

Mother is Mothering

<https://www.climateone.org/audio/mother-mothering>

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Kousha Navidar: This is Climate One, I'm Kousha Navidar. It's Mothers Day this weekend, and so we're dedicating this episode to those incredible people who care for us, care for the planet, and care for the natural systems that support kids everywhere - starting with... a high profile guest, and I can't believe she was able to clear her schedule for us to make it happen..

Kousha Navidar: Hi, Mom.

Shohreh Karimipour: Hey, Kousha.

Kousha Navidar: One of my happiest memories of you was in fifth grade when you came to my classroom to talk about acid rain. Do you remember that?

Shohreh Karimipour: Yes, I do.

Kousha Navidar: I thought it was one of the coolest things ever because you were an environmental engineer, and I had no idea what that meant. But I knew that you brought a video game from your work about how to keep your driveway and lawn clean for the environment, and you spoke so authoritatively, about acid rain. So my first question for you was, uh, how do you remember talking about your work to me?

Shohreh Karimipour: I remember, uh, to be in your school and have a representation of you as, Kousha's mom is in this class, and I was just hoping that you would be proud that I represent my work. Actually, acid rain was not my specialty, but I thought bringing a game would be cool for fifth graders.

Kousha Navidar: It was cool. We played it after you left. There was a line. You care about the environment. You were in charge of a lot of the water quality around New York State. Uh, that's how I always frame what you do. I'm like, "Oh, yeah, she made sure that the drinking water in the region

outside of New York City was safe to drink, a lot of-- along with a lot of other things." Why did you choose to become an environmental engineer?

Shohreh Karimipour: Well, I always loved, uh, nature and math, and environmental engineering is a marriage of both.

Kousha Navidar: how do you remember talking about your work to me?

Shohreh Karimipour: It wasn't easy because, uh, environmental engineer was an abstract for children that age. Um, I just tried to, instill, uh, appreciation for nature, like having my kids care about the world they live in.

Kousha Navidar: Can you talk a little bit more about that? Why was that the case, and, and how did you try to make that true that they would care about the environment?

Shohreh Karimipour: Well, as a mother, you try to teach the, uh, you know, the great values to your children. Um, it's a universal thing. Um, uh, it goes along with honesty, kindness, integrity, and, um, care for the world you live in. So I happen to be an environmental engineer, but, uh, but it's no different from what other people teach their children. Hmm. And I didn't, actually did not have a systematic way of teaching my children those values. I taught them to be good people, and good people end up loving the environment.

Kousha Navidar: Oh, that's a great... That's a great sentence. That's really nice. I like that. Something that I reflect on is when I was offered the chance to co-host this show, uh, I was quite excited. One, if I'm being real, one, um, guideline I used to determine if I wanted to take this job or not was, "Oh, my mom would think this is a pretty cool job. It would feel cool to tell her that I was working on this." How did it feel for you when I told you, "Hey, I'm gonna go do a show about climate"?

Shohreh Karimipour: I was very happy that you made that choice. I did not want to say anything to influence your decisions and of your career. So I kept like a very low-key, but I was very thrilled.

Kousha Navidar: Since this episode is gonna air for Mother's Day, uh, you know we're gonna be talking to mother figures, to moms that work to make the world healthier and better. So my last question for you is, do you think moms have a special power when it comes to making change happen?

Shohreh Karimipour: mothers do have a special power, and that comes from their, from their resiliency and, adaptability, that they can make changes. They can make world better. That was a terrible answer, but

Kousha Navidar: That was a great answer. No, that's a great answer. You're, you're, you're saying things that I think a lot of people could relate to, and maybe we'll hear about throughout the rest of the episode. So I really appreciate it. I think it's a very good insight. Shohreh Karimipour is formerly a regional water engineer with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and equally as important, she is my mom. Mom, thanks for joining us.

Shohreh Karimipour: Thank you for making me happy every day.

Kousha Navidar: Happy Mother's Day, everyone. I'm Kousha Navidar.

Ariana Brocious: And I'm Ariana Brocious. Today, we're marking Mother's Day by exploring what it really means to care, to care for our communities, for our children, and for the planet they'll inherit.

And Kousha, we had such a lovely interview with your mom there at the top.

Kousha Navidar: I feel so special that I got to share that moment with her and with you, Ariana, and with everyone listening right now. Uh, I've never actually had a conversation like that with my mom about where her career and care for the environment and raising her children, where those all intersected. So it was a really special experience for me.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, and as we gathered stories and interviews for this episode, one thing that really became clear to me is how universal this is, this idea of, of moms, of caregivers, of, of your chosen family, of your auntie or someone who's special in your life, teaching you i-in their own way the value of the natural world, right? And I think moms are especially special in this sense because of all the things that they encompass and hold. My own mom was an amazing woman, and I have this really beautiful memory of her teaching me as a young kid that Ponderosa pines smell like butterscotch and that I should go and stick my nose in the trunk and, uh, experience it and her--having that moment with her. And I think that sense of connection, that sense of wonder is something that so many of us can relate to.

