

Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy (JSSRP)
From Charity to Climate Justice: Reimagining Social Work Practice in Climate Vulnerable Indigenous Communities of Pakistan – A Qualitative Systematic Review
Aysha Farooq

MPhil Scholar, Department of Social Work, University of Punjab, Pakistan.

Cite This Article: Farooq, A. (2025). From Charity to Climate Justice: Reimagining Social Work Practice in Climate Vulnerable Indigenous Communities of Pakistan – A Qualitative Systematic Review. *Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy*. 3 (04), 938-954.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71327/jssrp.34.938.954>

ISSN: 3006-6557 (Online)

ISSN: 3006-6549 (Print)

Vol. 3, No. 4 (2025)

Pages: 938-954

Key Words:

Climate justice, Indigenous communities, social work, Pakistan, Charity model, Qualitative systematic review, Thematic synthesis

Corresponding Author:**Aysha Farooq**Email: ayshasaqib329@gmail.com**License:**

Abstract: Pakistan is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world with respect to climate change, and indigenous peoples are the most affected, yet they emit least. This is a qualitative systematic review (QSR) with a thematic synthesis approach to understand the interventions of social work in the climate vulnerable communities of Pakistan and whether such work is charity-based or justice-based. A detailed examination of 26 peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, NGO reports and case studies between 2015 and 2025 shows that the primary approach in these documents is the application of a top-down charity model where Indigenous communities are depicted as recipients of aid, not rights- and knowledge-holders. Indigenous people are being systematically excluded from climate policy-making and adaptation planning, are facing existential threats to land, culture and livelihoods (Khan, Khan, & Kamal, 2024). At grassroots, alternatives motivated by a desire for justice are being developed, such as DASTAK Foundation's FIERCE program and Madat Balochistan's community-based resilience efforts (Global Solutions Initiative, 2025; DASTAK Foundation, 2025). The article ends by visualising social work practice in Pakistan based on the principle of climate justice which includes advocacy, cultural sensitivity, and integration of Indigenous knowledge and policy engagement.

Introduction

The global climate crisis is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, and impacts populations and ecosystems differently. Despite producing less than one per cent of world greenhouse gases (GHGs), Pakistan is among the countries that suffer the most from climate change (Mahmood, Bakht, & Tahir, 2025). Ali and Williams (2022) place Pakistan 20th in the list of 191 countries regarding their natural hazard exposure and the 2022 floods inundated a third of Pakistan's territory and impacted millions of people. Climate impacts will impact a spectrum of Pakistani society, but most strongly will impact those who have done the least to cause the climate change, Indigenous peoples whose livelihoods, cultures and identities are tied to the natural environment.

The indigenous people from northwest, coastal fishing communities in Balochistan and riverine communities in the province of Sindh and Punjab are the first to experience climate hazards. The communities face glacial lake outburst floods, sea level rise, desertification, water scarcity and changing

rainfall patterns which affect traditional farming schedules. Khan, Khan and Kamal (2024) have shown how the natural resources of the Kalash have been greatly impacted by climate change, and how climate-induced disasters have led to migration from traditional habitats. This melting of glaciers in the area of Pakistan known as Gilgit-Baltistan has caused anxiety, trauma and fears of displacement among the people of the area (Ali et al., 2025). The irony is great; communities who lived in harmony with their ecosystems for generations are paying the price for a crisis they did not bring and which they were not responsible for (Whyte, 2017).

Humanitarian and development actors have largely been using a "charity model" – a top down approach that assumes that affected communities are passive recipients of aid. This colonialist-based model is a short-term intervention that fails to confront structural inequalities that make people vulnerable (Drolet, Ali, & Williams, 2022; Gray & Coates, 2015). Charity based emergency response can be needed in the acute disaster phase, but the ongoing existence of this approach is problematic (Drolet, Ali, & Williams, 2022).

This article makes a case for a paradigm shift in the practice of social work with the indigenous people of Pakistan from charity to climate justice. Climate justice acknowledges that climate change is a political-ethical and environmental issue, and that the inclusion of vulnerable populations in decision-making, the recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems, and the distribution of climate action benefits and burdens are important issues (Schlosberg, 2013; Whyte, 2017). Social work, which is based on human rights, social justice, and human dignity (Ife, 2012), should incorporate the ecological dimension to practice (Khan & Saeed, 2024).

This qualitative systematic review and thematic synthesis examines the evidence on three related dimensions: vulnerabilities of Indigenous people in Pakistan; types of social work and humanitarian responses recorded; and inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and rights in climate policy and practice. The analysis is contributing to the concept of "green social work" and decolonisation of social work practice in Pakistan as suggested by Dominelli (2012) and Gray and Coates (2015).

Research Questions

1. What are the impacts of the climate change on the indigenous communities of Pakistan?
2. What do you see when you examine some of the patterns in documented interventions into the social life—charity oriented or justice oriented?
3. Is there any evidence of integration or incorporation of Indigenous knowledge in climate adaptation?
4. What are the current policy gaps in terms of inclusion in climate frameworks?

