



**DISASTERS
ARE NOT
NATURAL**

The
#NoNaturalDisasters
Conference

22 September 2022
London

www.nonaturaldisasters.com

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

CONFERENCE VENUE

CONWAY HALL
LONDON
WC1R 4RL

Sponsors



The UCL Warning Research Centre (WRC) is a joint venture between the Department of Science and Technology Studies and the Institute of Risk and Disaster Reduction focusing on all aspects in relation to warnings for all forms of risks and disasters. Founded in 2020, the WRC is an interdepartmental centre bringing together expertise already established at UCL with warning expertise at universities globally to work with businesses, government, non-governmental, and intergovernmental organisations to address the growing need for effective warning and alert systems via cutting-edge research, policy guidance, applications, and collaborative expertise. WRC is transforming research into warnings and alert solutions by being strongly interdisciplinary and innovative.

More information can be found here -
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/warning-research-centre>

Sponsors



DRR Dynamics is a research and advocacy organisation formed in June 2014. Its primary goal is ensuring marginalised groups are better included in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster risk management (DRM) policy and practice.

Our organisation works towards and advocates for a process that views marginalised groups as agents of change who are not only able to contribute to DRR policy and practice but in turn, make it more inclusive, responsive and fair.

More information can be found here -
<https://www.drrdynamics.com>

Agenda

09:30 – 10:00 **Arrival & coffee**

10:00 – 10:15 **Introduction**

A high level introduction to the conference, its aims and objectives.

10:15 – 11:30 **Opening session**

The ‘who, what and why’ of the #NoNaturalDisasters argument.

11:30 – 13:00 **The implications of the status quo**

Examining the current context of the campaign.

13:00 – 14:00

Lunch

14:00 – 15:30 **#NoNaturalDisasters within broader societal systems**

The role of our societal systems on our campaign and how best to work within these systems.

15:30 – 17:00 **Researching the unnaturalness of disasters**

Examining the existing, upcoming and needed research to help continue to move theory into practice.

17:00 – 17:50 **Micro-presentations on upcoming research**

A series of micro-presentations looking at research currently being done

17:50 – 18:00 **Closing**

Closing remarks provided by Ilan Kelman

18:30 - **Post-conference social event**

Introduction

Hello and Welcome to the first ever #NoNaturalDisasters conference!

I'm so excited to see so many people interested in this topic.

Whether this is your first step into the world of #NoNaturalDisasters, or whether you're a seasoned advocate, I'm certain there will be something here for you over the course of these 8 hours.

Whilst a dedicated conference on the topic is new, the discussion around the unnaturalness of disasters has been happening for decades.

The online campaign and advocacy aspect of this work are the latest in a long line of activities and research, which have aimed to highlight that disasters are not natural.

We've had a number of successes over that time – with organisations, individuals and institutions adopting the #NoNaturalDisasters message, ensuring our aim of recognising the true cause of disasters spreads ever further, both within our community and further afield, amongst other key sectors.

This event is part of that process; today, through our panellists' presentations, audience discussion and our collective enthusiasm, we'll begin to consider the next phase of our campaign.

Building on the decades of work already out there and using the momentum to further our overall aims and goals.

I'm so grateful to all those who have helped and given their time and energy to build this conference. Thank you so much.

Please enjoy the day, exploring ideas and asking questions, and help us form the agenda for the next 5 years.

Kevin Blanchard

Organiser of the #NoNaturalDisasters conference

Opening session

Session background

The 'who, what and why' of the #NoNaturalDisasters argument including specific sections on the history of the campaign, why disasters are not natural and why this discussion is so important and more than a discussion of semantics.

Duration

75 mins

Panelists



Katuscia Fara
DRR Expert



Bhola Saha
Assam Royal
Global University



Terry Cannon
Institute of
Development
Studies



Kanza Ahmed
UK Health
Security Agency

The implications of the status quo

Session background

Examining the status quo, including presentations on why some organisations, institutions and individuals within the sector fight for “natural” to be part of the discourse and an exploration of why the term has been beneficial to some people throughout history.

Duration

90 mins

Panelists



Monica Sanders
Georgetown
University



Malcolm Shead
ShelterBox



**Ksenia
Chmutina**
Loughborough
University



**Jeanette
Elsworth**
UNDRR

#NoNaturalDisasters within our societal systems

Session background

Looking at the role of culture, language, economics and religion (amongst other areas) this session will explore how our societal systems shape and limit our campaign and how best to work within these systems.

