

River activism around the world

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Working globally for more than 35 years--with partners and movements for protection of rivers and defending the rights of communities that depend on them.

Anti-dam movement history

1970'S AND 1980'S

Movement against dams was growing

1980'S

Global network began forming, coordinating the anti-dam movement

1985

First international anti-dam protests disrupt a meeting of the International Commission on Large Dams in Switzerland

1987

Swedish parliament outlaws dam building on most of the nation's last free-flowing rivers

1988

International conference of dam activists from 26 countries

1998-2000

World Commission on Dams - acknowledgement of the economics and negative and social impacts

1998

The First International Day of Action against Dams and for Rivers, Water and Life results in 50 actions in 24 countries

1997

1st International Meeting of People Affected by Dams, held in Curitiba, Brazil which produced the Curitiba Declaration

1996

"Silenced Rivers: The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams" is published and

1994

Manibeli Declaration - Calling for a Moratorium on World Bank Funding of Large Dams

2003

Rivers for Life: The 2nd International Meeting of Dam-Affected People and their Allies, held in Rasi Salai, Thailand-a river basin where a failed water diversion project with 14 dams devastated the livelihoods and lives of local populations. 300+ people from 62 countries meet

2007

Work exposing the fraudulent carbon trading system known as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) begins

2008

The historic Xingu Encounter marks the largest gathering of indigenous people in the Amazon since 1989

2010

Rivers for Life 3, held in Temacapulín, México

World Commission on Dams (WCD)

The WCD was a global multi-stakeholder body pulled together in 1997 by the World Bank and the IUCN in response to a powerful global anti-dam movement and growing opposition to large dam projects.

The WCD launch included key world leaders including Nelson Mandela.



WCD recommendations included:

1

Development needs and objectives should be clearly formulated through an **open and participatory process...**

2

A balanced and comprehensive **assessment of all options should be conducted...**

3

Before a decision is taken to build a new dam, outstanding **social and environmental issues from existing dams should be addressed...**

4

All stakeholders should have the opportunity for **informed participation in decision-making processes...**

5

Entitlements to **affected people to improve their livelihoods and ensure that they receive the priority** share of project benefits...

6

Affected people should be able to negotiate mutually agreed and legally enforceable agreements...

7

Assessment of the river ecosystem and attempt to avoid significant impacts on threatened and endangered species...

8

provide for the **release of environmental flows to help maintain downstream ecosystems.**

9

Compliance with regulations and negotiated agreements should be developed...

10

A dam should not be constructed on a shared river if other riparian States raise an objection that is upheld by an independent panel...

Movement Moments



Massive public pressure forces Hungarian parliament to abandon Nagymaros Dam and suspend work on Gabčíkovo Dam. Became a movement that fought communism too. (1989)



A proposal for a series of 6 hydroelectric dams on the Xingu River. A mass rally draws the eyes of the world. The World Bank is pressured into denying the dams loan (1989)

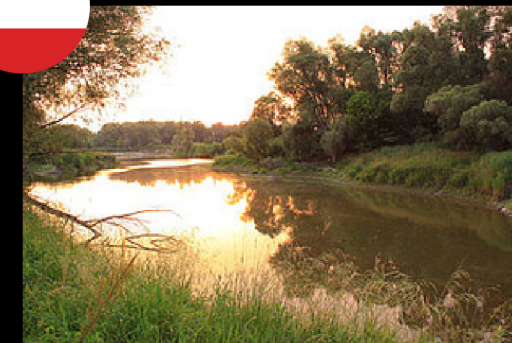


"The dam-building era in the United States is now over."
-Daniel Beard, head of US Bureau of Reclamation

Due to growing pressure from the anti-dam movement-US Bureau of Reclamation pulls support for Three Gorges Dam calling the project "outdated and overly expensive," and proclaims: "The dam-building era in the United States is now over." (1994)



World Bank cancels Arun III Dam in Nepal after NGOs filed a pre-emptive claim against the project. Proposed series of dams on the Mekong River is scrapped due to opposition (1995)



10,000 hectares of Rhine riverine forest by cancelled Hainburg Dam in Austria, becomes a national park. environmentalists also defeat plans to build a series of dams on the Elbe River.



