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Malawi, a land-locked country in Southern Africa, is heavily impacted by climate change. Disasters such as flooding and drought are increasing in frequency and intensity, giving relief interventions an almost seasonal character. Apart from being disaster-prone, the country is also dependent on donor aid, a condition that becomes more pronounced when disaster strikes. Efforts to connect development and relief interventions, referred to as strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus, have been a central concern of the international community for several years but solving the clash between projects grounded in developmental ideas of progress versus projects based on humanitarian ideals of relief and recovery, is difficult in practice.

In line with international agreements like the Sendai framework, countries like Malawi are entitled to additional assistance to cope with the effects of climate change but the responsibility to do so primarily lies with the state. Malawi's underfunded Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DODMA) is tasked with both disaster response and disaster risk reduction. Activities related to the former are present-oriented and often executed with great urgency in a context of immediate need whereas activities related to the latter tend to be future-oriented and have to be integrated into the ordinary, everyday way of doing things. In a context of aid-dependency, the interconnections between development, disasters and disaster risk reduction make DODMA's work of preventing and planning or preparing for disasters a complex task.

In this paper I explore the humanitarian-development nexus in Malawi ethnographically by focusing on the clashing and converging timelines that structure disaster relief interventions in the present as well as planned responses to anticipated disasters in imagined futures. Based on twelve months of in-depth ethnographic fieldwork with district-based civil servants of the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DODMA), I suggest that in Malawi both state and non-state actors count on crisis in order to obtain much needed resources. I claim that this de-politicizes and obscures the ordinariness of disasters as well as parallel processes that are of pivotal importance to the cycles of planning, preparation and implementation of disaster relief interventions, ultimately hampering our understating of effective ways to strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus.

Preparing for future crises: Temporal possibilities and their materialisations