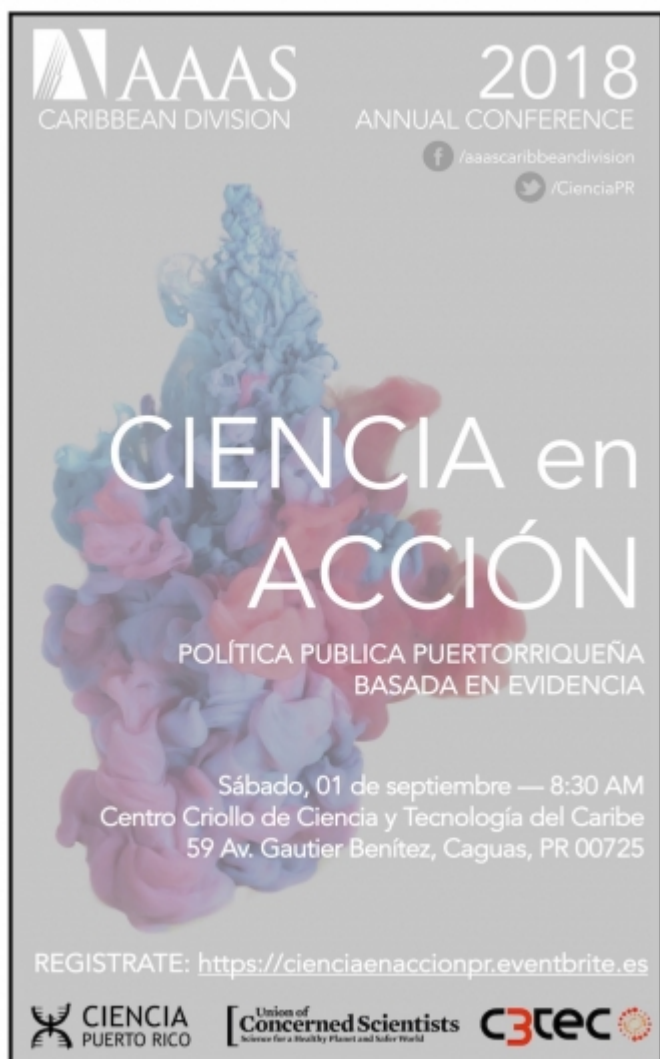


Science and public policy for a more resilient Puerto Rico ^[1]

Submitted by [Zulmarie Perez Horta](#) ^[2] on 29 August 2018 - 2:14am



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Puerto Rico is at a crossroads—the reconstruction decisions made following the fiscal crisis and the hurricanes of 2017 will determine the kind of society we will have in the future. Do we want to be prepared for the hurricanes to come? Or are we willing to allow the mistakes of the past to be repeated?

Moving forward requires that Puerto Rican policy makers incorporate the best available data from different fields, from economics, public administration, and social sciences, to engineering, technology, and the natural and physical sciences. Therefore, it is essential that public and private sectors collaborate with multidisciplinary teams to formulate public policies based on evidence.

A recent example of the importance of involving experts and opening access to data is the number of deaths attributed to Hurricane Maria. The miniscule and unreliable official figure of 64 deaths pales in comparison to the estimated 4,645 deaths recently revealed by a scientific study. The discrepancy in numbers, in addition to being shameful, directly impacted the amount of aid received, reducing the urgency of the federal government's response to the humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico after the hurricane.

Consider another possible future: A Puerto Rico where the regulations governing post-Maria reconstruction and development projects incorporate findings that show that environmental conservation helps mitigate the impact of climate change and has economic benefits. An archipelago with a redesigned energy infrastructure based on durable, sustainable and renewable options, instead of relying almost completely on the import of fossil fuels, susceptible to weather events and oil cartels.

With the objective of empowering Caribbean and diaspora scientists to serve as a bridge between government and civil society, the Caribbean Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science [3], Ciencia Puerto Rico [4] and the Union of Concerned Scientists [5] have joined forces to present a conference entitled **Science in Action: Puerto Rican Public Policy Supported by Evidence** [6], to be held on **Saturday, September 1, 2018** at C3Tec in Caguas, Puerto Rico. The event will launch the **Puerto Rico Science Policy Action Network (PR-SPAN)** [7], a network of scientists committed to act as science and technology experts, and serve as links within their respective fields to ensure the participation of the scientific community in the development of public policies, at the federal and local levels, of relevance to Puerto Rico.

The current turning point requires that the Puerto Rican scientific community take a seat at the table and raise its voice to inform reconstruction efforts. Their expertise, work, and experience have much to contribute to these conversations and can help assure that public policy leads to a resilient and fair future for all.

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