

International Rivers Annual Report 2018

Photo by Pai Deetes, International Rivers



INTERNATIONAL
RIVERS
PEOPLE • WATER • LIFE

Our Impact in 2018

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ARGENTINA

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An aerial view of the Santa Cruz River on the 2018 Day of Action for Rivers.

Photo by International Rivers

A Letter From the Executive Director

To succeed at protecting some of the world's most important rivers for livelihoods and biodiversity, we need a resilient, interconnected movement, grounded in local contexts, and working together across the globe. Our 2018-2022 strategic plan, "Our Rivers, Our Water Future," is designed based on this understanding, with a proactive approach to protecting rivers. In the first year of our new strategic plan, we worked to strengthen translocal movements to support the rights of communities, inform and build capacity within river communities, and provide local and regional groups with campaign support, resources, trainings and workshops.

Precedent-setting legal rights granted to rivers in New Zealand, Colombia and India in 2017 and 2018 provided a critical opportunity to push for permanent protection for rivers globally. The 2018 celebration of the 50th anniversary of the United States' Wild and Scenic Rivers Act reinforced the vision to protect rivers permanently. We helped groups come together to exchange strategies and knowledge on river protection from the Congo to the Mekong. We supported communities in the Amazon to help them map their territories and outline self-governance plans. And we worked with upstream and downstream communities along India's Teesta River to draft shared management plans. In all of these efforts, we found that the movement is increasingly interconnected and, as a result, more resilient.

The need to protect rivers also has never been more urgent, or visibly apparent. Water scarcity, drought, and flooding caused by climate change are increasingly severe threats that remain to be addressed on a global scale. Additionally, several major dam breaks and damages in Laos, Colombia, Myanmar, and most recently Brazil, exposed the extreme risk associated with large dams. These tragedies resulted in loss of life, destruction of entire towns and freshwater ecosystems, and billions of dollars in damages – a stark reminder of the true costs of large dams.

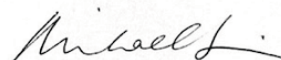
The goals laid out in our strategic plan represent our roadmap for addressing these urgent threats, by providing capacity building and support to those directly affected and working on the front lines. We are supporting communities to be more interconnected, and to be effective voices for governance of their natural resources. We accomplish this by linking upstream and downstream communities in developing shared understandings of their resource use and needs, advocating for more inclusive prior consultation in decision making around dams, supporting community-led mapping and demarcation exercises, supporting partner-led research, and participating in high level dialogues on regional transboundary river governance.

We are also ensuring large dam companies and financiers are aware of the negative impacts caused by their projects, and are accountable for the risks their projects impose on rivers and communities. To complement this we are promoting the cost effectiveness and positive outcomes of investment in non-hydro renewables, especially wind and solar, and through investments in distributed and smart grids.

A global clampdown on social movements in many countries has created difficult and at times even heartbreaking conditions for our work and the lives of our local partners. We are redoubling our commitment to supporting our partners who are on the frontlines of this struggle, and we hope you will stand with us. They need our support now, and we need theirs too, because in the long run, the only way we are going to succeed is with the strength and vitality of all of us working together toward our common purpose.

With the support of our global community, we will continue to strengthen momentum needed for scaling up an interconnected movement to protect rivers. Thank you for standing with us.

Sincerely,



Michael Simon
Interim Executive Director

P.S. – I write this letter in reflection of another productive year for International Rivers. During 2018, Kate Horner helped pilot us to new heights and we wish her well in her future endeavors in the field.

Mission & Vision

International Rivers protects rivers and defends the rights of communities that depend on them.

We seek a world where healthy rivers and the rights of local river communities are valued and protected. We envision a world where water and energy needs are met without degrading nature or increasing poverty, and where people have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

We are a global organization with regional offices in Asia, Africa and Latin America. We work with river-dependent and dam-affected communities to ensure their voices are heard and their rights are respected. We help to build well-resourced, active networks of civil society groups to demonstrate our collective power and create the change we seek. We undertake independent, investigative research, generating robust data and evidence to inform policies and campaigns. We remain independent and fearless in campaigning to expose and resist destructive projects, while also engaging with all relevant stakeholders to develop a vision that protects rivers and the communities that depend on them.

