

PANEL

Rethinking critical studies for Myanmar — the nexus of Land, Labor, and Humanitarian Sovereignty in Times of Crisis

Convener

Kay

Panel Description

Why does critical development studies matter for Myanmar today? This panel advances a critical perspective that questions dominant development models, assumptions, and policies rather than accepting them at face value. Amid protracted political conflict, economic crisis, mass displacement, and intensifying climate shocks, Myanmar offers a crucial site for rethinking development paradigms and the relationships among land, labour, and local autonomy. Bringing together three papers, the panel examines how development, precarity, and agency are shaped through interconnected processes of social reproduction, capitalist accumulation, and political struggle. Together, the papers demonstrate that Myanmar is not merely a case of crisis but a critical lens through which to rethink development itself. By foregrounding social reproduction, agrarian justice, and transnational political agency, the panel challenges static notions of development, defies predatory capital, and questions the premise of humanitarian neutrality.

The first paper, *Land, Remittance and Resistance*, examines the Thailand–Myanmar labour migration corridor to show how remittances function not only as economic transfers sustaining households but also as mechanisms of socio-political reproduction. Migrant workers, often portrayed as passive victims, instead emerge as political actors whose labour, organizing, and financial contributions sustain resilience at home and reconfigure the meaning of land as homeland, territory, and political claim beyond national borders.

The second paper, *Development or Accumulation?*, critically reassesses the Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Approach (SRLA) promoted by international financial institutions following Myanmar's post-2010 liberalization. Drawing on qualitative rural data, it argues that financialization particularly through microfinance expansion has deepened rural indebtedness and served global capitalist accumulation rather than poverty alleviation, raising fundamental questions about mainstream development interventions.

The third paper, *Disasters and Capitalism*, introduces the concept of “humanitarian sovereignty” to analyze how humanitarian crises and agrarian transformations co-constitute one another. Grounded in Myanmar's post-Cyclone Nargis humanitarian landscape, it shows how local actors challenge depoliticized aid models by linking humanitarian justice with agrarian and food sovereignty struggles.

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