Theoretical Framework: From Charity to Climate Justice

The Charity Model In Social Work

The charity model is not new to social work, and stems from the religious and philanthropic tradition in which the "helper" is seen as good and the "helped" as "helpless. They are linked to: top-down decision making with outsiders deciding needs and solutions; short-term thinking rather than long-term change; communities as objects of intervention rather than subject of development; and the absence of local knowledge, cultural practices and community priorities (Gray & Coates, 2015; Ife, 2012). Criticism is targeted at charity models beyond the emergency phase; when communities need to move towards empowerment and self-determination (Drolet, Ali, & Williams, 2022).

The charity approach in Pakistan is expressed through an international donor/NGO delivered solution rolled out from above, without any meaningful community consultation, and is manifested in the rolling out of tents, food rations and cash transfers. The 2022 floods in Sindh are a good example of "ghost recovery"—more than 14,000 schools have yet to be rebuilt by the end of early 2026, with rebuilds

listed “on paper” but no teachers, functioning facilities, or student attendance. A focus on measurable outputs obscures whether communities are truly able to rebuild their lives on their own terms.

Climate Justice as Transformative Framework

Climate justice is a paradigm shift from charity because it is based on principles of environmental justice and human rights. In recognition that climate change is not equal, and those who have done the least harm—those in the global poor, Indigenous populations and future generations—are hurt the most (Schlosberg, 2013). Climate justice goes beyond charity and is about a change in the system that addresses power, resources and decision-making (Whyte, 2017). The principles of climate justice need to be integrated into policy-making processes (Ali, Khan, Azhar, & Raheem, 2024).

Six principles of climate justice are as follows: the marginalized are affected more than others; the affected community should be part of the decision making process; Indigenous knowledge and rights should be respected; past emissions are the responsibility of those who caused them; and burden and benefits of climate action should be shared equitably (Schlosberg, 2013; Whyte, 2017). Indigenous communities in Pakistan demand that their land rights be recognised, their traditional ecological knowledge respected, they be given a voice in policy-making, and that they be supported in their own approaches to adaptation strategies that are appropriate to them (Khan et al., 2024; Ullah et al., 2024).

Social work’s Potential for Climate justice

Social work’s work to advance human rights and social justice places it in a unique position in the climate crisis. Environmental sustainability has emerged as a priority in the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (GASWD) and as with many other areas of social work, it is discussed under the terms of “green social work” (Dominelli, 2012) and “environmental social work” (Ramsay & Boddy, 2017). Khan & Saeed (2024) highlight the link between social work and environmental sustainability. These strategies see social workers as environmental justice advocates, as agents for community-led adaptation and as a link between communities and policy spaces (Gray & Coates, 2015). However, there is a gap between theory and practice in Pakistan, and existing practice models are continuing to reflect charity-driven practice (Drolet, Ali, & Williams, 2022).

Methodology

Research Design

This is a qualitative systematic review using a thematic synthesis approach that is based on the detailed protocol developed by Heaton (2008) for identifying, appraising and synthesising qualitative evidence. Thematic synthesis involves three steps: line-by-line coding; descriptive themes; and analytic themes, which “go beyond” the primary texts and generate new interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Johnston, 2014). This works to link findings from various types of documents, but in a transparent way.

Data Sources

Five types of sources were analysed. In order to identify relevant peer-reviewed articles published in 2015-2025, the researcher has used a systematic search strategy through Scopus, Google Scholar and PubMed using various combinations of keywords related to climate justice, climate change, climate vulnerability, Indigenous communities (Kalash, Gwadar), Pakistan and social work, community resilience and adaptation (Khan, Khan, & Kamal, 2024; Ullah, Khan, Begum, Han, & Mohamed, 2024; Whyte, 2017; Yousuf & Changezi, 2026; Ali et al., 2025; Mahmood, Bakht, & Tahir, 2025; Khan & Saeed, 2024; Abid, Raza, Naz, & Bukhari, 2025). Second, reports from organizations and NGOs from the grassroots, such as DASTAK Foundation (2025) and Global Solutions Initiative (2025) were used as evidence based on practice. Thirdly, policy documents such as the National Climate Change Policy 2021, provincial policies and reports from the Pakistan Meteorological Department were analysed (Government of Pakistan,

2021; Policy Analysis Report, 2024). Fourth, news and media reports from Dawn provided up-to-date information (Khanzadi Kapri & Manglo, 2026). Fifth, UN reports from UNDP and UN Women provided background on gender and climate vulnerability (UN Women, 2024; UNDP, 2023).

The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The documents were included only if they were about Pakistan or world relevant frameworks applicable to Pakistan; climate vulnerability; Indigenous communities; social work or humanitarian intervention; and were published between 2015-2025 (Policy and organizational reports were included even if published before or after this time frame if relevant); and in English or Urdu with translation. No documents were included that did not have social context information for Indigenous communities or did not address quantitative modelling of climate impacts.

