

Population, Development, and the Environment

Helen James
Editor

Population, Development, and the Environment

Challenges to Achieving the Sustainable
Development Goals in the Asia Pacific

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PREFACE

This book *Population, Development and the Environment: Challenges to Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the Asia Pacific* had its origins in a joint conference between the Australian National University (ANU) and the University of Yangon, 2–3 February 2017. It was held in the Arts Assembly Hall at the University of Yangon and represents a significant collaborative research engagement between the authors of all the chapters in the book. Many of the authors are researchers from the University of Yangon who participated in the research training program funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra, Australia, 2014–2016, for academics from the University of Yangon to assist in enhancing their research outputs. They came to the ANU in four cohorts, 56 researchers, to study an intensive program of Social and Demographic Research Methods training which they then applied to significant socio-economic development issues in transitional Myanmar.

Other authors came from around the world—from Japan, New Zealand, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, The Netherlands, and, of course, Australia—to join with University of Yangon researchers in presenting firstly the conference, then producing the book. A notable characteristic of this endeavor has been the goodwill and collegiality which has underpinned this venture.

Based on empirical research across various countries in the Asia Pacific, the book highlights the interlinkages between disasters, the sustainable development goals (SDGs), poverty alleviation, and climate change impacts, in both urban and rural contexts. Most of all, it brings to the fore the enduring commonalities in human societies in seeking to overcome

environmental and resource challenges impinging on human well-being. From floods, landslides, and earthquakes to poverty alleviation, migration, mining, water, food security, and agricultural dilemmas in coping with salinity as a result of rising sea levels, the quality of life on earth, as Professor Maung Maung Aye has so clearly articulated, is very much conditioned by how we interact with, preserve, and respect the environment for the future.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to all the authors, who gave their time to making this project a reality, and to the sponsors, the Crawford Fund, the Australian National University, and the University of Yangon. Many of the international speakers whose chapters are included here funded their participation themselves as funds were tight; to them I owe a debt of gratitude for their generosity in being prepared to invest their time and resources in this collaborative endeavor.

Canberra, ACT, Australia
16 April 2018

Helen James

PROLOGUE I

Opening Address Delivered by Dr. Nay Win Oo, Deputy Director General of the Department of Higher Education at the International Conference on *Regional Perspectives on Population, Development and the Environment*, Arts Hall, University of Yangon, 2 February 2017

H.E. Dr. Myo Myint, Chairman of the National Education Policy Commission

Mr. Nicholas Cumpston, Minister Counselor and Economic Development Advisor at the Australian Embassy

Professor Helen James, Lead Project Coordinator, Social and Demographic Research Methods, Government partnerships for Development, Australian National University

Keynote Speaker, Professor Maung Maung Aye, Vice-President of Environmental and Economic Research Institute

Keynote Speaker, Professor Robert Cribb, Professor of Asian History and Politics, College of Asia and Pacific, Australian National University

Rectors, Pro-Rectors, Professors

Distinguished Guests

Esteemed participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

and all those who are present at this occasion, I would like to wish you a very Good Morning.

It is a pleasure for me to deliver the opening remarks at this International Conference on *Regional Perspectives on Population, Development and the Environment* organized by the Australian National University, The

Crawford Fund for a Food Secure World, the University of Yangon and all the personnel concerned.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This conference has been held for the faculty of the University of Yangon who studied social and demographic research methods at the Australian National University at Canberra, Australia. They did research in different research areas in Myanmar and are going to present their research results.

I have great expectations that this conference will lead us to a systematic implementation of social and demographic research projects in the fields of social sciences and humanities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure that this conference will not only help us polish our mastery of social and demographic research methods but also, most importantly, contribute to developing specific original and feasible research ideas and projects that we will pursue in our professional future as well as in planning for social, economic, educational, healthcare and environmental development for our country.

I would like to extend a hearty welcome to those attending this conference as it coincides with the strenuous efforts being made by Myanmar to raise the standard of education to international level.

I am certain that this conference will make significant contributions to our efforts to make the education sector more responsive to the needs of our citizens, further strengthen the education sector and help raise the standard of higher education.

I would also like to request Myanmar faculty members to participate actively in the conference to make effective use of what they have learnt and to share the knowledge gained from this conference with colleagues.

Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to conclude my opening remarks by expressing my sincere thanks to H.E. Dr. Myo Myint, Mr. Nicholas Cumpston, Professor Helen James, ANU personnel, and all the international as well as local speakers for the special efforts that they have made to present at this conference, without which this event will not be a success, and to all the attendees for sharing their specialist knowledge and extensive experience.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Keynote speakers who will be leading this conference. I am confident that we will be able to learn a great deal from the discussions, enhance our capacity as well as promote the standard of our Higher Education institutions.

Thank you.

PROLOGUE 2

Mr. Nicholas Cumpston
Counselor and Economic Development Advisor,
Australian Embassy, Yangon

Yangon University

2 February 2017

Your Excellencies,

Professor Dr. Myo Myint, Director General Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Myanmar

Professor Dr. Nay Win Oo, Deputy Director General and Joint Secretary National Education Policy Commission

Professor Dr. Maung Maung Aye, President Geographical Association of Myanmar

International and Domestic Speakers, Colleagues and Guests.

It is a great pleasure to speak today on behalf of the Australian Embassy Yangon and the Australian Government at this conference. This is a very heavy schedule where people seem to cover a range of important topics. Thinking about all the different issues and parts of what is going to be discussed in the next two days reminds me very much that these are the same issues that come up over and over again in the work that the Australian Embassy is involved with throughout the country to support

the people of Myanmar. More broadly, the issues relate closely to those that we often hear the State Counselor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, speak to the international community and her colleagues within the government about: what are the challenges facing Myanmar at the moment? Those challenges are substantial. I don't need to tell people here about the history that has led to this point in terms of, for instance, the areas of water dam projects for hydropower that has often been extremely controversial, often been unpopular with local communities, but at the same time the demand for electricity in Myanmar is doubling every six years. Only 30% of the population has access to the national electricity grids and other forms of electricity generation such as coal. It is also controversial. They are no easy answers to these questions. And part of the value of conferences like this is to learn from experiences of others, and we can see this from within these countries that have faced many of the same challenges, made choices regarding possible solutions. Choices often come with benefits, but we are speaking as representatives of the Australian government and we can't make these choices for the government and the people of Myanmar. However, we can help share experiences and help in the collection of information so that informed choices can be made. But ultimately they are the choices that the people and government in Myanmar make for themselves. What we can do through events such as this is to help make those choices better informed, to learn from both mistakes but also successes that hopefully can be shared. The challenges go well beyond the water sectors as well. We are all just coming here today to see the challenges of Yangon, a rapidly expanding city very much at the heart of growing the economy of the nation. This economic growth is put in peril potentially, if solutions are not found to transport infrastructure, and in helping to manage the challenges of urban migration. There has been an increasing urban population. What happens to the rural areas where people come from? There are villages where there are almost no men as a result of outward migration to other countries overseas, or cities, leaving behind families and farms. What happens to those communities? These are not easy questions for which to find answers.

Challenges and opportunities are presented by Myanmar's unique mining resources. Again the areas where the mining projects exist in the country have been controversial, to say the very least. Those resources are also potentially great opportunities which may transform the lives of millions of people. So again communities need help and hopefully this is a useful

way for us to help. This is the question that Myanmar needs to consider for itself.

I also had the privilege of attending an event last week on the government nutrition initiative, very ambitious, a new initiative to reduce the level of childhood stunting across Myanmar which remains high, around 30% of all children. But the question here is increasing agricultural productivity, different processes for the use of land, and who owns the land. To achieve this inspiring vision, we need to know more. The State Counselor said: “We need the data; we cannot take action without accurate data.” Sitting in the comfort of Yangon, these questions can sometimes seem far away. We go through the next few days thinking about how these lessons are learned, how the successes and failures of others can provide information for the future, can provide the information that helps realize this vision of a peaceful, prosperous, stable and democratic Myanmar which I think we all share. Thank you.

