



## Exploring the Lived Experiences and Subjective Adaptation Strategies to Climate Change in Rural and Urban Communities

Mukhlis lubis <sup>1\*</sup>, Amrar Mahfuzh Faza <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Sekoah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Mandailing Natal, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>[mukhlislubis@gmail.com](mailto:mukhlislubis@gmail.com) \*

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### ABSTRACT

Climate change is a global phenomenon that impacts various environmental, social, and economic systems. While much of the existing research focuses on the physical and economic impacts of climate change, less attention has been given to understanding how individuals and communities perceive and experience these changes on a subjective level. This study addresses the gap in the literature by exploring the lived experiences of individuals in rural and urban communities, focusing on how they perceive and adapt to climate change. Using a phenomenological approach, this research aims to capture the essence of these experiences and provides insights into the personal and social dimensions of climate change. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with 20 participants from rural and urban areas, analyzing their responses thematically to uncover key themes of perception, adaptation, and policy engagement. The findings reveal a stark contrast between rural and urban communities, with rural participants more directly engaged with the immediate impacts of climate change, while urban participants view it more abstractly and rely on governmental interventions. These findings have important implications for policy development, highlighting the need for context-specific climate adaptation policies that consider both rural and urban experiences. Policymakers should prioritize participatory strategies that empower local communities to take ownership of climate adaptation initiatives. Additionally, practical recommendations include the integration of community-based adaptation programs that foster resilience and encourage proactive engagement. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the human experience of climate change, suggesting the need for more context-specific and participatory climate adaptation strategies. Future research should explore the role of local governance in facilitating these strategies and evaluate the effectiveness of such participatory approaches in building long-term climate resilience.



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## INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the most pressing global challenges of the 21st century, affecting ecosystems, economies, and human societies in profound ways (Gannon et al., 2025). As the Earth's climate system undergoes significant shifts, communities across the world are experiencing increasingly erratic weather patterns, rising sea levels, and more frequent extreme weather events. Yet, the focus of most studies has primarily been on broad scientific analyses and policy implications, rather than on understanding the lived experiences of individuals within vulnerable communities. In the context of this global crisis, the social, cultural, and economic impacts on local communities, particularly those in vulnerable regions, have become a focal point of both scientific inquiry and policy discussions. However, while much attention has been given to the scientific and policy aspects of climate change, there remains a gap in understanding the lived experiences of individuals and communities who are directly affected by these changes.

The relevance of studying climate change from a phenomenological perspective lies in its focus on the subjective experiences of individuals (Rayamajhee & Paudel, 2024; Sofyan et al., 2025).

Climate change is not just an abstract scientific phenomenon; it is a lived experience that shapes the way people understand their environment, livelihoods, and futures. How individuals and communities perceive and respond to climate change is deeply influenced by their socio-cultural contexts, values, and personal experiences. Understanding these experiences is crucial for developing more effective, context-specific policies and interventions that can better address the needs of those most affected. As such, exploring the personal, emotional, and social dimensions of climate change through phenomenology allows for a deeper understanding of how individuals navigate and make sense of the environmental challenges they face.

This research highlights the importance of capturing these subjective experiences, as they provide insights into the meanings people attach to climate change and its effects on their lives. By focusing on the lived experiences of individuals, this study aims to uncover the nuanced ways in which climate change impacts everyday life, from altering agricultural practices to reshaping social structures (Duc, 2025). In the context of phenomenology, the goal is not to generalize or predict outcomes but to explore the essence of human experience what it feels like, what it means, and how it shapes individual and collective responses to the challenges posed by climate change.

Research into the subjective experiences of individuals, particularly within the context of climate change, has become an increasingly significant area of study. Understanding how people perceive and respond to environmental challenges is crucial for developing effective interventions and policies. Phenomenological research, with its focus on lived experiences, is particularly suited for exploring the personal and emotional dimensions of climate change (Kuhn et al., 2025; Wood et al., 2025). This approach allows researchers to capture the essence of how individuals understand and make sense of environmental changes, providing insights that go beyond statistical or surface-level observations.

