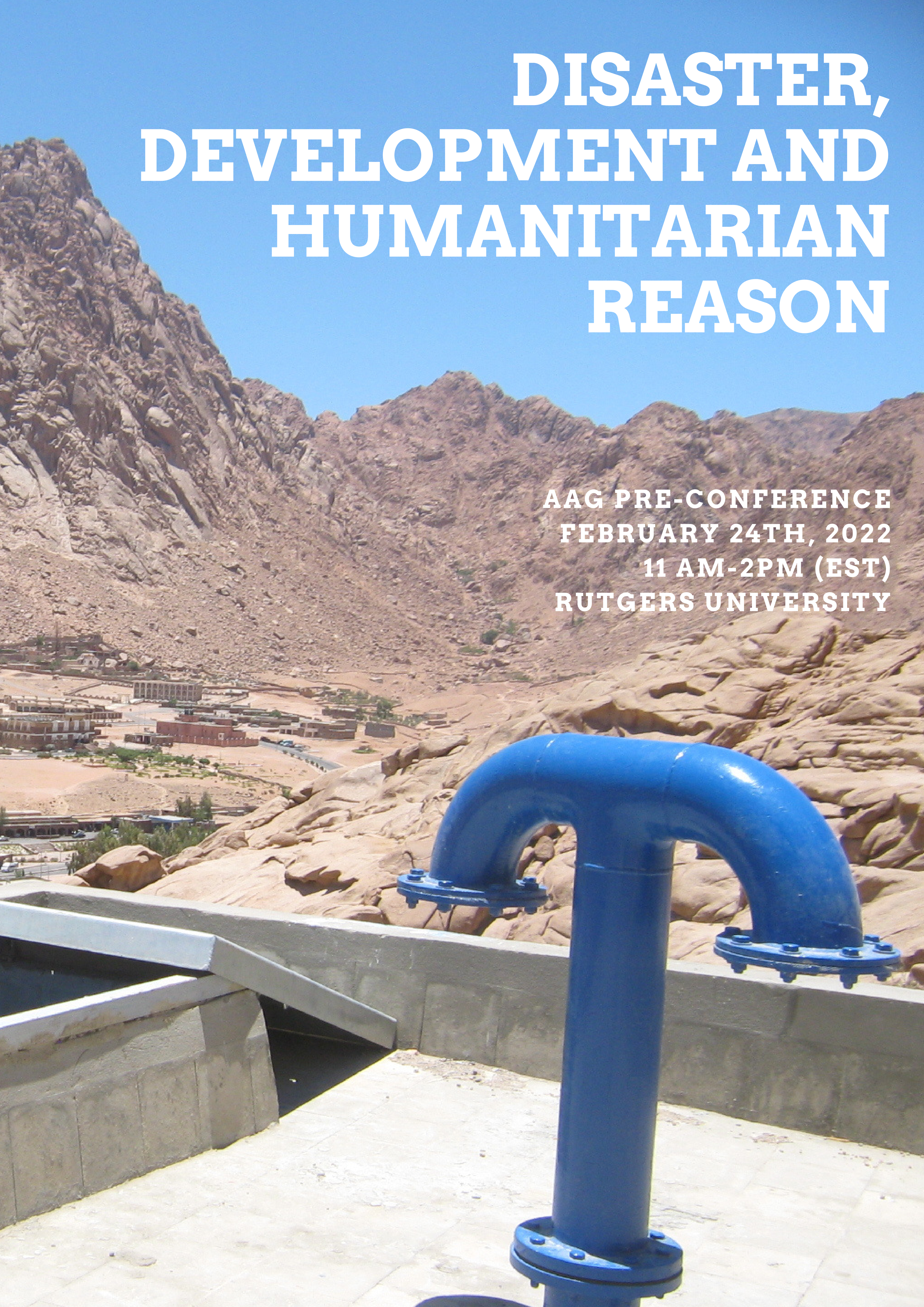# DISASTER, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN REASON

