

# The Girl and the Hidden Losses of Her World

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On the edge of a wide, turbulent river stands a young girl, her bare feet touching the earth as she chases a grasshopper, laughing with a friend. The wind tugs at her faded dress as she gazes across the water, oblivious to the danger beneath its deceptively calm surface. Their world, at that moment, was simple: catch the grasshopper, run faster, and laugh louder.

The river, swollen from relentless rains, threatens her home and her future, but she is unaware. She doesn't know how to swim, nor does she understand the enormity of the risk that lies ahead. All she knows is that the river has always been there, part of the rhythm of her life, of her community's life, where children grow up by the water with no fear.

This girl's innocence and her lack of concern are not unique. It's the story of countless vulnerable communities, living at the mercy of rising waters, changing climates and the slow erosion of their way of life. For her, the threat is not just drowning, but the gradual, invisible loss that takes more than homes. It takes away the intangible essence of who they are.

<sup>1</sup> At this moment, standing at the water's edge, she is unaware of how climate change steals the future from her grasp, one flood, one storm at a time. The river's advance is a thief of traditions, of stories, of a sense of place. <sup>2</sup> Her village is slowly being erased from the map, from memory, as the land shrinks under the force of natural disasters and rising sea levels.

For this girl and her community, the river has always been a part of their lives, an enduring, familiar presence. But with each flood, with each storm, the river takes something more than just physical space. It takes their sense of place and their connection to the land. The stories tied to the riverbanks, the festivals celebrated by its shores, the identity that comes from being a part of that landscape all of these are being washed away.



**The Girl with No name**

Location: Namar Char, Barisal

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<sup>1</sup> [IPCC \(2021\), Sixth Assessment Report: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, detailing the accelerating effects of climate change on coastal communities, particularly in low-lying regions like Bangladesh.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [UNDP \(2023\), Climate Displacement in South Asia, examining how rising sea levels and extreme weather events displace communities in coastal areas.](#)

<sup>3</sup> This is what we call Non-economic loss and damage. It's not just about the tangible things you can rebuild or replace; it's about the things that can't be bought back like culture, heritage and the emotional bonds that tie people to their homes. <sup>4</sup> These losses are invisible at first but deeply felt over time, as communities realize that they're not just losing land, but a part of who they are. <sup>5</sup> The river, once a giver of life, has become a silent harbinger of displacement and despair.

As I watched her stand there, on the brink of the swelling river, I felt an urge to ask her name. But I didn't, I couldn't. Her name, though important, didn't matter at that moment. She wasn't just one girl; she represented every child from every vulnerable community staring into the uncertain future. Her story was more than her identity it was the story of all those who stand unknowingly at the edge of loss. A loss so vast and yet so invisible that they don't even realize it is happening. The loss was insidious, creeping in silently, unnoticed, just as she stood there unafraid. How could she be so unafraid? It wasn't ignorance, but the kind of quiet acceptance that comes when life's uncertainties are too large, too constant, to question. The land under her feet was slowly being devoured, year by year, flood by flood. The water had taken crops, homes, and livelihoods but something much deeper was slipping away too. She carried the weight of non-economic loss in her silence, in her unawareness.

Non-economic loss and damage have no name, no clear identity that policymakers can point to and fix with a budget line or a relief package. <sup>6</sup> It's the quiet loss of tradition, of ancestral ties to the land, of community bonds that were once woven so tightly. It is the loss of language, of songs, of rituals performed at the riverside for generations.

What cuts deepest isn't just the physical loss of land, homes, or livelihoods; it's the slow, unspoken erosion of identity and cultural roots that once anchored communities to their history. As we stand witness to these invisible losses, we must ask ourselves: How can we, as a society, remain indifferent? Will policymakers continue to overlook the intangible aspects of non-economic loss and damage? And for those in positions of responsibility, can they truly justify inaction when entire ways of life are slipping away?

Climate change doesn't just destroy structures; it dismantles identities. The river may take her land, but it will also carry away the intangible pieces of her world, leaving behind only the husk of what once was.

The girl standing at the river's edge unknowingly bears the weight of these questions, but it's up to us to answer them before her story becomes yet another forgotten tragedy.

We need to recognize this unspoken loss to act before it's too late. We must prioritize the human side of climate change before all that is left are fading memories of a life once lived in harmony with the water.

And that, perhaps, is the greatest tragedy of all.

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<sup>3</sup> [Warner, K., van der Geest, K. \(2013\). Loss and damage from climate change: Local-level evidence from nine vulnerable countries. United Nations University](#)

<sup>4</sup> [UNESCO \(2019\). Culture in Crisis: Implications of Climate Change on Cultural Heritage.](#)

<sup>5</sup> [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\) \(2020\). Addressing Climate Migration and Displacement.](#)

<sup>6</sup> [UNFCCC \(2013\). Non-Economic Losses in the Context of Climate Change Impacts. Explores the significance of cultural, social, and heritage losses due to climate change.](#)