

Kenyan Pre-COP30 Dialogue Highlights the Role of Faith Actors in Tackling Climate Change: Adding Ethical Value to Climate Discussions

A Submission to the Global Ethical Stocktake for COP30

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Organization leading the Dialogue: OikoDiplomatique

Partner organizations involved in this Dialogue: Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi

City: Nairobi

State: Nairobi

Country: Kenya

Number of people participating in this dialogue: A total of 83 participants took part in the dialogue, both in person and online, representing diverse regions, the majority from Kenya, and others from Switzerland, Germany, Brazil, India, the United States, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Lebanon, Sudan, Ghana, Somalia, Australia, and Canada.

Photos of the event/dialogue gathering: See attached below.

Question 4: What traditions, histories, or practices (cultural or spiritual) from your community teach us to live in greater harmony with nature?

OikoDiplomatique's self organized Dialogue event reports the following answers from the participants:

Kenyan communities draw climate wisdom from faith traditions and custodian cultures. Participants at our Pre-COP30 Dialogue shared about practices that embed restoration, reverence, and restraint in everyday life. Ambari Seda - a leader of the indigenous Rabai group of the Mijikenda based at Kenya's Coast (Rabai, Mijikenda) shared that "we must respect all living things and Mother Earth. In subduing the Earth, we are charged to restore it physically and spiritually."

From the coastal Kayas, sacred forests protected by the Mijikenda, to the Kilumi rain dances of Ukambani, spirituality and ecology are intertwined. Seda reminded the gathering that some landscapes are not merely ecological assets but mountains of worship or wells of thanksgiving, where human interference breaks sacred order: "When a developer turned a wellspring into a project, its waters turned red and lost their value because it was a place of worship." These memories warn that when development ignores spiritual value, even nature itself seems to protest.

In Ukambani, communities still perform the Kilumi dance to seek rain and renewal. A participant explained that it is "a way for people to reconcile themselves with creation and with each other." Others recalled ancient beliefs such as that of Kathambi, a goddess thought to guard water sources, reminding people that water must be approached with reverence. In the same region, families practise small-scale engineering to preserve soil "we fill sand into sacks and place them on the riverbanks to stop erosion" simple, enduring methods of climate adaptation.

Spirituality extends to the household. “Kambas are also prayerful,” one woman said. “At home and in church we pray for rain, for food, for our crops and animals.” Such prayer is seen as both worship and weather stewardship.

Across christian, muslim, hindu and african traditional faiths, participants affirmed that “the earth is our common home and we should live in harmony with all living things.” They spoke of moral teachings that shape daily practice: “Cleanliness is godliness; this should guide how we manage waste.” A middle-aged participant reflected, “While growing up in the 1980s, our parents taught us to respect natural resources. If you cut one tree, plant three.” That rule, taught at the family hearth, has become a generational contract of regeneration.

Several contributors linked stewardship to eternal duty. “When a person dies,” one said, “their deeds end except three, continuous charity such as tree planting, knowledge that benefits others, and a good child who prays for them.” Planting trees therefore becomes an act of faith that outlives the planter.

Participants from the Ilchamus and Kikuyu communities emphasised taboos that once safeguarded ecosystems. “Elders taught that certain trees carry blessings; cutting them brings a curse,” said one. Another added, “In our Kikuyu faith, nature was never separate from God, some groves were His dwelling places.”

A youth reminded the room that these beliefs converge with Scripture: “Our faith teaches us that the Earth is not ours to exploit, it is God’s creation entrusted to our care. Climate action is not political; it is spiritual obedience.” Many cited Genesis 1–2 and Psalm 24, “The Earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it,” to underline that creation care is an act of discipleship, not ideology.

One participant looked to the Kenyan national anthem for guidance, calling it a collective prayer for balance:

“O God of all creation, bless this our world, one nation... May we dwell in unity, peace and liberty; plenty be found across all borders.”

He suggested these lyrics could stand as a universal anthem of harmony between people and planet.

Throughout the discussion, participants agreed that nature is a way of connecting to God, and to harm it is to offend the Creator. Their testimonies revealed an unbroken thread of custodianship: traditional rituals, household practices, and scriptural teachings that all call for humility before creation.

