

# RIVERS FOR RECOVERY

A global call to protect rivers  
and rights as essential for a  
just and green recovery

STATEMENT

2021 



# Rivers for Recovery Statement

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting public health and economic crises are devastating populations around the globe, affecting marginalized and vulnerable groups most acutely.

The massive, transformational shocks these crises have produced for our current economic, energy, and food systems require an equally transformational response, to address widespread economic collapse, hunger, unemployment, and environmental damage, centered in concerns for social justice and ecological integrity.



Rivers and freshwater ecosystems are vital to a post-COVID global economic recovery. They underpin our natural systems, provide critical ecosystem services, and work as an economic safety net for the poor and vulnerable in many low- and middle-income countries. Yet, for generations, these arteries of the planet have been dammed, diverted, and polluted at a catastrophic cost to people and Earth's living systems. One in three freshwater species is now threatened with extinction.

Today's tragic pandemic sheds new light on the fundamental inequities and challenges of our time, providing an opportunity to change course on the historic degradation of our rivers and freshwater systems into the future. Our natural systems are integral to life on earth; for too long we have taken them for granted, and exploited them to drive profit and “development” for the primary benefit of a privileged minority. Globally, this trajectory has been unsustainable.

A new paradigm in river stewardship is critical, not only to safeguard the water sources that are indispensable to life and public health, but to help prevent countries bankrupted by COVID-19 from taking on calamitous new debt, speed a just energy transition, and effectively confront the climate crisis. The current push to escalate dam-building in many low and middle income countries threatens such progress – a false energy solution that the hydropower industry is promoting under the guise of a “green” economic recovery.



MEKONG RIVER |  
Women paddling.  
Photo courtesy  
of Tomáš Malík (via pexel)

A false path to economic recovery is one that expands crippling debt for countries already struggling under massive debt burdens, prioritizes “green-washed” solutions that divert scarce funds away from better alternatives, promotes large centralized grids designed around destructive projects, such as mega-dams and fossil fuels, weakens environmental and social safeguards, and continues the abuse of our freshwater resources.

Hydropower dams carry extremely high environmental and social impacts – they are a false solution and cannot deliver a green recovery.

By comparison, investments in decentralized solar and wind technologies, as well as energy efficiency, are affordable, quickly deployable, and can deliver jobs cost-effectively in the economic recovery. In order to rebuild towards a better future, economic stimulus packages should invest in low-impact technologies and those that benefit vulnerable populations and ecosystems, prioritizing community rights and participation rather than bailing out destructive industries that are rapidly losing relevance and financing.

**We call for a recovery that is rooted in climate justice and protects our rivers as critical lifelines – supporting biodiversity, water supply, food production, Indigenous peoples, and diverse populations around the world – rather than damming and polluting them in pursuit of profit and economic growth.**

# We call for a green economic recovery that includes:

## A MORATORIUM ON NEW HYDROPOWER DAMS

1



KENYA | Solar salesman  
Photo by International Rivers

A moratorium on new hydropower dams in economic recovery plans as an essential step towards a sustainable and just recovery.

This should be accompanied by a comprehensive review of energy systems and pipeline projects to ensure priority to protecting freshwater ecosystems and the community livelihoods and economies that depend on them.\*

\* This excludes mini (typically less than 500 kW) and micro-hydro (less than 100 kW) supported by local communities, projects equipping existing canals, reservoirs and dams with generators, and closed-loop pumped hydro, which does not use natural water bodies as reservoirs.

## INVEST IN RENEWABLE ENERGY

2

A rapid upscale of investment into renewable energy alternatives to destructive hydropower, together with policies to facilitate socially and environmentally responsible investment. Investment should kickstart renewable energy projects, roll out centralized and distributed connectivity, build jobs, and deliver low-cost and low-impact electrification to those experiencing energy poverty. Governments can use incentives to foster upstream value chain investment in local renewable energy manufacturing and assembly.

## UPDGRATE EXISTING DAM

3

**Upgrades to existing hydropower projects to increase efficiency instead of building new dams.** This can include retrofitting turbines, improved pumped storage, and grid integration with wind, solar, and other energy innovations. Upgrades should be accompanied by concrete steps to reduce damage to freshwater ecosystems and local livelihoods through robust mitigation and compensation. Dam removal and river restoration should be undertaken when the adverse social and environmental impacts of existing dams cannot be effectively mitigated.



ZAMBEZI RIVER | The Kariba Dam blocks the Zambezi River.  
Photo courtesy of Joe McKenna.

## INVESTMENT IN GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

4

**Investment in green infrastructure that protects and restores freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity, alongside laws governing freshwater protection.** This includes ensuring priority to ecosystem services and job opportunities for local communities, and facilitating dialogues between government, private sector, and Indigenous and community water users. Green infrastructure and renewable energy investments must be in line with international human rights standards and environmental safeguards and respect the right of Indigenous peoples and other traditional communities to Free, Prior, and Informed Consultation and Consent.