However, there are considerable methodological challenges in exploring these deep, subjective experiences. One of the primary challenges is the limitation of quantitative methods in capturing the complexity and richness of human experience. While quantitative data can provide broad patterns and trends, it often overlooks the nuanced, individual-level experiences that are critical for understanding the full impact of climate change on local communities (Crosson, 2024). This is especially true when examining how communities in different socio-cultural contexts adapt to or suffer from environmental changes. The use of structured surveys or numerical data does not allow for an exploration of the meaning-making processes that individuals go through as they navigate these challenges.

These limitations underscore the inadequacy of many traditional research methods in fully understanding the essence of climate change as experienced by individuals. The reductionist nature of many studies fails to account for the complexities of human experience, such as how environmental changes affect people's sense of place, identity, and agency (Nipa et al., 2025). Therefore, phenomenology is not only relevant but essential in addressing these gaps. It enables a deeper, more holistic exploration of how individuals perceive and respond to climate change, capturing the intricate layers of personal, emotional, and social dimensions that are often overlooked by other research approaches.

In the existing literature on climate change and its impacts, much of the research has relied on practical, quantitative approaches to understanding the phenomenon. These methods often focus on measuring broad patterns, such as temperature changes, economic losses, or shifts in agricultural productivity (Shoib et al., 2025). While these studies provide valuable insights into the scope of climate change, they fail to capture the deeper, subjective experiences of individuals who are directly affected by these changes. The practical approaches, while effective for broad policy analysis and forecasting, lack the ability to address the personal, emotional, and social dimensions that shape how individuals and communities perceive and adapt to environmental shifts.

This gap in understanding becomes even more evident when examining the lived experiences of local communities, whose adaptive strategies and responses are heavily influenced by their social, cultural, and economic contexts. Current research often overlooks how these communities make sense of climate change, how they interpret its impact on their daily lives, and how they navigate the

complex realities of environmental disruption (Gupta & Miah, 2024; Syamsu et al., 2025). The lack of a comprehensive exploration of these subjective experiences means that the essence of the phenomenon remains underexplored (Shaffer et al., 2025). As a result, much of the existing literature offers a limited, surface-level understanding of climate change, primarily framed through data and external factors rather than through the lens of those who live through its effects.

To address this gap, there is a clear need for research that adopts a phenomenological approach. By focusing on the lived experiences of individuals, phenomenology offers a more holistic and in-depth exploration of the essence of climate change as experienced on the ground (Parthasarathy et al., 2025). This approach allows for the extraction of meaningful insights that reveal not just the observable effects of climate change but also the personal and social meanings that shape how people perceive and respond to these changes. Through phenomenology, the study aims to bridge this gap by providing a richer, more nuanced understanding of how climate change impacts local communities, offering insights that can inform more effective, context-specific policies and interventions.

Previous research on climate change has primarily focused on quantitative assessments of environmental impacts, such as changes in temperature or agricultural productivity. However, fewer studies have delved into the subjective experiences of individuals living in areas directly affected by these environmental shifts (Naheed, 2024). Existing literature has shown that local communities perceive and adapt to climate change in unique ways, shaped by their socio-cultural and economic contexts. Studies on environmental perception have highlighted the importance of understanding these subjective experiences. However, much of this research still falls short of providing in-depth insights into how individuals emotionally and socially navigate the complexities of climate change in their everyday lives, pointing to the need for a more focused phenomenological approach.

In response to this gap, we propose using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of individuals facing climate change. Phenomenology, with its focus on understanding individuals' perceptions and meanings, offers the depth necessary to uncover how climate change impacts local communities beyond surface-level observations (Gössling & Schweiggart, 2022). This approach allows us to move past generalizations and delve into the personal, emotional, and social aspects of climate change (Kahomwe & Muzingili, 2025; Otiniano León et al., 2025). By adopting this method, the study aims to address the gap identified in the previous section, revealing not only the physical effects of climate change but also the deeply personal experiences that shape how individuals and communities perceive and adapt to these changes. In doing so, we will provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon.