Faith communities continue to live out this calling today, opening sanctuaries during floods, providing food in droughts, leading tree-planting as acts of prayer, and educating children in ecological ethics. These living traditions show that caring for nature is not only technical work but sacred work, linking generations through gratitude and responsibility.

As the world prepares for COP30, these testimonies call for recognition of local custodianship and cultural rights, and for integration of faith-based ecological knowledge into restoration finance, adaptation planning, and just-transition frameworks. They remind

negotiators that in Kenya, and across the world, environmental care begins where spirituality, memory, and livelihood meet.

Question 5: Considering that we need to guarantee diversity in the collective, how can we mobilize more people, leaders, corporations, companies, and nations to support just and ethical changes in combating the climate crisis? What ideas and values could inspire us in this mission?

Participants at the Kenyan Pre-COP30 Dialogue agreed that true mobilisation for just and ethical climate action begins with embracing diversity as strength. As one participant observed, “We are diverse... our thinking does not always synchronise. As academia, community groups, and religious bodies, we should be meeting people where they are, in their lecture rooms, in their religious grounds, and in their local communities. Everybody is a teacher and everybody is a learner.”

This philosophy of co-creation and lifelong learning reflects the Ubuntu ethic “I am because we are.” Participants said that inclusion across faiths, ages, and sectors can make the collective wiser and more resilient. Diversity, they noted, should not divide but deepen understanding, allowing multiple worldviews to co-design climate responses rooted in shared moral ground.

From churches and mosques to indigenous Kayas and classrooms, the call was clear: appeal to values that unite across cultures, faiths, and backgrounds, justice, peace, stewardship, compassion, and trustworthiness. “Our diversity in religion and spirituality teaches us these values,” one participant said. “They are our tools to confront injustice, conflict, and environmental degradation.”

Participants proposed that mobilisation must begin with the heart, appealing to moral and emotional resonance before policy. “Charity begins at home,” one said. “You cannot give what you don’t have. Let’s teach our children to respect and embrace Mother Nature — to plant trees and care for life.” Faith leaders were urged to take the lead in preaching this “gospel of ecological conversion,” transforming awareness into daily action through sermons, schools, and storytelling.

Stories and lived experiences were identified as powerful connectors. Linking the global crisis to everyday realities, food, health, and livelihoods, makes the crisis personal and urgent. “Faith and culture can reach the conscience of people more than policy can,” a participant said. “Faith leaders have the credibility to bridge moral conviction with government responsibility and business influence.”

To widen engagement, participants proposed:

Organising interfaith campaigns and sermons on creation care, with climate messages broadcast on radio, television, and WhatsApp, channels already trusted by local communities.

Intergenerational learning, where elders, youth, and children learn together about restoration and stewardship.

Green job creation platforms and innovation challenges to align climate responsibility with livelihood opportunities.

Co-creation of solutions with communities, not for them, turning participation into ownership.

Public–private partnerships that tie corporate sponsorships to indigenous-led restoration, ESG metrics, and women-led innovation.

Collaboration across sectors faith, academia, private industry, and government, as an avenue for shared responsibility.

Participants also called for trust and accountability to be restored as foundations of climate cooperation. “Trust should be the basis for all social interaction,” one said. “When governments fail to live by commitments, it breaks hope. Re-establishing trust must be part of the solution to global warming.”

Economic and governance reforms were also suggested:

Using economic diplomacy tools such as debt-for-nature swaps and technology transfers to low-income nations.

Ensuring Loss and Damage funds are distributed through diverse oversight boards that include youth, women, and indigenous representatives.

Re-shaping international forums to expand representation “let UN voting include youth and indigenous voices for real diversity.”

Encouraging corporations to adopt transparent supply-chain audits and equitable hiring, with incentives like tax breaks for women-led green tech firms.

Faith actors were recognised as powerful bridges between spiritual values and environmental action. They can connect values, livelihoods, and policy influence, transforming belief into collective resilience. “The best way to mobilise,” one participant said, “is to start with what we believe, where we live, and who we already trust.”