The Search Strategy and Screening Process

Systematic searches were carried out in line with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021) from January to March 2025. A preliminary search of the databases produced 342 documents that may be relevant. A total of 187 documents were excluded after title and abstract screening of 253 documents (after removal of duplicates); the screening process took place at two stages. The screening process was conducted at two stages: title screening and abstract screening, and 187 documents were excluded, after duplicates (n=89). There were 66 full-text documents and 40 of them were excluded because they did not focus on Pakistan and/or Indigenous communities. Twenty-six documents were included in the final sample, covering 11 peer-reviewed articles, 6 NGO reports, 3 government policy documents, 2 news/media reports, 2 UN documents, 1 book and 1 book chapter.

Table 1: PRISMA 2020 Flow Table for Study Selection

Stage	Description	Number of Documents
Identification	Records identified through database searching	342
Screening	Records after duplicates removed	253
Screening	Records screened at title/abstract level	253
Screening	Records excluded (did not meet inclusion criteria)	187
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	66
Eligibility	Full-text articles excluded (insufficient focus on Pakistan or Indigenous communities)	40
Included	Studies included in qualitative synthesis	26

Quality Appraisal

The articles were evaluated using the CASP Qualitative Checklist (CASP, 2018) with 10 criteria. The evaluations of NGO and policy reports included methodological and data sources, looking at the transparency of the processes (Johnston, 2014). NGO reports, news media had lower levels of evidence than a hierarchy of weighted peer reviewed journal articles and official UN/government documents

(Drolet, Ali, & Williams, 2022). Quality assessment did not exclude studies, but rather led to confidence levels when interpreting and synthesizing studies. The deductive themes were generated by the coding of the 26 documents line by line, and codes were organized in a systematic way using deductive themes that were formulated from the theoretical framework. A structured matrix ensured evidence weighting, with CASP scores (8-10 = high confidence, 5-7 = moderate and below 5 = low) allocated to each piece of evidence to support development of the theme.

Analytical Framework

Thematic synthesis used deductive coding and inductive coding, and five deductive themes were developed from the theoretical framework: nature of intervention, Indigenous voice and participation, knowledge integration, policy inclusion and empowerment indicators. The analysis deliberately tried to recruit 'negative cases' that challenged the charity-justice framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to prevent confirmation bias. A detailed audit trail, code derivation documentation and illustrative quotations were used to ensure transparency.

Reflexivity Statement

Document selection and interpretation was influenced by the authors' roles as social work researchers and members of social justice and decolonial practice communities. A reflective journal was used to record decisions made and individual reactions to data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure data was represented as opposed to any preconceived notions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; CASP, 2018), the thematic categories were continually reviewed.

Limitations

The methodological limitations are small sample size (n=26) that reduces generalizability, the variation in the quality of the sources, the systematic negative cases search to mitigate confirmation bias, the single-reviewer analysis, and the publication and language bias due to the exclusion of non-English sources. Explicit weighting, quality appraisal and transparent reporting were used to manage these limitations.

Findings

Intersectional Vulnerabilities Across Indigenous Communities

Thematic synthesis shows that there are multiple cross-cutting vulnerabilities in Indigenous communities from climate change. Three interwoven patterns emerge: disruption of TEK, psychosocial trauma and pressure for displacement, and resource depletion and migration.

Loss of TEK: Climate change is threatening the traditional knowledge systems of generations across communities. Previous to the disruption of ICKN, the fishing communities in Gwadar have been able to utilize the resources sustainably, reduce disaster risks, and maintain strong social networks (Ullah, Khan, Begum, Han, & Mohamed, 2024). The recent climate changes, including the warming oceans, altered fish migration patterns and extreme weather events, have reduced the ability of communities to predict climatic phenomenon and understand fish availability (Ullah, Khan, Begum, Han, & Mohamed, 2024). Yousuf & Changezi (2026) describe how in small-scale farming communities in arid northwest Pakistan, religious and cultural beliefs affect climate perceptions by encouraging community members to interpret climate change as God's will, not man's. This perception affects individual actions as they feel that they are not responsible for mitigation, and there is a gap that needs to be overcome between the local experience and scientific approaches (Yousuf & Changezi, 2026).

Psychosocial Trauma and Displacement Pressures: Glacial retreat in GBA has led to significant ecological changes, resulting in reported anxiety (70%), trauma (30%) and fear of displacement (40%) with youth feeling fear and uncertainty, women reporting high anxiety and traditional coping mechanisms reducing

mental health issues by 40% (Ali et al., 2025). Severe effects on water, biodiversity, forests and traditional crops have been observed, climate disasters leading to migration from ancestral lands amongst the Kalash community (Khan, Khan, & Kamal, 2024). Climate change is also related with socio-economic marginality, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities (Khan, Khan, & Kamal, 2024).

Resource Depletion and Forced Migration: The higher frequency and intensity of flooding has exceeded traditional adaptive capacities, especially due to economic marginalisation (Mahmood, Bakht, & Tahir, 2025). The climate vulnerability and local reform in flood management of Pakistan suggests the need for value and justice agenda on international platforms along with indigenous radical reform (Mahmood, Bakht & Tahir 2025). This pattern is indicative of “intersectional vulnerability”, which is the combination of ecological, economic, cultural and political vulnerability and the resulting exposure of Indigenous people (Khan, Khan & Kamal 2024; Ullah, Khan, Begum, Han & Mohamed 2024).

