Author(s): Adiputri, Ratih Dwiyani

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Climate Change, Peace, and Language Usage in the United Nations Reports within the ASEAN Style of Multilateralism

Ratih Dwiyani Adiputri [1]

[1]University of Jyväskylä, Finland

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Indonesia's efforts to tackle peace-related climate change, which shows the ASEAN style of multilateralism. The multilateralism style of this Southeast Asian Regional Organization (ASEAN) highlights passivity and ineffective collaboration in the area. By studying the United Nations General Assembly plenary sessions between 2016 and 2021 and the formal documents from both the ASEAN and the Indonesian government, the paper shows that commitment to the discussion at the global and international levels is not moved beyond the meetings or implemented at the local (country) level. With such normative terminologies used in the documents and the employment of its language usage, Southeast Asian multilateralism shows the practice of upholding principles/norms in discussing climate change, but not as an outcome or action. As climate crisis action is immediately needed, one possible way can be to start by using strong words to tackle climate crises in global commitments and start to act.

1. Introduction

Despite the 2004 tsunami and earthquake that hit Aceh and caused the most significant number of deaths, Aceh proceeded with the Peace Agreement in 2005 between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), a separatist fighting for the independence of Aceh since 1976. Here, the natural disaster led to opening paths for a peaceful situation. After the peace agreement, the situation improved and consolidated, with the GAM weapons being destroyed and the withdrawal of the Indonesian armed forces and police troops (Reliefweb, 2005) to start ending the 30-year conflict. It was followed by enacting a special law on Aceh in 2006 and, most importantly, peace and security in daily life. As a result, people can sit for a longer time in the coffee shop (Reliefweb, 2006). Many women shared how they felt relieved that their children could go to schools or somewhere else without fear of their family members being abducted either by the military or by GAM people anymore (Report of the Aceh Community Assistance & Research Project (ACARP), 2007). Peace is a condition without fear, which is essential in daily life. While the environmental situation or disaster may trigger peace, it may also create a crisis. As "climate crisis is a security crisis" (Gowan, 2022), it is important to keep peace in the climate crisis. The blog of the United Nations (UN) Foundation also reported how the UN Secretary-General António Guterres tried to seek ways to enhance the "inclusion of climate-related security risks" at the Security Council, emphasizing the "threat multiplier" of climate change's impact on peace, and advocating that conversation about climate change and security challenges are likely better "within the country-specific and regional contexts" rather than at the global level (Toufanian, 2020). This shows how climate crisis and security are interrelated, and more discussions and actions are needed at the local level.

Thus, to achieve peace, we must tackle the climate crisis. Again, with another example from Indonesia, the country is constantly threatened by the impact of climate change, with the constant heavy rains, floods, and landslides that make schools collapse (The Economist, 2022). The Economist article reported that the capital, Jakarta, has constantly flooded, with frequent rain and 13 flowing rivers in the city, and "parts of the city are sinking into the sea at a rate of 25cm (ten inches) each year" (The Economist, 2023). However, the government's tackling action remained small, slow, and unsustainable. For example, building the coastal wall kept being extended while the groundwater extraction continued (Renaldi, 2022). With climate change news becoming everyday news nowadays and its impact must be taken seriously by all, the (local) government must collaborate with international organizations, non-government organizations/NGOs, business practices, and individual activities. Interestingly, such news from the Economist above was not about climate change; it is part of "The Color of Islam," which reported that Indonesia's Islamic imams preach about climate action. A recent YouGov-Cambridge poll found that 13% of Indonesians are supporters of "climate denialism" ("humans do not cause climate change") despite the constant dangers of climate change occurring daily. That is why Indonesia's imams, as part of the influential and trustworthy Islamic establishment, want to change that, which will affect around 200 million Muslims (Jenkins et al., 2018). In tackling the climate crisis—while including the religious sector has been underway—systemized programs from the government are still needed. Actions, international agreements, and multilateral commitments must be implemented as countries and regions need them in their specific contexts.

These two case studies—that climate as part of a security crisis and the religious leaders preached about climate change—show actions conducted at the country level. In this paper, I am particularly interested in assessing formal documents from the global level (United Nations or UN general assembly), to the discussion at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meetings and the Indonesian government levels, how are the climate change discussed and how they are implemented? The research aims to assess how these global agendas on climate action are implemented in the country (Indonesia) and processed at the

regional, such as Southeast Asia and ASEAN, through the language used in the formal reports. Is there any discussion on peace in climate change debates? The paper will be divided into four sections, including the conclusion. First, after this introduction, the section contexts describe multilateralism from the perspectives of the UN, ASEAN, and Indonesia, notably on climate change issues. In this section, I will show how the style of language in the data—the summary reports of the United Nations General Assembly plenary sessions and the formal documents from both the ASEAN and the Indonesian government on climate change—give a background of language evolvement in Indonesia and ASEAN contexts. The documents were limited to the topics of sustainability and the environment of these institutions between 2016 and 2021. I employed a qualitative political discourse/language analysis to study the data. The data and how data is analyzed will also be explained. Afterward, the sections on research results and discussion will show the findings from the data and how the language of the discussion at the formal institution has been too elitist. Efforts to transform and comprehend the meaning of such global agreement and commitment to local legislation/regulation for real programs are needed, and such comprehension includes turning into the everyday language of climate that is easy to understand for the public or citizens.

