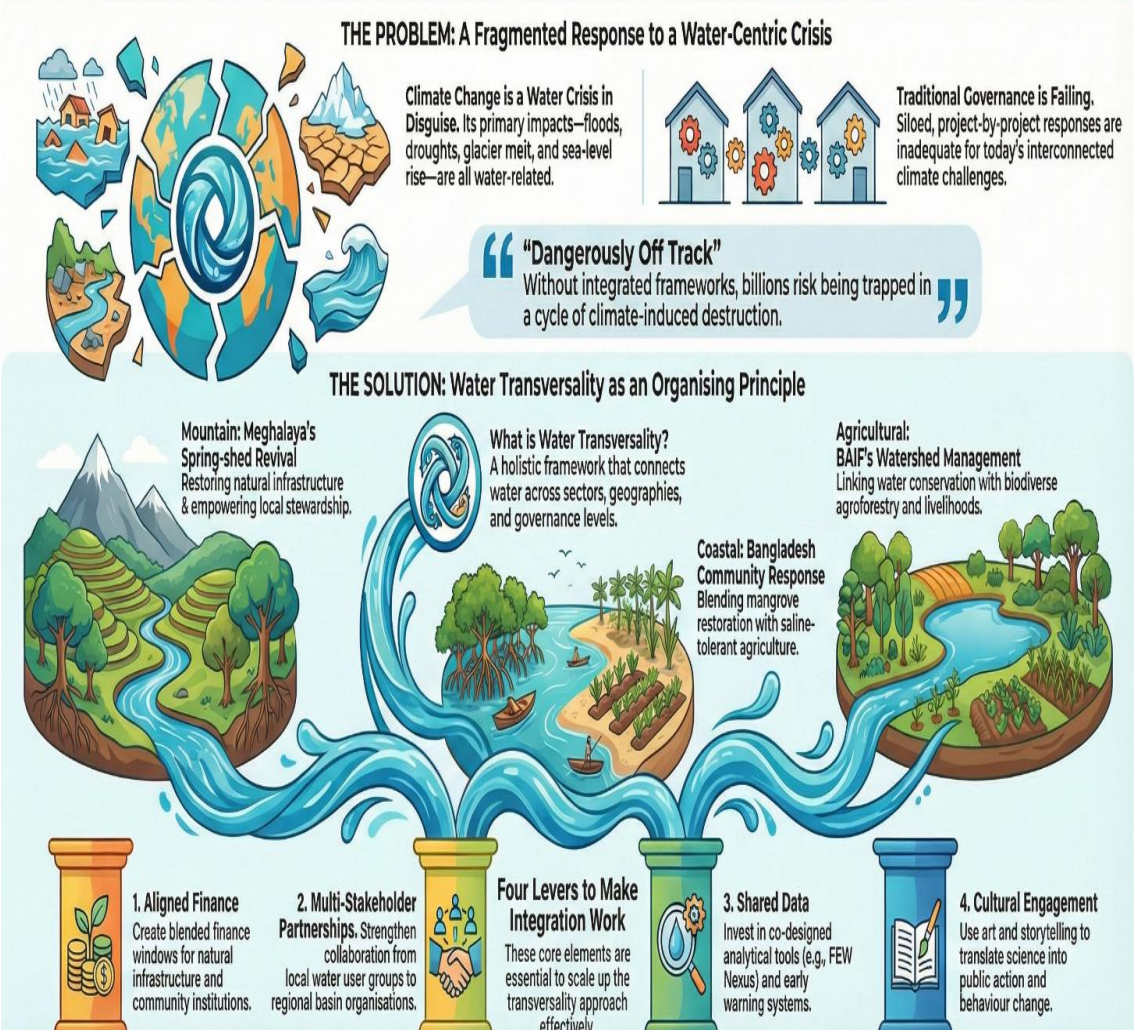


REPORT - COP 30 SIDE EVENT

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Accelerating Climate Action through Water Transversality

COP30 SIDE EVENT

Report

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Accelerating Climate Action through Water Transversality

Hosts & Partners: India Water Foundation, BAIF Development Research Foundation, ARTPORT_making waves, CPRD Bangladesh, Government of Meghalaya

Location / Occasion: COP30 side event

1. INTRODUCTION

COP30 in Belém marked a milestone moment for the global climate regime, symbolically held at the edge of the Amazon to underline the urgency of protecting critical ecosystems while advancing just and inclusive development pathways. Framed as a "COP of delivery," it shifted the emphasis from negotiating new promises to implementing, scaling, and financing existing commitments under the Paris Agreement, especially around climate finance, adaptation, loss and damage, and just transitions for vulnerable communities.

