

### Dear Readers,

Across South Asia, the climate crisis is not only measured in melting glaciers or rising seas. It is written into the cracks of parched farmland, in the absence of rainwater in a well, and in the decisions quietly made when crops fail or floodwaters rise. When land gives less and the future grows more uncertain, it is often girls' lives that are quietly rearranged.

In drought-hit interiors and riverine deltas, marriage has become a silent form of adaptation — not planned by policy, but forged out of necessity. Without formal safety nets, families turn to one of the oldest social institutions to cope. A daughter's wedding might mean one less mouth to feed, access to a safer village, or a claim to protection through kin. Often, it is early. Often, it is unequal.

Launched on World Environment Day, Climate Brides Quarterly explores this fragile terrain, asking:

- How is marriage being used to cope with climate change?
- How does it redistribute care, labour, and risk?
- Who gains, and who is left more vulnerable?

Each issue will bring together field stories, critical readings, grassroots innovations, and tools in multiple languages — a shared learning space for the anganwadi worker, the researcher, the youth advocate, and the policy thinker. Together, we are asking what real climate justice looks like — from the bastis of India, to the pukurs of Bangladesh, and the floodplains of the Tarai.

### **VOICES FROM THE GROUND**

Last month, Pakistan took a long-overdue step: <u>child marriage is now</u> <u>banned in Islamabad, with 18 set as the legal minimum age.</u> Lawmakers hailed it as a win for girls' rights — a rare sign of progress in a world where such rights are under threat.

But while the law matters, raising the age alone won't end the practice. What's needed is deeper change — in livelihoods, social protections, and the hard choices families face in the aftermath of disaster. This June marks three years since the <u>catastrophic 2022 floods</u>. In Usta Muhammad, one of the worst-hit towns in Balochistan, <u>child marriages</u> <u>surged</u>. Crops failed. Incomes vanished. And daughters became currency.

"We lost our home to the flood. Then I lost my daughter to marriage," one mother said.



On flash floods, humanitarian aid, and survival marriages in Balochistan

"We only sell our daughter because she can bear children. We do not sell boys," said a father.

"Child marriage has always existed here," added a senior police official. "But it got worse after the floods."

Girls were married for Rs. 300,000 to Rs. 500,000 (roughly USD 1,000– 1,800) — to repay loans, pay medical bills, or educate sons. Some were married more than once. If a bride fled, a younger sister took her place. In regions like Balochistan, child marriage is not just tradition — it is adaptation under pressure. Unless laws are backed by real investment in education, land rights, healthcare, and labour — they won't reach the girls they are meant to protect.



Tune in to the Climate Brides podcast with Maryam Jamali from Madat Balochistan, as she talks about their relief work after the floods — and what was missing when it came to supporting girls and women.



LISTEN TO THE <u>EPISODE HERE</u> OR WHEREVER YOU GET YOUR PODCASTS.

# WHAT WE ARE READING

We have curated a few powerful pieces this month that reflect the growing intersection between climate stress and early marriage:

<u>Why was there No Famine Following the 1992 Southern African Drought?</u> — <u>Christopher Eldridge (IDS Bulletin, 2002)</u>

One of the earliest studies to link environmental shocks with marriage practices, this paper documents how drought in Southern Africa pushed some families to marry off daughters in exchange for bride price — a critical coping mechanism in the absence of aid.

<u>Does Climate Change Increase the Risk of Child Marriage? — McLeod, Barr & Rall</u> (<u>Columbia Journal of Gender & Law, 2019</u>) Focusing on Bangladesh and

Mozambique, this socio-legal analysis explores how climate-related events intersect with poverty and gender inequality, with important gaps in data and policy still unaddressed.

<u>Global Girlhood Report: Girls at the Centre of the Storm — Save the Children (2023)</u> By 2050, nearly 40 million girls could face the double threat of climate change and child marriage — a 33% rise. This report draws on data and testimonies from across the Global South, highlighting how environmental stress drives early marriage as a last resort.

#### 1 Introduction

The 1992 southern African drought was the region's worst drought in living memory. Many wells and some prennial rivers dried. Well over a million cattle died: 1.03 million in Zimbabwe alone, moe than 23 per cent of the rational heat (Tobaiwa 1993). The drought affected around 86 million people in the ten countries which then comprised the Southern African Development Community (SADC), of whom around 20 million people were estimated to be at 'serious risk' (SADC) [aly 1993). Aggregate cereal production in the rine severely affected countries (including South Africa) was 38 per cent of the previous 5-year mean, and orly 22 per cent in Zimbabwe, often an exporting country. Cereal imports into the ten SADC countries and South Africa more than tripled during 19922, from 3.3 to 10.5 million tons (Clay et al. 1995).

Aggregate figures concealed even greater reductions among the poor. Many smallholders produced enough grain for orly 2–3 months. Some harvested little or nothing, and some lost all their draught arimals. In Zimbabwe's communal lands, maize production was only 9 per cent of the previous seven years' average, and maize yields were only around a hith of the national average (Ministry of Agriculture, Zimbabwe 1996).

#### But there was no famine. Why not?

#### 2 Changes in food sources

Most villagers in southern Africa are deficit food producers. Even in 'normal' years, most smallholders do not havest enough to last them 12 months, for several reasons, including: insufficient and/or poorly distributed mirfall,' poor soils, shortages of draught power, insufficient labour and, in some areas, a lack of money for fertiliser.

