



People's Courage  
International

# Voices of Resilience

Stories of internal migrants  
coping with climate change

*18 written and video stories from  
South and Southeast Asia*



**People's Courage**  
**International**

**September 2024**

**Contact us at:**

People's Courage International

Washington DC

Email: [info@peoplescourageinternational.org](mailto:info@peoplescourageinternational.org)

# Preface

Struggle, grit, and resilience. Our research team, field teams, and partners spoke to over 24,000 internal migrants over the past year. Across cities and villages in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, and the Philippines, we heard people's stories of struggle, resilience, and grit.

The increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather is clear in many of their lives. Many have heard of "climate change". Mohammad Bokul from Rajshahi, Bangladesh, wonders whether this is happening because of any sins they have committed. Either way, there is no escape. Those who face droughts and floods in their village are often confronted with heatwaves and floods in cities they had to move to.

This collection of stories provides a glimpse of the lives of people who are exposed to the impacts of extreme weather and climate change. There are millions like them, as we see from the companion research report *Coping with Climate: How extreme weather is already impacting internal migrants*. The report quantitatively captures why people migrate, what the impact of extreme weather is on their lives, and how they are coping. This collection aims to show what these impacts look like in real life. Through written and video stories (accessible by scanning QR codes), you can hear the **Voices of Resilience**.

# Acknowledgements

First, we would like to thank Arif, Ateeq, Bahadur, Bokul, Eric, Gangamaya, Ichsan, Israt, Jovelyn, Lingappa, Margilita, Mofizul, Nirwana, Rajya, Santa, Shukurudin, Sudip, and Yunus for allowing us to share their story.

We would also like to thank the organizations and individuals who contributed in different ways to this project.

Story development: Association for Community Development (ACD) from Bangladesh, Migrants Resilience Collaborative from India, Palangkaraya Ecological and Human Rights Studies (PROGRESS) from Indonesia, Samari Utthan Sewa (SUS) from Nepal, and Myrasol G Dela Cruz from the Philippines.

Video partners: Laam Films, especially Danish Qazi, Vivek Das, Kashif Shakeel, Rohit Jain, Tanya Roy, Raja Ibnu Faderi and Sandeep Singh.




Photographers: Danish Qazi, Jithendra M., Kashif Shakeel, Prakash Chandra Timilsena, S. Pandey, Searle Lira, Siddhant Shrotriya, and Wasif Kabir.






Our thanks to Report Yak for the report design.

Finally, we would like to thank individuals in our team and beyond who wore multiple hats to bring the stories together. They are Peerzada Muzamil, Siji Chacko, Ameena Kidwai, Eylvn Samuel, Karthik Shankar, and Varun Behani.



# Contents

- 1. Cyclone's wrath: Constantly on the move to rebuild**  
*Mohammad Mofizul Islam, Daily wage worker, Bangladesh* 01
- 2. Fever dream: Pedaling through heat**  
*Yunus Howladar, Rickshaw puller, Bangladesh* 03
- 3. Mother's resolve: Wading through climate extremes**  
*Israt Jahan, Domestic worker, Bangladesh*  05
- 4. "Is it our sin?": Scrapping in extreme climate**  
*Muhammad Bokul, Scrap dealer, Bangladesh*  06
- 5. Feeling the heat: The volatility of brick making**  
*Ateeq Khan, Brick kiln worker, India* 07
- 6. "Rains have become our enemy": The life of a distress migrant**  
*Lingappa Thimmappa, Construction worker, India* 09
- 7. Living season by season: The life of a farm worker**  
*Rajya Patle, Sugarcane worker, India* 11
- 8. Raging rivers: Rebuilding after floods**  
*Bahadur Bhuiya, Agricultural labourer, India*  13
- 9. Moving for scraps: The migrant struggle**  
*Shukurudin Mondal, Raggpicker, India*  14
- 10. From paddy fields to plantations: Between exploitation and survival**  
*Nirwana, Plantation worker, Indonesia* 15

- 11. **Tides of uncertainty: A journey amidst climate chaos**  
*Ichsan Basri, Fisherman, Indonesia* 17
  
- 12. **Rising above waters: A migrant's pursuit to stability**  
*Arif Supriyanto, Factory worker, Indonesia*  19
  
- 13. **Vanishing catch: The dilemma of a fishing community**  
*Santa Kumar, Fisherman, Nepal* 21
  
- 14. **No escape: From droughts to floods**  
*Sudip Damai, Construction worker, Nepal*  23
  
- 15. **Crop failure: Indebted by climate change**  
*Gangamaya Purja, Agriculture labourer, Nepal*  24
  
- 16. **Between floods and heatwaves:  
A story of resilience in a changing climate**  
*Jovelyn Cottelion, Street vendor, Philippines* 25
  
- 17. **To higher ground: Eric's dream of a better life**  
*Eric Ydio, Construction worker, Philippines*  27
  
- 18. **Traversing typhoons: Margilita's unwavering resilience**  
*Margilita Sison, Greengrocer, Philippines*  28

# Cyclone's wrath: Constantly on the move to rebuild

## Mohammad Mofizul Islam

*Daily wage worker, Bangladesh*



*"After the destructions caused by Cyclone Aila, there was no work here. It became so hard to feed my family,"* says Mohammad Mofizul Islam, a 46-year-old father of two, about the devastating aftermath of cyclone Aila in his village.

Mohammad hails from Gorkumarpur village in Shyamnagar, Bangladesh, where he lives with his family of 10. His village, a coastal area close to the Sundarbans, is severely impacted by increasing intensity of cyclones, cyclone-triggered rains, and subsequent floods. Storms and cyclones destroy the river embankments, increasing salinity of soil, contributing to river erosion. Mohammad, like many others in his village, used to be dependent on agriculture, however increasing salinity has rendered the agricultural land unproductive.

