



## Conclusion: Best Practices, Best Outcomes?

A commitment to standards and rights is not enough; a policy commitment to international standards is only as good as the results the policy produces on the ground. For this reason, it is not always effective for civil society to tell a dam developer “you need to follow a standard because it is enshrined in a UN Convention.” The dam developer may simply respond that they are not directly bound by that convention; that they have committed to follow the pertinent national laws; or that they follow industry best practices by adhering to a guideline or an auditing tool. Indeed, dam builders and funders will often claim that they are following international standards in order to reap the public relations benefits from saying so. In other cases, dam developers may say that a given standard — such as Free, Prior, and Informed Consent — is not practical enough to be implemented within the project cycle.

An Ashaninka family collects food to share with the community, on the Ene River in the Peruvian Amazon. Photo by International Rivers.

No matter the discourse, following best practices does not necessarily guarantee best outcomes. Dam planners, financiers, and builders must be held accountable to their outcomes above all else.

One method of doing so is to work closely with advocates who can help explain in detail how each right, principle, or standard is interpreted. Using available national and international legal mechanisms alongside the use of dam standards and policies will also help you achieve better results. Meanwhile, direct advocacy with local and regional decision-makers, and communications with local and regional media are effective ways to publicly call for these results.

Dam-affected communities know better than anyone that in some situations, national laws do not represent

a viable means to seek justice. This may be because of corruption in the legal system, prevailing political interests, or a lack of representation. For this reason, it is important to push for national legal reforms, so that the dam standards such as those described above are recognized and protected by your government. Since many challenges faced by dam-affected communities around the world are similar, you should know that allies exist who may provide helpful perspectives and ideas.

By utilizing social and environmental standards to push for better outcomes across all stages of dam building – from planning to construction to mitigation, to decommissioning and reparations – you may be able to change the particular outcomes of a project; you may influence the long-term direction of policies; and you may even transform an industry.



The Ashaninka women of Tsiquireni, near the Ene River, in the Peruvian Amazon. Photo by International Rivers.

## PRINCIPAL INSTITUTIONS CITED IN THIS GUIDE

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Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement developed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing  
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Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency  
[www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca](http://www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca)

Convention on Biological Diversity  
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European Bank for Reconstruction and Development  
[www.ebrd.com](http://www.ebrd.com)

European Commission  
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GHG Protocol  
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Global Water Partnership  
[www.gwptoolbox.org](http://www.gwptoolbox.org)

ICOLD  
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Inter-American Development Bank  
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International Association for Impact Assessment  
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International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights  
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International Finance Corporation  
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International Rivers  
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Mekong River Commission  
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Murray-Darling River Basin Authority  
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Nomogaia  
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OECD  
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Oxfam Australia  
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Ramsar Convention  
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Stockholm Environment Institute  
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UN  
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UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women  
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UN High Commissioner for Human Rights  
[www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org)

UN Protect, Respect and Remedy Framework for Business and Human Rights (Ruggie Framework)  
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UNEP

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UNESCO

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Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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USAID

[www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

[www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)

World Bank

[www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

World Commission on Dams

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World Wide Fund for Nature

[www.wwf.org](http://www.wwf.org)

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