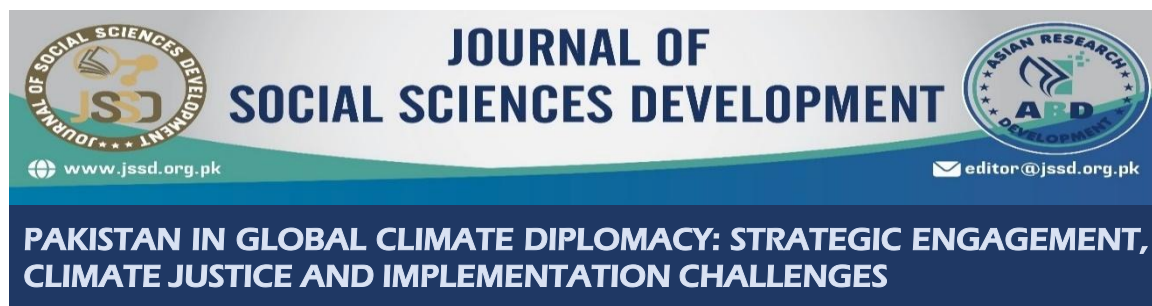




Ayesha Sajid¹, Saad Siddique Khan² & Khadija Tariq Khan³

¹Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Govt. Queen Mary Graduate College, Lahore,

Email: ayeshasajid_zuberi@yahoo.com

²PhD Scholar, Department of Social Work, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan,

Email: saad.dsw@pu.edu.pk

³Visiting Lecturer, Department of Social work, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan,

Email: khadija.dsw@pu.edu.pk

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
climate vulnerability, environmental diplomacy, Global climate governance, Global South, liberal institutionalism, UNFCC	Climate diplomacy has emerged as one of the key spaces of international relations for the negotiation of the sharing of mitigation responsibilities, adaptation support, climate finance and loss and damage. Pakistan is a specific case as the contribution of the country in global GHG emission is comparatively small but the exposure to the flood, heat, water stress, glacial hazards etc. is quite large. The article explores the role played by multilateral institutions, claims of climate justice and coalition diplomacy in promoting Pakistan's interests in global climate governance and the lack of correlation between international visibility and domestic resilience. The study uses a qualitative documentary analysis of the official Pakistani submissions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), such as the updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) 2021, the Biennial Transparency Report (BTR) 2024, the Third National Communication, NDC 3.0 submitted in 2025, climate-finance and implementation instruments published in 2026, COP decisions, multilateral assessments, and peer-reviewed scholarship. The issue of institutional access and access through repeated negotiation, transparency and coalition building is explored under the lens of liberal institutionalism, while differentiated responsibility, vulnerability, finance and loss and damage are explored under the climate-justice framework. The analysis suggests that Pakistan has become a more visible player on the international stage via its engagements with G77 and China, climate-justice advocacy, and the salience of the 2022 floods, especially in discussions on loss and damage. Institutional fragmentation and limited technical and fiscal capacity, access barriers to climate finance, and a disconnect between international ambition and domestic implementation, however, continue to limit diplomatic effectiveness. The article concludes that vulnerability can be a source of normative legitimacy, but only when it is supported by coalition strategy, institutional capacity, credible implementation and climate-finance readiness.
ARTICLE HISTORY	 2026 Journal of Social Sciences Development
Date of Submission: 13-08-2026	
Date of Acceptance: 24-09-2026	
Date of Publication: 29-09-2026	
Corresponding Author	
Email:	ayeshasajid_zuberi@yahoo.com
DOI	https://doi.org/10.59075/jssd.v5i7.336
Volume/Issue	5(7), 2026, 471-490

Introduction

Climate change has come to the heart of international diplomacy. The UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement, the annual Conferences of the Parties (COPs), mechanisms for climate finance, the architecture of adaptation, transparency and the allocation of climate costs now form a new institutional space in which states negotiate emissions reductions, climate financing, adaptation, transparency and the distribution of climate costs. The Paris Agreement is particularly significant because it introduces a universal but differentiated approach to climate action, with legally binding procedural commitments and nationally determined mitigation commitments. The Paris Agreement is significant because of the universal but differentiated approach to climate action, with legally binding procedural commitments and nationally determined mitigation commitments (Dimitrov, 2016; Doussis & Dikaïos, 2025; UNFCCC, 2015).

Pakistan is in a unique place in this system. It is not a large historical emitter but its geography and development profile result in high exposure to climate related hazards. The 2022 floods impacted tens of millions of people and caused direct losses of over US\$14.9 billion and economic losses of approximately US\$15.2 billion, and estimates of the reconstruction costs required to make the floods resilient were higher than US\$16.3 billion (Government of Pakistan et al., 2022; World Bank, 2022a). The Third National Communication also lists recurrent flood, drought, heat waves, variation in precipitation, glacial hazards and water stress as climate risks in Pakistan (Government of Pakistan, 2025a). The conditions make it easier for Pakistan to continue to stress adaptation, climate finance, equity, and loss and damage in multilateral talks.

But vulnerability to climate change does not necessarily mean that it translates to diplomatic power. International negotiations continue to be shaped by material inequalities, the unequal use of technology, and unequal bargaining power between the major emitters and donor states, and climate vulnerable countries (Ciplet et al., 2015; Falkner & Buzan, 2022). The literature on small and less materially powerful states reveals that coalition building, niche diplomacy, institutional rules, moral authority, and technical competence can partially compensate for such limited structural power, but their impact on the outcome of the process is different across issues and negotiating contexts (Betzold, 2010; Deitelhoff & Wallbott, 2012).