CONTENTS

1	Introduction: The Dynamics of Sustainability and Environmental Governance in the Asia Pacific	1
	Helen James	
2	The Nexus Between Population, Development and the Environment: Critical to Determining Quality of Life on Earth	11
	Maung Maung Aye	
3	Nature Conservation and Its Bedfellows: The Politics of Preserving Nature	21
	Robert Cribb	
4	Food, Agriculture and Small Farmers in Asia	35
	Lindsay Falvey	
5	Trade-Offs Between Hydropower Development and Food Security in River Management	53
	Jamie Pittock	

- 6 Impacts of Flood and Riverbank Erosion on Human Livelihoods: A Case Study of Some Riverside Villages in the Lower Ayeyarwady** 69
Khin Mar Wai and Wint Wint Htun
- 7 Social Capital, Adaptation and Resilience: Case Studies of Rural Communities in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Myanmar** 87
Julian Prior, Thaw Ni Ni Zaw, Jemal Yousuf Hassen, and Estella Toperesi
- 8 Rural-Urban Interaction in Rural Development of Peri-Urban Areas in Yangon Region, Myanmar: A Case Study of Hlegu Township** 113
Nilar Aung and Tin Tin Mar
- 9 Changing Livelihood Options as Adaptation: A Comparative Analysis of Three Flood Control Schemes in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta** 137
Thong Tran and Helen James
- 10 Environmental and Social Impacts of Mining in the Mogok Area, Pyin Oo Lwin District, Mandalay Region, Myanmar** 155
Ohn Thwin, Wint Wint Htun, and Khin Mar Wai
- 11 Negotiating Livelihoods Access to Coastal Resources: Environmental Citizenship by NGOs in Indonesia** 171
Henri Sitorus
- 12 Landslide Hazard in Chin State: A Case Study in Hakka and Its Environs** 195
Kyaw Htun, Cho Thae Oo, Tun Naing Zaw, and Day Wa Aung

- 13 Women, Water and ‘Wicked Problems’: Community Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Change in Northern Pakkoku, Myanmar** 215
Helen James
- 14 Socio-Political Transformation After the 2011 Floods in Thailand** 227
Ladawan Khaikham and Helen James
- 15 The Impact of Floods on the Socio-Economic Activities of Yangon** 255
Nwe Nwe Aung, San San Htwe, Kyi Kyi Sein, and Lei Lei Aung
- 16 State of Forest Governance in Vietnam: Where Are the Local Communities?** 273
Mucahid Mustafa Bayrak
- 17 Laws Relating to Environmental Conservation in Myanmar** 297
Myint Thu Myaing
- 18 Effects of Rural-Urban Migration on Agricultural Production in Taungdwingyi Township, Magway Region, Myanmar** 317
Khine Myint Cho, Kyaw Kyaw, and Phyu Phyu Khaing
- 19 Effects of Migration on Two Small Villages Between *Pyalin* and *Gonmin Chaungs*, Pantanaw Township, Ayeyarwady Region** 331
Kyaw Kyaw
- 20 An Overview of Post-disaster Regional Administrative Management in Japan: Actors and Responsibilities** 349
Adam Jon Lebowitz

21	Family Recombination in Post-disaster Reconstruction: A Case Study of the Earthquake-Stricken Area in Wenchuan, SW China	363
	Yang Chenggang	
22	Ahi Kā Roa, Ahi Kā Ora Ōtautahi: Māori, Recovery Trajectories and Resilience in Canterbury, New Zealand	375
	Christine Kenney	
23	Poverty Alleviation and Community Empowerment in the Bagan-Nyaung-U Area of Central Myanmar	395
	Nilar Aung	
24	Rural Economy and Poverty in the Myanmar Delta: A Case Study of Ahmar Sub-township, Ayeyarwady Region	411
	Myint Thida, Nwe Yin Min, Khin Myat Myat Mon, and Nyi Nyi Aung	
25	Conclusion and Policy Implications	427
	Helen James	
	Index	433

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LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 4.1	Cereal price spikes and riots 2007–2008. (Source: von Braun 2009)	39
Fig. 4.2	Major agricultural production values and production, 2015. (Source: Smith 2017)	48
Fig. 5.1	The lower Mekong River basin showing existing and planned hydropower dams. (Source © Clive Hilliker ANU with data on dam sites from CPWF 2013)	55
Fig. 5.2	Myanmar showing existing and planned hydropower dams above 10 MW capacity, as well as the floodplains and deltas where rice production is concentrated. (Source © Clive Hilliker ANU with data on dam projects from IFC and ICEM (2017) and lowland rice production areas from Raitzer et al. (2015))	56
Fig. 6.1	Bank erosion in some parts of Nyaungdon Township. (Source: Photo by Wint Wint Htun 2016)	70
Fig. 6.2	Location map of the study area. (Source: Agriculture Atlas, 2002)	71
Fig. 6.3	The view of the students' school transportation means. (Source: Photo by Wint Wint Htun 2016)	72
Fig. 6.4	Flooded betel trees in Parlei village. (Source: Photo by Wint Wint Htun 2016)	77
Fig. 6.5	Flooded areas in some parts of Nyaungdon Township. (Source: Photo Wint Wint Htun 2016)	83
Fig. 6.6	The research team in front of the Dhama Wi HarYaMonestry. (Source: Photo Wint Wint Htun 2016)	83
Fig. 8.1	Conceptual framework	116