MEKONG RIVER

Fishing boats on the
Mekong River.

Photo by Pai Deetes,
International Rivers.



Strengthen Movements for Healthy Rivers

Strong movements made up of networked, informed and well-resourced community partners, civil society, individuals and allies are needed to achieve the scale of transformative change for river conservation that we seek. We are supporting the growth and interconnection of these movements, which prioritize indigenous rights and leadership and ensure that women and men are equally engaged in leadership roles. Together, we'll make progress on a new vision for the world's rivers.

Activist Training School in the DRC

In DRC, our Africa Program staff organized a national activist training school for civil society and community collaborators on the Inga 3 dam campaign. The course was designed and developed with expert advice from our Southeast Asia Program staff and their partners, who have played key roles in the activist training school for the Mekong region. The training was aimed at strengthening the movement of civil society partners and community groups to effectively advocate for the protection of rivers, the rights of dam affected communities, and energy access for marginalized populations. Attendees reported coming away from the training with a greater skill and knowledge set about advocacy strategies, as well as new campaign initiatives developed with other participants. We are providing follow-up support for campaign plans linking DRC advocacy with regional and international campaigns targeting financiers of the project.



DRC

Civil society activists working to protect the Congo River participate in an advocacy training school led by International Rivers in May 2018.

Photo by
International Rivers.

Empowering WOM's Leadership in River Protection Movements

A targeted part of the Activist Training School in the DRC was to trial and test methods to empower women's leadership and engagement in campaigns and community organizing. In addition to empowering women leaders in civil society organizations, we also identified the role of gender in shaping advocacy at the local level, and discussed some key actions to promote women's advocacy at the community level.

In the Teesta River basin, our South Asia program held a workshop to amplify women's voices regarding their lived experiences and knowledge about water and rivers, and to visualize these experiences and knowledge through written narrative, expressive drawings, and photography. The workshop explored the various ways story and image can be shared on various online platforms for movement building.

Through dialogue with our partners and funding supporters in Asia, we began the groundwork of planning for our first ever Women and Rivers Congress, to be held in March 2019. The Congress will bring together women water defenders from around the world to share stories of campaign success and strategy, and to recognize and celebrate their contributions to the river protection movement.



SOUTH ASIA

Participants and facilitators of the Visualizing Our Water and River Relations workshop for women of Sikkim and West Bengal in May 2018.

Photo by
International Rivers.

Ensure Corporations are Accountable in Policy and Practice

Water is a human right, yet far too often water is treated solely as a commodity, undermining the environmental, social and cultural values of rivers. We are monitoring compliance and advocating for company commitments to the highest international laws, standards and policies. We are documenting poor performance in specific projects and advocating for redress. We are monitoring and exposing projects that harm the environment and undermine rights, and using that information to influence the private sector and its supporters. And we are engaging in dialogue and debates with governments and financiers about standards and safeguards for the private sector.

Advocating for accountability in response to the dam collapse in Laos

The Xe Pian Xe Namnoy dam collapse in Laos caused the loss of at least 40 lives, with many more still missing. Over 7,000 people have been displaced, now seeking refuge in temporary camps with limited supplies and facilities. Following the crisis, our Southeast Asia team assisted in post-disaster efforts to raise awareness of survivor stories, and to hold responsible parties accountable. Together with local partners, we conducted extensive media work, with coverage in international and regional media including the New York Times, Bloomberg, BBC World, Al Jazeera, and others. In response to the devastation, the Lao government announced that they would review safety risks in dams nation-wide and reassess the country's hydropower policy. We called for independence and transparency in this review, and are monitoring it closely as it unfolds.



LAOS

Impacts of the dam collapse in Ban Hinlat-Tha Sangchan, Laos, in July 2018.

Photo by Roengrit Kongmuang.