This tension is apparent in Pakistan in terms of the gap between the international climate advocacy and domestic implementation. The country has repeatedly called for climate justice and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC), and actively joined the G77 and China, and also as Chair of the G77 in 2022, called for strong support for the financing of loss and damage. Meanwhile, studies of climate governance in Pakistan reveal that there remain challenges of federal-provincial coordination, policy implementation, institutional capacity and funding (Masud & Khan, 2024). The World Bank estimates that Pakistan needs around US\$348 billion over the next eight years (2023–2030) for climate-resilient and low-carbon development, highlighting the financial and implementation gap (World Bank, 2022b).

The article thus moves the analytical lens from the question of whether Pakistan is climate vulnerable to how it becomes (or how it does not become) a climate agency and climate implementer. It questions: How Pakistan has been leveraging multilateral institutions, climate-justice claims and coalition diplomacy for its interests in the global climate governance and what are the domestic and international constraints that hinder the linkage between climate diplomacy and climate-resilience outcomes?

The main point is that vulnerability in Pakistan creates a normative legitimacy and political visibility but not the same as political leverage. It is effective if it has institutional access, builds coalitions, is technically credible, is ready for climate finance, maintains foreign-policy continuity, and has domestic implementation capacity. This argument serves as a link between two literatures, international climate diplomacy and domestic climate governance, which are usually considered separately.

Research Objectives

- To analyse the role of multilateral institutions and developing countries coalitions in Pakistan's climate diplomacy.
- To study the climate-diplomatic claims of Pakistan in a liberal institutionalist and climate-justice lens.
- To pinpoint domestic and international barriers to the translation of diplomatic engagement into climate-resilience outcomes.
- To evaluate strategic options to enhance Pakistan's climate-diplomatic effectiveness and implementation credibility.

Literature Review

Climate Diplomacy and International Institutions

Climate diplomacy can be defined as a process of engaging in negotiation, forming coalitions, international institutions, scientific information, and foreign policy tools to influence collective action on climate change. The UNFCCC regime is based on the principle of iterative negotiation, reporting, review, differentiation of responsibilities and mechanisms for mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology, and loss and damage. Liberal institutionalist scholarship is applicable because it outlines the ways that institutions can reduce transaction costs, establish information and expectations, facilitate repeated interactions, and facilitate cooperation despite conflicting state interests (Keohane, 1984). In the climate context, the institutional architecture is not an alternative to power politics, but rather a way of organizing power and procedural and discursive access for less powerful states in negotiations (Dimitrov, 2016; Doussis & Dikaïos, 2025; Gray & Cointet, 2023; Klöck et al., 2025).

Participation changed from Kyoto to Paris. Under the Kyoto Protocol, binding emission targets were set for developed countries, while under the Paris Agreement, Parties have been given a general framework for transparency and progression in the form of NDCs (UNFCCC, 1997, 2015). This wider involvement enhanced the universality of the participation, but also added a stronger focus on national implementation, reporting, financial aspects and iterative ambition. Participation of institutions thus provides opportunities for developing countries to influence agendas, establish coalitions and refer to agreed principles, and to highlight the differences in technical capacity and to negotiate resources.

Climate Justice, Differentiated Responsibility, and Loss and Damage

Climate justice scholarship focuses on the fact that climate change is both an environmental and a distributional and political issue. Climate governance is fair in different ways depending on the contributions to GHGs in the past, the adaptive capacities of different groups, different exposure to hazards, and different access to finance (Roberts & Parks, 2006; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). The procedural aspect of climate justice is also relevant as it involves who has a say in the decision-making process in climate policy and who has a say in it (de Ridder et al., 2023; Klöck et al., 2025). CBDR-RC embeds a portion of this distributive logic in the UNFCCC, through both the notion of common responsibility and the notion of differentiation of obligations based on historical responsibility and capacity.

Loss and damage is one of the most obvious manifestations of climate-justice politics. The idea of irreversible and residual losses has been around for decades and was a central theme of the discussion of developing countries and vulnerable-state coalitions about mitigation and adaptation. COP27 created new funding arrangements and a dedicated fund for loss and damage responses, which were then followed up at COP28 (UNFCCC, 2022, 2023). In recent scholarship, moral authority, lived vulnerability, coalition solidarity, scientific legitimacy, and negotiation strategy have been found to be key to the breakthrough, but none of these factors can be singled out as the sole determinant of the outcome (Dreyer, 2025). This is especially true for Pakistan, as the 2022 floods were a major talking point in the international loss and damage discussions.

Coalition Diplomacy and the Agency of Less Powerful States

Studies on multilateral negotiation disputes the rule of material power. Coalition building, niche specialization, procedural knowledge, moral framing, and external knowledge can help smaller, less powerful states to strengthen their bargaining power. Betzold (2010) illustrates how vulnerable states can be able to 'borrow' power through the formation of coalitions, and Deitelhoff and Wallbott (2012) demonstrate how coalition formation can help to shape negotiating power in favourable institutional contexts by converting discursive resources. The following recent examples of the UNFCCC negotiations also demonstrate how relational and discursive approaches to influencing the agenda can be used to gain influence within multilateral institutions by marginal actors (Gray & Cointet, 2023).

Though Pakistan is not a small island state, these insights are useful for analysing Pakistan. While Pakistan has more population, geopolitical power, and capacity than many vulnerable country coalitions, it has to play a game of negotiations with huge inequalities in terms of resources, technical knowledge, and historical accountability. Being a member of the G77 and China gives Pakistan the negotiating leverage, knowledge and broader platform for negotiating with the developing countries. However, formal equality of the Parties does not ensure meaningful participation: the size of delegations, their technical specialization, and their resources can affect meaningful participation in climate negotiations (Klöck et al., 2025). What is then not being asked is whether Pakistan is 'powerful' or 'weak' per se, but how it can mobilize coalition and normative resources in a very unequal negotiating environment.

