

PANEL

Climate Change, Resource Politics and Conflict in Myanmar

Convener

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Panel Description

Myanmar ranks among the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world while also being embroiled in a profound political crisis since the 2021 coup and military rule and armed conflict in resource-rich ethnic territories since independence. This panel addresses the intersections of climate change, resource politics and armed political conflict from the perspective of the everyday experiences of dispossession among conflict-affected populations in post-coup Myanmar, set against longer-term histories of land and resource control. Through critical engagement with debates on the climate-conflict nexus, the panel challenges dominant framings of climate change as a security threat and potential trigger of violent conflict. Instead, we foreground a central, often overlooked, dynamic: that the political processes driving militarization, dispossession and displacement that constitute the armed conflict — state-led conservation enclosures, hydropower dams, biofuel concessions, rare earth extraction, and state territorial control — are simultaneously what produce and deepen marginalized populations' vulnerabilities to climate change impacts. The forces that have displaced villagers, disrupted livelihoods, and eroded customary resource governance systems are the same dynamisms that strip away the capacities, knowledge systems, and territorial foundations communities rely upon to adapt to escalating climate risks. Each paper historically situates how different forms of resource appropriation and military state building in ethnic territories have cumulatively undermined communities' ability to simultaneously defend their land and cope with climate-related hazards. Dispossession and displacement do not merely precede or accompany climate risk — they actively constitute it by fragmenting territories, severing people from adaptive practices rooted in place, and concentrating exposure among those with the fewest resources to respond. Violent conflict, both before and after the coup, further compounds these vulnerabilities. At the same time, the panel highlights how environmental rights defenders and indigenous knowledge systems, despite severe repression, continue to sustain customary land rights and community-led environmental protections as critical forms of climate adaptation from below. By bringing together cases spanning forestry governance, agrarian change, border community resilience, and resource frontier politics, the panel offers an integrated analysis of how climate change, conflict, and resource politics are co-constituted in Myanmar.