For India and its partners, COP30 also became an important platform to foreground water as the central medium through which the climate crisis is experienced and managed heatwaves, floods, droughts, glacier melt, coastal salinisation, and food system disruptions all manifest primarily through disruptions in water systems, exposing gaps in siloed sectoral governance and finance.

Against this backdrop, the side event "Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Accelerating Climate Action through Water Transversality," hosted by India Water Foundation, BAIF and a wide coalition of global and regional partners, positioned water transversality as a unifying lens to connect climate mitigation, adaptation, food and nutrition security, biodiversity, and livelihoods within and beyond national borders. Designed as a 90-minute blended format with recorded expert messages and a live panel, the session brought together practitioners, policymakers, scientists, cultural leaders and regional institutions from India, South Asia, mountain regions and coastal and aquatic systems to move the concept from rhetoric to operational practice.

Speakers and partners highlighted how integrated watershed management, mountain “water tower” protection, blue food systems, transboundary water diplomacy, cultural engagement, and long-term institutional models can translate COP30 decisions into concrete, scalable action on the ground, backed by blended finance, robust data systems, and community-led institutions.

In doing so, the side event not only aligned with the broader COP30 implementation agenda but also offered a clear post-COP roadmap for embedding water transversality into NDCs, national adaptation plans, and regional cooperation frameworks as a practical pathway to resilient, climate-smart development.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE SIDE EVENT

1. Clarify and operationalize the concept of **water transversality** for policy and programming.
2. Present practical models and case studies that demonstrate integrated approaches at state and community scales.
3. Highlight the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships- including transboundary cooperation, cultural networks, and long-standing institutions — in scaling climate-resilient water solutions.
4. Identify priority actionable steps and financing modalities that can be pursued following COP30.
5. Produce a synthesis that informs donors, governments, and implementing agencies on priority pathways to embed water transversality into national/subnational climate planning.

3. PARTICIPANTS

Panelists and contributors (recorded and live): Dr. Arvind Kumar, President, India Water Foundation; Prof. Rabi Mohtar, Governor-WWC, American University of Beirut, Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences; Sara Manuelli, Programme Officer, Mountain Partnership, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); Mikiko Tanaka, Head, UNESCAP SSWA office; Dr. Essam Yassin Mohammed, Senior Director of Aquatic Food Systems, CGIAR, Director General, WorldFish; Sylvie Goyet; Dr. Shakil Ahammed, Hon'ble Chief Secretary, Government of Meghalaya; Anne-Marie Melster; Shohanur Rahman; Shrinivas Kulkarni.

Audience included representatives from government delegations, international agencies, research institutes, civil society organisations, and interested members of the public attending COP30.

4. DETAILED SUMMARY OF RECORDED MESSAGES

4.1 Dr. Arvind Kumar (India Water Foundation)- Key points

Dr. Arvind Kumar, President, India Water Foundation, delivered the opening intervention at the High-Level Policy Dialogue on "Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for Accelerating Climate Action through Water Transversality." He welcomed participants and partners, underscoring the urgency of collective action in the face of accelerating climate impacts.

Dr. Kumar highlighted that climate change has entered a critical and dangerous phase, noting recent assessments from the European Commission's Copernicus Climate Change Service and the World Meteorological Organization. He cautioned that 2025 is projected to be among the warmest years on record, reaffirming scientific warnings that the world is nearing the 1.5°C threshold. He also referred to the Climate Risk Index 2026, emphasising that intensifying storms, floods, droughts, and heatwaves are disproportionately affecting countries in the Global South.