With such normative terminologies used in the documents and the employment of its language usage, Southeast Asian multilateralism shows the practice of upholding principles/norms in discussing climate change. Southeast Asian countries, including ASEAN (East Timor is not a member yet), are regular participants and follow the procedural rules of the UN (voting, signing, and ratifying the global commitment). However, the local outcome or action at the country and regional levels still needs to be improved. The conclusion section will reiterate that as climate crisis action is immediately needed, one possible way can be started: using strong words to tackle climate crises and including many different actors, as the religious imam in the previous example showed.

1.1. On Multilateralism

Indonesia ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) in 1992, followed by the National Law No. 6/1994 (Ministry of Environmental, 1992). It also ratified the United Nations' Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals/SDG in 2016 and the ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change (ASEAN, 2021), which all have aspects of climate action. ASEAN also has joint statements on climate change for its ten-member countries. This is multilateralism in action, notably in environmental and climate change issues. Indeed, multilateralism coins a positive word that global problems—climate change, terrorism, pandemics, migration, and food and energy crises, to name a few—must be managed collectively. Multilateralism is an "intergovernmental concept, closely aligned with the UN Charter's sovereignty norm…equated with the notion of political activism and responsiveness to the problem of humanity" (Rüland, 2018) . This definition is relevant more to the concept of global governance in the 1990s, famously theorized by John Gerard Ruggie, as "principled multilateralism" of coordinated relations among three or more states that "specify appropriate conduct of a class of actions, without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific occurrence" (Ruggie, 1992). At that time, the definition followed certain behaviorally principled standards of international relations, and after the Cold War, however, such multilateralism has declined or what Rüland called "diminished multilateralism" (Rüland, 2018), as multilateralism is also "a strategic choice made by self-interested states about how to advance their interest and influence world order" (Murray Robert, 2018). It was theorized that multilateralism had become the "tool for states to pursue their national interests." At the same time, there is a pressing need to "continue to support measured collaborations on shared challenges" (Moreland, 2019).

This "diminished multilateralism" happened due to the emerging non-Western global and regional powers, such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and Indonesia—especially Indonesia held the G20 presidency in 2022 and ASEAN chairmanship in 2023—sharing one significant trait: "a sense of frustrated entitlement" (Rüland, 2012). These new emerging countries had gone through exploitation, colonialism (with Russia's losing its power of the Soviet Union breakdown), and the economic crisis, yet they rose with their internal reform, transformation, and aim for democratization, thanks to economic globalization. Thus, they resent establishing Western-made institutional power, knowing their growing importance and capabilities, as they want to be acknowledged as rule-makers.

According to Rüland (2012), such "diminished multilateralism" is seen when international institutions become "arenas of power rivalries which take the form of contests over access and membership, decision-making rules and normative order. Indeed, while historically, the United States America (US) as a hegemon crafted the institutional framework and bargaining process of multilateralism, the weaker states merely "accepted the deal". Recently, with the US's decline of power, the emerging powers as BRICS and non-state actors, the global power shift from the West to the Rest, and the rise of regionalism (Acharya, 2018), the global commitment through UN multilateralism such as elimination of wars and tackling climate crisis is questioned. Multilateralism as using the UN as a platform also may discuss anything "international" or "global," but this reflected how disorganized the UN is, with "overlapping mission, competition for limited resources and the desire to keep abreast of what is popular with donors" (Weiss, 2016).

Consequently, multilateral meetings no longer produced agreements to tackle them; the long-winding negotiation yielded to a "non-enforceable agreement guided by the lowest common denominator" and facilitated processes of "forum shopping"—a strategy by which an individual state pick and choose among the mechanisms the best fit their political agenda" (Rüland, 2018). At least, as seen in Indonesia, despite Indonesia's constant participation in international forums, the public did not see the results widely. The commitment at the global and regional levels is slowly adopted into national regulation, for example, and not known publicly. Indeed, the 2022 Multilateralism Index of the International Peace Institute and Institute for Economics and Peace analyzed the multilateral system between 2010 and 2020 and reported that for the environmental aspect, "most Participation and Performance indicators have deteriorated over the past decade, while all Inclusivity indicators have improved" (International Peace Institute, 2022). The cause was a lack of robust climate change policies, despite Indonesia being one of the seven major CO_2 emitters (along with China, the USA, India, Russia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (International Peace Institute, 2022). As one of the world's largest CO_2 emitters, Indonesia must embrace an ambitious plan to tackle the climate crisis. It is perhaps why the religious imams are involved in advocating climate crisis in their preaches.