The structure of this article is organized into several key sections. Following this introduction, the context of climate change and its impacts on local communities will be explored (Alfi et al., 2025). The methodology section will outline the phenomenological approach used in this study, detailing the data collection and analysis processes. In the analysis section, thematic analysis will be employed to interpret the data collected from in-depth interviews with participants. The discussion will reflect on the findings and their implications, and the article will conclude with key insights and recommendations for future research and policy interventions.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Study Design**

A phenomenological approach was adopted for this study, as it is well-suited to exploring and understanding the lived experiences of individuals in relation to a specific phenomenon. This design focuses on uncovering the meanings and essences of participants' subjective experiences, allowing for an in-depth understanding of their perceptions and responses to climate change (Lutz & Knox, 2014; McNabb, 2015). Phenomenology, by its nature, seeks to explore how individuals perceive and make sense of their world, making it ideal for investigating the ways in which local communities experience and adapt to environmental changes. In this study, a descriptive phenomenological approach was applied, which emphasizes a detailed and clear depiction of participants' lived

experiences without interpretation or theoretical assumptions. This approach allows for the direct representation of participants' perspectives, contributing to a rich understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

### **Participants**

Participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct experience with the phenomenon of climate change and its effects on their lives. Inclusion criteria required participants to be residents of rural or urban areas affected by environmental changes, particularly those experiencing disruptions in agriculture, livelihood, or daily life due to climate change. The study focused on gathering insights from individuals who could offer detailed descriptions of their personal experiences and perceptions (Hillman & Radel, 2018; Migdal, 2018). A total of 30 participants were included, with an expanded sample that now includes participants from both rural and urban areas across multiple regions, enhancing the diversity of perspectives. The age of participants ranged from 25 to 60 years, with an average age of 45 years. Participants included both male and female individuals, with diverse backgrounds in farming, local business, and public service, ensuring a range of perspectives on the topic. This larger and more diverse sample aims to improve the external validity of the study and better represent a broader range of experiences.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, allowing participants to express their experiences and thoughts in their own words while providing a framework for consistent data across interviews (Carreiras & Castro, 2012; Iosifides, 2016). The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a quiet, comfortable setting to ensure participants felt at ease sharing their experiences. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the participant's willingness to elaborate on their experiences. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The interview guide was designed to explore key themes related to participants' perceptions of climate change, adaptation strategies, and their experiences with governmental policies. The interview protocol was adapted from existing literature on environmental perception, with minor modifications to better align with the local context.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, a common technique in phenomenological research for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. Thematic analysis allows for the identification of core themes that reflect the participants' lived experiences and meanings. Data analysis followed a systematic, step-by-step process: first, transcripts were read repeatedly to gain familiarity with the content; second, significant statements and phrases were highlighted to identify meaning units; third, these units were grouped into themes that emerged from the data (Daly, 2007; Longhofer et al., 2012). A software tool, NVivo, was utilized to assist with organizing and coding the data, but the analysis itself remained qualitative and interpretation-based. This approach enabled the identification of essential themes that capture the core aspects of participants' experiences, ensuring a rich and nuanced interpretation of the data.

Ethical considerations were central to the design and conduct of this study. Prior to participation, all participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and understanding of their rights, including the right to withdraw at any stage of the research (Fife, 2020; Kawamura, 2020). Confidentiality was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to all participants, and all data was stored securely in accordance with ethical guidelines. The study was reviewed and approved by the relevant ethical review board, and it adhered to international ethical standards for research with human participants. The data collected was treated with the utmost confidentiality and was used solely for the purposes of this research.

## **RESULTS**

**Perception of Climate Change and Its Local Impact**

The participants in this study shared a profound awareness of climate change, yet their experiences and perceptions varied significantly based on their social contexts. One common theme emerged regarding the perception of climate change as a distant and largely abstract phenomenon, with many participants struggling to connect it directly to their everyday lives. However, as the discussion evolved, it became evident that those living in rural areas experienced more direct and tangible impacts. One participant, a farmer from a coastal village, remarked:

"I never really thought about climate change until I noticed the rice crops were failing because of the unpredictable rains. It's something I only started understanding when I couldn't harvest the way I used to."

