

Hegemonic Governance and Africa's Climate Adaptation Deficit: A Critical Political Economy of International Finance Flows

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Abstract

Climate Finance is formally recognized as a tool of solidarity to assist vulnerable countries, yet the actual financial flows to the African Region reflect deep structural asymmetries. Therefore, this study is to examine climate finance as a political and power-laden mechanism focusing on its implications for the adaptation of climate agreements in the African region. The qualitative analytical approach based on policy documents, reports, and scholarly literature has been adapted to assess the functioning of mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility, and emerging arrangements such as Just Energy Transition Partnerships that support African Nationally Determined Contribution implementation. The debates were drawn from a Neo-Gramscian perspective, arguing that climate finance has reproduced the structures of hegemonic governance, furthering the disparities rather than solving them. The findings reflect a persistent adaptation deficit, showing that Africa receives only a marginal share of global climate finance, and the finance flows are unevenly distributed among sub-regions, with a larger portion received as loans rather than grants. Thus, current dynamics and trends reveal a gradual shift from obligation-based public responsibility toward a market-prone, privatized mode of climate action, weakening the principle of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities. Without transformative reforms that prioritize grant-based, needs-driven, yet Africa - centered climate architecture governance, the existing structure might deepen the risks of dependency and undermine the development potential of climate agreements.

Keywords: Adaptation Deficit, African Region, Climate Finance, Neo-Gramscian lens

Introduction

Climate finance refers to financial resources and instruments that are used to support action on climate change. Climate finance is critical to addressing climate change because of the large-scale investments that are needed to transition to a low-carbon global economy and to help societies build resilience and adapt to the impacts of climate change (UNDP, 2023). The global climate finance regime is represented as an intersection between environmental necessity and entrenched structures of political economy. Despite being solely a powerful mechanism of ecological redress, climate finance has reflected the asymmetries in power between the Global North and South. Africa can be seen as an example where the high vulnerability of climate impacts contrasts sharply with its contribution to global greenhouse emissions (Tamasiga et al., 2023). The major climate finance flows occur as loans, private capital, and conditional assistance, raising critical questions about whether this assistance alleviates or reproduces economic dependency. The situation fosters a new paradox at the heart of global climate governance. The fiscal instruments that are designed in favour of adaptation and mitigation may simultaneously deepen the fiscal dependency and constrain the development autonomy of countries.

The political economy of climate finance in Africa operates primarily through institutions and norms outside the continent. After determining the eligibility criteria, risk assessments, and other project priorities, the multilateral development banks, donor agencies, and transnational investors facilitate mitigation projects over defined local adaptation needs. The empirical data reveal that more than two-thirds of public climate finance flows to the African region are delivered as loans or debt-creating instruments rather than grants, spurring debt repayment issues rather than development (Freitas & Mwaniki, 2024).

Therefore, this study mainly focuses on assessing how the hegemonic governance structures influence the climate adaptation financing deficit in Africa. To support this research question, the study was followed by the objectives of examining the current status and scale of the climate adaptation financing gap in Africa, analyzing the role of global governance structures in shaping climate finance distribution, assessing how hegemonic power relations influence adaptation priorities and funding mechanisms, and evaluating the implications of these dynamics for equitable and sustainable climate adaptation in African states.

Literature Review

Climate finance refers to local, national, or transnational financing facilities stemming from public, private, and alternative sources of financing that mainly seek to help mitigation and adaptation actions addressing climate change (UNFCCC, 2022). The major climate agreements, such as the Paris Agreement and Kyoto Protocol, necessitate financial assistance from parties with more financial resources for those that are less capable and more vulnerable. Therefore, it is notable that the contribution to climate change and their capacities in addressing climate-related issues may vary accordingly. Due to the large investment needs in reducing emissions, Climate Finance is essentially needed for mitigation. Equally for adaptation, where the lasting solutions are to be installed, climate finance acts as a crucial point, enabling countries to reduce the impacts of a changing, yet unpredictable climate. To facilitate climate actions, the UNFCCC established a financial mechanism, enabling it to serve as the operational arm of the convention, and is accountable to the Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC, 2022).

