

Climate Security as Human Right in South Asia: A Neglected Dimension

Malik Altamash Ahmad Noori¹

<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2025.14.3.111>

Abstract

In particular, regions such as South Asia are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which pose a significant threat to economic and environmental systems and to fundamental human rights. The intersection of human rights within strategy and security discourses remains inadequately theorised and operationalised in South Asia, despite the concept of climate security gaining significant traction in recent years. This paper argues that climate security should be understood as a fundamental human rights issue in South Asia. It goes beyond normative human rights frameworks currently in place and incorporates the empirical significance of climate-induced vulnerabilities. To establish a conceptual framework that illustrates how breaches of climate security manifest as violations of human rights — specifically the rights to life, health, food, water, shelter, and labour — the article uses a qualitative methodology that involves examining the literature and secondary data. In this context, the focus is on South Asian countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, with particular attention to human rights, climate justice, and security. The primary findings indicate that there has always been a disparity between what people claim to believe and what they actually do, particularly for marginalized groups such as women, children, people with low incomes, and climate migrants. The article recommends incorporating human rights-based approaches into climate-security governance, strengthening regional cooperation, and giving communities greater power.

Keywords: Climate Security, Human Rights, South Asia.

Introduction

The climate issue worldwide has worsened since the start of the twenty-first century. Now, it is at an unprecedented level and hard for all of us to deal with. Climate change is no longer just a notion; it is happening right now and affecting ecosystems, industry, and, most importantly, humans. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) says that human-caused climate change is still worsening the world by driving more extreme weather and widening social and economic gaps. It can lead to issues such as food and water shortages, population movements, health problems, and political unrest. These effects are interconnected, illustrating that climate change harms more than just the environment; it also harms human rights and safety in many ways. As this discourse grows, the idea of climate security emerges as a way to show how environmental changes and political stability are interconnected in complex ways. Even as more and more individuals in politics and academia are interested in climate security, it is still not regarded as a

¹MPhil Political Science and IR, Lahore Leads University, Lahore. Email: malikaltamash9@gmail.com



human rights issue, especially in South Asia, which is one of the country's most at risk from climate change.

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are all part of South Asia. Many people are living here; it is poor, with many social and political issues, and the ecosystem is relatively weak. About a quarter of the world's population lives in this area, which features long coastlines, rich deltas, and glacier systems that affect jobs, farming, and energy. However, it is also the part of the world where climate change has the most significant impact. The area's physical and social landscape is already changing due to rising temperatures, unpredictable monsoons, melting Himalayan glaciers, and recurring floods and droughts (World Bank, 2022). More than 30 million people had to leave their homes because of the floods in Pakistan in 2022. The floods affected a third of the country. Several beaches in Bangladesh are becoming uninhabitable due to cyclones and rising sea levels. Because of more frequent and severe heat waves and reduced groundwater levels, food and water are becoming less safe in India. These are not separate natural disasters; they are dangers to our lives that violate our most basic human rights, such as the right to live, be healthy, have food and drink, and live in a safe location.

Climate security is a broad term that refers to how climate change affects people's health, happiness, and peace. Barnett and Adger (2007) characterize it as a hypothesis linking environmental deterioration to societal vulnerability and the likelihood of war. However, most of the research and plans for climate security have focused on countries. They have considered factors such as the risk of tensions between nations, conflicts over resources, and threats to national security. This narrow framing often overlooks the human side of climate-related issues, including their impact on people's daily lives, rights, and dignity. In South Asia, where socioeconomic disparities and poor governance compromise fundamental rights, the absence of a human rights perspective in climate-security frameworks is a significant logical and ethical deficiency.

When we talk about climate security as a human rights issue, we stop protecting countries and start protecting people. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and all other human rights treaties that followed say that everyone has the right to life, health, food, water, work, and a place to live. Climate change is not only an environmental or developmental concern; it constitutes a significant violation of human dignity, eroding fundamental rights both directly and indirectly. When droughts damage crops, rising seas cover homes, or floods make drinking water unsafe, people lose more than just their things; they also lose their fundamental human rights.

When we view climate change as a human rights issue, countries and international groups see climate adaptation, mitigation, and justice as moral and legal duties rather than merely policy aims. This rights-based framework is critical in South Asia. The region's climate challenges are exacerbated by long-term poverty, gender inequality, political instability, and weak institutions. Millions of poor people rely on farming for food, work in the informal economy, or work in jobs that use natural resources. This makes them particularly open to climate shocks. Women and marginalized groups frequently face the highest risks stemming from these repercussions, primarily due to restricted access to property, financial resources, education, and decision-making authority. People who have to move due to climate change are becoming a new human rights issue.