*"Due to salinity, people can't farm any crops in their lands now,"* laments Mohammad.

The once-fertile fields that supported entire communities are now barren, replaced by shrimp farms that require minimal human labour. The loss of traditional livelihoods has forced many to seek work elsewhere, contributing to the ongoing cycle of displacement and poverty. *"I'd say 70 people out of 100 from our village leave the village for their livelihoods."* Many are forced to take on dangerous and low-paying jobs, such as working in brick kilns or fishing in the deep sea. The village becomes a ghost town, populated mainly by the elderly who are unable to work.

In the past three decades, Mohammad has migrated to multiple locations seeking greener pastures, within and outside Bangladesh including a challenging period of exploitation in Saudi Arabia. Mohammad's journey as a migrant started at the tender age of 13 to supplement his father's meagre income and ensure his family's survival. He has worked as a labourer on fishing boats, venturing as far as Mongla, living and working on the vessels for months at a time. However, his life has been fraught with the harsh realities of unpredictable weather and its uncertainties.

Bangladesh, due to its unique geographical location, is significantly prone to tropical cyclones. Coastal areas like Mohammad's village, experience direct and more devastating impacts in times of intense cyclones like floods, river erosion due to their low-lying topography.



He recalls his terrifying experience of Cyclone Aila, where the high tides breached the river embankments, washing away everything. The devastating impact of cyclones, like Sidr and Aila, has become an all too frequent reality for Mohammad and his community and the entire region.

Mohammad describes his region as “neglected” in terms of development, *“Our Gabura and Paddapukur unions are the most neglected unions in Shyamnagar Thana. There are no proper roads, and it’s like an island with rivers flowing all around it. People here mostly are involved in shrimp farming, and very few lands can be used for crops; most of the lands are destroyed by salinity,”* says Mohammad. A significant portion of Shyamnagar Thana lives below the poverty line. Existing precarities like these are further compounded with the increasing frequency and intensity of weather events like cyclones leading to loss of livelihood, damage and loss of property and food shortages.

Mohammad’s current work situation is unstable, forcing him to take on odd jobs, like day labour in other people’s homes, which earns him a meager 400 taka (\$3.35) per shift. This starkly contrasts with his experiences in Saudi Arabia, where he worked various jobs, from workshop labour to construction, earning 190 Riyal (\$52.11) per day in some jobs. His attempt to establish a shrimp farming business also failed due to disease and virus outbreaks, resulting in significant financial losses. This unfortunate turn of events underscores the challenges faced by individuals like Mohammad, who are constantly seeking viable livelihood options in the face of economic hardship and unpredictable circumstances.

Despite his years of hard work and sacrifice, Mohammad remains burdened by debt and faces an uncertain future. Mohammad

attributes the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters to “Allah’s punishment” for humanity’s disregard for the environment. He points to deforestation as a major contributing factor, stating, *“People are cutting down the trees now. Trees give us oxygen so that we can exist. The number of trees is decreasing and that’s why these natural calamities are happening so often.”*

Even today, Mohammad bears the weight of the disasters. Aila, even more intense than Sidr, caused such extensive damage that it took two and a half years to rebuild, leaving the community in a prolonged state of hardship and dependence on relief. The repeated losses and displacement have taken a toll on the community’s resilience.

Mohammad’s aspirations for the future are clear: *“I want to save up money to start a successful business.”* He recognises the financial struggles his family faces and aims to achieve stability and get out of debt. Providing a good education for his two sons and supporting his mother are also top priorities.

Mohammad’s journey of resonates with the hardships of many living in climate-vulnerable areas like the coastal areas of Bangladesh. Their lives are rife with the constant fear and threat of displacement to unfamiliar terrains of newer vulnerabilities. Improved infrastructure, sustainable livelihood opportunities and climate resilience must be prioritised to alleviate the ongoing cycle of poverty and displacement in communities like that of Mohammad.



# Fever dream: Pedaling through heat

**Yunus Howladar**

*Rickshaw puller, Bangladesh*

*"The heat is getting intense in Dhaka. When we migrated, it was hot, now it is much more than it was before,"* informs Yunus Howladar. Yunus, 55 years old, belongs to Patuakhali in Barisal, Bangladesh. Six years ago, he migrated to the city of Dhaka to work as a rickshaw puller.

In Patuakhali, Yunus was engaged in watermelon farming. The impact of recurrent floods on his livelihood and household back in his village finally made him take

the decision to migrate. *"Our house was destroyed and washed away by floods. The watermelons were also spoilt, they weren't even in a condition for us to sell them,"* says Yunus. The loss was devastating, leaving him with mounting debts. *"I was buried in loans and that's why I migrated,"* he informs.

After an arduous journey, Yunus and his family finally reached Dhaka. He started work as a rickshaw puller to support his family, an extremely physically-demanding job. He mentions, *"Pedal rickshaw is manual – I have to pedal it manually with my legs, unlike automatic electric rickshaws."* He ferries passengers across the city, working long hours, sometimes more than 12 hours in a day for a meagre income of 300 taka (\$1.68).

In the past few years, Dhaka has seen increasing heat. The city witnessed one of its most intense heatwaves in 2024. Such extreme temperatures, coupled with the physical exertion of pedaling a rickshaw, have limited Yunus' ability to work long hours and earn a decent living in Dhaka. *"Previously, I'd ride my rickshaw for 12 hours, but now I can only do 2-3 hours and then I need to take rest. It's very hard due to the heat,"* he explains. Yunus informs that he has ended up cutting his working hours short which impacts his daily wages due to the heat. *"I go out at 6 a.m. and return by 10 a.m. because I can't bear the heat,"* he says.





