



Recognized by: Higher Education Commission (HEC), Government of Pakistan

---

## Pakistan's Role in Global Climate Diplomacy: Challenges and Opportunities

**Dr. Arfan Mahmood \***

Assistant Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

[arfanmahmood.csas@pu.edu.pk](mailto:arfanmahmood.csas@pu.edu.pk)

**Dr. Naudir Bakht**

Professor, School of Political Science, Minhaj University Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan.

**Muhammad Tahir**

Lecturer, Riphah International University Faisalabad, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

\*Corresponding Author

---

### ABSTRACT

Pakistan, contributing less than a fraction of 1% of the total greenhouse gas emissions, is among the most affected countries by climate change. This paper attempts to analyze this scenario of influence caused within the framework of the international climate change dialogue with regard to the climatic diplomacy of Pakistan to examine the difficulties as well as opportunities created within the changed international perspective of Pakistan on this issue. This study offers qualitative analysis regarding the scenario of change that occurred regarding the alteration caused within the framework of the international climate change scenario within the changed perspectives of Pakistan on the dialogues of climate change, along with equality within the framework of finances. It applies qualitative thematic analysis, which relates to the records of the UNFCCC conferences of the parties, national policy papers, Post Disaster Needs Assessment reports, and peer-reviewed literature to show how the narrative of diplomacy in Pakistan has changed over the years. The conclusion suggests, based on the Pakistani scenario of vulnerability to climate change, along with some local reforms within the native framework of the Pakistani scenario regarding flood management within the initiatives of Living Indus, Pakistan will have to continue imposing a value and justice agenda on global agendas and collaborating in an indigenous radical reform agenda.

---

---

**Keywords:** Climate Diplomacy, Loss and Damage, Climate Justice, Climate Vulnerability, National Adaptation Plan, Living Indus

---

## INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is in quite a contradictory position concerning the international system of climate regulation. As much as its contribution to the global increase of greenhouse gas emissions has been less than one percent, it has always been one of the most climate-prone countries in the world (Germanwatch, 2023). This is because the ecological profile of Pakistan is diverse and weak due to the effect of higher rates of glacial melting in the north, the frequency of monsoon systems in the Indus plains becoming more erratic, rising sea levels, and the tendency of extreme weather events along the southern coast. The devastating floods of 2022 and 2025 made these vulnerabilities particularly prominent as they displaced millions of people, caused destruction of critical infrastructure, and caused economic destruction never witnessed before. Besides the domestic implications, these disasters re-established the identity and position of Pakistan in the world climate politics, which provided it with a starting point in its strategy in the international climate governance.

Previously, the role of Pakistan in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) regime was termed as active, however, peripheral. In spite of the regular alignment with the Global South on the agenda of equity, common yet differentiated responsibilities, and climate justice, Pakistan has failed to convert the vulnerability into long-term diplomatic power (Ahmed and Khan, 2021). The creation of the National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) in 2012 and its update in 2021 were signs of a policy-level realization of the risks of climate change. Still, these frameworks remained more of a vision due to low institutional coordination, financial limitations, and the presence of short-term economic and security interests in the national policymaking (Sultan, 2019). Therefore, climate change has remained at the periphery of the Pakistani strategic priorities as far back as 2022.

The historical responsibility and disproportional vulnerability to climate as imposed on the Global North and South respectively have created a systemic normative rift in the literature of climate governance in the world. In this argument, climate justice has emerged as a leading ethical paradigm, meaning the emitters must not be provided with disproportionate climate expenses (Robinson and Shine, 2018). The demand for an exclusive Loss and Damage mechanism has been one of the most controversial aspects of the debate. The opposite of the official recognition of Loss and Damage was vehemently supported by the developed states based on the fear of having to be legally responsible and compensated in the open-ended liability (van der Geest and Warner, 2021). Consequently, the issue remained relegated to the political fringes of the political fray as the manifestations of irreversible climate damage kept being found in some of the most susceptible states.