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has served as an operational entity of the financial mechanism since 1994 (Nakhoda, 2013). It provides grants and concessional funding to projects in developing countries aiming the environmental protection, adaptation, and mitigation. In 2010, the COP established the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and it became a central pillar of climate finance under the Paris Agreement (Green Climate Fund, 2024). Both GEF and GCF mechanisms act as primary conduits for international climate finance, and their policies and governance structures shape how much and what type of funding reaches the regions, including Africa.

In addition to the aforementioned core institutions, specialized funds have also been established by the parties. The Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF), for example, is to support projects and programs relating to climate change adaptation, technology transfer, and capacity building (Christiansen et al., 2012). The Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) focuses exclusively on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (UNFCCC, 2022). They help to prepare and implement National Adaptation Programs of Action (NAPAs) of LDCs. Moreover, the Adaptation Fund (AF), that established under the Kyoto Protocol, was to facilitate projects and programs typically in the most vulnerable communities. All these funds and programs are being monitored by GEF or GCF, enabling a multi-layered system to channel climate finance.

The Standing Committee on Finance (SCF) was established at COP 16 in 2010 and now serves the Paris Agreement. It is responsible for improving coherence in climate finance delivery, supporting resource mobilization, guiding the financial mechanism, and overseeing reporting

and verification of support to developing countries. Long-term climate finance, another priority of the Standing Committee, focuses on scaling up resources from diverse sources, and developed countries are committed to mobilizing USD 100 billion per year by 2020 under the Cancun Agreement in 2010 (Rajamani, 2011).

Methodology

To examine the dynamics of climate finance in African countries, this study employs a qualitative policy analysis, which was complemented by secondary quantitative data resources. The study is grounded in the Neo-Gramscian¹ political economic framework, which enables us to dive into how power relations have been sharpened by institutional agreements and market-oriented policies. Thus, to examine how the flow, composition, and governance of climate finance are governed under the UNFCCC and Paris Agreements. The methodology seeks to address whether the existing governance mechanisms, such as GEF, GCF, NCQG, and emerging mechanisms like JETPs, are taking actions toward addressing them or reproducing the patterns of dependency and inequality.

The qualitative document and policy analysis act as the principal method. UNFCCC decisions, provisions of the Paris Agreement, COP key outcomes, and reports of the Standing Committee on Finance are being systematically reviewed in order to identify dominant narratives on responsibility, resource allocation, and mobility while paying special attention to the newly emerging debates surrounding the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) that broadens the shifting definition of climate finance.

To support these debates, secondary quantitative data were integrated from Climate Policy Initiative (CPI), OECD, UNEP, IMF, and World Bank databases, mainly from 2020 to 2025. The data are primarily being used to assess the scale of finance relative to Africa's adaptation needs, to compare the proportion of loans and grants while assessing the impact on NDC implementation of subregions, and finally to scrutinize how the concentration of funding among selected recipient countries and all the aforementioned reasons have impacted the

¹ The Neo-Gramscian political economic framework is a critical theory approach that explains how global dominance is maintained not just by military/economic force, but by shaping "common sense" through ideology, culture, and institutions. It bridges Marxism and International Relations (IR), focusing on how ruling classes (historic blocs) secure consent from subaltern groups.

implementation of climate agreements within the region. Quantitative evidence is interpreted critically rather than as a descriptive analysis to show how numerical trends reveal broader hegemonic structures in global climate governance through the lens of Neo-Gramscian interpretations.

The study acknowledges the limitations that could stem from the reliance on secondary data and variations in reporting across multiple institutions. To mitigate this, the preference has been given to peer-reviewed and officially verified authentic datasets.

Discussion and Analysis

The subsequent analysis scrutinizes climate finance as a contested arena of global governance rather than a neutral channel of providing technical assistance. The gap between the framed support from international agreements and the actual flows, structure, and distribution of resources reveals the deeper asymmetries between donors and recipients. In order to examine how climate finance functions in reality within the African Region, this analysis goes beyond descriptively analyzing the mechanisms, such as the GCF, GEF, and other related funds, investigating whether current agreements actually improve implementation capacity or if they instead perpetuate structural dependency within the Paris Agreement. Therefore, this section will connect financial disparities linking how those impacts change and create emerging negotiation dynamics.