Finally, the need to inspire hope and possibility, was highlighted. People act when they believe change is achievable. In the words of a youth participant: “Solidarity means protecting those who cannot protect themselves. If we keep hope alive, justice and stewardship will follow.”

Mobilizing through empathy and evidence, that links policy with prayer, and that rebuilds trust through action. In this shared calling, diversity becomes the source of unity, and ethical transformation becomes the measure of progress.

Kenyan Pre-COP30 Dialogue Highlights the Role of Faith Actors in Tackling Climate Change: Adding Ethical Value to Climate Discussions

A report by Carolyne Bii, Alan Channer and Nkatha Kobia

On 22 October, OikoDiplomatique, in collaboration with the University of Nairobi's Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, convened the Kenya Pre-COP30 Dialogue entitled "Empowering Faith Actors to Strengthen Climate Resilience in Kenya."

The hybrid event brought together 83 participants, comprising faith leaders, scientists, academics, negotiators, grassroots actors, and students from around the world, to explore how faith perspectives can strengthen ethical and community-based approaches to climate resilience.

The Dialogue went beyond amplifying the voices of faith actors and excluded groups. It created a shared space for intercultural and interfaith exchange, examined the impacts of global climate processes on local communities, and explored actionable pathways for just and sustainable climate action in Kenya and beyond.

The event opened with prayers from representatives of Christian, Muslim and African Traditional faiths.

OikoDiplomatique Co-Director Nkatha Kobia noted that the deliberations of the Dialogue - with input from participants both in the auditorium and online - would inform the Global Ethical Stocktake of the COP30 Presidency. She highlighted the importance of a multi-sectoral approach to climate resilience appreciating the dialogue's inclusion of faith actors academia, science and research, county government and global experts.

Co-Director Dr Alan Channer pointed out that Kenya has already taken a lead in climate action. "Over 80% of Kenya's electricity comes from renewable sources, compared to less than 25% in the United States," he noted. He observed that the opening lines of Kenya's national anthem - "Oh God of all Creation, bless this land and nation" - impart a clue as to why Kenya has already taken a global lead in faith-inspired climate action.

Dr. Patrick Nyabul, Chair of the University of Nairobi's Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, affirmed the relevance of a faith-based approach towards land restoration to address climate change. He highlighted collaboration between academia and faith communities as a convergence of faith and reason that fosters ethical reflection, shared learning, and collective action for climate resilience and sustainable development.

Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, Chair of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission of Kenya and former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, in delivering the keynote, framed the gathering as part of an ecumenical legacy linking faith to environmental stewardship. He emphasised that humanity is called to heed the "divine imperative" to preserve the integrity of God's creation, and that deep collaborative action is now critically important.

Direct, sometimes radical interventions, characterised the dialogue.

Brother Rodrigo Peret OFM, a Brazilian Franciscan, environmental activist and contributor to the upcoming “Peoples’ Summit” running in parallel to COP30, issued a challenge to market-led, technocratic fixes: “Commodifying forests and carbon can replace their spiritual value and be part of a global project of domination,” he said. He noted that the so-called Green Transition felt like “business as usual” to many indigenous communities in Brazil, with rare earth mining, driven by the demand for renewable technologies, now expanding into their territories. He urged faith actors to expose so-called “solutions” that dispossess custodial communities.

On the scientific front, Dr. Dennis Garrity, Founder of the Global Evergreening Alliance and Chair of the Healthy Planet Action Coalition, argued for an expanded restoration agenda. Highlighting that the 1.5 degree target of the Paris Agreement is now “dead”, he urged that we must not only “rapidly pull vast quantities of carbon back down to Earth through large-scale reforestation and soil restoration,” we must also urgently consider “lowering planetary albedo through solar radiation management,” if we are to have any prospect of addressing runaway heating.

A livelihood-centered case for restoration was made by Dr. Martin Frick, Director of Global Operations at the World Food Programme in Berlin. “Restoring degraded land puts people to work, creates agricultural production and sinks carbon,” he maintained. Frick emphasised that smallholders, notably women farmers, can deliver measurable climate and food security benefits when they are supported with finance and technical help.