Charity Model in social work practice

From the documented interventions, it can be seen that the humanitarian response to climate disaster is mostly charity-based. The 2022 floods provide a good example of this: as of early 2026, 14,343 schools have not been rebuilt and the education budget is at around 0.8% of GDP, well below the UNESCO recommendation of 4-6% of GDP (Khanzadi Kapri & Manglo, 2026). School records state that enrolment is increasing, but when you go to the schools and check out classrooms, the actual attendance is much lower, according to activists (Khanzadi Kapri & Manglo, 2026). One development professional remarked: “Donors are looking for their money to be ‘worked’ and government is looking for ‘progress’—there is information about enrolment, temporary learning centres counted, school with roofs, with flags—the information that is missing is whether it was rebuilt properly or not” (Khanzadi Kapri & Manglo, 2026). The need for speedy response and relief distribution was deemed appropriate after the floods, however the criticism is that this approach continued beyond the emergency phase (Drolet, Ali, & Williams, 2022).

Relief distribution models lead to dependency and reduce agency and knowledge locally (Yousuf & Changezi, 2026). Indigenous knowledge is still not used as a climate adaptation resource, although its importance for climate adaptation is becoming more apparent (Yousuf & Changezi, 2026). The basic premise of the charity approach is that solutions lie with people outside the community and not with those within, furthering Indigenous communities' exclusion and marginalisation (Policy Analysis Report, 2024). Another dimension of the crisis is highlighted, by a climate justice expert Roshni Anwar: "We talk about infrastructure, relief packages and statistics after the floods, we don't talk about women's privacy, safe sanitation, gendered experiences of displacement, emotional and psychological trauma, the silent dropout crisis" (Khanzadi Kapri & Manglo, 2026). This observation shows that system of measurable outputs neglects gender and human dimensions of climate impacts.

Emerging Justice-Oriented Alternatives

New alternatives to the charity model are underway and led by grass-roots level, spearheaded by women and Indigenous people, and envision justice-driven social work practice.

The DASTAK Foundation's FIERCE Program is reflective of feminist climate justice in practice. Through this national study in ten climate sensitive districts, FIERCE (Feminist Initiative for Environmental Resilience, Collective Care, and Wellbeing of Ecojustice Defenders) looks at both emotional and physical stressors of frontline ecojustice defenders, mostly women who support the communities in facing the climate crises (DASTAK Foundation, 2025). The program sends dignity and prenatal kits during floods and heat waves; provides mental health assistance through the REST Manifesto; and advocates on policy development with District Disaster Management Authorities (DASTAK Foundation, 2025). Instead

of victimization, DASTAK empowers women as "environmental human rights defenders" and emphasizes collective preparedness for disaster and building community capacities (DASTAK Foundation, 2025; Kasztelan, 2025). DASTAK was named 2025 Innovation Award recipient by CIVICUS (CIVICUS, 2025).

Indigenous and women led Madat Balochistan is making community climate resilience of arid Balochistan. Resilience is the ability to learn about the vulnerabilities and various impacts of climate changes, says Iqra Bellani, the founder. (Kasztelan, 2025) The organization is delivering informal climate change education to hundreds of women and girls, such as climate resilient crops and enabling communities to voice their concerns on the effects of climate change (Kasztelan, 2025). Madat has helped thousands of people, constructed zero-carbon homes and showcased the possible resilience of Indigenous and women-led solutions to climate change (Global Solutions Initiative, 2025). This project began with one goal in mind: to restore our people, our land, and our climate, and to be part of the solution, not the victim, wrote Maryam Jamali, Co-founder of Madat, in the Global Solutions Initiative 2025 (GSI 2025).

Since 2015, Accountability Lab's Eco-Leaders Initiative has trained hundreds of youth climate change advocates in advocacy and policy engagement skills, building a National Eco-Leaders Network to help youth climate governance engagement (Policy Analysis Report, 2024). Participative planning, capacity-building, and policy advocacy within the community context have been identified as crucial for climate resilience building (Abid, Raza, Naz, & Bukhari, 2025). Khan and Saeed (2024) highlight the interrelationship between social work and environmental sustainability.

Policy Inclusion and Its Gaps

Indigenous community involvement in climate planning documented in policies is incomplete. The National Climate Change Policy (2021) has identified the groups that are marginalized or disproportionately affected but there are no clear institutional mandates, enforcement mechanisms and issue-oriented strategy (Government of Pakistan, 2021; Policy Analysis Report, 2024). Despite the fact that Balochistan is one of the more climate vulnerable provinces, it has not yet developed a Climate Change Policy (Policy Analysis Report 2024). Women are depicted as vulnerable but not agents of change (UN Women, 2024; DASTAK Foundation, 2025) which reduces their potential to act for transformation in climate change. Indigenous knowledge is acknowledged in research but not widely included in policy processes (Policy Analysis Report, 2024; Yousuf & Changezi, 2026). Mahmood et al (2025) emphasize that Pakistan's climate diplomacy needs to be an agenda for value and justice, be visible in international fora and involve domestic radical climate change reforms. Policy analysis shows that vulnerable groups are not included in policy decisions, and minority communities are discriminated against in relief distribution, while policies that impact Indigenous communities do not sufficiently address the GLFO hazard (Policy Analysis Report 2024).