Financing Deficits for Climate Adaptation in Africa

Globally, Africa receives a low share of climate finance, accounting for only around 2 percent of total flows in 2021 (CPI, 2023). This is particularly striking given the acute vulnerability to climate change. Although a significant increment in climate finance can be seen, averaging around 24 percent annual growth between 2011 and 2021 (OECD, 2021), the amount remains inadequate relative to the continent's needs.

The data on Estimated Adaptation on finance flows and needs in Africa (see figure 01) illustrates the magnitude of the challenge in the region. If the same current annual flows are maintained during 2021 - 2035, inarguably, Africa would only mobilize USD 195 billion for adaptation in 2035, when the estimated need reaches USD 795 billion. Nevertheless, there may be even USD 1.6 trillion if current estimates are off by a factor of two. This proves that the

available finance only fulfills 12 to 24 percent of the required adaptation investment of the region.

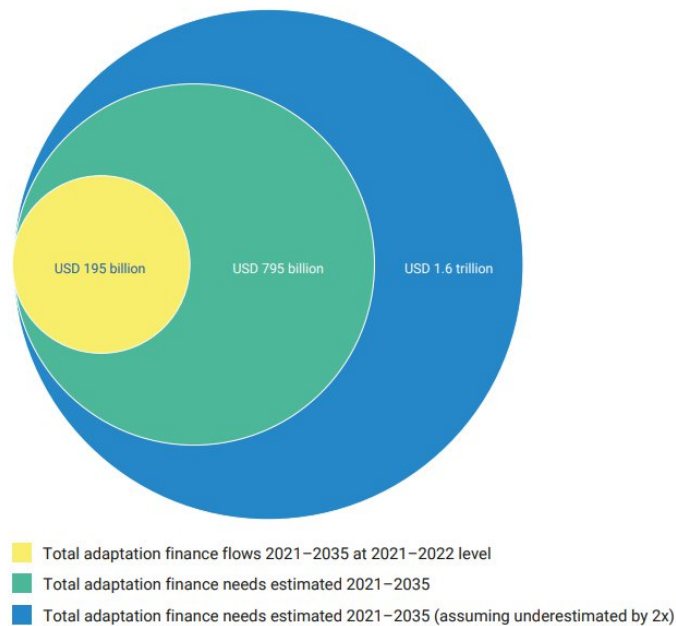


Figure 1: Estimated Adaptation Finance Flows and Needs in Africa 2021- 2035

Source - Climate Policy Initiative of The Global Center on Adaptation (GCA), 2024

Such a gap calls for a strong recall of the long-term progressive ambition of the Paris Agreement. Under Article 9 of the Paris Agreement, they necessitate financial assistance from donors to recipients, where they prioritize the role of resource-rich countries in providing financial assistance. The agreement assumes that developing countries will develop their NDCs over time; in contrast, the data suggest that many African countries lack the material basis to implement their current commitments. Similar conclusions have been drawn by UNEP (2023) and CPI (2024), which identify inadequate and unregulated finance flows as the principal bottleneck for climate adaptation. From a neo-Gramscian perspective, this gap reflects how the donors might control global governance, reproducing the global hierarchies of power. Thus, those are the developed and powerful states that decide the financial capacity of what African states can implement. Altogether, these findings strengthen this argument by quantifying the long-term cumulative loss, and it demonstrates that the existing gap is not marginal but systematic.

Regional inequalities in NDC implementation and distribution

The deeply uneven distribution of implementation burdens across sub-regions has become another central issue in climate finance in Africa. As per the Paris agreement, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are to be realized through a combination of domestic resources and international support (Williams, 2025). Nevertheless, these common interpretations overlook structural differences in vulnerability, economic capacities, and access to finance in different regions, leading them to undertake far more costly transitions than others, and the proportionate external assistance might not be received by those regions (UNEP, 2023).

