



INTERNATIONAL
RIVERS
people • water • life



2025 Annual Report

Photo credit: International Rivers



Dear Friends of International Rivers,



Forty years ago, International Rivers was born from a dream: that rivers could be protected, that communities could shape the future of their waterways, and that a committed coalition could change the course of history. As we mark this anniversary, the stories from 2025 remind us that this dream is not only alive, it is more powerful than ever.



This was a year of remarkable victories. In Peru, Kukama leader Mariluz Canaquiri was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize for her landmark victory in securing recognition of the Marañón River as a subject with inherent rights — the first of its kind in Peru. We were honored to nominate Mariluz for the award, and her recognition belongs to every river defender who has put their livelihood and community on the line for their rivers.



Across the movement, momentum is building. In Brazil, we supported communities in halting the controversial Tabajara dam and advanced landmark legal work charting a path to durable, basin-wide protection for the Tapajós River in the Brazilian Amazon. In Chile, we helped communities secure crucial new protections guaranteeing two iconic rivers will remain free-flowing. Women leaders from the Brahmaputra to the Salween river basins forged new networks and shared strategies across borders.



In Africa, we developed new tools to help communities in Namibia, Guinea, and the DRC navigate complex legal processes and defend their rights, their rivers, and the ecosystems they sustain. And the IUCN World Conservation Congress passed a resounding resolution calling for the global adoption of Rights of Rivers



frameworks: an international validation that will accelerate growing momentum.

But the threats are intensifying. After years in retreat, big dam financing is back. The World Bank's 2025 approval of funding to prepare the Inga 3 dam on the Congo River — despite unresolved harms from earlier Inga dams and serious governance concerns — represents a dangerous regression. From Central Asia to West Africa, we are standing with communities determined not to be sacrificed as hundreds of thousands have been before. The IUCN Congress proved a watershed moment here too, with member organizations issuing a rare rebuke of the World Bank's return to mega-dam financing and affirming that river integrity and community rights are non-negotiable.

2025 was also a year of change for our organization. After years of strong leadership, my Co-Director, Isabella Winkler, concluded her tenure at International Rivers, and we remain grateful for her many contributions to the organization. We also celebrated a milestone as our Southeast Asia program launched its next chapter as the Rivers & Rights Foundation, an independent organization headquartered in Thailand. Born from the same founding vision of a network of regionally rooted organizations, this transition is a story of growth, deeper local leadership, and enduring collaboration.

While 2025 brought change, it also brought renewed hope. The river protection movement is larger, more legally sophisticated, and more globally connected than ever. None of this is possible without you. Your support fuels every legal brief, every community exchange, every coalition. We carry this momentum into 2026 with deep gratitude.



Josh Klemm

Executive Director

**Four decades
united for rivers**





| 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

In 2025, International Rivers co-hosted with the Tapajós Vivo Movement a gathering for the permanent protection of the Tapajós River

Building the Legal Foundations for Living Rivers

Photo credit: Courtesy of Movimento Tapajós Vivo

For decades, rivers have been dredged, diverted, dammed, and extracted. Campaigns to stop the most harmful projects have won important victories, but many remain temporary: a permit delayed, a license suspended, a ruling appealed.

Durable protection requires something different, moving from reactive resistance to legal frameworks that recognize rivers as living systems with ecological, cultural, and economic value that can endure across political cycles.

In 2025, International Rivers worked with partners to build exactly that: policies, conservation mechanisms, and rights-based frameworks that protect rivers beyond any single project or campaign.

That shift has been especially visible in Latin America, where governments, courts, and civil society are actively redefining what river governance can look like.

In October 2025, an International Rivers event brought together 56 socio-environmental, Indigenous, and local leaders to advance legal strategies for protecting the Tapajós River.

Forging innovative pathways in Brazil

In Brazil, the Tapajós River offers a powerful example of how local leadership and legal strategy can move from resistance toward permanence.

