Climate Breakthrough

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Climate Breakthrough Announces 2026 Cohort

AT A GLANCE

- The 2026 cohort of the Climate Breakthrough Award program is Delphine Lévi Alvarès, Josimara Baré, Nyasha Frank Mpahlo, and Valmir Ortega.
- They will pursue breakthroughs in petrochemicals, Indigenous climate finance, energy innovation in Africa, and regenerative agriculture, respectively—sectors where transformative potential for climate impact remains untapped, underfunded, or constrained by existing approaches.
- Climate Breakthrough provides them with the space, flexibility, and resources to develop, launch, and expand their new initiatives, including a $4 million multiyear funding package for each—the largest climate award for individuals.

San Francisco, September 15, 2026—Four visionary strategists are embarking on their boldest new initiatives to create breakthroughs in systems critical to resolving the climate crisis.

Climate Breakthrough today announced the 2026 cohort of its Climate Breakthrough Award program: **Delphine Lévi Alvarès**, **Josimara Baré**, **Nyasha Frank Mpahlo**, and **Valmir Ortega**. Climate Breakthrough provides them with the space, flexibility, and resources to develop, launch, and expand their new initiatives, including a $4 million multiyear funding package for each—the largest climate award for individuals.

They join a global community of strategists who have built ambitious initiatives through the program. Among others are Mohamed Adow (*Power Shift Africa*), Tzeporah Berman (*the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty*), Alex Doukas (*the Polluter Pays Project*), John Hepburn (*Insure Our Future*), Sebastián Kind (*RELP*), and Nicole Rycroft (*Canopy's Next-Gen Solutions*).

Climate Breakthrough continues to catalyze large-scale change by investing in people and sectors where significant potential for climate impact remains untapped, underfunded, or constrained by existing approaches. With the new cohort, the 11th, Climate Breakthrough has now provided or committed multimillion-dollar funding to 30 individuals and two teams of Awardees. Awardees have collectively secured more than $640 million in follow-on support from more than 137 funders, along with more than $1 billion through ventures, trusts, and funds outside philanthropy.

Initiatives that began as early-stage ideas are now shaping how the world tackles the climate crisis—accelerating clean energy adoption, rewriting international policy, and breaking down the economic and cultural barriers that have stalled progress for decades. If every Awardee achieves the emissions-reduction goals they have set, their work collectively could cut global annual greenhouse gas emissions by more than 6.4 gigatons by 2030 (more than twice the annual emissions of the European Union).

"The work of our Awardees shows that the biggest barrier to climate innovation today is not a lack of leadership or ideas; it's doubt," said ***Savanna Ferguson****, Executive Director of Climate Breakthrough. "The skepticism that these innovations can deliver real-world impact is what stops many from backing the bold, when that backing alone can make the implausible the probable. We need a portfolio of audacity."*

THE PROGRAM

For the past decade, Climate Breakthrough has pursued a single mission to catalyze transformational, not incremental, climate action that can swiftly and justly close the gap between the world today and a sustainable future. The Climate Breakthrough Award program identifies visionary strategists and gives them the space and resources to develop, launch, and expand ideas with the potential to reduce global annual emissions by hundreds of millions of tons, affect entire industries or regions of the world, and materially change the lives of millions of people.

The program combines elements from breakthrough innovation models such as DARPA and ARPA-E with the entrepreneurial spirit of startup incubators and venture capital. After a rigorous scouting and selection process that involves an international network of partners and experts, Awardees begin a six-to-nine-month phase to develop their long-term visions and strategies. Throughout their multiyear tenure, they receive non-directive funding and a suite of tailored support designed to meet the needs of breakthrough-style pursuits, impact and learning tools, and opportunities to increase their visibility among key stakeholders. As their tenure progresses, Awardees receive additional support to attract more funding and expand the reach of their work.

Building on a decade of results, Climate Breakthrough is expanding efforts to identify and invest in more people and ideas to create a healthy, sustainable future for people and the planet. Climate Breakthrough is currently funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, IKEA Foundation,

The Lemelson Foundation, Oceankind, Quadrature Climate Foundation, Vere Initiatives, and MacKenzie Scott's Yield Giving.

2026 AWARDEE COHORT

DELPHINE LÉVI ALVARÈS (*based in France*)
Through the Climate Breakthrough Award program, Delphine will build the first coordinated global effort to reduce the world's dependence on petrochemicals—the plastics, fertilizers, pesticides, and synthetic materials made from oil and gas—and make alternatives imaginable, practical, and scalable.

The challenge is immense. Petrochemicals already account for 14 percent of global oil consumption, 8 percent of natural gas, and 10 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. As demand for fossil fuels declines elsewhere, Delphine calls petrochemicals "the lifeline for the industry's financiers," a sector that could drive up to half of oil demand growth by mid-century.

