

'Challenges and Opportunities for Climate Compatible Adaptive Urban Development in Southeast Asia' assessed at AIT-ICI Int'l Workshop

Rapid urbanization across Southeast Asia's coastlines is placing severe stress on fast-growing cities that are often poorly planned, energy reliant and increasing vulnerable to the consequences of global climate change.



"Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change in Coastal Cities of Southeast Asia," a 4-year, 3-country focused research project conducted by the Asian Institute of Technology and funded by the International Climate Initiative (ICI), provided the intellectual backdrop this week for a meeting of climate change and urban professionals studying ways to make coastal urban areas more adaptable to climate-related risks.

Enhancing adaptive capacities for implementing climate-sensitive plans and policies is crucial in the age of climate change, AIT's Dr. Vilas Nitivattananon said at the opening of the one-day workshop on 9 December 2014.

Titled "Challenges and Opportunities for Climate Compatible Adaptive Urban Development in Southeast Asia", the event was organized and hosted by AIT in partnership with Thai City Planners Society (TCPS), and in collaboration with the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP), United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat), Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology, Urban and Regional Development Institute (URDI) and ICI.

PHOTO GALLERY

The workshop drew together 45 academicians, practitioners and policy-makers to share relevant experiences and lessons derived from the AIT-ICI project and other new knowledge emerging in relation to urban development and climate change. AIT Vice President for Research Prof. Kanchana Kanchanasut and TCPS President Mr. Akhom Vephasayanant delivered welcome remarks.

Representing UN-Habitat, Mr. Liam Fee delivered a keynote presentation titled "Climate Compatible Urban Development in Southeast Asia." Kastetsart University's Dr. Eggarin Anukulyudhathon delivered a follow up keynote address on "Urban Development in the Context of Climate Change."

Led by principal investigator Dr. Vilas Nitivattananon of the Urban Environmental Management Field of Study at the AIT School of Environment, Resources and Development, the study concluded that riverine flooding, drought, and coastal erosion have greatly impacted 15 cities studied in Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand.

The research project -- which included collaborators from Ho Chi Minh University of Technology, Urban and Regional Development Institute, Indonesia, and Chumchonchai Foundation, Thailand -- recommended that major adaptation improvements be introduced into the planning, design and operations of urban water-related sector activities.

Eighty percent of Southeast Asia's population of 500 million people live within 100 kilometers of the coast, said Dr. Vilas, explaining that Padang and Manokwari in Indonesia, Cha-am, Phuket, in Thailand, and Hoi An and Ben Tre in Vietnam, all cities studied in detail, are vulnerable to hazards such as flooding, storm surge, coastal erosion, water scarcity, salinity intrusion and flooding and drought.

Participants recommended a number of specific adaptation strategies and key actions for the each city in sectors such as water and infrastructure, tourism, fishery, housing and settlements, and industry. It identified risks along coastlines, public areas, inner areas and sub-urban areas.

The workshop featured relevant case studies from the three countries, as well as lessons learned from Thai cities, including presentations on policies and practices for climate change adaptation, policy and implementation in Bangkok, and experiences on successful city adaptation techniques for floods. The event concluded with discussions on partnership development and ideas for dissemination of shared views, experiences and development strategies.