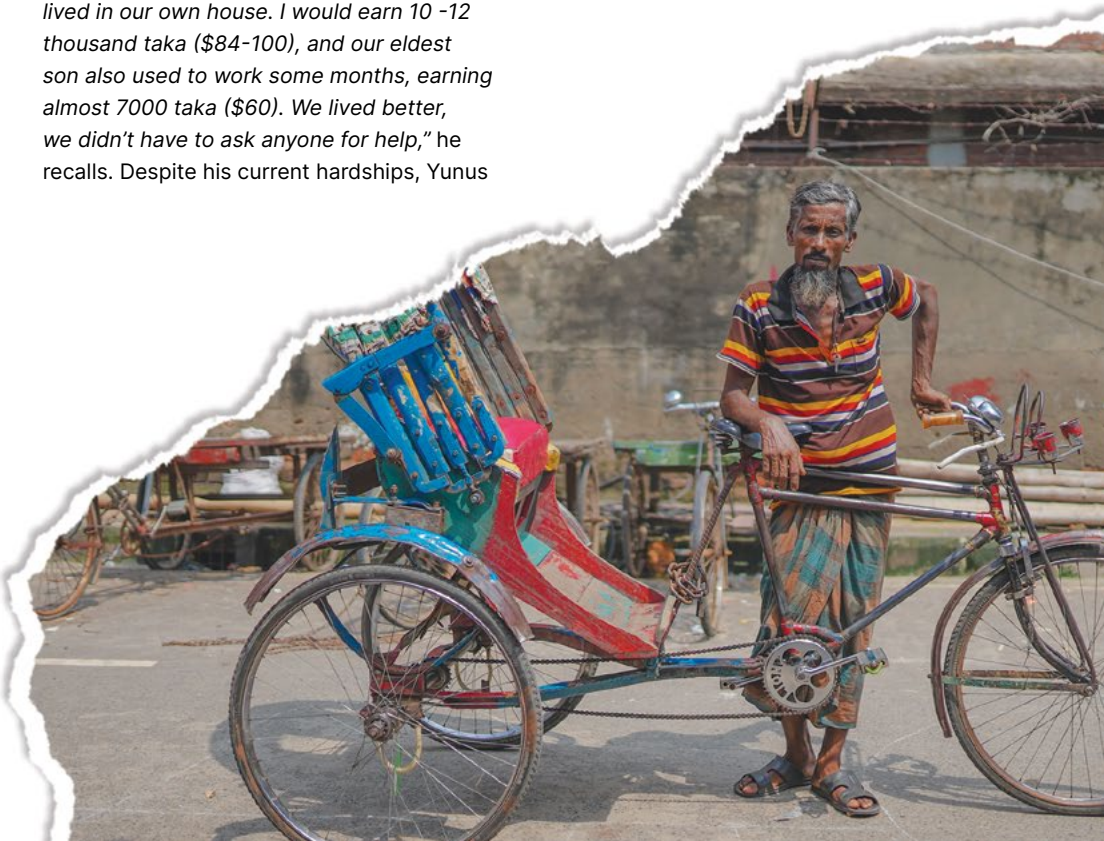
The heat has also taken a toll on his health. *“Due to the heat, I become sick. I sweat too much, and then it drains my energy leading to dehydration. So, I can’t drive the rickshaw for a long time.”* says Yunus.

Yunus fears for his family’s future. He says, *“We’re constantly struggling, and sometimes we even go hungry. A few days ago, when we were starving, one of the neighbors gave us some rice. For the last two days, we have not cooked anything.”* For him, the increasing heat is further worrisome, *“We’ll suffer more if excess heat continues like this. Our earnings and health condition will not improve if the heat is extreme. Previously I could earn 6,000 taka per month, but now it is lesser than that”,* he says. Yunus and his family have received little to no support from the government or non-profit organisations to cope with such distress in the city.

Yunus still longs for his life in the village, *“It was good back then in our village as we lived in our own house. I would earn 10 -12 thousand taka (\$84-100), and our eldest son also used to work some months, earning almost 7000 taka (\$60). We lived better, we didn’t have to ask anyone for help,”* he recalls. Despite his current hardships, Yunus

holds onto a dream of returning to his village eventually, *“If we could pay our loans back, then in the future, we’d like to go back to our village and build a home on our land”.* Their dream underscores the deep connection they still feel to their native home and expresses their desire to rebuild their lives in a place where they feel a sense of belonging and security.

Long-term weather changes such as heat in the past decades have only been intensifying causing devastating impacts on outdoor workers such as Yunus. With no support mechanisms or policies focused on protecting them, the impacts they currently face would only multiply in the future. There is an urgent need for solutions and policies to address the distinct challenges that the climate poses on workers and migrants to make cities more hospitable for them like Yunus and his family.



# Mother's resolve: Wading through climate extremes

## Israt Jahan

*Domestic worker, Bangladesh*

Israt Jahan, a 40-year-old, lives in Rajshahi, Bangladesh with her three children. She belongs to the village of Sirajganj where floods are recurrent. As a result, Israt and her family often faced house damage and health issues triggering them to finally migrate.

In Rajshahi, Israt works as a domestic worker to support her family. At destination, the unpredictable weather, intense summers and prolonged rains, adds another layer of difficulty for Israt and her family.

Despite these challenges, Israt's determination shines through. *"I want to raise my kids properly and educate them,"* she declares. *"No matter how hard it is, I will continue their education."*



Scan the QR code to see a short film on how Israt copes with the impacts of floods in Rajshahi.



# “Is it our sins?”

## Scrapping in extreme climate

### **Muhammad Bokul**

*Scrap dealer, Bangladesh*

Muhammad Bokul, a 38-year-old, former fisherman, belongs to Niyamotpur, Bangladesh. Once reliant on the bountiful rivers for their livelihood, Bokul and his community face the devastating consequences of drying waterways, forcing them to abandon their ancestral homes and fishing traditions.

