Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on us:

Shattering the Illusion of Climate Security as a Means of Protecting Communities Facing Climate Disaster

Claudia Milena Adler, PhD (Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor in International Humanitarian Affairs Department of Health Sciences University of York / England https://ror.org/04m01e293 *claudiamilena.adler@york.ac.uk / 0000-0002-6836-974X*

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Abstract:

The climate crisis remains central to international discourse, yet efforts to transition from fossil fuel-dependent economies remain fragmented. Addressing climate disasters as isolated regional events undermines the global, multidimensional nature of the crisis. Climate change continues to expose gaps in human development frameworks, particularly regarding marginalised and vulnerable communities. This article explores Pakistan's struggle to develop a coherent climate security strategy that addresses the educational, health, social, and economic needs of these communities—a challenge shared by many countries worldwide. Using a

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qualitative, interpretative approach, this research draws on the lived experiences of rural communities severely impacted by Pakistan's 2022 floods. It examines the psychosocial trauma faced by children and the broader implications for community preparedness and resilience. Findings reveal how health and well-being are deeply connected to socioeconomic and collective indicators, with entire generations at risk of falling into cycles of underdevelopment. The study highlights critical gaps in current climate solutions that intensify the multidimensional nature of poverty and social injustice. As disasters and conflicts persist across the Global South, community resilience continues to erode. The article argues for innovative, locally grounded climate and human development solutions that emerge from the Global South itself. It advocates for a shift from conventional climate security approaches toward integrated protection and development frameworks that center both planetary and human well-being. The potential of regions such as Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East to shape sustainable futures amid ongoing climatic and systemic challenges is presented as urgent and necessary.

Keywords: Climate Disaster, Climate Security, Sustainability, Colonialism, Protection, Pakistan, Global South.

Introduction

The severity and frequency of human-caused climate change disasters have become a more prominent global topic within the last couple of decades. Much of the research on climate change is loosely connected to pre-existing socio-economic, cultural, geographical, and political inequities. The vacuum that exists in linking climate-related disasters to inequality and issues of justice has skewed accountability measures to be taken seriously. Currently, under the climate change banner, historically high-emitting industrial nations have leveraged global governance structures to their advantage - to use a more colloquial expression, this has been a hand well played. A third of the finance given to the least developed countries (LDCs) comes in the form of loans rather than grants, raising the risk of climate debt traps (Zagema et al., 2023). As of 2021, 17 of the 20 most climate-vulnerable and least climate-prepared countries were LDCs (UNCTAD, 2023). This research article makes links to Pakistan and its struggle to create a comprehensive climate security strategy and the broader challenges that the Global South is facing with an underlining examination of the colonial legacies within global governance.

The construct of climate security is largely a Western-driven agenda entangled with colonial and capitalist interests at heart. Climate security, as a political and policy framework, is shaping mainstream approaches to climate solutions. Within this mainstream apparatus, both the climate and those most affected by disasters are often framed as a threat to the current status quo. The disruption brought about by the crisis infringes on both internal and external capabilities and capacities (Nussbaum, 2000). This research focused on the mental health impact the 2022 floods had on children in two provinces in rural Pakistan. The overarching research question the study looked at is: **What are the rehabilitation approaches for children affected by psycho-social trauma from flood-prone areas in Pakistan?** From the onset, the research adopted a sociological and anthropological approach. The justification for this framing lies in the inequities of a modern capitalist system, where a disaster happens due

to pre-existing vulnerabilities of a people and those territories. As argued by Kleinman (1995, p.101):

> There are routinised forms of suffering that are either shared aspects of human conditions - chronic illness or death – or experiences of deprivation and exploitation and degradation and oppression that certain categories of individuals (the poor, the vulnerable, the defeated) are especially exposed to and others relatively protected from.

Current global approaches to resolving climate disasters have no clear impetus for addressing societal inequities. The focal point in climate security is maintaining the status quo on security and peace. Cordoned off are attempts to disrupt economic interests, which seem to take precedence over human development. The question raised is, security and peace for whom – and at what cost?