Kousha Navidar: I love that, and I can imagine you as a little kid sticking your head right in the tree. It's such a cool memory for you, I'm sure such a special one. And I think it also means a lot for me to hear it because it kinda reminds me about how formative and, like, impactful these kinds of moments in raising your kids or, or people that you love that are younger than you, as a mom can be.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, and beyond those interpersonal special connections, mothers have been active as a force, you know, in so many important social and political movements. There's the Mothers of East LA, MAD, Moms Clean Air Force, who we'll hear from in just a few minutes. When moms get together, they make a lot happen.

Kousha Navidar: Yeah. And, and today we're gonna hear from a couple of incredible women who are working hard to make a better world for their families and everyone else

Ariana Brocious: And we'll also hear some more beautiful stories from our colleagues, friends, and listeners about the women and mentors who shaped how they see and care for the natural world

Kousha Navidar: Dominique Browning is co-founder and director of Moms Clean Air Force, an organization that has spent fifteen years mobilizing parents to fight for cleaner air and a safer climate.

Dominique Browning: when I started there was, uh, blogging was a new thing, right? Hard to believe, but it was new. Now it's substack, but it used to be blogging and, um, there were a lot of women I noticed in the blogosphere who identified themselves as mommy bloggers and they were all writing, um, posts about toxic chemicals and baby bottles, BPA or uh, where do I get an air filter to clean the air, that kind of thing. There was a lot of energy and it was from women, and I thought to myself like, how can we harness that energy and that passion and that protectiveness that desire to do something? How can we harness that into systemic change? Not just what you buy, but how do we change laws? How do we change or create regulations to protect us from pollution?

Kousha Navidar: So for you, it was kind of your recognition of this, uh, coalition, of this community that had untapped potential. Is that a fair way of framing it?

Dominique Browning: Yeah. Untapped potential. Exactly. That's right.

Kousha Navidar: Uh, you described the organization as a term that I've, I've really taken a liking to: Mom partisan. Did you coin that? Can you unpack it for me? What does it mean?

Dominique Browning: Sure. Um, we are trying to be nonpartisan. Um. Instead, we say we are mom partisan because we are supportive of anybody on either side of the aisle who is trying to make things better for our children, safer for our children.

Kousha Navidar: so I want to touch back on that in a second, but let's, let's go a little bit in the, in the history of the organization. So you've described the failure of the Waxman Markey bill of 2009, which would've set a nationwide price on carbon and shift the economy toward lowering emissions as a turning point for the climate movement. Things weren't looking good after it failed to pass, but that didn't stop you. How did that moment think about how you think about climate action?

Dominique Browning: That didn't stop me because I was completely naive. And this is a very good example of how if you don't know what you're doing, you will go ahead and do things and, um. When I started Moms, I thought we could get into getting a new bill going and getting that climate fight going again. And it was very naive of me because obviously this had become a third rail politically. However, at the same time, there was an enormous fight going on with, uh, the Environmental Protection Agency over mercury protections and, uh, mercury is a byproduct of burning coal in power plants, and there was a real struggle to bring this pollution down. Just the mercury part. But if you bring down mercury pollution, you also bring down carbon pollution. So there's actually a big climate plus, as well as protecting children from a potent neurotoxin in their food.

Kousha Navidar: When did you start to see the Environmental Protection Agency as the path forward and kind of decided to shift from advocating to, to, for legislation to, to shaping EPA rules?

Dominique Browning: That was when I saw that that EPA could be a path forward, it's actually very easy to understand at a superficial level. You know, these regulations are very hard to understand if you're not trained. But at the top level, you can tell people why there shouldn't be mercury in our food. You can explain how it damages the developing fetal brain and people get it. People understand pollution and they understand that pollution is bad. And we can talk about climate pollution. People don't really talk about emissions in their everyday lives, but they understand pollution is something that's upsetting the balance of things. So EPA turned out to be a really important place for us to engage, and that was very exciting.

Kousha Navidar: You're talking a lot about framing, which I find quite interesting. I always like talking to people about how you frame these issues. So an interesting angle that you have explored as part of your career is framing these climate change challenges around children's health. How do you feel like people respond to that?

Dominique Browning: Huh, I used to talk about how I wanted to change the climate conversation from polar bearers to people. What was happening back 15 years ago was that everybody was focused on climate change as a far away issue that was going to happen in a far distant future, and people weren't talking about the impact on people. And it's a very easy step to go from people to children. And the reason that's a very powerful step to take is apart from how much we love our children and they are our future. It's also devastating to learn about the impacts of pollution and climate problems on children's bodies. Their bodies are still developing. They're far more vulnerable. They breathe more frequently per minute. Their hearts beat faster. Everything that is bad is worse for children.

