



## Regional cooperation in addressing food security issues in Southeast Asia: Malaysian perspectives

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### Abstract

Food insecurity has long been classified as one of the major threats to human wellbeing. In the field of international relations, the concept of human security as highlighted by the UNDP is viewed as an alternative to the mainstream state-centric paradigms designed to tackle the food insecurity issue. In this vein and to address this issue in Southeast Asia, various initiatives and efforts have been taken at regional levels through ASEAN but due to various reasons the desired outcomes have yet to be achieved. This article examines the effectiveness of ASEAN food security framework of cooperation and elucidates the factors that encourage Malaysia to support the existing mechanism. It is based on descriptive content analysis utilising primary data from field interviews and related secondary data. The findings show that in addition to the poor commitment of member states, conflicting national interests between member states are among the major factors that have hindered the regional cooperation framework from effectively addressing the food security issue, as well illustrated by the 2007/2008 episode of food crisis experienced by the region. In spite of the relative ineffectiveness, Malaysia continues to support the regional framework because it does provide a backup strategy in the event of domestic emergencies. Nevertheless, while working for more effective participations of member countries, the Malaysian government would do well to pay more serious attention to the nation's domestic food production sector in the interest of the people.

**Keywords:** ASEAN, food security, human security, international relations, Malaysia, regional cooperation

### Introduction

Food security prevails as one of the major issues that seek to be addressed by any state to uphold the interests of their people. To date, almost states face problems surrounding food security at different rates and with different degrees. However, if compared with other more advanced states, developing states are found to be more inclined to face a more seriously threatening scenario. Taking into account the food crisis in 2007/2008, developing states all over the world, specifically among states that depend on their import resources, face a more critical situation. The crisis at the time took place due to the large increase of food prices, especially staple food like rice, wheat and corn. Such an increase leaves a very bad impact to particularly developing states, such as Malaysia because Malaysia is a net importer of rice – Malaysia's staple food.

To address the crisis, and as a preparation for the possibility of a more serious threat, various approaches either long term or short term have been adopted by states and organisations, bodies and regions all over the world. In relation to this, this paper will try to explain the reaction of the regional states to the existing framework of cooperation that has been worked on by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN and the main problems faced in the effort to enhance food security cooperation in this region. This article also looks into factors that encourage Malaysia to give a full support to the ASEAN food security initiative.

## Food Security threats as a global phenomenon

The issue of food security cannot be discussed without looking into the status of food security at the global level. Today, the issue of food security or particularly, food crisis has become one of the threats towards the human security<sup>1</sup> all over the world (Rashila et al., 2012). The experience facing with the crisis in 2007/2008 is an evidence that without good preparation of policy and planning, the security and stability of any state will become frail, and even there will be governments who will collapse due to the pressure exerted by the public who is suffering, as the result of the drastic increase of basic food prices. The highest increase recorded around that year, is then followed once more with another increase in 2010/2011, clearly giving a warning that the food supply market and resources for the needs of the world population are unstable and not fully secured as expected (Cribbs, 2011:123). The two-phase increase that took place in the period of three years clearly explains the reality of the imbalanced supply and demand, that is still undermined by a lot of parties (Cribbs, 2011).

The phenomenon of food price increase also has prompted many analysts to harsh criticism to manifest their concern over the current food security issues worldwide (Braun, 2009; Cribb, 2010; Roberts, 2009). Braun (2009) maintains that food security will become a critical problem at the global level, thus it impact human security as well. Looking into several aspects such as the existing technological development, current diet pattern and also negative effect of climate change that sweeping the globe, the aim of providing food security to all individuals is still far-reaching. A similar statement was mentioned by the G8 states' leaders on food security after the July 2008 G8 Summit in Hokkaido, Japan, expressing a similar concern,

“We are deeply concerned that the steep rise in global food prices coupled with availability problems in a number of developing countries is threatening global food security”<sup>2</sup>

According to Brüntrup (2008), to see the state of the food security pattern in the world, two things need to be understood which are the aspect of supply and demand, that become fundamental in economic debates. In general, the trend of demand in food supply will be determined by several factors, which are related very closely to one another. There will be several factors that influence the demand of food supply, among of which, the increase of the total population, urbanization, the increased family income, and the demand over raw materials. These factors will continuously leave an impact to food supply at any given time.