Pakistan's Climate Governance and Implementation Gap

Vulnerability, adaptation, policy implementation, institutional coordination, disaster risk and environmental governance are the major aspects of climate scholarship focused on Pakistan. One of the key findings is the disconnect between institutional fragmentation and uneven implementation that can impede the ambition of climate policies. The deficits in consultation, unclear implementation responsibilities, and conflicts between federal and devolved governance are key challenges in the implementation of adaptation policies, as noted by Masud and Khan (2024). Similarly, subnational studies in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reveal the lack of monitoring, legal implementation and intergovernmental relations (Mumtaz & Puppim de Oliveira, 2023). Wider South Asian evidence, such as from Pakistan, shows exclusionary policy processes, failures of coordination, and power imbalances are persistent barriers to climate action (Vij et al., 2024), and recent Pakistan-specific research finds that analytical, operational, and political capacity gaps remain in national and subnational climate institutions (Shaheen et al., 2026).

Official reporting also demonstrates that Pakistan's climate-governance architecture has become more developed. The country submitted its first Biennial Transparency Report in December 2024, its Third National Communication in June 2025, and NDC 3.0 in September 2025 (Government of Pakistan, 2024, 2025a, 2025b). NDC 3.0 sets an indicative 2035 target of reducing projected emissions by 50%, comprising a 17% unconditional reduction and a 33% reduction conditional on international finance, technology transfer, and capacity support (Government of Pakistan, 2025b). The policy architecture continued to evolve in 2026 with the publication of the National Climate Finance Strategy - Phase 1 and the Pakistan Climate Prosperity Plan, both of which place greater emphasis on finance mobilization, implementation, and investable climate-development pathways (Government of Pakistan, 2026a, 2026b). This progression strengthens transparency and planning credibility, while also increasing the importance of implementation capacity and climate-finance readiness.

Research Gap

Existing scholarship provides substantial knowledge on Pakistan's climate vulnerability, domestic policy implementation, and aspects of its international climate engagement. Pakistan's climate diplomacy has also begun to receive direct scholarly attention, including work on its diplomatic engagement and climate-policy positioning (Gul & Shakir, 2024). The gap is therefore not that Pakistan's climate diplomacy has never been studied. Rather, there is limited integrated analysis of how vulnerability-based climate-justice claims, multilateral institutional participation, coalition diplomacy, climate-finance dependence, and domestic implementation constraints interact within a single framework. This article addresses that gap by connecting international diplomatic agency with domestic governance capacity and by treating the difference between diplomatic visibility and implementation outcomes as an analytical problem rather than a contradiction to be explained away.

Analytical Framework

Liberal Institutionalism

The first lens is liberal institutionalism. It sees international institutions as tools that can help states to cooperate by providing rules, information, lowering uncertainty, creating reoccurring interactions, and providing coordination over common problems (Keohane, 1984). The UNFCCC and Paris Agreement establish such an institutional framework in climate governance via periodic COP negotiations, NDC cycles, transparency mechanisms, adaptation mechanisms, climate-finance institutions and collective review.

In case of Pakistan, this framework draws two key questions to mind: Do multilateral institutions give access to decision making? Do coalition membership boost the bargaining power? Do reporting and transparency build credibility? Do international institutions help access finance, technology and implementation support? Liberal institutionalism is not synonymous with the elimination of power inequalities by institutions. Instead, it is designed to shed light on how rules of procedure and the repeated negotiation process can open opportunities to the states with less material power of the major powers.

Climate Justice Framework

The second lens is climate justice lens. Climate justice is distributive, procedural, recognitional and intergenerational aspects of climate politics (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). One of the aspects of procedural justice that is especially relevant to climate diplomacy is the fact that nominal equality between states does not necessarily lead to equal opportunities to participate, to influence agendas, or to influence outcomes (de Ridder et al., 2023; Klöck et al., 2025). This article emphasizes four aspects that are pertinent to Pakistan: differentiated responsibility,

disproportionate vulnerability, equitable access to climate finance, and loss and damage responses.

These ideas are particularly relevant as Pakistan's foreign policy statements often include low attribution and high vulnerability to climate risk. These claims are legitimate both because of the UNFCCC principle of CBDR-RC and from the wider justice principle that those who have the most historical responsibility and capacity to mitigate should have the greatest responsibilities and support to offer in mitigation. The framework thus allows to differentiate between moral and normative legitimacy and from negotiating influence measurable.

Integrated Analytical Dimensions

Dimension	Analytical Question	Indicative Evidence
Institutional access	How does Pakistan use UNFCCC structures and reporting processes?	COP participation, NDCs, BTR, national communications
Coalition diplomacy	How does collective action amplify Pakistan's bargaining position?	G77 and China roles, joint positions, agenda advocacy
Climate justice	How are vulnerability, responsibility, finance, and loss and damage framed?	Official statements, COP decisions, NDC language
Climate finance	What support is required and what constrains access?	NDC conditionality, finance strategies, multilateral assessments
Domestic capacity	What limits implementation of international commitments?	Institutional studies, policy documents, transparency reports
Diplomatic outcomes	What observable outcomes can reasonably be linked to engagement?	Agenda inclusion, negotiating roles, coalition achievements, institutional access

Research Methodology

In this study, the qualitative documentary analysis method is used. Documentary analysis is appropriate since the research question is not about attitudes or causal effects among individuals, but rather about the diplomatic positions, institutional involvement, policy commitments, and constraints on policy implementation that are publicly observable. The analytical period is from 2015 to September 2026, starting with the Paris Agreement and running through NDC 3.0, COP30 and post-COP30 climate finance and implementation documents that will be published in 2026. Previous progress in the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol is provided as background.

The documentary corpus was chosen in a purposeful manner. The primary sources include the Paris Agreement and relevant decisions of the COPs; Pakistan's updated NDC submitted in 2021; Pakistan's 2024 Biennial Transparency Report; Pakistan's NDC 3.0 submitted in September

2025; the 2026 National Climate Finance Strategy – Phase 1 and Pakistan Climate Prosperity Plan; official policy documents; and relevant statements with reference to Pakistan's climate diplomacy. The secondary sources consist of peer reviewed scholarship on climate diplomacy, climate justice, climate coalition negotiation, climate related human impacts and climate governance in Pakistan as well as authoritative multilateral assessment of Pakistan's climate governance by various institutions including World Bank, UNDP and UNFCCC.