Discussion

Social Work's Commitment to Social Justice

This review identifies critical need to change the paradigm in social work practice with climate vulnerable indigenous communities in Pakistan. The shortcomings of the persistent charity model are well documented, and it demonstrates more widely how power is being implicated in humanitarian and development practice. But how can charity be both ineffective and creating dependency, marginalizing Indigenous knowledge and perpetuating power imbalances that lead to vulnerability (Gray & Coates, 2015)? But charity-based interventions are still valid when it comes to emergency situations where quick life-saving interventions are needed (Drolet, Ali, & Williams, 2022). The critique focuses on the

continuation of charity beyond the crisis, when communities need to be empowered and autonomous. The values of social work and human rights, and social justice, offer a coherent alternative to a climate justice approach (Ife, 2012; Schlosberg, 2013). There are 5 pathways of climate justice in Pakistan: First, social workers are equipped to advocate for land rights recognition, integration of Indigenous knowledge in adaptation planning and Indigenous representation in decision making forums through their roles in advocacy for Indigenous rights and policy inclusion. Social workers are well placed to advocate for the recognition of land rights, the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge in adaptation planning and the representation of Indigenous peoples in decision making fora. The lack of policy recognition and action (Policy Analysis Report, 2024) can be addressed by social work advocacy, which involves documenting the community experience, raising the community's needs, and holding those responsible for action accountable (Dominelli, 2012; Mahmood, Bakht, & Tahir, 2025). Second, the term culturally responsive practice moves beyond the concept of cultural sensitivity; it is about partnership, as is evident in DASTAK and Madat Balochistan (DASTAK Foundation, 2025; Kasztelan, 2025). Social workers must have participatory skills, cross-cultural communication, humility, reflexivity and an ability to learn from communities (Ramsay & Boddy, 2017; Yousuf & Changezi, 2026). Third, community organizing and empowerment is about building community capacity in self advocacy and community action. Community-driven approaches (Global Solutions Initiative, 2025): Community-based solutions in Madat Balochistan demonstrate the power of community-based solutions. If the communities are able to recognize the issues they face and find their solutions, they become agents and not a recipient of aid (Ife, 2012; Abid, Raza, Naz, & Bukhari, 2025). Fourth, knowledge brokering and translation connects the priorities of Indigenous communities to the formal policy space, bringing community priorities into policy discourse and advocating Indigenous interests (DASTAK Foundation, 2025; Gray & Coates, 2015; Khan & Saeed, 2024). Fifth, confronting climate vulnerability means tackling structural inequalities that result from inequalities in climate exposure due to colonialism, patriarchy and economic marginalisation (Schlosberg, 2013; Whyte, 2017; Ali, Khan, Azhar, & Raheem, 2024).

Decolonizing Social Work in Pakistan

Decolonisation of social work in Pakistan is essential for paradigm shift from charity to climate justice. Many post-colonial contexts, including Pakistan, bring Western models and practices that are unsuitable for local contexts (Gray & Coates, 2015). Decolonization includes Indigenous knowledge-centring, unsettling Eurocentric theories and the creation of locally-based practice models. It involves an understanding of Indigenous communities' knowledge system that is relevant to climate adaptation in Gwadar, including sustainable resource use, DRR, and social organization (Ullah et al., 2024). Challenges the unequal power relationship in charitable models (DASTAK Foundation, 2025). It calls for intersectionality of climate vulnerability (multiple marginalizations that indigenous peoples face as ethnic, economic and religious minorities) (Khan, Khan, & Kamal, 2024; Ullah, Khan, Begum, Han, & Mohamed, 2024; Khan & Saeed, 2024).

Limitations

The review is subject to some limitations that are worthy of being noted. Due to the small number of participants (n = 26), the findings might not be generalizable, but it is limited to the scope of literature that is available. The reporting and weight of evidence were used to address variation in sources quality. The deductive charity-justice approach might lead to confirmation bias, which can be avoided by conscious negative case searching. Weighing in by one analyst can add a degree of bias, but reflexive journaling can eliminate that. Limits of generalizability apply as the focus is on geographic context of Indigenous communities in Pakistan, while conceptual framework may be applicable to other climate

vulnerable settings. If a study did not appear in English, it may not have been included due to language.

Consequences for Social Work Practice

Education and Training

Content on climate change, environmental justice, Indigenous knowledge and community organizing needs to be incorporated into the social work curriculum (Dominelli, 2012; Ramsay & Boddy, 2017). A focus should be given to participatory approaches, cross-cultural communication, and policy advocacy skills. The practice of justice-based work should be integrated into field education to offer practical opportunities for learning about grassroots climate justice (Drolet, Ali, & Williams, 2022; Gray & Coates, 2015; Khan & Saeed, 2024).

