A Report of

Dialogue on Priorities for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation for Global South

A civil society perspective and narrative for COP 30

Oct 2025

Executive Summary

A Report of Dialogue on Priorities for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation for Global South - A Civil Society Perspective and Narratives for COP 30 (October 11–12, 2025)

Purpose and Context

In the run-up to COP30, to be held in Belém, Brazil, a coalition of Indian civil society organisations — YOJAK Center for Research and Strategic Planning for Sustainable Development, Paryavaran Sanrakshan Gatividhi (PSG), Indian Social Responsibility Network (ISRN), and AIPRIS – Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Policy Research and International Studies, MSU Baroda — convened a two-day **Pre-COP30 Virtual Dialogue on "Civil Society Narratives for Climate Resilience."**

This dialogue represents a continuation of the journey that began during **Bharat's G20 Presidency** and the **Civil20 (C20) LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) Working Group**, where Indian civil society first came together to articulate a value-based, community-driven approach to sustainability. Building on that foundation, the same networks and partner institutions have continued to nurture a **civilisation-centric framework for climate action**, grounded in India's ethos of harmony between ecology, economy, and ethics.

The consultation sought to articulate Bharat's civil society perspective ahead of global deliberations, building on the continuity from India's G20 and C20 processes. It aimed to help shape a shared lexicon, narrative, and ethical framework that reflects Bharat's civilisational worldview — one where *ecology, economy, and ethics are inseparable.*

Participation

Over 180 institutional representatives and 14 speakers participated from diverse sectors — community organisations, academia, policy institutions, and grassroots movements — covering the majority of Indian states and international observers.

The sessions were structured around four themes:
1. **Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE)**
2. **Practicing Biodiversity**
3. **Adaptation, Cooperation & Investments**
4. **Civil Society Narratives and Lexicon for COP30**

Core Message

The dialogue reaffirmed that **Bharat's sustainability vision is civilisation-centric**: development and conservation are complementary, not conflicting. It emphasised that India's climate narrative must be rooted in *Jeevan Drishti* — a worldview where humans are part of nature, not masters of it.

Speakers highlighted that while global discourse often focuses on carbon metrics and finance, Bharat brings to the table a philosophy of **duty, relationship, and reciprocity** — values that can help re-humanise climate negotiations.

Key Insights

1. Civilisation-Centric Sustainability
Participants agreed that Bharat's civilisational ethos — expressed through ideas like *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family) and *LiFE* (Lifestyle for Environment) — provides a moral and practical foundation for climate action. The focus should shift from rights to *responsibilities*, from exploitation to *reverence*, and from individual gain to *collective well-being*.

2. Community-Driven Adaptation and Cooperation
Grassroots examples — such as *Halma* water conservation in Jhabua, *Lift Irrigation Cooperatives* in Dahod, and *women's Self Help Group federations* in Maharashtra — demonstrated that communities are already building resilience through self-governance, cooperation, and traditional knowledge. Adaptation must thus be recognised as a **community-led movement**, not a top-down programme.

3. Integrating Traditional Wisdom and Modern Innovation
India's indigenous knowledge systems, from *Bhumi Suposhan* (soil nourishment) to *Devrai* (sacred groves), represent living sciences of sustainability. The dialogue urged that policy and research adopt a **co-creation approach** — blending scientific tools with inherited ecological wisdom rather than replacing it.

4. Reclaiming the Lexicon of Sustainability

Language emerged as a critical tool. Terms such as *Sewa* (service), *Halma* (a representative term for collective action), and *Kartavya* (duty) resonate deeply within society and convey climate ethics more effectively than technocratic jargon. Civil society must consciously use, share, and build such lexicon to shape the global narrative from the Global South.

Recommendations for Civil Society

Building on keynote reflections, participants outlined overarching principles for how Bharat's civil society should represent itself internationally:

- **Assert Bharat's distinct context** — there are no "settler–indigenous" divides; all citizens are native custodians of their ecosystems.

- **Anchor advocacy in statutory realities** — showcase India's pioneering laws such as PESA, the Forest Rights Act, PPVFR, and the Biological Diversity Act as models of government–society complementarity.

- **Frame arguments through duties as well as rights**, reflecting Bharat's ethical grammar.

- **Document, quantify, and communicate** community efforts as measurable adaptation outcomes.

- **Build South–South people-to-people solidarity**, linking nations that share civilisational ethics of coexistence.

These are not tactical steps but guiding principles to shape tone, vocabulary, and evidence when representing Bharat on international platforms.

Significance for COP30

The Belém COP — located in the Amazon, the lungs of the planet — will centre on adaptation, cooperation, and financing frameworks for resilience. The dialogue concluded that this is a historic opportunity for Bharat to contribute **not only technology and policy models but also a moral compass** for global climate governance.

By bringing together civil society, government partners, and research institutions, India can present a united narrative: that *ecological responsibility is a way of life, not a compliance measure.*

Emerging Civil Society Narratives

The deliberations across both days of the Pre-COP30 Virtual Dialogue converged on a unifying realization: **Bharat's civil society possesses a distinctive ecological worldview** — one that situates sustainability not merely as a policy goal but as a *way of life*. The dialogue reaffirmed that the strength of India's climate response lies in **its cultural memory, community institutions, and everyday ethics of restraint and reciprocity**.