## NEW ENERGY PLANS

5

**New energy development plans** that emphasize investment in energy conservation and efficiency, participatory demand-side modeling, and options for smart, distributed energy and mini-grids located close to energy sources and end users, with a focus on community grids and expanded energy access. Governments should halt expensive and long-timeline hydropower projects to review and update energy plans and reassess options for electrification, ensuring transparency and public participation at all stages of planning and implementation.

6

## SAFEGUARDED FOR PROTECTED AREAS

**Safeguards for protected areas in stimulus and recovery plans.** This includes adopting policies supporting “no go” zones for environmentally risky investments in protected areas, endangered and vulnerable species habitat, free-flowing rivers, and the territories of Indigenous people and other traditional communities. Identify and halt destructive uses and development pressures on protected areas. Instead of backtracking on existing legislation, governments should strengthen policies to protect rivers, biodiversity and people’s rights.

# Endorsing Organizations

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- AAMA associação amigos dos mananciais
- AAPPMA de l'Albanais
- A Sud
- ABAA Associação Bujaruense dos Agricultores e Agricultoras
- Abibinsroma Foundation
- Ассоциация "За экологически чистую Фергану"
- Ackroyd & Harvey
- Action Humanitaire pour le Développement Durable
- Action for Improvement of Food Child and Mother-AFICM
- Adhoc Cambodia
- Aqua Crisius
- Aid/Watch
- Albergue Noturno de Pimenta Bueno
- ALERT: The Alliance of Leading Environmental Researchers & Thinkers
- Alinsaetamarn Library & Resource Center
- Alliance for Conflict Transformation (ACT)
- Allier Sauvage
- Amazon Rebelliin
- Amazon Rebellion / Londres - Reino Unido
- Amazon Watch
- Aniban ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (AMA)
- Animal and Environment Protection E.D.E.N.
- Apt Succor Organization
- Apremavi - Associação de Preservação do Meio Ambiente e da Vida
- Arab Watch Regional Coalition
- Arctic Consult
- Ars'egk Indigenous Peoples' Organization (Varzino) (ПОКМHC "Арсьегк" (Варзино))
- Articulação popular São Francisco vivo
- Arnika
- Associação Alternativa Terrazul
- Associação do Corrego Barriguda (ACB)
- Associação de Favelas de SJCampos
- Asociatia ARIN
- Associação Alternativa Terrazul
- Association des jeunes pour le développement
- Association for Eco Solutions EKO ALIJANSA
- Association of Indigenous People at the Northern Taimyr Dolgan-Nenets District (Местная Ассоциация общественных объединений коренных малочисленных народов Севера Таймырского Долгано-Ненецкого муниципального района)
- Association of Parks in Bulgaria
- Association of Patriotic Upbringing "Master of Own Land"
- Association Protectrice du Saumon pour le bassin de la Loire et de l'Allier
- Asociatia Grupul Milvus
- Asociación Plataforma Jalón Vivo
- Asociación Quisca
- Associacao Multietnica Wyka Kwara
- Ayeyarwady Youth Network
- Ayse Ege Yildirim Heritage Planning
- Aves Argentinas
- BALKANI Wildlife Society
- Balkanka Association (Sofia, Bulgaria)
- BAMEE - Bulgarian Association of Municipal Environmental Experts
- Bank Information Center
- BankTrack
- Biodiversity Conservation Center
- BIOS
- Beauty
- Blue Planet Project
- Bureau for Regional Outreach Campaigns - BROCC, Vladivostok
- California Trout
- Cambodian Volunteers for Society (CVS)
- Cambodian Youth Network
- Candle Light
- Catalan network for a new water culture
- Catedra Unesco/Unicap dom Helder Camara de Direitos Humanos
- Catena Ecology Club
- Center for Climate Change, Macedonia
- Center for Environment
- Center for Environmental Initiatives Ecoaction
- Center for Ethnic Studies and Development, Chiang Mai University
- Centre for Inland Waters in South Asia
- Center for Protection and Research of Birds
- Center for Support of Indigenous Peoples of the NorthCentre for Human Rights and Civic Education
- Centre for Environmental Justice
- Centre for Initiative Against Human Trafficking (CIAHT)
- Centro Amazónico de Antropología y Aplicación Práctica (CAAAP)
- Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos "Segundo Montes Mozo S.J." (CSMM)
- CESTA FOE
- CeVi - Centro di Volontariato Internazionale
- Chalakudypuzha Samrakshana Samithi
- CIMI/MS
- Cirneq
- Citizen's Action for Transparency (CAfT)
- Colong Foundation for Wilderness
- Comitato Terre San Giovanni Scarenò
- Comitê de Bacias Hidrográficas dos Rios Peruípe, Itanhém e Jucuruçu
- Comunidades SETAA / Movimento Ríos Vivos
- Competence Center for Environmental Technologies
- Congreso de los Pueblos-Chile
- Conselho rebentinho do Xingu
- CooperAcción
- Coordinamento Nazionale Tutela Fiumi - Free Rivers Italia
- CORAP
- CORE
- Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe
- Coletivo de Assistentes Sociais Resistência e Luta
- Colectivo Mura de Porta Velho
- Comitato PERALTRETRADE Dolomiti
- Comitê de Energia renovável do Semiárido - CERSA
- Community Development & Advocacy Forum Nepal
- Community Resource Center
- Conselho Pastoral dos Pescadores - ES
- Conservación Humana AC
- Coordinadora Afectados por Grandes Embalses y Trasvases - COAGRET
- Coordinadora Ciudadana No Alto Maipo
- Corner House
- Council of Merowe Dam Affected Communities