Eventually to survive, Bokul and his family migrated to Rajshahi city. In the city, he works as a scrap collector and his wife as a domestic worker to support their family. Bokul and his family grapple with the dual challenges of poverty and extreme weather events at both these locations. Despite these hardships, Bokul remains hopeful for the future of his children and grandchildren.



Scan the QR code to see a short film on how Bokul copes with the depletion of water resources in his village.





# Feeling the heat:

## The volatility of brick making

### Ateeq Khan

*Brick kiln worker, India*

The intense heat of brick kilns is familiar to Ateeq Khan. A resident of Narayach village in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, Ateeq has worked as a labourer in brick kilns from the age of fifteen. He is the primary breadwinner in his family, comprising of his elderly parents, wife and five children. His work at the destination location primarily involves placing raw bricks into the furnace and removing them, once ready. For this labour-intensive task, he earns 300 rupees (less than \$4) a day.

Extreme heat combined with continuous exposure to dust and pollution have made the task of handling bricks challenging and hampered Ateeq's ability to work. He often suffers health-related issues due to the heat.

The nature of work in the brick kilns has also led to severe injuries for him, leaving him unable to work for days. His meagre income forces him to put off the possibility of medical care in such scenarios. Instead, he prioritises the care of his elderly parents and other family members. He worries about his family's well-being if he isn't around. *"If I do not work, my family would be on the streets,"* he says.

The number of employment days in the brick kilns is inconsistent. During rains, work halts as brick production (drying and firing bricks) is heavily reliant on dry weather. The changing weather patterns have further increased this inconsistency. Ateeq mentions, *"Earlier, we knew when it would rain but these days, the season is very unpredictable,"* further impacting his workdays and wages.

Ateeq's migration from his village near a river was also driven by weather events. During the monsoon season, floods were frequently complicating his ability to secure consistent work. Volatile weather patterns pushed him to find alternate sources of employment.





For almost six months a year, he migrates to neighbouring states like Chhattisgarh, where he works in construction sites apart from brick kilns.

Forced into a cycle of debt and migration, Ateeq says that he has taken a loan of 40,000 rupees (\$477) from a micro-finance group in his village to cope with household damages during floods, which he is paying back gradually. Despite working tirelessly, he admits that he is not able to consistently meet the basic needs of his family due to low wages. He informs, *“Usually, what we get is subsistence money for food on a weekly basis for daily expenses.”* Moreover, when he works in other states, he is hesitant to insist on timely payments, fearing job loss.

Ateeq’s children attend the local government school. However, he is unsure of his ability to give them a better future. *“Humari koi aukat nahi hai ki hum unko koi naukari dila sake*

*(I do not have the capacity to be able to get my children a job),”* he says. His current focus is on his oldest daughter’s wedding. *“I work overtime to get my daughter married,”* he notes.

There has been some respite for Ateeq in the past year. Through the support of a local non-profit organisation working with Migrants Resilience Collaborative (MRC), he received crucial assistance in the form of access to a BOCW card.<sup>1</sup>

The harsh realities faced by labourers in rural India are exacerbated by changing weather patterns and systemic challenges. Even as support from non-profit organisations provides some relief for internal migrants such as Ateeq, there is a pressing need for broader systemic solutions to ensure sustainable livelihoods for workers during this growing climate crisis.

<sup>1</sup> A BOCW card is an identification card issued to registered construction workers in India, granting them access to government-provided social security and welfare benefits under the 1996 BOCW Act.



# “Rains have become our enemy”

## The life of a distress migrant

**Lingappa Thimmappa**

*Construction worker, India*



*“The rains have become our enemy,”* laments Lingappa. The life of the 36-year-old farmer from Gunjur village, Raichur district, in the southern Indian state of Karnataka is a testament to the resilience of India’s rural populace in the face of climate change. Unpredictable weather patterns have altered the lives of many, like Lingappa and his family, who have deep roots in agriculture. *“My father owns three acres of land. We used to lease more but erratic rains have forced us to seek other options,”* he says.

The district where Lingappa hails from, is home to the Raichur Thermal Power Station (RTPS). Deforestation caused by the coal

industry, coupled with erratic rainfalls have left his once lush village barren. Their once-fertile land nestled near the Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers now yields poor harvests, even of cotton which is more resistant to unpredictable rains. When the crops failed, moneylenders came knocking. *“We couldn’t bear the shame of not repaying our debts, so we left,”* he says. Mounting debts and failed crops forced Lingappa and many others like him to abandon their ancestral homes and seek economic alternatives in cities. *“Migration is our only way to cope,”* he says with a sigh.



Many from Lingappa's village migrate to neighboring Southern Indian states like Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. He, however, prefers to be closer to home, migrating repeatedly to the metropolitan city of Bengaluru. *"It's not perfect here but everyone speaks Kannada, so we feel less like strangers,"* he says.

Lingappa and his wife Mahadevi's hands are calloused from digging, mixing concrete, and hauling building materials. *"We work as labourers doing whatever we can to survive,"* he says. They work tirelessly but rarely enjoy a fixed income. Some weeks, they work for six days. Others, they manage far fewer. *"Sometimes we earn 20,000 rupees (\$238) a month, sometimes 25,000 (\$298), depending on the availability of work,"* he says. After covering their basic necessities, they manage to save a small amount. This is quickly depleted during emergencies, festivals, and when supporting the family back home.

