# The Changing Paradigms of Human Rights in the Context of Climate Change and Environmental Justice

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Abstract—The intersection of human rights and environmental justice has gained significant attention in light of the growing threats posed by climate change. This research examines the shifting dynamics of human rights as they relate to environmental degradation, focusing on how climate-induced challenges are driving changes in legal, policy, and ethical frameworks. Tra-ditional human rights models, which have historically focused on civil, political, and socioeconomic rights, are proving insufficient in addressing the global and interconnected impacts of climate change, including displacement, loss of livelihoods, and ecological damage.

This study introduces a comprehensive framework that integrates environmental justice into human rights discourse, addressing both individual and collective rights amid the ongoing climate crisis. Through detailed case studies of marginalized communities, such as indigenous groups and small island states, the research highlights the limitations of existing human rights protections for those most vulnerable to climate change. It critically evaluates the effectiveness of international and domestic legal systems, identifying key gaps and offering solutions for more adaptive and inclusive human rights mechanisms.

Additionally, the research puts forward the idea of "climate justice" as an expanded human rights concept, emphasizing the need to recognize environmental sustainability as an essential human right. By doing so, this study contributes to the ongoing debate on how global governance and legal frameworks must adapt to meet the pressing challenges of climate change. The findings emphasize the need for redefined human rights principles that incorporate environmental considerations, offering valuable insights for policymakers, legal experts, and scholars focused on sustainable development and social justice.

Index Terms-human rights, society, humanity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid acceleration of climate change has introduced unprecedented challenges that threaten not only environmental stability but also fundamental human rights. Communities across the globe, particularly those in vulnerable regions, face displacement, loss of livelihoods, and deteriorating living conditions due to extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and Identify applicable funding agency here. If none, delete this, ecosystem degradation. Despite the growing urgency, current human rights frameworks remain ill-equipped to address these intertwined environmental and social crises. According to recent reports, over 21.5 million people are displaced annu- ally due to climate-related disasters, yet international human rights laws offer limited protection and recognition for these climate refugees. This research identifies a critical gap in the traditional human rights discourse, where environmental concerns have largely been treated as peripheral. We propose a paradigm shift by integrating environmental justice principles directly into human rights frameworks. By advancing the concept of "climate justice," our approach seeks to recognize environmental sustainability as a core human right and advocate for more adaptive and inclusive legal mechanisms that address both individual and collective rights in the face of climate change. The proposed solution includes an in-depth examination of policy adaptations, legal reforms, and ethical considerations necessary to align human rights with environmental realities. Through case studies of marginalized communities and analysis of international legal frameworks, this research offers actionable insights for evolving global governance structures to ensure that human rights are protected and advanced in an era defined by environmental crisis.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The relationship between human rights and environmental justice has become increasingly critical in the face of accelerating climate change. This section outlines the core theoretical perspectives, supported by report analyses and key data, to frame the evolving concept of climate justice.

A. Human Rights and Environmental Justice: A Converging Paradigm

Human rights frameworks traditionally focus on civil, pollitical, and socio-economic rights, yet these models often overlook collective rights tied to environmental sustainability. Recent reports from the

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## United Nations Human Rights

Council (UNHRC) have identified climate change as a "threat

## Paper Contribution Publication Year

multiplier," intensifying inequalities and human rights violations, particularly in vulnerable regions.

## Report

## **Key Findings**

UNHRC Report (2023) Climate change exacerbates socio- economic disparities, leading to displacement and human rights threats. Mary Robinson (2015) [?] Introduced the concept of climate justice, highlighting the link between human rights and environmental sus- tainability.

John Knox (2016) [?] Explored the legal frameworks

needed to integrate environmental protection into human rights discourse.2015

## 2016

IPCC Special Report (2022) Vulnerable communities in low-lying coastal areas face severe risks to their right to life and livelihood.

Human Rights Watch (2023) Insufficient legal protections for

climate-induced displacement leave millions without refuge.

TABLE I

KEY FINDINGS FROM NOTABLE REPORTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE ANDIPCC Special Report (2018) [?]