Promote Clean and Fair Finance for Energy and Water Solutions

Securing a clean, fair and climate-resilient future requires massive investment in sustainable water and energy solutions. To stave off the most devastating impacts of an ever-worsening climate crisis, the world must radically shift financial flows away from wasteful and harmful projects towards cleaner, safer approaches. We are documenting and exposing the financial risk of investing in large hydropower infrastructure, monitoring the safeguards of multilateral development banks, campaigning against investments supporting destructive dams, and undertaking independent research to provide a credible pathway to clean, decentralized energy and water infrastructure.

Advising financiers on the true cost of hydro, and the competitiveness of alternatives

This year we continued developing outreach to banks and individuals involved in financing decision-making around the true costs of hydropower, and the increasing cost competitiveness of wind and solar. We provided advice to Equator Principle Banks on ensuring their environmental and social due diligence screening is robust to highest standards, and to latest thinking regarding energy options and energy planning. This investment is part of the wider positioning of using these relationships, and advisory roles, to leverage dialogue with Chinese financiers – responsible for a large majority of the world's investment in hydropower – about accountability and improving standards for assessment.



SALWEEN RIVER

Indigenous Karen community members participate in the Day of Action for Rivers 2018 in Myanmar.

Photo by Pai Deetes, International Rivers.

Secure Human Rights for Water Protectors

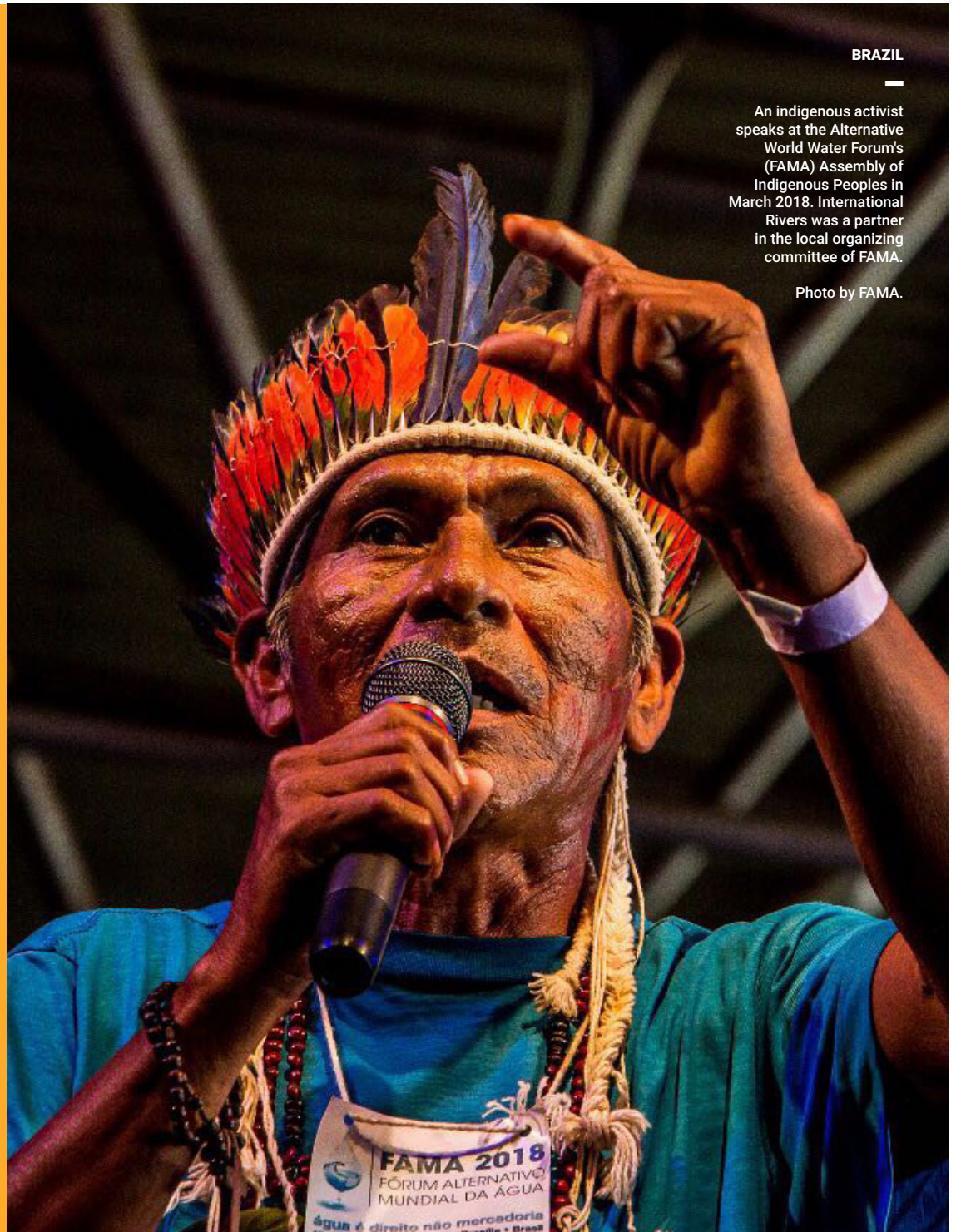
In countries where human rights abuses are rife, indigenous and local communities face enormous risks when they stand up to the powerful interests behind proposed infrastructure and extractive projects. River protectors, in particular, routinely come under threat for their opposition to large hydropower projects. We are documenting and monitoring projects where rights violations are occurring, working with the hydropower sector and governments to improve their practices and bolster respect for human rights, supporting project-affected people seeking redress for human rights impacts, and working to strengthen national, regional and international instruments for human rights protections.