Kousha Navidar: Let, let's, let's talk about the communication aspect of, of it more, You're reaching out to all kinds of people to build alliances far beyond the usual environmental circles, including anti-abortion groups, and, and you ended up finding an ally with evangelicals, like this spread of folks you're bringing into the tent is so interesting to me. How did that unfold?

Dominique Browning: um, again, back to those mercury regulations, which have just been weakened again by this administration. I might add, by the way, um, I just started dialing people to say, okay, you are against abortion. What about protecting fetal health? Are you interested in doing that? Sounds like you are. You're protecting fetal life. Most leaders said, no, they didn't wanna do it, but one person said Yes, the Evangelical Environmental Network and Mitch Hescocox, and he was a wonderful ally in getting stronger mercury regulations and that was terrific.

Ariana Brocious: We'll hear more from Dominique Browning in a minute

In honor of Mother's Day, we asked people to share stories of how their mothers or mother figures influenced the way they experience the natural world.

Dan Lawrence, our audio engineer for our live events at the Commonwealth Club, asked his kids what their mother has taught them:

Isla: My name is Isla and I'm seven years old and I'm in first grade. My favorite flower is a California poppy. And, um, I like oak trees and I don't really have a favorite animal. I, I just like all of them.

Dan: What kinds of lessons has mom taught?

Isla: Um, she helps me plant flowers in our garden in the backyard. And I really like, um, gardening with her. It's fun for me. She taught me to not litter and be respectful to the nature.

Levi: My name is Levi and I'm nine years old, and I'm in third grade. My favorite thing is just going places and having a fun time there, like the beach and basically doing stuff out in the wilderness. My mom has taught me how to keep this place nice by not littering and not showing disrespect for the, for the earth. That's pretty much what I have to say about mom.

Ariana Brocious: And here's another message from Climate One listener Elizabeth Fiddler:

Elizabeth: Years ago I met Mary. She was my new boyfriend's mom. Now she's my mother-in-law. When we met, I was nearly 30, yet I had spent very little time in the wilderness. I didn't know much about hiking or gardening. I'd never been backpacking. I didn't own hiking boots. In contrast, this interesting mom I was meeting was an avid outdoors woman. She was and still is, a skilled backpacker, kayaker and gardener. She was a conservationist. These passions in her lifestyle were new to me. However, they woke up a yearning, but I didn't know if I could do these outdoorsy things. Fortunately, Mary is a generous, welcoming soul. Through her, I learned how to provision a backpack, travel lightly, and leave no trace. I know the joy of being a lifelong nature learner and the thrill of finding wild blueberries on the trail. Now, Mary and I have been exploring and sweating together for over 30 years. Thank you, Mary, for influencing the path of my life so profoundly.

Ariana Brocious: We'll be right back after a quick break.

Kousha Navidar: This is Climate One. I'm Kousha Navidar. Today we're honoring moms and mother figures for the ways they work to protect their loved ones - and the rest of us.

Let's get back to my conversation with Dominique Browning, Co-Founder and Director of Moms Clean Air Force, which works to protect children from air pollution and climate change.

Kousha Navidar: Now obviously we're seeing so many environmental rollbacks at the federal level. Have the rollbacks changed the way that you have had to lead, or how you have had to operate

Mom's Air Force in any way over the past, let's say two years.

Dominique Browning: The rollbacks are so radical, so severe, and so reckless that they have had a, a kind of mind spinning impact. So in terms of management, you kind of wake up in the morning and think. Why would anybody do this? Who on this planet thinks it should be more mercury in a fetal brain who thinks particulate pollution, which kills people? Right. Who thinks that's okay? Why do, why would anybody want more endocrine disruptors in our stuff? So it, you kind of feel like you're through the looking glass, and, and sometimes we just look at each other like, what is going on? I mean, it's so ideologically anti-regulation that is just throwing, throwing everything away.

Kousha Navidar: How does meaningful change happen now?

Dominique Browning: Well, there's meaningful change and then there's meaningful resistance. We can't, you know, we can't go to sleep for four years. We can't pretend this isn't important. We have to keep reminding people what's at stake here. But on the other side, there's a lot of work going on at the state level. That is good and important. Governors have power, mayors have power, and they need to hear from moms and dads and caregivers. They need to hear that we care, and so, while EPA might be rolling back methane rules, the Governor of New Mexico is saying, no, we are gonna have strong methane rules because not only is that a waste of energy to have methane leaking into the atmosphere and disrupting our climate balance, essentially all these volatile organic compounds come out with the methane, and that's really bad for people's health. So that means state level work really matters.

Kousha Navidar: Have the rollbacks changed the way that you have had to lead, how are you operating in a different way than you might've been in the past?