Because sea levels are rising, deserts are expanding, and there is not enough water, many people in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan have to move within their own countries or across borders. This method has been written about by the UNHCR (2023). After being transported, these people typically have to deal with discrimination, being taken advantage of, and not being seen by the

law. This shows that current systems are not doing enough to protect the rights of people who move due to climate change.

Another crucial component of this conversation is climate justice. It fights climate change by promoting fairness, responsibility, and equality among the least responsible people.

People who are most affected by greenhouse gas emissions are typically the ones responsible for them. South Asia is responsible for less than 10% of the greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere. However, it is one of the places where climate change has hit the hardest. Pakistan, for instance, produces less than 1% of the world's carbon dioxide, yet in 2022 it experienced devastating floods that caused more than \$30 billion in damage and affected millions of people (UNDP, 2023). This is unfair and reveals the moral side of climate governance, where not everyone is equally responsible or at risk.

Climate justice means that worldwide and regional institutions should work to make things fair, give people what they deserve, and support one another. From a human rights perspective focused on justice, climate security means ensuring that these vulnerable groups do not fall behind in their efforts to become strong and survive.

More and more people are recognizing climate change as a "threat multiplier," but South Asian governments have been slow to embed rights-based climate governance into their laws. The region's climate policies are still not very good, are mostly centred on technology, and do not work well. There are few legal ways to make states or businesses pay for climate damage, and human rights are rarely addressed in national adaptation or crisis management plans. The ecosystems in the area are facing significant environmental challenges that affect more than one, including water sharing, melting glaciers, and animal migration.

We need to find solutions to these problems that go beyond the nation-state. Political rivalries, resource nationalism, and ineffective regional frameworks, exemplified by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), have obstructed collective action initiatives.

The goal of this essay is to bring together the relationship between climate security and human rights in South Asia.

The worsening climate issue should not just be considered a danger, but also a threat to national security and economic prosperity, and a direct attack on the fundamental rights and liberties of millions of individuals. The human rights framework for climate security would help make climate governance fairer, more accountable, and more morally decent.

It also stresses that protecting human dignity, fairness, and participation—principles that are part of international human rights law is necessary for climate security.

This uses a qualitative approach, examining documents, evaluating policies, and using secondary data from studies conducted by international organizations, regional institutions, and civil society groups. This strategy makes it easier to see how climate-related risks can violate rights in complex ways and how governments either address or ignore these issues. This research, although geographically focused, is deeply grounded in the experiences of communities across South Asia, emphasising local agency and vulnerability.

This is how the text is set up: The following section discusses how climate justice, climate security, and human rights are interconnected. Then it talks about the political and environmental situation in South Asia. The following parts discuss how climate-related dangers, such as floods, droughts, displacement, and health problems, violate fundamental rights. The following discussion highlights the moral and institutional deficiencies in policy responses and proposes integrating human rights concepts into climate-security governance.

Theoretical Framework

Climate security

According to De Arya, Mohanty, and Bhattacharyya (2021), the term "climate security" refers to the interaction of climate change with challenges to national, regional, or human security. These concerns include competition for resources, migration, the risk of natural catastrophes, and inadequate infrastructure. According to Mukhtar (2019), climate security in South Asia is commonly contextualized by water disputes (for example, in the Indus basin), floods, droughts, glacial melt, and inter-state rivalry. Climate change is a "threat multiplier," meaning it worsens existing issues (Shidore et al., 2021).

Aspects of human rights

The frameworks of human rights offer normative support for the preservation of persons' dignity, life, health, sustenance, water, shelter, and participation in society. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and subsequent treaties, these rights are guaranteed to every single person on the planet. Nevertheless, the effects of climate change are making it more difficult for individuals and nations to protect such rights. The idea of "climate justice" underscores that marginalised communities, particularly those in the Global South, are disproportionately affected by climate change despite contributing a tiny share of global greenhouse gas emissions (Prajapati et al., 2023). The violation of rights resulting from climate-induced damage is brought to light by a human rights-based approach to climate security. It also highlights the need for solutions that prioritise the preservation of rights and the empowerment of marginalised people.

Connecting climate security and human rights in South Asia

The intersection of climate security and human rights in South Asia is particularly pronounced due to:

- a) Significant vulnerability to climate change (evidenced by glacial melt, sea-level rise, monsoonal variability, floods, and droughts).
- b) Extensive populations living in poverty, informality, and marginalization.
- c) Tensions between and within states regarding resources and displacement (Bose, 2024)
- d) The limited capacity of regional governance mechanisms (e.g., SAARC) to facilitate coordinated responses to climate-security-rights issues (Nawaz et al., 2025).