Frederick Ouma, from Kenya’s Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry, and a member of the Africa Group of Negotiators, reminded participants of the political realities of multilateral talks and the important role that non-state actors play in them. Ouma, who will be negotiating at COP30 on behalf of Kenya, said that “faith observers are needed in COP processes to ensure negotiations remain tethered to public interest and moral responsibility.”

Local government and grassroots voices made a strong operational case for faith engagement. Grace Ojiayo, Special Technical Assistant to the Minister for Mobility and Works of Nairobi City County, described how faith institutions function across the disaster-risk reduction cycle: “Faith actors are often the first to open their doors, turning sanctuaries into shelters and their kitchens into food banks.” Ojiayo recommended creating formal links between faith institutions and county emergency operations, for faster, community-trusted response and recovery to climate disaster impacts.

Rev Jane Jilani, co-founder of the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics, and youth leader Mariam Abdirashid, founder of Roots of Hope CBO in Malkadaha, Isiolo County, provided vivid, local evidence of faith-led climate resilience. Rev. Jilani shared accounts of coastal women working to restore mangrove forests while facing barriers to land ownership and safe resource use. She told of widows displaced from their homes, fisherfolk falling ill while researchers nearby hold unshared health data, and local communities excluded from decisions on conservation. She called for closer collaboration between scientists and faith actors to make research accessible, inform local action, and ensure that restoration efforts include and benefit those most affected. Abdirashid recounted how she mobilised an imam, parents and students to secure 400 tree seedlings from the Kenya Forestry Service for a school re-greening project. “One tree is not enough for the hope we need,” she said,

demonstrating how youth initiative in combination with faith leadership can yield quick, visible restoration.

Athena Peralta, Director of the Commission on Climate Justice and Sustainable Development at the World Council of Churches (WCC) invited collaboration with WCC programmes: “Join the Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action,” she said. Peralta called on faith communities to advance debt justice, in this jubilee year, through the “Turn Debt into Hope” campaign so that climate-vulnerable nations can invest in resilience rather than debt service.

The Dialogue facilitated a rich exchange of perspectives and experiences from those online and in the room. Results from a mentimeter poll shared with participants showed an overwhelming call for ‘change’ - change in attitudes, systems and in developing shared responsibility for creation. Together, participants expressed a commitment to translate spiritual and ethical teachings into practical climate solutions, ensuring that Kenya’s faith voices contribute meaningfully to national and global climate action. They also addressed two key areas for the Global Ethical Stocktake: the cultural and spiritual practices that teach us to live in greater harmony with nature, and how a wider range of stakeholders can be mobilised to support just and ethical changes in combatting the climate crisis.

Key recommendations emerging from the dialogue were as follows:

- Advocate for systemic reforms: debt relief, reformed climate finance, and fiscal space for vulnerable countries to pursue just transitions.
- Encourage faith actors to support multilateral processes that determine globally agreed and nationally implemented climate actions and policies.
- Mobilise faith institutions as formal partners in county and national disaster risk reduction and climate planning. Faith actors can map vulnerable people, host early-warning drills and anchor long-term recovery.
- Prioritize land restoration approaches that center local custodianship, indigenous spiritual frameworks and equitable benefit sharing, assuring “free, prior and informed consent” by local communities and eliminating dispossession.
- Strengthen ethical standards and safeguards to ensure carbon finance benefits frontline communities and protects land and cultural rights.
- Scale “youth+faith” restoration and sustainable development pilots (with seedlings, renewable energy technologies, training, digital measurement tools etc) with clear “livelihood+environment+climate” benefits.

By informing the Global Ethical Stocktake under the COP30 Presidency, these recommendations and other key insights from the Dialogue will be channeled into the global conversation on ethics, resilience and climate action.

Athena Peralta affirmed the readiness of the World Council of Churches to amplify the priorities identified during the Dialogue, emphasising that faith communities in Kenya and across the world possess the moral authority, deep networks and local trust that make them go to actors in building climate resilience.

The Dialogue closed with inter-faith prayers and the Kenyan national anthem.





UoN | Chandaria Hall



Dennis Garrity



Fredrick Ouma



Martin Frick