Fig. 8.2	Location of Yangon Region in Myanmar. (Source: Survey Department, Yangon, 2016)	118
Fig. 8.3	Location of Hlegu Township, in Yangon Region. (Source: Survey Department, Yangon, 2016)	119
Fig. 8.4	Locations of three sample village tracts in Hlegu Township. (Source: Survey Department, Yangon, 2016)	120
Fig. 8.5	Location of Sinphone Village Tract. (Source: Survey Department of Yangon, 2016)	121
Fig. 8.6	Location of Barlar Village Tract. (Source: Survey Department of Yangon, 2016)	122
Fig. 8.7	Location of Kyunkalay Village Tract. (Source: Survey Department of Yangon, 2016)	123
Fig. 8.8	The changes on percentage of worker, student and dependent in Sinphone Village Tract. (Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2015)	125
Fig. 8.9	Changes on percentage of worker, students and dependent in Balar Village Tract (2011–2015). (Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2015)	126
Fig. 8.10	Changes on percentage of worker, students and dependent in Kyunkalay Village Tract (2011–2015). (Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2015)	126
Fig. 8.11	Types of worker in Sinphone village (2015). (Source: Questionnaire Survey in 2015)	129
Fig. 8.12	Types of worker in Barlar village (2015). (Source: Questionnaire Survey in 2015)	129
Fig. 8.13	Types of worker in Kyunkalay village (2015). (Source: Questionnaire Survey in 2015)	130
Fig. 8.14	SWOT analysis for the rural-urban interactions in rural development. (Source: Based on the results of both questionnaires and field observations in 2015)	132
Fig. 9.1	Flood control schemes and study areas in the VMD. (Source: Adapted from the base map of Nguyen Van Sanh et al. 1998)	139
Fig. 9.2	Governance frameworks for flood management in the VMD. (Source: Modified from Hansen and Do Hong Phan (2005))	142
Fig. 9.3	Households' change in livelihood patterns in Phu Thanh B. (Source: Thong Tran 2017)	147
Fig. 9.4	Households' transformation of livelihood patterns in Phu Xuan. (Source: Thong Tran 2017)	147
Fig. 9.5	Households' transformation of livelihood patterns in Thoi Hung. (Source: Thong Tran 2017)	148
Fig. 10.1	Location map of the study sites	157
Fig. 10.2	Geomorphological changes in the Mogok gem area	159
Fig. 10.3	Flooding of Mogok during the rainy season in 2009	160

