010). A theory of gradual institutional change. *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Muhammad, F. (2022). Environmental agreement under the non-interference principle: The case of ASEAN agreement on transboundary haze pollution. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 22(1), 139-155.
- Nazeer, N., & Furuoka, F. (2017). Overview of Asean environment, transboundary haze pollution agreement and public health. *International Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies*, 13(1), 73-94.
- Nguitragool, P. (2011). Negotiating the haze treaty: Rationality and institutions in the negotiations for the ASEAN agreement on transboundary haze pollution (2002). *Asian Survey*, 51(2), 356-378.
- Otsuka, K., & Cheng, F. (2022). Embryonic forms of private environmental governance in northeast asia. *Pacific Review*, 35(1), 116-146.
- Ramirez, N. E. (2013). ASEAN peatlands management strategy 2006-2020: Promoting sustainable management of peatlands in southeast asia. *Rehabilitation*, 10, 10.2.
- Soma, C. (2018). *The IFAD-GEF advantage II: Linking smallholders and global environmental benefits*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.22004/ag.econ.304744>
- Song, W., & Wang, J. (2019). The European union in the Asia-Pacific: Rethinking Europe's strategies and policies. In *The European Union in the Asia-Pacific*. Manchester University Press.
- Sunchindah, A. (2015). *Transboundary haze pollution problem in Southeast Asia: Reframing ASEAN's response* (No. DP-2015-82).
- The Global Environment Facility. (2023a). *Donor countries*. Retrieved from <https://www.thegef.org/projects-operations/donor-countries>
- The Global Environment Facility. (2023b). *Who we are*. Retrieved from <https://www.thegef.org/who-we-are>
- Van der Heijden, J. (2011). Institutional layering: A review of the use of the concept. *Politics (Manchester, England)*, 31(1), 9-18.
- Varkkey, H. (2017). 40 years of ASEAN environmental governance: Enhancing Asean centrality through the ASEAN plus three (APT). *Malaysian Journal of International Relations*, 5(1), 47-65.
- Varkkey, H. (2020). The Asean way and haze mitigation efforts. *Journal of International Studies*, 8(2012), 78-97.
- Varkkey, H. (2022). Emergent geographies of chronic air pollution governance in southeast Asia: Transboundary publics in Singapore. *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 32(4), 348-361.
- Varkkey, H., & Lupascu, M. (2023). Peat fires in Brunei Darussalam: Considerations for ASEAN haze cooperation and emerging regional infrastructure development. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 45(1), 129-141.