Policy Brief

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Closing the Adaptation Gap: Finance, Metrics and Inclusion after COP30

How targeted finance, measurable indicators and inclusive governance can accelerate global adaptation and resilience goals

- **Global progress on adaptation remains slow** due to unpredictable finance, missing indicators, and fragmented leadership.
- **COP 30 exposed widening gaps in trust, participation, and implementation**, especially after the U.S. withdrawal.
- **A clear adaptation finance floor is needed** to better align climate finance with the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA).
- **Parties need to scale up nature-based solutions** through targeted, long-term investment prioritizing water security, urban heat management, coastal protection, and ecosystem restoration.
- **Negotiators must adopt a concise set of indicators** to operationalize the GGA metrics by 2026.
- **Negotiations need to integrate Indigenous knowledge** into the GGA framework and establish Indigenous-led adaptation finance solutions.

What's the issue?

Climate adaptation refers to actions that reduce vulnerability and strengthen resilience from climate-related disasters. The Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), established under Article 7 of the Paris Agreement, seeks to enhance adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience, and reduce vulnerability to climate change. This contributes to sustainable development and ensuring an adequate adaptation response in the context of the 1.5 °C goal.

Since its formal adoption at COP28 in Dubai, the GGA has provided framework for collective progress on adaptation across key systems. This includes water, food, health, ecosystems, infrastructure, and poverty reduction (UNFCCC, 2023). However, while the goal is clearly defined, the operational framework and measurable targets needed to implement it remain incomplete. Global adaptation finance continues to be a slow process, representing less than one-third of total climate finance flows (OECD, 2025). The absence of clear metrics, timelines, and consistent data collection makes it difficult to assess progress on resilience outcomes. The adaptation gap will continue widening without stronger systems for tracking financing and implementing adaptations.

Source: United Nations Environment Programme (2024). Adaptation Gap Report 2024

What are the challenges?

Despite growing recognition of the need for climate adaptation, progress toward resilience remains slow and uneven. The lack of a defined adaptation finance floor or standardized reporting framework limits transparency and accountability under the Global Goal on Adaptation (UNFCCC, 2025).

Meanwhile, gaps in data and metrics make it difficult to measure real-world outcomes. This is because countries often track inputs such as spending, or project counts rather than resilience impacts (UNEP, 2025). This weakens global accountability and slows learning across national adaptation plans.

Infrastructure and ecosystem investments also remain insufficient. Rapid urbanization, extreme heat, and water scarcity are increasing vulnerability, while many developing nations lack the capacity to integrate nature-based solutions into adaptation planning. Finally, loss and damage finance mechanisms are still under negotiation, leaving climate vulnerable countries without reliable support to recover from catastrophic events.

Without clear indicators and timely finance, communities face rising losses from floods, droughts, and heat extremes, especially in regions with weak infrastructure and limited technical capacity. Failing to close the adaptation gap increases disaster losses, pushes communities into poverty, and erodes development gains.

What Happened at COP30?

COP30 in Belém unfolded under historically unusual circumstances. Most notably, the absence of an official United States delegation after its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. This lack of representation was viewed as a significant setback for collective climate governance.

The United States is the second largest greenhouse gas emitter, and has traditionally played a critical role in shaping global climate finance. This US withdrawal from Paris caused major disruption to the collective climate finance and adaptation negotiations and deepened the funding and trust gap. The US absence heightened uncertainty around the delivery of Article 9 commitments and weakened confidence in predictable support for adaptation (Earth.org, 2025). This concern was echoed in several presidency debriefings. Negotiators described growing fatigue over repeated delays in implementing finance obligations.

COP 30 was also marked by unprecedented Indigenous participation, with five thousand in attendance and nine hundred with access to the conference. Yet only [illegible] of Indigenous Brazilians present had access to formal negotiation spaces. This discrepancy was highlighted further by the 1,600 fossil fuel lobbyists having access to negotiations. Protests occurred during the first week of COP30. Indigenous participants forced entry into the venue in response to the exclusion and slow progress on land rights and adaptation finance. This underscored the urgency of integrating Indigenous knowledge and leadership into adaptation governance. These events validated the earlier observation that adaptation progress remains hindered by limited participation and weak mechanisms for clear indicators.

Side events throughout COP30 further highlighted gaps in adaptation progress. Multiple sessions focused on resilient transitions, nature-based solutions, and community-led adaptation. In a side event with the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) the importance of ancestral knowledge was emphasized. Nature-based adaptation was repeatedly described as cost-effective and locally accepted. Nature-based solutions continue to remain underfunded relative to mitigation-focused or infrastructure-focused approaches. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) have shared findings that ecosystem-based adaptation is vital for long-term resilience.

Geopolitical shifts were also apparent at COP30, with China increasingly positioned to fill the leadership void caused by the US's exit. Chinese delegates stated that adaptation finance discussions were "no longer negotiating but enabling". In a press conference debriefing the effects of the withdrawal without the US, it was clear that other countries were concerned about a lack of US accountability. Africa delegates were frustrated but also prepared to step into a leadership role. These dynamics only reinforced the already present challenge; fragmented leadership and uncertainty about long-term finance commitments is continuing to stall progress. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse was the sole U.S. federal official present. He addressed the absence of representation and labelled the stance of the US as a product of influence from the fossil-fuel industry. His message was repeated that polarization is artificial. This echoed the uncertainty of finance commitments without U.S. participation. Long-term global trust in climate cooperation risks further erosion.

Limited advancement on the development of adaptation indicators for the GGA was made. Although Parties did reaffirm the 2026 deadline, negotiations only produced a draft structure, without a full set of adopted metrics. Disagreements are ongoing over how to measure resilience. This includes how to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and nature-based solutions into the indicator framework (UNFCCC 2025). COP30 revealed that without predictable finance, inclusive governance, strong metrics, and meaningful Indigenous participation, global adaptation efforts will continue to fall short of the aims established under the GGA.

2) Integrate Indigenous knowledge into the GGA indicator framework by 2026

As Parties finalize adaptation indicators, Indigenous knowledge must be incorporated to ensure measures reflect culturally grounded resilience. A co-designed indicator framework would improve relevance, equity, and legitimacy while directly addressing COP 30 concerns about limited Indigenous representation and the marginalization of their expertise.

3) Create a dedicated Indigenous-led adaptation finance window

Indigenous Peoples steward ecosystems vital to global resilience yet receive less than one percent of climate finance. A directly accessible, Indigenous-led finance window would ensure resources reach communities without intermediaries that often redirect or delay funding. This approach would strengthen trust, improve adaptation outcomes, and advance key GGA objectives, including ecosystem resilience, food and water security, culturally grounded governance, and nature-based solutions.

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