Documents were read deductively on the bases of analytical dimensions of liberal institutionalism and climate justice. Conceptual coding of evidence was done under the headings of institutional access, coalition diplomacy, climate-justice framing, climate finance, domestic implementation capacity, and observable diplomatic outcomes. The SWOT framework was used as a strategic synthesis tool, and was not considered as the main research tool, but rather, it was applied after the documentary analysis.

Advocacy is also differentiated from actual influence in the study. Speeches, or normative claims, are considered evidence of engagement; more powerful claims of influence include having had an agenda placed on the table, led a coalition, held formal negotiating positions, had advocated issues incorporated into institutional outcomes, or access to support mechanisms. This distinction helps minimize the chances of assigning multilateral results to Pakistan as there is a shared responsibility for a number of Parties and negotiating groups.

Its one drawback is that it does not show the confidential bargaining or private motives of the multilateral decision-making process. The study thus examines the visible diplomatic actions and institutional outcomes and refrains from attributing the sole blame of Pakistan in negotiated outcomes like the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund.

From Global Climate Governance to Pakistan's Diplomatic Agenda

The UNFCCC, which was adopted in 1992, laid the groundwork and basic principles of international climate cooperation, as well as its institutional framework. The Paris Agreement went on to establish a more universal framework of quantified emission-limitation commitments under successive NDCs and an improved transparency framework (UNFCCC, 2015), while the Kyoto Protocol established a more stringent framework of quantified emission-limitation commitments for Annex B developed countries during its first commitment period (UNFCCC, 1997). The Paris architecture increased the number of actors involved in participation, but also delegated more responsibility to the national level for planning implementation and reporting.

In Pakistan, post-Paris was a time of rising climate vulnerability and foreign-policy involvement. The 2021 NDC has significantly increased the level of ambition for mitigation and the 2024 BTR and 2025 Third National Communication have enhanced the transparency and reporting dimension of Pakistan. NDC 3.0 also revised the country's 2035 mitigation pathway, and kept a significant conditional element that relies on international financing, technology transfer and

capacity building (Government of Pakistan, 2024, 2025a, 2025b). The pattern shows that Pakistan's foreign policy is also linked with the issue of support in terms of implementation.

Climate finance is particularly important. The World Bank estimates that Pakistan requires approximately US\$348 billion in investment between 2023 and 2030 to support climate-resilient and low-carbon development, including adaptation and resilience as well as decarbonization (World Bank, 2022b). The scale of this requirement means that climate diplomacy is not merely symbolic foreign policy; it is linked directly to development finance, energy transition, resilience, and macroeconomic constraints.

Findings and Analysis

Climate Vulnerability as a Source of Normative Legitimacy

Climate vulnerability is a key part of Pakistan's foreign policy discourse. The 2022 floods brought unprecedented political visibility due to the unprecedented scale of the humanitarian and economic losses, which highlighted the climate responsibility-climate impact asymmetry. According to the official post disaster assessment, direct damages were estimated to be more than US\$14.9 billion and economic losses were estimated to be around US\$15.2 billion (Government of Pakistan et al., 2022). Beyond the physical and economic damage, the effects of flooding also included an increased risk of communicable diseases, disruption of maternal and child health services, food insecurity, mental-health problems, and health-system dysfunction, as outlined in a recent review of health impacts of flooding in Pakistan (Khan et al., 2025). This broader human security aspect further bolsters the empirical evidence behind Pakistan's focus on adaptation and loss and damage arrangements, including both economic and non-economic losses.

But vulnerability is not to be interpreted as necessarily entitling to automatic bargaining power, it is to be interpreted as a source of normative legitimacy. While climate-justice framing can enhance moral authority and coalition unity, the challenge is to negotiate influence, which requires making vulnerability institutional. It mirrors the findings of a study that argued that lived experience, moral legitimacy, coalition structures and discursive strategies can be political resources for vulnerable and weaker material states, but only when they are "embedded" in "sustained institutional engagement" (Betzold, 2010; Dreyer, 2025; Gray & Cointet, 2023).

Coalition Diplomacy and the G77 and China

One of Pakistan's most valuable foreign policy tools is its involvement with the G77 and China. Coalition diplomacy enables developing countries to combine negotiating power, harmonize their negotiating strategies and eliminate some of the disadvantages that result from unequal access to technical expertise and negotiating resources. This function is particularly relevant as the UN climate negotiation process in practice is still not equal, with less well-resourced States having fewer specialists and smaller delegations (Klöck et al., 2025). Pakistan's G77

chairmanship, in 2022, enhanced Pakistan's visibility in COP27, as loss and damage emerged as a key negotiating point.

The COP27 outcome was a significant success for the G77 and China, and Pakistan as chair of the G77 in 2022 helped to make loss-and-damage finance an agenda item and mobilise support for a fund (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). While this official account is evidence of Pakistan's diplomatic strategy and understanding of itself, it is not sufficient to be considered evidence of causal influence alone. The establishment of new funding arrangements and the creation of a fund for the response to loss and damage was a consensus result of coalitions of vulnerable countries, the broader G77 and China, developed-country Parties, the Egyptian COP presidency and advocacy that has been built over decades of years (UNFCCC, 2022; Dreyer, 2025). Pakistan's role was thus limited to being a leader and a voice for the coalition, and not a single author of the outcome.

This separation is relevant as an analysis. The collective platform is the best diplomatic tool for Pakistan, rather than the power of coercion. That discovery confirms the liberal institutionalist assumption that repeated negotiation and institutions will increase the agency of states whose material power is less than that of the big emitters.

