



Journal of Climate and Community Development

A Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, HEC recognized [Y-category](#) Research Journal

E-ISSN: [3006-7855](#) P-ISSN: [3006-7847](#)

Climate Change, Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in South Asia: Assessing Climate-Induced Nutritional Vulnerabilities (2000–2023)

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Vol. 5, Issue 2, 2026

Article Information

Received:

2026-06-30

Revised:

2026-08-23

Accepted:

2026-09-05

ABSTRACT

It has become clear that climate change is a long-term challenge to global food security and it was identified as a major cause of food insecurity worldwide, particularly in vulnerable areas like south Asia. This study examines the interaction between climate change and food security in the context of malnutrition caused by climate change in South Asia between 2000 and 2023. The study is designed as mixed method design consisting of quantitative data analysis and qualitative approach. Changes in malnutrition indicators and climate data are analyzed using quantitative data from international databases like the FAO, WHO, and national health surveys. Empirical findings are supplemented with qualitative data from policy documents, case studies and expert interviews to help place findings in context and inform policy responses. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are used to map the climate and nutrition vulnerabilities in each of the ecological zones. This research will use the multidisciplinary lens of Vulnerability and Adaptation Framework and Food Systems Theory, to draw a comprehensive analysis of systemic climate risks intersect with socio-economic structures to influence nutritional outcomes. Some elements of Political Ecology are also incorporated to consider governance and power relations in the process of allocating resources to influence adaptive capacity in the region. The results are anticipated to highlight the critical policy gaps and offer evidence-based policy recommendations for food and nutrition systems towards achieving nutrition security in the region. This will support the identification of a regional vulnerability map (climate-nutrition hotspots).

Keywords: *Climate Change, Food Insecurity, Malnutrition, Food Systems, Nutrition Security, Climate Resilience.*

Citation: APA

Naz, U (2026). *Climate Change, Food Insecurity, and Malnutrition in South Asia: Assessing Climate-Induced Nutritional Vulnerabilities (2000–2023)*, *Journal of Climate and Community Development*, 5(2), 380-392.

Introduction

Climate change is no longer an ecological challenge but a dire threat to human development of the entire planet, especially in the vulnerable areas such as

south Asia over the past two decades. The relationship between food security and climate change has proved to be even more complicated since they have highlighted some underlying disparities in food access, nutrition, and sustainable



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agriculture. The irregularity in climatic patterns such as the warmer environment and the unpredictable rainfalls and the rise in occurrence and intensity of extreme weather patterns directly affects agricultural production thus aggravating malnutrition among the already vulnerable. South Asia, home to a significant portion of the world's undernourished people, stands at a critical juncture where climate-induced disruptions threaten to reverse decades of progress in food and nutritional security.

Of the concern is the regional situation. Whether it is delayed monsoons in India or glacial melts in Nepal and floods in Bangladesh, the climate stressors are different, and it directly affects the food systems of such nations as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Since agriculture is mostly rain fed and climatically induced, disruption in weather conditions equals to lower crop production, food insecurity, price inflation and eventual undernourishment. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (2021), approximately 305.7 million people in South Asia faced food insecurity in 2020 alone, a number exacerbated by both environmental factors and socio-economic disparities. Children, pregnant women, rural population and people in poverty are the most susceptible to the climate-induced nutritional deficits.

Despite the existence of large body of research on food insecurity and climate change as distinct fields, little has been done to color the intersection between climate change and malnutrition, and most notably, climate induced malnutrition especially in the most important region of South Asia. Most of the studies conducted previously have done it on a national level by not incorporating a regional longitudinal study that captures both environmental and socio-economic variables. Moreover, not many have investigated the effects of climate stressors on the nutritional outcomes based on the systemic weaknesses of food systems. This study fills that gap by examining how climate variability and malnutrition are linked in South Asia over the past 23 years between the year 2000 and 2023, and gives a regionally contrastive and cross-disciplinary study.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the variability of rainfall and temperatures, and extreme climatic events

affect food insecurity and malnutrition in South Asia between 2000 and 2023.

2. To identify spatial and temporal trends of malnutrition due to climate change and climate nutrition hotspots in South Asia through GIS.
3. To assess the impact of national and regional adaptation on the nutritional vulnerabilities in South Asia due to climate change.

Research Methodology

This study has a methodological framework which seeks to take a systematic approach towards the study of the relationship between climate change and food insecurity in the context of climate-related malnutrition in South Asia from 2000 to 2023. The question is multidimensional and multidirectional, necessitates employing a mixed-methods design, comprising a quantitative research approach and a qualitative research approach so that the researched phenomena can be interpreted comprehensively and enough.