Work fluctuates with the weather and the demand for construction. During the 2024 water crisis in Bengaluru, migrant workers like Lingappa and Mahadevi lost work for days on end. Construction work halted since water shortages meant cement could not be mixed. Lingappa points out that there wasn't enough water to even wash up after a day's labour. His family had to buy drinking water which put additional strains on their finances. They had to borrow money from friends and family in their community. *"It was a difficult time but we supported each other to get through it. Here in the city, we rely on each other. We borrow, we lend, we get by."*

Lingappa's family resides in a makeshift shelter that has no running water or electricity. It is a far cry from the life they had in their village where they enjoyed fresh air and clean water. *"The changing climate has*

*robbed us of our homes, our livelihoods, and our dignity,"* he says. Their home, a tarpaulin-covered shed, offers little protection from the monsoon rains or the scorching summers. The roof leaks and their food frequently spoils. Lingappa points out that access to affordable housing would transform his experience of the city. *"A pucca house or a dedicated housing colony would provide us with much-needed security and stability. Reliable electricity would not only improve our living conditions but also ensure our children can study and have a chance at a better future."*

As erratic weather patterns and crop failures drive millions from their rural homes, the need for comprehensive support systems that connect climate change, labour rights, and migration policies becomes urgent. Lingappa's story highlights the urgent need for systemic solutions that address the root causes of climate-induced migration and pave way for a more sustainable and equitable future for all. *"We are not asking for much,"* Lingappa says. *"Just a chance to live with dignity and to provide for our families so that we can build a better tomorrow."*



# Living season by season: The life of a farm worker

**Rajya Patle**

*Sugarcane worker, India*



*"The weather is changing rapidly, and it's affecting everyone here,"* says Rajya Janglya Patle. The 35-year-old farm worker lives with his family of seven, including his wife, children, and elderly parents in Bodla village, in the Satpura ranges of Maharashtra, Western India.

Characteristic to hilly terrains, agriculture here is entirely rainfed. The state of Maharashtra has been grappling with severe droughts and poor rainfall since 2013 and its impact did not spare Rajya's village. Erratic rains, droughts and heat waves have rendered their agricultural land unproductive. Crop failures are frequent, leaving them with little to sustain themselves. *"There's*

*absolutely no work or other way to earn money in our village. Our village is in the Satpura hills, so summers are getting hotter and hotter. With no water, our crops are burning up, and we're producing much less. Our children have to drop out of school. We can't afford proper medical care when we fall sick. There are times when we go hungry,"* says Rajya.

Under these circumstances, meeting even their basic needs becomes a challenge for Rajya's family. Savings carefully set aside for emergencies are quickly depleted. Desperate to find a way out, they often resort to selling their livestock, including buffaloes and cows. The unbearable heat, coupled with

limited water supplies and fodder shortages, exacerbates the situation, leading to significant livestock losses.

Despite their reluctance, Rajya and his family are often forced to borrow money from relatives, neighbours, or even moneylenders to tide over the lean periods, trapping them in a cycle of debt. Low employment, suppressed wages, and the crushing weight of debt constantly compels agricultural labourers to seek employment elsewhere to repay their loans.

To supplement their meagre income, Rajya and his family, like many others from his village, undertake seasonal migration to other districts in Maharashtra and Gujarat for five to six months every year, where they engage in work in the sugarcane sector, or other agricultural activities.

The sugarcane sector, notorious for its backbreaking labour demands and informality, often absorbs its workers into cycles of debt bondage. *"We have to leave our families to repay our loans, and the*

*loans we take from moneylenders and contractors put us in a constant cycle of debt,"* Rajya says.

He notes that the lack of communication, education, and awareness about government programs pushes families like his to miss out on crucial support. *"We need help to stay in our villages,"* he emphasises. *"Investing in sustainable agriculture, providing alternative livelihoods, and improving access to education and healthcare are what we need."*

Rajya's story is a stark reminder of how the environmental crisis intersects with broader issues like poverty, inequality, and a lack of access to basic services. Poor infrastructure coupled with little awareness about public schemes hinders access to essential services. There is an urgent need for comprehensive solutions that address both environmental and socioeconomic challenges faced by vulnerable communities like that of Rajya.





# Raging rivers: Rebuilding after floods

## Bahadur Bhuiya

*Agricultural labourer, India*

Bahadur Bhuiya, 50 years old, belongs to Chandpur, a village in northern Bihar, India. The village is precariously situated at the confluence of three rivers, the Kosi, the Champa, and the Mahananda. Without homestead land of his own, Bahadur along with his family lives in a temporary mud house, highly susceptible to the impacts of flooding. *“At present, we inhabit a kuccha house situated on another individual's land. In exchange, we work as labourers for him (the landlord), he compensates us sometimes.”*

Recurring floods force his community to evacuate yearly. *“We take to the roadside and utilise plastic materials or tarpaulins to put up temporary shelters,”* Bahadur explains. His family has been displaced and relocated at least four times.

Bahadur began migrating to cities for employment opportunities when he was 20 years old. Today, his two sons migrate to support the family.



Scan the QR code to see a short film on how Bahadur copes with the impact of recurring floods.



# Moving for scraps: The migrant struggle

**Shukurudin Mondal**  
*Ragpicker, India*

Shukuruddin Mondal, 53, belongs to Karimpur village in West Bengal, India. Extreme weather events like floods and heat in his village forced Shukuruddin to migrate for better opportunities.

Shukuruddin, who used to be a farmer, now works as a rag-picker in Hebbal, Bengaluru with an income of Rs 400-500 (\$4.76 - 5.96) daily, barely enough to get by. Increasing heat in Bengaluru is proving to be no less severe. *"During the summer, it's hot inside the houses. We don't have electricity here. How will we sleep at night? Some people sleep outside at night. Some try to sleep, while others just end up sitting. That's how people try to survive,"* he explains.

After 15 years in Bengaluru, Shukuruddin remains trapped in debt, barely managing to sustain himself.



Scan the QR code to see a short film on how Shukuruddin copes with the impact of excess heat.





# From paddy fields to plantations: Between exploitation and survival

## Nirwana

*Plantation worker, Indonesia*

*"We cannot rely on the seasons anymore. Climate change has taken that away from us",* says 36-year-old Nirwana about her life in the palm oil plantations of Central Kalimantan, Indonesia where she lives with her husband and daughter.