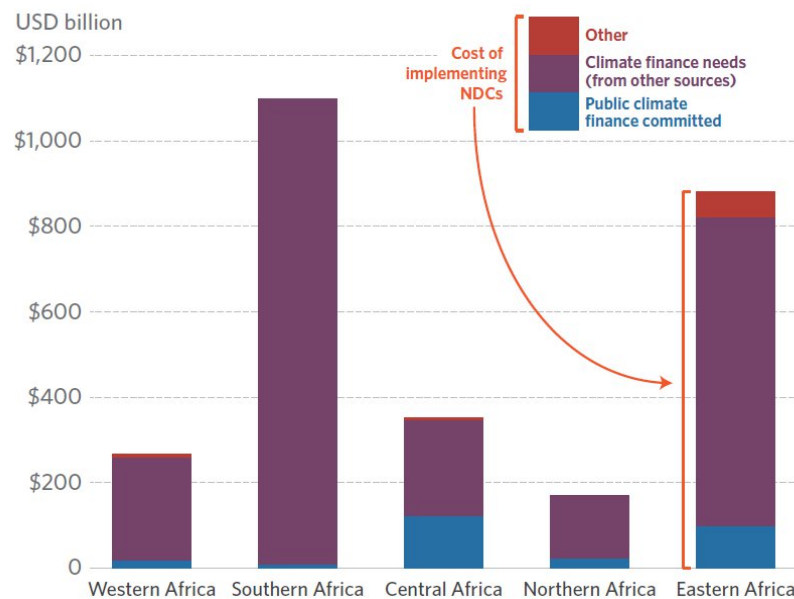


Figure 2: Cost of Implementing NDCs (2020-2030) USD Billion

Source - Climate Policy Initiative of The Global Center on Adaptation (GCA), 2024

Statistically, South Africa requires costs exceeding USD 1.1 trillion (see figure 2), while Eastern Africa requires USD 900 billion for the period of 2020 -2030 (Climate Policy Initiative, 2024). In contrast, other regions, such as the Central and Northern African regions, have fewer totals. However, even in these areas, public climate funding that is committed is still a small part of what is needed.

Across all sub-regions, confirmed public finance remains marginal compared with other sources, indicating a heavy dependence on private investment and debt-based instruments. This imbalance between required and committed resources indicates that the financial architecture of the Paris Regime is not aligned with the practical geographical climate risks. Accordingly, these implications might have directly impacted the functioning of global climate governance. For example, Southern and Eastern Africa are exposed to the most extreme climate challenges, such as cyclones, prolonged droughts, food insecurity, and displacement. When funding becomes uneven, these challenges will not be addressed, and the implementation becomes spatially fragmented. The high need states will experience persistent delays, resulting in an uneven map of compliance, where success is less dependent on political desire and more on actual material conditions of the region.

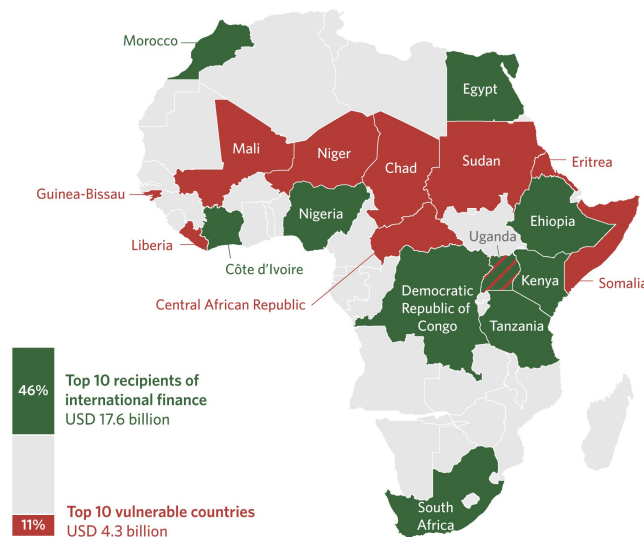


Figure 3: International Climate Finance Flows to the top 10 recipient's vs Most vulnerable African countries

Source - Climate Policy Initiative of The Global Center on Adaptation (GCA), 2024

The Paris agreement and UNFCCC coined the need to provide financial support for the most exposed climate risks, which has been contrarily mismanaged by the resource allocation. The ten largest recipient countries, for example, have captured USD 17.6 billion (see Figure 03), nearly 46 percent of total international climate finance, while ten other most vulnerable

countries receive only USD 4.3 billion, or only 11 percent. Even though the most vulnerable countries, such as Somalia, Chad, Niger, and Eritrea, are ranked as highly vulnerable, they remain outside of major funding streams. The distribution of finance is therefore not guided by levels of risk or real conditions, but rather by other structural considerations.