Duration
90 mins

Panelists



**Jason
von Meding**
University of
Florida



Leisa Perch
SAEDI
Consulting Inc



Becky Sindall
Wash Failures



Rodrigo Mena
International
Institute
of Social Studies,
Erasmus University

Researching the unnaturalness of disasters

Session background

During this session we'll examine what research is already out there, how future generations are being taught about disasters and risk and discuss which areas need further consideration to help move theory into practice.

Duration

90 mins

Panelists



Louis Vis
Redland Green
Secondary
School



**Alex
Tsakiridis**
PreventionWeb



**Dewald van
Niekerk**
African Centre
for Disaster
Studies



Jazmin Scarlett
University of
East Anglia

Upcoming research

Session background

Micro-presentations based on abstracts submitted for the conference from a number of early career researchers and academics highlighting their own research & how it contributes to the #NoNaturalDisasters campaign.

Duration

50 mins

Micro-presentations

1	Estefania Mompean Botias ALICE LAB - EPFL - École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland	11	Erich Wolff & Hanna Rauf Nanyang Technological University Singapore
2	Daniela Paredes Grijalva Institute for Social Anthropology Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria	12	Alicia Coromoto Hernandez Telleria Universidad De Las Fuerzas Armadas De Venezuela (Unefa), Venezuela
3	Michelle Munive García Centro Nacional de Prevención de Desastres (CENAPRED), México	13	Paul Huddson University of York. UK
4	Lien Sururoh Yayasan Skala Indonesia Indonesia	14	Mhari Gordon UCL IRDR UK
5	Afroz Ahmad Shah Universiti Brunei Darussalam Brunei	15	Pamela Cajilig, Monica FA W Santos, Simon Cervantes & Olivia Sicam RMIT University, Australia
6	Carole Therrien Carleton University, Ottawa Canada	16	Lowine Hill University of Waterloo Canada
7	Holly A Seglah DRR Dynamics / Independent UK	17	Laura Hirst Kindling UK
8	Roger Philip Abbott The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion UK	18	Shahzad Ahmed Malik McGan's Ooty School of Architecture India
9	Alexis Nzeyimana Rwanda Meteorology Agency Rwanda	19	David Matyas University of Cambridge UK
10	Christopher Cowan Lund University Sweden		

Speakers

(alphabetical order)

Kanza Ahmed - UKHSA

Kanza is a Consultant in Global Public Health for the Global Disaster Risk Reduction and Global Health Security Teams at the newly formed UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) (previously known as Public Health England). She has extensive experience of epidemiology and statistics, having graduated from the UK Field Epidemiology Training Programme (UK-FETP) in 2020. Kanza is currently leading the Disaster Related Statistics (DRS) pilot on behalf of the UN Inter-Agency Expert Group (IAEG) Task Force on Measuring Hazardous Events and Disasters. She is also the UKHSA lead for the joint UKHSA-ONS Climate Change Statistics Wellcome Trust Project, collaborating with partners in Africa on developing climate change related statistics and models. She was part of the team responsible for leading the delivery of the recently published [UNDRR/ISC Hazard Definition and Classification Supplement](#). Kanza is also an honorary lecturer at Keele Medical School, England.

Kevin Blanchard - DRR Dynamics

Kevin Blanchard is the lead advocate on the #NoNaturalDisasters Twitter account, website and merchandise operation. Kevin works alongside the wider community to help dispel the myth that disasters are in any way natural and that their results are something beyond our control.

Outside of the #NoNaturalDisasters campaign, Kevin is a freelance consultant and policymaker focused on developing policy to ensure the inclusion and empowerment of marginalised groups in disaster risk reduction policy and practice. Kevin has over 14 years' experience in developing inclusive DRR and humanitarian policy for national governments, international agencies and NGOs.

Kevin achieved an undergraduate degree in Environmental Management and a master's degree in Environment, Politics and Globalisation at King's College London. Kevin is a visiting lecturer at a number of prestigious universities around the world where he lectures on inclusive disaster risk reduction, emergency management and climate change.

Terry Cannon - IDS

Terry integrates his work on disasters (and climate change) with many years of teaching and researching in development studies. His background discipline is geography, with additional qualifications in economics and politics. At IDS he teaches in the MSc Climate Change, Development and Policy. He also lectures at King's College London (on disaster vulnerability and climate change), and in the MSc Disaster Management at University of Copenhagen. Recent work has focused on Bangladesh, where he is also affiliated with the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) in Dhaka.