Because of this, the normative argument proposes that climate security in this region ought to be reframed as a human rights imperative, with implications for policy, governance, and justice³.

Methodology

This qualitative study comprises a thorough literature review, analysis of policy and report documents, and analytical synthesis. Structure of the method:

Academic journals, regional/international policy papers, human rights documents, and South Asian regional case studies provide data. Studies on climate change vulnerabilities in South Asia (Saira et al., 2023), climate security (Mahmood, 2025), and climate justice and human rights (Prajapati et al., 2023) provide vital insights.

Selection and Sampling: Use keywords such as "climate security South Asia," "human rights climate change South Asia," and "climate justice SAARC human rights" to find papers published in 2015. Select documents addressed climate change, security, and human rights in South Asia.

Thematic analysis categorized and integrated data sources. Life and health, food and water security, shelter and displacement, labour and migration, gender and vulnerability, and state and regional governance deficits are critical.

Regional human rights and climate security data constrain secondary data analysis. Less disaggregated data links rights abuses to climate change than qualitative narratives. Moral and interpretive frameworks trump statistical modelling, making causality difficult to determine.

South Asia: background and weaknesses

Among the regions of the world that are most susceptible to the effects of climate change is South Asia, which encompasses countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Agricultural and food security in South Asia have been significantly affected by climate change, according to Saira et al. (2023). This is because climate change has caused water scarcity, increasing temperatures, glacial melting, and variable monsoon storm patterns. Furthermore, the region is characterized by large numbers of people travelling, flooding, and inadequate infrastructure (Mukhtar, 2019; Shidore et al., 2021).

Because of socioeconomic factors such as a large informal workforce, significant poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and high population density, the region lacks the capacity to adapt to new circumstances. When gender is broken down into its parts, it becomes much more apparent that women and children are more susceptible to the risk (Aita & Ahmed, 2022). These environmental factors indicate a climate in which climate security threats easily translate into rights shortages.

Climate security as human rights violations in South Asia

The study focuses on connective, ambidextrous, and learning capacities at the individual, organizational, and network levels to investigate the combined effects of these three capacities on innovation in the public education sector and, ultimately, on the quality of education. In particular, it examines how these capabilities enable educational institutions to adapt to new circumstances, collaborate, and continuously improve their performance. The research also investigates the role that innovation plays as a mediator in the connection between these capacities and educational quality. This is done to gain an understanding of how improved innovation practices lead to long-lasting gains in public education performance.

Connective capacity emphasizes the importance of collaboration, coordination, and information sharing among individuals, groups, and networks to enhance governance and stimulate innovation. The core focus of ambidextrous capacity is the ability to balance exploration and exploitation, meaning the capacity to seize new opportunities while simultaneously streamlining existing procedures to maintain both creative and operational efficiency. On the other hand, learning capacity emphasises the importance of continuous education, adaptability, and activities that provide opportunities for reflection to enhance overall performance and organisational flexibility. The study employs a quantitative research methodology to analyse data and test hypothesised correlations between variables using structural equation modelling (SEM). To collect information from educators, school administrators, and representatives of the innovation and quality assurance departments of the public education system, a comprehensive survey was devised and administered. To evaluate responses, a 7-point Likert scale was used to record varying degrees of agreement or disagreement with each construct.

The research provides valuable insights into how collaborative networks, adaptive techniques, and continuous learning processes can boost innovation and, in turn, raise the standard of education by

combining these multifaceted capabilities. In addition to contributing to the broader discussion of public-sector performance, the findings have important implications for stakeholders, educational leaders, and legislators interested in advancing reforms driven by innovation. In conclusion, the research highlights the importance of cultivating connective, ambidextrous, and learning capacities to achieve a more resilient, creative, and efficient educational system capable of meeting the ever-evolving requirements of modern public service delivery and governance.

Governance, regional cooperation, and deficiencies

Furthermore, although climate security and human rights are inextricably linked, South Asia continues to face significant governance gaps. Because there are insufficient institutional frameworks in the region, it is not easy to guarantee that a rights-based approach to climate security will ultimately succeed. For example, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has struggled to develop coordinated plans for climate change, security, and human rights (Bose, 2024). This group has not been successful in accomplishing its objectives.

In technical contexts, national policies often prioritize disaster risk management and adaptation while neglecting normative rights frameworks (Prajapati et al., 2023).

Some South Asian nations do not recognize human migration resulting from climate change as legally valid (Chowdhury, 2025). This is the case in many South Asian countries.