History also shows that food issues are always an obstacle and a threat to humans in every corner of the world. The decline of early civilizations such as Mayan and several others were partly caused by the depletion of food supply.<sup>3</sup> Succumbing to this reality, the right for food is included in the international laws of basic rights as part of the basic rights of every individual or human security. In reality, it is also one of the aspects that have been neglected, despite being given assurance by the government. The concern arising from the food crisis in the middle of the 1970s also motivates world leaders to collectively endorse and accept the responsibility of combating famine and malnutrition as the concerted effort of the international community (Clover, 2003).

According to the FAO, the number of undernourished people in the world remains unacceptably high at near the one billion mark despite an expected decline in 2010 for the first time. However, the increased food price that was reported of late especially in 2011, has become an additional barrier towards the effort

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<sup>1</sup> (which is defined as security for the people rather than state security)

<sup>2</sup> Statement of G8 country leaders on the food security issued after the July 2008 G8 Summit in Hokkaido, Japan. Please refer to *G8 Leaders Statement on Global Food Security*, G8 Summit 2008 page 1, retrieved from: [http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/summit/2008/doc/doc080709\\_04\\_en.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/summit/2008/doc/doc080709_04_en.html) (19 October 2011)

<sup>3</sup> The Mayan civilization can serve as an example to see the impact of soil erosion and serious drought that gives a negative impact to food production, which finally affects their civilization. Other collapsing civilizations also have a strong link with the two aforementioned factors soil erosion and the reduction of food crop yield that lead to the deterioration of their civilizations (Gugliotta, 2007; Diamond, 2005; Tainter, 1998).

to combat global famine. The number of 925 million people represents 13.6 percent from the estimated world population at the rate of 6.8 billion in 2010 (FAO, 2010).<sup>4</sup> Almost all of them are from developing states. The number still reaching one billion, although the world has surpassed the phase of crisis in 2007/08, has served as clear evidence that the world actually has a big problem which becomes an obstacle to any effort to reach international objectives to reduce global starvation, as agreed in The First Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and the 1996 World Food Summit vision [Table 1. below] (FAO, 2010).

**Table 1. The number and percentage of individuals with malnutrition up until 2011**

Year	Number	Percent
2010-2011	925 million	13.6
2006-2008	850 million	13.0
2000-2002	836 million	14.0
1995-1997	792 million	14.0
1990-1992	848 million	16.0
1979-1981	853 million	21.0
1969-1971	878 million	26.0

Source: FAO (2010)

In the 2011 report published by the *United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization* (FAO), there was no clear statistics issued about the level of 'under nutrition' of the world population at the moment (FAO, 2011). *The 2011 Global Hunger Index* (GHI), in its sixth annual report, reports that although the effort to eliminate starvation has shown improvement, the actual figure of individuals experiencing hunger remained high which shows that food security is an issue that needs serious attention. In the last 20 years, the 2011 GHI report records a reduction of almost a quarter of the degree of hunger in 1990, but at the global level, hunger remained in a serious category. The volatility of the international economic market also has a significant impact on the poor and hunger (Grebmer *et al.*, 2011).