Positioning water as far more than a sectoral concern, Dr. Kumar stated that water is a "development connector" and a core economic indicator. He argued that achieving sustainable development is impossible without integrating water into food security, energy production, climate mitigation, ecosystem health, and socio-economic systems. In this context, he introduced Water Transversality as an advanced, holistic framework that shifts governance away from fragmented and siloed approaches toward interconnected systems thinking.

He explained that Water Transversality enables integrated planning by linking vertical relationships across the water–food–energy nexus and ecosystem-based adaptation, while also incorporating horizontal dimensions such as health, education, agriculture, and gender. This approach, he noted, represents a "quantum leap" beyond traditional methods, allowing governments and institutions to craft adaptive, resilient, and context-specific solutions.

Dr. Kumar underscored the critical importance of climate adaptation, clarifying that adaptation is not about maintaining the status quo but about adjusting intelligently to emerging risks. He stressed that adaptation fundamentally relies on improved water management supported by transversality-driven strategies that enhance resilience and reduce costs.

Calling for strong political will, Dr. Kumar urged governments to recognise water as the backbone of climate adaptation and resilience. He warned that despite clear evidence and available solutions, the world remains "dangerously off track" and is entering a "new normal" marked by continuous climate shocks. Without strengthened global cooperation, integrated transversality frameworks, and sustained support for vulnerable regions, he cautioned that billions may be trapped in an endless cycle of climate-induced destruction and recovery.

Dr. Kumar concluded with an urgent appeal for coordinated multi-stakeholder partnerships that prioritise efficiency, effectiveness, and equity affirming that the solutions exist, but must be implemented collectively and systematically to safeguard sustainable development.

Implication: National NDCs and adaptation plans should make explicit water-centred integration clauses and designate institutional mechanisms for cross-sector coordination.

4.2 Prof. Rabi Mohtar (FEW Nexus)- Key points

- FEW Nexus as a system-architectural approach: integration is an engineering of governance and data systems, not a slogan.
- Necessity for shared definitions, boundary specification, and co-designed decision support tools that stakeholders accept and use.
- Emphasised context specificity — system maps vary by hydrology, economics, and social structures.

Implication: Investment in shared analytical platforms and stakeholder co-design processes to operationalize the FEW nexus in national planning.

4.3 Sara Manuelli (FAO Mountain Partnership)- Key points

- Mountain ecosystems (water towers) are experiencing rapid changes (glacier loss, altered seasonal runoff).
- Mountain communities are under-funded in climate finance streams despite high vulnerability.
- Integration of mountain priorities into climate finance and adaptation programming is urgent.

Implication: Design dedicated funding windows and technical assistance to include mountain water systems explicitly within national climate finance mechanisms.

4.4 Mikiko Tanaka (UNESCAP)- Key points

- In the Asia-Pacific region, climate risks (floods, droughts, salinity intrusion, storms) manifest primarily through water.
- Regional data systems, early warning, and cross-border governance mechanisms are central to resilience.
- The need for inclusive governance frameworks that bridge national and sub-national institutions.

Implication: Strengthen regional cooperation platforms (data-sharing, joint early warning) and invest in sub-national capacity.

4.5 Dr. Essam Yassin Mohammed (WorldFish)- Key points

- Aquatic food systems (“blue foods”) must be mainstreamed into climate and food security policies.
- Aquatic systems connect nutrition, livelihoods and biodiversity and can be a source of adaptive capacity.
- Integration of fisheries and aquaculture into adaptation financing and policy supports resilience.

Implication: Integrate blue food considerations into NDCs, nutrition policy, and rural livelihoods programs with targeted finance.

