

Past4future (Risk KAN Working Group)

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Risk KAN Steering Group Representative: Lara Mani

Rationale:

Climate change and extreme events are a primary concern worldwide and are common features of future scenarios that address not just environmental, but also societal trajectories. The past provides us with an evidence base of how climate change and extreme events have shaped the fates of communities towards either growth and complexity or decline and collapse. Yet, this increasingly rich source of knowledge often remains constrained within disciplinary boundaries and, most crucially, largely overlooked in climate action debates and policy thinking.

The Risk KAN Working Group “**past4future**” focuses on past climate changes, extreme events and their societal impacts (health, demography, technology) as reflected in the palaeo-environmental and palaeo-societal (i.e., archaeological and historical) records respectively. It is challenging but necessary to try and understand both the environmental and cultural impacts in terms of their constituent

components, i.e., impacts on climate, biodiversity, terrestrial and marine productivity as well as health, demography and teleconnections. Our ambition is to work towards a close alignment of palaeoenvironmental and ‘palaeosocietal’ records taking into use novel methods and different forms of engagement. In expanding our evidence base for environment-society interactions in this way, such coupled datasets form the basis for constructing extreme event/disaster scenarios that are evidence-based, realistic and culturally relevant. By bringing a direct human interest into palaeo-environmental and -climatalogical science, we can begin to develop powerful narratives of past environmental changes and extreme events in relation to the human impacts and the ways in which individuals, communities and societies handled these. Building on efforts by relevant PAGES working groups as well as this Risk-KAN Working Group, anchored at the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk (CSER), University of Cambridge, United Kingdom and Department of Geology, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia will establish a network of environmental scientists, archaeologists, and environmental historians who will bring their collective knowledge and expertise to bear on the issue. The group will try to address the global issues throughout the world.

Aims & scope:

Our explicit aims include:

- (i) aligning available palaeo-perspectives terminologically – within and between disciplines – and in terms of time scales with recent and contemporary examples of extreme events,
- (ii) deriving more standardized and case-transferable methods that can be used to study past human-environment relations.

Integrating archaeological, historical, and palaeoenvironmental perspectives in an environmental-interdisciplinary meta-laboratory, the WG will engage with factors and mechanisms of resistance and disruption that shape the relations between people, climate, and environments over time. In this respect, the WG will explore multi-scalar approaches to extreme events, moving beyond the contingencies of ‘now’ and ‘episodic’ to more fully develop a temporal perspective that can contextualize anomalies and trends. Cases of past societal collapse in the context of changing climates afford considerable scientific and public attention. The proposed Risk KAN Working Group endeavors to use this momentum to create effective outreach and dissemination strategies that include, for instance, museum stakeholders and science communicators. The WG will develop a platform to bring together *academics* working on the impact of environmental and climate extremes on society – past and present – and *public and private institutions* working on public awareness, policy-making and implementation strategies concerning the current UN Sustainable Development Goals like SDG Goals 11, 13 and 15.