Loss and Damage: From Advocacy to Institutional Outcome

The loss and damage negotiations are a testament to the possibilities and boundaries of Pakistan's climate diplomacy. The floods of 2022 brought the issue of irreversible impacts of climate change to the fore and Pakistan became a significant reference point in diplomatic discussions. Pakistan's Chairmanship of the G77 and China was an opportune moment to advance the developing countries' agenda at a time when the issue was on the radar.

The inclusion of new funding arrangements and a fund in the outcome of the COP27, therefore, was consistent with Pakistan's stated objectives but the institutional outcome was a reflection of a wider struggle of coalition. A better judgment would be that Pakistan played a role in the agenda-setting and coalition advocacy during a crucial negotiating period. This is a valuable type of influence, but should not be confused with being the only one who achieved the outcome.

The subsequent implementation of the fund at COP28 is also an example of an important aspect of institutional continuity: success in diplomacy can be distributed over several COPs. Therefore, high-profile advocacy is not enough, it is necessary to engage with access criteria, fund governance, project preparation and domestic mechanisms that can convert international finance into resilient investments, which are Pakistan's long-term interests. Administrative and institutional readiness is a key consideration as there can be substantial access barriers to climate finance in vulnerable countries even when their needs are high (Tennant et al., 2024).

Transparency, NDC 3.0 and Diplomatic Credibility

In terms of institutional dimension, Pakistan's recent reporting efforts enhance its climate diplomacy. The 2024 BTR, Third National Communication and NDC 3.0 present new inventories, policy information, vulnerability assessments, targets and implementation needs. The NDC 3.0 has an indicative 2035 target of 50% reduction in projected emissions, with 17% of them listed as unconditional and 33% as conditional on international climate finance, technology transfer, capacity building and commensurate global action (Government of Pakistan, 2025b).

These documents are of diplomatic importance because of two reasons. First, transparency increases the credibility of the international demand, by showing that it is not just a rhetorical demand, but a demand that is connected to national planning. Second, the conditional nature of the NDC makes the connection between finance and development clear: there is a substantial part of Pakistan's mitigation ambition that is reliant on international assistance. Climate diplomacy is thus a diplomacy of responsibility negotiation and a diplomacy of resources mobilization for implementation.

Nevertheless, documents that are ambitious don't mean they will be implemented. Going forward, the effectiveness of Pakistani advocacy will rely on the extent to which these institutions can be coordinated, projects prepared, data systems are established, renewable energy is deployed, adaptation plans are made and subnational implementation is achieved. This concern is further supported by Pakistan-specific research which has highlighted that intergovernmental coordination, monitoring, analytical capacity and operational delivery are all weak points in the policy implementation process (Mumtaz & Puppim de Oliveira, 2023; Shaheen et al., 2026; Vij et al., 2024).

The Diplomacy-Implementation Gap

The biggest barrier found in the documents is the disconnect between international climate ambition and domestic action. Despite the formulation of various policies, institutions, plans and reporting instruments, implementation is still hindered due to the lack of coordination among federal and provincial governments, technical and fiscal capacity, fragmented mandates and challenges of implementation. Decentralisation has led to ambiguity regarding the roles in implementation and has made adaptation policy delivery more complex, as demonstrated by Masud and Khan (2024). Provincial and institutional level research comes to a similar conclusion: locally capable institutions, better intergovernmental relations, improved monitoring and analytical and operational policy capacity are needed to implement effectively (Mumtaz & Puppim de Oliveira, 2023; Shaheen et al., 2026). The broader South Asian evidence also shows the impact of coordination failures and exclusionary power dynamics on the effectiveness of climate policies (Vij et al., 2024).

This is a diplomatic consequence of this gap. Project preparation, fiduciary compliance, monitoring systems and safeguards, measurable outcomes, and institutional continuity are becoming an increasing part of international climate finance. Weak implementation capacity thus weakens the capacity of the country to be resilient and to receive and utilise international assistance. Administrative capacity and access conditions are shown to systematically disadvantage vulnerable economies even if the need for climate finance is high (Tennant et al., 2024). In this respect, domestic governance is a foreign policy resource: credible institutions help to create negotiating legitimacy, by providing evidence of the ability to translate requested support into verifiable action (Shaheen et al., 2026).

Climate finance is central to Pakistan's climate diplomacy because national mitigation and adaptation ambitions exceed available domestic fiscal resources. The World Bank's estimate of roughly US\$348 billion in climate-related investment needs through 2030 illustrates the scale of the challenge (World Bank, 2022b). Pakistan has since moved toward a more explicit finance-and-investment architecture. The National Climate Finance Strategy - Phase 1 emphasizes whole-of-government coordination, diversification of domestic and international finance, and stronger mechanisms for mobilizing climate investment, while the Pakistan Climate Prosperity Plan frames climate action through investable pathways linking resilience, low-carbon development, and economic growth (Government of Pakistan, 2026a, 2026b). These instruments are strategically relevant because they seek to bridge international finance advocacy with domestic project development and implementation.

Climate Finance as Both Opportunity and Structural Constraint

Climate finance plays a pivotal role in Pakistan's climate diplomacy as the country's climate mitigation and adaptation goals are beyond its fiscal reach. The challenge is large with the World Bank estimating the investment requirements to be around US\$348 billion by 2030 for climate change impacts (World Bank, 2022b). Since then, Pakistan has taken steps towards a more clear-cut finance and investment structure. Whole of government coordination, diversifying domestic and international climate finance, and enhancing the capacity to mobilise climate financing through investable pathways are highlighted in the National Climate Finance Strategy - Phase 1, while the Pakistan Climate Prosperity Plan outlines climate action in terms of investable pathways, including those for resilience, low carbon development and economic growth (Government of Pakistan, 2026a, 2026b). The instruments are strategically relevant in that they aim to connect the international finance advocacy with the international project development and implementation.

