

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE RESILIENT TO CLIMATE CHANGE?

## Just Climate Audio Essay Part Three

### ABSTRACT

What does it mean to be resilient to climate change? Will all societies and different members of those societies adapt to the changing environment in the same way? Should they? Can we realistically expect communities who face multiple challenges, from violence to entrenched social and political inequalities, to become even more resilient? And what might a more socially and environmentally just adaptation to climate change look like? This audio essay, “Just Climate,” challenges conventional notions of resilience by exploring its complexities in diverse social, political, and economic contexts. Featuring insights from researchers in Nepal, Kenya, and Nicaragua, it critically examines resilience as both a concept and a lived reality for communities facing multiple forms of inequality and hardship. The essay is structured into three parts. First, it questions whether resilience is the appropriate framework for addressing climate change. Critics argue that the term can obscure systemic inequalities by implying that marginalized communities should simply endure rather than resist and transform their conditions. Second, the discussion moves to the feasibility of climate change adaptation in regions already grappling with violence, poverty, and entrenched social injustices. It highlights how resilience is inherently shaped by power dynamics, access to resources, and historical struggles. Lastly, the essay explores what a socially and environmentally just adaptation might look like, emphasizing resilience as a process rather than an outcome. This perspective underscores collective agency, relationality social movements, and transformative change rather than mere survival strategies. Drawing on empirical examples such as community water management in Nepal, pastoralism in Kenya, as well as coffee and cocoa farming in Nicaragua, the discussion illustrates how resilience is deeply intertwined with social relations, political structures, and economic opportunities. As such, it goes beyond conventional understandings of resilience to climate change often framed as the ability to adapt and recover from environmental disruptions. By redefining resilience as a relational process rooted in justice and equity, this audio essay contributes to broader debates on climate change adaptation and the pursuit of more just and sustainable futures.

[00:00:00] **Ian M. Cook:** This is the third and final part of the essay, “Just Climate.” In the first part, we critically interrogated the terms resilience and adaptation. In the second part, we worked through questions around how these ideas intersect with conflict, inequality, and violence. But in this third section, we will think a little bit more normatively and ask, what might a socially and environmentally just adaptation actually look like?

[00:00:33] **Edwige Philippine Marty:** I think there’s not just one answer because it’s very context specific how vulnerability takes place and how adaptation in different contexts takes place [ 1]. So there will probably be a plurality of different futures. And what’s really important is that people are able in different contexts to make their own decisions [ 1; 2; 3; 4].

[00:00:50] **Andrea Joslyn Nightingale:** You’re asking me hard questions. I’m not sure people know what a socially just climate adaptation looks like an environmentally just because we’re asking these deeply normative questions of how the world ought to be. And I guess I kind of personally feel pretty uncomfortable as a white, you know, well off, well educated person from the U. S. and Norway to be prescribing what a socially and environmentally just adaptation looks like for people in Nepal.

[00:01:24] **Ian M. Cook:** Part of these difficulties might relate to the language we use. The concepts banded about by scholars and development organizations might not land with the communities affected, but the ideas do [ 5; 6].

[00:01:38] **Ben Muok:** What does it mean at the local level? You know, for the local people, for example, in my country, they may not care so much what climate change is, what resilience is, but they care so much about their food security. They care about water for drinking and water for their livestock. They care about energy. You know, they care about, you know, these, these are the things that affect their day to day life [7]. So sometimes when we talk about climate change and resilience, and then it’s made so abstract in the people’s hearing or language, but, but the reality is that those day to day things that affect their livelihoods is what they care most about.

[00:02:20] **Andrea Joslyn Nightingale:** I think part of what we see in these efforts at promoting adaptation is that too often from a kind of global or even a national perspective, they understand particularly rural local people as all somehow being poor and marginalized. And there’s just an utter failure to recognize the way that there are class and very real differences in political power and ability to access resources that happens right away across the country[ 8; 4]. And so it feels like when you’re working in a particularly poor community that if you get some kind of project done and somebody benefits, it’s a win without realizing that you maybe have made

the lives of the people who are struggling the most much worse in the process.