Pakistan, as a case study, represents a growing trend across other nations in the Global South whose populations are plunged into ongoing humanitarian crises. The colonial legacy of these territories continues to unfold to this day (Kihlström, M., 2025). Historical emissions and the imposition of modernity through compulsive consumption, together with the exploitation of resources and economic growth on fossil fuels, sit on the shoulders of communities that fit the categorisation of poor, rural, and marginalised (Prashad, 2012). This year commemorates the 75th anniversary of the UN and 80 years of the UN Charter (ICRC, 2024). Despite the milestones, inequality continues to underpin international relations. These are not unrelated issues; rather, as argued by Oxfam in their report titled, Takers not Makers (2005), the historical and ongoing colonialism continues to dictate both economic and political policy. The report examines how, in 2023, the Global North extracted $921 billion from the Global South through the financial system; this is four times the amount that is spent on aid (Taneja et al., 2025). Against this backdrop, the impending climate crisis is a phenomenon that has exacerbated the suffering of affected communities. The magnitude of how a disaster is felt varies from place to place. Drawing from the research case study, community robustness is dependent on external factors like economic and social conditions and access to health, education, and transportation. As argued by Friederike Otto, scientists have struggled to discuss climate and politics as interlinked topics; "I believe it is important to

show that both obstacles – the technical and the political – can be overcome; our climate models have become better and better, and we are coming to realise that research cannot take place at a remove from the real world" (Otto, 2025). Building on this idea, this research article not only connects the technical and the political dimensions of climate disasters but also integrates human ethnography to unravel the lived realities of children, their mothers, fathers, and communities.

The literature shows that there is a divide between the statistical representation of climate change that focuses on rising sea level temperatures, carbon emissions, and ecosystem collapse and lived experience, which includes the intentional marginalisation and disablement of communities. Pakistan is listed as the eighth most climate-vulnerable country in the world, according to the German Climate Risk Index (2025). This is a condition not uncommon amongst LDCs (Germanwatch.n.d.). Moreover, children in LDCs have been identified as the most at-risk population when it comes to climate change. Their developing physiologies, together with prolonged exposure to vector-borne diseases, food insecurity, malnutrition, psychological stress, and reduced livelihood opportunities, including their dependency on adults, significantly magnify their risk of climate-induced disasters (Campbell, Holl, Marwah, et al., 2025).

The apocalyptic scenes of the 2022 floods that submerged a third of the country underwater are not isolated incidents. What renders climate change a disaster is the interplay between the exposure to the disaster itself and the set of pre-existing vulnerabilities with which we enter (Otto, 2025). Within this complex web of systems, local, national, and global governance apparatuses are key determinants of whether communities can withstand a disaster and, if so, the capacity for recovery. The enabling conditions to foster human development in the Global South have been systematically undermined by the colonial project of 1492 (Rodney, 1972). As argued by Silvia Federici (2021), capitalism flourished through the enslavement of colonised peoples and the devaluation of women - their bodies and their labour - all of which are hallmarks of an emerging capitalist system. This historical background is key to formulating a holistic understanding of who is most impacted by disasters today and how policy intersects with inequality. These factors contribute to determining the repercussions of recovery. A narrow focus on the mechanics of climate change

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undermines the complex interplay of needs that communities face in initiating post-disaster rehabilitation. Policies that are void of participatory methods risk replicating the paternalistic approach within the mainstream humanitarian and development sectors (Shiva, 1999).

A running theme throughout this research article and its methodological underpinning is the involvement of the research participants as equal partners. The vulnerability paradigm, in which affected communities are stripped of agency through top-down global aid programmes, is colonial at its root (Adler, 2024). This restructuring of society by the European colonial expansion, which included the transatlantic slave trade, the witch hunts in Europe, and a woman's forced reproductive labour, made up the foundations of our current capitalist economic system (Federici, 2021). This research article looks to build on the decolonial discourse by linking the historical implications to the contemporary climate security debate. Against this historical backdrop, it is important to distinguish between vulnerability arising from economic, political, social, cultural, and geographical inequalities and the imposition of vulnerability as a fixed identity. With the acceleration of disasters induced by climate change, the crippling of capacity by intentional disablement diminishes all necessary capabilities to withstand uncertainty (Nussbaum, 2000). For instance, Pakistan's current climate crisis and contemporary policymaking practices are modelled by British colonial rule. The two governance practices to this day by successive post-Partition governments are replicates of this archaic governance system. In this political makeup, the centralization of governance and exclusion of local and indigenous communities, their experiential knowledge of soil, land and   water, and spiritual ties with coexistence are dismissed (Hayat, 2022). Climate change, as a global issue, is also an opportunity to reset, reintegrate and collectively re-imagine within planetary system boundaries what development ought to be beyond an economic endeavour.