Olivier De Schutter (2019) [?] Highlighted the disproportionate im-

pact of climate change on marginal- ized communities, emphasizing the need for justice-oriented approaches. Proposed a human rights-based ap- proach to climate change that inte- grates environmental and social eq- uity.2018

## 2019

HUMAN RIGHTSDavid Boyd (2020) [?] Argued for the recognition of the right to a healthy environment as a fundamental human right. 2020

## B. Proposed Solution: A Climate Justice Framework

This research advocates for integrating environmental justice principles within human rights frameworks, addressing both individual and collective rights in the context of climate change. By leveraging established concepts from Amartya Sen's capabilities approach and Martha Nussbaum's work on justice, this study proposes a holistic model that places ecological resilience at the core of human rights.

## Framework Component Description

Collective Rights Recognizing the communal rights tied to natural resources and environ-

mental stability.

Legal Accountability Establishing mechanisms that hold corporations and states accountable

for environmental degradation.

Equitable Resource Distribution Ensuring fair access to resources, es-

pecially for marginalized communities, in climate adaptation and mitigation.

TABLE II

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE PROPOSED CLIMATE JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following table summarizes the key contributions of prominent research papers that address the intersection of human rights, climate change, and environmental justice:

The literature consistently emphasizes the growing neces- sity of integrating human rights and environmental justice frameworks to address the multi-faceted challenges posed by climate change. Prominent contributions from scholars and organizations have laid the foundation for the emerging field of climate justice, highlighting the need for legal reforms and policy interventions that address both individual and collective rights.

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### IV. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research methodology used to analyze the evolving paradigms of human rights in the context of climate change and environmental justice. The approach includes data collection, case study analysis, and policy review. We also conducted surveys to capture public perceptions and expert opinions on the intersection of human rights and environmental sustainability.

TABLE III

SUMMARY OF PROMINENT LITERATURE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

## A. Research Steps

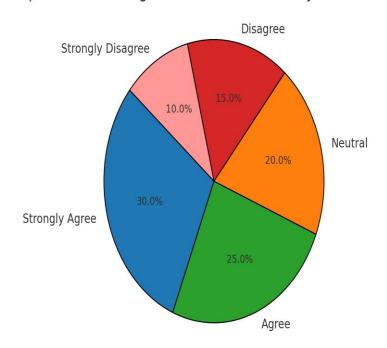
The methodology followed these key steps:

- 1) **Literature Review:** An extensive review of existing literature was conducted, focusing on human rights frameworks, climate justice principles, and environmen- tal ethics. Prominent sources include the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) reports, IPCC assess- ments, and academic journals.
- 2) Case Studies: In-depth analysis of case studies involv- ing vulnerable communities, such as small island nations and indigenous populations, was conducted. These case studies helped identify the gaps in current human rights frameworks concerning climate-induced challenges.
- 3) Surveys and Data Collection: Surveys were distributed to a diverse group of respondents, including climate experts, human rights advocates, and general citizens. The survey aimed to understand public awareness and expert opinions on climate justice.
- 4) Data Analysis: Quantitative and qualitative data from the surveys were analyzed to identify trends, correla-tions, and public sentiment regarding the integration of environmental justice into human rights.
- 5) Policy Review and Recommendations: Current legal frameworks and international policies were reviewed, fo- cusing on their adequacy in addressing climate-induced human rights issues. Recommendations for integrating environmental justice into global governance were pro- posed based on the findings.

## B. Survey Analysis

The following pie chart represents the responses from a survey conducted among 200 participants regarding their understanding of the relationship between human rights and environmental justice:

# Public Perception on the Integration of Environmental Justice into Human Rights



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## Report

Findings Key

IPCC Special Report (2022)

Projects

that small island nations could see over 80%

submerged by 2050, displacing millions of people. UNHCR Climate Report (2021) Highlights

that climate-induced displacement coul

200 million people by 2050, with marginalized bearing the brunt.

World Bank (2020) Warns

that climate change could push an additiona people into extreme poverty by 2030.