Individuals are more difficult to hold accountable and to put in order because data and monitoring systems are not yet capable of adequately linking climate change to human rights outcomes. This makes it more challenging to put things in order.

When these shortcomings are taken into account, the normative potential of human rights has not yet been realised in the governance of climate security in South Asia. Not only is the problem conceptual (placement of climate security within the context of rights), but it is also operational (the process of transforming rights pledges into policy and action). Precisely this is the difficulty.

Analysis

When climate security is framed as a human rights issue in South Asia, several consequences can follow. Many of these consequences are listed below. A good number of these repercussions are detailed below. All of these consequences are described in greater detail in the following paragraphs. To begin, it shifts the focus away from state-centred security (such as threats to national resources or borders) toward the safety and dignity of individuals and groups. This is a significant step forward. This is a massive advance in the right direction. This represents an essential step forward.

Second, this underscores the importance of nations protecting human rights amid climate change, even though its causes are global and transcend national boundaries. This is because climate change is a phenomenon driven by global warming. The reason is that rising global temperatures drive climate change. This is because climate change is affecting every city on the planet. This is the reason why this effect is occurring.

In the third place, it emphasizes fairness and justice: the effects of climate change are more severe for women, people in informal jobs, and people living in inland and coastal regions of South Asia. Fairness and justice are also emphasized. There is also an emphasis placed on fairness and justice. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis placed on fairness and justice. There ought to be a higher level of protection afforded to these categories than they currently provide for themselves.

However, the fact of the matter is that this framing faces both normative and practical challenges. This is the reality of the situation. For instance, it is still difficult to establish a connection between

specific climate events and the government's actions or inaction over the last few decades. This is because climate change is a relatively new phenomenon. This is a result of the government's failure to respond to the situation.

In many cases, robust institutions, Accountability mechanisms, and enforcement mechanisms are necessary for implementing rights-based frameworks. However, these elements are frequently lacking in the region. In addition, there is often a lack of enforcement mechanisms. Due to geopolitical tensions, international cooperation is difficult. One illustration of this is the disagreement between India and Pakistan over water resources. Despite global cooperation being an absolute requirement, this is the result. The framework of human rights not only provides a moral compass but also justifies modifying our policies when viewed from a different perspective. This is because the human rights framework provides us with both of these things.

It is of the utmost importance that the countries of South Asia incorporate the rights to life, health, food, water, housing, and employment into their strategies for adapting to and addressing the effects of climate change. As a result, it will become abundantly clear that protecting human rights has a direct bearing on climate security.

Cooperative efforts between the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and other regional organisations would be beneficial for identifying data-sharing methods, establishing early warning systems, and developing joint strategies for migration and resettlement. In addition, they ought to collaborate to find international solutions to climate change, national security, and human rights issues.

Monitoring how climate-related events or trends affect human rights by using distinct indicators (such as displacement, food insecurity, and health outcomes) has become an increasingly important aspect of climate change monitoring.

Policies need to be centred on groups that are frequently excluded, ensure participation is open to all individuals, and guarantee assistance is provided to communities with the greatest need.

All of these things need to be done.

It is recommended that states adopt a rights-based approach to assist individuals whose employment opportunities have been affected by climate change. This can be accomplished by expanding the number of social protection programs, such as insurance, cash transfers, and employment guarantee programs.

To acknowledge the impact that climate change has on people's mobility and to protect their rights to move securely, to be paid, and to be free from discrimination, the countries of South Asia need to either create new laws or improve the laws that are already in place, as stated by Chowdhury (2025). This is necessary to protect people's rights.

Human rights organisations and members of civil society should be involved in reporting climate rights violations, and the process should be made easier for individuals to use. Through this, the government will be able to ensure that it follows the rules and addresses any problems that may arise.

Conclusion

There is a genuine and significant connection between climate security and human rights; however, this connection is not discussed nearly enough in the political discourse associated with South Asian countries. They can align normative obligations with tangible safeguards by reinterpreting climate security as a human rights issue. This allows governments, academic institutions, and civil society organisations to protect the environment better. In this paper, a qualitative analysis of the incorporation of climate-related concerns into human rights violations in South Asia has been

carried out, deficiencies in governance have been identified, and recommendations for pragmatic action have been proposed. All of these things have been accomplished. There is a possibility that the human rights framework will provide support on moral, legal, and practical grounds to ensure that the governance of climate security does not prioritize the most vulnerable populations. Climate change is not only a problem for the environment but also a threat to the people of South Asia, including their rights, dignity, and the right to justice. This is because climate change harms the environment.

Recommendations

All of South Asia's national climate policies and adaptation plans should incorporate human rights principles, including the rights to life, health, food, water, and shelter. This will make sure that climate security is about people.