International finance, however, creates a dual dynamic. It is an opportunity because multilateral climate funds, development banks, blended finance, carbon markets, and bilateral partnerships can support resilience and low-carbon investment. It is also a structural constraint because access depends on project pipelines, accreditation, fiduciary standards, co-financing, debt sustainability, safeguards, monitoring, and administrative capacity. Research on vulnerable economies shows

that complex eligibility and allocation processes can restrict access even where climate vulnerability is high (Tennant et al., 2024). The existence of new finance strategies should therefore be treated as an institutional advance rather than as evidence that the finance gap has already been solved. A diplomatic strategy focused only on increasing global financial commitments would remain incomplete unless Pakistan also strengthens domestic readiness to access, absorb, and account for those resources.

Strategic SWOT Synthesis

The SWOT matrix below combines the results of the documentary analysis. It takes a step beyond identifying capabilities and constraints within the country, and beyond identifying opportunities and threats from the outside, and does not mistake external factors like the Loss and Damage Fund as a national strength.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Coalition experience through G77 and China	Institutional fragmentation and coordination gaps	Expansion of loss-and-damage and adaptation finance	Increasing frequency and severity of climate-related hazards
High international salience of climate vulnerability	Limited technical and project-preparation capacity	NDC 3.0 implementation partnerships and technology transfer	Uncertainty in international climate-finance flows
Growing UNFCCC reporting and transparency capacity	Fiscal constraints and dependence on external support	Renewable-energy, resilience, and green-investment opportunities	Geopolitical fragmentation and competing global crises
Strong climate-justice narrative grounded in documented losses	Implementation gap between policy ambition and delivery	South-South and regional cooperation	Debt and macroeconomic constraints on climate investment

According to SWOT synthesis Pakistan has strong political and institutional capabilities as its strengths while its weaknesses are in the material area. The country has a recognizable diplomatic platform thanks to the experience of the coalitions, the legitimacy based on vulnerability and the growing transparency architecture. It has the main disadvantage of its internal implementation limitations. The most critical opportunities are thus international engagement and domestic readiness, international technology transfer, project development, renewable energy investment, and adaptation delivery. Physical climate risk is not the only risk, as global finance and geopolitical interest is also volatile.

Discussion

The findings refine the common claim that climate vulnerability can be converted into diplomatic leverage. Pakistan's experience shows that vulnerability is better understood as a form of normative and agenda-setting capital. The 2022 floods increased international attention and strengthened the legitimacy of Pakistan's justice-based claims, but the translation of that legitimacy into institutional outcomes depended on coalition coordination, timing, procedural access, and wider shifts in the negotiating environment. This is consistent with scholarship showing that less materially powerful actors can increase influence by combining moral authority with coalition and institutional strategies, including what Gray and Cointet (2023) describe as forms of influence developed from the margins of multilateral negotiations (Betzold, 2010; Deitelhoff & Wallbott, 2012; Dreyer, 2025).

The findings also support a qualified liberal institutionalist interpretation. The UNFCCC system creates opportunities for Pakistan that would be difficult to obtain through bilateral bargaining alone. Repeated COP negotiations, G77 coordination, NDC cycles, transparency mechanisms, climate funds, and loss-and-damage arrangements institutionalize channels through which Pakistan can articulate demands and seek support. Yet institutions do not erase power asymmetry. Major emitters and donor states retain disproportionate financial and technological resources, while developing countries can face participation constraints arising from delegation size, technical specialization, and negotiating resources (Ciplet et al., 2015; Falkner & Buzan, 2022; Klöck et al., 2025). Institutionalism therefore explains access and cooperation, but not equality of bargaining power.

A second layer is added by the climate-justice framework. The Pakistani central diplomatic story is based on a distributive imbalance in the world, with comparatively low contribution to global emissions and high vulnerability to climate impacts. This provides claims for adaptation finance, technology transfer and loss-and-damage a normative basis on CBDR-RC and broader justice considerations. But, there is also a process aspect to climate justice. Vulnerable countries must not only be identified as deserving recipients of support, but they must also be given a role in the agenda-setting, fund-governance, access procedures and implementation decisions. The importance of inclusive and meaningful participation, as a precondition for fair outcomes, is also highlighted in the field of procedural-climate-justice scholarship (de Ridder et al., 2023; Klöck et al., 2025). Coalition diplomacy, therefore, is crucial not only for Pakistan's access to resources but also for its voice within institutions that allocate resources.

The key substantive finding of the study is the discovery of the diplomacy-implementation gap. While Pakistan's international advocacy has become more sophisticated, the country's governance struggles are still plagued with capacity and coordination challenges. It does not mean that climate diplomacy is flawed, it is about whether or not gains in diplomacy result in tangible resilience. The BTR, Third National Communication, NDC 3.0 and finance and investment instruments for 2026 show a more advanced reporting and planning framework, but

do not indicate whether they are being implemented successfully or not. The key question is whether these frameworks create coordinated provincial delivery, funding options, monitoring and measurable resilience and mitigation outcomes. There is strong scholarship on the policy-design/implementation gaps, lack of intergovernmental coordination, power imbalance and limited policy capacity at the individual policy level for Pakistan, which supports this interpretation (Masud & Khan, 2024; Mumtaz & Puppim de Oliveira, 2023; Shaheen et al., 2026; Vij et al., 2024).

The analysis further indicates that climate finance should be considered not just a distributive-justice issue, but also an institutional-capacity issue. Pakistan is quite right in seeking more international support, but access to finance becomes more and more reliant on project pipelines, fiduciary systems, monitoring, safeguards, and bankable investment structures within the domestic arena. Data from fragile economies suggests that allocation of finance is not just determined by the need for finance, but also by institutional and donor-side barriers, which can be more prohibitive for fragile countries with less institutional capacity (Tennant et al., 2024). The diplomatic advocacy and administrative ability are thus mutually supportive and not mutually exclusive.