The 2022 floods caused Pakistan an estimated $30 billion in damages, of which the country was only able to make up a third of the costs for rebuilding efforts. The remaining amount was largely made up of loans that have weighed heavily on an existing debt of approximately $20 billion from previous climate-change-induced damages (Zaidi, 2022). This segment of the case study reveals a profound domino effect of chronic underdevelopment from micro, meso and macro levels.

The disruption to life – especially for children – is evident in physical and mental health impacts, societal and structural breakdowns, and communal and future frustrations. Globally, children are amongst the most affected and at the highest risk of the consequences of public health emergencies. It is estimated that 50% of the 3.4 million children affected by the 2022 floods showed signs of distress following the 2022 floods (Save the Children International, 2022). The complex nature of children's health and wellbeing is the interlinkage of protection issues that are largely reliant on family and community settings. In addition, children's mental, physical and spiritual health is again sustained by close relations and surrounding societal infrastructure that can accommodate the rights of the child. This research article brings to the forefront the health and wellbeing and societal injustices that have been exacerbated by climate change in society's most vulnerable populations.

2. Materials and Methods

The research focused on the communities of Dadu and Dera Ismail Khan that were severely affected regions. With a central focus on the psychosocial trauma experienced by children after the 2022 floods and the intricate relationship between health, wellbeing and development. The methods used varied among the participants. The study aimed to examine the coping mechanisms from the community perspective to build on the climate security, humanitarian and development discourse. The research took on a participatory qualitative approach that involved grassroots leaders who were active within these communities. While consultations were held with civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, and first responders, it was the affected families and the children themselves that created the breadth of the data collected. In order to understand the diversity of lived experience, a range of methodologies, methods and theories were woven into the research framework. The break from the strict confines of Western scientific protocol to allow participatory research design involving arts-based mediums and games removed the oppressive structures that can come with strict Western methodologies and methods (Blaak, Openjuru and Zeelen, 2013. The fieldwork conducted in Dadu facilitated the development of a coding and analytical framework then used in the analysis.

The research design comprised two in-person field visits. At each field visit,

sharing circles were conducted with the women from the communities, separate from the men and the children.

2.1 Data collection

2.1.1 Sharing Circles and Arts-Based Research Methods

Sharing circles and arts-based research methods were both culturally and contextually appropriate methods in this region. All the sessions followed the same overall design, in which the participants were asked to discuss life before the floods, during and what their current needs are post-flood. Sharing circles with men and women was held separately to ensure that participants could explore their feelings freely . Similarly, the arts and games-based sessions with the child's participants were also held independently of their parents, with the older children of this study located at two different schools. Within the cultural context, separating the participants was particularly important for the women-led sessions. The various caring roles of women in these communities provided a grounded understanding of the mental and physical health of their children both during the disaster and after. From a decolonial feminist lens, women from rural and marginalised backgrounds are rarely given the space to participate as experts. Key to the data collection process was the acknowledgement and space for women to relay their children's behaviour patterns and their observations as to what support their children needed. The women were vocal, emotive and pragmatic in their responses. As shown in Figure 1, the mapping of cognitive, behavioural and psychosocial consequences emerged from the mother's account of the experience of trauma by their children. This figure ties in with the mainstream guidelines for dealing with these symptoms. This figure depicts the complex nature and diverse behaviour changes experienced that result from climate disasters. To be able to offer child-friendly spaces, therapy, sports and routine, funding is needed.

The women expressed frustration and helplessness following the severity of the destruction. These states of disorientation and exclusion are core to the discussion section of this article. Care was central to healing and was expressed freely, with many of the mothers only able to offer comfort to their children. The women showed a deep sense of understanding, which is discussed in the findings section as a mechanism of support. Similarly, the men expressed guilt

and helplessness seeing their family suffer. The data collection methods allowed the men to gather and express solidarity between them. The varied modalities and sharing circles in the study facilitated deep discussions about lived experience and how members of communities congregate and support one another. The robustness of the community came through in the observation, which is a fundamental method in the ethnographies and distinct narratives captured within this research.