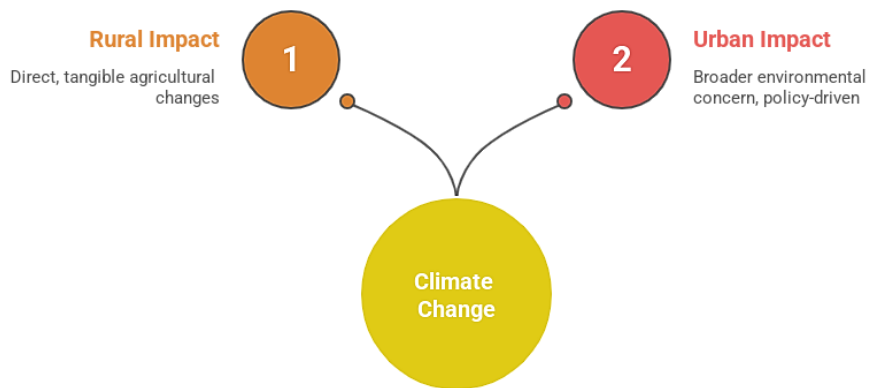
This quote encapsulates the struggle of connecting abstract scientific concepts with the lived experiences of individuals. For the rural participants, climate change was not merely an abstract notion but something manifest in altered agricultural patterns. These shifts had significant socio-economic implications, affecting livelihoods and contributing to a sense of vulnerability.

In urban areas, however, participants discussed climate change more as a broader environmental concern, often tied to governmental policies, yet with little personal connection to daily life. One urban participant stated:

"Climate change is a problem for the government to solve. I read about it in the news, but I don't think it impacts me directly. I trust the authorities to deal with it."

This observation reflects the degree to which urban residents felt disconnected from the immediate effects of climate change, viewing it through the lens of policy rather than personal experience.

**Climate Change Impacts Vary by Location**



**Adaptation Strategies and Responses to Environmental Change**

A key theme that emerged from the data was the diversity of adaptive strategies employed by participants in response to environmental changes. In the rural context, adaptation was often framed as a survival mechanism, influenced by practical needs and immediate environmental changes. Participants spoke of adjusting agricultural practices, such as changing planting seasons or diversifying crops to cope with unpredictable weather patterns. One rural participant described:

"We have started planting different types of crops. The old crops don't grow well anymore with the strange weather. We just try new things and see what works."

This adaptation was described as reactive, driven by necessity rather than proactive planning. In contrast, urban participants described a more passive approach to adaptation, often relying on the government or external bodies to address environmental changes. One urban participant said:

"We don't do anything ourselves. If there's a flood or something, the government handles it. We don't have much control over it anyway."

This discrepancy between rural and urban responses highlights the differential impact and adaptation mechanisms influenced by geography, socioeconomic status, and governmental infrastructure.

### **Climate Change Policies and Public Engagement**

The role of government policies and public engagement in addressing climate change was another major theme. Rural participants often felt disconnected from national policies, and their perceptions of these policies were generally skeptical. One farmer expressed:

"The government talks a lot about climate change, but I don't see it helping us directly. They say a lot, but we still face the same problems year after year."

This sentiment reflects the gap between high-level policy discourse and the ground-level realities faced by rural communities. Participants felt that policies were often too generalized and disconnected from local needs, making them less effective in mitigating the local impacts of climate change.

Conversely, urban participants seemed more engaged with governmental initiatives, but this engagement was more passive, based on trust in institutional responses rather than active participation in shaping or enacting change. One participant mentioned:

"I think the government is trying to fix the problem. I just follow the rules, like sorting my trash and recycling, because I trust they're doing something with it."

This illustrates how public engagement in urban areas often takes the form of compliance with regulations rather than active involvement in shaping climate change mitigation strategies.

The findings of this study reveal a nuanced understanding of climate change among participants, shaped by their geographic location, socioeconomic status, and level of engagement with governmental policies. While rural participants showed direct, tangible adaptation strategies, urban participants viewed climate change more as a distant issue, often leaving adaptation to government actions. The research highlights the gap between policy discourse and local experiences, emphasizing the need for more context-specific, participatory approaches in climate change interventions.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings from this study highlight the deeply personal and subjective experiences of individuals as they navigate the impacts of climate change. The key themes that emerged perception of climate change, adaptation strategies, and the role of policies underscore the significant ways in which local communities experience environmental disruption (Ul Haq et al., 2025). These findings directly address the research question regarding how individuals perceive and respond to climate change, providing a nuanced understanding of the emotional, social, and practical dimensions of these experiences.