Supporting the rights of communities along the Amazon's Tapajos River

Along the Tapajos River and other areas of the Amazon, we are supporting a coalition of indigenous groups and their CSO supporters to have clear demarcation of lands and territories, and to have this legally recognized and protected.

Providing digital security assessment and support for local river defender groups in Southeast Asia

We helped environmental and human rights defenders in Thailand and Cambodia create and implement digital security plans in the face of state-sponsored repression. By providing custom-fit digital security assessments and planning, we helped our partners improve their agency to seek out and address challenges within their organizations, and coordinate and communicate internally with greater levels of safety and security. We also continued to support the communities affected by the Lower Se San 2 dam in Cambodia as they deal with ongoing issues arising from the flooding of their homes and villages, and the consequence of involuntary resettlement and loss of farm lands and fishing access.



BRAZIL

An indigenous activist speaks at the Alternative World Water Forum's (FAMA) Assembly of Indigenous Peoples in March 2018. International Rivers was a partner in the local organizing committee of FAMA.

Photo by FAMA.

Support Equitable and Effective Governance That Sustains Rivers

Decisions about the management of river basins that affect millions of people are often made far away from the riverbanks, without involving those directly affected. We are working with peoples' movements and civil society networks to engage with river governance processes, promoting access to information, facilitating cross-border exchanges between all stakeholders, encouraging and assisting governments to conduct planning at river basin and transboundary scales, sharing practical examples of good governance, documenting examples where national and transboundary governance frameworks are not working for communities and ecosystem sustainability, and developing an evidence base that demonstrates why including marginalized people and groups achieves better river governance and sustainable development.

Promoting transboundary river management in the Himalayan Teesta River Basin

In South Asia, we are joining IUCN-led basin dialogues on the Meghna and Mahakali Rivers as part of our regional Transboundary River program for South Asia. In the Teesta Basin, a transboundary tributary of the mighty Brahmaputra, we are facilitating linking upstream and downstream communities in order to develop shared understandings of their river within India, and between Indian and Bangladesh communities. We are helping to influence how infrastructure managers (government and private sector) operate their dams and barrages so that downstream environmental and social issues are better considered in flow regimes.

THAILAND

Mekong villagers at the Thai administrative court in 2016.

Photo by Pai Deetes, International Rivers.



Gain Permanent Legal Protections for the World's Iconic Rivers

Many existing legal protections for rivers and community rights to river waters have been unclear, weak or insufficient. We're pursuing new means of protecting key rivers permanently, by prioritizing rivers that present the strongest need and greatest opportunity for permanent legal protection. We are evaluating the feasibility for legal protections in river basins in regions where we work, commissioning studies to identify at-risk rivers in basins where we work, and developing strong relationships with regional legal experts to craft nationally-specific legal models that will help communities around the world protect their rivers.