Lastly, the Pakistan case is part of broader discussions on the agency of the Global South. It demonstrates that climate rules are not just imposed on states that are not in the core of the big powers. They can influence the agenda, drive coalitions, call for justice norms and shape institutional change through their continued presence and discursive approach (Gray & Cointet, 2023). In Pakistan, the study on climate diplomacy further indicates that climate diplomacy has emerged as a distinct facet of Pakistan's foreign climate diplomacy (Gul & Shakir, 2024). Yet, when vulnerability claims are backed by technical evidence, consistent diplomatic activity, participatory governance and tangible domestic action, the impact is most believable. The broader South Asian literature also underscores the need for policy processes that are power sensitive and participatory to translate the formalized climate commitments into action (Vij et al., 2024). In this regard, Pakistan's climate diplomacy will be assessed on its ability to communicate injustice as well as its capacity to translate international opportunities into resilient development.

Policy Recommendations

Institutionalize Climate Diplomacy within Foreign Policy

Pakistan needs to create a permanent Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee for Climate Diplomacy with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning, Energy Sector Institutions and Provincial Governments. The mechanism should have a pre-COP cycle role to pre-emptively develop common negotiating positions, and ensure that the diplomatic commitments are followed by the domestic implementation.

Strengthen Technical Negotiating Capacity

The added value of climate diplomacy is the need for knowledge in carbon accounting, Article 6, adaptation metrics, climate finance, transparency, loss and damage, and pathways towards sectoral transition. Pakistan should build up a permanent technical negotiation team instead of setting up ad hoc teams. Repeated multilateral negotiations is a good example of the importance of institutional memory.

Treat Climate-Finance Readiness as Diplomatic Priority

NDC 3.0, the National Climate Finance Strategy, and the Pakistan Climate Prosperity Plan now provide complementary elements of Pakistan's international ambition and domestic financing architecture. Their implementation will depend heavily on provincial and sectoral institutions. Federal targets and investment priorities should therefore be translated into subnational implementation pathways with measurable milestones, transparent responsibilities, project pipelines, and regular reporting so that international commitments, finance mobilization, and provincial delivery reinforce one another.

Align NDC 3.0, Climate-Finance Instruments and Provisional Implementation

The National Climate Finance Strategy (NDC 3.0) and the Pakistan Climate Prosperity Plan now complement Pakistan's ambition in the international arena and its financing architecture. They will rely heavily on the provincial and sectoral institutions for their implementation. Federal targets and investment priorities should then be cascaded down to subnational implementation pathways with clear milestones, responsibilities, project pipelines and reporting, and international commitments, finance mobilization and provincial delivery should reinforce each other.

Deepen Coalition and South-South Diplomacy

Pakistan should leverage the G77 and China as a key platform and build partnerships on issues such as adaptation, loss and damage, climate finance, heat resilience, glacial risks, water management and just energy transition. Coalition strategy should be determined by the priorities of issues, not by the general alignment of diplomacy.

Link Domestic Resilience to International Credibility

Resilience investments in early warning systems, water management, climate-smart agriculture, health systems, urban adaptation and ecosystem restoration should be considered as domestic development priorities, as well as an indicator of implementation credibility. The positive outcomes will bolster Pakistan's demand for further international assistance.

Improve Evidence-Based Climate Communication

There is a need to differentiate carefully between climate vulnerability, disaster exposure and air pollution in official diplomatic communication, as well as between climate vulnerability and climate event attribution. The claims should be backed by recent scientific and institutional evidence. Pakistan's climate-justice story will be further enhanced by greater precision.

Conclusion

The experience of Pakistan shows that climate diplomacy is becoming an integral part of development policy, finance, institutional capacity and resilience. The country's low emissions and high vulnerability to climate change hazards offer a robust normative justification for climate justice claims, especially in the areas of adaptation, funding and loss and damage. The 2022 floods brought the issue to the fore, and Pakistan's participation and leadership at the G77 and COP27 with the Chinese government further boosted its profile in the discussions on loss and damage.

The study also reveals that there is no equivalence between vulnerability and influence. Pakistan's diplomacy is effective when it is able to blend the normative legitimacy with coalition politics, institutional access, technical skills, credible reporting and consistent implementation. The post-Paris development of Pakistan's reporting architecture – the 2024 BTR, the Third National Communication, NDC 3.0 and the climate-finance and investment instruments that will be released in 2026 offers a more robust institutional framework for this strategy, but also sets expectations for tangible outcomes.

The issue of diplomacy-implementation gap is thus the central challenge. International recognition and negotiated mechanisms can be an opportunity, but if they are domestically valuable, they must be able to raise finance, develop projects, coordinate between federal and provincial institutions and provide tangible outcomes of resilience and mitigation. The future of Pakistan's contribution to global climate diplomacy will be at its best if the issues of climate justice, institutional cooperation and national implementation are seen as complementary and interrelated elements of a national climate action plan.

Based on the above, future studies should focus on analysing the negotiating approach adopted by Pakistan by interviewing the technical delegates and diplomats, the impact of issues on subsequent COP decisions and a comparative study of Pakistan with other climate vulnerable developing countries. This kind of research would clarify more clearly the difference between being seen in the diplomatic arena, being a leader of coalitions, and having an impact on the outcomes of multilateral processes.

References

- Agreement, P. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2015). Paris Agreement.*
- Betzold, C. (2010). 'Borrowing' power to influence international negotiations: AOSIS in the climate change regime, 1990–1997. *Politics*, 30(3), 131-148. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9256.2010.01377.x>
- Ciplet, D., Roberts, J. T., & Khan, M. R. (2015). *Power in a warming world: The new global politics of climate change and the remaking of environmental inequality.* The MIT Press. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262029612.001.0001>
- Deitelhoff, N., & Wallbott, L. (2012). Beyond soft balancing: small states and coalition-building in the ICC and climate negotiations. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 25(3), 345-366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2012.710580>
- de Ridder, K., Schultz, F. C., & Pies, I. (2023). Procedural climate justice: Conceptualizing a polycentric solution to a global problem. *Ecological Economics*, 214, 107998. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2023.107998>
- Dimitrov, R. S. (2016). The Paris agreement on climate change: Behind closed doors. *Global environmental politics*, 16(3), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP_a_00361
- Doussis, E., & Dikaos, G. (2025). Climate diplomacy under the UNFCCC: past, present, and future. In *Contemporary Diplomatic and Consular Relations: Selected Aspects* (pp. 153-163). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-99243-8_10
- Dreyer, J. (2025). The power of victimhood: A relational analysis of the diplomatic negotiations on a UN loss and damage fund. *Millennium*, 53(2), 468-490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298251318780>
- Falkner, R., & Buzan, B. (Eds.). (2022). *Great powers, climate change, and global environmental responsibilities.* Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198866022.001.0001>
- Government of Pakistan. (2024). *Pakistan: 2024 biennial transparency report (BTR1).* United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. https://unfccc.int/reports?%5B0%5D=corporate_author%3A276
- Government of Pakistan. (2025a). *Pakistan's third national communication on climate change (TNC) 2025 to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.* Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination. <https://unfccc.int/documents/648622>
- Government of Pakistan. (2025b). *Pakistan NDC 3.0.* United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/2025-09/Pakistan_NDC3.0_24%20Sep.pdf
- Government of Pakistan. (2026a). *National climate finance strategy—Phase 1.* Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination. <https://mocc.gov.pk/Publications>
- Government of Pakistan. (2026b). *Pakistan climate prosperity plan.* Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination. <https://mocc.gov.pk/Publications>

- Government of Pakistan, Asian Development Bank, European Union, United Nations Agencies, & World Bank. (2022). *Pakistan Floods 2022: Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (Main Report and Supplemental Report)*. Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives.
https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_862500.pdf
- Gray, I., & Cointet, J.-P. (2023). Multilateralism of the marginal: Least developed countries and international climate negotiations, 1995–2016. *American Journal of Sociology*, 129(3), 796–855. <https://doi.org/10.1086/727753>
- Gul, S., & Shakir, H. (2024). Tackling the scourge of climate change: Pakistan's engagements in climate diplomacy. *Pakistan Journal of Integrated Social Sciences*, 1(1), 29–33. <https://doi.org/10.51846/pjiss.v1i1.3598>
- Keohane, R. O. (1984). *After hegemony* (Vol. 54). Princeton: Princeton university press. [Keohane ~ After Hegemony \[Ch 4-6\].pdf](#)
- Khan, K. T., Omer, S., & Khan, S. S. (2025). Health challenges in the wake of floods: Evidence from Pakistan. *Journal of Religion and Society*, 4(1), 1096–1110. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20558069>
- Klöck, C., Baatz, C., & Wendler, N. (2025). Procedural justice and (in) equitable participation in climate negotiations. *UCL Open Environment*, 7, e3116. <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444/ucloe.3116>
- Masud, S., & Khan, A. (2024). Policy implementation barriers in climate change adaptation: The case of Pakistan. *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 34(1), 42–52. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.2054>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2022, November 20). *Pakistan welcomes the historic decision of COP27 to establish the Fund for Loss and Damage*. <https://mofa.gov.pk/pakistan-welcomes-the-historic-decision-of-cop27-to-establish-the-fund-for-loss-and-damage>
- Mumtaz, M., & Puppim de Oliveira, J. A. (2023). A framework for analyzing the implementation of climate adaptation policies in the agriculture sector at the subnational level. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 147, 126–137. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2023.06.002>
- Protocol, K. (1997). United Nations framework convention on climate change. *Kyoto Protocol, Kyoto*, 198, 1–21. https://climate.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2016-11/2011060601_overview_schedule_en.pdf
- Roberts, J. T., & Parks, B. (2006). *A climate of injustice: Global inequality, north-south politics, and climate policy*. MIT press.
- Schlosberg, D., & Collins, L. B. (2014). From environmental to climate justice: climate change and the discourse of environmental justice. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 5(3), 359–374. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.275>
- Shaheen, A., Hussain, F., & Mumtaz, M. (2026). Diagnosing Individual Policy Capacity for Climate Governance: Evidence From National and Subnational Institutions in Pakistan. *Review of Policy Research*, 43(2), e70086. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.70086>

- Tennant, D., Davies, S., & Tennant, S. (2024). Determinants of access to climate finance: Nuanced insights for SIDS and other vulnerable economies. *World Development*, 180, 106623. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2024.106623>
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (1992). *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*.
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2022). *Funding arrangements for responding to loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including a focus on addressing loss and damage: Decision 2/CP.27 and Decision 2/CMA.4*. UNFCCC <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/decision%202%20CP%2027.pdf>
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2023). *Operationalization of the new funding arrangements for addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change*. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. <https://www.ecolex.org/details/decision/operationalization-of-the-new-funding-arrangements-including-a-fund-for-responding-to-loss-and-damage-referred-to-in-paragraphs-23-of-decisions-2cp27-and-2cma4-0d69e890-6875-4023-adbf-4481ed8eac83/>
- Vij, S., Stock, R., Ishtiaque, A., Gardezi, M., & Zia, A. (2024). Power in climate change policy-making process in South Asia. *Climate Policy*, 24(1), 104-116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2023.2271440>
- World Bank. (2022a, October 28). *Pakistan: Flood damages and economic losses over US\$30 billion and reconstruction needs over US\$16 billion—New assessment*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/10/28/pakistan-flood-damages-and-economic-losses-over-usd-30-billion-and-reconstruction-needs-over-usd-16-billion-new-assessme>
- World Bank. (2022b). *Pakistan country climate and development report*. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099950111072234047>