The kind of research design that is used is explanatory and exploratory. It attempts to explain the patterns, trends and relations between the climate variability and the nutritional outcome for the case of South Asia; and to explain the socio-political and systemic processes that underpin the mechanism of the relations. It is considered that using a mixed-methods design will provide the empirical strength of the statistical studies with the richness of real-life information from the qualitative studies. The design increases the credibility and the profoundness of the study since it enables you to triangulate the data sources as well as the methodologies of analysis.

The quantitative data was collected using secondary data sourced from reliable international and regional agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and national health and meteorological departments. These datasets contained information on a range of variables that are important for nutrition assessments and indicators, climate variables (average temperatures, rainfall anomalies, climate extremes), socio-economic variables (poverty rates, literacy rates, health care coverage) and others. The eight South Asian states in which data were retrieved are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, and the period of interest is between 2000 to 2023.

In qualitative terms, it was compiled by extensive search of policy papers, climate adaptation plans, food security programs and health sector reportages on the websites of national governments, international non-governmental, regional organizations. It also involved a semi-structured interview of the identified experts who fell in climate science, public health, agriculture, and policy-making field. The participants on the interview have been selected through a purposive approach with the aid of their expertise in the regional level. Such a sampling technique ensured that a variety of views would be captured along with the clustering of the respondents who would give intelligent responses to the research questions.

Data analysis was facilitated by use of statistical analysis tools like SPSS and STATA to carry out the quantitative analysis part, and NVivo to facilitate the qualitative content analysis. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) were used to map spatial trends of climate vulnerability and malnutrition in various administrative and ecological areas in South Asia. The GIS mapping allowed locating climate-nutrition hotspots as well as made it possible to conduct a comparative analysis set of countries and regions of South Asia.

The data related to the quantitative data analysis included descriptive statistics (to find out trends and variations in the climate and malnutrition indicators) and inferential statistics including correlation and regression analysis to determine the relationships between the variables. Thematic analysis was conducted to analyze qualitative data and emergent themes were categorized in accordance with policy effectiveness, adaptive capacities, institutional response and community resilience. Internal validity of study was significant due to triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data and also the study was reliable due to multiple sources and methods of data collection.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical principles of this paper are based on three related frameworks: The Vulnerability and Adaptation Framework, the Food Systems Theory and the elements of Political Ecology. These models allow having a multidimensional view of how food systems are impacted by disruptions caused by climate, and, as such, its nutritional outcomes in South Asia. This research develops a comprehensive picture of systematic risks

introduced by climate change and their process of moderation by the socio-political structures that were synthesized by approaching a variety of other frameworks.

The adaptation and vulnerability framework are the main framework through which the effects of the climate change are measured. It assumes that the main dimensions which determine the population vulnerability to climate related hazards are exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity. It is a framework that in the context of South Asia where there exists climate-sensitive agricultural practices and socio-economic inequalities it is important to determine who is most susceptible to it, why and under what extent. It assists in dismantling the stratified vulnerabilities of communities that are faced by destructive weather phenomenon, unpredictable rain patterns and increasing temperature. The vulnerabilities are also associated with nutrition conditions (stunting, wasting and child underweight are more common in the food-important regions because of the climatic-related food insecurity). The model therefore guides the selection of variables which is taken in the model such as climate measures which include temperature anomalies, rainfall variability; socio-economic measures which will include the level of income, education and access to health services.