A sharp contrasting phenomenon at the same time occurs in both developed and developing states. The issue of obesity and death due to dietary has reached epidemic proportions globally, with more than 1.4 billion adults overweight -- and of these, over 200 million men and nearly 300 million women were obese -- is a major contributor to the global burden of chronic disease and disability. Often coexisting in developing states with under-nutrition, obesity is a complex condition, with serious social and psychological dimensions, affecting virtually all ages and socioeconomic groups. The finding of research by the World Health Organisation (WHO) shows that more than 1.4 billion people have an excess body weight or obese, that is 60% more than those facing starvation (WHO, 2003; 2014). As early as 1987, the mass media in America has started to publicise obesity as an epidemic, and in 2001, WHO had started to talk about "globesity" (Otter, 2010). The danger that arises out of this scenario is explained as a public health crisis and is also regarded as the "time bomb" and "the tsunami", due to several arising implications like the potential of costs in terms of spending in healthcare, personal in capacity and the loss of economic productivity (Delpeuch, Maire, Monnier & Holdsworth, 2009).

Today, obesity epidemic is not restricted only to industrialized societies; this increase is often faster in developing states than in the developed world. Obesity is seen to have achieved the status of *epidemic* as it does not just only spreads in America and Western Europe, but also is a phenomenon in other areas like East Asia, Middle Asia, South America and some regions in Africa. In the Southern Africa, for instance, 30.5% from black women are categorized as obese. Meanwhile, in China, the phenomenon of obesity among children is also increasing from 1.5% in 1989 to 12.6% in 1997 (Yangfeng, 2006). Although there is food security issue, obesity remains in certain states.

<sup>4</sup> This figure shows that the number of victims in famine has increased since 1995-96. In 1990, it is estimated that 15-35 million people ran the risk of starvation, 786 million exposed to chronic food deficit, lack of chronic nutrition, and hundreds of million experiencing the lack of micro-nutrient, diarrhoea, typhoid, malaria, parasite, and other dietary issues.

The different scenarios of the global hunger and food crisis on one hand and the rising rates of obesity on the other hand, seem to show a great contradiction. Tounder stand this situation, a study on the issue of global food security should beseen from various angles, including economics, geopolitics and also the environment. This scenario also serves as the very basic method to show the actual manifestation of the inequality of authority and access towards resources at the global level (Otter, 2010).

### The 2007-2008 crisis and the reaction of ASEAN States

In facing the crisis as witnessed in 2007/2008, states in the South East Asian region have generally given some mixed reactions depending on the positions of the respective states, either as an exporter or importer. There are also states that seize this opportunity to increase the rate of export despite experiencing the shortage of supply for domestic use.

States being in the group of rice exporters, lead by Thailand and Vietnam, as expected have been able to benefit from higher prices. Among rice-importing states like the Phillipines and Malaysia, have to compete to meet the basic food needs domestically and therefore it is a human security issue. Indonesia which reaps its income from its export of palm oil receives double profit, and also shows increased spending on rice. Meanwhile, Cambodia uses this opportunity to increase its export of rice, although at that time its people had to face shortage of rice supply at the domestic level (Arnst, 2009). The reactions from the South East Asian states over the food crisis can be summarised in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Policy responses to the global food crisis of selected ASEAN countries**

Policy responses	ASEAN member countries*							
	Cambodia	Indonesia	Malaysia	Myanmar	Phillippines	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam
Reduce import duties		X						
Increase supplies using reserves	X	X					X	
Build up reserves/stockpiles	X		X		X	X	X	X
Increase imports/relax restrictions		X			X		X	X
Increase export duties								
Impose export restrictions	X							X
Price controls/consumer subsidies	X	X	X		X		X	
Minimum support prices					X			X
Minimum export prices								
Subsidies to farmers					X			
Promote self-sufficiency			X	X	X			
Cash transfers						X		
Food rationing		X			X			

Note: Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam are considered to be net exporting countries, whereas Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Phillipines and Singapore are net importing countries.

