

The Research Group  
**Physical Geography**

has the honor to invite you to the public defense of the PhD thesis of

**Jan MAES**

to obtain the degree of Doctor of Sciences

Title of the PhD thesis:

The role of governance in (re)producing ineffective disaster risk reduction: Evidence from landslides in Uganda and Cameroon

**Promotors:**

Prof. dr. Matthieu Kervyn  
Prof. dr. Jean Poesen

The defence will take place on  
**February 27, 2018 at 17.00h**

in Aula of the Second Law TI 01.02, Thermo-technic Institute, Kasteelpark Arenberg 41 Heverlee, and will be followed by a reception.

**Members of the jury:**

Prof. dr. C. Kesteloot (Chair, KU Leuven)  
Prof. dr. B. Van Heur (Secretary, VUB)  
Prof. dr. C. Parra (Co-promoter)  
Prof. dr. A. Van Rompaey (KU Leuven)  
Prof. dr. N. Koedam (VUB)  
Prof. dr. T. Cannon (University of Sussex, UK)  
Prof. dr. I. Alcántara-Ayala (UNAM, Mexico)

**Curriculum vitae**

Jan graduated in Bio-science Engineering (KU Leuven, 2010) and Cultures and Development Studies (KU Leuven, 2012). After working as a teacher and doing an internship at UN FAO (Rome), he started a joint PhD in geography at the VUB. The PhD is a joint PhD together with KU Leuven and embedded in a larger BELSPO project entitled AfReSlide, a project aiming at identifying suitable disaster risk reduction strategies in central Africa. Jan supervised several Msc theses and is first author of 1 peer-reviewed article. His research interest include the critical analysis of disaster governance with a specific focus on landslides in Uganda and Cameroon.

**Abstract of the PhD research**

The growth in scientific literature on disasters and disaster-related investment and institutions is unprecedented. The number of humans and assets being exposed to natural hazards is, however, still rising faster than their vulnerability to hazards is being reduced. We therefore argue that several gaps persist in and between disaster research, policy and action. The objective of this dissertation is to contribute to the better understanding of these mismatches through investigating the role of disaster governance.

By incorporating contributions from ‘politics of disaster’, ‘science and technology studies’ and ‘network governance’, we try to enrich the debate on disaster governance and to answer the repeated calls for both empirical cross-scale disaster analysis and a re-politisation of disaster research. The main data collection methods are focus groups and semi-structured interviews with key actors involved in disaster risk management from national to local scale.

Based on qualitative empirical data from landslides in Uganda and Cameroon, we provide insights on specific examples of disaster governance, such as disaster platforms in Uganda and disaster risk zonation policies in Cameroon. Concerning disaster platforms at decentralised administrative levels in the Rwenzori Mountains region (Uganda), we show that these types of horizontal governance are used as spatial tactics to centralise power for the ruling party. This resulted in unequal risk through blame dissolution and scale jumping. As a consequence, decentralised platforms cannot be considered a panacea for disaster risk management despite such claims of international treaties on disaster risk reduction. Concerning disaster risk zonation in Limbe city (Cameroon), this study illustrates that the current policies are characterised by ad-hoc risk assessment and poor enforcement of the law, leading to risk accumulation instead of risk reduction. Moreover, this study reveals that these perverse effects in Limbe can partly be attributed to socio-political drivers like the use of a post-political discourse by national and local level authorities. A post-political discourse portrays disasters as a technical and a-political problem, making it difficult for citizens to contest the proposed solutions.