Policy Engagement

Social workers need to be involved at several levels of climate policy: at local level – ensure representation in disaster management and climate adaptation planning; at provincial and national level – ensure Indigenous rights and knowledge are considered (Policy Analysis Report, 2024); and at international level – climate finance, loss and damage, and Indigenous rights frameworks (Schlosberg, 2013; Whyte, 2017). Mahmood, Bakht and Tahir (2025) emphasize the importance of promoting Pakistan's value and justice agenda on the international platform.

Organizational Practice

Social work institutions need to shift programs from relief to rights, engage communities in a partnership role and create institutional structures based on principles of justice and participation (DASTAK Foundation, 2025; Gray & Coates, 2015). Climate justice approaches and engagement with and capacity building of Indigenous community organisations are priorities (Global Solutions Initiative, 2025). The model of “care and community” that DASTAK Foundation is working with, and the REST Manifesto that re-frames burnout as “a systemic challenge and a policy issue” (DASTAK Foundation, 2025; Abid, Raza, Naz, & Bukhari, 2025) are both encouraging.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

There is a need for multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary collaboration for climate justice. To tackle multi-faceted climate vulnerability, social workers need to work alongside environmental scientists, urban planners and public health professionals, as well as other stakeholders (Dominelli, 2012; Ramsay & Boddy, 2017). Especially, the integration of Indigenous knowledge with scientific knowledge, where both are valued and respected for their unique character, is important (Ullah, Khan, Begum, Han, & Mohamed, 2024; Global Solutions Initiative, 2025). Yousuf and Changezi (2026) argue that interdisciplinary approaches are required in climate policy as it should integrate indigenous knowledge and scientific knowledge. Khan and Saeed (2024) stress the importance of social workers working inter-professionally.

Conclusion

This qualitative systematic review shows that the charity models are still dominating in the social work with the climate vulnerable indigenous communities in Pakistan, turning the community into a receiver of assistance instead of rights and knowledge holder. The analysis yields three major findings: Indigenous people experience multiple vulnerabilities such as disruption of their TEK, psychosocial trauma, and forced migration; the interventions documented are mostly based on the principles of charity, leading to dependency and marginalisation of Indigenous knowledge; and despite the rhetoric of inclusion, policy frameworks systematically fail to include Indigenous people in climate planning.

Local alternatives are emerging which offer justice-oriented alternatives. The community-driven resilience work of DASTAK Foundation's FIERCE program, and Madat Balochistan's Eco-Leaders Initiative

by Accountability Lab are a testament that communities can be put in the driver's seat as partners. All these initiatives reflect a shift in power from paternalism towards partnership, beneficence to solidarity, charity to justice.

It is obvious and urgent that the implications for social work practice are clear. Climate justice needs to be taught in social work education and needs grassroots experiences in field. To ensure Indigenous rights and knowledge are recognized, policy engagement needs to take place at various levels. An organization needs to shift from a relief to a rights-based approach. There is a need to work across disciplines and cross Indigenous and scientific knowledge systems.

Fundamental value, power, and practice change is needed to move from charity to climate justice, and in this, community working – not doing to communities – is key (Gray & Coates, 2015; Whyte, 2017). This change is already taking place in climate vulnerable communities of Pakistan. The social work profession's future in the world lies in either being a tool of humanitarian action or a force for social change; to reinforcing the patterns of exclusion or to help create more just and sustainable futures for all.

References

- Abid, H. M. S., Raza, N., Naz, M., & Bukhari, T. (2025). Innovative approaches to community-based social work: Building resilience against climate change impacts. *Dialogue Social Science Review*, 3(2), 1032–1040.
- Ali, S., Khan, Z. A., Azhar, M., & Raheem, I. (2024). Investigating the disproportionate effects of climate change on marginalized groups and the concept of climate justice in policy-making. *Review of Education, Administration & Law*, 7(4), 1–12.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Critical Appraisal Skills Programme. (2018). *CASP qualitative checklist*.
- DASTAK Foundation. (2025). *Feminist climate resilience for ecological defenders*. Climate x SRHR Hub.
- Dominelli, L. (2012). *Green social work: From environmental crises to environmental justice*. Polity Press.
- Drolet, J., Ali, W., & Williams, N. (2022). Environment, social work, and environmental justice. In *Human rights and social work* (pp. 1–20). Taylor & Francis.
- Global Solutions Initiative. (2025). *Madat Community*.
- Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Climate Change. (2021). *Updated National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) 2021*.
- Gray, M., & Coates, J. (2015). Changing gears: Shifting to an environmental perspective in social work education. *Social Work Education*, 34(5), 502–512. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2015.1065807>
- Heaton, J. (2008). Secondary analysis of qualitative data: An overview. *Historical Social Research*, 33(3), 33–45.
- Ife, J. (2012). *Human rights and social work: Towards rights-based practice* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Johnston, M. P. (2014). Secondary data analysis: A method of which the time has come. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries*, 3(3), 619–626.
- Kasztelan, M. (2025). *The future of climate resilience is female-led and it is now*. Youth Climate Justice Fund.
- Khan, A. (2026, July 12). After the floods, missing girls. *Dawn*. [After the floods, missing girls](#)