Commonly in sessions with children, the data collection methods were age-sensitive and accommodated for the different levels of comprehension of the child. The child sessions explored feelings of being 'happy, unhappy, safe, and unsafe within their community and environment. Distinct from the adult-run sessions, which allowed for a comparison to life before the floods, during, and after, it was important to understand protection as a core concept, as indicated in Figure 1. In addition to understanding any challenges within surrounding locations, 'body protection' was a vital terminology used in the subsequent sections to identify areas where sexual abuse was caused due to the displacement and disruption to the community safeguarding mechanism by the floods.
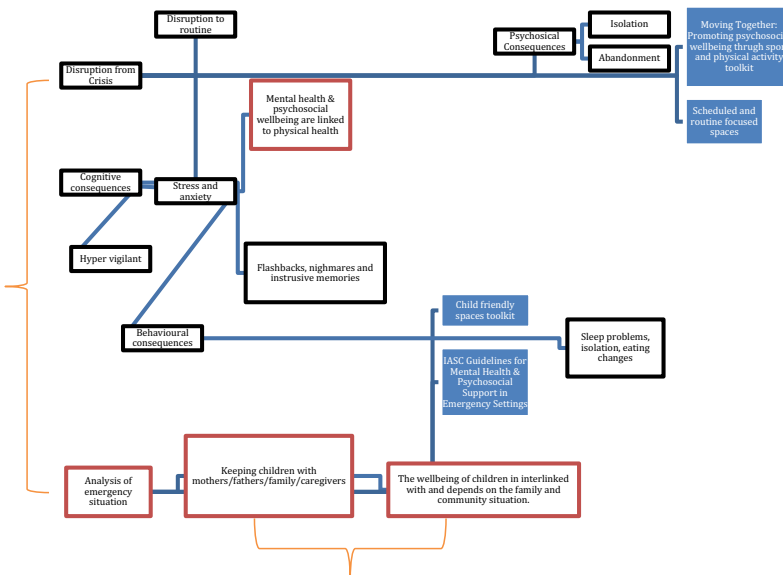

Figure 1: Mapping of disaster outcomes and guidelines (authors own)

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The children's sessions started with an icebreaker. To understand children's cognitive development and impact on situations and experiences, the sessions were crafted around play. The children were asked to shout out what their favourite games and activities are and what makes them happy. The ability of the child to situate themselves confidently with emotion and experience highlights the child's capacity for comprehension. Basic emotions like happiness, anger, fear, surprise and sadness are intrinsic to humans at birth (LoBue et al., 2019). The study broadly involved four categories of research participants as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Research Participants Overview

Group One:	Interviews and structured discussions and observations with local staff	10 participants
Group Two:	Interviews and structured discussions with relevant stakeholder organisations and teachers	5 participants
Group Three:	Sharing circles with flood-affected men and women in Sindh and KP	60 participants
Group Four:	Interactive sessions designed specifically for Pakistani, flood-affected children from 4 – 15 years of age of both genders.	50 participants

The role that humanitarian aid and development programmes need to play before, during, and after a disaster has to emerge from the collection of narratives of communities struggling to recover. The robustness of women, men, and children within these communities is also subject to the existing infrastructure and funding that has been allocated to the areas affected. The destruction of essential services like healthcare , education, and access to roads for communities that are already at the margins of society further limits their ability to cope. What emerged within the data collection were key findings that interlinked the unattended needs from a health, educational, and economic perspective before the 2022 floods.

3. Results

The themes that emerged through thematic analysis showed patterns within the rich data set. For the purposes of this article and the broader global discussion on climate disasters, a focus on development and crisis through two overarching umbrella themes is presented. Within the thematic underpinning that ties over to the discussion section, there is a bare minimum of the standards that marginalised communities have been routinised to survive.