Villagers already exploit a variety of food and income sources in non-drought years to compensate for production shortfalls. They therefore had few, if any strategies in reserve for obtaining food to compensate for production losses following the 1992 drought. Those activities sometimes described as 'coping strategies' were also affected by the drought. Per capita amounts of wild foods collected were less than normal due to reduced rainfall and increased numbers of people collecting them. Food Why was there No Famine Following the 1992 Southern African Drought?

The Contributions and Consequences of Household Responses Christopher Eldridge\*

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## LANGUAGE CORNER

In drought-hit Marathwada region of western India, the phrase gate-cane kele — "they did a gate-cane" — is common. These marriages aren't about celebration, but survival. Contractors prefer husband-wife teams (koytas) for cane-cutting. So adolescent girls are married quickly, often with no rituals, just a ride to the fields.

The term borrows from "farmgate" sugar sales — fast, unregulated, and shaped by urgency. Not quite Marathi, not quite English — but unmistakably rooted in a region where climate, labour, and gender collide.



## gate-cane (noun):

A quick, informal marriage arranged in western India's sugarcane belt before harvest — enabling couples to migrate for seasonal labour.

> READ THE FULL PAPER IN <u>CLIMATE</u> <u>AND DEVELOPMENT</u>, OR SEE COVERAGE IN <u>THE TIMES OF INDIA.</u>

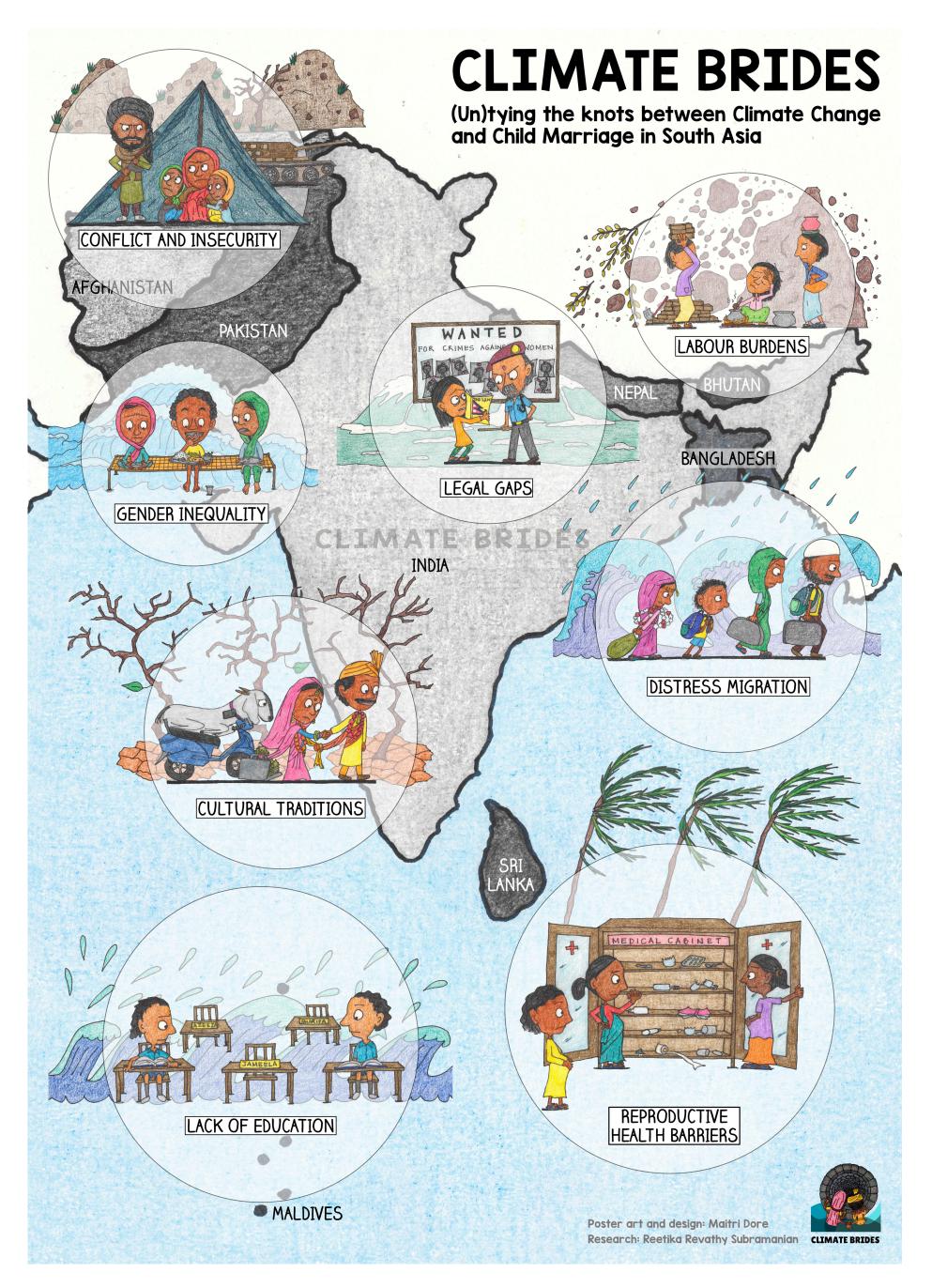


### **RESOURCES FOR GRASSROOTS**

This quarter, we are sharing a powerful new tool: The Climate Brides Map — a visual explainer showing how climate risks in South Asia fuel the structural conditions that drive child marriage.

Ideal for classrooms, workshops, and advocacy settings. Feel free to print and circulate from <u>www.climatebrides.com/map</u>

Currently available in: English, Hindi, and Nepali



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