Impact on Implementation of Climate Agreements

The most visible outcome of all the aforementioned issues and patterns is the transformation of the very logic of climate agreements. Historically, the UNFCCC regime has framed climate finance as a responsibility and duty of developed states. The current structure, where a higher portion of resources arrives as loans or private investments, gradually recasts this duty as a form of shared entrepreneurial, yet profit-based responsibility of powerful donors.

During the recent COP27(2022) and COP29(2024) climate negotiations, new concerns regarding the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) were illustrated (European Commission, 2024). The blocs, such as the African Group and developing countries, have argued that these goals should prioritize public, additional, and grant-based finance from developed countries, while the developed countries have advocated for broader definitions for climate finance, urging private finance mobilized by public support to be considered as climate finance (European Commission, 2024). Under the NCQG agreed at COP29, a baseline of USD 300 annual grant by 2035 was adopted, while accepting USD 1.3 trillion of combined public and private sources expansion (European Commission, 2024). This was signaling the acceptance of private capital, counting toward the collective targets, reflecting pressure from donor states, potentially diluting the emphasis on developed-country obligation. The practical implications of these decisions have a direct impact on how developing countries design and implement climate plans. For example, after Cyclone Idai struck in Mozambique in March April 2019, the country received financial facilities through mechanisms such as an IMF Rapid Credit facility, US\$ 118.2 Million (Zhang, 2019) to support reconstructions and budgetary gaps. These were not received primarily as grant-based climate finance, furthering their fiscal shortfalls and increasing the debt burdens. This illustrates how reliance on credit rather than direct climate grants can shape national responses and incentives.

Many developing nations have increased their concerns about bilateral or small group financing arrangements as an alternative to insufficient multilateral funding through traditional UNFCCC

channels. The large capital required for energy transition and mitigation was a top priority, and these mechanisms were often negotiated outside formal UNFCCC processes and enabled new norms and priorities to be implemented.

Following the Just Energy Transition partnership (JETP)² model at COP26 in Glasgow 2021, a model that was built up to support South Africa's energy transition from coal toward clean energy, the JETPs have been formed in other countries (Hadley, 2022). In June 2023, for example, Senegal formalized a JEPT with its International Partnership Groups, aiming to increase its share of renewables in its electricity (Africa Energy Portal, 2025). This emergence of "mini regimes" could have reduced the influence of universal UNFCCC forums in shaping how climate finance is deployed. The weakened capacity to capture and evaluate these flows might deepen disparities that the Paris Agreement seeks to address through the principle of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The current climate finance regime, as interpreted by Neo-Gramscian theory, is similar to what Cox refers to as a transnational historic bloc, where donor states, multilateral organizations, and private capital work together to create norms that seem to be in agreement but actually serve hegemonic interests (Obamamoye, 2023). The analysis reveals that despite the required large financial needs in the region, the flows coming into the region through the UNFCCC and Paris Agreements only cover a small fraction of projected requirements. Thus, the uneven distribution of resources across the region, together with the dominance of loans over grants and the increasing reliance on private capital, have collectively weakened the ability of vulnerable states to implement their Nationally Determined Contributions. Moreover, the conditionalities attached to many funding mechanisms often prioritize donor-driven agendas over locally defined priorities, limiting African states' policy autonomy and reinforcing existing dependency structures. Continuing current trends in the region, climate agreements will continue to legitimize a hegemonic order, rather than resolving the climate vulnerabilities of Africa. Therefore, a transformed system from conditional dependency into a reflected principle of equity and historical responsibility is required to tackle the current weaknesses of

² Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) are a new plurilateral structure for accelerating the phase-out of fossil fuels. These intergovernmental partnerships coordinate financial resources and technical assistance from countries in the Global North to a recipient country to help it in this regard. To date, JETPs have targeted emerging economies that produce and consume coal on a large scale.

climate governance in Africa, ensuring that adaptation financing becomes truly responsive to the material and socio-economic realities of the continent.

