In the south of Thailand and on the border with Malaysia, heavy downpours on what historically have been drier months is flooding towns. Heavy rainfall is also inundating a northern city on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. If governments in these localities and elsewhere in vulnerable Southeast Asia do not start acting now, many vulnerable populations in the region will continue to endure significant impacts to people’s lives and livelihoods. These climate change-induced impacts are not limited to heavy downpours. Heat waves, prolonged drought, and coastal flooding due to rising sea levels are other climate impacts that are fast becoming the new normal.

While national-level preparations and adaptations are vital, Southeast Asia needs its local governments to innovate first to ensure that the burden of climate-related impacts is minimised. That said, every village, municipality, city, and provincial government should be equipped with capacity for effective and efficient response.

By starting to plan and invest in local climate resiliency now -- and by integrating these initiatives with other local units, local governments can lead the effort in reducing the vulnerabilities of many Southeast Asians to climate change.

As local governments situate themselves at the forefront of protecting their people, they also have to protect vital electricity, food and water supplies. This entails preventing disruptions to key infrastructure, especially road systems, during extreme weather events. As local governments ensure this, they also need to cushion themselves from unnecessary institutional mayhem. They, too, have to be resilient. To work effectively, they need stronger institutional arrangements.

Strengthening these arrangements requires a number of things. Foremost is preparation and planning in terms of which places in the jurisdictions of local governments are most likely to need help, and how such help could be efficiently and delivered on a timely basis. To achieve this, integrated and networked preparations and planning, across sectors and across local governments themselves, is key. This is necessary especially
when emergency evacuations become necessary.

Local governments, therefore, should produce a portfolio approach to climate resiliency.

A portfolio approach entails locally situating climate projections and long-term climate change action plans. This requires that local governments immediately start adopting resiliency measures, monitor how effectively (or ineffectively) they work, and continually update their understanding of climate risk information and responses as the climate system and local resilience actions evolve.

This requires that local governments invest in resiliency measures that spread not only the local risks but also their resources, across multiple actors and categories. This includes implementing locally based policies, such as upgrades in local building regulations, strengthening critical local protective structures, and fortifying social safety nets. This demands planning across local governments at the inter-village, inter-municipality, inter-city, and inter-provincial levels.

A cross-border approach to climate resiliency planning includes ways that consider the inter-connectedness of energy, water, transportation, telecommunications, sanitation, health, food and public safety systems across local spaces. One important aspect of these plans, for instance, is to consider how inland floods or extreme droughts can affect the watersheds that supply drinking water to affected populations.

A key step to a portfolio approach to climate resiliency is to view it as a multi-actor effort. This means bringing together not only public officials in the planning effort. Local government decision-makers have to work together with infrastructure managers, planners, citizen-groups, and members of knowledge communities. A multi-actor effort is a must to develop a shared understanding of specific climate change vulnerabilities and the climate science needs of every locality. In sum, local governments, knowledge communities, the public, and the private sector need to work together to learn about local climate risks, brainstorm locally-based strategies, and prioritise locally oriented implementation. To facilitate cross-sector, multiple-actor processes, deliberative democracy exercises offer a tremendous opportunity.

Deliberations harvest heterogeneous insights by opening up non-confrontational dialogues and conversations among affected people of varying experiences and expertise. Deliberations magnify public engagement since these activities allow laymen and experts alike to actively participate in matters of public concern in a platform that promotes
mutual respect. Deliberations further the understanding of issues by creating cohorts of citizens who are knowledgeable about how they could face their common future together.

Deliberations offer the opportunity for the public to go over, consider, and prioritise solutions that they themselves can work on and contribute towards. Deliberations facilitate greater buy-in of plans since it's the public themselves that have crafted these plans. Deliberations, in the end, increase the efficiency of implementation. For deliberations to be effective, nevertheless, reflective mechanisms have to be built into the process. This kind of reflexivity allows pathways of action to be oriented, or re-oriented, along with real-time dynamics in their local settings and beyond.

In the age of climate consequences, the people of Southeast Asia -- deemed to be among the most vulnerable -- need to be transformed into deliberative locals. That way, they can chart their own future and navigate what ought to be their climate-resilient futures.

With frequent, stronger, and weirder weather events fast becoming the norm affecting many in the region, the resiliency of Southeast Asian peoples will ultimately rest upon their capacity to strengthen their communal bonds. Inclusive local governments that democratise efforts for greater resiliency are required to steer towards this change.