Dominique Browning: Uh, you know, that's a really good question because, um, I had an epiphany about that last, at the end of last year. We were operating for the first, almost three quarters of the first year of this administration. In the normal way, they would announce a rollback at EPA and we would show up and we would testify why this was a bad idea and we would collect evidence and et cetera, et cetera. You know, there's this whole like routine that

Kousha Navidar: Lifecycle of, yeah, of

Dominique Browning: Lifecycle of regulation making, which is actually very, very exciting. And testimony days are my favorite days because you really

Kousha Navidar: More than Mother's Day. Sorry, I just had to throw that in more than

Dominique Browning: way more than Mother's Day. Yeah. Our moms are bringing bouquets, uh, uh, evidence to, uh, EPA panels to say, here's why we care about these things. And it's very moving. Um.

Kousha Navidar: Sorry, but I, I got you off track. So you're saying that you

Dominique Browning: no. so we were doing that for a long time. And then, um, right around Thanksgiving, uh, EPA announced that they were not going to enforce, um, methane regulations. And one of my key colleagues lives in Pennsylvania, in western Pennsylvania. And, um. Her son as a child suffered from childhood leukemia, and that means that as a young adult, as an older teenager now, he is much more susceptible to cancers. And a lot of these compounds that are released around oil and gas operations and petrochemical operations are cancer related. And I had this moment of, wait a minute, we can't continue with business as usual. We have to say they have crossed a line. This is unacceptable. And it became very clear that this administrator, Lee Zeldin, has totally

corrupted the mission of EPA, the mission of EPA, which is to protect human health and the environment that's just been thrown out the window, literally. EPA has now announced that a human life has no value and they're not taking the cost of health impacts into consideration when they make rules. So literally that week I decided we are going to launch a Zelsin Must Go campaign because this is unacceptable. We can't just creep into a paralysis over what's going on, and even if it's quixotic, um, he is beloved by Trump and all the rest of it. We have to keep saying this is unacceptable.

Kousha Navidar: How is your approach different from other environmental organizations? And I'm thinking specifically here about organizations that might frame fossil fuel providers as the enemy.

Dominique Browning: Well, okay. Fossil fuel providers as the enemy is a very, you, we could unpack that one for an hour. That is a really complicated issue and I can't do that. I can give you two diametrically, sort of opposed angles on that. One is, yes, this industry has lied. The misinformation campaigns, the disinformation campaign, let's just call it what it is, it's lying. They've lied to people for decades about what they knew about the impacts of what they were doing on our atmosphere. So that's bad.

Kousha Navidar: Mm-hmm.

Dominique Browning: On the other side of the coin, I think that our, uh, environmental movements. Have been a little, um, tone deaf about say coal miners. And when we talk about killing coal, not only are we talking about killing people's livelihoods, um, but more importantly, we've never said thank you to coal miners who gave up generations of lives to black lung disease and to horrific illnesses so that we could turn on the lights around the country. Around the country, people can read at night because coal miners gave their lives. I am extremely grateful for that, and I think that that doesn't mean we don't move on when we understand the damage of what's been done. But we shouldn't vilify people who changed our world for the better.

Kousha Navidar: Hmm. for you, it sounds like honor, honor is really important, like finding places to, to bring people along to, um, recognize the, the larger narrative of where we are as a, as a whole community for, for clean air.

Dominique Browning: Yeah. Honor and love. not something that we talk a lot about in politics except when it gets people in trouble. But, um, basically, you know, operating from a place of love. We cherish this planet. We cherish our family and our children, and we are blessed with incredible beauty and bounty around us. Um, we need to honor that and protect it for future generations.

Kousha Navidar: Let me dig into that a little bit. What does, what does act, uh, what was the way that you said it, acting from a place of love? Is that what you said? What does that, what does that look like?

Dominique Browning: I think what it looks like is just the kind of conversation we're having where we try not to vilify people. We try. To bring people along in this mom partisan way, we try to focus on the pollution and we try to focus on the solutions to those problems, those pollution problems, um, which are simple in description and complicated in enactment, but made much, much more complicated by all the ideology surrounding all of this.

Kousha Navidar: I can't think of a better episode to talk about acting from a place of love as a Mother's Day episode. So thanks for bringing that up. I really appreciate it. And, and since we're on that topic, uh, if, if it's okay, I'd like to talk about your kids for, for just a second, would that be okay?

Dominique Browning: Oh, sure.

Kousha Navidar: So you have, uh, two kids, right? One is 36 and one is 40.

Dominique Browning: Yes.

Kousha Navidar: What do they think about the work you do now that they're adults?

Dominique Browning: well, uh, I think they swing between like, you know, what's that Debbie Downer? Uh, uh, you know, that noise theme? Like, oh no, here's mom, like, now she's gonna tell us why we can't use this, or why we shouldn't have black plastic in the kitchen. You know, that kind of thing. So I think there's that, but. Um, on the other hand, uh, my older son is a law professor at Marquette in Wisconsin, and he, a lot of his focus is on disaster law. So he, he spends a lot of time thinking and writing about, um, flood insurance and climate issues and, you know, that kind of thing. So that's, that's very moving to me and, uh, my younger son is a, um, contemplative psychotherapist. He's a Buddhist, sort of Buddha meets Freud. And, uh, you know, he's a wonderful person for me to talk to about what we were talking about earlier, like how do you deal every day with waking up in the morning and thinking you have gone through the looking glass. So, so I find my sons to be enormously supportive.