**AAG PRE-CONFERENCE
FEBRUARY 24TH, 2022
11 AM-2PM (EST)
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY**

"As development expenditure gives way to humanitarian assistance, we are watching the unedifying spectacle of the rich world, patching up the worst of the casualties its policies have created while pretending to be a magnanimity"

MIDDLETON AND O'KEEFE. DISASTER AND DEVELOPMENT: THE POLITICS OF HUMANITARIAN AID

# DISASTER, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN REASON
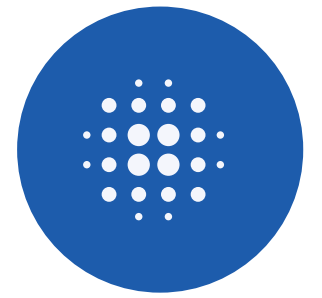
## CONFERENCE PROGRAM
## 24 FEBRUARY 2022, 11 AM – 2 PM (EST)

11:00 – **Welcome and Introductory Remarks**
Dr. Paul O'Keefe (paul.okeefe@rutgers.edu)
*Rutgers University, USA*


11:20 – **Intersectional Climate Justice: Case of Idu Mishmis in Arunachal Pradesh**
Dr. Sneha Krishnan (skrishnan@jgu.edu.in)
*Jindal School of Environment and Sustainability, OP Jindal University, India*


11:40 – **The Ruins of Recovery: 30 years of "temporary" shelter in post-quake Armenia**
Evangeline McGlynn (emcglynn@berkeley.edu)
*University of California Berkeley, USA*


12:00 – **The Politics of Sustainable Displacement in the Rohingya Refugee Camps**
Samira Siddique (samirasiddique@berkeley.edu)
*University of California Berkeley, USA*


12:20 – **Break**


12:30 – **Maintaining land and life in Vanuatu: Indigenous alter-natives of recovery following the Manaro eruption on Ambae, Vanuatu.**
Foley Pfalzgraf (foleycp@hawaii.edu)
*University of Hawaiʻi–Mānoa, USA*


12:50 – **Humanitarian Accountability, Cash Transfers and Technology**
Dr. Hanna Ruszczyk (h.a.ruszczyk@durham.ac.uk) & Dr. Lauren Martin (lauren.martin@durhan.ac.uk)
*Durham University, UK*


13:10 – **Food Regimes, Crisis and Humanitarian Food Networks**
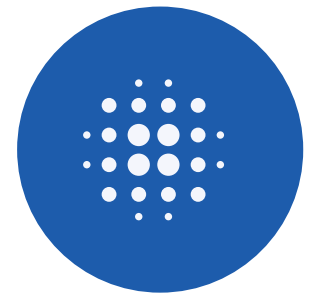Dr. Joshua Lohnes (jlohnes@mail.wvu.edu)
*West Virginia University, USA*


13:30 – **Break**


13:40 – **Facilitated Discussion**
Dr. Solomon Maingi (maingi.solomon@unh.edu)
*University of New Hampshire, UK*

# DISASTER, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN REASON

## ABSTRACTS

### Intersectional Climate Justice: Case of Idu Mishmis in Arunachal Pradesh

Dr. Sneha Krishnan (skrishnan@jgu.edu.in)
Jindal School of Environment and Sustainability, OP Jindal University, India

Indigenous Peoples in developing countries are vulnerable to climate change and must cope with the impacts of climate change. Despite actively protesting development-induced impacts on their ecosystems for years, their voices are unheard and the needs of the most affected people in vulnerable hotspots remain unaddressed and unmet. This article asks, "What kinds of alliances do we need to forge to pursue intersectionality-informed climate justice for Indigenous peoples?" and describes the case of Idu Mishmis, an indigenous tribe in Arunachal Pradesh, India. Arunachal Pradesh is categorized as Zone 5 in Seismic Risk Mapping National Exercise. Two dams are proposed in this region: the Etalin Dam and Dibang Multipurpose Dam. They are part of a larger national project that proposes over 42 Dams projects for Arunachal Pradesh.