Unpredictable rains and crop failure in her village drove Nirwana to migrate to the palm oil plantations, seven years ago. Originally from the remote village of Bontobajinema, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, Nirwana and her family farmed rice for generations. *"Back home, the rains used to be our lifeline. Now, we don't know when the rain will come.",* she informs. Untimely advent of rains and

subsequent droughts forced Nirwana's family into a dire situation. *"The seasons had become chaotic, and our crops were failing. We never knew when to plant, or how much we could grow. The land couldn't feed us anymore."* In the face of adversity, marked by poor harvests and mounting debts, Nirwana and her husband made the difficult decision to mortgage their land to pay for their trip to Central Kalimantan. *"Here, we could at least find work in the palm oil plantations. It was our only option,"* explains Nirwana about their decision to migrate, leaving behind their ageing parents.



*"Life in the plantations in Central Kalimantan is not devoid of weather extremities and hardships. The heat is worse here,"* says Nirwana. Adding to this, early and long hours of backbreaking work, lesser wages and exposure to hazardous chemicals are typical to the daily lives of plantation workers. In the heart of Indonesia's palm oil industry, Nirwana mixes fertilizer in a warehouse from dawn until late afternoon. *"We have to pack 250 sacks a day, and sometimes the fumes make me dizzy,"* she explains. The extreme heat, exacerbated by climate change, and the chemicals Nirwana handles every day, make her job both physically exhausting and dangerous.

Nirwana recalls 2019 to be a particularly challenging year in the plantation, where she had to continue working amidst the haze and smoke. Indonesia witnessed one of its most devastating forest fires in 2019 caused by the burning of peatlands, exacerbated by prolonged dry seasons and El Nino phenomenon. Peatlands, highly inflammable, are typically cleared to make way for palm oil cultivation through the slash and burn technique. This directly puts the health of plantation workers at risk due to the dense haze and fine particles of pollutants causing severe respiratory and cardiovascular issues.

Migrants in labour-intensive sectors, such as palm oil, are particularly vulnerable, as they often work outdoors or in conditions exacerbated by changing weather conditions. Apart from increasing heat, untimely rains pose a significant challenge for Nirwana and her family. With the rains comes a stop to most work in the plantations, resulting in wage loss for workers. The unpredictability of rains has increased uncertainty, as earlier, prior to monsoon season, they would be able to accumulate enough to be able to cope with the limited or no income during this period. Nirwana informs, *"Maybe the rains could come again. But for now, we will keep working and saving."*

Despite the hardships, Nirwana and her family are determined to survive. They work tirelessly, they have finally reclaimed their land in Sulawesi. Yet, the prospects of returning home seem distant. Nirwana's hopes now comprise of a better future for her daughter, Humairah. *"I want her to study and have a better life,"* she says with a note of hope in her voice. *"I don't want her to end up like me, working in the fields or factories, always worried about the weather and debt."*

In spite of their essential role in supporting the informal economy, internal migrants like Nirwana are often excluded from social support systems. Across the region, migrants face significant barriers to accessing social protections due to legal or administrative limitations. Nirwana's story, like so many others, underscores the need for systemic changes. Climate change has upended traditional ways of life, driving families away from their homes and into uncertain futures. What families like Nirwana's need, is not just immediate relief, but long-term solutions that address both the impacts of climate change and the economic vulnerabilities that come with migration. If urgent action is not taken, the future for such workers could be filled with more hardships. As Nirwana puts it, *"We need help, not just for us, but for our children. If nothing changes, their future will be just as hard as ours."*





# Tides of uncertainty: A journey amidst climate chaos

**Ichsan Basri**

*Fisherman, Indonesia*



*"Sometimes, when there is a storm at sea, you encounter waves of 4-5 meters, and such strong winds. If the weather is like this, we can't predict it",* says Ichsan Basri, a 33-year-old fisherman from Jakarta, Indonesia.

Ichsan's life is deeply intertwined with the unpredictable rhythms of the sea. For over a decade, he worked in a restaurant, only turning to fishing in 2018. He started work as a fisherman with the hopes of earning enough to migrate abroad. However, with the amount of capital required for his eventual migration, Ichsan continues as a fisherman. His days include long hours of work. *"The workday starts in the late afternoon, casting the nets from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Later, we pull the nets from 12 midnight to 7 a.m. It's 10, sometimes*

*12 hours a day, with only brief breaks for rest and repair of nets,"* he informs.

The erratic weather patterns have made his livelihood even more precarious. According to Ichsan, the extreme and erratic weather events, that are now more frequent and unpredictable, have increased the vulnerability of fishermen like him. His fishing routine has always been in alignment with the seasons. In the west monsoon, small-scale fishers do not undertake fishing due to rough seas, leaving them without income. As a result, many small-scale fishers opt to work on larger fishing boats that can go further out to sea and withstand storms, high waves, and other harsh weather conditions. The rising sea temperatures affect fish migration patterns.



Ichsan informs, *“Being a fisherman really depends on the season. We usually use the west and east seasons. If it’s the west season, it means it’s rainy and the waves are usually big. If it’s the east season, it’s sunny. So, during the western season, I often go on a big ship that takes 2 months to return, basically 75 days.”* As storms with high waves are becoming increasingly common and unpredictable, such fixed patterns of work, for fishermen like Ichsan, are being disrupted, and putting their lives at risk. He says, *“When a storm hits, we’re forced to stop work. It’s a constant battle against nature, and our livelihoods hang in the balance.”*

The impact of erratic and unpredictable weather patterns on Ichsan’s livelihood is profound, leading to reduced fish stocks, which makes it difficult to earn a stable income. No written agreement, no insurance — just a shared hope for a good catch. *“During Eid in 2024, I went to sea for 2 months, but I only caught a little. I brought home about 2 million rupiah (\$130), my wife and children were not able to buy any clothes for Eid. My wife cried and I cried too.”*

Ichsan’s struggle with unpredictable tides, precarious income, and the looming threat of climate change reflects a larger crisis among Indonesian fishermen, where debt, extreme weather, and dwindling catches paint a stark picture of their fight for survival. Ichsan and his family live in extreme distress without any assistance or coping support from employers, governments or non-profit organisations. Despite this, he still has an unfulfilled dream of wanting to go abroad and earn better for his family. In fact, Ichsan moved from an urban area due to promises of a job on foreign fishing vessels and Tegal where he resides is a major hub of agencies that facilitate fisher candidate for jobs abroad.

Ichsan’s story underscores the urgent need for systemic solutions that address the root causes of climate change and its impact on vulnerable communities. Providing fishermen with access to sustainable fishing practices, alternative livelihood opportunities, and social safety nets can help them adapt to the changing climate and secure a more stable future.



# Rising above waters: A migrant's pursuit to stability

**Arif Supriyanto**

*Factory worker, Indonesia*



Arif Supriyanto and his family from Bekasi Regency, Indonesia face the threat of intensifying floods yearly. *"I've been living in this housing complex for 14 years, and we experience floods every year."* The situation became extremely critical in 2014, when the floodwaters rose to chest-level, forcing his then seven-months-pregnant wife to evacuate through the dangerous floods.

The floods, worsened by unchecked industrial expansion, have become a regular crisis. Wage cuts due to flood-related work absences, loss and damage of property and belongings, frequent bouts of flu and fever put Arif and his family in precarious conditions. *"As the head of the family, I hope to find a stable job,"* he asserts, highlighting the struggle for economic stability in the face of climate-induced challenges. *"We want our children to advance further than we did,"* Arif declares, encapsulating the hopes and aspirations of a generation striving for a brighter future.



Scan the QR code to see a short film on how Arif struggles with economic stability due to climate events.





# Vanishing catch:

## The dilemma of a fishing community

**Santa Kumar**

*Fisherman, Nepal*

*"The river used to give us life, but now it feels like it's slipping away",* says 34-year-old Santa Kumar Majhi from the rural municipality of Champadevi in Nepal. The calloused hands of the father of six are a testament to a life of labour. He belongs to the community of Majhis, an indigenous group associated with fishing and boating along the riverbanks

of the inner Terai region. Santa Kumar who was taught how to fish by his father says, *"Fishing has been part of my family's legacy for generations, but it's no longer enough."*

The community's way of life has been severely disrupted by development projects, environmental degradation, and overfishing. There was a time when the fishing community used to catch enough to feed their families. Over the last several years, water levels in the once-abundant rivers of Sunkoshi and Likhu have dropped. *"There are about 80 Majhi households here, and most of us depend on the rivers. The water is reducing, the fish are disappearing, and with them, our ability to survive,"* Santa Kumar notes.

The Majhi community has, in addition to fishing, also relied on small-scale agriculture to make ends meet. However, irregular weather patterns, including prolonged droughts and unseasonal rains, have ravaged farmlands too. Most in the community are landless labourers who own tiny parcels of land. Droughts have reduced grazing pastures, impacting livestock and crop yields. *"I work on my small farm, but it's not enough. The crops fail often, and we barely make it through the year. It's ruining our harvests,"* Santa Kumar says. In recent years, many from the community have had to leave their farmlands fallow.



The intensifying impacts of climate change intersects with social and economic challenges such as limited access to education, healthcare, and stable employment for vulnerable communities like the Majhis. Many in the community, including Santa Kumar, are not educated and have little formal training or vocational skills. *“There are few opportunities for us,”* he admits. *“Most young people are forced to leave home for work, but even then, it’s hard to find good jobs.”*

The Majhis largely live under the poverty line, face social exclusion and caste-based discrimination. Santa Kumar admits that his family struggles to even make it through for a few months of the year. With six children to care for, his eldest daughter has already begun working in Kathmandu as a domestic worker while his son has taken on daily wage labour in the village. *“I wanted my children to get an education, to have a better life than me,”* he says, his voice heavy with regret. *“But we had no choice. They had to work to help us survive.”*

Santa Kumar emphasises the need for systemic support. He believes vocational training and a push for small-scale businesses will help his community diversify their incomes instead of only depending on fishing and agriculture. *“Without support, our children will continue to leave for cities, and our village will slowly disappear,”* he says. Despite the hardships life keeps throwing his way, Santa Kumar’s determination when it comes to his family’s survival is unwavering. *“I have some hope left,”* he says, his eyes fixed on the horizon. *“If we get help, maybe my children will not have to struggle like I did. Maybe they can go back to school. But without help, we will keep losing everything – the land, the rivers, our future.”*





# No escape: From droughts to floods

**Sudip Damai**

*Construction worker, Nepal*

Severe drought and unemployment forced Sudip Damai's family to flee their village in Sindhuli, Nepal. *"There was no rain there, so we couldn't grow crops. What will we eat?"* Sudip recalls, explaining his migration to Kathmandu in 2003.

Working in construction, Sudip and his wife now live in a slum near the Manohara river where they face threats of floods annually. *"During the rains, there is no employment here, so we go to our relatives' homes to borrow money to buy food and fill our stomachs,"* Sudip informs.

Loss of livelihood, health issues, mounting debts are regular occurrences in Sudip's life now, owing to the increasing frequency of floods in Kathmandu. Unexpected setbacks like workplace accidents have worsened Sudip's already-precarious conditions in Kathmandu. Sudip and his family are now often reliant on loans and help from relatives.



Scan the QR code to see a short film on how Sudip copes with the impact of floods at his destination location.