Slovakian activists defeat a proposed water-supply dam by lobbying for an alternative plan of small-scale water harvesting and conservation (1997)



Thai villagers occupy Pak Mun Dam site for 14 months to demand compensation for lost fisheries. A "Rally for the Valley" brings thousands to oppose dams in India's Narmada Valley (1998)



The Lesotho high court launches the most public exposé of corruption in the dam-building industry by launching cases against a number of multinational companies accused of bribery (2000)



European countries withdraw from the controversial Ilisu Dam, proposed for the Kurdish region of Turkey (2002)



After 3 years of campaigning, Spain shelves plans to build 120 dams on the Ebro River. Suspension of 13 dams on the Nu River in China, following criticisms raised by Chinese scientists and activists. (2004)

Key Global Anti-Dam and River Groups Movements



US Anti-Dam
Movement



South Asia
Network on
Dams, Rivers and
People



Dam Removal
Europe



Save the
Narmada (India)
formed in 1989



Affected
Citizens of
Teesta



Save the
Mekong (formed
in 2009



REDLAR- *Latin
American
Network Against
Dams and for
Rivers,
Communities
and Water.*



Movement of
People Affected
by Dams-Brazil
(MAB) formed in
1991



CORAP-
coalition of 55
NGOs



Friends of Lake
Turkana



Rights of Rivers
South Asia



KESAN-Karen
Environmental
and Social
Action Network

River, land and human rights defenders under threat



"We must undertake the struggle in all parts of the world, wherever we may be, because we have no other spare or replacement planet." – Berta Cáceres



We've lost many river defenders. Killed or threatened due to their support of communities and rivers and stopping dams.

4 river and climate activists have been jailed in Vietnam including Goldman Prize Winner and Mekong River defender Nguy Thi Khanh

Sukhgerel Dugersuren is a Mongolian human rights and river defender under threat for her work with impacted communities and opposition to dams



Global Witness' annual report



A River Runs Through Us



Where are we now?

Unfortunately, still fighting new dams but now...

**Join the 26th
International
Day of Action
for Rivers!
March 14, 2023**

Growing calls for **Indigenous**-centered decision making, rights and territories #LandBank

Increased focus on **Women's leadership** in River and environmental protection

Increasing **dam removals** in Europe & globally including largest dam removal in U.S. history

Rewilding and **River Restoration** projects

Growing **Rights of Rivers & Rights of Nature** movement

Increasing connection between global **Biodiversity and Climate** goals

Permanent Protections for Rivers–Rights of Rivers Map



Universal Declaration of the Rights of River

Establishes that all rivers shall possess, at minimum, the following fundamental rights:

The RIGHT TO FLOW

**The RIGHT TO PERFORM ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS
WITHIN ITS ECOSYSTEM**

The RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM POLLUTION

**The RIGHT TO FEED AND BE FED BY SUSTAINABLE
AQUIFERS**

The RIGHT TO NATIVE BIODIVERSITY

The RIGHT TO REGENERATION AND RESTORATION



Amazon Basin

Including the Tapajós River-
communities and their Bioeconomy

The Balkans

Activism and victories to stop proposed
hydropower dams

Chile

Progress towards Right of Nature and
Indigenous Rights in the constitution

Colombia

Coalition working on rights of rivers
and permanent river protections

Congo

The largest and second longest river in
Africa. Threatened by "green
hydrogen" dam export to Europe

Klamath

The largest dam removal in US history

Kunene

Transboundary river where a dam was
stopped and another is proposed

Martuwarra Fitzroy

Indigenous Aboriginal-led rights of
rivers protection against dams and
extractive threats

Mighty Mekong

The largest freshwater fishery in the
world supporting 65 million people

Pascua

Emblematic river in Patagonia- movement
for community-based protection plan

Salween

The longest undammed free-flowing
river in mainland Southeast Asia

Teesta

Active indigenous and youth groups
protecting transboundary river

Vjosa

Planned first wild river national park in
Europe



River and Rights Activism to watch in 2023 and beyond!

Thank you

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