In May 2020, this project was cleared by the Government of India without any Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and has been receiving criticism from not only environmentalists and wildlife enthusiasts but geographers and disaster planners who argue this will add further vulnerability to the seismic risks posed in the region. A fragile and eco-sensitive region, Dibhang Valley is a global mega-biodiversity hotspot, and the home to the indigenous 'Idu Mishmi' community.

Building on theories of hydro-development and disaster, this paper focuses on concerns about the erasure of indigenous communities, their lived experiences, their relationship with the natural habitat and wildlife which informs their activism from a feminist perspective. The Idu Mishmi community has been protesting the massive dispossession the project will bring, facing violence from the government and a lack of solidarity from some conservation institutions. The Idu people fear that the dam will bring ecological degradation, threaten their culture, and dispossess them from their lands and livelihoods.

### The Ruins of Recovery: 30 years of "temporary" shelter in post-quake Armenia

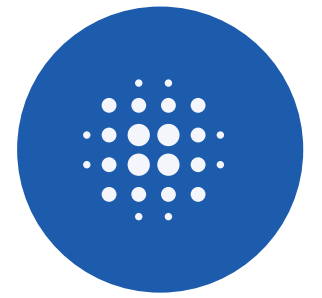Evangeline McGlynn (emcglynn@berkeley.edu)
University of California Berkeley, USA

After the devastating 1988 Spitak earthquake in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia, the USSR distributed tens of thousands of temporary shelters, domiks, to people displaced by the disaster. The fall of the Soviet Union before the completion of reconstruction led to a recovery so stalled it is still incomplete today. While domiks were originally designed to last a couple of years, a few thousand are still in active use in the disaster zone. Further, in spite of subsequent development projects requiring destruction of domiks as a prerequisite for housing aid, materials from the shelters themselves are visible throughout the disaster zone's largest city, Gyumri. In this paper, I focus on domiks and their place in the urban landscape in order to comment on recovery itself as its own moment of catastrophe.

Whereas most disasters exacerbate already existing socio-spatial disparities, the contradictions at play both in the unexpected vulnerability of newer buildings and politically divergent waves of post-disaster development projects led to more complicated dynamics around housing aid. Domiks occupy a similarly contradictory rhetorical space, because while their very presence is evidence of massive state failure before and after the quake, they also represent new realms of possibility in their material afterlives. In establishing the 33-year recovery process as its own slow disaster, I will end the paper with a provocation about ruin. What changes for us as scholars of disaster if we analyze aging emergency shelters in the same light as we do rubble?

# DISASTER, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN REASON

## ABSTRACTS

**The Politics of Sustainable Displacement in the Rohingya Refugee Camps**
Samira Siddique (samirasiddique@berkeley.edu)
University of California Berkeley, USA

Since the Rohingya refugee influx into Bangladesh in 2017, nearly one million Rohingya refugees have lived on 23 square kilometers of land in refugee camps in the coastal city of Cox's Bazar. This paper highlights the particular case of the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh as a broader critical analysis of the humanitarian and development regimes as they increasingly pivot toward issues of displacement and climate change. This research is based on three years of fieldwork, including interviews with UN officials and humanitarian and development workers in the Rohingya camps, Rohingya activists, and Bangladeshi policymakers and researchers, as well as document and discourse analysis and participant observation.

This paper argues that the international humanitarian response in the Rohingya refugee camps is increasingly defined by and through a "sustainable displacement" regime, a socially and historically specific configuration of power that governs the landscape of possible intervention in the face of climate change and protracted displacement. It includes institutions of development, research, media, and science, as well as various state actors both nationally and internationally. The sustainable displacement regime is built on a vision of development in which increased human mobility and sustainable technologies are both desirable and inevitable. For the displaced, this entails dispossession from land and power and increased precarity while living in an infinite space of liminality. As this shift contributes to the expansion of sustainable technologies, the threat of climate change in protracted displacement situations is reframed as an opportunity for market-based development and growth. By defining and articulating the processes that constitute this regime, this research acts as a critical intervention, noting that sustained displacement, even if "sustainable," is not a just outcome for refugees, migrants, and other displaced populations.