5. DETAILED SUMMARY OF LIVE PRESENTATIONS (Operational Models & Evidence)

5.1 Ms. Sylvie Goyet (OSCE)- Transboundary governance and water diplomacy

Presentation highlights:

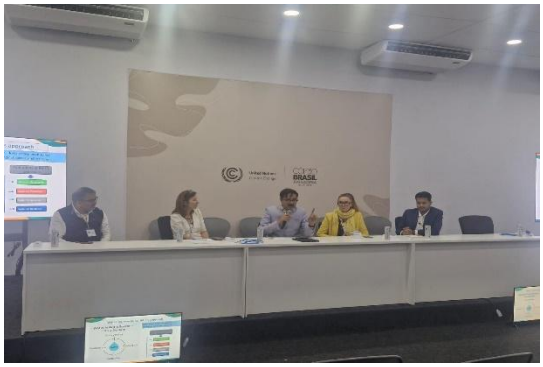
- Practical experiences on building trust in shared basins: joint monitoring, basin institutions, conflict-sensitive planning.
- Examples of how environmental cooperation contributes to security and disaster risk reduction.
- Emphasis on the political economy of transboundary water management: incentives, trust, and funding.

Operational lessons:

- Basin-level institutions with strong data transparency reduce risk and create space for joint investments.
- Peacebuilding and climate resilience are co-benefits of water diplomacy.

5.2 Dr. Shakil Ahammed (Chief Secretary, Meghalaya)- State model of integration

Presentation highlights:



- Meghalaya's spring-shed revival program: restoring natural springs, catchment protection, and community stewardship.
- Forest restoration and natural capital accounting to value ecosystem services.
- Institutional arrangements that empower local community institutions and link to finance mechanisms (PES, carbon finance explorations).

Operational lessons:

- Vertical integration: state policy aligned with gram/panchayat level institutions ensures continuity and local ownership.

- Investment in natural infrastructure (springs, forests) yields durable ecosystem and livelihood benefits.

5.3 Anne-Marie Melster (ARTPORT_making waves)- Cultural engagement

Presentation highlights:

- Projects illustrating how art and storytelling translate scientific messages into actionable public behaviour.
- WE ARE OCEAN and similar initiatives mobilise communities and create new stakeholder coalitions.
- Role of cultural actors in designing participatory processes and local education.

Operational lessons:

- Cultural interventions accelerate social acceptance of novel governance approaches and can be cost-effective in behaviour change.

5.4 Shohanur Rahman (CPRD Bangladesh)- Coastal water crisis case study

Presentation highlights:

- Empirical evidence on salinization, groundwater decline, cyclone impacts, and socio-economic loss & damage in coastal Bangladesh.
- Examples of community responses: rainwater harvesting, women-led water committees, mangrove restoration, saline-tolerant agriculture.
- Need for blended finance and support for local institutions to scale adaptive solutions.

Operational lessons:

- Coastal resilience demands multi-sectoral interventions- infrastructure, ecosystem restoration, finance, gender-sensitive governance.

5.5 Mr. Shrinivas Kulkarni (BAIF)- Institutional experience in practice

Presentation highlights:

- BAIF’s long-running models: integrated watershed management, biodiverse agroforestry, and livelihood linkages.

- Financial governance and institutional continuity enable multi-decadal interventions and evidence accumulation.
- Partnership frameworks with government and donors to scale innovations.

Operational lessons:

- Sustained institutions are critical for long-term resilience and for converting pilots into scalable programs.

6. THEMES, CROSS-CUTTING INSIGHTS AND LEARNING

1. **Systems design over ad hoc integration:** Multiple speakers emphasised that true integration requires defined system boundaries, metrics, and decision support tools. Integration must be operational (processes and institutions), not rhetorical.

2. **Local leadership and community institutions:** Resilience is realized locally. Projects anchored in women's groups, water user associations, and community leaders show better uptake and sustainability.
3. **Transboundary and regional cooperation as core governance:** Shared basins and regional climate impacts need mechanisms for joint monitoring, financing and trust building.
4. **Blue foods and mountain water towers must be mainstreamed:** Both sectors are under-represented in national climate plans despite critical roles in food and water security.
5. **Cultural engagement and narrative change:** Deploying art and cultural practice strategically enhances public engagement and behaviour change, complementing technical interventions.
6. **Finance needs alignment:** Climate finance currently favors projects over systems. Instruments must evolve to fund natural infrastructure, long-term institutional capacity, and blended modalities that reach communities.