The 2022 Pakistan floods might also be taken as the turning point of this discussion. The scale and media attention of the disaster made the abstract climate

danger a concrete humanitarian crisis, which enabled Pakistan to refreeze its diplomatic rhetoric of moral panic and international accountability. This reframing made Pakistan more visible in the international arena, giving a new impetus to Loss and Damage financing. However, disaster-reconstruction literature cautions that aid dependency caused by donors can obstruct local self-governance, undermine governance, and result in dependency (O'Brien, 2023). External interventions or those whose design is external are termed technocratic and insensitive to the local socio-economic reality, hence resulting in unsustainable outcomes.

It is on this basis that this paper examines how the recent climate catastrophes in Pakistan have transformed its image in the global climate policy. It applies qualitative thematic analysis, which relates to the records of the UNFCCC conferences of the parties, national policy papers, Post Disaster Needs Assessment reports, and peer-reviewed literature to show how the narrative of diplomacy in Pakistan has changed over the years. The paper fits into the broader debate of equity, resilience, and power in the new global climate regime by making Pakistan not an agent of passive victim of climate change but an agent of climate justice emergence.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Pakistan's experience with climate change has been a paradox spanning decades. It is consistently ranked among the most climate-vulnerable countries, with the north's melting glaciers, insecure monsoons of the plains, rising sea levels of the south, and frequent recurrence of extreme weather events (Harmeling & Eckstein, 2012). On the contrary, its role in the problem at the international level is zero, something on which it bases its argument of climate justice. This paradox has propelled its activity in global climate politics for decades. Before 2022, critical analysis largely defined Pakistan as an engaged but marginal member of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC) regime whose main interest was in seeking adaptation finance and technology transfer (Khan, 2025). The 2012 National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) was adopted as an aspirational framework, but its implementation was hindered by limited political will, insufficient resources, and weak institutional capacity (Kumar, Kumari, Kumar, Tunio, & Sassanelli, 2023). Its goals were once again eclipsed by more urgent economic and security concerns, relegating climate change to the margins of the political agenda.

The most widespread master narrative across the global climate governance literature is one of historical cleavage between South and North, responsibility and current exposure. "Climate justice" has also been the most prevalent ethics framework for closing the cleavage, arguing that the least responsible producers of the problem cannot be held responsible for the problem's greatest burdens (Klein, Carazo, Doelle, Bulmer, & Higham, 2017). Under this framework, the issue of requesting a "Loss and Damage" fund has also been the most controversial. Rich nations delayed Loss and Damage formal negotiations for years with the argument that it would set the stage for liability litigation in law and open-ended compensation (Nabong, Walters, & Opdyke, 2025). Literature does indicate that

what was required was a tipping point, a compelling, indefensible argument that would put the issue on officialdom's agenda and make negotiators confronting the theoretical risk of irreversible climate damage a stark reality.

Lastly, post-disaster reconstruction literature in the developing world brings a word of caution. Emergency relief is usually an absolute requirement when foreign aid is concerned. Scholars have pointed to the "paradox of aid," whereby huge amounts of foreign funding can distort local economies, exhaust government capacity, and create dependency (O'Brien, 2023). Foreign-conceived projects tend to be critiqued as technocratic, top-down, and divorced from indigenous realities and indigenous knowledge, producing unsustainable and unjust outcomes (San Gabriel, 2019). It determines the three critical gaps discussed in this article: the need to examine the diplomatic impact of a prominent climate tragedy, the domestic policy role on global reputation, and achieving a balance between global assistance and native autonomy from a perspective to sustain longer-term resilience. It positions Pakistan not only as a case study of exposure but as an influencer whose evolving diplomacy can redesign the future of the international climate regime.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This article employs a double theoretical framework to analyze the evolving role of Pakistan in climate diplomacy. One of these is "Vulnerability as Power", or the idea that the exceptionally high vulnerability of a state to a universal threat can be a factor in symbolic or moral power in world politics (Barnett, 2020). Classic theories of power, which tend to be associated with military or economic power, are not particularly helpful for small or new states' power in a given area of concern. In the context of climate change, the theory operates as follows: it assumes that nations such as Pakistan can use their victimhood to convert global norms into practice, set the agenda for negotiations, and gain moral capital against polluting nations (Aslam et al., 2017). The 2022 floods provide a gut-check test case to observe how Pakistan used its high material vulnerability to gain diplomatic capital within the international community.

