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INTERVIEW

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“Brazil needs the future as an ally: we must have the courage to forge alliances with it”

IZABELLA TEIXEIRA

Izabella Teixeira is a biologist by training, holds a Master’s degree in Energy Planning and a PhD in Environmental Planning from the Alberto Luiz Coimbra Institute of Graduate Studies and Engineering Research at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (COPPE/UFRJ). She served as Minister of the Environment from 2010 to 2016. She began her career at the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) in 1984, later serving in the state government of Rio de Janeiro. She is currently a member of the International Advisory Board of CEBRI and co-chair of the International Panel on Natural Resources of the United Nations Environment Programme (IRP/UNEP/UN), a member of the High-Level Advisory Board of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), and a member of the Board of Directors of BNDES. Recognized with the UN “Champions of the Earth” Award in 2013, she also works as a consultant and serves on private boards and sustainability organizations.

The following is the interview given to CEBRI-Journal in October 2025.

How do you assess Brazil’s role at COP30 and the international context at this time?

IZABELLA TEIXEIRA: COP30 takes place at a symbolic moment: 10 years after the Paris Agreement and amid a profound crisis of trust and international

cooperation. The multilateral system is at its institutional limit. The COPs, in fact, have reached a tipping point—an inflection point that demands new norms of negotiation, dialogue, and action.

After the isolation experienced under the last administration, Brazil is rebuilding its

international presence. Today, there is a renewed appreciation for environmental, climate, and human rights issues, along with a vision of equity, solidarity, and democracy. The country aims to exercise soft power as a strategic asset once again and consolidate its international presence by presiding over groups such as the G20, BRICS, and now COP30. This trajectory is the result of three years of a consistent international reintegration process, and COP30 solidifies this strategy, reaffirming the country's commitment to the environment, climate, human rights, and a vision of greater solidarity with the world.

It is essential to consolidate a strategic vision of the significance of these movements and their impact on Brazilian foreign policy, encompassing economic, political, and diplomatic dimensions. Brazil defends democracy, debates the new multilateral system, and repositions its global relations. The country has returned to the international stage, and this dynamic is driven not only by the Head of State but also by society and institutions. The G20 and the BRICS Summit mobilized the country, and COP30 should be understood not as an event but as the beginning of a process: climate policy and security, which connect to the challenges of national development. I prefer to speak of climate security because it becomes the axis that connects climate, policy, and development. Brazil, with its unique characteristics, has once again turned

its attention to the world and now needs to learn to look at itself as well.

[Brazil] lacks a national understanding of the Amazon. We have an international image, but we have not yet built an internal understanding of what it represents. Brazilians must recognize its strategic, political, economic, and civilizing role. [...] The Amazon is not just nature; it is politics, it is civilization. [...] The Amazon cannot be seen merely as a frontier awaiting exploration; this is a neocolonialist vision of subnational colonialism.

Held in the Amazon region, the conference is a call to action to the world and to Brazil. However, the country lacks a national understanding of the Amazon. We have an international image, but we have not yet built an internal understanding of what it represents. Brazilians must recognize its strategic, political, economic, and civilizing role. The standing forest expresses a vision

of the country that includes traditional and indigenous peoples as civilizing traits. The Amazon is not just nature; it is politics, it is civilization. Twenty-eight million Brazilians live there, with development rates far below the national average. The Amazon cannot be seen merely as a frontier awaiting exploration; this is a neocolonialist vision of subnational colonialism.

We need to view Amazon as a matter of national interest, as a means to a less vulnerable, more inclusive, fair, and developed country. Brazil has all the conditions to adopt new development standards: it has natural resources, alternatives, and creative people. However, this transformation depends on a deep understanding of the country, and such understanding necessarily involves the Amazon. We still lack this political awareness.

Brazil needs to understand its own reality and recognize that its agendas are interconnected. It is a process of national change that requires looking toward the future. Illegality, deforestation, and public safety are all part of the same civilizational challenge. Brazilian leadership in recent years has shown that the world has turned its gaze on us, and has come here; now, it is Brazil that needs to look at and understand the world. Brazil needs the future as an ally: we must have the courage to forge alliances with it. However, we can only do this if the country also has an identity with the Amazon. The Amazon is an

essential part of Brazil, and the country must have the courage to propose new forms of cooperation, repositioning itself as an articulator between political power and climate power.

How do the Amazon and the Amazon Cooperation Treaty relate to this vision of the future?

IT: The Amazon is the heart of the country's water security and the linchpin of global climate security. Nevertheless, Brazil still lacks political awareness of the forest's significance. We need a national concept of the Amazon, not just an ecological or international vision. The standing forest expresses a vision of the country, of civilization, and of sovereignty.