Acknowledging these multilateralist backgrounds is helpful because, as most states (the UN members) uphold the idea of multilateralism and cooperation, the practice and process are different. One drafter of the UN report, Capacity Study in 2006 High-Level Panel of Coherence, Margaret Joan Anstee (later became the first woman under secretary general), encouraged that "development is home-made" (Weiss, 2016). This meant that the context of development, environment, and even tackling climate crisis was better conducted at home, specifically within the nearby region. Moreover, the "homogenizing world-view of Western universalism" is no longer suitable in such a fast-changing world (Acharya, 2018); thus, significant contributions from the Global South, such as from Indonesia, India, and even from ASEAN, are needed to reformulate the UN vision in the future.

Thus, ASEAN must address its task of implementing climate action among its members. The impact of natural disasters will hit harder in ASEAN than in other places as by 2050, climate change will reduce the annual gross domestic product (GDP) of ASEAN by up to 6%

per year (Anbumozhi & Kojima, 2022). Indonesia has pledged to reduce emissions by 29 percent by 2030 and said it could increase that to 41 percent with international support. Vietnam's analogous targets are 8 percent and 25 percent. The Philippines has made only a conditional pledge of a 70 percent reduction. ASEAN needs a more ambitious plan to mitigate the climate crisis, as these pledges will still result in higher emissions (Prakash, 2018a). In short, multilateralism is being questioned, and paying attention to language and language policy discourse will likely help bridge the gap between policymakers and citizens.

1.2. On Language

Two critical historical contexts related to language in discussing climate change are entangled: the high status of English and Southeast Asia as a colonialized region with a hierarchical society. Indeed, almost all ASEAN state members (except Thailand) were colonized by Britain, France, Spain, the Dutch, Portuguese, and the USA. Such a diverse colonial background was not the only one that characterizes Southeast Asia. Differences in economic disparities (e.g., between Singapore and Cambodia), size and population (e.g., Indonesia and Brunei), religion and culture, and many more made Southeast Asia unpopular. It has been shadowed by more extraordinary civilizations, such as East Asia (China and Japan) and South Asia (India). In terms of colonial background, colonialism left legacies of language and societal hierarchies, patron and client relationships between elites and commoners, and ignorance of local values, highlighting that Western products are better. Using English in Indonesian society and ASEAN/Southeast Asia, in general, shows the tool of the sociolinguistic status and the users' identities, which "symbolized power and prestige" (Low & Ao, 2018).

When English is treated highly as a language in the region, despite being brought with colonial power (in some British colonial states, the colonial legacy also brought tension), it mingled well with the client-patron societal relationships within the Southeast Asian region. Perhaps due to the societal hierarchy between the colonial (European) government, the traders (Chinese, Japanese), and commoners (the natives), most countries in Southeast Asia rank English higher than their national language. Then, widespread English usage has rapidly increased due to globalization and economic growth in the region. ASEAN has always been prone to economic growth and development and neglected environmental and sustainability issues.

When reading the references from Indonesia, the governments' or institutional formal publications: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Forestry and Environment, the National Development Planning, for example, most documents related to the climate crisis (and actions) are primarily in English—and not in its local language, Indonesian—even the term "SDG", Sustainable Development Goals or SDG, while the translation is available (*Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan or TPB*), the government and academics keep using the SDG, or the English word, instead the local translated one, TPB. All government publications regarding the global agreement, including SDG and climate reports, are available in English and Indonesian only in regulations, flyers, or short reports/summaries. This indicates that the global show-face is more important than the local public accountability. The use of the English language is also more appreciated than the local one, or the global display (in English) is better or more appreciated than providing information for citizens in the Indonesian language.

2. Methods

For this paper, the data from the UN documents is collected from the UN library (digitallibrary.un.org), available online and publicly accessible. As Southeast Asia or ASEAN has been more active with the climate change issue after the regional commitment to

implement the Agenda 2030, the SDG, the data is abundant, so the study limits the reports between 2016 and 2022 after the enactment of this SDG to the Indonesia's G20 presidency 2022, which resulted around 84 documents to study. The data were collected using selected words and years inserted into the UN digital library. The data were also accompanied by studies across Indonesian and ASEAN public documents, reports, and regulations on SDG (around 20 documents). These data were obtained from the ASEAN Secretariat public documents (website) and donors and think-tank agencies (e.g., Center for Strategic and International Studies/CSIS), as well as national newspaper reports (e.g., Kompas) on climate and environment. The list of studied documents, notably from the UN library resources, is available at the end of this paper.