His main research focus is on rural livelihoods, disaster vulnerability and adaptation to climate change, especially at the local level. For many years he supported the International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent (IFRC), especially in their work on disaster preparedness. He has recently focused on the significance of culture in relation to risk and people's perception of hazards and climate change. This involved being a lead editor for the IFRC World Disasters Report 2014: Focus on Culture and Risk. He is one of the co-authors of 'At Risk: natural hazards, people's vulnerability and disasters', which is one of the most widely cited and used books in the field, and translated into Spanish and Japanese. He has also engaged in capacity building on these issues for NGOs and UNDP in several countries, including Bangladesh and Vietnam.

Ksenia Chmutina - Loughborough University

Dr Ksenia Chmutina is a Reader in Sustainable and Resilient Urbanism at the School of Architecture, Building and Civil Engineering, Loughborough University, UK.

Ksenia's research focusses on the processes of urban disaster risk creation and systemic implications of sustainability and resilience in the context of neoliberalism. Her research mainly comprises location-based case studies and systemic policy analysis; it brings together qualitative research and participatory methodologies to generate transdisciplinary understanding of disasters as socio-political processes.

Ksenia have conducted research in the UK, India, Indonesia, Japan, Nepal, China, and the Caribbean, working with policymakers, industry, and marginalised communities.

She is a co-author of textbooks 'Disaster Risk Reduction for the Built Environment' (Wiley, 2017) and 'Disaster Risk' (Taylor and Francis, 2022), and a Joint Coordinator of the CIB W120 'Disasters and the Built Environment'. A core part of Ksenia's activities is science communication: she is a co-host of a popular podcast 'Disasters: Deconstructed' and writes for the non-academic outlets.

Jeanette Elsworth - UNDRR

Jeanette is a communications professional with 20 years' experience, including twelve years leading communications teams at the UN. and is currently Chief of Communications, Advocacy, Knowledge Management and IT at the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, UNDRR, based in Geneva. Jeanette started her career in broadcast journalism at the BBC and also served two years in a policy role at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, based in Nairobi. Jeanette is passionate about using communications and advocacy to achieve overall strategic objectives, and putting the sense of control back into the climate disaster risk debate.

Katiuscia Fara - DRR Expert

Katiuscia Fara is a specialist in climate change adaptation and disaster risk management with extensive experience in sustainable development and environmental management. Katiuscia has worked with several international organizations on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, including WFP, IFAD, IFRC, ICLEI and UNDP.

She holds a geography degree from the London School of Economics and a Master in Environmental Management from the University of Cape Town. Her main interests include climate risk management, community based-participatory approaches, bridging the divide between scientific and local knowledge to support informed decision making and greater resilience.

Ilan Kelman - UCL IRDR

Ilan Kelman is Professor of Disasters and Health at University College London, England and a Professor II at the University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway. His overall research interest is linking disasters and health, integrating climate change into both. Three main areas are: (i) disaster diplomacy and health diplomacy; (ii) island sustainability involving safe and healthy communities in isolated locations; and (iii) risk education for health and disasters.

Jason von Meding - University of Florida

Dr Jason von Meding (@vonmeding) is an architect turned disaster researcher who centers the experiences, knowledges and strengths of affected communities, focusing on how injustice and inequality underpin the creation of risk in society, profoundly shaping disaster impacts. He is an Associate Professor and a founding faculty member of the Florida Institute for Built Environment Resilience at the University of Florida and devotes his research efforts to community-centered issues and processes related to disaster risk. He has a passion for communicating about disasters to the general public - and encouraging other scientists to do the same - using mediums such as journalistic writing, podcasting and filmmaking. He is the co-host of Disasters: Deconstructed Podcast (@DisastersDecon) and you can find his popular science writing at The Conversation, Barron's, and OpenDemocracy. At the #NoNaturalDisasters Conference he will be talking about framing arguments about disasters in academic and professional contexts, and how language/translation matters.