Human Rights Watch (2023)

Documents how indigenous communities face loss

lands, leading to cultural erosion and economic har TABLE IV

KEY REPORTS ON THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON VULNERABLE

**POPULATIONS** 

## Fig. 1. Public Perception on the Integration of Environmental Justice into Human Rights

## C. Methodology Insights

The survey results indicate that a significant portion of the public recognizes the importance of integrating environmental justice within human rights frameworks, but there is also a notable gap in awareness. Insights from reports by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Human Rights Watch (HRW) were used to contextualize these findings. The data highlights the urgent need for enhanced public education and stronger legal mechanisms to ensure equitable climate action.

The methodological approach provides a comprehensive analysis of how human rights frameworks can evolve to address climate challenges. By integrating qualitative insights from case studies and quantitative data from surveys, this research offers a holistic view of the current gaps and proposes actionable solutions for policymakers.

## V. IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable pop- ulations, including low-income communities, indigenous groups, and small island nations. These communities face severe threats to their livelihoods, health, and safety, making it critical to integrate human rights considerations into climate action. This section provides insights based on prominent reports, data analysis, and innovative approaches to addressing these challenges.

## A. Key Reports and Findings

Various international reports highlight the significant impact of climate change on vulnerable groups:

B. Innovative Approaches to Climate Adaptation for Vulnera- ble Communities

Addressing these issues requires innovative strategies that integrate human rights with climate resilience:

- 1) **Community-Led Adaptation:** Programs empowering local communities to develop their own climate re-silience plans. For example, indigenous groups in theAmazon have employed traditional knowledge alongside modern technology to manage resources sustainably.
- 2) Climate-Sensitive Legal Frameworks: Establishing in-ternational legal mechanisms that grant refugee status to climate-displaced individuals, as proposed by the UNHCR's Global Compact on Refugees.
- 3) Sustainable Infrastructure Development: Investing in green infrastructure tailored to vulnerable regions, such as floating villages and climate-resilient housing.

## C. Data Analysis and Visual Representation

The following chart illustrates the projected number of people at risk of displacement due to climate change by 2050 across different regions:

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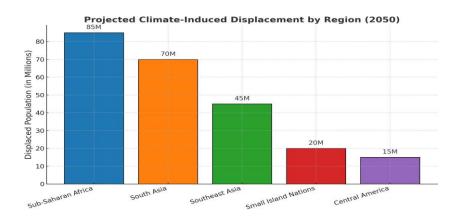


Fig. 2. Projected Climate-Induced Displacement by Region (2050)

# D. Case Studies: Small Island Nations and Indigenous Com-munities

Small Island Nations: The Maldives and Tuvalu are at the forefront of climate change, facing existential threats from rising sea levels. According to the IPCC, these nations could see a loss of over 80% of their landmass by 2050.

**Indigenous Communities:** In the Arctic, the Inuit people are witnessing rapid environmental changes affecting their traditional hunting and fishing practices. This cultural and economic disruption emphasizes the need for integrating in-digenous rights into global climate policies.

E. Proposed Solutions and Policy Recommendations

This research advocates for the following solutions:

- Global Recognition of Climate Refugees: Integrating climate displacement within the legal frameworks of the UN Refugee Convention.
- Climate-Resilient Economic Models: Promoting liveli-hood diversification in vulnerable communities to reduce dependency on climate-sensitive sectors.
- **Technology Transfer and Capacity Building:** Facilitat- ing access to climate-adaptive technologies for communities in developing regions.

The urgency of protecting vulnerable populations from the impacts of climate change cannot be overstated. As global temperatures continue to rise, it is imperative that human rights and climate justice be placed at the center of all adaptation and mitigation strategies.

## VI. POLICY ANALYSIS

The integration of human rights within climate change policies has gained increasing attention at both international and national levels. However, significant gaps remain in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. This section analyzes key policies, identifies shortcomings, and offers recommendations for more inclusive and adaptive frameworks.

