

# Climate crisis causing families to shun farmers for arranged marriages

July 8 2020, by Komali Kantamaneni, Komali Yenneti, Louis Rice and Luiza C Campos

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Credit: Nandhu Kumar/Unsplash, FAL

The devastating effects of climate change on the natural environment are already well known. Temperatures are increasing. The frequency of extreme weather events is on the up. Sea levels are rising. But the social and cultural effects of the climate crisis are discussed less often. Is the climate crisis already changing societal norms? And if so, how?

These were the sorts of questions that took us to the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, where we interviewed over [1,000 farmers](#) between November 2018 and June 2019. Our research was initially focused on examining the increasing vulnerability of agriculture along these coastal regions of southern India. We found [strong evidence](#) of the negative effects of climate change on the agricultural sector, with lives and incomes becoming much more precarious.

But we also had some unexpected findings—namely, that this precarity is affecting marriage patterns. Worsening climatic conditions, we found, are leading to a [marriage crisis](#).

## **Farming failures**

Agriculture is still the primary employment for the majority of people worldwide. In low- and [middle-income countries](#), nearly three billion people live in rural areas and of those, [2.5 billion people](#) depend on agriculture for their livelihood. In India, [more than 70%](#) of the rural population depends on agriculture as their primary source of [income](#).

A significant amount of these farmers depend on the rain and other natural resources for their agriculture needs. Increasing temperatures, changes in rainfall trends and more extreme natural hazards are [negatively affecting incomes](#) from agriculture. Climate change is leading to loss of crops, reductions in productivity, depletion of biodiversity, even the [complete devastation of entire crops](#).

Inevitably, the economic security of farmers is becoming more precarious. This is filtering through to longer-term social and [cultural changes](#). Worsening fluctuations in [climatic conditions](#) are mirrored by deterioration in the cultural capital of Indian farmers.



A curry leaf field, Andhra Pradesh. Credit: Komali Kantamaneni, Author provided

## Long-term effects

The vast majority of Indian farmers are male and earn low- to medium-range incomes, and they typically have between one to five acres of farming land. In India, most marriages are arranged, and because of the increasing uncertainty of farmers' incomes, most parents no longer want farmers as their son-in-law. Employees who have a stable monthly income are preferred, particularly those with government jobs which are perceived as stable and secure.

This means that [many](#) young farmers are becoming [middle-aged bachelors](#). The farmers we spoke to shared [stories](#) with us about the emerging marriage crisis. Srinivas\*, for example, a farmer from South India, is in his early 40s and still unmarried. He has not found a bride despite offering a financial incentive, known locally as *kanyasulkam* – the old, but uncommon, practice of a gift to the future bride, a kind of reverse dowry (dowries given from women to men is the prevalent practice).

This middle-aged [farmer](#) is not able to find a wife due to the changes in their cultural capital. Farmers are becoming ever less attractive grooms thanks to mounting uncertainties in farm incomes.

Based on our discussions, we estimate that just over half of the state of Andhra Pradesh's farmers are facing some level of barrier to marriage.





Talking to a farmer in his sugar cane field. Credit: Komali Kantamaneni, Author provided

The long-term consequences of this are worrying. On a personal level, wellbeing and happiness are being negatively impacted. But on a wider level, the population of farming communities will be reduced. This will lead to a reduction in farming capacity. Traditional agricultural experience and farming knowledge will be lost.

A significant number of farmers are being forced to migrate to other regions or other states to cope. If we do not minimise the impact of climate change in the near future, [agriculture](#) will be significantly

affected, harming many traditional cultural practices as well as global food production.

So far, the world's focus on climate change has mostly focused on impacts to the natural environment. Our new research highlights for the first time that social and cultural changes are also occurring as a consequence of environmental damage. The [climate](#) crisis is linked to a [marriage](#) crisis, in a place where over a billion of the world's population still have arranged marriages. The social and cultural consequences of [climate change](#) are just beginning to be understood and experienced.

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