3.1. Marginalisation

The key findings from the case study of Pakistan highlight the degree of impact that poverty-stricken communities and children face. Marginalisation is the consequence of a neglected territory and its people. The existing power concentration that is not unique to Pakistan has created swaths of underdevelopment and poverty for millions. The accumulation of capital that comes with power has not trickled down wealth to those on the margins of society but rather has absorbed it. Inequality as a phenomenon is presented in a plethora of ways (Taneja et al., 2025). The visited districts had a poorly functioning school before the floods, with some semblance of lessons that teachers were able to attend. The Sindh district is remote, with many teachers reluctant to take posts in far-out locations. Nonetheless, it was observed by the researchers and confirmed by the mothers of the community, who relayed that after the floods their local school had been destroyed. The red brick building had missing walls and an open roof. The building that once seated the children of this remote village was derelict. The mothers talked about the boredom of the children and how some of them were discouraged altogether from attending school. The education crisis in Pakistan was palpable during our field visits. It is reported that more than 36% of children are out of school, the equivalent of 25.3 million children aged 5 to 16 (The Express Tribune, 2025). Drawing from the research findings and the first comprehensive analysis of out-of-school children (OOSC) done in Pakistan, it is reported that 74% of the figure are children from rural areas. Where reports summarise the challenges to increasing enrolment in these regions due to social barriers, poverty, and limited infrastructure and access, a different picture is painted on the ground. One can gloss over these issues as they become repetitive and common throughout different countries within the Global South. It is quite another matter when the schools available

are long distances away, cramped classrooms in scorching heat, with no food or ventilation. The desire to learn is the same from child to child, but discrimination sets one against the other. As education becomes ever more an accepted commodity, the development of children and their wellbeing is a privilege that can only be afforded by the elite ruling class. As shown in Figure 1, child-friendly spaces allow a sense of normalcy through play and routine. It is incredibly difficult in a crisis setting to facilitate these spaces. During our visit to Dadu, we came across a tent-shift structure that still had the worn-out logo of a prominent INGO. It had been taken over by a local teacher who was using it to give informal teaching. The scorching sun intensified the temperatures inside the tent to over 51º. In the analysis, marginalisation is discussed as barriers to access but experienced as torturous attempts to offer affected communities a semblance of dignity.

It is on this basis that the author argues against a bare minimum standard status quo. The systems of accountability in rural communities are largely nonexistent , and at best, fragmented. The consequence of a global impetus for exponential economic growth that defies planetary and human flourishing boundaries is a rise in exploitation. This is directly consequential to violence, which in turn requires security measures and militarisation. Global military spending has soared, reaching $2.7 trillion in 2024, , a 9.4% increase from the previous year (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2025). The global trend for compulsive consumption is caused by the increase and severity of extreme weather events inflicted upon the least contributing populations of carbon emissions (Kihlström, 2025). As argued by Ivan Illich (1978), the erasure of essential human skills that comes from underfunding social services in a needs-service economy sets dependency across all critical areas of human life (Illich, 1978).

An overarching commonality within the findings of both the sharing circles between women and men, was a shared feeling of abandonment by the state and the international community. In the analysis, affected communities are denied meaningful mechanisms by which they can shape humanitarian and development efforts. The experience of aid and development by the participants was that only one organisation that had a strong presence on the ground really listened to their needs. Still, the speed at which permanent housing and

sanitation were being implemented was painfully slow. The dependence on donor governments and funding dictates the speed and efficiency at which the needs of affected communities are addressed. Despite the sophisticated international legal frameworks, like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Pakistan is a signatory to, all children are not protected equally. Articles 19 and 27 refer to protection from harm. As discussed in the introduction, the pounding of crises in already deprived sectors erodes the community's ability to fully recover and maintain robustness. When examining the pre-existing vulnerabilities of a community, international relations, despite seeming far removed, are interlinked. The IMF, for example, has been pushing Pakistan to privatize state-owned enterprises (SOEs) since 1991, with little progress in solving its budget deficit and slow long-term growth. The IMF's notorious austerity measures indiscriminately impact the poorest in society, depriving them of any governmental social-economic safety net (CADTM, 2024). This, in turn, sets the wheels in motion to determine who becomes a victim of the climate disaster. As long as human development and sustainability agendas ignore the root issues of exploitation and marginalisation, larger sways of communities will be left to suffer the consequences of a global issue, with little to no meaningful solutions.