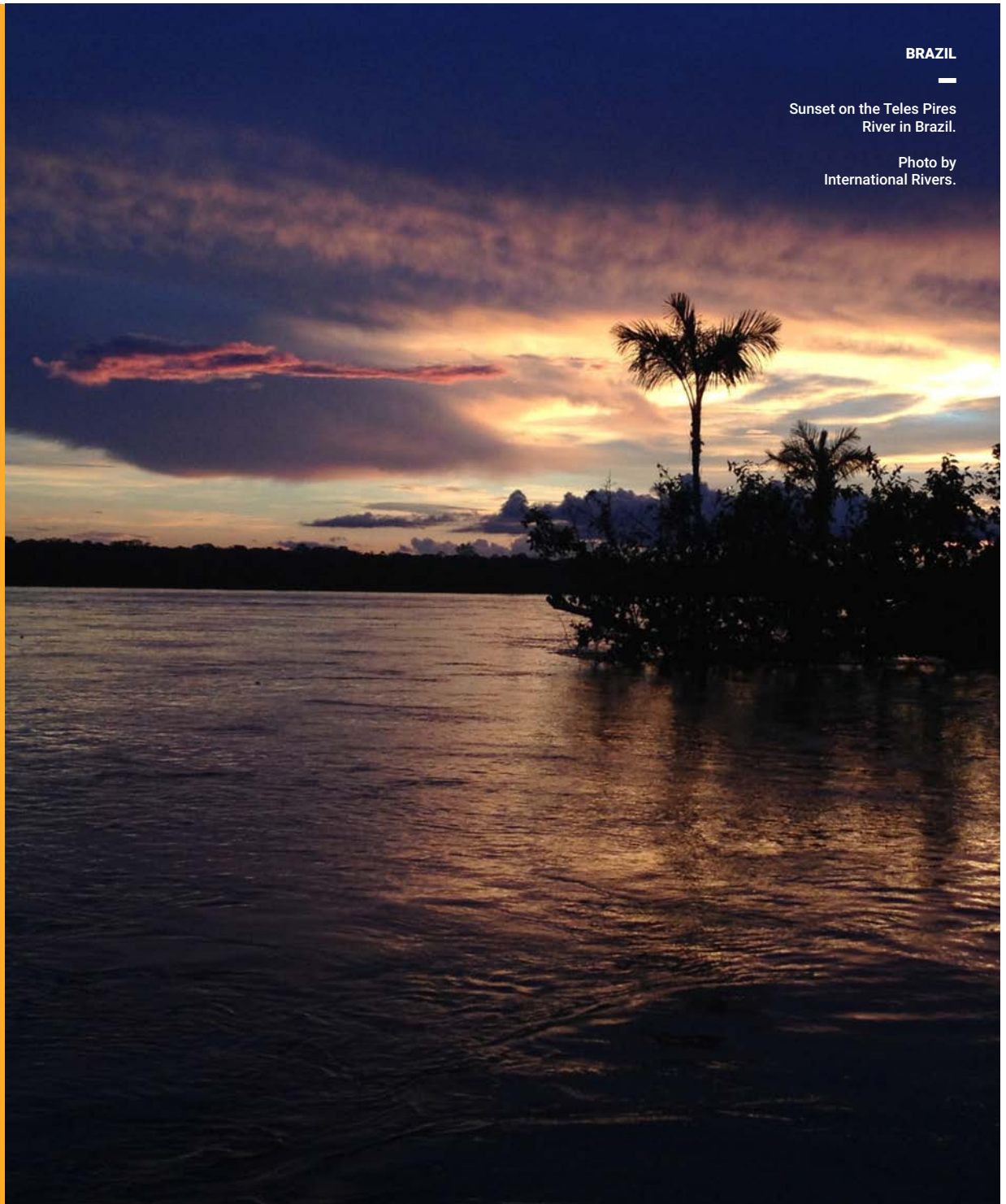
Strengthening a Movement for Permanent River Protection in Latin America

In Colombia, we worked with lawyers and environmental NGOs, and engaged with the Rios Vivos movement, to explore permanent legal protections for rivers in the country. Together we will develop a proposal to the National Congress of Colombia to create a national dams commission and a call for policies on dam removal. In Chile, we worked with partners to launch a communications and media campaign on the value of rivers and the need to protect them. We are working with lawyers to explore implementation of a Rights of Rivers approach in Colombia and Peru that integrates river protection with strategies for the empowerment of indigenous peoples. This goal is to strengthen the voices of native peoples and their autonomous territorial governments in the Peruvian Amazon, and help ensure protection of their territories, cultures and rivers.

