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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE RESILIENT TO CLIMATE CHANGE?

Just Climate Audio Essay Part Two

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 part two of the audio essay, “Just Climate.” If you haven’t listened to Part One, then I strongly recommend you do so before continuing. The question that drives this section is, can we still talk about resilience and adaptation to climate change in places where there is intense conflict and entrenched intersectional inequalities?

[00:00:28] **Gyanu Maskey:** So, well, I think it’s important because we usually consider the biophysical aspects only. So while talking about the impacts of climate change in water and other resources, but I think the socio political aspects are very much important and the governance aspects that lead actually to the access of resources to the poor and the marginalized communities, and not only in terms of getting access to a particular resource, but also their participation and particularly the meaningful participation in the decision making and also recognizing their prior rights, particularly of the indigenous communities and the local communities [1; 2; 3].

[00:01:07] **Dil Khatri:** I mean, it is even more important in this context because I think the social hierarchies and political environment actually shapes the relation, shapes how resources are allocated [4].

[00:01:19] **Ian M. Cook:** Okay, don’t we maybe need to separate out these issues in analysis to help develop technical solutions to problems?

[00:01:29] **Edwige Philippine Marty:** I think it’s even dangerous to try to separate them or address one without thinking of the others [5].

And I think that came up a lot in a lot of the interviews we did in Kenya that people would think about it together because it’s part of those multiple concerns that are really affecting their livelihoods and their ability to herd livestock, to continue making a living in different ways. And that interaction is really what we need to understand. And I think a lot of the policies and the way that development or adaptation has taken place has been addressing one or the other rather than together, which creates a lot of difficulties [6]. I think I remember one interviewee saying that when there was the last East Africa drought, which was between 2020-2023, which really had devastating consequences, you had humanitarian aid coming in and giving food relief, for instance, but they didn’t really address the conflict at all. And the moments that it started raining, they stopped even though people didn’t have livestock and the conflicts were still ongoing. So we really need to understand how these dynamics work together if we want to provide more holistic ways of supporting people towards resilience.

[00:02:34] **Siri Ellen Hallstrøm Eriksen:** That’s why we can’t think of adaptation as a very sort of isolated technical policy process that takes place in peaceful settings. Because adaptation is really about how multiple actors negotiate and contest various

strategies and sometimes use violence in order to gain authority or gain legitimacy for the strategies, uh, that they're trying to implement [7].

[00:03:00] **Ian M. Cook:** And I'm sorry for coming back to it. Are we sure resilience is even the right word when we're talking about adaptation to climate change? Is it not the case that if people are already in pretty terrible conditions, then we don't want them to adapt to overcome one concern, for instance, climate struggles, if they remain stuck in many others?

[00:03:23] **Noémi Gonda:** Resilience is not about bouncing back to, to this violent situation or to the, the oppressive, the unjust situation. It's about transforming the situation. And I think the problem of resilience, it has often been used in this depoliticized way, using, for example, violence, marginalization, or even authoritarianism as just a context in which necessary adaptation or resilience projects need to unfold without really engaging with this context, which I don't like to call context. It's not context. It's part and parcel of what we need to address to engage in these resilience processes [8].

[00:04:11] **Ian M. Cook:** Okay, and then so we need, I imagine, to think about how different groups live within and through these lived realities.

[00:04:21] **Ben Muok:** Violence, or the kind of conflict that comes, are one of the factors that expose people to vulnerability. And so they become more vulnerable to climate change, and so they need to be able to adapt. The violence will affect different segments of the society differently. The way violence, you know, affect women, or the youth, or the children, [9; 10], or the elderly people, is completely different from the way it affects the young people or, you know, the men. When we're looking at adaptation, it cannot be a blanket cover and it cannot be a cut and paste [11].

[00:04:55] **Ian M. Cook:** If it's not a cut and paste job, then it will be extremely difficult. Is it even possible to imagine developing a socially unjust adaptation at all?

[00:05:07] **Andrea Joslyn Nightingale:** I mean, I think for me, it kind of really points to these questions of, you know, who's considered expendable in this climate changed world, because that's what's at stake here [12; 13]. Like we, if we talk about helping communities to adapt. If they end up with a nice water source and the water flows in the taps in the main market center, which is where government officials go and development agency officials go to visit, they think it's a success and they fail to see the way that some of these more remote farms that might be sitting high up on a hillside have now suddenly lost their water source and what kind of really significant assets they gave away.

It's not just the water. It's also about that multi generational wealth that's represented by having land that has this permanent spring on it. And so I think that it really comes

down to these big questions about whose lives are expendable and even what kind of livelihoods are expendable.

[00:06:09] **Ian M. Cook:** These questions around who is considered expendable are not just local. It's something we can also think through on a wider global scale.

[00:06:19] **Pierre Merlet:** If you look at what is happening in Europe, if you look at social injustices in Europe, there are also entrenched with violence [14]. And I'm not talking about authoritarian regimes in Europe. I'm talking about social relations that are actually happening in Europe. We have to recognize that this violence, first, is also present here and second, the violence that we live in our country is also related with historical relations and longer term historical dynamics and unequal dynamics in which we are embedded since longer term, for which in Europe, we also have some kind of level of responsibility and for which we have to respond and that we have to take into consideration.

Researchers are part of the process. This implies responsibility. This implies solidarity. This implies an ethical positioning that is very important as researchers to take.

[00:07:16] **Ian M. Cook:** This implies that we need a more focused understanding about what should be done and how. If there is to be solidarity within our practice as we attempt to think through resilience and climate adaptation within situations where there is conflict, then we need, I would suggest, to think more directly about what is a socially important and environmentally just adaptation might look like. Which is what we're going to do in our third and final part. □

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