**Maintaining land and life in Vanuatu: Indigenous alter-natives of recovery following the Manaro eruption on Ambae, Vanuatu**
Foley Pfalzgraf (foleycp@hawaii.edu)
University of Hawai'i-Mānoa, USA

Between 2017 and 2019, the Manaro volcano on the island of Ambae in Vanuatu erupted consistently, leading to two compulsory evacuations of the island's communities. The eruption was only one of many ecological emergencies unfolding in Vanuatu as climate change continues to affect the islands. Amidst these overlapping crises, community leaders and the national government leveraged customary tenure practices to develop a system of customary reunion and secondary homes for evacuees. An analysis of 54 articles from the Vanuatu Daily Post's media coverage of the Manaro eruption and disaster recovery from 2017 to 2019 reveals the centrality of customary tenure. While political ecologists have illustrated how disaster recovery policies can become disastrous in and of themselves, this article elaborates upon alter-native disaster recovery practices in Vanuatu and affirms the centrality of land control to Indigenous and settler futures.

# DISASTER, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN REASON
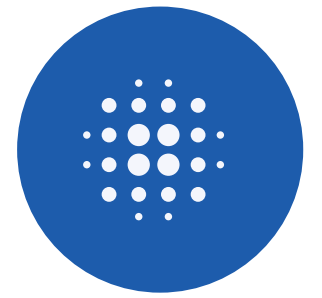
## ABSTRACTS

**Humanitarian Accountability, Cash Transfers and Technology**

Dr. Hanna Ruszczyk (h.a.ruszczyk@durham.ac.uk) & Dr. Lauren Martin (lauren.martin@durhan.ac.uk)
Durham University, UK

The Humanitarian Aid system is attempting to show political accountability to its donors through an emphasis on value for money. The perspectives and interests of humanitarian donors, UN agencies (especially WFP and UNHCR) drive experimentation in digitalizing cash transfers for refugees and asylum seekers with subsequent implications for policy and practice in a range of disaster and conflict contexts. This paper asks how the turn to Cash assistance by the humanitarian sector is constructed and implemented, how cash assistance intersect with technological innovation and accountability to whom and for what purpose. To achieve this, the paper explores a genealogy of how accountability, cash transfers, technology and innovation are linked discursively and materially. We analyze policy briefs and documentation from UN Agencies, donors and humanitarian research institutes, analyze virtual seminars, conferences and podcasts and lastly, conducted interviews with independent consultants, policy makers, UN officials, a digital technology provider and policy orientated researchers during 2021. We examine the role of accountability in the shift towards cash assistance and argue that asymmetrical in/visibilies reproduce, rather than address inequalities within the humanitarian aid sector. Ensuring the Aid system works best for refugees and other recipients of aid is not the overriding concern in the move towards accountability of the sector. Without changing the system to facilitate NGOs, state actors and residents' voices being heard regarding accountability, cash transfers and technology, inequalities related to governance and power will continue to be obscured by technological innovation and will be perpetuated within the humanitarian sector.
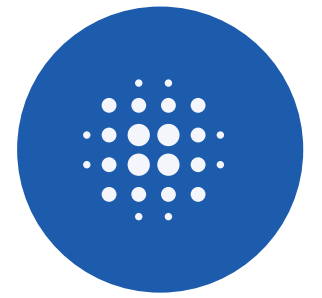
**Food Regimes, Crisis and Humanitarian Food Networks**