The Amazon Cooperation Treaty is the first regional multilateral forum to build convergence of interests and to understand how to address climate vulnerability regionally, beyond global scenarios. It is crucial to understand the Brazilian reality, especially that of the Amazon: not only in relation to deforestation and the transnational dimension of organized crime, but also because of the region's central role in the country's water security and global climate security.

This multilateral treaty was updated during a crisis in the multilateral system. Brazil convened heads of State for a conference in Belém, raising the political level of decision-making. This

meeting presented a groundbreaking vision for the Amazon, recognizing the tipping point for the first time. Brazil played a central role in raising the threat to the forest’s stability and its ability to sustain life for debate.

However, this progress did not translate into effective political action. Recognition of the tipping point should have strengthened the COP30 debate, but the theme was sidelined. Even so, the Belém meeting was an important step toward recreating regional forums and renegotiating South American integration. The challenge now is to transform scientific recognition into regional political commitments. In Brazil’s political ambition, conservation must be the third pillar of climate security, alongside electrification and decarbonization.

The Amazon is the only tipping point to which Brazil is directly exposed. The country initiated this political conversation two years ago, but it has not made any progress. As I have mentioned, there is a lack of national understanding of the Amazon’s significance. Brazil needs to see itself as a solution provider, aligning its realities with neighboring countries and understanding regional vulnerabilities.

The climate issue requires political understanding. China is an example: it sets goals and delivers results. Brazil, for its part, makes commitments but does not define the path. Political ambition must transform into concrete

commitments to neighbors and a regional strategic vision. The tipping point must be present in nationally determined contributions (NDCs), sectoral policies, and climate plans.

The debate over oil in the Amazon, organized crime, and the forest’s role in water and climate security reveals that the most significant challenge is to transform political ambition into action. The climate agenda is no longer just environmental; it is also economic, technological, and geopolitical. The game now revolves around political power and development.

How do you view the energy transition and the challenges of climate and economic security?

IT: The climate crisis has revealed the need for a new energy and economic matrix. The energy transition is, therefore, a geopolitical transformation. Brazil used to be a country that lacked the dollars to invest in oil. Then, it developed ethanol fifty years ago as a transportation solution, and today it has a balanced energy matrix based on biofuels and energy efficiency. The great challenge is that changing an energy matrix also means changing the economic matrix; both are entirely linked. It is a geopolitical transformation because this structure defines power relations among countries. The energy transition is, above all, a global power shift.

The future will depend on new fuels and markets. The country needs to be an innovation partner, bringing the past into the present and designing new business visions. Oil will remain relevant, but energy security, reforestation, and carbon capture and storage technologies must guide the transition. Brazil can become a leader in mining and carbon sequestration solutions.

The challenge is to coordinate economic sectors—energy, mining, and agriculture—to achieve emissions neutrality. The climate issue is now a matter of political, economic, and technological power. Nature has already changed, and extreme events are a reality. It is necessary to prepare for regulatory risks and seek long-term solutions. No transition will be possible without nature as an ally: natural resources, strategic minerals, and new materials are the foundation of this transformation.

For years, the world has been organizing itself around the idea of energy transition, which advocates for a structural change in the energy matrix, replacing it with renewables. The time has come—and this ambition can and should be ours—to develop a concept of transition in the use of resources and land, promoting a structural change in the way land, material resources, and natural resources, from water to biomass, are used. This involves not only advocating for the adoption of more sustainable practices, but also a better understanding of the distribution

of these resources around the globe, the volume and speed of their demand, the impacts arising from their extraction, and the technological changes that should be encouraged for more efficient and sufficient uses.

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Brazil must avoid a new form of extractivism and a new form of colonialism disguised as a green transition. The transition cannot reproduce inequalities. It is essential to understand the impacts of solutions and their interrelationships across environmental, social, economic, and technological domains. The world is experiencing new dependencies: on strategic minerals, on tech giants, and on supply chains. Nature can be an ally or an enemy, depending on the capacity for appropriation and political intelligence.

Contrary to the idea that Brazil is already a powerhouse, the country is not yet ready to fully assume this position. As in physics, power is the rate of work. The country has potential, but it needs to deliver. Nature provides the conditions for us to avoid repeating past mistakes and do things differently. The world cannot be transformed simply by having assets and knowing what to do with them, but rather by understanding the new global dynamics, building new partnerships, and recognizing our vulnerability to the international political order and the climate issue.

Traceability, market, and productivity must go hand in hand. Brazil must maintain its competitiveness and agree on visions and processes. Transformation takes time. Just as the country became a major food producer and eradicated diseases after decades of effort, the same must happen with the climate transition.

What, in your view, are the main political and institutional challenges that COP30 must face?