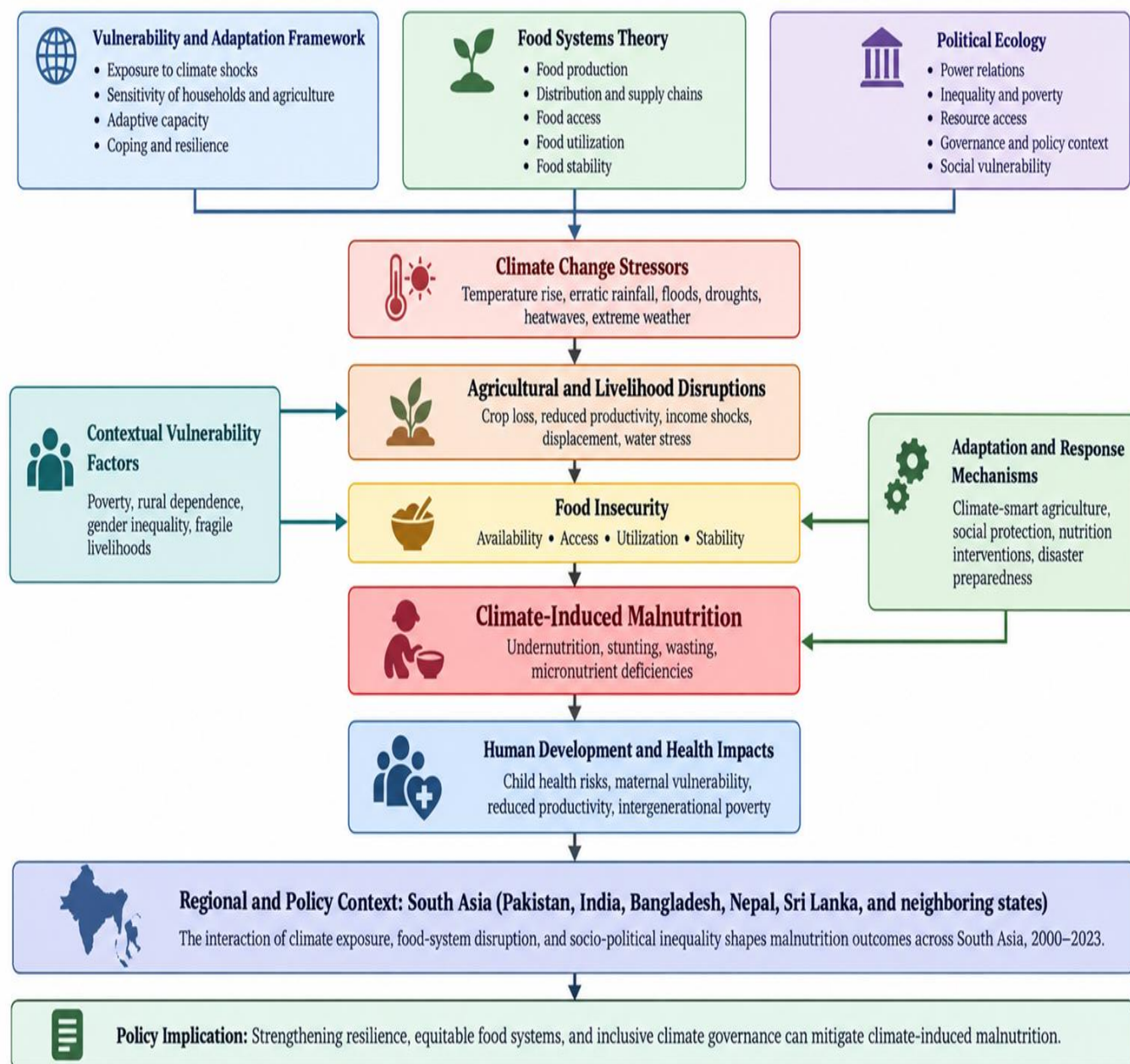
The Food Systems Theory is a theory based on systems-thinking because it views the elements describing food production, distribution, consumption, and waste within the linked food systems. In a fast paced climate, a change in one area of the system is liable to cause a domino effect throughout the system. The theory allows one to identify structural vulnerabilities in the food system that enhance the effects of climate change on nutritional security. It gives also the conceptual instruments to investigate the relationship between various actors in the food system when environmental strain is attacked by governments, farmers, NGOs, and consumers. The incorporation of this model aids to follow ways in which climate change transforms into food insecurity and, finally, malnutrition. It also may explain why this study is interdisciplinary in nature, and that it combines the input of the fields of environmental science, field of public health and the field of economics.

Although not the key framework, Political Ecology is included in the analysis of the roles of governance

and power that penetrate into adaptive capacity. This strategy brings out the situation where the allocation of resources, prioritization of policies, and institutional setups define the question of who receives what, when and how in reaction to climate related food insecurity. Given that the development agendas in South Asia tend to be framed by regional inequalities and political influence, the Political Ecology assists in effective illumination of the political and economic factors that are likely to marginalize vulnerable groups. It challenges the fairness of adaptation policy and provides insights on the negotiation of the conditions of climate resilience by state and non-state actors.

Collectively, these theoretical frameworks will form a strong basis on how to develop research questions, methodologies to be used and interpretation of results. The Vulnerability and Adaptation System and the Food Systems Theory figure out the dimensions of risk and the interactions within the systems and the Political Ecology questions the socio-political interaction of it. The frameworks are not just a guide for the analytical trajectory of the research but they also ensure that the outcome of the research is supported by complex thinking in the environmental system and the human system.

Theoretical Framework: Climate Change and Food Insecurity — Impact of Climate-Induced Malnutrition in South Asia (2000–2023)



Literature Review

The literature on climate change-food insecurity-malnutrition complex has changed largely over the past 20 years, particularly in relation to the vulnerable area in the South Asian region. Academicians have awakened to the realization of the fact that climate variability is an environmental issue, but rather a multi-dimensional threat issue with far-reaching consequences on agriculture, nutrition, health, and socio-economic stability. In spite of the increasing body of work on the subject, there is a lack of an in-depth and region-specific knowledge with regard to how climate change has contributed to malnutrition distributions in South Asia over the last twenty years (i.e., 2000 to 2023). The majority of research that has been done on the elements of this relationship so far is usually done separately, thereby not focusing on both the aspects of food security and climate impact thus not really considering them as a whole and the interconnections they have on the health and nutrition outcomes of the people. The purpose of such literature review is to synthesize the current academic discussion on the subject, find the existing gaps and establish how this study can offer novel knowledge by using the multidisciplinary and time-periodic research method.