Fig. 10.4	Landslides in Mogok	161
Fig. 10.5	Final stage, acquired Landsat-8ETM imagery (2015-04-05)	162
Fig. 10.6	Population of the Mogok area. (Source: Myanmar Census of Population and Housing 2014)	164
Fig. 10.7	Survival of the ethnic minority miners	165
Fig. 11.1	Map of palm oil plantations in Indonesia	175
Fig. 11.2	Palm oil land by owners in Indonesia in 2016 (in ha)	176
Fig. 12.1	Location of the study areas	196
Fig. 12.2	Geological formation of Hakka-Falam Area (United Nations Team 1979)	199
Fig. 12.3	Aerial photographic interpretation of the study areas	201
Fig. 12.4	Photographs showing folds (a), steep slopes (b and c), and daylight features (d)	202
Fig. 12.5	Residual soil occurring along the slope of road section	203
Fig. 12.6	Photographs showing the old landslide debris and colluvial deposit under Hakka-Myohaung Ward	203
Fig. 12.7	Photographs of slope failure due to steep slopes	204
Fig. 12.8	Photograph showing slope failure due to erosion processes at Falam in Rung Mountain (a) and in the Falam-Laizo Landslide (b)	205
Fig. 12.9	Photograph showing slope failure along the Bedding Plane	206
Fig. 12.10	Multi-landslide events on troublesome materials in Myohaung Ward	206
Fig. 12.11	Monthly rainfall from 1989 to 2015 (<i>left</i>) and July daily rainfall in 2015 (<i>right</i>)	207
Fig. 12.12	Types of landslide: (a) Rock Falls, (b) Debris Flow	208
Fig. 12.13	Types of landslide: (c) Translational Slide, (d) Rotational Slide	208
Fig. 12.14	Landslide zonation map of Hakka area	210
Fig. 13.1	Map of Myanmar showing Pakkoku and the Central Dry Zone	218
Fig. 13.2	Dry Zone landscape Bagan 1997	219
Fig. 13.3	'Greening' the Central Dry Zone 2002	220
Fig. 13.4	Community resilience as a set of networked adaptive capacities. (Source: Norris et al. 2008)	222
Fig. 14.1	Muang Ake Rescue Centre. (Source: Ladawan Khaikham, 25 October 2017)	238
Fig. 14.2	'Roo Su Flood Ep1: Know more about Flood' Short Video Clip. (Source: RooSuFlood 2011)	241
Fig. 14.3	The features of JS100 mobile application (Source: GlobeTech 2017)	242
Fig. 15.1	Data for four main reservoirs	259
Fig. 15.2	Types of water supply	260
Fig. 15.3	Sewage system downtown Yangon	260

Fig. 15.4	Creeks in Yangon city	261
Fig. 15.5	Experiences of flood	264
Fig. 15.6	Frequency of experiences of flood	264
Fig. 15.7	Effect of flood on daily activities	264
Fig. 15.8	Flooding in Yangon city (2015)	267
Fig. 15.9	Flooding in Yangon city (2016)	267
Fig. 15.10	Illegal disposal of refuse	268
Fig. 15.11	The performance of YCDC to clean the city	269
Fig. 15.12	Water distribution system and sewage system in Latha Township	269
Fig. 18.1	Location of study area in Taungdwingyi Township. (Source: General Administrative Office, Taungdwingyi Township)	320
Fig. 18.2	Distribution of migration from abroad to Myanmar. (Source: Population Census of Myanmar, 2014)	324
Fig. 18.3	International migration of Myanmar and Magway Region. (Source: Census of Myanmar 2014)	327
Fig. 18.4	Internal and international migration in the study areas. (Source: Field observation and interview in 2015)	327
Fig. 19.1	Location of study area. (Source: based on Myanmar Survey Department, Yangon)	333
Fig. 19.2	Study area along <i>Pyalin Chaung</i> . (Source: Based on Google Earth, 2016)	336
Plate 19.1	Betel-leaf Cultivation. (Note: High ground betel-leaf farm near house at background image)	343
Plate 19.2	Boquake Bean Cultivation. (Note: <i>Boquake</i> bean plants)	343
Plate 19.3	Collection and storing of <i>Thin</i> fabric bundle. (Note: Preparation to dry and storing for <i>Thin</i> mat-making)	344
Plate 19.4	Collection and storing of <i>Thin</i> fabric bundle. (Note: Preparation to dry and storing for <i>Thin</i> mat-making)	345
Plate 19.5	Two-storey wood building. (Note: Building construction based on a concrete pole)	345
Plate 19.6	Bamboo huts. (Note: Houses on stilt and flat plain)	346
Fig. 20.1	Administrative conceptual plan from WP 2014. (Source: Government of Japan Cabinet Office)	351
Fig. 20.2	Jôsô city political map showing Kinugawa River in the middle and Kokaigawa River on the right border. (Source: Google Maps)	352
Fig. 20.3	Time-scale graph of flood warning announcements and responses. Dashed line is water level. Diamonds represent evacuation orders. Time 1: Gate breached, prefecture flood warning. Time 2: Gate breach announcement. Time 3: SDF dispatched. Time 4: Riverbank breached. (Source: Komazawa University, Dept. of Meteorology)	354