7. **Evidence and monitoring:** Shared data platforms and common indicators are needed to evaluate integrated impacts across water, food, health and livelihoods.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy & Governance

- **Embed water transversality clauses** in revised NDCs and national adaptation plans; mandate cross-ministerial steering committees.
- **Establish basin and landscape governance bodies** with clear mandates for data sharing, integrated planning, and pooled financing.

Finance & Investment

- **Create blended finance windows** that combine climate, biodiversity, and livelihood objectives- e.g., a "Water Transversality Fund" for natural infrastructure, community institutions, and blue food systems.
- **Allocate dedicated climate finance** for mountain and coastal water systems, with simplified access for community organisations.

Knowledge, Data & Decision-Support

- **Co-design FEW Nexus tools** with local stakeholders; invest in interoperable data platforms and regional early warning systems.
- **Standardize a core set of indicators** for water transversality

Capacity & Partnerships

- **Support long-term institutions** (NGOs, KVKs, local networks) with multi-year finance and governance strengthening.
- **Scale culture-science partnerships** under UN Ocean Decade and national programs to foster community engagement.

Diplomacy & Regional Cooperation

- **Operationalize water diplomacy** through joint monitoring agreements, shared investments in infrastructure and ecosystem restoration, and conflict-sensitive programming in shared basins.

8. CONCLUSION

The COP30 side event successfully reframed water from a single sector to a transversal system that connects ecology, livelihoods, governance, nutrition, culture, and geopolitics. The combination of conceptual clarity, operational case studies, institutional experience, and cultural strategy provided both the “why” and the “how” for integrated water governance.

Moving from concept to large-scale implementation requires a deliberate shift in policy architecture, finance modalities, institutional design, and cultural engagement. The recommendations in this report outline a practical and coherent pathway for post-COP action: aligning policy, mobilising blended finance, strengthening institutions, and scaling pilot investments to demonstrate impact.

9. COP - 30

The 30th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP 30) took place in Belém, Brazil, from November 10-21, 2025, marking a pivotal moment for global climate action on the tenth anniversary of the Paris Agreement. Held in the gateway to the Amazon rainforest, the summit brought together nearly 200 nations and more than 56,000 participants, including world leaders, scientists, and stakeholders from all sectors of society. The overarching theme emphasized by Brazil's presidency was shifting from negotiation to delivery focusing on concrete implementation of existing commitments rather than generating new promises.

10. Key Outcomes and the Belém Political Package

COP 30 produced a comprehensive set of decisions collectively known as the Belém Political Package, bundled together in a landmark agreement called the "Mutirão" text. This consolidation brought together four contentious negotiation tracks—mitigation, finance, adaptation, and trade—into a single consensus-based agreement, accompanied by seventeen additional decisions. The outcomes demonstrated that despite turbulent geopolitical tensions and climate denial, 194 nations stood united in the commitment to keep humanity in the fight for a liveable planet and to hold the line at 1.5°C.

The most significant financial commitment from COP 30 is the mobilization of at least $1.3 trillion annually by 2035 for climate action. This represents a major scaling up from previous agreements, with particular emphasis on adaptation finance, which is to be tripled by 2035. Additionally, the Loss and Damage Fund, which was operationalized at COP 28, received confirmed replenishment cycles and guidance for acceleration, becoming available to developing countries through direct budget support and grant finance, though with initial funding calls for only $250 million—far below the estimated need of $395 billion annually for developing countries.

COP 30 also launched two major implementation initiatives designed to bridge the ambition gap and translate plans into action. The Belém Mission to 1.5°C encourages higher ambition in national climate plans through fostering dialogue on necessary international cooperation and investment. Complementing this is the Global Implementation Accelerator, a voluntary and cooperative platform that assists countries in moving from planning to action, facilitating practical delivery of mitigation and adaptation measures. Both initiatives reflect recognition that current Nationally Determined Contributions, while important, fall short of what is necessary to avoid catastrophic climate change.