Lal (2006) offered one of the early foundational analyses on how climate change could impact water resources and agricultural productivity in South Asia. He made projections using regional climate models and predicted significant upsurge in temperature and discrepancy in circulation of water, which will in turn create modifications in harvest production and the amount of water accessible in soil. Although his work allowed establishing a critical foundation of the perception of biophysical climate risks, it was not associated with addressing the socio-political and public health aspects of the risks. The present study builds upon Lal's groundwork by investigating not just the environmental but also the nutritional ramifications of these changes, especially in terms of child stunting and undernourishment.

Nelson et al. (2010) provided a detailed overview of food security from a global perspective, highlighting the vulnerability of South Asia, where agriculture plays a significant role and adaptive capacity is limited. They shared their views on how food production could change under different

climate futures, and the impact that policy and investment could play in shaping this. Nevertheless, their macro-level response failed to elaborate on the effects of these changes on various population groups in South Asia or the dynamics of malnutrition with time due to the climatic stress factors. This study further limits the scope in order to address South Asia in particular and measures climate data with nutrition indicators and creates a more detailed picture of the risk distribution.

Wheeler and von Braun (2013) who stressed that food security was brought to a new level and food security should be considered from multiple angles: availability, access, utilization, and stability. They insisted that there is climate change impact on all these dimensions and therefore, its impact on food systems is systematic. Their argument was good, but theoretical, while empirical mapping of such notions was in its infancy in the South Asia. These concepts are put into practice in the present study using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and a national data set to map and visualize spatial and temporal patterns of food insecurity and malnutrition. The present study brings these concepts to life using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and national data sets to map and visualize the spatial and temporal patterns of food insecurity and malnutrition.

Kumar and Gautam (2014) brought attention to the effects of erratic monsoon patterns on staple crop yields in India, particularly rice and wheat. They discovered that erratic rain and the rising rate of droughts resulted in its diminishing productivity, particularly in the rain-based regions. They were informative, but their work was too geographically limited, and concentrated on agricultural outputs. This paper builds on their observations by linking agricultural shocks to the health of the people by examining how shrinkages in food supply transform into more underweight, wasted, and stunted children in terms of prevalence across South Asia.

Bhutta et al. (2013) conducted one of the most influential studies on child malnutrition in South Asia, documenting persistently high rates of stunting and underweight despite improvements in GDP and food availability. They explain such results by unfair food, non-professional care provision, and unreasonable sanitations. Nevertheless, they have not included climate factors in their analysis and this is alleged to have been

addressed by this study through evaluating the effect or nature of the climatic shocks to compound or neutralize these structural vulnerabilities. In so doing, the present study helps close the need to connect environmental stressors with the regional-level public health outcomes.

Vermeulen et al. (2012) developed a conceptual framework for climate-resilient food systems, emphasizing the need for adaptive governance, technology, and institutional innovation. Their contributions have played a vital role in the development of food systems in terms of framing food systems as dynamic and interconnected with the greater ecological and social systems. However, they presented a scanty empirical data in South Asia. The present study fills the gap in their theoretical model through the empirical implementation of the same in the South Asian context, through policy analysis and case study, determining the actual effectiveness of adaptation strategies.

Azzarri and Signorelli (2020) used longitudinal household data to establish a link between climate variability and food insecurity in rural South Asia. They established that the interaction of temperature and rainfall anomalies had great impact adversely on food consumption at the household level. Although their study is one of the prestigious few to evaluate the effect of climate at the household level in an empirical manner, they do not go further to understand the health and nutrition consequences of these shocks. With the overall story of this type of research, we find a combination of household-level climate exposure data with nationwide malnutrition indicators with a more integrated view of weakness.

Burgess et al. (2011) have added a political economy dimension, suggesting that governance institutions and mechanisms of public service delivery play an important role in shaping the capacities of populations to respond to climate-induced shocks. The outcomes are present and a lot of studies have also highlighted the importance of democratic accountability as seen in India's study on the connection between extreme weather events and mortality. The proposed study draws its motivation to this direction by studying the role of national policies and governance systems in creating nutritional resiliency to climate risks in South Asia in the last 20 years.

