

From ancestral water systems to heritage-led adaptation: Four champions celebrated for their climate leadership at COP30

Winners of the 2025 Local Adaptation Champions Awards featured innovative adaptation initiatives empowering communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

BELÉM, BRAZIL, November 10, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Four winners of the [2025 Local Adaptation Champions Awards](#), organized by the Global Center on Adaptation (GCA) with support from the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, have been announced at an awards ceremony at the COP30 climate summit in Belém, Brazil.



AJSA India, a non-profit organization from the Indian state of Odisha, received the award for the Women's Livelihoods category, for working with thousands of tribal women farmers. (Credit: AJSA India)

The Awards reward exemplary locally led efforts to address climate change impacts and build effective resilience. Applications were submitted across four categories: Citizen Science, Health, Nature-based Solutions and Women's Livelihoods. Each of the four winners received €15,000 to invest in future activities and will benefit from sponsorship by the [Adaptation Fund](#).

"Today we celebrate those who lead every day on the frontlines of climate change. The Local Adaptation Champions are setting the global standard for resilience, showing that when local actors are empowered, adaptation delivers real, lasting results. The international community must now do its part — not by prescribing solutions, but by partnering with and investing in these local leaders who are transforming climate action from the ground up," said Professor Patrick V. Verkooijen, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Global Center on Adaptation.

The winners were selected from a shortlist of 20 outstanding projects. They showcase the power and reach of locally led action, rising to meet the urgent challenges of climate change just when the world needs it most.

Preserving Legacies, a global organization working in 35 countries, received the award in the



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President and CEO of GCA*

Citizen Science category, for their worldwide movement that empowers communities to harness the wisdom of their heritage to adapt, thrive, and inspire hope in the face of climate change.

Preserving Legacies unites communities across the world in a shared mission: to protect the places, traditions, and knowledge that hold the keys to our collective resilience. By blending ancestral wisdom with cutting-edge science, local custodians are transforming heritage into a living force for climate action—from safeguarding earthen tower houses in West Africa to restoring sacred landscapes in the

Himalayas. The initiative brings together the voices of elders, youth, women, and artisans, ensuring adaptation is guided by the values and identities that define each community. Together, these custodians are proving that our past is not a burden to be preserved—it is a source of strength to build a more resilient future. With each site that joins, Preserving Legacies grows into a global network of hope, unity, and renewal.

Dr. Salma Sabour, Director of Science for Preserving Legacies, stated, “Preserving Legacies has always been locally- and community-driven, shaped with and for the people it serves. From the very beginning, the initiative was built around the leadership of ‘heritage custodians’—those who live, protect, and carry forward the cultural and natural heritage of their communities. By positioning heritage as a foundation for climate action, Preserving Legacies strengthens communities, encourages intergenerational learning, and supports sustainable, culturally relevant adaptation.”

A Kenyan community-based organization, Foundation for Tomorrow (F4T), won the award in the Health category, for their Climate-Responsive Inclusive Health and Psychosocial Support Initiative that empowers Nairobi’s informal settlements to lead their own climate resilience, transforming vulnerability into collective strength and hope.

In the heart of Nairobi’s informal settlements, F4T is proving that the most powerful solutions come from within the community. Their initiative brings healthcare, trauma support, and emergency preparedness directly to families most affected by climate shocks. The program trains local leaders, supports caregivers, and creates safe spaces for healing and dialogue, while putting women, youth, and persons with disabilities at the center of every decision. What began as small circles of support has grown into a movement of resilience, where neighbors care for one another and communities no longer feel invisible. Together, they are not just surviving climate change—they are rewriting the story of what it means to thrive in the face of crisis.

“The initiative is explicitly designed to dismantle barriers to healthcare access by decentralizing services, leveraging local knowledge, and addressing stigma around both disability and mental

health. Our initiative doesn't just respond to climate impacts. It prepares people to face them, transforms local capacities to manage them, and ensures no one is left behind. Resilience, in our model, is both a collective process and a lived experience rooted in local knowledge, equity, and community ownership." said George Kakala, Executive Director of F4T.

Aquafondo, a non-profit organization and the first water fund in Peru, was chosen as the winner in the Nature-based Solutions category, for their initiative with local communities to revive ancient Andean water systems, proving that ancestral wisdom can secure a resilient, water-abundant future for Lima and beyond.

In the high Andes, where generations once learned to "sow water," Aquafondo is breathing new life into ancestral engineering to confront Peru's growing water crisis. Through restored amunas, qochas, and wetlands, thousands of rural residents are working hand in hand with urban partners to replenish groundwater, stabilize soils, and revive ecosystems. This powerful alliance blends traditional knowledge with modern tools, uniting local communities in shared stewardship of water. As rivers flow stronger and communities grow more resilient, their work proves the value of tapping into local ancestral wisdom. By restoring the art of sowing water, they are ensuring that future generations can thrive.

"We have strengthened our unity, our identity, and our capacity to adapt without losing our roots. This is not only a nature-based solution. It is a solution grounded in memory, dignity, and the leadership of our communities. One that confronts inequality, builds lasting capacities, adapts and evolves, and responds with transparency and shared responsibility," said Mariella Sánchez, Executive Director of Aquafondo. "We envision our initiative as a living, scalable model that weaves together climate justice, ecological restoration, and community empowerment."

AJSA India, a non-profit organization from the Indian state of Odisha, received the award for the Women's Livelihoods category, for working with thousands of tribal women farmers to transform the once drought-stricken region of Kalahandi into a beacon of women-led climate resilience, powered by solidarity, innovation, and self-determination.

Once known for drought and hardship, Kalahandi is now witnessing a quiet transformation led by its women farmers. Through AJSA India's initiative, over 5,500 tribal women have organized into producer groups and a company, taking charge of farming, markets, and decision-making in their communities. They coordinate crop cycles, practice sustainable agriculture, and run their own fleet of electric "Green Express" carts to reach markets efficiently. Beyond improving harvests and income, this work has shifted local power dynamics, giving women real influence in households, villages, and local governance. Their efforts demonstrate how practical solutions, collective organization, and local leadership can build resilience in the face of climate challenges.

Manoranjan Behera, Executive Director for AJSA India said, "The initiative strengthens women's economic empowerment and climate resilience through a transformative, locally led model of

women-led agriculture production—tackling both gendered socio-economic inequality and climate stressors in one of India’s most climate-vulnerable regions. Today, many women who once had no say in their households are now board members, market negotiators, and community trainers. This model has not only increased household incomes and reduced vulnerability but also shifted social norms. It is positioning women as the architects of climate resilience.”

The Award winners were selected by a prestigious judging panel, comprising:

- Ban Ki-moon, 8th Secretary-General of the United Nations and Honorary Chair of the Global Center on Adaptation
- Janja Lula da Silva, First Lady of Brazil
- Baroness Chapman of Darlington, Minister for International Development and Africa, United Kingdom
- Åsmund Grøver Aukrust, Minister of International Development, Norway
- Nardos Bekele-Thomas, CEO of Africa Union Development Agency-New Partnerships for Africa’s Development (AUDA-NEPAD)
- Professor Patrick V. Verkooijen, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Global Center on Adaptation

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