A particularly consequential outcome was the establishment of the Belém Action Mechanism (BAM) for a Global Just Transition, a new UNFCCC mechanism designed to support countries in ensuring that their transition to sustainable economies is just and inclusive. This mechanism includes unprecedented references to labor rights, human rights, and environmental rights, addressing concerns from developing nations and workers whose livelihoods depend on carbon-intensive sectors. The mechanism aims to provide technical assistance, capacity-building, and knowledge sharing to support affected communities and workers.

On adaptation specifically, countries adopted a formal decision marking the end of prolonged negotiations over the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), a framework that will guide international adaptation efforts and provide clearer metrics for measuring progress. Additionally, the summit saw the launch of the Fostering Investible National Implementation

(FINI) initiative, which aims to help countries convert their National Adaptation Plans into investment-ready projects, with the goal of unlocking $1 trillion in adaptation project pipelines within three years.

Notably, while more than 80 countries backed a proposal for formal language on phasing out fossil fuels, this did not materialize in the final agreed text. Instead, the outcome refers only to the "UAE Consensus" from COP 28, calling for "transitioning away from fossil fuels." However, the COP 30 presidency has committed to bring forward separate roadmaps on transitioning away from fossil fuels and reversing deforestation for presentation at COP 31.

11. India's Strategic Engagement and Contributions

India entered COP 30 with a deliberate strategy centered on equity, climate justice, and the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). Delivering India's National Statement at the Leaders' Summit on November 7, 2025, Ambassador Dinesh Bhatia reaffirmed the country's consistent commitment to equitable climate action based on national circumstances and historical responsibilities.

Climate Finance and Equity Advocacy: India, speaking on behalf of the BASIC group (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) and the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC), made climate finance the center piece of its engagement at COP 30. The country stressed that climate finance remains the biggest barrier to enhanced global ambition and called for a clear, universally acceptable definition of what constitutes climate finance, distinguishing it from development assistance. Critically, India emphasized that Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement places a binding responsibility on developed countries to provide financial resources to developing nations—a principle it had advocated for but which was notably overlooked in the Baku finance agreement from COP 29.

India's demands were specific and grounded in development realities. The country called for $1.3 trillion annually in climate finance as per the Baku-to-Belém Roadmap, with particular emphasis on grant-based finance rather than loan-driven models that burden developing nations with additional debt. Furthermore, India stressed that adaptation finance must increase fifteenfold to meet the needs of billions of vulnerable people who have contributed the least to

global warming. Beyond aggregated financing, India pressed for simpler access procedures to multilateral funds, greater allocation specifically for adaptation rather than just mitigation, and clearer rules for leveraging private capital without saddling poorer countries with unsustainable debt burdens.

India also advocated for strengthened South-South cooperation, calling for the removal of intellectual property, financing, and institutional barriers that slow technology diffusion to developing countries. The country cautioned against unilateral climate-related trade measures, warning that such steps risk becoming protectionist tools that force developing and low-income nations to bear the costs of transitioning to low-carbon economies while simultaneously undermining climate finance commitments from developed nations that have historically benefitted from industrialization.

Forest Finance and the Tropical Forests Forever Facility: One of India's most significant diplomatic achievements at COP 30 was securing language ensuring that forest finance discussions would not be limited to the Amazon. Working with Brazil and Indonesia, India's negotiators, led by Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav, ensured that India's mangroves, Himalayan forests, and semi-arid biomes would be equally eligible for future carbon payments under the proposed Tropical Forests Forever Facility (TFFF). Launched by Brazil on the sidelines of COP 30, the TFFF is a blended-finance mechanism designed to mobilize approximately $125 billion through a mix of public (20-25%) and private investment (70-80%), rewarding tropical forest countries with annual payments for maintaining standing forests. India joined the Facility as an Observer, recognizing it as a significant step toward collective global action for forest preservation. This move was tactically important for India, as it expanded the country's economic stake in ecosystem finance while aligning it with the broader Global South agenda.