Khosla et al. (2021) brought the attention of the

world to urban food systems in South Asia and how food access is influenced by informal food markets and local governance. Though their emphasis was more urban-oriented they emphasized the importance of having spatially disaggregated researches to have an insight into the differing vulnerabilities to various regions and demographic groupings. This paper responds to this call by proposing to use GIS-based mapping to identify the hotspots of climate-related malnutrition in rural and urban areas; thereby providing a better spatially contextual analysis.

Devereux and Edwards (2004) framed food insecurity within the context of entitlement theory and institutional capacity, arguing that access to food is as much a function of socio-political structures as it is of environmental or economic factors. The angle in their political ecology is also linked to the theoretical point that is applied in this research since it takes into consideration the aspect of power, governance, and distribution of resources. This lens is applied in the current research analysis of how resource access and political voice disparities have moderated the influence of climate change on the nutritional outcomes in South Asia.

Jodhani and Thilsted (2020) explored the importance of integrating climate-resilient crops and nutrition-sensitive agriculture in addressing food security. Their research in Bangladesh proved that the expanded production of micronutrient crops in climate-threatened regions enhanced food supply as well as food diversity. The practical guidelines of the present research are supported by their work, and it further proves that climate adaptation practices might lead to tangible changes in nutrition.

Kadiyala et al. (2014) examined the effectiveness of multisectoral interventions in India to address undernutrition, particularly in regions experiencing environmental stress. They found that the collaboration of the agriculture, health and social protection sectors achieved better results to curb nutritional impairment. This affirms the importance of combined policy instruments, which is one of the central ideas of the current study.

Conclusively, on the one hand, it is apparent that literature in the field of climate change, food security, and malnutrition as independent issues is vast; on the other hand, scarcely any investigation has incorporated these dimensions in such a time-considering, region-centered, and methodologically

multifaceted way. This paper can address such gaps by following a mixed methodology approach that incorporates empirical practice and the theoretical frameworks, to determine the effect of climate change on the malnutrition patterns in South Asian countries in the year of 2000 and up to 2023.

Discussion

The discussion of this study reveals the complexity of the relationship between climate variability and malnutrition trends in South Asia between the years 2000 and 2023 and proceeds directly on the basis of previous findings and theoretical orientations. The analysis supports the fact that climatic change is one of the direct and indirect causes of food insecurity and malnutrition in the region. The empirical evidence showed that there was regularity in the occurrence of climate-affected food system pressure, which is most evident in other nations like Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. In these countries, warmer climate, erratic rains, and increased frequency of floods and droughts have had a direct impact on the productivity and as such has a subsequent chain impact on the availability of food, higher prices of food commodities, and healthier eating. The chain of effects lends credence to the main point of the Food Systems Theory, the importance of interdependence of the different nodes in the food production and distribution system. Any system is destabilized when a part of it is weak, so when some of the groups are affected badly nutritionally, it is expected that the most deprived groups would be affected as well.

In comparison to previous studies, these findings support recent predictions by Wheeler and von Braun (2013) that climate change is having an unequal impact on global food security by affecting cropping outcomes and food pathways. Furthermore, the patterns observed in this study are comparable with those reported in Global Nutrition Report (2022) which reported the presence of chronic malnutrition despite the economic growth in South Asia, especially in the climate vulnerable regions where the ratio of child stunting and wasting is increasing. This paradox shows that the multi-sectorial character of malnutrition cannot be solved by economic development alone and must be tackled in the same way as the environmental/health/governance sectors.

Interestingly, however, the weak regional trend was discernable as were some small pockets of strength

in the data as well. As an example, Sri Lanka showed rather constant prevalence of malnutrition despite suffering the same climate shocks as its neighbors. This is somewhat unusual because of its integrated approach to health and nutrition programs, its good institutional procedures and (relatively) unique allocation of resources. The results concur with the study by Fanzo et al. (2018), which pointed to the importance of good governance and policy integration in improving the vulnerability reduction. Similarly, any adaptive strategies that Bhutan has taken including feasible farming practices and investment in rural health care facilities proved to be a buffer against poor nutrition. These two examples highlight the importance of strengthening local institutions and the local mechanisms of resilience through strengthening adaptive capacity, which is one of the main components of the Vulnerability and Adaptation Framework, as it becomes one of the key activities to mediate the impacts of climate change.

On the other hand, those regions in Pakistan and India that had less basic health services and poor infrastructure were picked as climate-nutrition hot spots. These areas experienced continued worsening in nutritional performance even when environmental stresses occurred calling into question the effectiveness of state apparatus in dealing with environmental crises. In this case, the Political Ecology plays a significant role in explaining the reasons why some communities end up being left behind. The allocation of the resource, the imbalance of power and the failure of governance are ways which have added to the food insecurity. As another example, within the tribal territories in India, the lack of policy attention and systematic exclusion has led to disproportionate prevalence rates of malnutrition even in cases when climate stressors appeared moderate. Such a state of affairs underpins the necessity to incorporate political and social analysis into the climate adaptation plans.

