



Urban Climate Resilience

# in Southeast Asia

Partnership Project

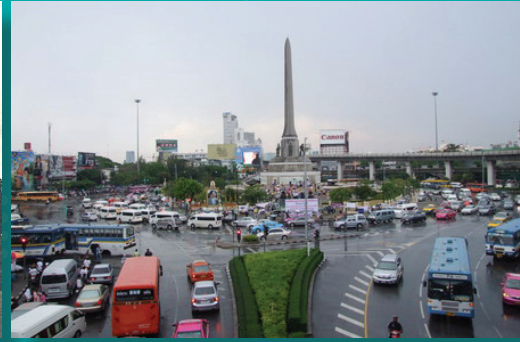


## *Introduction*

Planning for climate change is a daunting challenge for governments in the Mekong Region. Limited capacity at the municipal level, high rates of urbanization, rapid social and economic change, and geographic exposure to extreme events contribute to the vulnerability of urban populations and economic sectors. Climate change is described as a **“wicked problem”** because the nature of the problem is not easily defined, and the equity of policy solutions is contested. Research suggests that the best way to approach such problems is to create both intellectual and practical spaces that permit informed open dialogue.

**S**outheast Asia, as a region, is highly vulnerable to climate change due to its limited capacity to plan for the impacts of global environmental change. The effects of natural disasters and climate change are magnified by the weak governance in terms of basic services provision, management of public funds, and public participation in decision-making processes. As medium-sized cities in the Lower Mekong region are rapidly becoming more urbanized, urban residents are faced with increasing vulnerability from physical consequences and social and economic costs of climate change. While the nature of the climate change problem is not easily defined, the science to address it is uncertain, and the equity of policy solutions is contested, it is suggested that the best approach is to create intellectual and practical spaces that permit informed open dialogue around these issues.





## Overall objective:

The overall objective of this project is to enhance the economic and social resiliency of cities in the Southeast Asia, recognizing the important connections between urbanization, the effects of climate change, public awareness, and societal well-being.

## Specific Objective:

The specific objective of the project is to provide vulnerable people in transitional states with the space to learn about and share in decisions about protecting themselves from the economic, social, and physical impacts of climate change.

**The Urban Climate Resilience in Southeast Asia Partnership** is co-led by the *Thailand Environment Institute* and the *University of Toronto*. Together with academic, local government, and civil society partners, the team will refine and apply tools for assessing vulnerability and building climate-resilient local governance in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.



## *Expected outcomes*

- ***Advance knowledge:*** Investigate the economic, social, and physical impacts of climate change on secondary cities in the Lower Mekong region and the connections between urbanization, the effects of climate change, public awareness, and societal well-being; conduct research on creating inclusive and equitable climate-resilient urban governance through facilitating dialogues in focus cities with city planners and residents.
- ***Shape policy and inform practice:*** Provide space for informed public dialogue in each target city to identify opportunities and priorities for urban development; facilitate learning across cities to promote professional exchange among NGOs and local government; develop and test tools for urban climate vulnerability assessment and resilience planning.
- ***Train a new generation of scholars and leaders:*** Design and use locally appropriate educational materials for use in public education and schools; develop methods for community-based organizations and urban planners to facilitate citizen engagement in building urban resilience to climate change; support graduate students to conduct research collaborate with Canadian peers.
- ***Develop innovative research partnerships:*** Develop and strengthen a network of Canadian and Southeast Asian academics, government officials, NGOs, and local organizations to develop, refine, and apply tools for assessing vulnerability and building climate-resilient local governance across the region.



## *Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework provides overall intellectual guidance to the project participants.

***The Urban Climate Resilience in Southeast Asia Partnership (UCRSAP)*** project is designed to fill a critical gap in understanding around regionalization and urbanization, and the growing risks posed by climate change in the countries of Southeast Asia. As such, the Partnership is committed to viewing urbanization as a transformative process in terms of poverty, vulnerability, growth, and climate change impacts. In particular, the focus is on a historical political economy or political ecology perspective. We seek to understand ecology-human society interactions, primarily based on an actor-oriented approach.

The Partnership is based in four regional partner countries, all of whom are experiencing dramatic urban and economic growth following a period of conflict (UNDP 2012). Fundamental social transformation with population shifts to urban areas, away from traditional agriculture sectors, is underway. Expansion of urban areas in coastal zones, deltas, and river basins has exacerbated climate related vulnerabilities in areas that are already ecologically fragile (UN-Habitat 2011; Tanner et al., 2009).