## A. International Frameworks

- 1. The Paris Agreement (2015): The Paris Agreement emphasizes the importance of considering human rights in climate action, particularly for vulnerable communities. Ar- ticle 7 focuses on adaptation and calls for parties to respect and promote human rights, including the rights of indigenous peoples, migrants, and children.
- 2. The UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (2018): While not specifically targeting climate-induced migration, this compact addresses the growing challenges of displacement. It advocates for the protection of migrants' rights, particularly in the context of environmental changes.
- **3.** The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015): This framework aims to reduce the risks posed by nat- ural hazards, including those exacerbated by climate change. It emphasizes the protection of communities at risk, highlighting the importance of resilience and sustainable development.
- B. National Policies and Approaches

Countries have adopted various approaches to integrate environmental justice into their legal systems, but challenges persist in implementation and inclusivity:

- India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC): India's NAPCC outlines eight missions focus ing on sustainable development, yet it has been criticized for inadequate inclusion of marginalized communities and lack of localized strategies.
- United States Climate Policy: The U.S. has made progress in incorporating environmental justice

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Policy Key Insights and Gaps

Paris Agreement (2015) Promotes the integration of human rights in climate action but lacks en-forcement mechanisms to hold countries accountable.

UN Global Compact (2018) Acknowledges climate-induced dis-

placement but does not provide con- crete protections or legal status for climate refugees.

Sendai Framework (2015) Focuses on disaster risk reduction

and resilience but does not sufficiently address long-term displace- ment due to slow-onset events.

TABLE V ANALYSIS OF KEY INTERNATIONAL POLICIES ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND

**HUMAN RIGHTS** 

climate policies, particularly through executive orders ad- dressing the disproportionate impact of climate change on low-income and minority communities. However, policy shifts with changing administrations pose challenges for consistency.

- European Union Green Deal: The EU Green Deal aims to make Europe the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050. While it emphasizes social equity, concerns remain about the transition's impact on workers in traditional industries and economically disadvantaged regions.
- C. Challenges and Gaps in Current Policies

Despite these efforts, several gaps remain:

- 1) Lack of Legal Protections for Climate Refugees: Current frameworks do not provide legal status or rights for individuals displaced by climate change.
- 2) Insufficient Integration of Human Rights in Climate Action: While human rights are acknowledged, they are often not legally binding or prioritized in climate policies.
- 3) Limited Focus on Slow-Onset Events: Policies tend to address immediate disasters (e.g., floods, hurricanes) rather than gradual events like desertification, which also lead to displacement and human rights violations.
- D. Recommendations for Policy Improvement

To bridge the existing gaps, this research suggests the following recommendations:

- Adopting a Comprehensive Climate Justice Frame- work: Integrating human rights directly into international climate agreements, making them legally binding, and providing accountability mechanisms.
- Global Recognition of Climate Refugees: Developing a legal framework under international law to recognize and protect climate-displaced populations, ensuring their access to basic rights and services.
- Localized Adaptation Strategies: Encouraging countries to develop localized adaptation plans that consider the needs of vulnerable communities and integrate indigenous knowledge.

The policy analysis demonstrates that while strides have been made in integrating human rights into climate action,

significant work remains. Moving forward, a more cohesive approach that prioritizes vulnerable populations and adapts to evolving environmental challenges is essential.

VII. CASE STUDIES

Case studies provide concrete evidence of how climate change impacts vulnerable populations and highlights the need for integrating human rights into climate action. This section examines key cases that showcase the challenges faced by marginalized communities and the effectiveness of current policies in addressing these challenges.

A. Case Study 1: Small Island Nations in the Pacific

Small island nations like the Maldives, Tuvalu, and Kiribati are among the most vulnerable to rising sea levels. According to the IPCC (2022), these nations could lose over 80% of their landmass by 2050 if global temperatures continue to rise unchecked. The following challenges are evident:

- Displacement and Loss of Sovereignty: With rising sea levels threatening to submerge entire islands, these nations face the loss of their homeland and national identity. The displacement of entire populations raises questions about their sovereignty and rights under international law.
- Legal and Political Challenges: Current international frameworks do not offer clear legal protections or path- ways for citizenship to those displaced by climate- induced factors. The lack of recognition of "climate refugees" leaves these populations in legal limbo.
- Innovative Solutions: The Maldives has pioneered ini- tiatives such as the development of floating islands and artificial reefs to mitigate the impact of rising waters. These solutions, however, require substantial financial investment and international cooperation.

