Advancing Climate, Peace, Security, and Geopolitical Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region

Workshop held in Canberra

14–15 July, 2025

Workshop Summary Report

Workshop Overview

Climate disruption risks peace and security across Asia and the Pacific – yet the scope of those risks, and policy solutions to address them, remain under-appreciated and explored.

Acknowledging this gap, and that the scale of these risks require collective responses that span regions and institutions, the July 2025 workshop, convened by Toda Peace Institute, adelphi, and ASPI's Climate & Security Policy Centre, addressed the underexplored nexus of climate, peace, and security in Asia and the Pacific.

The aim of the workshop was to drive a conversation on priorities and solutions to connect global approaches to climate, peace, and security with regional experts and institutional representatives from across Asia and the Pacific. This helped identify opportunities to generate concrete, region-grounded policy and program options linking climate, peace, and security.

Key Themes and Insights

- **Locally Relevant Framing:** Food security and mobility emerged as entry points for advancing climate, peace, and security discussions. Solutions must be grounded in local priorities and Pacific concepts of resilience and relationality.

- **Regional and Cross-Regional Dialogue:** Effective responses require connecting regional fora and institutions, leveraging expert networks, and ensuring cross-regional learning, including indigenous and gender perspectives.

- **Timeliness**: The period to 2026 is critical, with opportunities to inform the Boe Declaration action plan (2025) and leverage the potential Australia–Pacific COP31 (2026).

Summary of Discussions

Opening Remarks

The workshop opened by underscoring that intensifying climate hazards are unfolding alongside rising nationalism and isolationism, reducing space for climate-forward policy and constraining the influence of the countries most affected—especially Pacific Island states—relative to major powers and emitters.

Participants called for reshaping international norms so climate planning is fully integrated into security institutions, and for deeper engagement with China given its central role in emissions reduction and risk response. The discussion stressed the need to move from broad diagnosis to concrete, actionable policy and program measures that build peace and cooperation across Asia and the Pacific, informed by lessons from other regions. Emphasis was placed on stronger regional coordination and targeted, effective responses to climate-related stability risks.

The session closed by highlighting the importance of connecting regional voices with government partners to align action and resources, and by noting that—despite escalating impacts—the workshop provides a hopeful platform to anticipate risks and translate foresight into proactive preparedness.

Keynote Panel

The keynote panel set the tone for treating climate change as a security threat across Asia and the Pacific, highlighting concurrent risks—especially food insecurity and escalating heat—and wide variation in regional progress and resilience framings compared with Europe and Africa.

Discussions centred on the most pressing climate-security risks, their intersection with geopolitical competition, and the role of climate diplomacy in easing tensions.

Participants stressed that policy must be grounded in Pacific concepts of resilience and relationality, avoid creating dependency, and grapple with trade-offs such as growth from critical minerals (notably deep-sea mining) versus harms to marine ecosystems and community resilience. Climate mobility was framed beyond economics to include cultural and spiritual continuity for relocated communities and those left behind. Australia's 'Pacific family' rhetoric was weighed against its fossil-fuel exports, with credibility seen as contingent on its domestic transition. While Europe, Africa, and the Pacific have more established climate–peace–security linkages, momentum in Asia (and in Australia) remains nascent and at risk of stalling without concrete action.

A 'mutually assured resilience' approach can unlock cooperation, even among geopolitical rivals, by aligning with how countries frame climate risk (e.g., India's environmental lens) and by advancing shared interests such as fish stocks and distributed solar; this enables cross-regional partnerships (e.g., Germany–India) built on mutual benefits.

The panel urged rethinking development paradigms to reflect Pacific relational philosophies, proposing a holistic land–ocean ethic and locally rooted decision-making to strengthen resilience and avoid maladaptation.

