Editorial

Recent disasters across the globe, and in high-risk regions such as Nepal and Assam, demonstrate that while hazards are natural, catastrophic outcomes are largely driven by human exposure and structural vulnerability. Floods, landslides and earthquakes cannot be prevented, but whether they become calamities depends on where people live, how they are housed, what they know and how quickly they are able to act.

Reducing disaster losses calls for coordinated work across several disciplines. Forecasting from the physical sciences, ecosystem-based buffering from the biological sciences, resilient design from engineering, and insights from the social sciences on governance, traditional knowledge and equitable risk communication must be integrated for effective mitigation. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 sets out this task through four priorities for action: understanding disaster risk; strengthening disaster risk governance; investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience; and enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Such an integrated approach is essential if recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction are to leave communities more resilient than they were before. Higher education institutions located in vulnerable regions such as the Himalaya and the Brahmaputra Valley are well placed to lead this work by translating shared, multidisciplinary data into actionable knowledge that builds resilience and reduces losses on the ground.

At the heart of preparedness lies information. An early warning is a piece of information, and whether it saves lives depends on whether it reaches people, whether they have the device and the connection to receive it, and whether they trust its source. Where information increasingly reaches people through personalised digital feeds, due prominence must be given to what they need to know to reduce their risk. Technology delivers its benefits only when social, economic and institutional conditions allow it to do so.

Although none of the five articles in this issue was written about disasters, each approaches this lesson from a different direction. They do so through two problems that seem, at first, to belong to different worlds. In the first, information is scarce: it is valued, but it does not reliably arrive. In the second, information is so abundant that it has become difficult to manage, and someone, or something, must put it in order. Read alongside one another, the articles suggest that the scarcity and the abundance of information are two sides of the same difficulty.

Two of the contributions are empirical studies of how information reaches its users. The first, a pilot study of cattle farmers in the Kamrup (Metropolitan) district of Assam, applies the extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) framework to the use of information technology tools in supplier selection. The farmers recognise the value of these tools, but limited internet access, the cost of services and concerns over data privacy stand in the way. The second, from computer science, evaluates deep learning models for news recommendation on a large public dataset. It finds that the most accurate models markedly reduce the diversity of what readers are shown, and it proposes a hybrid framework that restores much of that diversity at little cost to accuracy.

The two studies work within different traditions, and neither was written as a response to the other. Yet they meet at a useful point. The first shows that information which is valued may fail to arrive when connectivity, cost and trust are not in place. The second shows that information which does arrive has already been selected, and that a system optimised only for accuracy narrows what people see—more so for users with specialised interests, and increasingly so over time. Together, they suggest that equitable access to information depends not only on whether it reaches people, but also on how it has been ordered before it does. These are precisely the conditions on which an early warning for disasters depends.

The remaining three contributions turn to the task of ordering information for research. Two are bibliometric analyses. One traces the evolution of the Person-in-Environment (PIE) framework from a social work model into an integrative, transdisciplinary one. The other maps research on consumer perception, food waste and food packaging, and identifies smart packaging and biodegradable materials among its emerging themes. The third article presents ResearchRover, a prototype platform that uses artificial intelligence and large language models to automate the collection and organisation of literature and the analysis of research trends. Such tools also hold potential for the disaster agenda, which depends on bringing scattered evidence together quickly enough for it to be of use when decisions must be made.

A further link runs through the issue. The PIE framework rests on the idea that a person cannot be understood apart from the environment in which they act. The farmer study makes much the same point about technology: whether a farmer takes up digital procurement depends on more than individual willingness. The news recommendation study adds that this environment is increasingly assembled by algorithms. The food packaging review approaches the point from yet another side, suggesting that a better material is only part of the answer, because whether an innovation reduces waste also depends on whether consumers understand

and accept it. Applied to a whole region, this is the argument with which this editorial began: hazards become disasters through the conditions that surround people.

For the Multidisciplinary Research Journal, this also suggests a productive direction for future contributions. We welcome original research articles, reviews and case studies addressing disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation and resilient development, particularly work that brings perspectives from the physical and biological sciences, engineering, the social sciences and the humanities into meaningful conversation. Such work need not begin with the assertion that disciplines must be integrated. It should begin instead with a practical problem to which different forms of knowledge genuinely have something to contribute.

The contributions in the present issue leave us with a question that extends beyond technology itself. As the capacity to produce, circulate and analyse information grows, what may matter more is whether societies have the institutions, social resources and trust needed to use that knowledge well. Calamities will continue to occur, technologies will continue to change and bodies of knowledge will continue to expand. What remains open, and what research must keep examining, is the relationship between what is known, who can access it, how it is ordered and what societies are able to do with it, unhindered by a deficit of trust.

Editor in-Chief
Multidisciplinary Research Journal