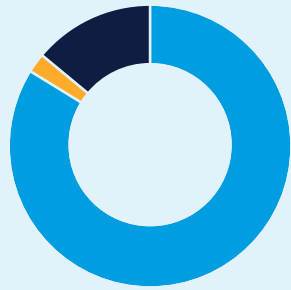
BRAZIL

Sunset on the Teles Pires River in Brazil.

Photo by
International Rivers.



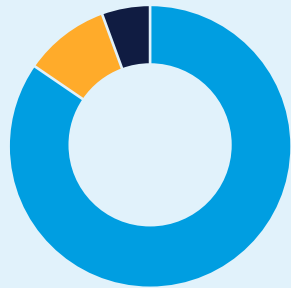
Financial Statement



2018 Income:

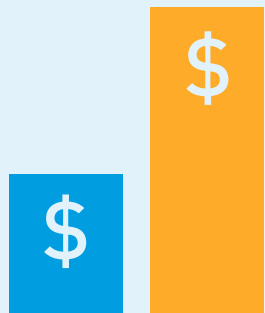
- Grants: \$3,563,193
- Contributions: \$102,145
- Other: \$580,073

Income figure includes in-kind donations and services.



2018 Expenses:

- Programs: \$3,003,953
- Administration: \$349,243
- Fundraising: \$187,080



2018 Net Assets:

- Beginning: \$1,104,542
- Ending: \$2,391,922

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Adam Dawson
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Alison Murray
Thomas Nerger
Eric Nysten
Meaveen O'Connor
Marvin Osman
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Brian Ross
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Claudia Rousseau
Robert Rutemoeller
Stewart Sanders
Rudo Angela
Sanyanga Hungwe
Manojkumar
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Effie Westervelt
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Charles Wilkinson
Crystal Williams
Lawrence F. Williams
Gary Wockner
Kristin Womack
Susanne Wong
Claudia Wornum
Lois Yuen
Gary Yules
Marc Zimmerman
Scott Zimmermann

Foundations

11th Hour Project,
Schmidt Family
Foundation
American Jewish
World Service
The Arcadia Fund
The Baltoro Trust
C.S. Mott Foundation
Conservation, Food &
Health Foundation
Critical Ecosystem
Partnership Fund
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Moore Foundation
Internews
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The Mulago
Foundation
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Open Society
Foundations
Orchard House
Foundation
Oxfam Australia
Oxfam Novib
Pledgeling
Foundation
Porticus Latin
America
Synchronicity Earth
Tikva Grassroots
Empowerment Fund
of Tides Foundation
Womadix Fund

Corporations

AmazonSmile
Foundation
Arkin Tilt Architects
MPulse Software,
Inc.
O.A.R.S. Family Of
Companies

Matching Gifts

Autodesk Matching
Gifts
Bill and Melinda
Gates Foundation
The Clorox Company
Deutsche Bank
Americas Foundation
Google Inc.
QUALCOMM
Matching Gift
Program

Connect with Us

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Read our 2018-22 Strategic Plan here:
InternationalRivers.org/StrategicPlan

Get Involved

Take Action on March 14

The annual International Day of Action for Rivers takes place on March 14. Tens of thousands of people rise up together on this day to clean up rivers, voice support for river protection, kayak and raft, screen documentaries, organize conferences, hold ceremonies, and more.

Pledge to take action for a river you care about on March 14:
intlrv.rs/riveraction

TEESTA RIVER

The Teesta River in Bangladesh at sunset.

Photo by Samir Mehta,
International Rivers.