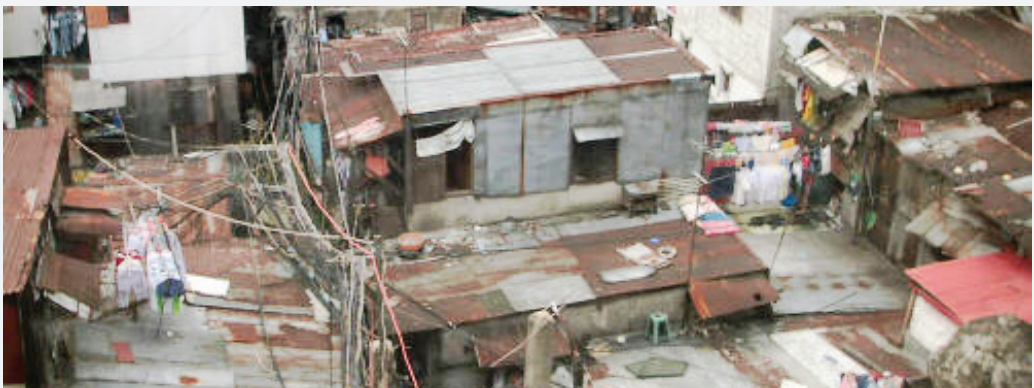
A third guiding intellectual principle is that of supporting innovative research, particularly scholarly inquiry that links with the Partnership's focus on urbanization as dependent on complex systems. Complexity theory suggests that better governance requires flexible and adaptive institutions capable of dealing with uncertainty and risk in ways that are representative and participatory (Folke et al. 2005; Tyler and Moench 2012).

The primary concerns of the Partnership are summarized by the three research questions that form the core of the IPaSS research proposal. These questions emerge from the Partnership's concern with patterns of rapid urban growth, weak governance, and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change in the Mekong region.

## *Research questions*

The Urban Climate Resilience in Southeast Asia Partnership will work with two target secondary cities in each of Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to build their knowledge about potential climate change impacts and how to consider and implement adaptation measures that respond to climate change. The research agenda of the Partnership is driven by following questions, none of which are mutually exclusive and which build upon each other in a sequential manner. This project seeks to enhance the economic and social resiliency of cities. Researchers will inform and facilitate public dialogues to strengthen urban populations' resilience to climate change. Research will focus on eight medium-sized cities in the Lower Mekong region that have received little attention to date. With demographic growth, more and more urban residents are vulnerable to the physical consequences and the social and economic costs of climate change.

- 1. How will climate change impact the poverty and vulnerability of urban residents in Southeast Asia?***
- 2. What does knowledge, from both academic literature and action research, tell us about creating climate resilient urban governance that is both inclusive and equitable?***
- 3. How can we strengthen the agency of individuals, groups and institutions to improve economic, physical and social well-being in urban areas, particularly in response to climate change?***



In addressing these questions, members of the Partnership will use a variety of research methodologies and stages of inquiry including: developing preliminary information regarding climate change impacts, uncertainties and risks; reviewing policy and documents; identifying case studies of recent disasters: identifying community and urban planning strategies based on complex systems theory; facilitating governance and public space conditions in participating countries; conducting community-based case studies; conducting structured open-ended interviews/focus groups; shared learning/public dialogue/communication.

## Contacts

*Co-Directors: Amrita ([amrita.daniere@utoronto.ca](mailto:amrita.daniere@utoronto.ca))*

*and Pakamas ([pakamas@tei.or.th](mailto:pakamas@tei.or.th))*

*Project Manager (Canada): Alicia ([alicia.filipowich@utoronto.ca](mailto:alicia.filipowich@utoronto.ca))*

*Project Manager (Thailand): Pimolwan ([petch@i-s-e-t.org](mailto:petch@i-s-e-t.org))*

*Project Coordinator (Thailand): Krongjit ([krongjit@tei.or.th](mailto:krongjit@tei.or.th))*

## Website:

<http://urbanclimateresiliencesea.apps01.yorku.ca>

*Urban Climate Resilience in Southeast Asia Partnership (UCRSAP) project is under the 2013 International Partnerships for Sustainable Societies (IPaSS), a joint initiative under the Partnership Grants. The project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)*



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



International Development Research Centre  
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

Canada

TEI  
THAILAND  
ENVIRONMENT  
INSTITUTE

ASIAN  
INSTITUTE  
MUNK  
SCHOOL  
OF  
GLOBAL  
AFFAIRS  
UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO