

A young girl with dark hair and a nose ring is looking upwards with a concerned expression. She is holding a colorful, patterned cloth or bag near her face. The background is a dark, heavily cracked and textured wall, suggesting a state of decay or distress.

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TRAPPED BY CLIMATE

Rising extreme weather
events expose millions
to trafficking



FOREST RIGHTS ACT

Displaced Chhattisgarh tribal
communities demand land
under a rarely used clause

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NUCLEAR ENERGY

Science is close to cracking the
fusion code as countries and
companies show interest

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West Bengal's Sundarbans region has seen five severe cyclones over the last decade that destroyed homes and livelihoods. Young girls desperate to escape the devastation and hunger are the primary targets of traffickers



CLIMATE'S TRAFFICKING CONNECT

Disasters and poverty fuel human trafficking. Increase in extreme weather events makes millions more vulnerable to this trap. **TARAN DEOL** and **SHUCHITA JHA** travel to the frequently battered parts of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra to capture this often ignored aspect of climate change

It has been a stormy life for cousins Tisha and Salima. Growing up in the Sundarbans delta in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district, they remember cyclones as major milestones in their lives. Still in their teens, they have endured five severe cyclones in over a decade—one every other year. Each time a cyclone has hit their villages in the Sundarban police district subdivision, it has pushed them into a downward spiral of poverty. Trying to break the cycle has often ended in nightmare scenarios.

South 24 Parganas is not only affected by the maximum number of cyclones in the country and is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, according to the India Meteorological Department, it is also one of the country's poorest districts—37.2 per cent of the population here lives below the poverty line, shows data with the state government. As extreme weather events keep aiding and abetting poverty, their impacts on people's lives are devastating.

Salima's four-member family reached the breaking point on May 20, 2020, when cyclone Amphan made landfall on the West Bengal coast. "We used to live in Raidighi village along a tributary of the Matla river. Our mud-and-thatch house was on the river bank,"

Salima tells *Down To Earth* (DTE). “Amphan caused a massive tidal surge, washing away our house and all our belongings within minutes.” Salima’s mother, the family’s sole breadwinner who used to work as a farm hand for ₹2,000 a month, was rendered jobless as the saline water inundated farmlands in the village and made them unfit for cultivation. A year later in May 2021, as the family was still trying to pick up the pieces of their lives, cyclone Yaas delivered another blow.

Though it did not hit West Bengal directly, the state’s coastal areas experienced squalls, with 140-260 km per hour winds, and large-scale flooding.

“Yaas made it impossible to live in Raidighi. So, we moved in with Tisha’s family whose village Borocharanfuli lies further inland,” Salima recalls. But life was not easy there either. Tisha’s entire family worked as daily-wage agricultural labourers and could hardly make ends meet. “At times, to arrange food for the family we would sell a few chickens, but that could not sustain us for long,” Tisha tells DTE.

Soon, like everyone else around them, the cousins started looking for employment and income. Their desperate search ended a few months later when they encountered someone who at the time appeared to them as a “saviour”.

“The woman claimed to be from our village who worked in Delhi. She offered us jobs of domestic help in the national capital at a government official’s house,” Tisha recalls. It was an unbelievable offer: a monthly income of ₹10,000 each, with free lodging and food. Such a chance to escape a risky geography put all their doubts at bay. But when they reached Delhi on September 10, 2021, they realised that the offer was a ruse. The woman had sold them to a buyer in Delhi’s Shakti Vihar for ₹5 lakh each for forced prostitution, recount Salima and Tisha.

Young girls like Tisha and Salima are the preferred victims of human traffickers whose network has been growing because of frequent

THE LINK BETWEEN DISASTERS AND TRAFFICKING HAS EMERGED TIME AND AGAIN. ONE OF THE FIRST SUCH CASES WAS DURING THE BENGAL FAMINE OF 1943, WHEN KOLKATA’S SONAGACHI AREA BECAME KNOWN AS A RED-LIGHT AREA

cyclones and consequent chronic poverty in South 24 Parganas and the neighbouring regions.

Around the time when the traffickers lured Tisha and Salima to Delhi, they had also set a trap for two other sisters—Hadhira, 18, and Rania, 19—from Beluni village in the Sundarban police district. Located 24 km from Raidighi, Beluni was also severely battered by cyclones Amphan and Yaas. “We have no land and our

parents used to work as daily-wage labourers to feed our six-member family. After Amphan, when we had to rebuild our house, they could not go to work on a regular basis,” says Rania. The family’s dependence on government ration for survival deepened with recurring natural disasters.

The woman who trapped Tisha and Salima also made the same promises to Hadhira and Rania. The sisters landed in Delhi on October 1, 2021, and found themselves sold to a brothel for ₹4 lakh each.

All four girls were rescued by local police in Delhi, and sent back to their villages on October 23, 2021. When DTE met them in their villages early this year, they had already begun their search for another escape route from the vicious cycle of disasters and poverty irrespective of consequences.

A similar scenario is playing out in Odisha—a state where cyclones and floods are an annual occurrence. Ghasiram Panda, national manager of non-profit ActionAid India’s programme to end child marriage, notes an increase in such incidences in the state’s Ganjam and Gajapati districts after cyclones Titli and Fani hit in 2018 and 2019 respectively. These “marriages” are often a guise for trafficking, Panda says.

“While there has been an enormous amount of attention paid to the factors that shape vulnerability to human trafficking, such as poverty and uneven development, conflict and gender inequality, the debate of what enables these factors to exist in the first place is relatively less explored,” states a paper on communities in the Sundarbans,



Parents of a young girl in Marathwada region's Beed district, who was lured by a boy and got sold for sex work in Ahmednagar. Perpetual drought has led to abject poverty in the region

published in peer-reviewed journal *Anti-Trafficking Review* in 2017. "People here primarily rely on agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, and the collection of prawn seeds and non-timber forest produce for their livelihood," the paper says, adding that repeated natural disasters have a severe effect on such sources of income.

"Every time a cyclone hits, embankments collapse and farm lands get inundated by saline water. At times, salination is so high that it takes years for the land to become cultivable again," says Nihar Ranjan Raptan, founder-secretary of Goranbose Gram Bikash Kendra, a non-profit that works with communities in South 24 Parganas to combat human trafficking. "While some leave willingly in search of work, others are lured under false pretences of marriage or jobs. Incidences of child labour, child marriages and trafficking for bonded labour and forced prostitution increase after every disaster," he adds.

In West Bengal, apart from South 24 Parganas, districts such as North 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Medinipur, Jalpaiguri and the tea gardens of Alipurduar have emerged as hubs for human trafficking. "A majority of those living in the South and North 24 Parganas and Medinipur depend on nature for their livelihood. Repeated natural

disasters have a severe effect on them," says Mahua Sur Ray, chairperson of Child Welfare Committee, Kolkata.

Ananya Chakraborti, chairperson of the West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights, says the relation between trafficking and disasters has come to the fore time and again. The first such instance became apparent during the Bengal famine of 1943, when Kolkata's Sonagachi area flooded with people and soon came to be known as the red-light area. In fact, Chakraborti explains, human trafficking triggered by natural disasters has historically remained underreported because when a calamity strikes, the priority is to ensure that people are physically safe. "Looking at trafficking is always an afterthought," she adds.

This approach needs to be changed. Worldwide, there is a growing acceptance that climate change is fuelling frequent disasters, leading to poverty and displacement and creating a vulnerable group of population that is then targeted for trafficking. It is no coincidence that the hotspots of human trafficking are also the regions that are vulnerable to climate impacts and are the poorest. "The World Migration Report 2022", published every other year by the UN

ALL-AROUND THREAT

While coastal states of India are seeing a rapid increase in floods and cyclones brought on by the impacts of climate change, interior regions see slower effects such as droughts. As a whole, the country is at severe risk to climate change, says the Union government's Climate Vulnerability Index in 2019-20. Even Maharashtra, which is marked least at risk, has a high score of 0.42 out of 1. The growing threat of climate change impacts also increases the instances of displacement and migration, making people more vulnerable to trafficking. *Down To Earth* visited four states that see frequent climate change induced weather events as well as high numbers of trafficking cases

Climate Vulnerability Index (out of 1)

- Highly vulnerable states (0.58-0.67)
- Moderately vulnerable states (0.50-0.58)
- Low vulnerable states (0.42-0.50)

Districts with migration



DISTRICTS THAT SEE MIGRATION

Osmanabad, Mumbai, Solapur, Beed, Parbhani, Nanded, Latur, Nagpur, Pune

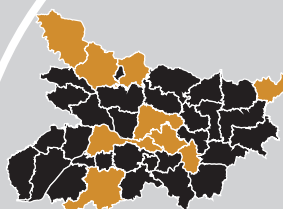
DESTINATIONS

Other parts of Maharashtra, Delhi, Goa, West Bengal, Rajasthan

Marathwada

- It is a severely drought prone region whose major crops—sugarcane and cotton—require water scarcity
- Poverty-ridden Beed, Osmanabad, Latur and Parbhani districts are major source points from where young girls are trafficked when parents migrate in search of work.
- During the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, some 32,000 women went missing from the state as a whole
 - The state government in 2021 commissioned 45 anti-human trafficking units across regions to curb the increase in such cases

BIHAR



DISTRICTS THAT SEE MIGRATION

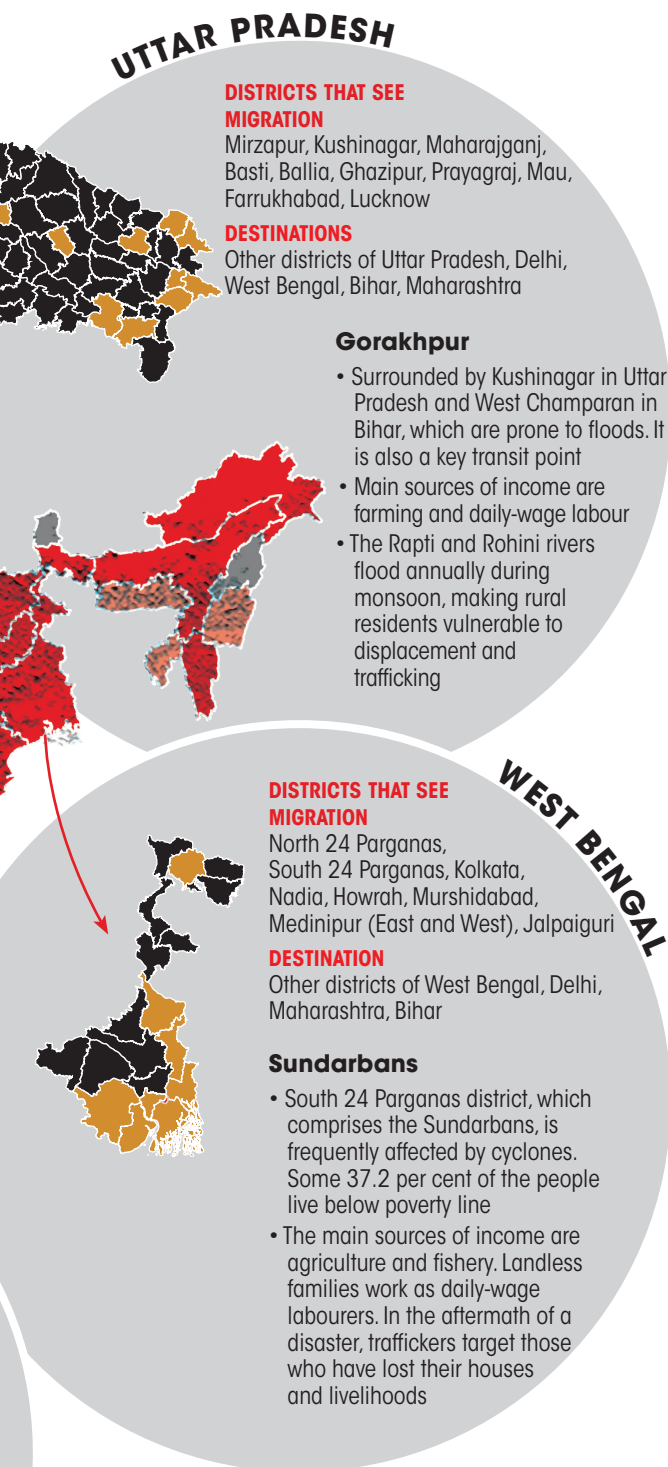
Patna, Kishanganj, Munger, Begusarai, Gaya, Sitamarhi, Samastipur, East and West Champaran

DESTINATIONS

Other parts of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, West Bengal, North Eastern states

Sitamarhi and Gaya

- Sitamarhi sees floods on the Bagmati river after the monsoon every year, which impacts livelihood. People migrate to Nepal and Kashmir to seek employment
- In the absence of parents, teenage boys are trafficked to factories in Jaipur, Hyderabad and Chennai. Every year around 200 boys from Sitamarhi are rescued in Jaipur alone
 - Gaya district is drought prone due to rocky terrain. People go to Uttar Pradesh and central India to work in brick-kilns, leaving their children as targets for traffickers



Source: "Climate Vulnerability Assessment for Adaptation Planning in India Using a Common Framework", Department of Science and Technology, 2019-20, "Report on Trafficking in Women and Children in India, 2002-2003", National Human Rights Commission, Institute of Social Sciences and UN Development Fund for Women

INFOGRAPHIC: SANJIT / CSE

International Organization for Migration, notes that more people are now displaced due to climate-induced disasters than due to conflicts, reversing a historical trend. Total internal displacement due to disasters, conflicts and violence increased from 31.5 million in 2019 to 40.5 million in 2020, despite containment measures to curb the COVID-19 pandemic. But some 30.7 million displacements in 2020 were triggered by disasters in 145 countries and territories. While storms accounted for 14.6 million displacements and floods for 14.1 million, extreme temperatures displaced 46,000 people and droughts 32,000 people. India reported nearly 4 million new displacements due to climate-induced disasters in 2020, the report notes.

These are the population targeted for trafficking. Latest data with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows in 2020, some 1,714 cases of human trafficking were registered, with "sexual exploitation for prostitution" (1,466), "forced labour" (1,452) and "domestic servitude" (846) being the top reasons. The cases involved 4,709 victims, of which 2,222 were under 18 years. Maharashtra and Telangana recorded the maximum human trafficking cases in the year (184 each), followed by Andhra Pradesh (171), Kerala (166), Jharkhand (140) and Rajasthan (128). Manika Kamthan, assistant professor at Symbiosis Law School in Pune has analysed two maps of India—one of flood-prone areas and the other showing trafficking hotspots. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal are common to both maps. Kamthan's analysis shows that trafficking in these states see a spike right after a flooding event. Bihar recorded an uptick in such cases after the Kosi river burst its banks and flooded half of the state in 2008, displacing more than 3 million people. Organisations working on anti-trafficking in Bihar say human trafficking is rife in districts of Saharsa, Supaul, Samastipur and Madhubani in Darbhanga, Madhepura, Purnia, Araria, Katihar, Naugachia and Bhagalpur that fall in the flood plain areas of the Kosi and Bagmati rivers.

"Disasters lead to a breakdown of social institutions, making food securing and humanitarian supplies 'difficult'. This leaves women and children 'vulnerable to kidnapping, sexual exploitation and trafficking'," Mondira Dutta, former professor and chairperson of the Centre for Inner Asian Studies at Jawaharlal

Nehru University's School of International Studies, writes in a 2017 paper published in the *European Scientific Journal*. "It is an extremely organised crime that thrives in the absence of a watchdog mechanism, at both the community and state levels," says Prabhat Kumar, deputy director of child protection at the non-profit Save the Children.

The UN Environment Programme estimates that globally, human trafficking rises by 20-30 per cent during a disaster. Under the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, human trafficking has been identified as a development challenge that should be eradicated by 2030. "Human trafficking is among the top three biggest criminal enterprises in the world. It follows drug trafficking and counterfeiting which are the other two largest criminal activities. Even in terms of organized [sic] crime, human trafficking also ranks third in the queue after drugs and arms smuggling," Dutta writes in her book *Disaster and Human Trafficking—Interlinks*, published in 2021.

The UN in its "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2020" says that "in 2018, for every 10 victims detected globally, about five were adult women and two were girls. About one-third of the overall detected victims were children, both girls and boys, while 20 per cent were adult men." South

Asia reported high cases for all groups—women (3,340), boys (1,874), girls (1,573) and men (857).

For the UN report, researchers analysed court cases of 233 trafficked persons to understand vulnerability of a geography or person. They found that a majority of the victims were reportedly in a condition of economic need, characterised by inability to meet basic requirements such as food, shelter or healthcare. Such victims constituted 51 per cent of the cases analysed, followed by children with dysfunctional families (20 per cent).

Just how vulnerable are certain populations to trafficking is highlighted in the experience of Mohammad Farookh, a resident of the flood-prone Bhulli village of Sitamarhi district, Bihar. He still shivers at the thought of the phone call he received in July last year, when he was in Kashmir. "From June to October every year, my village gets flooded. So we go to work in the brick-kilns in Kashmir," he tells DTE. "My neighbour called saying that my 15-year-old son Abdul had run away. My wife was alone, and I could not return to the village without finishing my contract," he adds. In January this year, non-profit Centre for Documentation, Information, Research, Education, Communication and Training (Centre DIRECT)

Bihar's Sitamarhi district floods from June to October, forcing people to move out for work. Their children are left behind and fall into labour traffickers' trap



rescued Abdul from a bangle factory in Jaipur along with 11 other boys from Sitamarhi district. Abdul says he had fled home after a man from the nearby village promised him ₹3,000 per month. “They were not even given proper food. They ate plain rice and leftovers. They are also still waiting for their hard-earned money,” says Farookh. The families are still in contact with the man who had lured the boys. “He keeps making promises, but never pays them,” adds Farookh.

Suresh Kumar, child rights activist and author of the book *Child Trafficking-Fight for Freedom* says, “The impact of climate change and extreme weather events is prominent in Bihar. While the northern part of the state is prone to floods, the southern regions see frequent droughts. There is poverty but no regular employment.” For instance, Kumar explains, in Gaya district in the south of Bihar, members of the Manjhi community work as agriculture labourers or in brick-kilns. Once the crop is harvested, they migrate to neighbouring states like Uttar Pradesh to seek work as daily-wage labourers in brick-kilns. Traffickers target the children of the Manjhi community when their families go out in search of work.

Rising floods have the same effect in Uttar Pradesh. In 1998, when Vijay from Pichhaura village in Uttar Pradesh’s Gorakhpur district was a small child, his house got destroyed by a heavy flooding in the river Rapti. The family was forced to move closer to the city and started living in the Gorakhpur Railway station with his five siblings—an older brother and four sisters. Making ends meet had always been a task for the family. So his brother had begun working when he was just 10 years old. “My brother got a job applying paint polish in Mumbai. He was supposed to get ₹4,000 a month,” recalls Vijay. “When he returned several months later, there was a wound on his torso. They had taken out his kidney. He went back to Mumbai to look for work. But this time he did not return,” Vijay says. His family believes his brother’s rest of the organs may have been harvested.

DISASTERS LEAD TO A BREAKDOWN OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, MAKING FOOD SECURING AND HUMANITARIAN SUPPLIES DIFFICULT. THIS LEAVES WOMEN AND CHILDREN VULNERABLE TO KIDNAPPING, SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND TRAFFICKING

There are several families like Vijay’s at the Gorakhpur railway station who have been displaced from their villages after floods. News of the three rivers, Rapti, Rohini and Ghaghara, overflowing makes headlines every year. In 2021, some 56,000 ha land across 391 villages was flooded, impacting 0.31 million people.

“Recurring floods are the root cause of trafficking in this region. The link may not necessarily be direct, but it is there and often overlooked,”

Brijesh Chaturvedi, programme head at Safe Society, a Gorakhpur-based non-profit working on empowerment of marginalised communities, tells DTE. Gorakhpur is flanked by Nepal on one side, and Kushinagar and Bihar’s West Champaran district on the other—all three are extremely prone to annual floods. The city also has an airport and a railway station, making it a key transit point for traffickers.

Data collected by Safe Society reveals that the majority of trafficking cases in Gorakhpur originate from Kushinagar and West Champaran. From April 2015 to February 2019, some 114 children were trafficked from the region using Gorakhpur as a transit point; 63 were from Bihar (including 36 from West Champaran), 13 from Kushinagar and four from Maharajganj. Safe Society’s analysis finds that trafficking cases from Kushinagar rose during and after monsoon seasons. For instance, between April 2015 and January 2016, seven children were trafficked from Kushinagar. This figure increased to 35 between February and July 2016. Anju Chaudhary, vice chairperson of Uttar Pradesh Women’s Commission, underlines similar concerns, but refrains from explicitly acknowledging a link between climate disasters and trafficking.

Umi Daniel, director, migration and education, Aide et Action International, says, “In India, we understand trafficking of women for sex trade. But a large number of people from vulnerable areas, especially the tribal belt, are being trafficked for labour. Debt-ridden

migrants are recruited by intermediaries and then forced into bonded labour.” He highlights that in tribal areas, a majority of people practise subsistence farming that is meant for personal consumption, not selling. With weather growing increasingly erratic and their crops failing, these people are now forced to move out. Central parts of India are witness to a slower onset of climate change like droughts. In these regions as well, there is increasing evidence of trafficking linked to dry spells and loss in agriculture.

The rain shadow region of Marathwada in Maharashtra is one of the most chronically drought-prone regions of the country. Earlier, only landless people migrated from the region. But now, even those who have 2.8-4 ha of farmland face financial disparity, and take up sugarcane cutting to make ends meet. Anu, a 15-year-old girl, lived with her parents in a village in Beed district (*name of the village withheld to protect identities*). “The family had some land, but the parents used to cut sugarcane locally in others’ fields and Anu was left alone for long hours. She struck a friendship with a boy from Ahmednagar, who made false promises and convinced her to leave the village with him,” says Manisha Tokle, a social activist working for the rights of sugarcane cutters and women in Beed district with the Women Sugarcane Cutters Labour Association and MAKAM (Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch). Anu was sold for sex work in Ahmednagar by the boy’s family, who brought her back to the village after the non-profits and local police got involved.

“Nowadays, traffickers target poor couples with daughters. Once the parents open up about their monetary problems, these traffickers offer to get their daughters married to some distant relative or friend, and also promise some money on the groom’s behalf. Sometimes girls as young as 12 or 13 are married off to 30- or 35-year-old men, who sell them for sex work in big cities,” says Tokle.

The Marathwada region also sees a drought every three years. “This increases unemployment, and hence migration rises in the area,” says Ashok

Tangde, who also works with Women Sugarcane Cutters Labour Association and MAKAM. “With this trafficking has also increased,” adds Ramesh Joshi of Pride India, a non-profit working on women empowerment in Osmanabad. Sugarcane cutters migrate to Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu in the south and Uttar Pradesh in the north, along with other districts of western Maharashtra, from October to March for as low as ₹200 per day. They leave their children with relatives, and sometimes return to find their daughters sold to traffickers in other cities.

Varsha Patil, chairperson of the Woman and Child Welfare Department, Latur district, tells DTE, “Most trafficking victims we interact with belong to poor families. Cases have increased in the last few years, but rescuing such victims is always a challenge.” The anti-human trafficking department of Latur began functioning since October 2021, when the Maharashtra government increased the strength of anti-human trafficking cells in the state from 12 to 45. The department, however, has trouble tracking traffickers as their *modus operandi* keeps changing. According to NCRB reports, 28,316 women went missing from Maharashtra in 2016. This increased to 29,279 in 2017 and to 33,964 in 2018. The number further rose to 38,506 in 2019 but fell to 32,283 in 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

A changing climate will only augment this trade. According to Overseas Development Institute: “There could be up to 325 million extremely poor people living in the 49 countries most exposed to the full range of natural hazards

THE UN ESTIMATES THAT GLOBALLY, HUMAN TRAFFICKING RISES BY 20-30 PER CENT DURING A DISASTER. IT IDENTIFIES HUMAN TRAFFICKING AS A DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE THAT SHOULD BE ERADICATED BY 2030

and climate extremes in 2030.” In a 2018 paper published in the *Miami Law Review*, Michael B Gerrard, Andrew Sabin Professor of Professional Practice and Director of the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law at Columbia Law School, US, writes: “At least 21 million people globally are victims of human trafficking, typically involving either sexual exploitation or forced labour. In the decades to come, climate

change will very likely lead to a large increase in the number of people who are displaced and thus vulnerable to trafficking.” Earlier in September 2021, the World Bank estimated 143 million would migrate within their countries by 2050 due to climate change related events in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America. The UN Convention to Combat Desertification also estimates that droughts could lead to the migration of 22 million more people in Africa, 12 million people in South America and 10 million people in Asia by 2059 (in comparison to the 2000-15 period). Such displacement after disasters leads to people becoming “easy targets for traffickers,” notes the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Across the globe, trafficking and its link to extreme weather events are coming to the fore. As per a 2016 report by the International Organisation for Migration, rising incidents of trafficking were first noticed in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004; in Indonesia, children were abducted and then put up for “adoption”. In Haiti, the 2010 earthquake exacerbated cases of trafficking. In the Philippines—where poverty and trafficking were already rampant—cases increased in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Thailand also saw a rise in human trafficking after this typhoon hit. Drought-affected migrants have also reportedly been smuggled from Cambodia to Thailand.

Droughts in African nations—much like in central India—have resulted in a rise in marriages of children as young as nine years old, solely because their parents don’t have the money to feed another mouth. Young girls, between 13 to 18 years of age were sexually exploited “by some NGO members, humanitarian staff, security forces, and men in positions of power and influence in exchange for money, food or other goods,” says a study by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), citing a survey by UNHCR & Save the Children-UK, 2002. A study published in *BMJ Global Health* also found evidence of forced early marriages in Iran after an earthquake and floods hit Bushehr and Mazandaran. In Fiji, after a flood wreaked havoc, children were forced to stay home to look after their younger siblings in the day and indulge in sex work at night, as per the IUCN study.

The Pacific Islands—where erratic rainfall, droughts, floods and cyclones occur frequently,

combined with persisting gender based violence—is another example of heightened trafficking, but evidence remains thin. Modern slavery and human trafficking are on the rise in India, among other countries, warn the UK-based non-profits International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and Anti-Slavery International in a recent report. Modern slavery—including debt bondage, bonded labour, early / forced marriage and human trafficking—converge with climate change, particularly climate shocks and climate-related forced displacement and migration, the report says. It establishes the close relationship between lack of resources, alternative livelihoods, safety nets and the protection against loss and damage as well as debt and exploitation. “This research identifies climate change as a risk multiplier that makes people who are already vulnerable due to conflict or inequality more likely to become victims of modern slavery,” Adéla Mackie, fellow, Anti-Slavery International, had said on the report that released in September 2021.

However, Peppi Kiviniemi-Siddiq, senior regional migrant protection specialist at the International Organisation for Migration, warns we must be careful in understanding how strong the link is between climate change and human trafficking in the absence of empirical data. “If the state has a strong control over trafficking, then it’s unlikely it will rise post a disaster. But if the structure is weak to begin with, then we are likely to see more trafficking,” she tells DTE, adding that cultural norms, where women traditionally have little to no agency, play an important role in how this manifests. She recalls the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, which killed 9,000 people and displaced countless others. Trafficking cases in the country had increased after the event, indicating that vulnerability was increasing.

Ritu Bharadwaj, a researcher for the IIED, said during the release of the report: “The world cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking that’s being fuelled by climate change. Addressing these issues needs to be part and parcel of global plans to tackle climate change.” DTE

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(Names of all victims and their families have been changed to protect identities)