Dr. Joshua Lohnes (jlohnes@mail.wvu.edu)
West Virginia University, USA

The United Nations' World Food Program (WFP) received the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize, spotlighting the geo-strategic role that food aid plays in maintaining the contemporary political and moral order. Founded in the 1960s, the agency now works to deliver food assistance to victims of acute food insecurity and hunger in over 80 low-income or conflict-ridden countries. In wealthier nations of the global north, the concurrent institutionalization of food banking networks over the past 40 years demands a shared analysis of the roll-out of humanitarian food networks writ large. The discursive and material frameworks driving the expansion of food aid across the world are intimately tied to capitalist food systems crises, geopolitical interests of dominant nation states and the attendant power of their agro-food concerns. Drawing empirically on the growth of humanitarian food networks in central Appalachia, this paper untangles the set of paradoxical social relationships driving the growth of feeding lines in the United States and beyond. Multi-scalar managerial techniques developed by the corporate food regime to address contradictions between the co-production of food surplus and food scarcity come to govern precarious lives while reinforcing institutional distance between givers and receivers and misaligned motivations between organizations and the people working in them. As food aid organizations increasingly leverage hunger relief discourses to advance sustainable development goals related to nutrition, economic development, and peace it leads to critical questions over the role of household precarity in maintaining and advancing new forms of global food system governance.

# DISASTER, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN REASON

## CALL FOR PAPERS

**Disasters** are the moments in space and time when underlying relations that produce **endemic crises of capitalism are made visible**. The production and reproduction of **vulnerability** that ultimately causes these disasters to materialize has been studied for nearly fifty years (O'Keefe et. al, 1976). Since, vulnerability as a concept has evolved in many directions now emerging as a **dominant discourse** alongside the concept of **resilience to disaster**. This evolution is not exclusive to places tied to former (and ongoing) **colonial dynamics** of uneven development, but is now increasingly relevant in **rich but unequal countries** of the global north.

The **project of development** everywhere is in crisis, faced with the **ecological limits** of economic growth and the increasing number of disasters wrought by a century of ill-fated ideas of modernity and progress. Food, water and housing crises, mass migrations and vulnerability to armed conflict, natural hazards and environmental degradation are increasingly informing a **politics of disaster** relief that is **reshaping the development sector** and tying it ever more intimately with humanitarianism. The deployment of this humanitarian reason is paradoxical, for the politics of compassion is both a politics of **inequality** and a politics of **solidarity**, one that binds relations of dominance and assistance into a socially palatable framework of concern (Fassin, 2011). In the process of managing precarious lives, **humanitarian interventions restructure capital flows** and develop **governance** mechanisms that have come to occupy key positions in the contemporary moral order (Barnett, 2011).

Organized through a diverse **constellation of institutional actors**, responses to disaster and human suffering involve socio-political contests among supranational organizations, state governments, NGOs, foundations, individual donors, aid and relief workers. As such, **humanitarianism** has emerged as a growing field of inquiry for scholars studying the politics of **aid** and **emergency assistance** (Hyndman, 2000; Bornstein and Redfield, 2011; Kapoor, 2013, Reid-Henry, 2013, Richey and Chouliaraki, 2017, Pallister-Wilkins, 2018). Yet this literature has yet to be adequately linked to the rich body of scholarship on **political ecology** including disasters, vulnerability and risk (O'Keefe, 1976; Blaikie 1985; Watts and Bohle, 1993; Wisner et. al, 2003; Adger, 2006; Ribot, 2014)

This blurring of the lines between humanitarianism, disaster relief and development is especially concerning in light of the **intensifying effects of climate change**, the accelerating reorganization of the **geopolitical terrain** and its attendant **networks of power over international aid flows**. The restructuring of the international donor community is upending the traditional **moral basis** that has linked development to humanitarianism and its attendant neoliberal policies are being challenged by the rise of new state and non-state actors.