Fig. 20.4	Satellite photo of the flooded city with riverbank breach circled at left, and the City Hall location circled near center. (Source: Photo Ministry of Science and Education)	354
Fig. 20.5	City Hall flooded. (Source: Photo Ministry of Science and Education)	355
Fig. 21.1	A recombined family after the Wenchuan earthquake	364
Fig. 21.2	Including elderly relatives in a recombined family	367
Fig. 21.3	A mass wedding for recombined families after the Wenchuan earthquake	373
Fig. 23.1	Location of Bagan-Nyaung-U area, Mandalay Region	399
Fig. 23.2	Conceptual frameworks on causes of poverty in the study areas	400
Fig. 23.3	Rainfall, raining days, temperature of Nyaung-U Township. (Source: Meteorological Department, Yangon)	400
Fig. 23.4	Changes in types of livelihoods. (Source: Based on semi-structured interview results)	401
Fig. 23.5	Aging people, water supply, and women laborers in the study village	404
Fig. 23.6	House situations in urban areas and Zaytawun monastic education	407
Fig. 24.1	Wards and Village Tracts in Ahmar Sub-township. (Source: General Administrative Department [Ahmar Sub-township])	413
Fig. 24.2	Ploughing the land by using drought animals. (Source: Myint Thida (17.6.16))	415
Fig. 24.3	Traditional broadcasting paddy cultivation in an unsystematic paddy field. (Source: Myint Thida (11.6.16))	416
Fig. 24.4	Selection of fish on the boat. (Source: Myint Thida (20.6.15))	418
Fig. 24.5	Fish depot. (Source: Myint Thida (20.6.15))	418
Fig. 24.6	Nippa leaves shop (Tebinseik Village). (Source: Myint Thida (24.4.15))	419
Fig. 24.7	Making thatch by family members. (Source: Myint Thida (24.4.15))	420
Fig. 24.8	Working plans of females in rural economic activities. (Source: Interviews by Participatory Rural Appraisal (24.4.15))	421
Fig. 24.9	Rainwater collection in large pots for drinking water. (Source: Myint Thida (24.4.15))	423
Fig. 24.10	Unsystematic toilet. (Source: Myint Thida (24.4.15))	424

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Average indicators of quality of life for the ten richest and poorest countries (averaged as a group)	14
Table 2.2	The US, with 4.5% of the world's population	15
Table 6.1	Education of the residents	72
Table 6.2	Occupations of the residents	73
Table 6.3	Possessions of the residents	73
Table 6.4	Average income per family	74
Table 6.5	Types of household	74
Table 6.6	Ownership of land	75
Table 6.7	Family patterns	75
Table 6.8	Ethnic composition	75
Table 6.9	Marital status	76
Table 7.1	Case study groups, collaborating NGOs and research methods	92
Table 7.2	Social capital attributes exhibited by case study communities, their implications for improved household livelihoods and attribute indicators	94
Table 9.1	Summary of research methods	140
Table 11.1	Year by year growth in the last 10 years	175
Table 11.2	Comparison of livelihoods assets in research sites	178
Table 11.3	Characteristics of NGOs' activities in Indonesia	181
Table 11.4	Range of advocacy strategies by NGOs	185
Table 11.5	Membership NGOs and environmental citizenship	186
Table 11.6	Membership NGOs' advocacy strategy	187
Table 12.1	Characteristics of landslide zones	209
Table 15.1	Extension of city's area	257
Table 15.2	Thirty-three townships of Yangon city	258

Table 15.3	Increased population	258
Table 15.4	Demographic and economic characteristics	263
Table 15.5	Experiences of flood	263
Table 15.6	Frequency of flood experiences	263
Table 15.7	Effect of floods on daily activities	263
Table 15.8	Rainfall in 2015	265
Table 15.9	Rainfall in 2016	266
Table 15.10	Causes of floods in Yangon	267
Table 16.1	Forest classifications in Vietnam in 2012	278
Table 16.2	Forest management per user group in Vietnam in 2012	280
Table 16.3	Formal forest governance system of Vietnam	281
Table 16.4	Differences between PES and REDD+	289
Table 18.1	Internal and international migration	325
Table 18.2	Gender of migrants in Myanmar	326
Table 19.1	Climatic data of Maubin Township, 2015	335
Table 19.2	Working calendar of crop cultivation in the study area	337
Table 19.3	Field survey analysis on migrants	338
Table 19.4	Number of respondents in study area	338
Table 19.5	Types of occupation in migrated areas	339
Table 19.6	Working hours per day at the migrated areas	340
Table 19.7	Reasons to return to the native village	340
Table 19.8	Occupational conditions of respondents in the two villages	341