Source: Asian Development Bank (2008:31)

In Malaysia, the effect of crisis in 2008 was overwhelming that the government has to take several drastic measures including by having to make ‘panic’ buying from Thailand to meet the need for rice reserve that could only last two weeks during the peak of the crisis (Malaysia Information Department, 2009). The Malaysian government has also taken some immediate measures by introducing a short-term policy named *Dasar Jaminan Bekalan Makanan (DJBM)* or Malaysia Food Security Policy for two years which ended in 2010 with an allocation reaching 4 billion (Ringgit Malaysia, RM). The implementation of this policy is placed on the shoulder of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry, with the aim to address the effect of the crisis and ensure that the food supply is sufficient. Among other targets are to increase the productivity of the agro-food sector including rice production.

### Policy cooperation at the ASEAN level

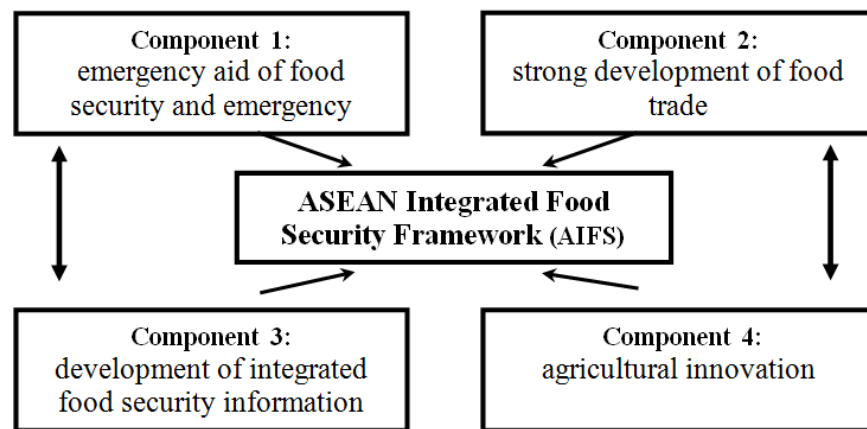
Malaysia is one of the founding states of ASEAN, which is directly involved with the establishment of the ASEAN Food Security Reserve (AFSR) since 1979. The mechanism at this regional level is created to fulfill a number of objectives which are to have an agency which manages the regional emergency rice reserve, assess in phases the level of food security in the South East Asian region, and prepare information about the food security development policy in member states. This initiative is also finally leading to the setting up of the ASEAN Emergency Rice Reserve (AERR) for use during crisis (Table 3). This reserve initially stipulated the rate of 50,000 tons to be reserved as stock. Meanwhile, at the time, the quantity allocated for the emergency rice reserve stayed at 87,000 metric tons (Bello, 2005). The term ‘emergency’ in this context is used to refer to the states or situations in an ASEAN member states, after subjected to extreme suffering and unanticipated natural disaster or human-made disaster, which are not able to address such circumstances through national reserves and also unable to cater for the supply need through normal trade channel. This reserve does not aimed to address food deficit in member states continuously, which normally can be fulfilled through imports (Bello, 2005).

**Table 3. The ASEAN emergency rice reserve system**

Country	Reserved stock (metric tons)
Brunei Darussalam	3,000
Cambodia	3,000
Indonesia	12,000
Lao PDR	3,000
Malaysia	6,000
Myanmar	14,000
Philippines	12,000
Singapore	5,000
Thailand	15,000
Vietnam	14,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>87,000</b>

Source: APTERR website, <http://www.apterr.org/faq> (10/4/2014)& Bello (2005).

As the follow-up from the food crisis experienced in 2008, The ASEAN Summit Conference in March 2009 had agreed and endorsed the ASEAN Integrated Food Security Framework (AIFS), supported by the Food Security Action Strategic Plan (SPA-FS). This plan contains an activity structure that is more concrete, if compared to other food security agreements established previously. The main component of



Source: ASEAN Integrated Food security (AIFS) framework 2009-13

**Figure 1. ASEAN Integrated Food Security Framework (AIFS)**

the AIFS framework contains four main elements namely, (i) emergency aid of food security and emergency, (ii) strong development of food trade, (iii) development of integrated food security information system, and (iv) agricultural innovation (Kindly refer to Figure 1.).