Kousha Navidar: That's wonderful, and it's such a wonderful opportunity to, to evolve the relationship through different phases of life, right? Like that's such a gift, that must be such a gift for you.

Dominique Browning: It is a gift. It is a gift. And as is my 10-year-old grandson, um, an enormous gift. Um, every time I feel like, uh, why am I, what am I doing with my life?

Why is this so negative? You know, I think about Oliver and I think. 10 years old, what is the world gonna be looking like in 50 years? And what can I do to make it a better place?

Kousha Navidar: Dominique Browning is co-founder and director of Moms Clean Air Force. Dominique, thank you so much.

Dominique Browning: Thank you so much. Happy Mother's Day. When it comes,

Kousha Navidar: Happy Mother's Day.

Kousha Navidar: Now we get to share a few more mothering stories from our colleagues and Climate One listeners. First, we've got one from Mark Buell:

Mark Buell: When I was 15 years old. My, uh, enterprising mother bought the first Volkswagen bus that was made and she converted it, taking the middle seat out, put curtains in it and a bed, and then supplied it with the idea to take a trip around the United States and stay in all the national parks. My father, being an older man, having been born in 1898 and running the telephone company in San Francisco, opted not to do this trip. So my mother embarked with us on what turned out to be a 44 day, 10,000 mile journey. We would pull into any given national park and we all had our assignments of, uh, what to do. And, uh, my brother and I would pitch the tent. My older sister would get the sleeping gear out. My younger sister would get utensils and cooking things, and within an hour and a half we were set up ready to go. And so we would stay two or three days at each of these, uh, national parks. It's, it's very hard to explain the impact that had on me, but as a result, I ended up serving on the board and 12 years as chair of the Golden Gate National Park Conservancy. For 13 years I was president of the Recreation and Park Commission. I sat on the board of the Neighborhood Park Council in San Francisco. Parks became, whether I knew it or not

very much a part of my life, and an appreciation for some very basic and fundamental, always outdoors and always seeing nature and, uh, and, and gaining, uh, kind of subconsciously this enormous appreciation for nature in its finest form.

Rachael Lacey: Hey, this is Rachael Lacey, senior Communications Manager at Climate One. When I think about care for the world around me, I think about my Aunt Colleen. Some of my fondest childhood memories are of going camping with her in the summer and walking through the redwoods and giant sequoias and marveling at how massive and ancient they were. She showed me early that nature is fascinating and awe inspiring and very much worth protecting. She also took me to my first political rally. I was 12, Obama was running for the first time, and it was the first time in my life I saw masses of people who were so energized by politics. And to this day, in the retirement community she lives in, she's organizing community meetings and postcard campaigns, and even flying to Washington DC to talk to people and is always staying involved and always asking how we can make the world better. In so many ways, Colleen has taught me that care is not just a feeling, it's something you do. It's a way of moving through life with curiosity and responsibility and an indestructible love for the people and the world around us.

Shohreh Karimipour: This is Shohreh Karimipour, Kousha Navidar's mom. You're listening to Climate One.

Ariana Brocious: This is Climate One. I'm Ariana Brocious. We know climate change intersects with nearly all aspects of life, and creating families is no exception.

When fossil-fueled disasters strike, pregnant women are among the most vulnerable, and often the most overlooked. In Pakistan, which has one of the world's highest infant mortality rates, midwife and climate advocate Neha Mankani has seen this firsthand. As founder of the Mama Baby Fund and Climate Advisor at the International Confederation of Midwives, she's making the case that midwifery isn't just a family-planning option, it's a climate resilience strategy.

Neha Mankani: Midwives are, inherently a climate friendly solution for communities. They don't have to be high tech. Their hands is what they basically work with. Um, they're a low cost solution. They're part of communities and they work within the infrastructure of communities, which means that they. Can also weather things like, climate disasters. Suppose there's a flood in a community, a midwife is part of that community. So a lot of times she can make sure that women don't lose that continuity of care.

Ariana Brocious: So I've worked with midwives. I've had the, the good fortune of being able to have those relationships and it's been very important in my life. Um, what's the most misunderstood thing you think there is about, being a midwife?

Neha Mankani: I would say the idea that midwives just support birth or just conduct deliveries because there's so much more. In our work as midwives, we are so immersed in the lives of women, the lives of families, and the word midwife means with women. So you're a birth companion, you're there with family, you're supporting them with the children, you're helping them with decision making. They are there for women through the pregnancy and birth process and beyond.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah. And you know, it is a long process. The, the preconception, family planning stage, conception, obviously carrying a baby and then postpartum. It's a long, it's multiple years. Um, really,

Neha Mankani: Yeah, and the emotional aspect of it also just goes beyond birth, right? It just is just being present, being there, being whatever it is that women and families need at that time. I just

love being a service provider. I love the messiness of human life. I love being part of all of that and more.