Rod Mena - Erasmus University Rotterdam

Rodrigo Mena is Asst. Professor of Disasters and Humanitarian Studies at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of Erasmus University Rotterdam. His research focuses on humanitarian responses and risk reduction to disasters and their interaction with other crises, such as social conflict, climate change, and migration. Dr Mena is the Coordinator of the European Research Council project 'Humanitarian Governance: Alternatives, advocacy, accountability' (HumGov), and serves as a Board member of the International Humanitarian Studies Association (IHSA), Board member of the Expertise Centre Humanitarian Communication (HumCom), and co-convenor Peace and Ecology commission of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA). With a particular interest in the ethical, safety, and security aspects of (fieldwork/in-situ) research, he is one of the authors of the "Safety and Security guidelines for field research in complex, remote and hazardous places", and teaches on this topic in different universities and research centres, leading the course "Safety and Security for Fieldwork Research" in the Dutch Research School for International Development. Before his current positions, he worked with local and international NGOs, the UN, ministries, and as consultant and researcher, particularly in disasters and conflict-affected places such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Chile, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, or Yemen.

Dewald van Niekerk

African Centre for Disaster Studies

Dewald van Niekerk is Professor in Geography and the founder and head of the African Centre for Disaster Studies at North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. Dewald is a South African B3 NRF rated researcher. He obtained his Ph.D. in 2005 and was promoted to full professor in 2012. He has authored and co-authored more than 100 publications which includes peer reviewed articles, books and chapters in books and international and national research reports. He has been project leader for local, national as well as international disaster risk reduction projects, and has undertaken disaster risk reduction research and consultancy in numerous countries world-wide. He is the programme leader for the Disaster Risk Sciences research group and the Ph.D. in Disaster Risk Sciences in the Unit for Environmental Sciences and Management. He is the founder and Editor in Chief of the accredited journal *Jàmábá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*. In 2012 he played a significant role in the establishment of the Southern Africa Society for Disaster Reduction. His research is motivated by a desire to reduce the possible impacts of natural hazards and unknowns like climate change on communities most at-risk. His interests include disaster risk governance, resilience building, complexity and complexity theory, anticipatory governance, building institutional capacities for disaster risk reduction, and transdisciplinary disaster risk reduction.

Leisa Perch - SAEDI Consulting Inc

Leisa Perch is the CEO and Founder of SAEDI Consulting Barbados Inc. She is an International Development Expert with 20+ years of experience in climate change, poverty reduction, livelihoods, gender equality policy, inclusive green growth, inclusive green economy, research and gender mainstreaming. Leisa has a proven track record of enabling purposeful dialogue & debate, coalition-building to deliver new ideas, promoting concepts of change and delivering transformation in developing and emerging economies. Well published, she has worked across the globe, from Latin America, to Africa and more recently in Asia. She has worked on Caribbean SIDS issues for most of her career.

Bhola Saha - Assam Royal Global University

Bhola Saha, an Architect at heart and a DRR professional by passion, completed his masters degree with a specialization in Disaster Mitigation and Management from IIT Roorkee, India. He is currently working as an Assistant Professor at The Assam Royal Global University, Guwahati, India. He is keenly interested in Nature-based Solution in Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation, Eco-DRR, Water Governance, Community Engagement and CBDRM. He loves using his knowledge in architecture to find pragmatic solutions in Disaster Risk Management. He was part of the team that developed the Toolkit for YYPs in SETI for DRR during the focus group discussions at UNESCO Office Jakarta. He was engaged with Avoidable Death Network on research titled "Avoidable Deaths from the Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Lockdown in India". He was part of the project "Mili-Juli: Ways of Life - Lesser Known Stories from Assam" which is based on Reinventing the Spirit of Community Based Disaster Risk Management in India (a project by CRRP India and RRI, funded by ICCROM and Swedish PostCode Foundation). He had also worked on a month-long exercise with Understanding Risk Field Lab on Urban Flooding in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Recently, he was part of the core team working on "Project ENACT: Evaluating the feasibility and efficacy of integrated catchment-scale Nature-based solutions for Climate Change adaptation in India" lead by Loughborough University with IIT Roorkee, IIT Guwahati and IIT Jammu.

Monica Sanders - Georgetown University

Monica Sanders founded the "The Undivided Project", an organisation dedicated to creating climate resilience in underserved communities via Internet infrastructure and service-centred digital solutions. She also holds a faculty appointment at the Georgetown University Law Center, manages a university program focused on environmental justice, and is a Senior Fellow at the Tulane University Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy. Professor Sanders is also a National Preparedness Month spokesperson, where she does media messaging around preparedness and risk reduction in partnership with the American Red Cross and FEMA. Professor Sanders' prior experience includes serving as a Senior Committee Counsel for both the House of Representatives and Senate Committees on Homeland Security. In those roles, she focused on oversight of disaster response and recovery programs, cybersecurity, and critical infrastructure protection. She also served as the Senior Legal Advisor for International Response and Programs at the American Red Cross, and as an attorney for the Small Business Administration during the Hurricane Maria and western wildfire responses. Professor Sanders also studied security and defense civilian coordination in emergencies as part of in the European Union Visitor's Program and remains involved in crisis and resilience work as part of UNDRR and Team Rubicon rosters.