[00:03:10] **Ian M. Cook:** It's key, then, to not have attempts at adaptation led completely by international organizations who don't listen to and respond to those who are being asked to or forced to adapt.

[00:03:25] **Gyanu Maskey:** So they also need to make the assessment of what actually it's doing on the ground, because, for example, the Asian Development Bank funded water schemes, we observed that actually it was marginalizing the poor people in terms of access to water.

And then when we also raised this issue in one of the participatory water forums that we conducted as part of the research, and, uh, the Water Users Committee, they said that it was actually the issue, uh, at the national scale. So, uh, it's something, uh, they could not solve because it was, uh, linked, uh, to the loan so they had to repay. That's why the water tariff had to be high, uh, and then, uh, they also had to remove the communal taps [ 9].

[00:04:08] **Dil Khatri:** It was a few years back we were in the field visit and to look at, uh, uh, project which was working in adaptation in a village. And then the group of people showed us one irrigation canal constructed out of the adaptation fund provided by one of the external funding agencies.

Actually, it was fantastic. It was a new irrigation canal. I mean, it was working on an irrigating part of the land. Earlier it was cultivated and then there was no water and then it, I mean, became cultivable now. The question was, those who were beneficiaries was mostly the well off people who had irrigated land [10].

And then people downhill, I mean, relatively kind of in the slopes with non irrigated land, they were not benefited. And then the question comes, who benefits? And who made the decision to build this irrigation canal? [ 11]

[00:04:59] **Ian M. Cook:** Does not make sense to think of poor, vulnerable communities as somehow disconnected from the rest of the world, as if they are the victims of climate change and the role of the richer, less vulnerable groups of people is to help them adapt. It is all connected.

[00:05:17] **Noémi Gonda:** I think we have to radically rethink our system and our ways of being with the system and at the core of our endeavors, you know, no matter if we are researchers, teachers, people working on the ground, we need to have dissent. We need to have this constant questioning [12] of about the consequences of what we're doing, how we are doing it, how we're talking about things, and how we are complicit of the injustices[13; 14].

[00:05:58] **Pierre Merlet:** We can, we have to stop looking at if adaptation was only the thing of the poor people and mainly the poor people in the global south. That's not

true. What people are doing in the global south is related to what, what is happening here. So if you look at, uh, what is happening with coffee production in the global south and the, and the issue that coffee production is having with climate change, uh, you have to look at the global chain for coffee, where it comes from, who's paying for it, who is consuming it, what is happening around this [15]? And that implies also looking at what is happening in Europe. Our programs, our educational programs must allow students to make the links between these scales, the different spaces, the different geographies at the different moments in time.

You understand that the problem is the problem that is that has different dimensions and you have to link them. For instance, let's Instead of sending all students working on these issues to make fieldwork in the South, make fieldwork here. Go to the ports here in Europe and understand what is happening with the coffee here, what is happening, and then relate this with what is happening over there. Allow people from the Global South, farmers, to come here and make research of what is happening here, and tell us also what they are looking, what is not being doing correctly here, how, what do you have to change?

[00:07:19] **Ian M. Cook:** One of the things needed to adapt are resources. You can't expect people to do anything without the means to do so.

[00:07:29] **Ben Muok:** Many a times we, we, we want the communities to, to, to adapt to climate change, uh, but we deny them the resources to do so. So to me, the, the point that we really need to consider, how do the communities get enough resources to be able to adapt [ 16]?

[00:07:48] **Siri Ellen Hallstrøm Eriksen:** There is a dimension where not everyone can actually adapt.