International Rivers' [Tapajós River: Prospects for Permanent Protection](#) report documents a basin under sustained pressure from large-scale infrastructure and extraction, with impacts falling hardest on Indigenous communities. Brazil's constitutional and environmental frameworks contain strong principles on paper, but enforcement gaps, fragmented governance, and shifting political priorities leave rivers vulnerable in practice.

Rather than inventing new protections from scratch, International Rivers and partners have developed a practical pathway focused on making existing protections coherent, enforceable, and basin-wide. A promising innovation is emerging in the Brazilian state of Pará: a new conservation category, ["Rivers of](#)

Photo credit: Courtesy of Movimento Tapajós Vivo



Brazil's Tapajós Basin by the Numbers

493,000

square kilometers across
the Amazon

55

planned hydroelectric projects

9,300+

pending mining applications



Widespread harm from
unregulated mining and mercury
contamination

Rivers of Special Protection (*Rios de Proteção Especial*)

Established in Brazil's Pará state, where the Tapajós flows, this new conservation category protects rivers of exceptional value as whole living systems rather than individual sites. For rivers like the Tapajós, it helps close structural gaps that have historically allowed damaging projects to advance piecemeal while cumulative basin impacts become severe. It represents a shift from site-by-site defense to systemic, basin-wide protection grounded in existing law.

[Special Protection” \(Rios de Proteção Especial\)](#), designed to safeguard rivers of exceptional value as whole living systems rather than protecting only individual sites.

Moving the needle at the global level

This shift is not only happening at the state level. At the [2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress](#) in Abu Dhabi, International Rivers, Earth Law Center, and other allies secured passage from government and other members of [Motion 67](#). Calling for a move from viewing rivers only as resources toward living in harmony with them, the motion explicitly situates Rights of Rivers within the broader Rights of Nature framework recognized in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The motion encourages states to implement legal frameworks that protect and restore rivers and create mechanisms to give rivers a formal voice. For river defenders who have

fought for this recognition for decades, the IUCN's endorsement marks a turning point: what communities have always known about rivers is now reflected in the policies of governments and conservation organizations worldwide.

International Rivers Executive Director Josh Klemm, alongside fellow participants at the 2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi.



Protecting rivers in law

Across the region, we see how local advocacy and international legitimacy are translating into legislative and institutional action in 2025:

Colombia:

Partners developed a River Protection Bill that incorporates a rights-of-rivers framework to strengthen protection and restoration through a rights-based approach, with passage expected in 2026.

Brazil:

With support from the Brazilian Coalition for Rivers and key allies in Congress, the [National River Protection Bill](#) passed key procedural hurdles in 2025. Once passed, the bill will strengthen permanent protection of ecologically and socio-culturally significant rivers and create a national framework for specially protected rivers country-wide.

Chile:

International Rivers supported communities in securing reserva de agua (water reserve) status for the Futaleufú and Puelo rivers, a legal mechanism that protects their free-flowing nature. Communities are now working to extend these protections to other rivers across the country.

These efforts reflect a strategic evolution. This work is not only about opposing individual dams or extractive projects. It is about embedding river protection into legislative and institutional frameworks so that safeguards endure. And it is about strengthening legal foundations so that protection can scale across tributaries, basins, and countries.

Rivers cannot defend themselves. But when legal systems recognize their intrinsic value, and when governments align policies, institutions, and public will around river protection, the balance of power begins to shift. Across Latin America, that shift is starting to take visible shape, moving from temporary victories to durable protection for living rivers.

Chile has reached a historic milestone as the government declares the Futaleufú and Puelo Rivers the country's first Environmental Flow Reserves, an achievement driven by community action and the Ríos Protegidos Coalition.

Photo: Courtesy of Ríos Protegidos Coalition



When Communities Shape River Decisions

International Rivers convened the Brahmaputra–
Salween Women and Rivers Exchange in July 2025

Photo credit: International Rivers

River defenders around the world are weaving a transnational movement through knowledge exchanges and joint initiatives that link distant basins. Community-led exchanges, from South Asia's women's river networks to Africa's dam-impacted communities, are amplifying local solutions and building solidarity along rivers spanning continents.