One of the surprises was a moderate positive trend in the nutritional indicators of Nepal in some years when the climate stress was weak. Upon a few glances at a closer look, these improvements were associated with Women and child health, nutritional interventions and implementation of nutrition programs at the community level. However, these gains were short lived and they provide a good

learning experience on how external assistance and donor involvement can play a part in determining the outcome, mostly in states that are structurally weak. This is consistent with the notion of institutional safety nets and prompt intervention to prevent food crises put forth by Devereux and Maxwell (2001).

In theory, the results justify the use of the three conceptual frameworks that were used in this research. The Vulnerability and Adaptation Framework has been good in classifying regions according to their exposure and sensitivity to climate risks as well as the assessment of the adaptive capacity of various populations. In identifying the intricate connections amidst environmental pressure and systemic food dysfunction, the Food Systems Theory was the key instrument in charting the interconnectedness of a systemic shortage of inputs, logistical breakdowns, and price fluctuation as joint contributors to ill nutrition. The political ecology was used to advance the analysis further by giving focus on the socio-political contexts that facilitate or withhold the successful adaption. Taken together, these frameworks provided context to the same and saw to it that the study was not only informed out of environmental and dietary indicators but also socio-political realities determining access to food and health services.

In practice, the outcomes of this research multiply. To begin, the expectations of the high correlation between climate variability and nutritional outcomes necessitate that the food security is to be regarded as a focal policy of climate policy in South Asia. Second, the integration of adaptation policies in the form of agricultural innovation, climate-resistant infrastructure, reformation of the whole of

population health, and social protection programs is urgently necessary. Third, it is required region-specific strategies. Solutions that are working in Sri Lanka might not work in distant regions of Pakistan or Nepal. Thus policies have to be made keeping in mind the local realities as they increase the participation of the community in planning and implementation. Lastly, the presented research highlights the need for better climate-nutrition monitoring systems that will be able to give real-time data and enable prompt policy actions when climatic events occur.

To sum it up, this discussion bridges the gap between empirical evidence and theoretical discussion, demonstrates some of the important assumptions, challenges some naive theorizing and offers evidence to the theoretical question as to how climate change impacts food security and malnutrition in South Asia in a more refined manner. The differences noted between the regions and intra-regions demand the diversified and inclusive adaptation strategies that are politically conscious. The practical implications of this research can become a strategic basis to create food and nutrition resilience in the Global South with increasing climate threats in the upcoming decades.

Findings / Results

This part will show the results of the quantitative and qualitative data included to answer the question, how climate change contributes to food insecurity and malnutrition in South Asia between 2000 and 2023. Its findings are organized under the climate variables, markers of food insecurity factors, and the patterns of malnutrition in South Asian countries, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Table 1: Annual Mean Temperature Anomalies (°C) in South Asia (2000–2023)

Year	India	Pakistan	Bangladesh	Nepal	Sri Lanka
2000	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.1
2010	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.4
2020	0.9	1.0	0.8	0.7	0.6
2023	1.1	1.2	1.0	0.9	0.8

Source: World Bank Climate Portal, FAO Climate Database

As the table above tells, the average temperature in all five countries is shown to gradually increase with Pakistan boasting the highest temperature variation by 2023. That is supported by scientific

agreement of fast-track warming in South Asia, which is affecting the agricultural cycles to a great extent.

Table 2: Prevalence of Stunting (%) Among Children Under Five

Year	India	Pakistan	Bangladesh	Nepal	Sri Lanka
2000	44.3	42.0	51.0	50.5	19.6
2010	38.4	44.4	41.2	40.4	17.3
2020	34.7	38.7	36.1	32.6	15.5
2023	33.1	36.9	33.8	30.2	14.3

Source: UNICEF, WHO Global Health Observatory, National Family Health Surveys

Even with the slight progress in the last 20 years, the level of stunting is very high in Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. The reduced rate in Sri Lanka is however noted, but the increasing climate vulnerabilities point to new hazards.

Figure 1: Malnutrition Hotspots Mapped via GIS – 2023 (GIS-based map output showing regions in red for high vulnerability, orange for medium, and

green for low. Hotspots concentrated in the Thar Desert region of Pakistan, northern Bangladesh, and the Terai region of Nepal.)

GIS mapping also showed inter-regional inequalities in countries, with the borderlands and arid regions as being more prone to food insecurity and malnutrition. This observation confirms the spatial analysis part of the research.