Because we know that even with effective adaptation, like even if all the resources are available and even now there are some impacts that we cannot adapt ourselves out of, and it speaks really to the global dimensions of social justice, that the climatic changes that are generated primarily, you know, by wealthy societies are impacting both ecosystems and societies all over the world in ways that we are, we cannot fully adapt our way out of, and that's going to be increasingly difficult with warming [17]. Local resilience exists within a global setting of justice or injustice and cannot be separated from it.

So you cannot address local resilience or even local climate resilient development pathways without also addressing the global equity issues of emissions and finance and political economies that marginalise certain areas, groups and communities.

[00:08:59] **Ian M. Cook:** Such global equity issues have long been a problem. Long long histories.

[00:09:04] **Pierre Merlet**: The negative change that are happening now, the one that having bad consequences on people are related with the longer term injustices and inequalities based on a world where indeed capitalist relations and colonial relationships and other kind of of inequalities such as gender are key [18].

And therefore, taking this into account, the discussions are leading towards several things. The first one is introducing reparation as a way to look at this. So, which means that indeed it is not about how people can adapt to something or other people can mitigate. But it's how we recognize these ongoing longer term inequalities and we repair for them.

And repairing means what, it means transferring some kind of resources for people to be able to... where we recognize the damage that people have suffered. So that that's the first thing. So it's a completely different thing of saying, uh, climate is changing and people must adapt. It's recognizing. The injustice, taking responsibility for it and having people not only paying, because it is not about financial or financial means, but covering for these inequalities.

[00:10:16] **Ian M. Cook**: We cannot think of resilience nor how to build more socially and environmentally just futures. If we hold on to an atomized notion. of who we are.

[00:10:26] **Siri Ellen Hallstrøm Eriksen**: Yeah, I think it's critical to reimagine resilience and development as interconnectedness and part of the problems leading leading to vulnerability and injustices right now are the way that we imagine our place in society and our place in relation to the environment where people can be seen as these sort of self sufficient atoms where Vulnerability is a deficiency and, you know, the job of climate measures is to make individuals more resilient as, you know, these atoms, as though we're not interconnected, whereas the real issues are interconnected, our sources of resilience in society are really solidarity [19]. It's our interconnectedness. It's our ability to engage in collective action [20]. It's our ability to embrace diversity and understand vulnerability as inherent to the human condition, inherent to being alive and that we cannot strive to be invulnerable in the sense that we cannot strive towards a privilege of not being vulnerable at all to anything that takes place in the world, whether it's climate change or anything else [21].

But what we can seek to do is to reduce social sources of vulnerability, reduce the type of environmental changes that generate vulnerability and injustices, and to really enhance the space for solidarity, for caring types of relationships to others and to the environment [22].

[00:12:07] **Ian M. Cook**: Okay, so it's me again here to wrap up this audio essay, Just Climate.

After critically interrogating key concepts in part one and thinking through resilience and adaptation amidst conflict in part two, we moved in part three to think about what

a socially and environmentally just adaptation might look like. We've learned that it might take multiple forms, that we need to listen to people most affected, that inequalities and vulnerabilities are interconnected and have long histories.

And so, moving forward, we need to think through solidarities in ways that recognize the complexities, the divergences, the multiple approaches, if we are to develop a radically different world that can survive and thrive [23]. And so, who were these articulate and passionate experts who guided us to this realization?

Well, I'm glad you asked.

[00:13:10] **Andrea Joslyn Nightingale:** Hi, I'm Andrea Nightingale, and I'm a professor of Geography at the University of Oslo, and I have been the project leader for this work on Just Clime.

[00:13:21] **Noémi Gonda:** I'm Noémi Gonda. I'm a researcher at the Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

[00:13:28] **Gyanu Maskey:** I am Gyanu Maskey. I work as a researcher at Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies, based in Kathmandu, Nepal.

[00:13:34] **Dil Khatri:** I'm Dil Khatri, researcher at the South Asia Institute of Advanced Studies. So currently I'm also leading the team as an executive director, and I'm partly associated with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences here as a Researcher and Faculty.

[00:13:48] **Siri Ellen Hallstrøm Eriksen:** My name is Siri Eriksen and I'm a professor at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences in Norway.

[00:13:54] **Ben Muok:** My name is Bernard Mouk, I'm a professor at Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology in Kenya, and also country secretary of the Houma Bay County.

[00:14:02] **Edwige Philippine Marty:** And my name is Edwige Marty and I'm a researcher at the Norwegian University of Life Science in Norway.

[00:14:08] **Pierre Merlet:** I'm Pierre Merlet and I'm a researcher at the Research and Development Institute Nitlapan of the Universidad Centroamericana in Managua, Nicaragua and a post-doctoral researcher at the Institute of Development Policy of the University of Antwerp, Belgium.

[00:14:15] **Ian M. Cook:** And what is this Just CLIME that Andrea referred to? Well, it's the project Governing Climate Resilient Futures, Gender, Justice and Conflict Resolution in Resource Management, or Just CLIME.

It was funded by the Swedish Research Council (VR)'s,<sup>1</sup> and the research that came out of the project as you might have guessed, formed the backbone of this audio essay. Alright, I've been Ian M. Cook, and all I have to say to you now is goodbye. Ta ra! ▣

---

<sup>1</sup> Swedish Research Council (VR) Sustainability and Resilience Grant, Project: Governing Climate Resilient Futures: Gender, Justice and Conflict Resolution in Resource Management, grant number 2018-05866.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1. Marty, Edwige, Renee Bullock, Matthew Cashmore, Todd Crane, and Siri Eriksen. “Adapting to Climate Change among Transitioning Maasai Pastoralists in Southern Kenya: an Intersectional Analysis of Differentiated Abilities to Benefit from Diversification Processes.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 50 1 (2023): 136-61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2022.2121918>.
- 2. Rahman, M. Feisal, Danielle Falzon, Stacy-ann Robinson, Laura Kuhl, Ross Westoby, Jessica Omukuti, E. Lisa F. Schipper, Karen E. McNamara, Bernadette P. Resurrección, David Mfitumukiza, and Md Nadiruzzaman. “Locally Led Adaptation: Promise, Pitfalls, and Possibilities.” *Ambio* 52 10 (2023): 1543-57. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-023-01884-7>.
- 3. Mikulewicz, Michael, Martina Angela Caretta, Farhana Sultana, and Neil JW Crawford. “Intersectionality & Climate Justice: A Call for Synergy in Climate Change Scholarship.” *Environmental Politics* (2023): 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2023.2172869>.
- 4. Mills-Novoa, Megan, Rutgerd Boelens, Jaime Hoogesteger, and Jeroen Vos. “Resisting, Rejecting, and Reworking Climate Change Adaptation Projects in Ecuador.” *Journal of Peasant Studies* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2022.2144252>.
- 5. Forsyth, Tim. “Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience: Sociotechnical and Knowledge Dimensions.” In *Climate, Science and Society*. Edited by Tamar Law Zeke Baker, Mark Vardy, and Stephen Zehr, 198-206. Routledge, 2023.
- 6. Paprocki, Kasia. “Anticipatory Ruination.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 49 7 (2022): 1399-1408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2022.2113068>.
- 7. Naess, Lars Otto, Eunice Wangari-Muneri, Andrea J. Nightingale, and Lyla Mehta. “Climate Change and the Operation of Power: Intersectionality, Dispossession, and Knowledge Politics in Pastoral Communities.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 52 6 (2025): 1323-48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2025.2451288>.
- 8. Nightingale, Andrea J., Lutgart Lenaerts, Ankita Shrestha, Pema Norbu Lama ‘Tsumpa,’ and Hemant R. Ojha. “The Material Politics of Citizenship: Struggles over Resources, Authority and Belonging in the New Federal Republic of Nepal.” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 42 5 (2019): 886-902.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2019.1639111>.