I employed a qualitative political discourse/language analysis to study the data. This means that I carefully read the available reports when the terminologies "climate change," "sustainability," and "Southeast Asia or ASEAN" are inserted in the UN digital database to understand the process of policy-making if such exists in the UN platform. I also employed what Halonen, Ihalainen, and Saarinen stated on "multi-sited language policy discourse" where:

> …the global, local, and various times are brought together into interaction: time and space create, maintain, and are dependent on each other… the applications and outcomes of legislation on the national level affect everyday life…Policy is formulated through language and involvement in discourse at all levels. Language users are….agents of change rather than merely implementers of the decision on the normative level (Halonen et al., 2015).

This quoted excerpt particular methodological chapter shows how 'language,' 'national,' 'global' and 'local' are always intertwined and demonstrates "how policies typically consisted of multi-sited and interconnected historical trajectories in which language policy actors reinforce and reformulate policies in interaction with each other and the political process." Moreover, the revision of articles and statements at the UN reflected how important language is to address specific topics (see, e.g. A/C.2/75/SR.7 point 17). Showing how important language is also happened in the ASEAN context. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia Marty Natalegawa recalled in his book how he needed to be careful in the language in bridging differences in the conflict between Cambodia and Thailand on ownership of the Preah Vihear Temple back in 2011. Such a small detail in language words (even a comma), especially in ASEAN, would trigger deadlock and conflict yet may proceed to a peaceful settlement. It also highlighted what role Indonesia took, whether Indonesia as "the current chair of ASEAN" or "Indonesia's engagement on the issues as its national capacity" (Natalegawa, 2018) needed to be distinguished.

As the data used by the UN General Assembly reports, the characteristic between the parliamentary and diplomatic/intergovernmental styles of politics needs to be acknowledged. The General Assembly is "a standing international conference in which any UN member states can raise any international issue it regards as deserving global attention" (Peterson, 2018). Here, the general assembly resembles the parliament or legislature within a national parliament as "a forum of deliberation by illuminating the importance of UN debates for the conduct of world politics" (Boilard, 2019). However, as the UN Charter Article 10 was enacted, the resolution or commitment it addresses to states was recommended. Each state member needs to ratify the recommendation into state legislation to work locally.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

Studying the climate crisis discussion from the data of the UN record (general assemblies' reports and meeting resolutions) and languages reveals interesting findings about the evolvement of climate or environmental discussion and politics of multilateralism through language. The language has changed throughout the periods of the study in general, between 1990 to 2020, from a mildly building awareness of climate change at the beginning (1990-1999), then transformed into planning to tackle climate crisis (2000-2009) and towards the end of the study in 2020 prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate issue becomes more urgent, with the using of climate emergencies and climate disaster were more common (2010-2020). However, for this paper, Southeast Asia and its ASEAN members' remarks were especially scrutinized, and there was not much there.

In Southeast Asia, the climate crisis discussion at the global level is likely to serve the executive government at the state level, notably as part of foreign affairs issues rather than the public. Suppose the UN General Assembly serves as a legislature and has a parliamentarian debate style. In that case, it is hard if the meetings were attended by state bureaucrats (notably from Foreign Affairs) instead of parliamentary members (some representatives with a parliamentary system may be attended by the executive government familiar with their parliamentary background). What was obvious to note regarding the resolution of the UN with ASEAN on "cooperation between the United Nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations" is how the cooperation related to these two organizations was shrunk to only meetings with "the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for their efforts to hold regular meetings, on an annual basis" (UN, A/RES/59/5, 22 October 2004). This is in contrast with a statement that "effective multilateralism can only be put in place when it is seen as legitimate by the peoples of the United Nations" (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen & Dahl, 2022).

Ideally, such annual meetings would be further organized by the members of parliament, as the people's representatives and the civil society organizations/CSO. Hence, they are up-to-date with the global issues agreement and might bring such discussion to the local levels. However, this is still ongoing. Even when the members of parliament—while having their global meetings on climate change and sustainable issues—they did not connect the information they gathered to relay to their constituents or the public. They mostly echoed what the executive government had done, while the CSOs had their reports analyzing (government) regulations instead of collecting the data directly from the public. The transformation of language from building awareness of climate change (1990-1999) to tackling climate crisis (2000-2009) and climate emergencies and climate disasters (2010-2020) shows that the climate issue has become more urgent. However, Southeast Asia (including Indonesia) has awoken due to supporting SDG in 2016 and the Paris Climate Change Agreement of 2015 (United Nations Climate Change, 2017), thus ASEAN reports, for example, showed how countries use "climate crises" terminology more often (see, e.g., A/77/PV.4).

