



Hurricanes Eta and Iota, Honduras 2020

DISASTERS ARE NOT NATURAL LET'S STOP SAYING THEY ARE

EARTHQUAKES, TSUNAMIS, VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS, AND EXTREME WEATHER LIKE STORMS, DROUGHT, AND FLOODING, OCCUR BECAUSE OF NATURAL PROCESSES ON EARTH. IT IS HOW THESE EVENTS AFFECT PEOPLE, OR THE ENVIRONMENT, THAT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO MAKE THEM A DISASTER.

Human factors influence whether an event becomes a disaster, such as where people live, what types of home they have, political instability, and the lack of proactive measures to protect vulnerable communities. It's important to understand why disasters aren't 'natural' and how misleading and damaging the term can be for affected communities.



Monsoon flooding, Pakistan 2022



Typhoon Rai, Philippines 2021



Drought, Somaliland 2020

REASONS WHY DISASTERS SHOULDN'T BE DESCRIBED AS 'NATURAL'

1

IT IGNORES THE HUMAN FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE IMPACT OF EXTREME WEATHER, SEISMIC ACTIVITY AND OTHER EVENTS

- Human-driven warming climate, urbanisation, poor land management practices, and deforestation, impacts the severity of extreme weather like droughts, flooding, storms, and wildfires.
- Political instability and conflicts disrupt access to critical resources such as food, water, healthcare, and shelter.
- Lack of preparation influences the impact an extreme weather event, volcanic eruption, tsunami, or earthquake can have on people and the environment.
- Inadequate infrastructure means some places in the world are less able to withstand the power of extreme weather or seismic activity.

2

IT IGNORES WHAT MAKES SOME PEOPLE MORE VULNERABLE TO THE IMPACT OF EXTREME WEATHER, SEISMIC ACTIVITY AND OTHER EVENTS

- Economic, social, and cultural factors like where people live, what type of homes they have, available livelihoods, and how much money they have can leave people more vulnerable to the impact of extreme weather or seismic activity.
- Political instability and lack of access to resources, healthcare, education, and decision-making processes can make marginalised and disadvantaged communities disproportionately affected. It often determines ability to recover too.

3

HOW DISASTERS AFFECT PEOPLE IS NOT BEYOND OUR CONTROL

- By framing the impact of these events as 'natural', we undermine the need for proactive measures to protect vulnerable communities.
- When people overlook how it's possible to change the impact on people it can lead to a sense of helplessness and resignation among affected communities and the rest of the world. That can make the impact worse.
- Extreme weather or an earthquake in an area with little impact on the environment or people would not be considered a disaster. The same event in a densely populated city with poorly constructed buildings where many people are living below the poverty line could be catastrophic.

4

IT LEADS TO A FOCUS ON IMMEDIATE IMPACTS WHILE OVERLOOKING THE LONG-TERM NEEDS OF AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

- When we overlook the true reasons why people are affected so badly, it means less focus on the long-term changes that are needed.
- It can lead to a lack of investment in the infrastructure, resources, and systems needed to help communities with recovery and rebuilding.
- It can mean a lack of attention around preparing for, building resilience against, and protecting people from, future events.

5

IT LEADS TO A LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE ROLE OF HUMAN ACTIONS IN EXACERBATING THE IMPACT OF DISASTERS

- This deflects the global and national discussions and actions urgently needed to meaningfully address the underlying causes of vulnerability.
- A lack of action to promote more proactive measures to mitigate the impact of disasters.

WHAT SHOULD I SAY INSTEAD?

The language we use matters. Instead of using 'natural' we simply say 'disaster' or are more specific, describing the type of extreme weather (tropical storm, flooding, drought), earthquake, tsunami, or volcanic eruption.

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