- Khan, M. A., & Saeed, A. (2024). Nexus between social work and environmental sustainability. *Social Work and Social Sciences Review*, 25(2), 28–45.
- Khan, Z., Khan, I., & Kamal, U. (2024). Climate change intersecting socio-economic vulnerabilities of Kalash Indigenous community in Northern Pakistan. *Journal of Environmental Science and Economics*, 3, 31–40.
- Mahmood, A., Bakht, N., & Tahir, M. (2025). Pakistan's role in global climate diplomacy: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Political Science Analysis*, 3(4), 1–18.
- Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., . . . Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372, n71. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>
- Pakistan Accountability Lab. (2024). *Enhancing climate resilience and inclusion: Policy analysis report*.
- Ramsay, S., & Boddy, J. (2017). Environmental social work: A concept analysis. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 47(1), 68–86. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcw078>
- Schlosberg, D. (2013). Theorising environmental justice: The expanding sphere of a discourse. *Environmental Politics*, 22(1), 37–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.755387>
- Sohail, A., Arshad, A., Naqvi, R. A., & Zhang, Y. (2025). Regional probabilistic threats: Assessing the impact of glacier melting on mental health using dynamic Bayesian networks. *Modeling Earth Systems and Environment*, 11, Article 153. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40808-025-02304-3>
- Ullah, S., Khan, U., Begum, A., Han, H., & Mohamed, A. (2024). Indigenous knowledge, climate change and transformations of Gwadar fishing community. *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management*, 16(3), 298–317. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCCSM-06-2022-0069>
- UN Women. (2024). *Gender and climate change in Pakistan: Policy gaps and opportunities*.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2023). *Pakistan climate vulnerability assessment*.
- Whyte, K. (2017). Indigenous climate change studies: Indigenizing futures, decolonizing the Anthropocene. *English Language Notes*, 55(1–2), 153–162. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00138282-55.1-2.153>
- Yousuf, M., & Changezi, A. R. (2026). Farmers' perceptions, indigenous knowledge, and risk assessment of climate change and water scarcity in arid northwest Pakistan. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 5(1), 29–54.

Appendix A: Summary of Included Documents by Type

Document Type	Count in Appendix B	Included in Appendix C?
Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles	11	Yes (All 11 are in Appendix B)
Books / Book Chapters	2 (Dominelli; Drolet et al.; Ife)	Yes (All 2 are in Appendix B)
NGO / UN / Policy / Media / Gov Reports	13	No (They don't use CASP)
Total	26	13

Appendix B: List of Included Studies (N=26)

No.	Author(s)	Year	Document Type	Region/Scope	Key Focus
1	Abid, H. M. S., Raza, N., Naz, M., & Bukhari, T.	2025	Journal Article	Pakistan	Community-based social work and climate resilience
2	Ali, S., Khan, Z. A., Azhar, M., & Raheem, I.	2024	Journal Article	Punjab	Climate justice and marginalized groups
3	Ali, S., et al.	2025	Journal Article	Gilgit-Baltistan	Glacier melting and mental health
4	DASTAK Foundation	2025	NGO Report	National	Feminist climate resilience/FIERCE program
5	Dominelli, L.	2012	Book	International	Green social work conceptual framework
6	Drolet, J., Ali, W., & Williams, N.	2022	Book Chapter	Pakistan/International	Environmental justice in social work
7	Global Solutions Initiative	2025	NGO Report	Balochistan	Women-led climate resilience/Madat Balochistan
8	Government of Pakistan	2021	Policy Document	National	National Climate Change Policy
9	Gray, M., & Coates, J.	2015	Journal Article	International	Decolonizing social work education
10	Ife, J.	2012	Book	International	Human rights-based social work
11	Kasztelan, M.	2025	NGO Report	Balochistan	Women-led climate resilience/Madat Balochistan
12	Khan, M. A., & Saeed, A.	2024	Journal Article	Pakistan	Social work and environmental sustainability
13	Khan, Z., Khan, I., & Kamal, U.	2024	Journal Article	Kalash Valley	Kalash community/Socio-economic vulnerabilities

14	Khanzadi Kapri & Manglo, R. H.	2026	Media Report	Sindh	Post-flood education crisis/Charity model critique
15	Mahmood, A., Bakht, N., & Tahir, M.	2025	Journal Article	International	Climate diplomacy and justice
16	Policy Analysis Report	2024	Policy Document	National	Climate policy gaps/Indigenous exclusion
17	Ramsay, S., & Boddy, J.	2017	Journal Article	International	Environmental social work concept analysis
18	Schlosberg, D.	2013	Journal Article	International	Environmental justice theoretical framework
19	Ullah, S., Khan, U., Begum, A., Han, H., & Mohamed, A.	2024	Journal Article	Gwadar/Coastal	Indigenous knowledge/Fishing communities
20	UN Women	2024	UN Report	Pakistan	Gender and climate change/Policy gaps
21	UNDP	2023	UN Report	Pakistan	Climate vulnerability assessment
22	Whyte, K.	2017	Journal Article	International	Indigenous climate change/Decolonization
23	Yousuf, M., & Changezi, A. R.	2026	Journal Article	Northwest Pakistan	Farmers' perceptions/Indigenous knowledge
24	CARE Pakistan	2023	NGO Report	Pakistan	Climate programs/Marginalized communities
25	Accountability Lab	2024	Policy Report	Pakistan	Climate resilience and inclusion
26	Pakistan Meteorological Department	2023	Government Report	Pakistan	Climate data and projections