The second theory is "Norm Entrepreneurship". This constructivist explanation of international relations outlines how agents (states or non-state actors) attempt to create new international norms of right action (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). The norm entrepreneurs initially attempt to convince enough states that the cause is just, a "norm cascade," before the norm internalizes as international law. This theory is employed in Pakistan's foreign policy after 2022, that is, its Loss and Damage fund campaign. By reframing the question from not one of charity begging but one of global responsibility and justice, Pakistan was seeking to establish a new norm in climate architecture. The model facilitates the understanding of the process of how Pakistan transitioned from being a rule-taker to a prospective rule-maker, seeking to remake the international climate governance order in the interests of the weak.

These two models act as complements to one another; Pakistan's weakness provided the context, and its norm-entrepreneurial behavior supplied the change-inducing mechanism.

## METHODOLOGY

In regards to the nature of the research being conducted in this paper, qualitative thematic analysis is the nature of this research paper because of the remarkably effective method of conducting research studies in the field of research papers like the current because it involves a very complex concept or idea, for example, strategy and policy approaches that provide an opportunity to have access to the themes and meanings of the patterns of the studied and retrieved pieces of information. Critical analysis in the field of research papers is performed at the stage of publication in the following manner:

**International Diplomatic Archives:** UNFCCC COP documents, along with the texts of those decisions, have some relevance to the issue of the COP26, 27, 28, 29, and 30. Being from the International Group of Diplomatic Archives, they manifest as a historian of public policy in the state of Pakistan.

**National Policy Documents:** Its 2012 National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) and its revised form in 2022, the 2023 National Adaptation Plan (NAP), and other sectoral policies in relation to it. These are its national strategic ideas and agenda behind its international position.

**Post-Disaster Needs Assessment Reports:** The Government of Pakistan, World Bank, EU, and UN collectively published the 2022 Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report. One must read this report so one is aware of how the floods were conceived and quantified for international consumption.

**Peer-Reviewed Literature:** Books and journal articles within academia on climate diplomacy, climate justice, Pakistan's environment policy, and post-disaster management. These literatures form theory and critical writings with which primary data are compared.

The research study involved coding the type of papers systematically to look for emerging themes, patterns, and dynamic terms that evolve over time. Emerging themes found were: climate justice, Loss and Damage, moral leadership, domestic change, institutional capacity, donor dependency, and equity. The study observed how these themes evolved over time through forums and compared Pakistan's pre- and post-2022 position to react to the impact of the catastrophic floods on its foreign policy agenda and lexicon.

## FINDINGS / RESULTS

Three of the most impactful post-2022 and 2025 flood climate diplomacy takeaway lessons were ascertained by thematic analysis.

### 1. The Floods as a Diplomatic Driver of Climate Justice and Loss and Damage

UNFCCC negotiations are full of new vigor in Pakistani diplomacy following the 2022 floods. The narrative in Pakistan then shifted to that of "climate justice" and

accusing some of the past developed economy emissions for its ills. As the G-77 and China chair, 134 developing nations, Pakistan would have been able to make a Loss and Damage fund a Breaker Column on the Agenda of climate justice. The PDNA report was employed as final evidence to build the impact estimates, as well as the main evidence to back the case of Pakistan. That was sealed as a true diplomatic achievement at COP27, when the pledge to establish a Loss and Damage fund came, the very victory of Pakistan's risked-and-fought-for cause. The negotiators from the country were wise enough to convert the floods into a "teaching moment" for the world, converting national tragedy into global demands for accountability.

## **2. Domestic Policy as a Source of International Credibility**

Analysis of the national policy documents of the country indicates that Pakistan has been very much engaged in fashioning its international reputation through national intervention. The recently launched NCCP (2022) and NAP (2023) proposed a declaration of one strategic priority to develop an integrated policy framework of climate resilience. Pilot was the "Living Indus Programme" that is an investment in grand nature-based solutions. This \$17 billion project is not a green project; it's an indicator. It's an indication towards anticipatory, integral strategies of ecological restoration and economic growth. This intra-focusing provides Pakistan with concrete evidence to show before international donors and benefactors that it is no client state nor a decaying power, but a dynamic hub of change with its vision for sustainable development.