In 2025, International Rivers helped turn these cross-basin exchanges into concrete organizing outcomes, strengthening women's leadership, expanding community participation, and supporting grassroots platforms for collective action.

From shared struggles to concrete actions in the Brahmaputra basin

Spanning China, India, and Bangladesh, the Brahmaputra basin is home to more than 130 million people and ranks among the world's ten largest river systems. A vital lifeline across remote stretches of Tibet and Northeast India, the river now faces unprecedented threats as two of the

world's largest hydropower schemes move toward construction. During the [Asia Women and Rivers Congress](#), co-convened by International Rivers, women leaders from across the basin recognized their shared struggles — from mega-dams to unregulated sand mining along the river's 1,800-mile length — and formed a nascent coalition committed to building solidarity and coordinating their responses.

Building on these connections, International Rivers convened the [Brahmaputra-Salween Women and Rivers Exchange](#) in Thailand in July 2025, bringing together women leaders from both basins. Representatives from the Brahmaputra learned from their Salween counterparts, who have successfully resisted dam development on what remains Asia's longest free-flowing river. Central to the exchange was the People's EIA — a community-led model that transforms technical environmental impact assessment processes into powerful tools for accountability. This

Photo: International Rivers

Women leaders from the Brahmaputra and Salween shared strategies in Thailand, highlighting the People's EIA as a tool for community-led accountability.



Mariluz Canaquiri Murayari *Goldman Environmental Prize*

In 2025, Kukama leader Mariluz Canaquiri Murayari received the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize for securing the landmark recognition of the rights of Peru's Marañón River. Nominated by International Rivers, Mariluz' victory spotlighted Indigenous stewardship as a cornerstone of durable river protection, and created a powerful opening to advance the rights of rivers movement globally. International Rivers worked alongside partners to translate the momentum into action: exploring opportunities to replicate the rights of rivers approach in other geographies and legal contexts. Mariluz' victory has the potential to be a watershed moment: a proof point that Indigenous-led legal strategies can succeed, and a catalyst for communities and advocates around the world working to secure the same recognition for their own rivers.



practical sharing of legal and advocacy approaches helped participants identify strategies they could adapt to their own contexts and carry forward in the work of protecting their rivers.

Strengthening community decision-making across Africa

International Rivers works from a core conviction that protecting rivers depends on communities being able to meaningfully participate in decisions that affect them. Public participation, however, is not automatic. It requires knowledge and structured tools for navigating complex project processes and entrenched power dynamics. In 2025, International Rivers made major

investments in strengthening this capacity across Africa through a structured curriculum designed to help river defenders engage confidently in decision-making processes. Hosting [public participation trainings](#) across the Democratic Republic of Congo, Namibia, and Guinea, community representatives gained understanding of key legal frameworks and rights — including Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) — as well as step-by-step organizing guidance, stakeholder mapping tools, and accountability mechanisms for challenging harmful projects. These forums embody a foundational principle of International Rivers' work: that movement-building



Across DR Congo, Namibia, and Guinea, communities strengthened their knowledge of rights, FPIC, and advocacy, developing action plans and collective structures.

Photos: International Rivers

happens at the grassroots level, and that when communities are mobilized, organized, and able to share experiences, isolated efforts can grow into collective action.

Mobilizing for mutual support in Guinea

In Guinea's remote Fouta Djallon highlands, communities facing the proposed [Koukoutamba Dam](#) on the Bafing River have spent years working to find each other — traveling hours on difficult roads and crossing rivers just to meet. This organizing work, led by International Rivers' partner CECIDE, has been painstaking but transformative. What began as scattered concerns about displacement and lost farmland has consolidated into a Community Forum for Collective Action, providing a structured channel to unite affected

villages and coordinate advocacy strategies.