Jazmin Scarlett - University of East Anglia

Dr Jazmin P. Scarlett is a Historical and Social Volcanologist, researching how people lived in the past and the present with active volcanoes. Previous research has researched the people and volcanoes of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Montserrat, Germany and Italy. She is currently continuing historical volcanology research in the Caribbean as a Senior Research Associate at the University of East Anglia. She also has interests in heritage studies, disaster studies concepts and theories and science communication and outreach pedagogy.

Dr Scarlett did her undergraduate in BSc (Hons) Geography and Natural Hazards at Coventry University, MSc Volcanology and Geological Hazards at Lancaster University and PhD in Earth Science at the University of Hull. She has been a visiting researcher at Aarhus University in Denmark and a Lecturer in Physical Geography at Newcastle University.

Malcolm Shead - ShelterBox

Malcolm Shead is the Head of Programme Quality at ShelterBox. Representing an organisation that is reviewing the way that humanitarian crisis is described in external communications, this presentation offers a reflection on what NGO's may have to gain from using language that asserts the naturalness of disasters. When this lens is applied to the Climate Change Crisis, Malcolm suggests that the sector still has further to go in the quest for a more critical portrayal of disasters.

Malcolm's interests in this area were fostered while undertaking Doctoral research into the lived experience of water stress in a South Indian megacity, Chennai. Malcolm explored the ways in which successive Colonial, Post-Colonial and Neo-liberal modes of urban governance have created water inequality in the city and surrounds. This research challenged the truism that water stress is simply a product of a lack of water, but instead is the result of urban governance that has placed Production at the heart of planning decisions.

Becky Sindall - WASH Failures

Dr. Becky Sindall is an international public health researcher with experience in water and sanitation, injury prevention, learning from failure, and risk reduction. She has been a core part of the WASH Failures team since 2017, looking at how failures happen and how the water and sanitation development sector can stop making the same mistakes again and again. She has a background in water engineering and has previously carried out community-based research focused on novel methods to improve water and sanitation provision in urban and peri-urban communities in South Africa. She has also been involved in drowning prevention in low- and middle-income countries, primarily in Africa for the last decade, and is currently working primarily on this topic with fishers around Lake Victoria in Tanzania.

Alex Tsakiridis - PreventionWeb

Alex Tsakiridis is a disaster risk reduction specialist who works as an editor for PreventionWeb, the global knowledge platform for DRR. He is responsible for identifying the best resources for DRR professionals and for communicating disaster risk content into actionable takeaways.

Previously, he worked in South Asia and Central Africa on development as well as emergency projects. He holds a Master's degree in disaster risk management from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India.

He recently edited an article based on the chapter of GAR 2022 on cognitive biases, and interviewed Athens' heat officer on her work to reduce heatwave impacts.

Louis Vis - Redland Green Secondary School

Louis Vis was born in Belgium and moved to the UK in 2011 to read Geography at the University of Sheffield. He then completed a Masters in European Studies at King's College London before working for Ipsos Mori. His passion for Geography led him to complete a PGCE at the University of Oxford in 2016. He has been teaching in British state schools since qualifying as a secondary school teacher and is currently the Head of Geography at Redland Green School in Bristol where he teaches physical geography to years 7 to 13.

Acknowledgements

This conference has engaged many people around the world and they have all very kindly offered their time, expertise and experience in helping to make this conference a reality.

The organiser of the conference would like to thank:

**Ilan Kelman and our kind sponsors at the
UCL Warning Research Centre**

Thank you also to the conference team:

Holly A. Seglah
Mhari Gordon

Notable contributions

Lee Boshier
Alex Thompson
V́ctor Cerón Ĺpez
Carole Therrien
Saskia Carusi
Tatenda Maona Kanengoni
Repaul Kanji
Suzy Paisley
Ashleigh Rushton
Maddie Weir



#NoNaturalDisasters

September 2022