## **3. Structural Extended Vulnerability Undermines Resilience**

In addition to policy and diplomatic success, three structural vulnerabilities, it states, are undermining resilience. First, donor-hub post-disaster reconstruction will definitely produce dependency creation along with disempowering locals. International UN agencies and NGOs arrive and bring compulsory assistance and staff so that they have a differing agenda and schedule, and thus provide a disjunctive response. Second, institutional capacity remains a stumbling block with the provincial environment departments and the Ministry of Climate Change not having the coordinating institutions and resources required to implement such complex policies as the NAP. Decentralization via the 18th Constitutional Amendment has also complicated inter-provincial coordination around inter-provincial common resources such as water. Third, rehabilitation will also continue to perpetuate prevailing socio-economic inequalities because the most disadvantaged of them, city poor, rural women, and landless peasants are still far from arriving at a position where they can exercise political influence so that they can bargain for reconstruction and relief on their own terms.

## **DISCUSSION**

These are words putting a rich country at a diplomatic crossroads. Evidentiary confirmation of being able to convert weakness into strength, as prescribed by theory, can be seen. Pakistan's bad luck provided its delegates with a voice that could not be suppressed and enabled it to act as a norm entrepreneur for

the Loss and Damage call. This can be linked to the fact that it has enhanced the status of the nation in international issues, as well as in moral affairs. The modifications associated with the domestic policies, taking into account Living Indus, which the nation is observing, are crucial in the sense that it has resulted in action speaking louder than words, ensuring that it provides the needed impetus for these countries to pursue multilateralism because of the enhanced status. Some of the erratic factors associated with the international aspect of foreign policies include the moral persuasion associated with the regions created within every reaction. The discoveries in these research endeavors, on the other hand, reveal the fault lines characterizing the study in relation to the matters left pending.

Being dependent on a donor by itself creates a paradox, which consists of this irony: "that which came from outside may one day prove to itself a cause for a lack of control over one's own making." Indeed, this makes it consistent with another prediction of a study that "Pakistan may find itself in a trap of dependence from which it could export its strength without anything inside." Home-based weakness would serve as the most impeding factor. No country can be a global leader in climate if its state-level institutions remain so weak that they fail to exist and formulate policies. This revelation shakes the very foundation of legitimation, its work-at-home so carefully tries to establish, which grants a chance to de-couple intention and action to be exploited by external forces. And last but not least, equity stands at the top priority.

Blinded criminal and climate-of-mind diplomacy in utter disregard for the welfare of its most helpless citizens is simply immoral and not sustainable. It now becomes a duty on Pakistan to connect this blindly criminal and climate-of-mind diplomacy with a sorely needed sense of gravitas on home turf climate justice. This shall entail its adaptation plans, rehabilitation aid, and top-of-the-line technology for the landless peasants of Sindh Province and the poor of Balochistan-not the elite urban dwellers and rich landowners. Otherwise, its preparedness to the challenge of climate change would never be wholesome on pillars of disparity that, by its definition, would fall apart the moment a challenge of whatever kind from the future on climate change comes knocking.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2022 and 2025 floods became defining moments that reshaped Pakistan's trajectory in global climate diplomacy.

It has not only been effective in utilizing its extremely-exposed status to good effect into being heard and having a voice to be heard on climate justice, and is one of the sponsors of the new Loss and Damage fund. With this further moral bargaining leverage and consequent enabling domestic policy reaction, there is only one window of opportunity. It is susceptible to donor dependency traps, weak institutions, and deep-rooted inequality. If Pakistan doesn't want to tread this thin ice and emerge as a climate champion, instead of a climate victim, it will have to adopt a twin strategy.