Referring to the first component, the main activity is to establish Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR) for ASEAN Plus Three (ASEAN+3). This reserve is built on the East Asian Rice Emergency Reserve framework (EAERR), which is a pioneering project of ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry and Agricultural Ministers plus China, Japan and South Korea (AMAF+3) launched back in 2003.<sup>5</sup> Through the establishment of a larger framework in this context of EAERR, it is hoped that it will lead to the re-development of ASEAN Emergency Rice Reserve (AERR).

More than that, an EAERR secretariat was set up in Bangkok in 2004 to manage the pilot project and supervise various social development activities. Although this secretariat is only a small body, its existence does have a great impact as a series of development to the implementation of agreement at the ministerial level in the form of institutional body (Yoshimatsu, 2009). Through this APTERR, three main dialogue partners namely China, Japan and South Korea decided on a contribution of 700,000 tons with the specific as shown in Table 4. below, other than 87,000 tons contributed by ASEAN states through the AERR framework. Since its launching, APTERR has successfully played its role, among which helping the Filipino overcome disasters caused by Haiyan Typhoon, Ketsana Typhoon, Megi Typhoon, La Nina and flash floods through the contribution of 520 metric tons of rice by Thailand. Other than that, Japan contributed 347 metric tons to help people affected by natural catastrophes in several areas in Laos due to Ketsana Typhoon (Trethewie, 2013).

**Table 4. The ASEAN plus three emergency reserve system**

Country	Reserved stock (metric tons)	Dialogue partners (+3)	Reserved stock (metric tons)
Brunei Darussalam	3,000	China	300,000
Cambodia	3,000	Japan	250,000
Indonesia	12,000	South Korea	150,000
Lao PDR	3,000	<b>Total</b>	<b>700,000</b>
Malaysia	6,000		
Myanmar	14,000		
Philippines	12,000		
Singapore	5,000		
Thailand	15,000		
Vietnam	14,000		
<b>Total</b>	<b>87,000</b>		

Source: APTERR web, <http://www.apterr.org/faq> (10/4/2014)

Secondly, creating a strong trade development to support a fair and balanced food trade at an acceptable price rate among the member states by means of developing a buffer mechanism- this is the goal set by the second component. It is hoped to facilitate the process of ensuring that consideration is given to the effort of balancing the domestic access towards food, intra and extra-regional food trade, also the criteria and certain requirements that have been agreed to enable the implementation to be done (ASEAN SPA-FS AIFS 2009-13). Through this second component, member states are required to adhere to and implement the provision of the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) especially related to the trade of food products signed on the 26 February 2009 in Cha Am, Thailand. Also, analysis and assessment will be done on the information of regional and international trade, including those relating to price, trade quantity, distribution and also logistics (ASEAN SPA-FS AIFS 2009-13).

<sup>5</sup> EAERR is a collaborative program seeking to prepare aids and strengthen the level of food security during emergency through the sharing of rice stock and contribute towards the price stability in this region.



Through the third component, ASEAN Plus Three has reacted to establish the ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS) in October 2002 motivated by the concern on the food security threat in the East Asia and the South East Asia. The project that has now gone past the second phase, was carried out in 2003 and 2012, and was led and coordinated by the Agricultural Ministry and Cooperation of Thailand with the funding received from Japan through the ASEAN Trust Fund (ASEAN SPA-FS AIFS 2009-13). The overall objective is to strengthen the level of food security in this region through a systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of information pertinent to food security. AFSIS is created with the aim to enable the assessment of the regional food security situation and help identify areas where food scarcity is a problem, through the joint effort of knowledge sharing and technical collaboration among ASEAN member states to provide valid and reliable information when necessary (Desker, Teng, & Caballero-Anthony 2013). Although the AFSIS project witnesses an extraordinary progress in terms of the handling, the reliability and data quality still remain as causes for concern.