3.1. Displacement and Protection Issues

The disorientation of communities after a crisis reverberates across all dimensions of their lives. The mothers in between tears recounted how their children still feared thunder and rain. The mothers went on to discuss how, for days, they were stranded as a third of the country was underwater . Forced to drink stagnant, contaminated water after the floods as they held their children ill from high fevers due to waterborne diseases. According to media reports, all the deaths caused by diarrhoea, malaria and gastroenteritis were reported in southeastern Sindh province, where more than 300 people died of flood-related illness (Hussain, 2022). The feeling of abandonment and helplessness corroborates with the length at which these communities were exposed to the enormity of destruction and disease. A key finding is the interconnectedness between the mother's health and that of the child - which is also dependent on community health at large. From a medical anthropological lens, the social suffering of these communities significantly debilitated their ability to withstand another hazard. The feeling of destitution characterises the descriptive accounts of what displacement felt like. The accounts of the flood

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and the helplessness to control natural hazards bring forth a crucial analysis of the so-called Anthropocene epoch. As argued by Vandana Shiva, the concept of the 'Anthropocene' – a proposed geological epoch that positions human activity as central to shaping the Earth's environment and geology, is problematic. In her critique, she argues that the generalisation of humans for ecological destruction conceals the specific role of corporations, unsustainable systems and capitalism driven by a minority. Rather, she advocates for local and organic systems and the importance of biodiversity and global commons to reverse ecological destruction (Shiva and Shiva, 2019). If bees were to become extinct, it would have devastating consequences for ecosystems, dramatically declining crop production and heightening food insecurity. On the other hand, the extinction of humans would not have a devastating effect on the ecosystem; rather, biodiversity would flourish. The worldview that positions humanity as supreme and separate from nature has paved the way for a skewed understanding of our very own nature (Jayawickrama, 2022). We are interconnected, both to each other and the planet. This sobering reality was what sustained the affected communities in rural Pakistan and allowed them to survive as they shared the little resources they had.

Health outcomes are at the intersection of the individual, collective and societal experience, meshed within a cultural context (Kleinman, 1995).

The guidelines and toolkits specialise in dealing with child trauma occurring from disasters, and advice on ensuring that children remain close to their mothers, fathers and community members. Families are often in need to relocate, with many of them losing their homes. When the women and men recounted the floods, they spoke about the mud homes, traditionally known as 'Kuchha' houses. All the families that were part of the research had lost their homes. The physical displacement also brought about the loss of cattle for men, which was their main source of income. With many of the communities' landless peasants and sharecroppers. The economic situation of the men after the floods had severely worsened. Selling their cattle at a much lower value due to desperate depravation has further pushed many of them into severe debt. Within these settings and as part of the data collection, displacement following a disaster impacts community protection mechanism.

Disasters have a profound negative effect on children's mental health, aside

from the long-lasting trauma and fear that children experience. One of the more sensitive topics is the heightened risk of sexual abuse for children, physical abuse and domestic violence for women. In keeping with cultural norms, the term 'body protection' was adopted. The disruption to schools which can act as a safeguarding institution and longer distances to reach water points create insecure settings for children. The World Health Organization (WHO) has indicated that around 1 billion children between 2 and 17 years of age are exposed to physical, psychological or sexual violence annually. Research has further shown that a direct link between soaring temperatures increases the propensity for violence and conflict (FUF.SE, 2022). These are the multi-dimensions of the climate change debate that can be overlooked through mechanistic frameworks that exclude lived experience. Care, compassion, faith and collaboration were core qualities that emerged from the research findings. The sustainability discourse predominately has an externally driven agenda. The Sustainable Development Goals 2030, born out of yet another set of international development goals that did not come to fruition, are an indication of a disregard to foster internal transformational skills at scale. In this, a broader analysis into the shift for the development sector transformative skills and the link with collective being was an overarching thread. Similarly, spirituality and faith were a source of hope for these communities.

4. Discussion

Climate change and security interventions are an increasing area of interest. As global policy takes on varied approaches to dealing with this global issue, it is important to acknowledge that as a collective we are at a crossroads. High-level discussions on deepening knowledge of why climate-related security risks arise and the mitigation process fall within meeting the Sustainable Development Goals 13 and long-term sustainable Peace Goal 16 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2025). This discussion section seeks to raise some fundamental questions to prompt an exploration into measures that can bring about sustainable futures. The findings of a Groundswell report estimate that by 2050 there will be up to 216 million internal climate migrants globally (Voegele, 2021). The competition for resources is first and foremost a domestic challenge. The nexus between climate change, migration and conflict is a growing phenomenon. As with most situations of crisis, it is difficult and

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perhaps inaccurate to attribute the escalation of displacement solely to climate change. The core focus of this article brings forth the relevance of addressing societal inequities and systematic degradation of core human development functionalities, which cause a perfect storm for human suffering. It is, therefore, just as relevant to examine to what degree climate change is being pushed by political elites as a cover-up for manmade and induced disasters (Otto, 2025). By this, what is being argued is that shifting the focus to climate change as a sole factor whilst failing to address existing vulnerabilities can relieve political accountability. Whilst natural hazards and climate change are ecological realities, it is the disaster, the lingering suffering and the inability of affected communities to recover that are highlighted in this research article.