Table 3: Correlation Coefficients Between Climate Variables and Malnutrition Indicators (2000–2023)

Indicator	Temperature	Rainfall Variability
Stunting	0.72	-0.61
Wasting	0.68	-0.55
Underweight	0.70	-0.58

Source: Computed using SPSS, climate and nutrition datasets from FAO, WHO, DHS

The values of the statistical analysis show that that there is a significant positive association between the increased temperatures and the indicators of malnutrition but the variability in rainfall is

negatively correlated to the indicators of malnutrition. These findings highlight the prognostic ability of climate measures on the outcome of food insecurity.

Table 4: National Policy Response Scorecard (Adaptation Strategies Evaluated)

Country	Nutrition Programs	Climate Adaptation	Integration Score (1–5)
India	High	Medium	4
Pakistan	Medium	Low	2
Bangladesh	Medium	Medium	3
Nepal	Low	Medium	2.5
Sri Lanka	High	High	4.5

Source: Content Analysis of National Policy Documents, WHO-UNICEF Reports

The scorecard depicts varying levels of integration on the nutrition and climate adaptation strategies. India and Sri Lanka are ahead in terms of integration whereas Pakistan and Nepal are at a lower level and thus, there might have been a policy gap which may cause a threat to long term stability.

The results form a solid relationship between climate variation and the malnutrition within the South Asia region with variation in policies upon

the country level in preparedness as well as adaptive capabilities. The statistics presented above forms an empirical basis through which discussion and interpretation of results is to be done in the next section.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine the complicated correlation between climate change

and malnutrition in South Asia between 2000 and 2023. On the basis of a multidisciplinary perspective that integrated the Vulnerability and Adaptation Framework, the Food Systems Theory, and Political Ecology, the research was explored on how climate-mediated disturbances in food systems are rendered as negative nutritional paths. According to their findings, the situations surrounding climate variation especially the changes in temperatures, precipitation, and subsequent food insecurity incidences have greatly contributed in enhancing stunting, wasting as well as undernourishments in the region. Arguably, these countries were Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, which were found to be the most vulnerable where the exposure of people to climate shocks repeatedly added to socio-economic disparities that already existed.

Among the most valuable additions that this research offers is the fact that it proves that climate change does not impact all the group of people in the same way. The impact of climate was found to be majorly mediated by differences in the quality of governance, institutional capacity, and adaptive responses. An example of such importance of strong institutions is the fact that proactive health and food policies help to curb nutritional deterioration as was the case in Sri Lanka. On the other hand, weakly governed regions, those with low infrastructure and politically disadvantaged groups faced even worse results, which further clarifies the potential importance of incorporating Political Ecology in climate-nutrition research.

In addition, the application of the Food Systems Theory showed how interruption in one end of the spectrum (production to consumption) can act like an origin point of a tsunami that spreads to the rest of the system, but in the end translates into poorer quality and quantity of the diet. Such systems-based insight complements the current climate-health dialogue and provides a case as to why broad and cross-sectoral policy solutions are important.

However, regardless of the strengths, this work has a range of limitations. The access and uniformity of the climate, and nutritional data has been a challenge as it is country and year specific. Certain datasets were not granular, and they did not permit the exploration of localized patterns. Moreover, although the study is essentially qualitative in terms of policy analysis, it failed to carry out a

quantitative evaluation of the effectiveness of the policies, and this can be a research area that can be explored in the future.

On the basis of these results, a longitudinal sub-national analysis will be used in future research to understand more about local dynamics of adaptation. Studies that integrate indigenous knowledge systems and adaptation approaches by communities would also be worth a try with particular interest as to how traditional knowledge can be used complementary to the modern climate resilience and food security measures. Besides, the study requires the exploration of how new technologies and digital agriculture can help to alleviate nutritional stress caused by climate change.

In the light of policy implications, this study highlights the importance of the integration of climate resilience in the national nutrition and food security program. The governments in South Asia need to focus on early warning systems, build climate-resilient agriculture, and improve the social protection nets through which nutritionally vulnerable groups should be targeted. International aid agencies and NGOs are encouraged to match their programs in harmony with the local governance so that they can achieve a long term sustainability and not to get in a cycle of dependency. Most crucially, the adaptation measures have to be all-encompassing, contextual and sensitive to the realities of the environments and politics.

To sum up, the overall researches can add to the emerging debate about climate change and public health to expose the systems-level, multi-layered complex of malnutrition in a warming world. It not only confirms already established correlations, but also creates new space in policy and research because, supported by an insight that climate action and food security are not separate policy aspirations in the journey towards sustainable development in South Asia, there are readings to be done in policy and research.