The Forum draws on hard-won lessons from communities displaced by Guinea's earlier Souapiti Dam, who emphasized to Koukoutamba residents that collective action is essential to preventing the worst impacts of forced displacement — lessons that now shape how the Forum organizes and advocates.

Together, these communities are building cross-village platforms of mutual support to defend their rights and livelihoods, and developing the knowledge, alliances, and organizing power needed to shape decisions about their futures.

What a Just Transition Looks Like Community-Led Renewable Energy in Borneo

In Sabah, Malaysia, International Rivers' Africa and Asia program staff and partners visited community-owned renewable energy mini-grids delivering reliable electricity to remote areas of Borneo. Led by Indigenous non-profits [Tonibung](#) and [Right Energy Partnership](#), these micro-hydro and solar systems are designed with robust Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes and built by project teams that include women engineers. Partners from the DRC, Guinea, Namibia, India, Nepal, and Cambodia saw firsthand how locally managed systems ensure clean energy access while strengthening livelihoods and village economies, and work is underway to replicate these successes in their countries.

Defending Rivers in the Energy Transition



Photo credit: Courtesy of NGO Forum

After a decade of stepping back from big dam financing, 2025 brought a troubling reversal. The World Bank approved financing for the Rogun dam in Tajikistan — what would be the world's tallest dam — and then approved an initial [\\$250 million for the first phase of Inga 3](#) on the Congo River in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This regression came after years of dedicated advocacy and high-profile missteps had pushed the Bank away from the sector, culminating in its 2016 exit from Inga 3.

International Rivers worked with partners across regions to challenge the World Bank's dangerous rebranding of mega-dams as climate solutions, guided by a core principle embedded in our strategy: a just and inclusive energy transition has no place for destructive hydropower. Decision-makers must instead prioritize energy solutions that are decentralized, locally governed, and aligned with human rights and healthy rivers.

Mobilizing to challenge Bank financing for Inga dam

Inga 3 has long been promoted as a flagship energy project for Africa. But for communities in Kongo Central, the story is shaped by lived experience with the earlier Inga 1 and Inga 2 dams, which imposed steep costs while failing to deliver promised benefits. When community and civil society representatives traveled to Washington, D.C. in early 2025, supported by International Rivers, they [pressed World Bank officials](#) to confront these unresolved harms and to reconsider renewed involvement. The World Bank argues that Inga 3 will help address severe energy poverty, an urgent challenge in the DRC. Yet both civil society analysis and the Bank's own proposed model raise serious red flags: the project is structured as a public-private partnership that incentivizes power sales to industrial interests and regional off-takers, with the risk of rising public debt

Inga 3 by the Numbers

\$250M

World Bank initial financing approved June 2025

Less than 20%

of DRC's population has access to electricity, yet most power from Inga 3 is slated for industrial use, not the people who need it most.

+30,000

people at risk of displacement due to the dam's reservoir

\$618M

Estimated annual financial losses that Inga 3 would incur on the DRC government, risking severe indebtedness

if costs escalate and timelines slip. When the Bank approved the initial financing in June, International Rivers and Congolese partners [denounced the move](#), warning that Inga 3 poses immense environmental, social, and governance risks while viable alternatives like solar and wind remain underfunded. The core challenge is not whether the DRC needs energy. The challenge is whether development will be designed around communities' rights and needs, or around large-scale projects whose primary beneficiaries are investors, contractors, and energy-intensive industries.

Shifting the global policy debate

Key debates around the relevance and impacts of dams also moved into global conservation policy at the 2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress, where International Rivers prepared and rallied support for [Motion 147](#), which explicitly challenged the World Bank's return to large hydropower. The timing was strategic.

Passed with significant governmental support, the motion landed the same week as the World Bank's Annual Meetings, where the Bank's energy portfolio — and its renewed embrace of mega-dams — was under active discussion. For International Rivers and partners, the motion matters because it helps shift default assumptions inside global institutions away from treating mega-dams as "green growth" and toward treating river integrity, community rights, and genuine energy access as the non-negotiable baseline for climate and development finance.

