

REZENSIONEN

**David Glover and Timothy Jessup (eds.):
Indonesia's Fires and Haze. The Cost of
Catastrophe**

Singapore: ISEAS, and Ottawa: IDRC 1999,
149 pages, 36 US\$

The next El Nino with its extreme dry season in South Asia will surely come. And with it the forest fires on Sumatra and Kalimantan (Borneo) with its haze and soot, covering large parts of S E Asia, including Singapore and Malaysia for months, as they did during August-November 1997 when 8 million hectares of Indonesian land were burnt. Large scale land clearing by fire has been a regular feature in Indonesia since 1990. It was followed by a few days of haze in the region as a recurrent habitual nuisance in the aftermath. But it never had been so bad and persistent as in the El Nino year of 1997.

In this modest and sober volume a small research team has made considerable efforts to specify the direct and indirect damages caused by the fires – and put the results in monetary terms, as this seems to be the only language which the Indonesian elite and much of the rest of the world seem to understand readily.

Over the last two decades the fires on East Sumatra and South Borneo have become more frequent, intense and larger (p. 4). In the past, traditional slash burn ("swidden") agriculture had little long term effect, as the vegetation had time to recover. Now with logging roads open to settlers larger plots were cleared for longer periods.

While an intact undisturbed rain forest is highly resistant to fire, the conversion to grassland and agriculture and wasteful log-

ging practices which leave plenty of dead wood behind increase the fire hazard. Under the Soeharto regime millions of hectares of forest land were awarded to logging companies. This triggered a "timber boom" on Sumatra and on Borneo, but the terms of the concessions (20 years) and the export regime for wood gave little incentives to sustainable forestry or for responsible logging practices. Plantation companies and their land clearance contractors used almost exclusively fire as the cheapest method for land clearing. It was particularly effective during dry season. Year to year an ever larger area of land was being cleared – quite in line with the government's objective to increase plantations in the lowlands of Borneo and Sumatra. When in 1997 El Nino reduced the rainfall by up to 90% the fires escaped control and raged into forests, peat swamps, mature plantations and agricultural land. Then in 1998 La Nina followed with unusually heavy rainfall on Kalimantan. This led to heavy flooding, increasing soil erosion and sedimentation, thus enhancing the cumulative effect of degradation in the ravaged areas (p. 135).

The authors have done very detailed and painstakingly documented work to estimate the monetary damages caused by this man-made catastrophe. They distinguish direct costs, like timber, crops and animals burnt in Indonesia, from indirect short term costs: such as hospitalization, treatment and work-days lost from people suffering respiratory, eye and skin ailments caused by the haze (which consists of smog like pollutants: soot particles, toxic gases and carbon dioxide), the costs of lost income from tourist and flight cancellations, the general disruption of business, transport, agriculture and fisheries (including a ten-day state of emergency in

Sarawak in September 1997, when only essential services were allowed to operate), the collisions of ships and of a commercial airliner crash on Sumatra (p. 9).

There were, however, indirect long term health and environmental effects which were much more difficult to quantify: wildlife killed from the lack of food and habit, rare species like the orang utan brought closer to extinction, the massive release of carbon oxide producing ozone, acid rain and greenhouse gases. The authors then settled for very conservative estimates. They put the costs per ton of carbon dioxide emitted at \$10, and set the value of square kilometer of burnt rain forest at \$300 (representing the value which international donors are prepared to pay for its preservation elsewhere, p. 21). The value of lost timber is set at only \$50 per cubic meter (p. 103).

Still the overall sum of all damages points to a staggering \$3 billion costs of direct fire impact, and \$1 billion as the short term haze impact for Indonesia alone (p. 109). The sum represents 2% of her GDP which was literally allowed to go up in smoke. Including the indirect haze induced damages to her neighbours Singapore and Malaysia, the total quantifiable costs of the fires of 1997 amount to \$4.5 billion, as the fallout of 8 million hectares burnt affected the livelihood of 70 million people in the region (p. 131).

The official Indonesian reaction consisted in down-playing the problem. Its estimates, against all evidence produced by satellite remote sensing (p. 99-101), claim that only 260,000 hectares were burnt (p. 98). There also seems to be little understanding for the value of Indonesia's remaining forestry resources (p. 137), as the expansion of agricultural and plantation land in the lowlands is further promoted (p. 140). Incentives for proper forestry management and the enforcement of bans against land clearing by fire remain conspicuous in their absence.

Given the lack of effective responsible policies everything is set for a repeat of the catastrophe. The authors of this valuable study are right to remind the international donor community diplomatically on their role and responsibility to step in and to work on this transnational problem which is bound to happen again – if only worse than back in 1997.

Albrecht Rothacher

Cheah Boon Kheng: Malaysia: The Making of a Nation

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Unter den Entwicklungs- und Schwellenländern Südasiens nimmt Malaysia aufgrund seiner bemerkenswerten wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung einen besonderen Platz ein: Befanden sich 1970 noch etwa 50% der Bevölkerung unterhalb der Armutsgrenze, so lag dieser Anteil im Jahr 2000 bei nur noch 7%. Allein im Zeitraum von 1981 bis 2000 vervierfachte sich das Bruttosozialprodukt nahezu auf ca. 100 Mrd. US-Dollar.

Hinter diesen beachtlichen wirtschaftlichen Zahlen steckt auch eine politische Leistung: Noch Ende der 1960er-Jahre war das multi-ethnische Malaysia von schweren Rassenunruhen erschüttert, die politische wie wirtschaftliche Zukunft erschien düster. In den letzten 30 Jahren ist es der politischen Klasse der Malaien, Chinesen und Inder jedoch gelungen, einen Modus Vivendi des Power-Sharing zu finden, der die ökonomische Entwicklung erst ermöglichte.

In seinem Buch gibt der emeritierte Historiker Cheah Boon Kheng von der Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang einen informativen Überblick über die politische Entwicklung des ethnisch und kulturell so heterogenen Landes seit der Unabhängigkeit 1957. Im Mittelpunkt steht dabei die Rolle der vier