The proposition that marginalisation and underdevelopment are the inevitable characteristics of a dominant global capitalist economic system takes root in a separation and devaluation process (Smith, 1984). Why is one type of labour monetarily remunerated and valued and another devalued? Productive (waged) labour, an inextricably Western colonial construct that rose out of industrial capitalism, classified reproductive (unwaged) labour as non-existent (Federici, 2004). Amidst this process of devaluation, the invisibility of women, colonies and their enslaved populations were normalised. Shattering the illusion of a developed and just system is the beginning to decolonise our minds. The anecdotal accounts from the affected communities in Pakistan provide a human account of what disaster feels like. In a small community room, the women gathered listening to one another, some with tears in their eyes knew that what helped them survive was one another. Disaster is defined by Rebecca Solnit, as a rupture to the order of things. Within this framing, Solnit (2009) marks a renaissance attached to crisis. The opportunity that arises from destruction is in the form of human solidarity and mutual aid. The ugliest part of a disaster is the exposition of institutional failures. This breakdown and breakthrough, where the large majority of affected people look to one another for life-saving support defies the imposed narrative of human self-centredness. Compassion, care and collaboration are recurrent qualities that shine through. For example, in the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, when the government mobilised the protection of private property over the lives of civilians, local residents dug with their bare hands survivors that were trapped under the rubble. The improvised grassroots mobilisation led to long-term political activism (Solnit, 2009). Similarly, after the

terrorist attack on the Twin Towers, boaters formed an impromptu evacuation fleet. In the direst of states, the participants of this research discussed how neighbours shared the little food and clean water they had with one another.

The sophisticated apparatus that has been built around the modern era entices one to render core capabilities for compulsive consumerism, comfort and entertainment (Illich, 1977). Its result is the passive participation of the masses. Thus, in times of disruption, the active and pragmatic mobilisation of communities emerges. The success of the current global governance and economic system is not only attributed to its global reach and monopoly but also its entrenched grip on defining worldviews where we fail to re-imagine outside of this construct. Thus, the imaginability of capitalism is perhaps its biggest success. Stemming from the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who argued that governments existed to protect individual rights because human nature was self-interested and chaotic, they have implanted an intrinsically individualist culture, shaping much of modern Western political paradigms (McGregor 2021).

In a modern era where we witness suffering through media outlets that feed collective helplessness, collective action has been crippled. Accumulation by dispossession is part and parcel of an extreme individualist culture. The dispossession of people from land to mine and exploit is allowed with impunity. The privatization, debt and global neoliberal policies permit a further devaluation process that is rapidly driving species, ecosystems and biodiversity to the brink of extinction at alarming rates. A global analysis which examined nearly 100,000 sites across all continents found that the number of species at human-impacted sites was almost 20% lower than at sites unaffected by humans (Weston, 2025).

The process of decolonisation on a global scale is a conscientisation of these two fundamental axes: the individualist and the collective. Both have positive and negative attributes. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise the limitations of a largely individualist society and whether it is the basis for which, as a collective, the complex issues around climate change can be solved through these mechanisms (Weston, 2025). Can the notion of 'individual uniqueness' be forsaken for a different framing that shapes our identity in conjunction with our role to one another and the planet? The mitigating impact of collective action is readily accounted for in mainstream policy frameworks. If this were not the

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case, strengthening community bonds through citizen participation would be supported by government-led disaster management, like in the case of Cuba (Keck and Reed, 2012). It is within this stripping away of 'being' that a deeper analysis of how entrenched the individualist mindset is. The collective notion, as altruistic as it is, requires a restructuring of values. Against this backdrop, the capacity for developed and industrial societies to lead the way in framing collective-driven approaches would be futile. Thus, at the core of this argument is the inconsistency of modern society to become sustainable without an overhaul of its current set-up. Rather, these are the spaces which need to be highlighted that reposition collective communities as leaders in innovative disaster management approaches. Indigenous and ancient philosophies, like 'Ayni' – originating from the Andean Mountain region, are a concept, now a common saying in South America 'today for you, tomorrow for me', that pierces the veil of individualism.