Ariana Brocious: What do you say to people who don't connect climate change and reproductive care?

Neha Mankani: I would say they should come and see the communities that we work in because we are seeing the, the connections every day. So this is not something that we see one off anymore. Climate change is a threat multiplier, so it's really increasing the severity of climate disasters that we see around us. So everywhere it is hotter, we are seeing a lot more intense tropical cyclones. We are seeing uncontrollable wildfires, persistent droughts, sea levels rising. And through this we are seeing how pregnant women, newborns are being affected by this every day. um, what something like extreme heat does to pregnant women, including raising their blood pressure, dehydration, preterm birth, um babies not being able to cool down and like ending up in the hospital in their early days. Or you see a very large scale climate disaster and what that that does to what being displaced does to women in the pregnancy process. Nutritional challenges, loss in continuity of care, vector-borne diseases. There's so much that we are seeing and we are seeing it every day. So I would just paint that picture so people could understand what it is that's happening.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, it is increasing reality for many parts of the world. Uh, you and I both live in places that are already hot. I live in southern Arizona, um, where nearby in Phoenix, you know, um, there's, I think just recently there were more than a hundred days, over 100 degrees of, of temperature. Um. Those extreme heat impacts are real for many parts of the population, especially pregnant women and newborns, as you said, who have a lot of difficulty regulating their body temperature. In Pakistan, temperatures in the spring and summer routinely exceed 104 degrees Fahrenheit, 40 degrees Celsius. How do you work with communities to care for mothers and newborns in those conditions, particularly when, uh, electricity access isn't always reliable.

Neha Mankani: It is really difficult. So the place that I work at, um, so that Sindh gets very hot, there are parts of northern Sindh that are, that go beyond um, 50 degrees, that's 50 degrees Celsius, which is actually now unlivable

Ariana Brocious: For listeners, 50 degrees Celsius is 122 degrees Fahrenheit. That is incredibly hot, as you said, unlivable, that that just exceeds, um. I'm just shocked that that is, uh, being registered.

Neha Mankani: and We don't have a very good energy infrastructure. We don't have access to, um, running fans or air conditioning in a lot of spaces that we work in. So we are seeing that women have a lot of adverse events related to this. A large part of this is also around knowledge, equity, for women and midwives to understand what the connections are between excessive heat and what's happening to their bodies and that of their, their, their babies, and pregnancy what's going on so that they can act on it.

Ariana Brocious: What would a more climate resilient maternal healthcare system look like in Pakistan?

Neha Mankani: Our healthcare system it is quite fragile. And for a system to be climate resilient, it does have to be, um, resistant to climate shock, especially in a place like Pakistan, which is one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world at this moment because of how we are situated. So one, our healthcare system needs to be a lot stronger. Uh, the second thing is that we need to really strengthen our, um, midwifery practice. So we have midwives in Pakistan, but the midwifery system is weak. If they, there was a strong midwifery system in rural parts of Pakistan, which is a

large part of the country. Women would have, um, frontline healthcare provider access. So what we saw in 2022 was that there was a very large flood in sin in the province of sim, and around 30 million people were affected by that flood. We provide a mama baby fund, myself and another midwife that works with me. We did a lot of frontline healthcare. We did a lot of emergency response in that space and in almost all of the spaces that we went, um, there was no frontline healthcare providers, so there were no midwives being able to provide care in that space because they didn't. And we spoke to some midwives who were around. We said, why are you not able to do this? And they said, it's because we don't have the mobility, we don't have the money. We don't even know if we're allowed to do it. So we, there is no support to be able to provide that care. Right. Um, so I think not having access to the right healthcare providers within an already fragile healthcare system means that you're not at all resilient to, uh, climate shocks of any kind.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, so you're referencing these really dramatic, uh, extensive floods in 2022, um, and you were there on the ground responding. I, I can't really imagine what it must have been like, um, to be serving as a midwife in that time. What was it like?