Carbon Market Safeguards: In another substantive contribution to COP 30 negotiations, India inserted crucial safeguards in the emerging carbon-market rulebooks under Articles 6.2 and 6.4 of the Paris Agreement. These articles are foundational to the future carbon-trade system and could determine how developing nations monetize emission reductions. Indian negotiators lobbied for language protecting India's right to transition its legacy Clean Development

Mechanism projects and demanded that a portion of market proceeds flow into adaptation funds for vulnerable communities. This reflected India's concern that carbon markets, if not properly regulated, could become speculative instruments divorced from genuine climate action.

Showcasing India's Climate Achievements: Throughout COP 30, India extensively highlighted its progress on climate action and clean energy transitions. The country emphasized that between 2005 and 2020, it reduced the emission intensity of its GDP by 36%, a trend that continues. Non-fossil fuel power now accounts for over 50% of India's installed capacity, enabling the country to reach its revised NDC target five years ahead of schedule—a rare achievement among major emitters that underscores India's commitment despite rapid development.

India further highlighted its status as the world's third-largest producer of renewable energy, with nearly 200 GW of installed renewable capacity. Through the International Solar Alliance, launched with France in 2015, India now unites over 120 countries and promotes affordable solar energy and South-South collaboration. The country also co-hosted a session with the International Energy Agency and the UAE titled "Clean Energy for the Global South," reinforcing India's role as one of the few large economies where clean-energy growth and GDP growth are moving in tandem.

Balanced Diplomatic Positioning: Minister Yadav's approach at Belém was notably more forward-leaning than in previous COPs while maintaining India's principles-based stance. He endorsed the idea of a global review of climate finance flows by 2026, supported continuing discussions on carbon border adjustments to protect developing exporters, and pushed for stronger language on adaptation and resilience. This reflected India's approach of working within a pragmatic framework while advocating for Global South interests embodied in his backing of Brazil's broader theme of the "COP of Delivery" alongside South Africa and Indonesia.

Adaptation and National Plans: While India had not yet formally submitted its National Adaptation Plan (NAP) at the time of COP 30 (the country continues to finalize it), the submission was expected soon. India's NAP process, supported by the United Nations

Development Programme and the Green Climate Fund, will serve as a blueprint for integrating climate adaptation into the country's broader development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring that climate resilience supports India's vision of Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047. The plan aligns with national initiatives such as Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) and Ek Ped Maa ke Naam, reflecting India's commitment to promoting climate-conscious and sustainable lifestyles.

12. CONCLUSION

COP 30 demonstrated both significant progress and persistent gaps in global climate ambition. The conference released a comprehensive COP30 Outcomes Report consolidating achievements across six axes and 30 key objectives. Across these axes, partners showcased tangible progress: a global coalition agreed to drive a $1 trillion investment plan to triple renewable capacity by 2030; more than 40 partners reported $9 billion invested for regenerative landscapes, reaching 12 million farmers across 110+ countries; and cities and regions representing 25,000 buildings and $400 billion in annual turnover cut 850,000 tonnes of CO_2 in 2024.

However, COP 30 also highlighted where global ambition lags behind what climate science demands. Scientists, including Brazilian scientist Carlos Nobre, issued stark warnings that fossil fuel use must fall to zero by 2040-2045 at the latest to avoid catastrophic temperature rises of up to 2.5°C by mid-century, which would spell near-total loss of coral reefs, collapse of the Amazon rainforest, and accelerated melt of Greenland ice sheets. The COP30 Outcomes Report itself acknowledges, for the first time in a COP text, that there is likely to be an "overshoot" of the 1.5°C target, with both the extent and duration of this overshoot needing to be "limited."

India's role at COP 30 exemplified its positioning as a leading voice for the Global South—advancing climate justice while demonstrating genuine progress on emissions reduction and clean energy deployment. By securing language favorable to diverse forest types, inserting safeguards into carbon markets, and relentlessly advocating for scaled-up adaptation finance, India shaped outcomes that reflect the needs and concerns of vulnerable nations. As the country prepares to host COP 33 in 2028—its second time after COP 8 in 2002—India's engagement at Belém has reinforced its credibility as a negotiator committed to translating global climate goals into equitable, locally-grounded action.