Together, these ideas form the emerging narrative for Bharat's engagement with COP30 and beyond — a narrative rooted in *civilizational sustainability*, *collective adaptation*, *integration of wisdom systems*, and *reclamation of lexicon*.

1 Civilization-Centric Sustainability

At the heart of this dialogue was a shared recognition that *sustainability cannot be imported; it must be remembered.*

Speakers invoked India's **Jeevan Drishti** — the worldview that sees life (*Jeevan*) as a continuum between humans, nature, and the divine — where *Prakriti Mata* (Mother Nature) is a living entity, not a resource to be consumed.

This approach, often described as *civilization-centric sustainability*, contrasts with global frameworks driven largely by economics, technology, and mitigation metrics. The **C20 LiFE Working Group**'s policy articulation was repeatedly referenced as a foundation for this ethos: transforming environmental governance from a **"rights-based"** to a **"responsibility-based"** model, guided by compassion, gratitude, harmony, and decentralization.

The dialogue underscored that ancient values like *Sewa* (selfless service), *Sahabhagita* (collective participation), and *Samagra Vikas* (integral development) remain active social instruments. When invoked consciously, they transform climate action from an administrative task into an ethical commitment.

Contrary to popular perception, *Bharatiya Samaj still operates through its cultural connects, social networks, and reverence toward nature.* Rekindling these civilizational memories was seen not as nostalgia but as the **precursor of renewed climate consciousness**.

2 Community-Driven Adaptation and Cooperation

The second strand of the narrative emerged from case experiences shared by speakers across states — demonstrating that **adaptation in India is inherently community-led.**

From Sadguru Foundation's *Lift Irrigation Cooperatives* and Chaitanya's *women's federations* to Subhiksha's farmer collectives, the message was consistent: **resilience is social before it is technological.**

These models showcased the power of *Sahakar se Samriddhi* (prosperity through cooperation) in bridging ecological restoration with livelihood dignity.

Participants urged that such efforts, though often treated as "pockets of success," must be documented and quantified. Their collective scale — measured through federations, community corpus funds, and natural-resource assets — already represents **a substantial part of India's adaptation economy.**

The cooperative approach, as discussed during Day 2, is not merely an economic model but a democratic mechanism where **the farmer becomes both the protector of soil and the provider of health.**

Civil society organizations were thus identified as catalysts for linking these decentralized systems with national and international climate frameworks, ensuring that *adaptation finance* recognizes and rewards community stewardship.

3 Integrating Traditional Ecological Wisdom with Modern Innovation

A third pillar of the narrative addressed the integration of **traditional ecological knowledge and modern scientific approaches**.

Speakers across sessions — from *LiFE* to *Biodiversity* and *Adaptation* — emphasized that India's indigenous knowledge is not antiquated; it is adaptive, empirical, and constantly evolving.

Examples such as Jhabua's *Halma* tradition, Rajasthan's *Orans* and *Devrais*, Dahod's water cooperatives, and the *Bhumi Suposhan* movement illustrate that **community-based regeneration and natural resource management are science in practice.**

The dialogue rejected the dichotomy between traditional and modern — instead proposing **co-creation** as the path forward.
Innovations such as solar-powered irrigation, decentralized seed banks, and agro-ecological mapping are most effective when built upon inherited systems of *Van Samvardhan* (forest stewardship) and *Jal Sanrakshan* (water conservation).

4 Reclaiming the Lexicon of Development and Sustainability

Perhaps the most distinctive consensus of the dialogue was the call to **reclaim the language of sustainability**.
Civil society leaders noted that international climate discourse often depends on a vocabulary that alienates the very communities who live closest to nature. Terms like *net zero*, *carbon credit*, and *offset* hold little resonance in rural Bharat; instead, words like *Sewa* (service), *Halma* (collective action), *Sahaj Jeevan* (simple living), and *Samvedana* (empathy) evoke genuine moral connection.

India's civilizational lexicon already provides a complete grammar of ecological responsibility — from *Bhumi Suposhan* (nourishing the Earth) to *Sumangalam* (universal well-being).
Reclaiming these terms and integrating them into contemporary climate communication is not semantic — it is strategic. It creates emotional ownership among citizens and reframes sustainability as *a shared journey, not a technical compliance.*

The dialogue therefore urged that India's civil society, when engaging in COP30 and other multilateral forums, present **its own linguistic framework** — one that expresses development through *Bharatiya Jeevan Drishti* (Bharat's Vision of Life), manifested on-ground as *Bharatiya Shashwat Jeewan Shaili* (Bharat's Sustainable Lifestyle).
Such an articulation would allow Bharat and the wider Global South to contribute not just solutions but **meaning — a language of unity, duty, and interconnectedness** that global governance urgently needs.

