Global Warming and Climate Change

Prospects and Policies in Asia and Europe

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# Contents

*List of Illustrations*  
vi

*Series Editor Preface*  
xi

*Notes on Contributors*  
xiii

- **Introduction**
  - *Antonio Marquina*  
  - 1

- **Part I  Water and Food**

  - **2** Water Availability and Policies in Asia
    - *Maizatun Mustafa*  
    - 35

  - **3** Effects of Climate Change on Hydrological Resources in Europe: The Case of Spain
    - *Teodoro Estrela Monreal and Elisa Vargas Amelin*  
    - 58

  - **4** Climate Change: Implications on Agriculture and Food Security in the Short-Medium Term
    - *Tomás Lindemann and Daniela Morra*  
    - 78

- **Part II  Natural Disasters**

  - **5** A European Mechanism to Address Natural Disasters: Working Alone Is Not an Option
    - *Kostas Ifantis*  
    - 99

  - **6** Natural Disasters in Japan
    - *Haruo Hayashi*  
    - 118

  - **7** China and Natural Disasters: Prospects and Policies
    - *Luo Tianhong*  
    - 133

  - **8** India and Natural Disasters
    - *P. R. Chari*  
    - 145
### Contents

9 Natural Disasters and Policies to Confront: A Case Study of Vietnam  
*Luan Thuy Duong*  
159

10 Cooperation for Natural Disasters and Special Units: The Emergency Military Unit (UME)  
*José Miguel González Requena*  
172

#### Part III Environmentally Induced Migration

11 From a Socioeconomic Approach to Migration to the Inclusion of Environmentally Induced Migration in the Mediterranean  
*Antonio Marquina*  
187

12 Global Warming and Climate Change: Prospects for Forced Migration in Southeast Asia  
*Carolina G. Hernández*  
208

#### Part IV Mitigation and Adaptation Policies

13 The EU and Germany’s Policies on Climate Change  
*Frank Umbach*  
227

14 The Nuclear Energy Debate and Emissions Reduction: The Italian Case  
*Massimo de Leonardis*  
253

15 EU Policies for Renewable Energies  
*Javier de Quinto Romero and Julián López Milla*  
267

16 Adaptation to Climate Change in the EU – the Spanish Case  
*Alfonso Gutiérrez Teira*  
287

17 China’s Emissions Reduction Policy: Problems and Prospects  
*Michal Meidan*  
307

18 An Analysis of Energy Utilization Efficiency in China  
*Shi Dan*  
322

19 Japan’s Policy for Energy Emissions Reductions and Foreign Aid  
*Shigeru Sudo*  
346

20 Coping with Climate Change: A Korean Perspective  
*Jae-seung Lee*  
357
21 India's Energy and Climate Concerns: The Inter-linkages, Constraints and Policy Choices
Devika Sharma

22 Climate Change and Human Security in Southeast Asia: Issues and Challenges
Mely Caballero-Anthony

23 Climate Change Awareness and Responses: Some Initiatives and Perspectives from Malaysia
Mazlin bin Mokhtar

24 Thailand Environmental Policies: Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change and Implications for Human Security
Keokam Kraisoraphong

Pia Bennagen Raquedan

Part V Conclusions

26 The Politics of East Asia's Environmental Crisis: The Coming of Environmental Authoritarianism?
Mark Beeson

27 Environmental Challenges, Conflict Prevention and Human Security
Antonio Marquina

Index
2
Water Availability and Policies in Asia
Maizatun Mustafa

Introduction

Water availability is becoming an increasingly crucial issue for Asia. With the rise in the region’s water usage, the demand for water is also increasing substantially. Many countries in Asia are beginning to experience moderate to severe water shortages, brought on by the simultaneous effects of various factors including agricultural growth, population expansion and environmental pollution. Global phenomena such as climate change also contribute towards water availability issues.

In recent years, evidence indicates that water is becoming increasingly affected by erratic weather patterns, as has already happened to countries such as Indonesia and China, which have experienced droughts and, inevitably, food shortages. Climate change and population growth also affected water availability in south Asian countries such as India and Bangladesh. Other Asian countries, such as Singapore, face water issues in a different way, Singapore having limited availability of water resources and being highly dependent on Malaysia for its water supplies.

The current concern is that continuously diminishing and degraded available freshwater not only leads to national issues within countries in Asia, but could cause possible interstate disputes and international instability. In this chapter, issues directly concerned with water availability in Asia will be discussed together with the discussion of factors that may influence such availability. The chapter will then highlight policy reforms undertaken by Asian countries to resolve conflicts, secure access and enhance water availability.

Water availability: Defining issues

Water is central to human existence and is an essential requirement for the survival of humans and ecosystems, and a vital element for human development. Thus, water availability is an issue of major concern globally. Although