For more than a decade, Delphine has helped build powerful coalitions to tackle these challenges. She helped launch the Zero Waste movement in France in 2014 and the Break Free From Plastic movement in 2016, and in 2017 co-founded the Rethink Plastic Alliance, whose advocacy contributed to the adoption of the EU's Single-Use Plastics Directive. Today, she serves as Global Petrochemicals Campaign Manager at the Center for International Environmental Law.

For her new initiative, she will map pathways out of the petrochemical economy across regions, sectors, and materials; unite those that have traditionally worked on this issue separately; and make a post-petrochemical future concrete enough for governments, businesses, communities, and civil society to build toward together.

JOSIMARA BARÉ (*based in Brazil*)
Through the Climate Breakthrough Award program, Josimara will transform the way climate finance reaches Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities so that those protecting the world's most important ecosystems can receive funding directly and direct resources on their own terms and according to their own priorities.

Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities steward more than one-third of the world's remaining intact forests, protecting them from deforestation, reducing wildfire risk, and helping stop illegal mining and logging. Yet less than 5 percent of multilateral climate funding reaches them directly. Josimara argues that the problem is structural: the rules, timelines, and reporting requirements that govern climate funding often fail to reflect Indigenous governance and structures, and bureaucracy blunts the impact of what little arrives.

Josimara has demonstrated that a different model can work. Building and managing two Indigenous-led funds taught her that direct access is the real constraint; that Indigenous organizations, once they have it, are fully capable of managing resources themselves. She supported the development of the Rio Negro Indigenous Fund, an initiative of the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of Rio Negro. In 2024, she took on a similar challenge for the Indigenous Council of Roraima, designing and building the Rutî Indigenous Fund. It has since invested across dozens of community-led projects in more than 60 villages.

Her new initiative will build what she describes as an intercultural infrastructure for direct funding: strengthening Indigenous-led funds while working with major funders to evolve their systems and practices.

NYASHA FRANK MPAHLO (*based in Zimbabwe*)
Through the Climate Breakthrough Award program, Nyasha will build the ecosystem needed to connect African innovators across the continent and help locally led energy solutions grow from promising pilots into systems capable of transforming communities.

Around 600 million people in Africa still lack access to electricity, and roughly a billion people still cook with polluting fuels. The continent also holds a significant share of the minerals the global energy transition depends on, and more than 350 million young people will enter its workforce over the next decade. How Africa builds this transition will shape not only the jobs it creates but also how the rest of the world gets there too.

Much of the climate investment reaching the continent has gone toward importing technologies designed elsewhere, many of which have proven poorly suited to local conditions. Nyasha argues that Africa's energy problem is not only a technology problem but a fit-for-purpose problem. As Executive Director of Green Governance Africa, Nyasha created the Green Villages model, which combines local renewable energy, ecological farming, and efficient cookstoves in a single community-designed package. That model is now operating in Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Mozambique.

His new initiative, which he calls the Energy+ Innovators Platform, will be a continent-wide ecosystem that connects inventors, communities, funders, researchers, and institutions so that African energy innovation can be developed, financed, scaled, and sustained within Africa itself.

VALMIR ORTEGA (*based in Brazil*)
Through the Climate Breakthrough Award program, Valmir will build the financial and operational infrastructure needed to make regenerative agriculture the most viable and profitable path for tropical farming landscapes.

Tropical forests store more than half of the world's above-ground carbon, yet 95 percent of forest loss now happens in the tropics. Evidence suggests these ecosystems are approaching a tipping point, where they shift from absorbing carbon to releasing it. Land use and agriculture account for roughly 75 percent of Brazil's emissions, while food systems contribute approximately one-third of global emissions.

Valmir argues that the same landscapes driving those emissions could instead become the world's greatest carbon sink. He says the techniques for sustainable farming are already proven, but no system exists to deploy them across entire landscapes rather than isolated projects. In 2020, Valmir founded Belterra, which now works with farms across four Brazilian states to implement regenerative agricultural systems—integrating trees with crops and livestock, restoring degraded land, and expanding access to financing for communities often overlooked by conventional lenders.

His new initiative, which he calls a Tropical Climate Infrastructure, will bring together finance, technology, producers, and partners to make regenerative agriculture scalable across the tropics. This will turn land use from a driver of emissions into a foundation for climate action and economic opportunity.

MEDIA CONTACT: Email Tony Bricktua at *press@climatebreakthrough.org* to request an interview and receive supporting announcement materials.

ABOUT CLIMATE BREAKTHROUGH: Website LinkedIn Board Media Center

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