This research contributes to the broader understanding of climate change by revealing the complex ways in which individuals make sense of environmental shifts. It emphasizes that climate change is not a distant, abstract phenomenon, but one that profoundly shapes daily life in rural and urban communities (Prana et al., 2024). The study demonstrates that, while urban participants often view climate change as an external issue handled by the government, rural participants are directly engaged with the immediate consequences of environmental changes, adjusting their agricultural practices and daily routines (Rosalina et al., 2024; Setyawati, 2021). This contrast highlights the varying levels of engagement and understanding of climate change, with rural communities experiencing more direct and tangible impacts. The findings suggest that local, personal experiences of climate change should be central to discussions of adaptation and policy, as these experiences drive individuals' actions and perceptions in ways that top-down policies cannot address.

When compared to existing literature, the results of this study align with previous research that emphasizes the importance of local context in shaping climate change. These studies also point to the divide between rural and urban perceptions of climate change, with rural communities

experiencing a more immediate and direct impact (Weerman et al., 2022). However, this study extends these findings by exploring the emotional and social aspects of climate change adaptation, an area that has been underexplored in prior research. While much of the existing literature focuses on the physical or economic impacts of climate change, this research sheds light on the psychological and social dimensions of these impacts, reinforcing the need for a more holistic approach to understanding climate change. Furthermore, the study underscores the relevance of phenomenology in exploring these dimensions, providing insights that are often missing in quantitative or policy-focused studies.

The findings of this study offer significant implications for both theory and practice. By providing a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of individuals affected by climate change, the study underscores the importance of considering emotional, social, and cultural factors in climate change research and policy. The rural-urban divide revealed in this research highlights the need for context-specific adaptation strategies that acknowledge the direct and immediate impacts experienced by rural communities, while also addressing the more passive, policy-driven engagement in urban areas. From a practical standpoint, this study suggests that climate change policies should be designed to resonate with local experiences and actively engage communities in meaningful ways (Savaresi, 2025). This approach would lead to more effective interventions that empower individuals to take ownership of their adaptation strategies, fostering resilience at the community level.

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. One key limitation is the sample size, which, although sufficient for qualitative research, may not be representative of all populations affected by climate change (Fernandez-Bou et al., 2023). The study's focus on rural and urban participants from a specific region may limit the generalizability of the findings to other geographic or cultural contexts (Ota et al., 2025; Setiawati et al., 2024). Furthermore, the use of phenomenology, while ideal for exploring subjective experiences, does not lend itself to broader statistical generalizations (Picó & Sáez-Soro, 2025). The methodological focus on in-depth interviews also means that the experiences of other groups, such as policymakers or international stakeholders, were not explored, which could provide valuable insights into the broader societal responses to climate change. These limitations suggest that further research with a larger and more diverse sample, as well as a comparative cross-cultural analysis, could expand on the findings of this study.

Looking ahead, the findings of this study open up several avenues for future research. One potential direction is to explore how climate change adaptation strategies evolve over time, particularly in response to shifts in policy or external interventions (Price, 2021). Additionally, future studies could investigate the role of community-based organizations in facilitating local adaptation and the impact of social networks on climate resilience. Moreover, examining the psychological and social dimensions of climate change across different cultures and geographic regions could further illuminate the universal and context-specific aspects of the phenomenon (Delina, 2025). These studies would not only deepen our understanding of climate change but also provide actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners working to mitigate its effects.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the subjective experiences of individuals affected by climate change, focusing on how local communities perceive and respond to its impacts. The findings reveal that rural communities face direct, tangible effects of climate change, such as disruptions in agricultural practices, while urban communities view the issue more abstractly and rely on government interventions. By adopting a phenomenological approach, the research provides a deeper understanding of the emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of climate change, which were previously overlooked in quantitative studies. These insights address gaps in existing literature by emphasizing the importance of local experiences in shaping climate change adaptation strategies. Based on these findings, it is recommended that policymakers develop localized strategies that account for the unique vulnerabilities and perceptions of both rural and urban communities. In practice, this may involve strengthening community-based resilience programs and fostering collaboration between local governments, communities, and climate experts to create context-specific

solutions. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring the role of community-based organizations and cross-cultural differences in climate resilience. Overall, this study contributes valuable insights into how climate change is experienced on a personal level, offering implications for more context-specific and effective policy development.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to this study.

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