The fourth component, in terms of the agricultural innovation, AIFS has proposed three cores to be executed, the first is enhancing the infrastructural development to ensure agricultural production system; reducing loss after harvesting, and reducing business transaction costs; secondly, encouraging a greater investment in the food sector and basic farming industry, to enhance the level of food security; and thirdly, to identify and address new emerging issues related to food security, related to increased demand on the food commodity to produce bio-fuel (ASEAN SPA-FS AIFS 2009-13).

The implementation of ASEAN AIFS is supported by the Food Security Action Strategic Plan (SPA-FS), formulated for a five-year period from 2009-2013 with the objective to ensure food security for the long term and improve the farmers' status of living in the South East Asian region. SPA-FS represents a special strategic plan created to achieve six strategic approaches in four main components of the AIFS. Through the Food Security Action Strategic Plan (SPA-FS), AMAF has, up until now, successfully implemented seven most important activities namely, i) sealing the ASEAN APTERR agreement; ii) solidifying the ASEAN Food Security Reserve System Institute; iii) preparing and consolidating the ASEAN Food Security Information System (AFSIS); iv) studying the joint study and policy forum concerning foreign direct investment in the field of agriculture in ASEAN states; v) holding two sessions of formal negotiations of the government-private sector (AMAF-Private Sector); vi) hold dialogue sessions in 2011 and 2012; and, vii) having a half-term assessment of the AIFS / SPA-FS (ASEAN Secretariat, 2012:23-24)

### **Problems in the implementation of regional cooperation framework**

The existence of the regional cooperation framework to address the issue of food security is much needed this time. However, continued efforts are necessary to increase the capacity to deal with crisis situations. Currently, the implementation is seen as still hindered by several factors;

Firstly, commitment barriers and excessive concerns among states over their interests resulting in no attention being given towards concerted efforts within the region when facing food crisis. AERR was previously used as a model by South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1987, but was never effectively used during the period of its existence. When global food crisis hit the region during the 2007/08 period, the amount of rice stored via the AERR scheme only amounted to 87,000 tonnes, was still considered small since it was barely enough to feed 550 million ASEAN people for less than half a day. This was similar with the ASEAN Plus Three APTERR which involved commitment from three nations namely Japan, China and South Korea to contribute a sum of 700,000 tons as an addition to the existing rate. While it looked interesting, a lesson that can be learned from the crisis is that it showed that participating states do not see the existing regional rice reserve mechanism as a solution towards food security problems in their respective states (Chandra & Lontoh, 2010). In this issue, even though ASEAN introduced food relief emergency system, some researchers viewed this pessimistically since a system that targets its objective in the event of emergency has the tendency to fail, because the solutions are only for a short period. The real solution for the issue of food security requires a long-term solution. Thus, it was not

surprising that ASEAN states were facing with the challenge of meeting their population demand for food to have the tendency to prioritize rice in their food security strategies at national or regional level.

Secondly, tension during the crisis encourages states to take a more urgent and profitable individualistic approach. This is apparent when facing with the world food crisis, when states within the region have put aside the spirit of ASEAN solidarity to guarantee the sustainability of food security level in the region as envisioned by ASEAN AIFS, behind ASEAN desire to establish ASEAN Economic Community in 2015. For instance, to reap profit from rising global food prices, major rice-producing countries in Southeast Asia such as Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia had chosen to meet the needs of other countries globally, as opposed to safeguarding the interests of rice-importing countries which are the members of ASEAN (Chandra & Lontoh, 2010:3). Producing countries are also beginning to walk their talk by implementing export controls. This significantly affects rice importing countries in the region such as Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia. Consumers in Malaysia had to deal with price increase of rice from Thailand during the peak of the crisis which occurred on multiple folds. The Malaysian government had also announced to increase the size of rice stocks held by Padiberas Nasional Berhad (BERNAS) despite having to pay a very high price (Tengku Mohd Ariff, personal communication, July 15, 2011). Similarly, the Philippines was forced to beg its neighbour, Vietnam to supply the rice needed. Indonesia had also announced plans to double its rice stockpile of 3 million tons (Timmer, 2008). The manner the rice producing countries imposed export restrictions on rice did not only affect ASEAN solidarity, which should be the key component for the 2015 ASEAN Economic Community's objective, instead, it has created panic, and promote global rice exporting countries to take the same negative measures. This affects the chances of importing countries to seek alternative food sources (Chandra & Lontoh, 2010:3).