Neha Mankani: I mean, I also couldn't imagine it. I think you had to be on ground until I was on ground. I didn't really know, I know that I worked, there was a, there was a CSO, the community organization that was on ground, and they had told me about the first, the first site that I went to and they said, you know, please make sure that, and this is like a dry landlocked area. It had a lake. And they said that, please make sure you bring your, uh, life jackets with you. And I was like, I'd be really curious about why. And when I got there, I saw there was just completely submerged, like maybe it would've been a 15 minute walk to get from my home to a healthcare facility. It was now maybe like a boat ride of two hours because everything, people's homes, hospitals, schools, everything was submerged; and it wasn't, it wasn't anything that we could have imagined like we were in, um river boats that were sailing, but then, you know, the boat would get stuck because it's on top of a tree. So that's how, that's how much water there was. So it was just unimaginable. But what we saw on ground was that climate disasters are not equal. They don't hit everyone equally. There are people who are much more affected than others, and I think women are affected much worse in situations like this. And then within women, there are obviously women who are more vulnerable, and in one of those groups is pregnant people. So. We saw just in the first day that I was there, I saw this woman so she had gone to a healthcare facility to give birth, but, and then that's when the flood hit, so she was able to get, give birth. But when she's coming back, she has a newborn with her. She takes a four hour boat ride to get back home and. I'm just looking at her. It's blazing hot, and she's sitting in this river boat with this newborn, and I'm thinking that this is the postpartum period that we, that is so sacred to us, and this is what this woman has to do. And after she gets off, she's going to wade through water that's still her belly, and then she's going to walk to her home, which I'm not even sure it still exists. So that kind of thing is just really, it's, it's really difficult.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, I, stories like that I think really get at the reality that climate is impacting us now and everywhere. And I want to come back to the US for a minute because I think that for sometimes, sometimes for people in the US there's still this idea that the climate crisis is happening elsewhere. Um, when in fact that's not true. It's everywhere. It's happening now. The US has experienced a lot of intense flooding of its own, um, made worse by human caused climate change, like the Guadalupe River flood in Texas in 2025. Hurricanes Helene and Milton, which were very, very destructive. We know more impacts are coming. Given everything that you've learned working on the ground, what lessons could leaders and healthcare practitioners in countries like the US learn from your work?

Neha Mankani: I think one of the biggest things I would say that you need to kind of, when you're doing any kind of planning or preparedness planning is that you really need to listen to people on the

ground because even if you talk to midwives from like five different contexts, you'll say that the kind of response that everyone is able to provide is so contextually specific. Um, and an example of this is, cooling mechanisms, for example, in places of excessive heat. And one of the things we will always tell midwives that you should make sure that women know that they should, you know, put cooling packs on their necks when they get home. And they should do footbaths because they need to, their circulation needs to, uh, improve when they come back from the heat. But, and a lot of times in, in my initial days, I would say this to women and women would say, I only have one bucket of water for the entire day. And with drought and, you know, dry, uh, dry times, I have to walk further and further to get that water. So I cannot use it on something like this. And those kind of moments are very humbling because they really tell us that we actually don't know anything and we won't know anything until we actually listen to what it is that people need on the ground. And there's also this very large element, I feel like people need to understand about intersectionality, which is that, I mean, we recently saw this article about whether men and women.

Um, experience heat differently. And the answer came from a very scientific point of view. So the person who was answering it was a scientist and they said that, no, actually women and men experience heat completely the same way. There is nothing that says that women experience heat differently, but look at the context in that, like, women actually experience all kinds of climate change differently than men.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, I wanna underscore that because part of the reason that women suffer from some of these impacts disproportionately is because of the work they do. Right? that's important regardless of how our, the physiology of our bodies is prepared to weather events. It's the context as you say.

Neha Mankani: Yeah, absolutely. And it's, you know, it's where they work, it's what they do. A lot of places. It's how they dress differently maybe from men. Um, and, you know, things like women will be responsible for things like getting water. And with drought you'll see that the spaces that they cover, the, that the amount of time that they need to get water is, um, is always increasing. We are seeing a lot of times. Even after these floods, we saw crop failures and which meant that women who work in the field had to work longer and longer hours. And you might have heard about how in a lot of spaces in South Asia, this is leading to women having hysterectomies very early in life because they're not able to take menstrual breaks. So things like that, like these are impacts that are very specific to women. and a lot of times also leads to exposure to unsafe conditions. Things like, uh, climate brides, which is women getting married, younger and younger in places with climate disasters. That's very specific to women. So the, I mean, the list is endless, but these are some things that we really need to think about.

Ariana Brocious: You founded the Mama Baby Fund, which helps support women and newborns, um, with resources at a time when they really need it. What gaps were you hoping to fill by creating that organization?

Neha Mankani: it started as a response to, um. Financial gaps that we were seeing. a lot of times women were not, able to access care because of financial gaps that they were experiencing in the healthcare process. So a lot of times they can't afford to put a baby in the NICU or they can't afford to, uh, pay for a birth, or if there is some kind of emergency, like if even if they need some blood products or they have high blood pressure and they need an intervention, the amount of money that they have set aside for it. It doesn't cover any of those costs. So we were bridging those gaps, but we wanted women to be able to define what those gaps were It could be financial support, but it could also be something like a woman needs a nutritious meal after birth. And we were able to give that and, and at some point in this process. I came across this coastal community off of Karachi, which is where I live. So it's a set of four islands and then a large part of the coast, and it's a population of

around 60,000 people. And this community, they had zero access to maternal healthcare, like nothing, no place where they could give birth and they're islands. So they're also cut off from the mainland. My answer to that gap was setting up a midwife led clinic Um, and it's run by two midwives. So myself and another midwife run the space and that clinic has basically transform the maternal, hence landscape of this entire coast.