Holding the line across regions

Inga 3 was the most visible battleground of 2025, but not the only one. International Rivers backed a formal complaint to the World Bank Inspection Panel regarding Rogun in Tajikistan, and engaged at key convenings including the Finance in Common Summit and the World Bank

IUCN Motion 147

Mega-Dams as Biodiversity and Climate Risk

Adopted at the 2025 IUCN World Conservation Congress, [Motion 147](#) directly addresses the risks of the World Bank's return to large hydropower, using Inga 3 as a central example. It situates mega-dams as a biodiversity and climate risk, emphasizes the Congo River's ecological significance (including its sediment-driven "[Congo Plume](#)" system), and challenges unsubstantiated claims that large hydropower automatically delivers climate benefits.

Spring Meetings — pressing decision-makers to confront the gap between “just transition” rhetoric and closed-door processes that exclude those most affected. Across all of this runs a consistent throughline: a just transition is not defined only by megawatts. It is defined by who decides, who benefits, and whether communities have enforceable rights, meaningful participation, and access to remedy

when harms occur.

In 2025, International Rivers and partners worked to hold that standard in view — challenging false solutions, amplifying frontline voices, and insisting that meeting the world’s energy needs must not come at the cost of rivers or the people who depend on them.

International Rivers staff and partners at World Bank Annual Spring Meeting 2025



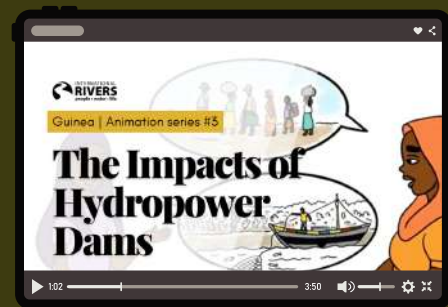
Reports and Publications

We support river defenders by creating reports and guides that address systemic challenges, while also helping to disseminate local and Indigenous knowledge essential for sustainable river governance.



Reaching Communities in Their Own Voice

Guinea and its rivers are the lifeblood of millions. Yet proposed dams threaten those same communities with displacement, lost livelihoods, and ecological harm. To help communities understand what's at stake — and their rights to shape these decisions — we produced a five-part animation series in the local Pulaar language. Each episode covers a different piece of the story: the rivers themselves, how dams work, their impacts, community rights, and sustainable energy alternatives. Working with our partner CECIDE, we brought the series directly to communities through workshops and distributed it to community members' phones via mobile messaging platforms.



120

events registered

30

countries

International Day
of Action for Rivers



2025 at
a glance:

250

participants
trained in Africa
public participation
curriculum

285

media mentions
about our work



\$614,000

(↑ 17.6% over 2024)

Small grants

directly supporting communities
and partners on the ground

Our Digital Impact

Unique visits to Guinea
dams animation

1,399

Active users on the
website in 2025

96,000

Instagram reach growth*

↑ 84.9%

Impressions across
LinkedIn and X

88,000

*YoY Growth Jan 1–Dec 31, 2025 vs. Dec 31, 2023–Dec 31, 2024



87%

of all funding was
invested directly into
our core programs

Our Financials

Income

Other & In-kind
contributions

11%

\$0.25M

\$2.38M

Grants &
Donations

89%

\$2.13M

Expenses

Support
services

13%

\$0.29M

\$2.21M

Programs

87%

\$1.92M

Major Donors

While space prevents us from naming every generous donor, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all who have supported our mission this year. Every contribution, regardless of size, has been instrumental in our success. Thank you for your belief in our work and for making a difference.

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International Rivers Board of Directors members with the Goldman Environmental Prize winner Mari Luz Canaquiri and Monti Aguirre, Latin America Program Director of International Rivers.

2025 Annual Report



Genny Ngende, Africa Program Senior Campaign Coordinator at International Rivers, alongside fellow participants at COP30 in Belém, where she contributed to advancing discussions on river protection, climate justice, and community-led solutions.

Thank you. For more information:
internationalrivers.org

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