In the process of restructuring the climate finance deficit in Africa, it is essential to implement a strong, long-term, comprehensive set of policies and structural reforms. First, the current debt-creating instruments that increase debt dependency, including concessional loans and credit-based facilities, must be replaced or significantly shifted towards grant-based and concessional financial mechanisms. The facilities, therefore, must ensure fiscal vulnerability does not exacerbate by the implementation, thus the adaptation efforts are sustainable without increasing sovereign debt burdens. Nevertheless, the implementation must focus on long-term resilience, rather than short-term mitigation interventions, which will allow African states to implement effective local adaptation measures.

Second, a proper assessment mechanism or a vulnerability-based allocation framework should be established across multilateral climate finance institutions, such as the GCF, GEF, SCCF, LDCF, and the Adaptation Fund. The priority and the funding should be based on risk exposure, socio-economic vulnerability, and projected adaptation costs. It is essential to align resource allocation with the actual material needs. The current pattern of resource allocation based on the strategic preferences of donor countries, in response to severe climate impacts, will not receive proportionate support to implement their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Third, building up a robust accountability and transparency framework is critical to monitor the private investment distribution, ensuring that the needs are met with the required amounts. For all climate finance flows, particularly for blended finance and public-private partnerships, clear monitoring and reporting standards are required. Mechanisms in monitoring the progression, fair distribution, together with the measures to prevent diversion or conditionalities that undermine local priorities, must be guided by a transparent framework, yet enhancing the legitimacy of climate finance by enhancing the trust among donors, private investors, and African states benefiting through maximum outcomes for all the parties involved.

Fourth, a forum for targeted capacity-building support in strengthening institutional competencies, particularly in project preparation, negotiation, and financial management, must be received by the African States. A platform where the parties get enough training toward technical teams, the establishment of knowledge sharing platforms, and strategic negotiations

to support national climate funds to manage and disburse finance efficiently, therefore sets the guiding principles of these frameworks. This enhancement of institutional capacity will be beneficial for African countries to negotiate with donors in a manner that brings effective outcomes, to better assess the suitability of loans vs grants, and to implement projects reflecting their national priorities rather than being subject to external agendas.

According to the available data and the drawings from the above-mentioned analysis, finally, it can be concluded that it is the responsibility of governments to focus on structural reforms by re-centering climate finance, considering equity among nations, rethinking the historical responsibilities lying on decision makers, and ensuring that climate justice hasn't been eroded by any parties. The capacities and contributions of African states may vary from state to state and therefore need to be recognized by the developed nations and other multilateral institutions. Thus, the financial strategists might reflect this understanding in their mitigation and adaptation measures. Moreover, the implementation of policies that promote South -led financial initiatives, encouraging regional collaboration among African states, is crucial for climate resilience. Therefore, once the countries innovate mechanisms toward addressing debt-led climate finance issues, it will automatically reduce dependency on traditional debt instruments.

By adopting the aforementioned recommendations, the African region might transition from a debt- based climate finance model, coupled with fiscal vulnerability and inequity, to a system that empowers states, encouraging public and private partnerships to mobilize within the region. All these measures will align with the original intent of the Paris Agreement, and deliver tangible adaptation outcomes for the most vulnerable populations.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Availability of Data and Materials

The data and materials used in this study are derived from publicly available secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, and institutional publications. All relevant sources have been appropriately cited within the manuscript. No primary datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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Author Contributions

The author solely contributed to the conception and design of the study. Material preparation, data collection, and analysis were carried out by the author. The first draft of the manuscript was written by the author, and subsequent revisions were also completed independently. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethics and Consent Statement

This study does not involve any human participants, animal subjects, or personally identifiable data. Therefore, ethical approval and informed consent were not required. The research is based solely on secondary literature and publicly accessible documents, ensuring compliance with standard academic ethical guidelines.

Declaration of AI Use

The author confirms that artificial intelligence (AI) tools were not used to generate, analyze, or interpret the core content, arguments, or findings of this manuscript.

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