Ariana Brocious: Let's talk more about that. So that's Baba Island, is, is what you're describing. Um, this densely populated fishing island close to Karachi. So you created, uh, a 100% solar powered clinic off grid. What does that provide? The, the fact that it is, um, solar powered, provide to the community.

Neha Mankani: So because it's solar powered and in a very place where we have plenty of sun, it means that we are able to. provide care, uninterrupted, we've also provided other elements in this healthcare facility. We have cross ventilation, you could run a nebulizer, you could run all kinds of machines, equipment that we need and we use our clinic as a cooling space. and we encourage women that in peak heat hours where you don't have access to cooling or you don't have electricity, you can use the space as a cooling space. We have access to running water, which not everyone has. We have access to solar, so we have access to fans. We have some other cooling mechanisms in our clinic, which means that people can have a community space that they can go to, which can help them in those times.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah. Um, and it must feel so empowering to be able to provide a service that people need directly, as you said, with your own hands and just be able to really, um, serve in that way.

Neha Mankani: Yeah, absolutely. And it just really, I think being present for people in that space, and I've always thought I, this is even when I started my midwifery practice, I think. The work of midwives is difficult physically, it's also, it's tough, and emotionally it's also tough. And I always had this question about why I wanted to keep doing it because like, what is it that keeps us going? And I think there is just, it is about just this, those connections and being there in those really vulnerable, magical moments. And then being part of the process with families as they go through, you know, through really happy times, through loss, through grief, all of it.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, yeah. Neha Mankani is founder of the Mama Baby Fund and the Humanitarian Engagement and Climate Advisor at the International Confederation of Midwives. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us and share some of the amazing work that you're doing.

Neha Mankani: Thank you for having me. It's always really great to be able to share what it is that we are seeing on ground. Thank you.

Kousha Navidar: And now let's round out the show with a few more stories celebrating mothers from our friends and colleagues.

Megan Bisciegli: My name is Megan Bisciegli. I'm a producer with Climate One. My mom and I, uh, we do not always see eye to eye on things and we certainly try not to talk about politics as much as possible. But, um, a few weeks ago it came up and she said that she thinks that everyone in Washington should have to sit down with one another and make a quilt because nothing brings people together like making a quilt. And she was not wrong. She was 100% correct and extremely wise. And I should mention that she's a crafter, so is my sister, so is my brother, and I am too. So thanks, mom.

Brad Marshland: Hey, it's Brad Marshland senior producer at Climate One. To say my mom was a neatnik is a bit of an understatement. When I was a kid, I had friends who told me they were afraid to come over to my house because they were worried they'd mess something up. We did have a designated playroom where we were allowed to be as messy as we liked, as long as we cleaned up after, but outdoors was different. My mom loved it. The trees, the flowers, the mountains, the ocean. We went camping as a family every summer and went hiking more weekends than not. Mom's favorite place though was probably the bluffs along the northern California coast. The gnarled stunted wind twisted trees growing from cracks in the sandstone, growing from cracks in the sandstone at Point Lobos like natural bonsais clinging to precarious holds above the crashing surf the sheer wildness of the place. I still picture her there, five years after she died. But when my brothers and I were kids, we'd picnic on those rocks or sitting on a log. And if one of us would drop a piece of food by accident, as kids will do, mom would say It's okay, just brush it off. It's clean dirt. So mess at home was not tolerated for long. But dirt in the outside world - that was nature. And mom taught us to love it.

Susanna: Hi, my name is Susanna and I'd love to talk about my mom. My first memory of her showing me something outdoors was when she pointed through the kitchen window at her mother's house to the beautiful rock garden there. Another memory, or maybe it's actually just a memory of a photo, is me and my brother sitting at a picnic table in a campground, brushing our teeth together. It. This memory is probably associated with our family saying of families who camp together get along together. Certainly those times in the wilderness helped me to experience the joy of the outdoors, navigate challenges like bad weather, being hangry, and also to get along with my brother, to find creative ways to play together. But my mom is truly next level when it comes to introducing other people to the outdoors. She and some like-minded friends created a full on nature center in her hometown. They started with some children's programs in an unused out of the way school building, and then they did the necessary fundraising and planning to grow it into a spectacularly designed building, showing skies, mountains, canyons, and mesas. It's now a local institution that's known as one of the best spots for locals and visitors alike. I'm proud of you, mom.

Kousha Navidar: And that's our show. Thanks for listening. You can see what our team is reading by subscribing to our newsletter - sign up at climateone.org.

Kousha Navidar: PODCAST version: And that's our show. Thanks for listening. Talking about climate can be hard, and exciting and interesting -- AND it's critical to address the transitions we need to make in all parts of society. Please help us get people talking more about climate by giving us a rating or review. You can do it right now on your device. Or consider joining us on Patreon and supporting the show that way.

Ariana Brocious: Climate One is a production of the Commonwealth Club. Our team includes Brad Marshland, Jenny Park, Austin Colón, Megan Bisciegli, Kousha Navidar and Rachael Lacey. Our theme music is by George Young. I'm Ariana Brocious.