Appendix C: CASP Quality Appraisal Results for Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

Study	Clear Aims	Appropriate Methodology	Appropriate Design	Appropriate Recruitment	Appropriate Data Collection	Researcher-Participant Relationship Considered	Ethical Issues Addressed	Rigorous Data Analysis	Clear Statement of Findings	Valuable Research	Total Score

Abid et al. (2025)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10/10
Ali et al. (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	9/10
Ali et al. (2025)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10/10
Gray & Coates (2015)	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A (Conceptual)	N/A (Conceptual)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10/10
Khan & Saeed (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A (Conceptual)	N/A (Conceptual)	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	9/10
Khan et al. (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	9/10
Mahmood et al. (2025)	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A (Conceptual)	N/A (Conceptual)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10/10
Ramsay & Boddy (2017)	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A (Conceptual)	N/A (Conceptual)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10/10
Schlossberg (2013)	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A (Conceptual)	N/A (Conceptual)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10/10
Ullah et al. (2024)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	9/10
Whyte (2017)	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A (Conceptual)	N/A (Conceptual)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10/10

Yousuf & Changizi (2026)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10/10
Braun & Clarke (2006)	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A (Methodological)	N/A (Methodological)	Can't Tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	9/10

Appendix D: PRISMA 2020 Checklist for Qualitative Systematic Review

Section and Topic	Item #	Checklist Item	Location where item is reported
TITLE			
Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review.	Title page
ABSTRACT			
Abstract	2	See the PRISMA 2020 for Abstracts checklist.	Abstract section
INTRODUCTION			
Rationale	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of existing knowledge.	Section 1: Introduction
Objectives	4	Provide an explicit statement of the objective(s) or question(s) the review addresses.	Section 1: Introduction (Research Questions); Section 3.1
METHODS			
Eligibility criteria	5	Specify the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the review and how studies were grouped for the syntheses.	Section 3.3: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
Information sources	6	Specify all databases, registers, websites, organisations, reference lists and other sources searched. Specify the date when each source was last searched.	Section 3.2: Data Sources; Section 3.4: Search Strategy
Search strategy	7	Present the full search strategies for all databases, registers and websites, including any filters and limits used.	Section 3.2: Data Sources; Section 3.4: Search Strategy
Selection process	8	Specify the methods used to decide	Section 3.3: Inclusion

		whether a study met inclusion criteria, including how many reviewers screened each record.	Criteria; Section 3.4: Screening Process
Data collection process	9	Specify the methods used to collect data from reports, including how many reviewers collected data.	Section 3.6: Analytical Framework
Data items	10a	List and define all outcomes for which data were sought.	Section 3.6: Analytical Framework
Study risk of bias assessment	11	Specify the methods used to assess risk of bias in included studies, including details of the tool(s) used.	Section 3.5: Quality Appraisal; Appendix B
Synthesis methods	13a	Describe the processes used to decide which studies were eligible for each synthesis.	Section 3.3: Inclusion Criteria
	13c	Describe any methods used to tabulate or visually display results.	Section 3.6: Analytical Framework; Appendix B
	13d	Describe any methods used to synthesize results and provide rationale.	Section 3.6: Analytical Framework; Section 3.1: Research Design
RESULTS			
Study selection	16a	Describe results of search and selection process, ideally using a flow diagram.	Section 3.4: Screening Process; Figure 1
	16b	Cite studies that might appear to meet inclusion criteria but were excluded, and explain why.	Section 3.4: Screening Process
Study characteristics	17	Cite each included study and present its characteristics.	Appendix A: List of Included Studies
Risk of bias in studies	18	Present assessments of risk of bias for each included study.	Appendix B: CASP Quality Appraisal Results
Results of syntheses	20a	For each synthesis, summarise the characteristics and risk of bias among contributing studies.	Section 4: Findings; Appendix B
DISCUSSION			
Discussion	23a	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence.	Section 5: Discussion
	23b	Discuss any limitations of the evidence included in the review.	Section 5.3: Limitations of the

			Review
	23c	Discuss any limitations of the review processes used.	Section 5.3: Limitations of the Review; Section 3.8: Limitations
	23d	Discuss implications of the results for practice, policy, and future research.	Section 6: Implications for Social Work Practice

PRISMA 2020 checklist adapted from Page, McKenzie, Bossuyt, Boutron, Hoffmann, Mulrow, and Moher (2021).