Thirdly, the act of creating rice cartel organization known as Organization of Rice Exporting Countries (OREC) had worsened the solidarity and showcased the low commitment showed by participating countries towards the existence of regional food security cooperation framework or AIFS. Although the initiative to create OREC was not a new idea, the announcement by the former Prime Minister of Thailand, Samak Sundrajev during the peak of the crisis in April 2008 had given rise to negative perceptions from various parties, especially among importing nations. Together with Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, Thailand argued that the idea OREC establishment was fair and noble (Timmer, 2008). If examined from another angle, this action had directly denied the importance of the AIFS framework, which requires a commitment among its members to ensure continuity of food security in Southeast Asia. It shows the integrated effort to create an exclusive cartel similar to OPEC's role in the world oil production. Even though OREC did not materialise, subregional agreement between the Mekong countries (Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar) was signed on November 2010 in Phnom Penh Declaration to establish Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy, known as ACMECS. ACMECS Rice Cooperation Mechanism also aims to continue and strengthen the production of rice and export cooperation between these countries (Arandez-Tanchuling, 2011).

Fourth, the entry of dialog partner states has made the implementation of regional food security cooperation framework more complicated. At present, apart from membership from ASEAN states, AIFS is also dominated by three main dialogue partners, hence making it as ASEAN plus Three, namely China, Japan and South Korea. If the first component of AIFS is referred, namely via the establishment of ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR) ASEAN Plus Three (ASEAN+3), the reserve mechanism which was previously under ASEAN was transferred to East ASEAN Emergency Rice Reserve (EAERR) as a pilot project for ASEAN Agricultural and Forest Ministers as well as the three main dialogue partners (AMAF+3) which was launched in 2003. Looking at the tension inherent in the relationship between the three key ASEAN dialogue partners, it is expected that ASEAN AIFS will be more difficult to be implemented within the region particularly when faced with crisis. Previous observation associated with the individualistic act of participating states when facing with rising food price crisis in 2008 showed that there is a strong tendency for these states to take measures which present more profits to their states individually, rather than collectively as advocated by the ASEAN spirit. The



situation is certainly more difficult with the inclusion of states such as China and Japan, or China and South Korea or Japan and South Korea that currently have a tensed relationship involving various issues.

### **Malaysia in ASEAN Food Security cooperation**

Malaysia in this context is very committed to the efforts of establishing a regional food security cooperation in ASEAN. This commitment among others is driven by a number of factors that are both internal and external.

The issue of food security is an issue in Malaysia because Malaysia is a staple food net importer. Although the domestic agricultural sector had been the food production guarantor particularly rice, it can only meet 70-80 percent of the domestic need. The remaining requirement is obtained by means of import rights awarded to BERNAS. The 2008 global food crisis had alerted various parties about the weakness of the food production sector in Malaysia. Domestically, the production of food commodities such as rice is synonymous with issues such as escalating production costs, inefficiencies, competition for resources, and climate change. All of these factors have affected production capabilities, in addition to making the overall cost of production at domestic level higher than the price offered by international markets (Fatimah Mohamed Arshad, personal communication, May 19, 2011). During the height of the crisis, Malaysia was suddenly hit by the difficulty in obtaining supplies from the international market, especially during the mid-2008. This experience has led to an immediate response from the government to implement the Malaysia Food Security Policy (2008-2010) with 100 percent self-sufficiency target. In other words, the food crisis has managed to reveal the real situation of food security in Malaysia. Support for the existence of this cooperation framework has a strong connection with this internal factor.