The imposition of vulnerability as a fixed identity on communities in the Global South, as argued in the introduction of this article, devalues the methods and concepts of these communities, replicating their invisibility on global platforms. A famous quote by Desmond Tutu said; 'When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible, and they had the land.' A global emergency that is projected to intensify so long as business as usual continues and security and militarisation increases sets us on a pathway to more violence. Figure 2 depicts the nexus between developments within the current landscape. Within this conceptual framework, the de-escalation of violence happens when economic and human development operate within the Planetary System Boundaries. For the purposes of this article, the author has coined the term 'parasitic development' to mean the extractive processes in which people, planet and separation generate an accumulation of economic gain for a few. This in turn heightens tensions, and amplifies vulnerabilities that cause disasters after hazards. The submission of humans to nature brings forth a further dimension to collectivism. The active participation of society is defined through critical expression and creational nature. Pockets of social unrest have erupted and are projected to as vulnerable nations see mass migration triggered by food and water crises (Hegazi, 2024). Already, hostility across most of Europe and the USA's Trumpian policy is indicating a move towards
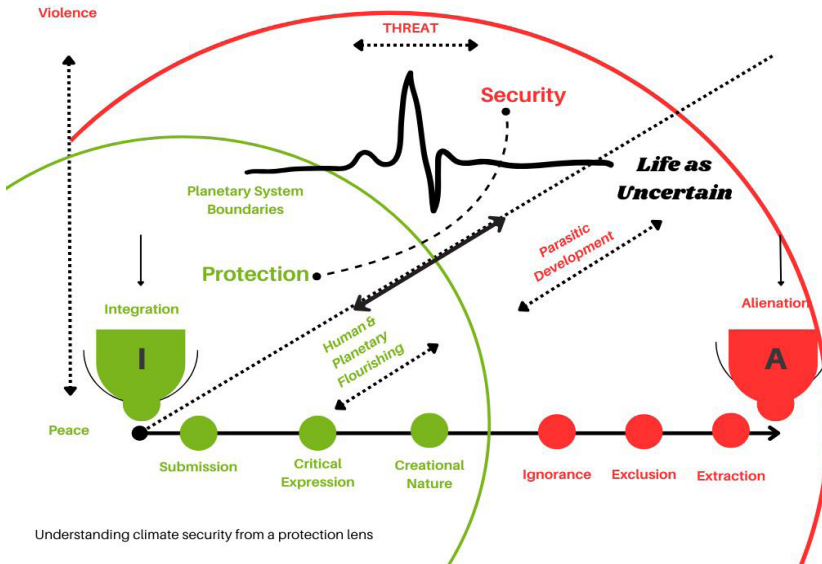
Figure 2: Understanding Climate Security from a Protection Lens (authors own)

5. Conclusion

The title of this article is meant to provoke an awakening to the layers by which oppressive systems have also demised a collective responsibility. In order to shift mindsets and shed the shackles, a degree of transition and discomfort is expected. The Capitalist system emphasizes ownership and responsibility for private property. But, what if, in redefining economic models around planetary bounds and human flourishing, ownership transformed into stewardship of the planet? The paternalism in global governance ridicules notions of peace and dignity as fanciful. As men in suits educate the rest on what the 'real world' is - one that requires more weapons and geo-engineering to secure peace – they craft a reality where walls are built and land is viewed as a mere resource. Care and compassion are relegated as irrelevant. How a threat is created, perceived and de-escalated requires a step back. Currently, increased funding for military arsenals has not paved the way for a more sustainable world. Climate-induced disasters are not universally experienced in the same manner. Nonetheless, the local is becoming global. Mass migration due to conflict and inhabitable

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territories will exacerbate host communities and local systems. In the current landscape, opportunities for further exploitation have been the preferred way, and funding loans to already vulnerable territories have become common practice. The growing political demand for climate security needs to be aligned with public demand for peace and climate protection, without exception of race, creed and sex. Unprecedented challenges will require new and brave transformative skills that dare to venture into the spiritual, the connected, and the dimensions that evoke love, compassion and empathy. This article invites the reader to reflect and locate oneself within their collective surroundings to move within the direction of transformation.

Ethics Statement

This study involved human participants. Interviews and focus groups were conducted. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined by the Ethics Committee of the University of York and was approved by the University of York Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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