Key Points from Regional Breakouts

- **Pacific Islands:** In the Pacific Islands, climate risks (including freshwater loss, sea-level rise, coastal erosion and displacement) are driving security concerns, including rights and protection for communities forced to move amid both climate-induced displacement and shifting great-power engagement. Participants flagged misaligned, short-term, donor-driven priorities and the risk of perceived neo-colonial bargains, urging intergenerational planning, community-led relocation, reformed climate finance, and engagement with churches and spiritual leaders. It was noted that cooperation can be strengthened by leveraging the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific, the Pacific Resilience Facility, and sustained regional/international dialogue, while recognising that China's role is viewed as threat by some and support by others.

- **South & Southeast Asia:** The region faces overlapping, systemic risks—transboundary water stress (e.g., Mekong), critical-minerals expansion, economic insecurity, and constrained humanitarian access—too broad for an 'everything, everywhere, all at once' frame. Progress was considered to hinge on clear, locally owned objectives and using climate as a convening lens only when it unlocks coordination and resources; many interventions should instead be framed around food and water security. With limited multilateral traction, regional pathways (ASEAN, the Quad, development banks) and empowered civil society offer pragmatic avenues, building incremental consensus suited to diverse political contexts.

- **Oceania (Australia):** It was considered that a holistic security lens – linking human, cultural/relational, national, and geopolitical interests – can widen buy-in and avoid polarising debates over terminology. Priorities discussed included integrating climate risk in national

adaptation plans (including the WPS agenda), reorienting ODA toward resilience outcomes, and fostering civil-society–government (especially defence) collaboration for preparedness and disaster response. A jointly supported systems-mapping exercise could align regional institutions around intersecting risks and inform initiatives timed to major milestones such as a potential Australia–Pacific COP31 in 2026, with work beginning beforehand and continuing beyond it.

Thematic Panel: Climate–Security Nexus in Practice

- Effective programming must be locally grounded and governance-aware.

- Cooperation grows when initiatives target shared environmental challenges.

- Water security, adaptation, and cultural security are critical themes.

The panel illustrated how theory translates into action across four areas: climate mobility, water security, adaptation as peacebuilding, and cultural security. Effective programming requires locally defined problems and governance-aware approaches. Successful cooperation emerges when initiatives address tangible, shared environmental challenges, engage civil society and faith groups, and include women—even where broader gender debates are constrained.

Water security discussions highlighted how both floods and droughts can increase local violence, especially affecting women, while also creating opportunities for collaboration. People in the Pacific have traditional ways of dealing with water insecurity, such as rationing, and given the possibility of in-situ adaptation for example through desalination and water tanks, strategies which allow means that communities to remain in place should be promoted. Cultural security in the Pacific relies on collective, land-rooted approaches, contrasting with individualised Western resilience models. A case from Bangladesh showed that governance gaps—like corruption and weak social protection—shape climate insecurity more than border securitisation. The panel rejected predictive 'hotspot' models, emphasising that climate seldom creates conflict where none exists; durable solutions must link environmental pressures, mobility, and community-defined resilience.

Thematic Breakouts

- Defence and Foreign Policy: Institutions are siloed and reactive. Progress depends on framing climate risks through existing priorities and institutionalising responses.

- Food Security/Supply Chains: Regional institutions should mediate disruptions, map crisis-prone countries, and pair supply-chain needs with technology and finance.

- Disaster Risk Reduction/Conflict Prevention: Aid must align with local priorities and avoid reinforcing dependency. Regional cooperation should build on local concepts and platforms.

Integrating Climate Security into Defence and Foreign Policy: Institutions are hampered by siloed mandates and uncertainty. Progress requires linking climate risks to existing policy priorities, clarifying strategic interests, and institutionalising responses. A shared, flexible definition of climate-security outcomes can foster cooperation. Priority actions include regional gap analysis, scenario planning, a Common Operating Picture, enhanced science and mapping tools, greener defence strategies, scaled adaptation finance, and use of consensus platforms like the Pact for the Future.

Food Security and Supply Chain Disruption: Climate shocks to water, food, and energy can destabilise markets and governance, with some countries closer to conflict thresholds. Regional institutions are

best placed to mediate disruptions, map vulnerabilities, and tailor responses. Solutions include adopting new practices and technologies (e.g., ASEAN guidelines, smart farming), diversifying food sources, strengthening cooperatives, addressing inequities, and supporting adaptation with climate funding.