Based on studying the 84 data from the UN General Assembly documents, at least four exciting characteristics came up: (1) acknowledging references on the previous agenda commitment. This character was shown mainly by the state representatives (diplomats) from Europe or high-income countries; (2) appreciation (if not boasting) for actions conducted by the (self) national government. This character was shown mainly by the state representatives (diplomats) from Asia or low- and middle-income countries; (3) revolving on articles working in Resolution and drafting revision; (4) dramatizing normative issues, added with the need for high or ambitious language for the climate crisis.

We discussed this one by one, and the examples were derived from all states, not necessarily from Indonesia or states in Southeast Asia. Acknowledging references to the previous commitment of agenda or situation was shown mainly from the state leaders/representatives (diplomats) from Europe or high-income countries. They were always referred to the previous UN commitment while at the same time showing how knowledgeable they were in addressing such issues. For example, the President of the Republic of Estonia, Mrs. Kersti Kaljulaid, when giving her speech in the plenary session of the UN General Assembly, recalled the COVID-19 pandemic and its constant online meeting situation, climate change issue (World Clean Up Day launched in 2008) and position of women (A/76/PV.6, 22 September 2021, Plenary of General Assembly, p. 22). She also stated:

> On 17 September, Estonia,…celebrated our thirtieth anniversary of joining the United Nations…Today Estonia is an elected member of the Security Council. Over the years, we have been consumers of security and responsible security contributors in various world regions, from the Sahel to Afghanistan to Iraq. In March 2019, as the president of the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, Estonia led the adoption of a ministerial declaration whereby countries all over the world agreed to create a global environmental data strategy by 2025….Estonia is launching a global alliance — the "data for the environment alliance" — that will bring together countries interested in improving the quality and accessibility of environmental data and developing digital solutions.

This excerpt shows the speaker's confidence in stating the issue, recalling references, and for a bit, also shows the characteristic of number two below: high appreciation of her own country's achievement. On a deeper level, we notice how being an "elected member of the Security Council" boosted Estonio for being "consumers and responsible security contributors." This statement supported many statements about the UN organ, the Security Council, and power over others (Von Einsiedel & Malone, 2018). It was also considered normal when diplomats spoke highly about their countries' achievements. Interestingly, such appreciation towards (self) national government or even boasting (if not show-off) was mainly conducted by the state representatives (diplomats) from Asia or low- and middle-income countries. The example is from Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mr. Phansourivong, speaking on behalf of ASEAN, that ASEAN had conducted much to support the UN…and some of the key milestones were "ASEAN Charter [that] has a provision expressing its commitment to upholding the Charter of the United Nations and international law", "2014-2015 ASEAN-United Nations work plan"; "ASEAN-United Nations Summit, held…in Vientiane" [along with] "ASEAN Community Vision 2023 to raise our people's standards of living so that no one is left behind", "ASEAN Integration Work Plans" and "ASEAN Human Right Declarations in 2012" (A/C.2/73/SR.14, 16 October 2018, General Assembly, p. 4).

These remarks were remarkable and impressive, but they did not mean anything, as they were all in the form of regulation, and it was not clear how the implementation at the public level was, as even the discussion of climate change was hidden under such ASEAN Community Vision without clear achievement (Adiputri, 2023). Similar remarks were usually notified with "his/her country agreed (or committed, announce its intention to/that) in (eradicating poverty; tackling climate change; adopting the declaration)" as stated in the documents, yet the actual actions at the public level and in everyday lives are missing. Apart from the previous two characteristics, the data also showed the tendency of diplomats to revolve around article wording for resolution or its draft. This is later connected with the fourth characteristic. As we see in the Resolution of Cooperation between the UN and ASEAN, for example (A/71/L.76, 3 July 2017), it was seen that the resolution used words of noting, welcoming, recalling, congratulating, recognizing, encouraging, inviting, and stressing. They

are normal terminologies in many UN (or even international non-government organizations), but they were meaningless, especially when the last point emphasized that "the implementation of the present resolution shall be met from voluntary contributions." This portrays that the Resolution is toothless. Such "soft words" usage was discussed already as one of the weaknesses of the UN and NGO documents, that the international public policy lexicons are using soft (original emphasis) words in their meaning and not pronunciation, with the example of "cooperation, cohesion, complementarity," compared to words with "a meaningful edge" as "consolidation, command, control, compulsion" (Weiss, 2016). Using more meaningful lexicons would show how severe the UN is in addressing collective-action problems. Decades have passed, and these soft lexicons are still conveniently used. However, when the UN produced the Resolution, it boosted confidence and acknowledgment of the global international organization of the UN towards the regional entity, such as ASEAN. Such an international or global dimension is needed for multilateralism to run in practice, which will likely "shift to a more regional character" (Murray Robert, 2018). The practices must fit the regional contexts and cannot be universally identical.