# DISASTER, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN REASON
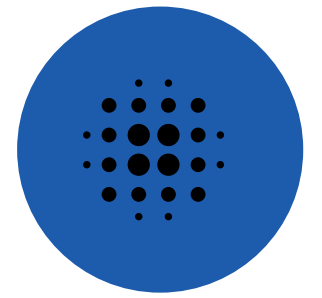
From a historical perspective, the intensification of humanitarian action across the world forces a consideration of the tight links between the **mobilization of compassion and the expansion of market and state power** (Reid-Henry, 2013). From a geographical perspective, the structural relationship between the **metropole and the periphery**, as a constitutive element of humanitarianism (Lester, 2002), forces a consideration of the way in which **systems of care** are organized across space and scale. This includes the governance mechanisms and territorial frameworks that come to shape the allocation of resources to governments and aid recipients.

In this pre-conference we aim to revisit the rich literature on the intersection between **disaster and development**, while advancing these debates in light of the rapid reorganization of international networks of aid and development through humanitarian logics. We seek contributions relating to the following lines of inquiry:

- Long-historical view of disaster and development
- Moral framings of development and disaster
- Infrastructure development and disaster preparedness
- Humanitarian Governance
- HumDev Nexus
- Bottom up/informal responses to disaster and development
- Mutual Aid, community driven development and disaster
- Green capitalism and humanitarianism
- Ethical branding and development
- Environmental risk assessments
- Racial and gendered politics of humanitarian assistance
- Human rights and disaster
- Food aid and emergency food assistance
- Hydro development and disaster
- Emergency shelter and disaster
- Decolonizing aid and development
- South – South disaster response
- Diaspora and disaster
- Data, development and disaster

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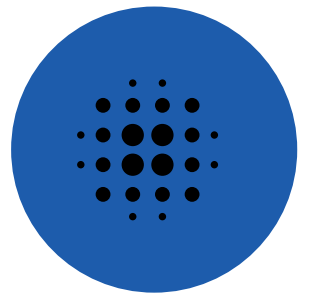
## SUBMISSIONS

We welcome submissions for virtual and in-person presentations. Please send title and brief abstract (250 words) **to jlohnes@mail.wvu.edu** and **paul.okeefe@rutgers.edu** by **December 15th** and indicate your preference for presenting virtually and/or in-person. Presenters will be notified by December 1st.

## ORGANIZING COMMITTEE
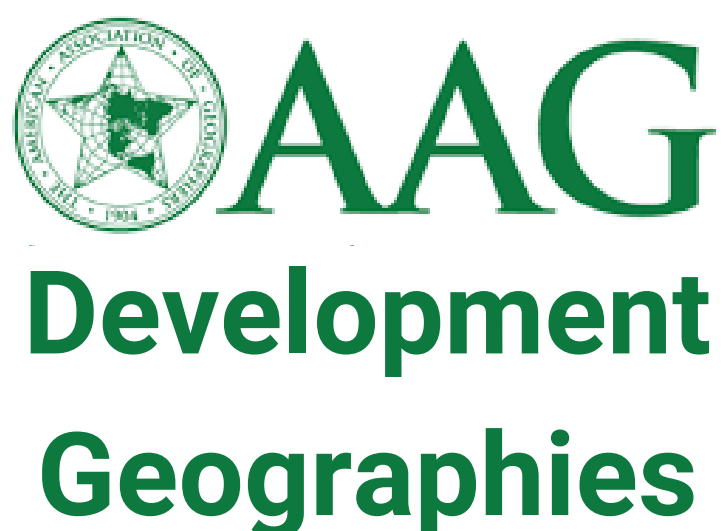
**PAUL O'KEEFE**
*Rutgers University*
*paul.okeefe@rutgers.edu*

**JOSHUA LOHNES**
*West Virginia University*
*jlohnes@mail.wvu.edu*

**ALVIN MAINGI SOLOMON**
*University of New Hampshire*
*maingi.solomon@unh.edu*

## PARTNERS

West Virginia University
CENTER FOR RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

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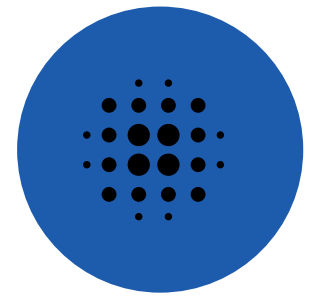
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