# Crop failure: Indebted by climate change

## Gangamaya Purja

*Agriculture labourer, Nepal*

Gangamaya Purja, 40 years old, belongs to the indigenous Chepang community in Nepal. She lives in Pyauli, Madi Municipality, within the Chitwan National Park, home to several landless indigenous families displaced by floods and landslides. Her family has faced repeated displacements due to extreme weather events since 2002. *"I remember, in 2017, during the monsoon season, the floods arrived at 6 in the morning. It collapsed the houses and washed them away."*

Gangamaya, who works as a small-scale farmer, continues to live under the threat of displacement with floods, droughts, and crop failures becoming recurrent. The flood waters bring a host of diseases like pneumonia, diarrhoea making their daily lives even more difficult. Gangamaya, like many others in her settlement, survives by selling cattle and taking loans from moneylenders.



Scan the QR code to see a short film on how Gangamaya copes with agricultural distress as a result of recurrent floods, droughts and crop failures.





# Between floods and heatwaves: A story of resilience in a changing climate

**Jovelyn Cottelion**  
Street vendor, Philippines



*"During the rainy season, it is difficult to sell items. We end up losing income for the day,"* says Jovelyn Cottelion, a 45-year-old mother of four. Jovelyn originally belongs to Payatas, Quezon city in the Philippines.

After migrating for multiple years in search of better opportunities, Jovelyn with her family, in the past year, returned to Payatas. *"When my husband's work contract ended, and we didn't have any income. We had to move back to Payatas because we couldn't afford the rent."* she informs.

Her husband, Eric is the main breadwinner but to supplement the family's income, Jovelyn works as a street vendor, selling eggs. Like many in her community, she has

seen the once predictable climate become increasingly erratic, bringing new challenges to her already-difficult life. She lives in a coastal area that has been severely impacted by climate change. Typhoons, once seasonal, now strike with unexpected frequency and intensity. Each storm brings with it floods, leaving the community vulnerable.

Jovelyn's struggle is made worse by extreme weather events that regularly hit her coastal areas. *"When it rains heavily, it floods our house, and we cannot even sell anything from the store."* The flooding of the streets and homes makes it impossible for Jovelyn to sell, losing a day's income. She informs, *"if it floods during rains, only a few people come out to buy and the sale is much lesser. I am unable to even get raw products from the market."*



Her family's income is also affected by the rising temperatures. *"When it gets too hot, I can't let the children go outside. My husband has high blood pressure, and the heat makes it worse,"* Jovelyn explains. The scorching heat not only affects the health of her family, but also limits her ability to run the store. *"On really hot days as well, fewer people come outside to buy."* This means, the little income she makes from her store reduces further with different weather events. Her husband, a construction worker, is also affected by the heat. *"He doesn't get called for work as often because it's too hot for work to continue."*

The challenges Jovelyn faces are further compounded by the rising cost of goods due to weather disruptions. *"The price of everything is going up,"* she says. *"I used to buy and sell 50 trays of eggs, but now I can only afford to buy 10 trays."* The combination of extreme weather and increasing prices has left Jovelyn with fewer products to sell, which cuts deeply into her profits. *"We're barely making enough to cover our expenses for water, electricity, and food."*

Jovelyn's situation reflects a broader crisis in the Philippines, as the country is one of the most disaster-prone, facing an average of twenty typhoons and torrential rains each year.

The constant struggle to make ends meet has pushed Jovelyn and her family into debt. *"If we don't make enough, we owe money to Bombay (private money lenders),"* she says, referring to local private creditors. With her husband only earning minimum wage and construction work being unreliable, their financial situation remains fragile. Despite her struggles, Jovelyn continues to hope for a better future for her children. She informs, *"If we could receive extra support for the education expenses of our children, it would really support our family. Especially my young children, who are still in elementary school. The income from construction is minimal."* With limited coping mechanisms and support from governments for families such as Jovelyn's, the cycle of poverty persists, made worse by the changing and harsh climate conditions.

The impacts of climate change are not just environmental; they exacerbate pre-existing social and economic challenges. Many like Jovelyn work in precarious jobs that provide little in terms of security or benefits. Urgent action is needed to ensure a more secure future for vulnerable individuals such as Jovelyn and her family.



# To higher ground: Eric's dream of a better life

## Eric Ydio

*Construction worker, Philippines*

Eric Ydio is a 42-year-old construction worker from the flood-prone Payatas area of Quezon City, Philippines. He has faced the harsh realities of extreme weather events like floods and typhoons. He vividly remembers: *"When I was ten years old, Pangasinan was flooded like the sea. If it floods for a day and it's harvest time, it's all gone, a total loss."* Crop failures forced him to migrate at 14 in search of a better livelihood.

Eric and his family continue to face threats of floods and extreme heat. *"Last week, the creek nearby overflowed. I couldn't go to work because our house was flooded,"* he shares. Typhoons and extreme weather further disrupt his income, forcing him to borrow money to cover basic expenses.

*"Sometimes, we really run short of money, even just for our allowance,"* Eric admits, revealing the extent of their hardship.



Scan the QR code to see a short film on how Eric copes with the impacts of excess heat and typhoons.



# Traversing typhoons: Margilita's unwavering resilience

## Margilita Sison

*Greengrocer, Philippines*

Margilita Sison, 58 years old, is a resident of San Rafael village in the Philippines. She has endured a lifetime of hardships due to extreme weather events. Margilita has faced the occurrence of typhoons since she was a child. These recurring typhoons and impacts on her livelihood, led to her eventually migrating out. At destination locations, she has lived in several flood-prone areas, each move bringing new challenges for Margilita and her family.

Margilita and her family are currently facing the devastating aftermath of Typhoon Karina, which destroyed their crops and savings. Her husband's lack of fixed income adds to their financial strain.

Margilita hopes to move her family down the mountains, closer to town, where the impacts of floods and landslides on her crops and house would be lesser.



Scan the QR code to see a short film on how Margilita copes with the impacts of typhoons at her village.







People's Courage  
International