Finally, the data shows that most diplomats liked dramatizing normative issues. Toward 2020 and 2022, the states' diplomats encouraged to use "stronger and ambitious language" for climate change and the environment, such as "building back better" must also mean "building back greener" (see, e.g., A/C.2/75/SR.7, p. 2 point 4) as some diplomats stated that the current draft "fell short on ambition" (ibid, point 37). Ms. Zuzana Čaputová, the President of the Slovak Republic, for example, stated that:

> However, our actions need to catch up to our words. Our greenhouse gas emissions need to fall faster. How much more scorched Earth, how many millions more climate refugees, how many flood victims will it take to convince us that ignoring our commitments is no longer an option? We are desperately behind in cutting our emissions…." (A/77/PV.4, 20 September 2022 p. 44)

Such speech, added with the need for "high" and ambitious language in the climate crisis (e.g., A/C.2/74/SR.13–E/2020/SR.3, 5 Dec 2019)—and sometimes "possible solutions," showed dramatization of the complex situation. From here, concrete action was not discussed; however, this finding confirms previous research in acknowledging that (1) we read this in summary record, not speech in full, and thus the discussion must (2) deal with limited time and also the statements are in (3) implicit meaning, not direct (Boilard, 2019). In fact, "state representatives often avoid direct references to real events in international affairs and substitute them by fleeting allusions or vague references to these events. Put differently; they often favor speaking in general rather than specific terms" (*ibid*).

Furthermore, when comparing these documents to the local public documents in ASEAN regions, notably in Indonesia, other characteristics occurred: (1) programs for tackling the climate crisis must link to the economy and growth (Prakash, 2018); (2) shown in the context above, the reports in Southeast Asia were primarily available in English, using words of "zero emission," "biodiversity loss," "integral ecology," "circular economy," "the future is circular" (Ministry of National Development Planning, 2021) emphasizing high language. These accentuated language hierarchy of English compared to national languages, and meaningless terminologies, unbeknownst to the public at the grassroots level; (3) revolve around capacity building/empowerment, meetings (workshop, training), and platform of monitoring (Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-United States Strategic Partnership 2021-2025, 2021).

However, when reading data from the CSO, they also tended to criticize the government, but their criticisms were based on the government's regulation instead of on the research field and discussion with general citizens (Hirawan et al., 2022). Meanwhile, most national newspapers in Indonesia (2023) reported on polluted air, floods, heatwaves, and waste

management—showing that what the general public sees from the climate crisis (The Jakarta Post, 2019) differs from what the policymaking regulates. Indeed, ASEAN, particularly Indonesia, had only started discussing the climate crisis after the enactment of the SDG in 2016, with the Indonesian Parliament initiating the World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development. However, for Southeast Asia, climate issue was still connected to economic development, highlighting the "business as usual" approach. The ASEAN declaration on multilateralism (ASEAN, 2021) addresses global concerns and sustainable development by emphasizing "cooperation for peace, security, stability and prosperity in the region" first. Thus, peace, security, and economic issues would be more important than development and the environment.

There is one particular data from the Ministry of Environment, based on the regulation of Law 6/1994 that:

> "Indonesia has set unconditional reduction target to reduce the effect of greenhouse gases and emissions of 29% with *business as usual* approach, and up to 41% with international support, by 2030". (emphasis added).

This regulation statement is a trademark of the Ministry of Environment, echoed by other government institutions, civil society organizations, and academics (Patrianti et al., 2020) (e.g., Enhanced National Determined Contribution) in Indonesia without explicit action on how to reduce it, especially with the business-as-usual approach. The UN had discussed this (e.g., A/C.2/74/SR.13 E/2020/SR.3, 2019) when Ms Juul, the president of the Economic and Social Council (Norway), had her statement in a panel discussion:

> "Business as usual would not solve anything: solutions with transformative effects on climate change were needed. The meeting would therefore focus on innovative approaches that made use of new technology, as well as practices from the past and indigenous knowledge" (point 2).

We see that the language used conforms to the hierarchy seen in government documents. It does not focus on the rights and entitlements of the general public to contribute to the climate crisis discussion. Instead, it emphasizes the state's duty (meaning the politicians, bureaucrats, and elites) to provide an understanding of such terminologies used in the documents. In studying the data, these findings show how Southeast Asian countries were committed to upholding multilateralism as a principle/norm, deliberating the climate change issue in the UN General Assembly, and even ratifying the Resolution. The process was observed diligently as part of what "citizens" should be, but it is not working for the climate crisis issues as an outcome. This will be discussed below.

