



# 2020: Tough Year for Climate Change, Amid the Need for Climate Resiliency

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The world is stunned by the emergence of fast-spreading Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). [Millions of people worldwide](#) have become infected by the respiratory system disease. It triggered a global economic crisis and generated domino effects on other sectors, including energy and climate change. People travel less if any. [Projects slowed down even halted](#) while business sectors introduced the 'work from home' scheme. In brief, human behaviours are shifting, and the global energy profile is changing.

Under the radar due to COVID-19 fanfare, the news about [Indonesia's disappearing islands](#), [Singapore's hottest year on record](#), and [Myanmar's climate migrations](#) opened the first-quarter of 2020. COVID-19 might be the most pressing issue of 2020, but climate change has become a common threat to humanity for decades. Both would leave far-reaching consequences if left unattended. As the impact of climate change on social security in the ASEAN region—a [highly vulnerable region in the world](#)—becomes increasingly apparent, building a climate-resilient region must be pursued swiftly. Through our climate insights, we serve the readers a story of what happened in ASEAN energy-climate issues in the first quarter of 2020.

## COVID-19 and climate change: friend or foe?

COVID-19 swept the world at a frightening speed, harshly impacting human activity. It forces people to change their behaviour. Such behaviour change, strangely, coincides with climate change mitigation efforts, in a sense that it results in emission reduction. It led to clearer skies of several major cities like [Manila](#) and [Jakarta](#) that have become noticeably brighter than before. Hence, it is not excessive if the similarity between the two might also [provide lessons to be learned](#), such as flattening the 'climate curve'; societies' ability to shift behaviour; and staying within the planet's limits.

Meanwhile, some even argue, the carriers of disease possibly have been altered by local changes in temperature, rainfall and humidity, and extreme weather. Such changes might raise the risk of human infections owing to this disease. Hence, scientists are also looking into [possible connections between COVID-19 and climate change](#). It is like a 'Twofer'.

On the other hand, even though some side effects from COVID-19 might align with climate mitigation efforts,





the undivided focus on COVID-19 somehow has been diverting attention from the climate change issues. The COP Bureau of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) has announced the [postponement of the UN COP26](#), which initially to be held in Glasgow this November owing to COVID-19. The disease also negatively impacted climate change mitigation efforts by [lowering fossil fuel prices](#), while [halting renewable energy projects](#).

### **Rising sea level is no longer a far-fetched abstract theory**

Away from the hysteria of COVID-19, [the risks of rising sea level already became a reality and will continually threaten the region](#), day by day. It has always been a challenge for vulnerable regions such as Southeast Asia, with its long coastline and lively coastal activities. Nevertheless, for those residing in coastal zones, rising sea level are no longer abstract theory. Climate projections indicate that [23 million people across Indonesia forced to leave their homes by 2050](#). Moreover, [two small islands in Indonesia have vanished](#), with four others are predicted to soon follow by 2020—undeniable proof even for the so-called climate change deniers.

This sea-level rise somehow also worsened by the immense exploitation of groundwater that caused land subsidence. Some capitals like Manila and Jakarta experienced subsidence at various level. Even some places in the north Manila already submerged below the sea level. [Sitio Pariahan, a coastal village roughly 17 kilometres north of Manila](#), has no streets, all sunken underwater. About 100 families were residing in this area, but only about 40 remain today. The village has sunk about four centimetres a year since 2003.

Seeing this harmful impact, ASEAN must act quickly. If the ASEAN governments fail to heed the warning signs through a heightened effort to adapt and mitigate climate change jeopardies, even other ASEAN capitals like [Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City could have followed the sinking 'trend'](#) not unlike Manila and Jakarta.

### **Climate change disrupts and questions the energy security in the region**

Apart from sea level rise, other impacts of climate change, mainly extreme weather events, provide yet another challenge and exacerbate the situations. [To start with, Singapore recorded 2019 as their hottest year ever](#). The Singapore Meteorological Service (MSS) stated that the mean temperature of the past year, which reached 28.4 oC was the same as that of 2016, 0.9 oC higher than the long-term average of 1981-2010 period. From 2010 to 2019, a mean temperature of 27.94 oC was also recorded as Singapore's hottest decade ever.

In Indonesia, the extreme weather conditions create severe issues affecting the operation of power plants in the region. [Heavy rainfall, heatwaves, and lightning could interrupt the electric transmission and distribution system](#) and trigger power outages/blackout, which would lead to serious economic consequences. The disruptions caused by severe weather events could cost energy suppliers, consumers and governments billions of dollars a year, [which in turn lead to higher electricity price](#). In consequence, electric utilities must acknowledge and account for climate change uncertainties in their long-term business and capacity building plans and strategies.



## Enhancing regional cooperation, upright governance, & green economy

The ASEAN governments must act with urgency and a strong ambition to fulfil their respective commitments to the Paris Agreement, not just mere statements and promises. Adaptation and mitigation efforts through climate-friendly policies will be one of the keys to tackle climate change. Such adaptation and mitigation initiatives [could prevent potential political conflicts](#) and [assure human security in some countries labelled as climate-vulnerable](#). These, of course, would require strong cooperation in the region.

Governance and economy are holding a crucial role to establish a climate-friendly pathway, also to fulfil the nations' submitted climate pledge despite its 'nationally unique' complexity. Viet Nam government has shown its seriousness in aligning the national directives with global commitments by introducing [laws to advance the goal of reducing greenhouse gases](#). This law has four main strategies: cap and trade, the prohibition of chemicals that damage ozone, company emissions reporting rules, and emissions databases and steps to reduce them. In addition to Viet Nam, Singapore's political parties also expressed their interest in tackling the climate problem by producing a [39-page policy paper on climate change](#). This policy paper is in line with the current government policies aimed at reducing emissions, such as increasing renewable energy penetration.

Apart from governance, the so-called green economy has become more substantial in recent days. As some ASEAN countries are still in the developing stage in term of economy, green schemes such as Green Loan or Green Deposit can help countries to keep their economy growing while limiting the greenhouse gas emissions.

The World Bank releases its first '[Green Loan](#)' for Vietnamese banks, which is aimed at businesses to help environmental problems in the country that has the highest emission levels in the world relative to its economy. In other news, [HSBC also offers a first green deposit account](#) for corporate clients that allows companies to directly divide cash savings into projects that directly benefit the environment.

## A thorny path towards resilience future

Distressing news on climate change impacts is becoming more common nowadays. Therefore, climate resilience is no longer just an option but a must. Many efforts have been done to make the region more resilient against climate change jeopardies, yet there are still gaps to be filled. The rise of COVID-19 threat reminded us that under certain stress, human behaviour could indeed change. This act can be seen as an opportunity, an optimism standpoint for us to fight both global disasters.

Meanwhile, the needs for a coordinated and focused effort on tackling the COVID-19 issue should not distract the global community on the looming climate change threat. Instead, it should serve as a reminder and [learning ground for climate change](#) concerted efforts. Hence the urgency and a strong ambition to fulfil the commitments under the Paris Agreement are necessary so ASEAN countries can prevent potential disturbances.



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