Regional Cooperation for Disaster Risk Reduction and Conflict Prevention: Effective cooperation must balance large-scale exposure and limited capacity, defining aid that aligns with local priorities and preserves agency. Assistance should avoid undermining traditional coping systems or fostering dependency. Shifting to resilience-centred language and locally grounded concepts strengthens ownership. Greater buy-in to coordination platforms and incremental coalition-building with Pacific partners are needed. Supporting policy education, local facilitators, culturally relevant exchanges, and citizen assemblies will help build durable, community-led resilience.

Geopolitical Panel

- Effective cooperation requires recognising divergent framings (e.g., Australia's focus on great power competition vs. Pacific's climate-first lens).

- Neutral, durable goals (disaster preparedness, energy security) can build alignment.

- Minilateral platforms (PIF, ASEAN, Quad) and Track 1.5/2 dialogues are agile vehicles for progress.

Effective climate-security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific hinges on recognising diverse perspectives. Australia's focus on great power competition contrasts with the Pacific's emphasis on climate as a primary security concern. Alignment around neutral goals like disaster preparedness and energy security is crucial. 'De-risking' and 'mutually assured resilience' investments can turn mistrust into shared preparedness. Minilateral platforms (PIF, ASEAN, Quad) and track 1.5/2 dialogues offer agile progress, especially with an Australia–Pacific COP31 as a catalyst. Efforts must support Pacific-led frameworks and prioritise risk assessment, technology, financing, and learning. Avoiding duplication and ensuring Pacific ownership are vital. Defence-led engagement can advance climate security without harming human security, but institutionalising climate-security work within mandates and sustaining it beyond political cycles is essential.

Key Learnings

- Deepened Understanding: The workshop clarified the complex interplay between climate risks, peace, and security, highlighting the need for regionally tailored approaches.

- Geopolitical Dimensions: Addressing climate security requires navigating great power competition and leveraging it for cooperation, not division.

- Actionable Strategies: Concrete entry points include food security, community-led resilience, and institutionalising climate-security in policy.

- Joint Programming: Collaboration across sub-regions and sectors is essential, with a focus on shared interests and mutual benefits.

Roadmap for Action

1. **Food Security as a Core Theme**
   - Develop a joint food-security declaration for COP31.
   - Facilitate structured knowledge exchange (Australia–ASEAN–PIF).
   - Integrate food security into national policies and NDCs/NAPs.
   - Support First Nations–Pacific exchanges.

2. **Community of Practice for Pacific Dialogue**
   - Establish under the Pacific Resilience Partnership, aligned with the Boe Declaration.
   - Convene multidisciplinary experts, technical working groups, and systems-mapping exercises.
   - Engage external partners and regional institutions.
   - Secure secretariat funding by end-2025 to inform the Boe Declaration and COP31.

3. **Strengthen Sub-Regional Engagement**
   - Reinforce PIF, ASEAN, and other regionally relevant and viable pathways.
   - Map strengths/gaps and prioritise high-yield themes (food, oceans, mobility, finance, gender).
   - Build learning networks and policy dialogues with formal government links.
   - Anchor governance in minilateral fora and time deliverables to key milestones (late-2025, late-2026).

4. **Integrate Climate Security into Policy and Practice**
   - Conduct regional gap analysis and scenario planning.
   - Develop a Common Operating Picture for operations and investment.
   - Institutionalise climate-security work within existing mandates.

5. **Support Locally Led, Culturally Grounded Solutions**
   - Prioritise community-led adaptation, cultural security, and intergenerational planning.
   - Reframe aid and disaster risk reduction to support agency and resilience.

Next Steps

- **Immediate (2025-2026):**
  - Launch Community of Practice and begin systems mapping.
  - Initiate food security knowledge exchange and policy integration.
  - Secure funding and partnerships for secretariat and pilot initiatives.

- **Medium-Term (2026-2028):**
  - Deliver joint programming outputs for COP31.
  - Refine and scale sub-regional engagement and learning networks.
  - Institutionalise climate-security in regional and national policies.

Authors

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