It will have to continue imposing a values and justice agenda on global agendas and collaborating in an indigenous radical reform agenda. It wishes to develop an externally supported but locally driven resilience, technologically erroneous but socially right. Thus, not only does Pakistan have its own future, but also a better model to demonstrate to the rest of the risk-taking world the way disaster can be the driving force for correctly fitted, fair, and sustainable change. In these regards, the following is presented before the Government of Pakistan:

#### **Invest in Institutional Capacity**

Establish Ministry of Climate Change and provincial environmental departments with sufficient budget, technical capacity, and mandate to coordinate provinces that can effectively implement NAP.

#### **Champion Locally-Led Solutions**

Scale up and disseminate Living Indus Programme-type interventions at a level where plans for climate adaptation and recovery are determined and provided by the people themselves, that can attain self-reliance and longer-term sustainability.

#### **Mainstream Equity**

Mainstream equity guarantees in all climate action and recovery planning that the investment is indeed going to the most vulnerable and not further deepening gaps.

#### **For International Partners and Donors**

##### **Promote Prior Local Priorities**

Stepped, gradual transition from project to program and budget support funding aligned with Pakistan's NAP and other nationally determined actions, state-building, and not subversive.

##### **First, Build Institutional Capacity**

Invest gigantic climate finance in building sustainable institutional capacity instead of necessarily physical infrastructure.

##### **Support, Not Substitute**

Incentivise to enable grassroots initiatives like the Living Indus Programme and provide technical and financial support, but do not substitute indigenous agendas.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Aslam, A. Q., Ahmad, S. R., Ahmad, I., Hussain, Y., & Hussain, M. S. (2017). Vulnerability and impact assessment of extreme climatic event: A case study of southern Punjab, Pakistan. *Science of the Total Environment*, 580, 468-481.
- Barnett, J. (2020). Global environmental change II: Political economies of vulnerability to climate change. *Progress in Human Geography*, 44(6), 1172-1184.
- Downs, E. S. (2004). The Chinese energy security debate. *The China Quarterly*, 177, 21-41.
- Finnemore, M., & Sikkink, K. (1998). International norm dynamics and political change. *International Organization*, 52(4), 887-917.

- Goldthau, A., & Witte, J. M. (2010). The global energy architecture: Governing the energy challenges of the twenty-first century. *International Affairs*, 86(2), 315–332.
- Government of Pakistan, European Union, United Nations, & World Bank. (2022). Pakistan Floods 2022: Post-Disaster Needs Assessment. Islamabad: Government of Pakistan.
- Government of Pakistan. (2022). National Climate Change Policy 2022. Ministry of Climate Change.
- Harmeling, S., & Eckstein, D. (2012). Global climate risk index 2013. *Who suffers most from extreme weather events, 1992-2011*.
- Khan, A. (2025). *The Communicative Construction of Adaptation, Mitigation, Resilience, and Vulnerability in Pakistan's National Climate Change Policy: A Critical Discourse Perspective* (Doctoral dissertation, Ohio University).
- Klare, M. T. (2008). Rising powers, shrinking planet: The new geopolitics of energy. Metropolitan Books.
- Klein, D., Carazo, M. P., Doelle, M., Bulmer, J., & Higham, A. (Eds.). (2017). *The Paris Agreement on climate change: Analysis and commentary*. Oxford University Press.
- Kumar, L., Kumari, R., Kumar, A., Tunio, I. A., & Sassanelli, C. (2023). Water quality assessment and monitoring in Pakistan: A comprehensive review. *Sustainability*, 15(7), 6246.
- Ministry of Climate Change. (2023). National Adaptation Plan 2023. Islamabad: Government of Pakistan.
- Nabong, E., Walters, J., & Opdyke, A. (2025). Identifying key drivers of habitability loss reveals pathways for climate change adaptation in the Pacific.
- O'Brien, K. (2023). The aid paradox: How post-disaster funding can undermine long-term resilience in developing countries. *World Development Quarterly*, 50(3), 75-92.
- San Gabriel, C. (2019). Does Aid Really Help? The Nexus Between Development Aid and State-Society Resilience in Fragile Situations.
- Yergin, D. (2011). *The quest: Energy, security, and the remaking of the modern world*. Penguin Press.
- Zhao, S. (2013). China's global energy strategy: Policy evolution and challenges. *Asian Survey*, 53(5), 889–912.