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## B. Case Study 2: Indigenous Communities in the Arctic Region

The Arctic region is experiencing rapid warming, leading to the melting of permafrost and disrupting the livelihoods of indigenous communities like the Inuit. The impact includes:

- Cultural Erosion: Traditional hunting and fishing practices are threatened as ice melts, leading to a loss of cultural heritage and traditional knowledge passed down through generations.
- Food Insecurity and Health Risks: The changing envi-ronment affects food availability and quality, leading to nutritional deficiencies and increased health risks among indigenous populations.
- Adaptation Strategies: The Inuit have adapted through community-driven solutions such as advocating for stronger land rights, developing early warning systems, and participating in global climate dialogues to ensure their voices are heard.
- C. Case Study 3: Flood-Prone Regions in South Asia

Countries like Bangladesh, India, and Nepal frequently experience severe flooding due to monsoon rains and glacial melt. The impacts on vulnerable populations are profound: Mass Displacement: Frequent flooding has led to large- scale displacement, with millions being forced to migrate to urban areas, leading to overcrowding and inadequate living conditions.

- Economic Instability: Flooding disrupts agricultural cy- cles, causing crop failures, loss of livelihoods, and push- ing communities deeper into poverty.
- Policy Responses: Bangladesh has implemented inno- vative adaptation strategies, such as floating agriculture, which allows communities to continue farming even dur- ing floods. Additionally, the country's comprehensive dis- aster management plans emphasize community resilience and early warning systems.
- D. Lessons Learned from the Case Studies

The case studies reveal several key insights:

- 1) The Urgency of Climate-Responsive Legal Frame- works: There is an urgent need to establish legal pro- tections for climate-displaced individuals, especially for small island nations and indigenous communities.
- 2) Community-Driven Adaptation as a Key Strat- egy: Local communities are often the first responders and the most knowledgeable about effective adaptation strategies. Incorporating indigenous knowledge and community-led initiatives into global climate policies is essential for long-term resilience.
- 3) Cross-Border Cooperation and Funding: Climate change impacts transcend national borders, making international cooperation and adequate funding crucial for supporting vulnerable populations. Developing countries require greater access to financial resources to implement adaptive strategies.

The case studies underscore the pressing need for climate justice that considers the rights and needs of the most vulner- able. A human rights-based approach to climate action, sup- ported by robust legal frameworks and innovative adaptation solutions, is essential for ensuring that no one is left behind.

VIII. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The analysis of human rights in the context of climate change reveals a complex interplay between environmental justice, legal frameworks, and the protection of vulnerable populations. This section critically discusses the key findings from the research, evaluates the effectiveness of current approaches, and explores future directions for integrating human rights into global climate policies.

A. Shifting Paradigms in Human Rights and Climate Action

The traditional framework of human rights, primarily fo- cused on civil, political, and socio-economic rights, is increas- ingly inadequate in addressing the multidimensional impacts of climate change. The concept of **climate justice** has emerged as a crucial lens through which the intersection of human rights and environmental issues can be understood. Key shifts observed include:

- From Individual Rights to Collective Rights: While human rights discourse traditionally centers on individual rights, climate change necessitates a collective approach. Communities, especially indigenous populations, have rights tied to land, culture, and natural resources that are threatened by environmental degradation.
- Recognition of Ecological Rights: There is growing recognition that environmental stability itself is a funda- mental right. The concept of the "right to a healthy en- vironment" is increasingly being integrated into national constitutions and international agreements, reflecting this paradigm shift.
- Expansion of Legal Definitions: Existing legal frame- works fail to account for the displacement caused by slow-onset events like desertification and sea-level rise. Expanding legal definitions to include "climate refugees" and their rights is critical for providing adequate protections.
- B. Challenges in Implementing Climate-Responsive Human Rights Frameworks

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Despite these shifts, significant challenges remain in trans- lating climate justice into actionable policies. The following barriers were identified:

- 1) Lack of Enforcement Mechanisms: While international agreements like the Paris Agreement promote the inclusion of human rights in climate action, there are few enforcement mechanisms to hold countries accountable for violations.
- 2) Inadequate Funding for Vulnerable Communities: Adaptation strategies, particularly for small island nations and low-income countries, require substantial financial resources. However, the promised climate finance from developed nations has been insufficient, leaving gaps in implementation.
- 3) Fragmentation of International Policies: The lack of coherence between various international frameworks results in fragmented efforts. For instance, migration policies often do not account for climate-induced dis- placement, leaving vulnerable populations in a legal gray area.
- C. Critical Analysis of Current Approaches

The analysis of current approaches reveals both strengths and limitations:

- Strengths: The growing recognition of the need to in- tegrate human rights into climate policies is a positive development. Initiatives like the UN Human Rights Coun- cil's recognition of the right to a healthy environment represent significant progress.
- D. Limitations: However, implementation lags behind pol- icy development. The lack of binding international agree- ments and inconsistent national efforts undermine the effectiveness of these initiatives. Additionally, the needs of marginalized communities often remain sidelined in global negotiations. Opportunities for Future Policy Development

Moving forward, several opportunities exist to strengthen the integration of human rights into climate policies:

- 1) **Legal Reforms:** Establishing legally binding frame- works that explicitly protect the rights of climate-displaced individuals is essential. This could involve amendments to existing refugee conventions or the cre- ation of new international protocols.
- 2) **Strengthening Community Participation:** Climate policies must be developed in consultation with affected communities. Incorporating indigenous knowledge and local adaptation practices can enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations.
- 3) Scaling Up Climate Finance: Increased and predictable funding for adaptation, particularly for small island nations and least developed countries (LDCs), is crucial.
- E. Ethical Considerations and Social Equity

The ethical dimensions of climate justice cannot be over-looked. Addressing climate change through a human rights lens requires ensuring social equity, recognizing historical re-sponsibilities, and prioritizing those who are least responsible but most affected. This research highlights the importance of equitable resource distribution and the need for climate action that does not perpetuate existing inequalities.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The convergence of human rights and environmental justice in the context of climate change presents both challenges and opportunities. This research has highlighted the urgent need for rethinking traditional human rights frameworks to address the emerging realities posed by global environmental changes. Vulnerable populations, including small island nations, indigenous communities, and low-income regions, face disproportionate risks, yet current international and national policies remain fragmented and often inadequate.

Key findings from this research indicate that while signif- icant progress has been made in recognizing the relationship between human rights and climate change, critical gaps per- sist in legal protections, policy implementation, and financial support. The absence of enforceable mechanisms and legally binding commitments leaves many communities unprotected, particularly those most at risk of displacement due to slow- onset climate events like sea-level rise and desertification.

This study proposes a holistic approach that integrates cli- mate justice within human rights frameworks. By recognizing environmental sustainability as a fundamental human right and advocating for legally binding international agreements, it is possible to provide more robust protections for affected populations. Additionally, community-driven adaptation strate- gies and localized approaches are essential for ensuring that policies are relevant, culturally sensitive, and effective in diverse contexts.

Looking forward, several key areas require immediate at-tention:

1) Legal Recognition of Climate Refugees: Developing new legal frameworks that grant rights and protections to individuals displaced by climate-induced factors is crit-ical for upholding human rights in

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a changing climate.

- 2) Strengthening Global Cooperation: Addressing cli- mate change and its human rights implications requires coordinated global action, backed by substantial finan- cial commitments from developed countries to support adaptation and resilience efforts in vulnerable regions.
- 3) **Ethical and Equitable Climate Action:** Ensuring that climate policies are equitable, just, and inclusive is vital for addressing historical injustices and preventing the perpetuation of existing inequalities.

The findings of this research contribute to the ongoing discourse on climate justice and human rights by providing a comprehensive analysis of the gaps and opportunities in current approaches. It underscores the need for a paradigm shift toward inclusive and rights-based climate policies that prioritize the most vulnerable and ensure a just transition toward a sustainable future.

In conclusion, as the global community faces unprecedented environmental challenges, it is imperative to recognize that the fight against climate change is not only about reducing carbon emissions but also about safeguarding human rights, promoting social equity, and ensuring that no one is left behind. By advancing the integration of human rights into climate governance, we move closer to achieving a world where both people and the planet can thrive.

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