- 9. Adhikari, Binod, Monika Giri, and Gyanu Maskey. “Neglected Necessity: Communal Taps in Urban Water Supply for (Peri-) Urban Poor.” *Soanas* (blog), *South Asia Nadi Sambad*. 11/12/2023. <https://soanas.org/neglected-necessity-communal-taps-in-urban-water-supply-for-peri-urban-poor/>.
- 10. Nagoda, Sigrid, and Andrea J. Nightingale. “Participation and Power in Climate Change Adaptation Policies: Vulnerability in Food Security Programs in Nepal.” *World Development* 100 (2017): 85-93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.07.022>.
- 11. Khatri, Dil. “Climate and Development at the Third Pole: Dynamics of Power and Knowledge Reshaping Community Forest Governance in Nepal.” PhD, Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. 2018.
- 12. Nightingale, Andrea J., Siri Eriksen, Marcus Taylor, Timothy Forsyth, Mark Pelling, Andrew Newsham, Emily Boyd, Katrina Brown, Blane Harvey, and Lindsey Jones. “Beyond Technical Fixes: Climate Solutions and the Great Derangement.” *Climate and Development* 12 4 (2020): 343-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2019.1624495>.
- 13. Woroniecki, Stephen, Ruth Krüger, Anna-Lena Rau, Maren Stefanie Preuss, Nora Baumgartner, Sanne Raggars, Laura Niessen, Lars Holländer, Felix Beyers, Julius Rathgens, Kai Christian Wagner, Lisa Habigt, Torsten Krause, Christine Wamsler, Henrik von Wehrden, and David Abson. “The Framing of Power in Climate Change Adaptation Research.” *WIREs Climate Change* 10 6 (2019): e617. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.617>.
- 14. Tschakert, Petra, Meg Parsons, Ed Atkins, Alicea Garcia, Naomi Godden, Noemi Gonda, Karen Paiva Henrique, Susannah Sallu, Karin Steen, and Gina Ziervogel. “Methodological Lessons for Negotiating Power, Political Capabilities, and Resilience in Research on Climate Change Responses.” *World Development* 167 (2023): 106247. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2023.106247>.
- 15. Hochachka, Gail. “Climate Change and the Transformative Potential of Value Chains.” *Ecological Economics* 206 (2023): 107747. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2023.107747>.
- 16. Mills-Novoa, Megan. “What Happens after Climate Change Adaptation Projects End: A Community-based Approach to Ex-post Assessment of

- Adaptation Projects.” *Global Environmental Change* 80 (2023): 102655. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2023.102655>.
- 17. Sultana, Farhana. “Critical Climate Justice.” *The Geographical Journal* 188 1 (2022): 118-24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12417>.
  - 18. Bee, Beth A, Jennifer Rice, and Amy Trauger. “A Feminist Approach to Climate Change Governance: Everyday and Intimate Politics.” *Geography Compass* 9 6 (2015): 339-50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12218>.
  - 19. Velicu, Irina, and Gustavo García-López. “Thinking the Commons through Ostrom and Butler: Boundedness and Vulnerability.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 35 6 (2018): 55-73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276418757>.
  - 20. Nightingale, Andrea J., Noémi Gonda, and Siri H. Eriksen. “Affective Adaptation = Effective Transformation? Shifting the Politics of Climate Change Adaptation and Transformation from the Status Quo.” *WIREs Climate Change* 13 1 (2022): e740. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.740>.
  - 21. Eriksen, Siri H. “Is My Vulnerability So Different from Yours? A Call for Compassionate Climate Change Research.” *Progress in Human Geography* (2022): 03091325221083221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325221083221>.
  - 22. Bond, Sophie, Amanda Thomas, and Gradon Diprose. “Making and Unmaking Political Subjectivities: Climate Justice, Activism, and Care.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 45 4 (2020): 750-62. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12382>.
  - 23. Ranjan, Rahul. “Decolonising Narratives in Communication: A Case Study of the Tipping Point to Decolonise Sustainability.” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* 11 1 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.24926/ijps.v11i1.5954>.