3.2. Discussion

Multilateralism is perceived as normative and a "safe" subject. Every nation-state, in general, will support the cooperation between countries, especially in saving the environment and tackling climate crises with actions. Southeast Asian multilateralism shows the practice of principle and norm but not as an outcome, at least not yet. The region needs more time to transform many global agreements and its own ASEAN commitments to local legislation/regulation for real programs to be implemented to citizens, better in everyday language understood by the general public of climate. So far, ASEAN has tried to be proactive in upholding international principles and norms, for example, complementing ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ASEAN, 2021). Now, the challenge for ASEAN and its member countries is to implement the plan.

The Indonesian presidency in G20 2022 and ASEAN Chairmanship 2023 highlights Indonesia's essential roles in the global world, yet with the style of holding the "events for elites" and does not touch upon the citizens' needs nor prioritizing issues for low and middle-income countries—with choosing the topics that were suitable for high-income countries such as Global Health Architecture, Sustainable Energy Transition, and Digital Transformation— (Adiputri, 2022), Indonesia missed the opportunity to voice problems at the Global South. Moreover, Indonesia's ASEAN Chairmanship 2023 with focusing on the "epicentrum of growth" and aim for industrialization would continue the tradition that "only big industrial countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam are likely to follow, and the meetings only touch upon elites gathering in Jakarta and holding Senior Official Meeting in Labuan Bajo—a new growing tourist destination after Bali—, Indonesia. The least developed state members (or LDCs), such as Cambodia, Lao, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste" are likely to be left out of discussions, only participating in the meetings (Adiputri, 2023).

Media reports on ASEAN activities wrote about "men in suits" meetings that focused more on the economic agenda and lack of human interests (Estella & Paz, 2019). ASEAN was notoriously known as a weak regional group, with its four major weaknesses that the member states are prioritizing the national interest over the regional ones, having weak leadership, having ineffective bureaucratization, and only following the Western approach of competing for economic capitalism and free trade agreement, which unsuitable for its agrarian society (The Jakarta Post, 2019). The important transnational issues in ASEAN—such as gender equality, human rights, environmental protection, and combatting climate change—under the motto and blueprint that is "resilient, secure, and responsive to its citizens" are also less important because these topics are "buried" under the ASEAN's socio-cultural community pillar with little to no practical implementation planned (Adiputri, 2023). As we learned above, the United Nations' SDG implementation strategy remains committed to 'business-as-usual', and this approach is unlikely to succeed.

Thus, despite its importance in size, population, and natural resources, Indonesia has a relatively low or modest role in international politics, especially in mitigating/solving global problems. When Ponzio (2023) predicted the future of the sustainability agenda, he stated:

> With Indonesia having presided over the G-20 nations last year and India doing so this year, Brazil next year, and South Africa in 2025, we can expect this influential group of *developing countries* to back progress toward mobilizing technology, finance, trade, and debt relief for meeting both poor and rich countries' 2030 Agenda targets. The G-20 can also foster high-level attendance at the SDG Summit while encouraging the treatment of politically contentious global financial architecture reforms at the Summit of the Future as integral to implementing the SDGs (2023). Emphasis added.

He expected that the influential developing (should be: middle-income) countries could "accelerate and transform" the SDG achievement, echoing what the president of the UN general assembly, Csaba Korosi, had said. However, with the multilateralism style of ASEAN of catering to high language preferred by Western—if not high-income— countries, the idea of acceleration and transformation in the low- and middle-income countries is likely to need time to pursue. Consequently, the climate crisis and its policy in ASEAN only belong to the elites and do not involve citizens. Citizens are seen merely as end-users and beneficiaries, and participation is needed when implementing it, and not when drafting and planning the policies. Such a tendency shows a grim view of implementation programs in tackling the climate crisis in Southeast Asia.

Another example of multilateral discussion was a discussion between "Brazil, Indonesia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the three countries with the biggest rainforests, during COP27, an annual UN climate conference, in November 2022, signed a pact to work together to curb deforestation, and to urge other countries to help finance it" (The Economist, 2023).

However, even with a strict law but with lack of "political will to enforce the agreement—including all global agreement and international agenda—, they are "just words on papers" (The Economist, 2023). This was common when Indonesia was involved. The role of Indonesia in presiding over the G20 in 2022 and the ASEAN Chairmanship in 2023 had the possibility to counter the "Western" hegemony at the global level and added to the Global South perspectives or emerging power views in UN-led multilateralism. It is unfortunate to state that Indonesia and Southeast Asia still act modestly as global political actors. Consequently, even as a big, populous country, Indonesia still needs "to balance China and the West" (The Economist, 2023). Therefore, the prospect of multilateralism from Southeast Asia in addressing climate change remains grim as upholding multilateralism as a principle/norm that ASEAN shows is insufficient if not followed by an outcome or actions in tackling the climate crisis.