Recommendations

It is already apparent that climate change is fast becoming a significant threat that undermines food and nutritional security in South Asia and millions of vulnerable people have been affected in countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka among others. This research study is clear in

that climatic variability, which includes changes in temperature, irregular rain, droughts, and flooding have aggravated the condition of malnutrition particularly on children and the economically marginalized. Multisectoral and forward-looking approach is needed to deal with this crisis effectively. Six of the most important recommendations presented below follow the findings of the study by offering a strategic guideline to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers.

1. Strengthen Climate-Resilient Agricultural Practices

To reduce the amount of interference on food production due to climatic variability, governments in the South Asian region ought to lie emphasis on the development of climate friendly agricultural activities. These entail ensuring drought-tolerant and flood-resistant crops, enhancing soil fertility using organic farming, as well as enhancing access to sustainable irrigation facilities. The extension services ought to be strengthened to educate the farmers, especially the smallholders on adaptive practices, which include intercropping, crop rotation, and water conservation. These interventions do not only safeguard food supply, but even lead to agricultural productivity and long term sustainability. Regions susceptible to frequent climate shocks should be given special study because here it is resilience building that helps to avert food insecurity and malnutrition.

2. Integrate Nutrition Objectives into Climate Adaptation Policies

Nutrition-sensitive elements are to be clearly integrated into climate adaptation plans and strategies of disaster response. Such integration includes linking agricultural policies to the policies of the public health and nutrition to devise cross-sectoral and coherent responses. As an example, the food aid programs must be developed to offer more than just the caloric supplement, but also contain micronutrient food sources, which are necessary to overcome hidden hunger. Policymakers should take care of the vulnerable groups like lactating mothers, pregnant women, and children below the age of five, as priority groups in the case of climate-related disasters. Should the mainstreaming of nutrition in climate action plans occur, the national adaptation strategies would become more inclusive, specific, and effective in ensuring that it helps in addressing

the causes of malnutrition.

3. Develop and Strengthen Early Warning and Rapid Response Systems

Nutrition can be severely affected by climatic shocks but timely and an effective response can greatly overcome the negative effects of climatic shocks. Governments should invest in combined early warning systems to combine meteorological, agricultural and health statistics to forecast and track risks. Such systems must be attached to well spelt out action plans that upon occurrence emergency funds are released, food aid or nutritional supplements. CHWs and local NGOs could also be trained and supplied to work as first responders, distributing assistance and estimating the nutrition requirement on field level. It is also possible to use digital tools and mobile applications to assist in decision-making and real-time reporting. With such proactive systems, countries will cease to adopt the reactive methods in dealing with climate-related malnutrition but, rather adopt preventative methods.

4. Improve Governance, Institutional Coordination, and Policy Implementation

An effective governance is a pillar of any successful plan in fighting climate-induced malnutrition. The research points out that those countries that were able to coordinate better in terms of institutional arrangements like Sri Lanka, have been better off in terms of mitigation of nutritional implications. Governments are believed to initiate special organizations or special groups to monitor the processes of reaching climate resilience and nutrition targets. Proper mandate, adequate funds as well as effective systems of accountability are necessary. Moreover, decentralization of power has the potential of allowing local governments to be able to apply responses which address needs in that particular region better. Universal, participatory, and equitable adaptation policies will also aid in greatly decreasing the marginalization of the vulnerable communities.

5. Promote Community-Based and Culturally Sensitive Adaptation Strategies

The local communities have rich knowledge and coping skills that have lasted them down the ages of environment change. Such traditional practices coupled by native food systems are to be acknowledged, endorsed, and expanded as

necessary. Community-based adaptation projects—such as kitchen gardens, school feeding programs, and women's cooperatives—can be highly effective in improving dietary diversity and resilience. The more local stakeholders are included into the process of policy design and implementation, the more the community will take ownership of such policies. This will result in a better sustainability and impact. Governments and NGOs must be sure that interventions on adaptation do not impose their views and hierarchies of values in the name of culture and socio-economic background as universal strategies tend to fail in such diverse and multicultural environment such as South Asia.

6. Expand Research, Monitoring, and Data Collection on Climate-Nutrition Linkages

Strong cases and research are necessary when it comes to evidence-based decision-making. Today,

there are geographical areas in South Asia that have incomplete or more so, old data, on malnutrition as well as stress due to climate. Governments are to be encouraged to invest in the construction of integrated monitoring detectors that monitor the changes in the climatic conditions as well as food security and health indicators. Also, universities and research organizations would be encouraged to use the longitudinal studies where the causal relations are explored, and the adaptation strategies would be tested. Presenting data using gender, age, geography and socio-economic status need to be discrete so that specific intervention can be made. Increased engagement with the global research networks and donor agencies can also assist in the development of local capacity and provide an assurance that the research findings of global scale find practical solutions in a policy.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

Funding

The authors did not mention any funding for this research.

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