

非天然災害

12月，我將出席在阿拉伯聯合大公國杜拜舉行的聯合國氣候變遷大會(COP28)。會中我將談論兩項全球危機的交替作用：氣候及心理健康。如世界衛生組織所指出，氣候變遷讓心理健康問題的風險因素惡化——例如對家園及生計的破壞。災害造成的情緒痛苦也讓人很難恢復及重建。

扶輪的合作夥伴「庇護箱」(ShelterBox)是一個災害救濟的國際慈善組織，曾在近100個國家運用緊急避難所、重要家用物資，及技術支援，協助超過250萬名流離失所的人。我邀請該組織的執行長桑吉·史里坎桑(Sanj Srikanthan)共同撰寫這個月的專欄，他會解釋我們選擇用來描寫災害的詞語為何很重要。

——葛登·麥金納利



「天然」災害一詞長久以來都被用來描寫熱帶風暴、洪水、地震，及火山爆發，可是我們所使用的語言需要緊急修正。雖然這個詞語看似無害，但我們的用法並非都很正確，透過我們在受災社區的工作，我們瞭解到這個詞語如何延續了一個危險的迷思：我們無能為力防止人們受到災害嚴重的影響。這個誤導及有害的論點可能造成缺乏行動來協助需要幫助的人。

我們所使用的語言很重要。當我們把災害界定為「天然」，便沒有突顯出大自然與人類行動之間的複雜交互作用及這些行動如何影響世界各地的社區。

地震、海嘯、火山爆發，以及極端的暴風、旱災，與洪水都會因為地球上的自然因素而發生。然而有可能讓這些事件成為災害的卻是這些事件如何影響人類或環境——其結果受到人類因素的影響，像是人們居住的地點、他們住宅的種類、政治不穩定，以及缺乏防患未然的措施來保護易受害的社區。天然災害是取

得資源及權力的系統性不平等所致。受災最重的災民就是過著貧困生活的人，他們保護自我的方法最少，也缺乏資源來承受下一場災害。

把這些事件界定為天然，我們便減損了採取預防性措施來保護脆弱社區的必要性，掩飾了讓邊緣化及弱勢社區承受不成比例災害的潛藏的社會、經濟，及政治不穩定。我們的團隊親眼看到不平等、貧窮、都市化、砍伐樹木，及氣候危機等問題如何讓社區更容易受災。

在庇護箱，我們只說「災害」或是更明確說出是極端氣候、地震、海嘯或火山爆發。我敦促各位使用能反映出人們嚴重受害之確切原因的語言，協助我們打破這種惡性循環。

只有這樣，才能鋪好解決受害之潛藏因素的道路，用必要的投資、資源，及防範措施來協助保護受災社區，努力為所有人打造一個更公正、更平等的未來。

讓我們停止說災害是天然的。

桑吉·史里坎桑 
庇護箱執行長

Unnatural disasters

In December, I will attend the United Nations COP28 climate change summit in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. There, I will speak about the convergence of two global crises: climate and mental health. As the World Health Organization has noted, climate change worsens risk factors — such as disruptions to homes and livelihoods — for mental health problems. The emotional distress of a disaster also makes it difficult for people to recover and rebuild.

Rotary partner ShelterBox is an international disaster relief charity that has helped more than 2.6 million displaced people in approximately 100 countries with emergency shelter, essential household items, and technical support. I wish to share this month's column with their CEO, Benj Srikanthan, who explains that the words we choose to describe disasters matter.

— GRINDIN MCINALLY



The term “natural” disaster has long been used to describe tropical storms, floods, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions, but there needs to be an urgent shift in the language we use. While the term may seem harmless, and we’ve not always gotten it right, we’ve learned through our work with disaster-affected communities how it perpetuates a dangerous myth that nothing could have been done to prevent people being so badly affected. This misleading and harmful narrative can lead to a lack of action to help people who need it.

The language we use matters. When we frame disasters as natural, we fail to acknowledge the complex interplay between nature and the role of human actions and how they impact communities around the world.

Earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and extreme storms, drought, and flooding occur because of natural processes on Earth. But it is how these events affect people or the environment that has the potential to make them a disaster — outcomes influenced by human factors like where people live, what types of houses they have, political instability, and the lack of proactive measures to protect vulnerable communities. A disaster is the result of systemic inequalities in access to resources and power. Where we live and how much money we have often deter-

mines our ability to recover. The people worst affected are those living in poverty, with the least means to protect themselves and few resources to withstand the next event.

By framing these events as natural, we undermine the need for proactive measures to protect vulnerable communities, masking the underlying social, economic, and political instability that makes marginalized and disadvantaged communities disproportionately affected. Our terms are far from new issues like inequality, poverty, urbanization, deforestation, and the climate crisis can make communities more vulnerable.

At ShelterBox, we simply say “disaster” or are more specific, describing the extreme weather, earthquake, tsunami, or volcanic eruption. I urge everyone to help us in breaking this cycle by committing to language that accurately reflects why people are affected so badly.

Only then does it pave the way to address the underlying causes of vulnerability and work toward a more just and equitable future for all, with the necessary investment, resources, and proactive measures to help protect affected communities.

Disasters are not natural. Let’s stop saying they are.

DR. BENJ SRIKANTHAN
CEO, ShelterBox