4. Conclusion

Studying the climate crisis discussion from the data of the UN record (general assemblies' reports) reveals exciting findings about the language evolvement of climate or environmental discussion and the politics of multilateralism. The data showed how the language evolved and how states' perceptions of the climate crisis changed. This finding is essential in that when the wording or lexicon is changing—using more vital words— perhaps when changing the language of policy can be "translated" into real programs and everyday-climate language, everybody feels the ownership of the situation and is compelled to act something together. Not only is there cooperation among countries at the government level but also at the grassroots level, so the impact is more massive and seen. While we speak the exact words "climate change" and "climate action", the understanding and implementation perhaps are not the same, and it is seen from the language used within the policy papers and in everyday language. This paper shows that Southeast Asia and Indonesia's contribution can potentially drive the political trajectories of climate change discussions from cultural and ethnic differences with proper communication between government and citizens, transforming the "high" policy language into everyday climate language that the public understands in their daily lives. However, due to a lack of communication with people and elitist "government" discussions within ASEAN and the UN, "people" perspectives are left behind. It is no wonder when the religious clerics initiated to contribute to climate crisis discussion. Perhaps the parliamentary members may take this role. However, when there is no bridge between citizens and government, any civil society, NGO; clerics, or even influential individuals, may play the role.

Language may use and influence the public understanding of the climate crisis, and this is what the religious clerics in Indonesia tried to do, too. Thus, all actors must act according to their roles. For example, the national parliament members must be able to transfer the updated information from the national one to the constituents at the local level, with relatively easy language for the public. Otherwise, they would be elitist and do not touch upon the need at the local level. As climate crisis action is immediately needed, one possible way can be to start by using strong words to tackle climate crises and include many different actors, as the religious imam in the previous example showed.

Acknowledgment

Appendix 1 The documents below were gathered from the UN Digital library for General Assembly official records, between 2016-2022.

No	Year	Number	Dates, type of meeting
1	2016 (12 docs)	A/71/PV.13 - 24	21-5 October 2016, 71st sessions: 13th-24nd plenary meeting
		A/C.2/71/SR.9	10 October 2016 Summary of the 9th meeting, 71st session
		A/C.2/71/SR.10	10 October 2016 Summary of the 10th meeting, 71st session
		A/C.2/73/SR.14	16 October 2018 Summary of the 14th meeting: 2nd Committee, 73rd session
		A/C.2/71/SR.20	24 October 2016 Summary of the 20th meeting, 71st session
	2017 (24 docs)	A/72/PV.3-23	19-25 September 2017, 72nd session : 3rd- 23rd plenary meeting
		A/C.2/72/SR.8	9 October 2017 Summary of the 8th meeting, 72nd session
		A/C.2/72/SR.9	9 October 2017 Summary of the 9th meeting, 72nd session
		A/C.2/72/SR.10	10 October 2017 Summary of the 10th meeting, 72nd session
	2018 (14 docs)	A/73/PV.6-16	25 September- 1 October 2018, 73rd session : 6th-16th plenary meetings
		A/C.2/73/SR.12	15 October 2018, 73rd session Summary of the 12th meeting : 2nd Committee
		A/C.2/73/SR.13	15 October 2018 Summary of the 13th meeting, 73rd session
		A/C.2/73/SR.26	30 November 2018 Summary of the 26th meeting, 73rd session
	2019 (15 docs)	A/74/PV.3-13	24-30 September 2019, 74th sessions: 3rd-13th plenary meeting
		A/C.2/74/SR.1	2 October 2019, 74th session Summary of the 1st meeting : 2nd Committee
		A/C.2/74/SR.5	8 October 2019 Summary of the 5th meeting : 2nd Committee, 74th session
		A/C.2/74/SR.11	14 October 2019 Summary of the 11th meeting, 74th session
		A/C.2/74/SR.13 - E/2020/SR.3	15 October 2019 Summary record of the joint meeting of the 2nd Committee and the Economic and Social Council on "Ecosystem approaches for shifting the world onto a sustainable pathway"
	2020 (1 doc)	A/C.2/75/SR.7	25 November 2020 Summary of the 7th meeting, 75th session
	2021 (16 docs)	A/76/PV.3-17	21-27 September 2021, 76th sessions: 3rd-17th plenary meetings
		A/C.2/76/SR.2-5	5-8 October 2021, 76th session Summary of the 2nd meeting : 2nd Committee
		A/C.2/76/SR.10	23 November 2021, , 76th session Summary of the 10th meeting : 2nd Committee
	2022 (2 docs)	A/77/PV.4	20 September 2022, 77th session : 4th plenary meeting
		A/77/PV.7	21 September 2022, 77th session : 7th plenary meeting
	84		Total studied documents

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