Malaysia's support for the existing ASEAN food security cooperative framework is also driven by our foreign policy commitments and support for regional organizations. ASEAN had been the centerpiece of Malaysia's foreign policy. Malaysia sees ASEAN as representing its geopolitical and economic interests and the same can also be said with other states within this region (KLN, 2014). Thus, as one of ASEAN founding nations, Malaysia's foreign policy continues to emphasize the relevance and importance of ASEAN as a forum and catalyst for regional dialogue. This support also includes support on the mechanism and food security cooperation framework undertaken by ASEAN such as AIFS.

Globally, the issue of food security has become an important theme that affect human security also prompted Malaysia to take a more proactive action. Similar to the issue of food security at the global level, the discussion at domestic level also can be seen from various aspects. Taking the example of a food crisis in 2008, apart from the usual factors such as the competition for production factors (such as land, water, etc.), the unpredictable weather patterns and natural disasters as well as competition to acquire food commodities for the production of bio-fuels also has led to increasingly serious food security issues. This is then coupled with speculative trading, and panic buying, which caused the price of food increased to double by multiple folds. The same situation can occur at any time. In the Malaysian context, import dependence and trade-oriented economic system makes this country more vulnerable to market sensitivity. Therefore, the existence of a cooperative framework is important as a means of short-term solutions in facing unexpected possibilities.

### **Conclusion**

In general, cooperative efforts and regional food security established by the ASEAN is an action that is appropriate in fulfilling the political and global security demands. However, arguments that have been expressed above truly exhibit a great challenge that must be faced by ASEAN to enable this cooperation framework to be implemented in the best possible manner. As noted from the very beginning, this article discusses the above issues based on two premises. The argument put forward is that the concept of human security must be seen as an alternative paradigm towards the security concept which is 'state-

centric' in nature, in addressing issues affecting human security. Based on this argument, all the problems that hinder the effectiveness of food security cooperation framework in Southeast Asia are more focused on the question of the conflict of interests between participating states which eventually prevent efficient collaborative efforts. Therefore, emphasis on the foundation or the policy is to be geared towards the interest of human wellbeing. This is where major deficiencies inherent in realism in the study of international relations.

Secondly, food security is one of the serious challenges to human security in the country as well as globally that has to be dealt wisely before the situation turns into a serious threat. Based on these arguments, results from observation made showed that the effort of establishing ASEAN AIFS which led to the establishment of APTERR is considered as a reasonable and prudent measures because it had taken into account various issues affecting global food security such as unpredictable climate, natural disasters, lack of resources such as labor supply and land, competition in acquiring commodities for biofuel productions and many more. In one way, it was found that APTERR has been able to play its role to help states affected by natural disasters such as the Philippines and Laos.

The analysis shows that the mechanism of cooperation to address the threat of food crisis in the ASEAN level was found to be failing to play its function appropriately in urgent situations when faced with the threat of a crisis as evident in 2008 even though such cooperation has long been established. Among the factors that hinder the effective functioning of this framework include, first, conflicts of interest among its members that have hindered the process of co-operation from occurring at an optimal level when facing a crisis situation. Secondly, this mechanism is exposed to the problem of commitment from participating states to play their functions effectively. Finally, the ineffectiveness of the mechanisms is due to their nature as short term support measures.

In the Malaysian context, support for such cooperation framework is very important because it provides states in the Southeast Asian region a backup strategy in the event of unexpected disasters. It is suggested that the government continues to place an emphasis on the agri-food sector as a contributor of food supply at domestic level. At the same time, the regional cooperation should be strengthened through the dedicated commitment from all countries involved either through their support on existing mechanism, or through efforts to strengthen intra-regional and inter-regional efforts to enhance human security.

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