States should recognize and protect people who are forced to leave their homes due to climate-related disasters, ensuring they can find housing, work, and fair treatment.

Bring SAARC back to life to help countries work together on climate security, sharing data, and making changes that respect people's rights.

Create a regional fund to help communities that have lost items that cannot be replaced due to climate change. Focus on groups already at risk, such as women, farmers, and people displaced by climate change.

Please set up a regional early warning network for floods, droughts, and heat waves to help keep people safe and protect their fundamental rights during climate emergencies.

To ensure climate action is fair to everyone, give women greater power in local planning for adaptation, leadership, and disaster response.

Governments should strengthen social safety nets, such as crop insurance, job guarantees, and cash transfers, to protect people's jobs and livelihoods from the impacts of climate shocks.

To ensure solutions are inclusive, relevant, and long-lasting, involve local communities and civil society groups in climate planning and decision-making.

To help policymakers make decisions, show how climate events (like floods and droughts) are connected to human rights outcomes (like food insecurity, health risks, and displacement).

Teach people about climate change and human rights in schools, colleges, and the media. This will help people understand, take responsibility, and build a culture of environmental justice.

References

- Adger, W. N., Barnett, J., Chapin, F. S., & Ellemor, H. (2019). Community-based adaptation to climate change: Scaling it up. *Climate Policy*, 19(2), 225–236. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2018.1527679>
- Aita, S., & Ahmed, R. (2022). Gendered vulnerabilities to climate change in South Asia. *Journal of Environmental Studies*, 18(2), 145–162.
- Asian Development Bank. (2023). *Climate change, human rights, and development in Asia and the Pacific*. ADB.
- Barnett, J., & Adger, W. N. (2007). Climate change, human security and violent conflict. *Political Geography*, 26(6), 639–655. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2007.03.003>
- Bose, T. (2024). Climate-induced resource conflicts in South Asia: Regional perspectives. *South Asian Journal of Security Studies*, 9(1), 23–45.
- Boyd, D. R. (2020). *The environmental rights revolution: A global study of constitutions, human rights, and the environment*. University of British Columbia Press.

- Chowdhury, R. (2025). Climate migration and legal recognition in South Asia. *Journal of Migration and Human Rights*, 10(2), 112–130.
- De Arya, R., Mohanty, S., & Bhattacharyya, D. (2021). Climate security and human resilience: Conceptual insights. *Climate and Security Review*, 12(3), 101–120.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2023). *Sixth assessment report: Climate change 2023: Impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability*. IPCC. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>
- Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. (2022). *Global report on internal displacement 2022*. IDMC.
- Islam, N., & Gupta, J. (2020). South Asia's climate challenge: Regional cooperation for shared security. *Journal of South Asian Development*, 15(3), 281–300.
- Mahmood, F. (2025). Climate security assessment in South Asia: Challenges and governance. *Asian Climate Policy Journal*, 7(1), 55–78.
- Mukhtar, S. (2019). Water disputes and climate vulnerability in South Asia. *South Asian Water Studies*, 6(4), 200–218.
- Nawaz, A., Singh, P., & Rahman, T. (2025). Regional governance and climate security in South Asia: SAARC perspectives. *Journal of Regional Policy*, 11(2), 33–57.
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2020). *Human rights and climate change: Key messages on implementation*. OHCHR.
- Prajapati, K., Reddy, L., & Sharma, V. (2023). Climate justice and human rights in the Global South. *Human Rights and Environment Journal*, 15(1), 77–98.
- Saira, N., Noureen, F., Ahmad, M., Naseer, S., & Khalid, R. (2023). Climate change vulnerabilities and agricultural adaptation in South Asia. *Environmental Development*, 46, 100–115.
- Shidore, J., Fleishman, R., & Kodack, P. (2021). Climate change as a threat multiplier in South Asia. *Global Environmental Change*, 68, 102256. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102256>
- UN Women. (2021). *Gender and climate security in Asia and the Pacific*. UN Women.
- UNDP. (2023). *South Asia climate vulnerability report: Climate impacts and human development*. United Nations Development Programme.
- UNHCR. (2023). *Climate-induced displacement and migration: Global report*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2021). *Integrating human rights into climate action*. UNDP.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Measuring climate and human rights outcomes: Indicators for action*. UNDP.
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2022). *Building regional climate resilience through early warning systems*. UNESCAP.
- World Bank. (2021). *Adaptive social protection for inclusive resilience in South Asia*. World Bank Group.
- World Bank. (2022). *South Asia climate overview: Risks, vulnerabilities, and adaptation pathways*. World Bank Group.