Recommendations for Civil Society (principles for representing Bharat at COP30 and similar fora)

1. **Assert Bharat's contextual distinctness clearly and consistently**
   When speaking on global platforms, represent the Indian reality: there is no clear "settler–indigenous" binary here — people across Bharat are rooted in their lands and traditions. Frame arguments with this premise so external misconceptions are pre-empted.
   Implication for COP: open with a short, evidence-based statement about India's social structure and customary systems when discussing indigenous/land-custody topics.

2. **Base public positions on statutory and institutional realities**
   Anchor civil society messages in India's legal architecture (examples: PESA 1996, Protection of Plant Varieties & Farmers' Rights Act 2001, Biological Diversity Act 2002, Forest Rights Act 2006). Use these domestically-legitimized instruments to show that India already recognizes community custodianship.
   Implication for COP: cite specific laws and institutional mechanisms when asserting India's approach to community rights and biodiversity governance.

3. **Frame the discourse as duty-based (kartavya) alongside rights-based claims**
   Emphasize the civilizational grammar of responsibility — *sewa*, *sahabhagita*, duty to *Prakriti* — as a complement to the right language. This reframes climate action as ethical stewardship, not only legal entitlement.
   Implication for COP: pair any rights claim with a responsibility narrative to communicate India's moral framing of environment and commons.

4. **Prioritize documentation and quantification of community efforts**
   Treat local "pockets of practice" as data points for national scale: document, quantify, and present aggregated evidence (area under community management, number of federations/cooperatives, corpus funds, households covered). Numbers strengthen the claim that community adaptation is a substantive, scalable response.
   Implication for COP: carry concise, aggregated metrics alongside case examples to demonstrate scale and replicability.

5. **Use and promote a culturally resonant lexicon**
   Deliberately employ Bharatiya terms that carry ethical and practical resonance — e.g., *Sewa*, *Halma*, *Mata Van*, *Bhumi Suposhan*, *Panchkoshiy Vikas* — while supplying succinct translations. Language shapes legitimacy; using home-grown terms builds emotional and moral connection for Indian delegations and Global South partners.
   Implication for COP: prepare a short glossary of core Bharat lexicon to be used by spokespeople and in briefs.

6. **Make co-creation (not substitution) the default claim about knowledge systems**
   Present indigenous/traditional knowledge as adaptive and empirical; propose *co-creation* with science (local knowledge + modern tools), not replacement. This counters the dichotomy, bridges epistemologies and demonstrates methodological robustness.
   Implication for COP: stress examples where traditional practice + scientific tools delivered measurable resilience benefits.

7. **Demonstrate government–society complementarity**
   Communicate that in India, government policy and civil society are frequently complementary: laws, schemes, and institutional mechanisms have evolved in response to social movements. This undermines narratives that pit civil society versus government.
   Implication for COP: where relevant, name government schemes that scale or enable community work (e.g., PM Kusum, natural-farming incentives, biodiversity management committees, PMKSY Watershed).

8. **Advocate for adaptation finance and recognition that fit community realities**
   Insist that global finance modalities (adaptation funds, carbon/integrity frameworks) recognize community conservation and locally-rooted assets as legitimate adaptation/mitigation outcomes — using India's own metrics and standards where needed.
   Implication for COP: propose measurement approaches that accommodate customary systems and community-led assets.

9. **Position Bharat as a convenor for Global South, people-to-people solidarity**
   Use COP participation to build South–South solidarities based on shared civilizational ethics of stewardship. Advocate for creating a common lexicon and platform that links communities across the Global South.
   Implication for COP: proactively seek and propose joint interventions with delegations from Africa, Latin America, and Asia that foreground cultural and community models.

10. **Commit to long-view, generational narratives rather than short electoral cycles**
    Stress that the transformations required (soil health, water regimes, natural farming, community governance) are multi-decadal. Frame civil society asks of national and international actors as long-term investments in social–ecological systems.
    Implication for COP: present multi-year outcome expectations and emphasize continuity of civic engagement rather than one-off projects.

11. **Develop and present an Indian narrative platform (year-round, not only pre-COP)**
    Build a sustained, year-round platform for storing case studies, standardizing the Bharat lexicon, coordinating pre-COP messaging, and preparing spokespeople — so messages at global fora are coherent, evidenced, and representative.
    Implication for COP: propose a consolidated "Bharat civil society platform" as part of pre-COP submissions and side-event coordination.

12. **Encourage research, synthesis and peer review of Bharat's living practices**
    Invest in accessible, peer-reviewed syntheses (including student and academic engagement) that translate lived practice into research-grade evidence. This helps convert moral and cultural claims into empirically credible narratives.
    Implication for COP: accompany policy positions with short research briefs or annotated bibliographies for diplomats and negotiators.

Closing Note

These recommendations emerge from the collective reflection of Bharat's civil society during the dialogue. They capture the shared understanding of how Indian experiences, values, and knowledge systems can be articulated on international platforms — consistently, credibly, and in harmony with Bharat's cultural and ethical worldview. Rather than prescribing action, they express the spirit with which civil society envisions presenting its voice: one that is both morally grounded and technically robust, rooted in lived practice and collective conviction.