IT: COP30 takes place in a world in flux, marked by power struggles and new geopolitical dynamics. The climate issue is a determining variable in this context. We are experiencing a crisis of prosperity and a sense of powerlessness in the face of the global inability to coordinate interests. The multilateral system, created after World War II, is exposed:

it faces wars, famines, epidemics, and institutional challenges. We have reached an institutional tipping point: COPs appear to have reached their limit—that is, the saturation of a negotiation model that needs reinvention.

Tragedy and fear characterize climate communication, and you cannot mobilize anyone through tragedy; you build nothing based on fear. We need to build inclusive, democratic, and fair narratives, replacing the tone of tragedy with a pragmatic optimism that mobilizes societies.

I identify three core issues: trust, accountability, and, most sensitively for me, the ability to communicate about the climate issue. Rebuilding trust is essential. Accountability is lacking, and reliable metrics too. Tragedy and fear characterize climate communication, and you cannot mobilize anyone through tragedy; you build nothing based on fear. We need to build inclusive, democratic, and fair narratives, replacing the tone of tragedy with a pragmatic optimism that mobilizes societies. The gap between

public policies and climate risks reveals the urgency of preparing the country for strategic decisions. Humanity's political timing does not align with the changes imposed by nature.

Brazil has science and excellence, but political decision-making has yet to place climate change at the center of its national strategy. The country has made significant decisions in the past: eradicating hunger, stabilizing its currency, and achieving oil self-sufficiency. Now it needs to address climate change with the same determination. COP30 should prepare the country for long-term decisions, not just to organize an event. Real engagement is needed, as social participation is still low.

The conference should define the country's development model, its partnerships, and its vulnerabilities. Governance must involve the federal government, Congress, the Judiciary, and the federative entities. Climate extremes demonstrate the importance of mayors' and governors' roles. COP30 cannot be just a delivery; it must be a turning point.

What do you expect as a legacy of COP30 for Brazil and the world?

IT: I hope that COP30 leaves as its legacy to Brazil the ability to align the time of politics with the time of nature. We must transform crisis into opportunity and build alliances for

the future. COP30 should be seen as a process of reorganizing interests. The COP president represents global interests, not just national ones. Therefore, it is essential to connect the diplomatic, economic, and social dimensions. The conference will be a stage for announcements and commitments. Tropical forests—beyond the Amazon, those of the Congo and Indonesia—contain critical and strategic minerals. It is not just about conservation: standing forests are essential for climate solutions. We need them, as well as the materials, natural resources, and strategic minerals found in these ecosystems. The geopolitical relations of these countries will also guide the debate. Conservation is fundamental, but natural and mineral resources also define the future. Brazil must build regional alliances and long-term partnerships based on affirmation and solidarity.

The private sector plays a significant political role, as countries own large companies and wield global power. Tech giants, for example, have enormous convening power and represent the interests of major powers such as the United States and China. These countries influence and control the climate agenda through the private sector. Thus, climate governance must include these actors, but with clarity of purpose and accountability.

After the conference, Brazil needs to organize its interests and pave the way

for the next COPs. Countries with natural resources must structure their political, technological, and economic power, just as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) did with oil. Brazil seeks to make conservation a pillar of climate solutions and needs to develop the structure and logistics for the bioeconomy. The COP will open spaces for strategic debate on development, and the country—together with society—must be prepared to occupy them.

Brazil cannot miss the opportunity to lead a vision focused on solutions. Solutions are collective, while addressing problems alone fragments and creates debate bubbles. It is necessary to involve all branches of government and to use instruments such as parliamentary amendments to strengthen civil defense and promote new local business models. While President Lula’s initial efforts were an important signal, there is still much homework to be done after COP30.

We need to build a regional and national agenda, as well as alliances and partnerships, that will allow Brazil to navigate the next five or ten years positively. The climate issue is, in fact, on the political agenda. Brazil is a peaceful country with a supportive and creative society, capable of defining a new form

of prosperity. This prosperity offers the world a new vision for the future.

COP30 should help Brazil embrace the future. It is necessary to bring in new players, especially the new generations, who are not afraid to make mistakes. We need to live by solutions, be resilient, and combine mitigation and adaptation. The goal is to build a less vulnerable future, sustained by development and cooperation.

It is time to transform the crisis into solutions, be bold about the future, and build a country capable of having the future as an ally. Nature has already changed; now we must change ourselves.

Brazil can offer the world a new vision of prosperity, based on alliances, not bubbles. Society must be the protagonist, and science must answer the questions that guide decisions, not just itself. It is time to transform the crisis into solutions, be bold about the future, and build a country capable of having the future as an ally. Nature has already changed; now we must change ourselves. ■

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