- Crear con Ciencia
- Crear con Ciencia
- Crude Accountability
- CSIPN
- Dalje nećeš moći
- Earthlife Africa Jhb
- Earth Thrive
- Eco-TIRAS International Association of River Keepers
- EcoContact NGO
- Ecoistituto del Veneto "Alex Langer"
- Eco Society India
- Ecopana
- Ecological Association "Rzav"
- Ecological Center DRONT
- Ecologistas en Acción - Adra
- EcoLur Informational NGO
- Eko Energy Ecolabel
- Eko Gerila Prespa
- Eko Rural Pelister
- El Paraná no se toca
- Energy and Environmental Sciences College Al-Kharkh University of Science
- Environics Trust
- Environmental Citizens' Association "Front 21/42"
- Ergonomic
- ERN European Rivers Network
- ESAMACITO
- Equitable Cambodia
- Etica en los Bosques
- EuroNatur
- Fair Finance International
- FAOR Fórum da Amazônia Oriental
- Femmes Solidaires
- Fly Fishing Club Idrija
- Fonds pour la Conservation des Rivières Sauvages
- FORED
- Fundación Cauce: Cultura Ambiental, Causa Ecologista
- Fundação SOS Mata Atlântica
- Future Young Pioneer Organization
- GegenStrömung/ CounterCurrent
- German-Russian Exchange St. Petersburg
- Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, Regionalgruppe München
- GAIA Kosovo
- Global Forest Coalition
- Global Shapers Hub Skopje-Water4changes project
- Grand Riverkeeper Labrador, Inc
- Green Advocates International
- Green Alternative (Environmental NGO)
- Fórum do livro ; Leitura; Literatura e bibliotecas
- Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua
- Fórum Mundações Climáticas E Justiça Socioambiental - FMCJS
- Fórum Nacional da Sociedade Civil em Comitês de Bacias Hidrográficas
- Forum for Policy Dialogue on Water Conflicts in India
- Foundation for Environment and Agriculture
- Foundation of Sami Heritage and Development
- Free-Flowing Rivers Lab, Northern Arizona University
- Free Rivers Fund
- Frente Brasil Popular
- Frente por uma Nova Política Energética para o Brasil
- Freshwater Life Project
- Friends of Bharathapuzha
- Friends of Clayoquot Sound
- Friends of the Earth Japan
- Friends of the Siberian Forests
- Friends with Environment in Development (FED)
- Fundação SOS Mata Atlântica
- Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (FARN)
- Fundacion Arcoiris por el Respeto a la Diversidad sexual
- Fundacion Delta Ecuador
- Fundación Avina
- Green Lotus NGO
- International Union for the Conservation of Nature - Species Survival Commission (Freshwater Conservation Committee)
- Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense
- INTERDOL
- International Accountability Project
- International Indigenous Fund for Development and Solidarity "Batani"
- International Rafting Federation
- International Rivers
- IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas Freshwater Specialist Group
- Jalbiradari
- Jamaa Resource Initiatives
- Journalists for Human Rights
- Kampagne Bergwerk Peru - Riquesa se va, pobreza se queda
- Kalpavriksh
- Keepers of the Water Society
- Kempische vloegvusclub
- Koalisi Rakyat untuk Hak atas Air (KRuHA) / People's Coalition for the Right to Water
- Green Silk Road Coalition
- Gruppo Italiano Amici della Natura
- Héritier du Développement au Congo
- Hill Area and Community Development Foundation
- IAD
- Igapo Project
- Indian Institute of Forest Management
- Institute for Environmental Policy
- Institute for the Study of Natural Resources and Environmental Management, Mae Fah Luang University
- Informationsstelle Peru e.V.
- Iniciativa para las Inversiones Sustentables China-América Latina
- Iniciativa para las Inversiones Sustentables China-América Latina
- Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive
- Innovation pour le Développement et la Protection de l'Environnement
- Instituto BiodiverCidade
- Instituto Calliandra de Educação Integral e Ambiental
- Instituto Madeira Vivo-IMV
- Institution Rongo-RJ (Association of National Organized Graffiti Workshop Region)
- Instituto Oca do Sol
- Koalisi Rakyat untuk Hak atas Air (KRuHA) / people's coalition for the right to water
- Kogayon Association
- Kola Sámi Radio
- Kostroma Regional Environmental Association "For the sake of Life" (Костромское областное общественное экологическое движение "Во имя жизни")
- Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center - Friends of the Earth Philippines
- Le Réseau des Rivières sauvages
- Living River Siam Association
- Lokshakti Abhiyan
- Lok Vidyaan Sanghatana
- Lonko Comunidad Indígena Sin Tierra de Galvarino
- Mae Sai Environment Group
- Maiouri Nature Guyane
- Manna Gum
- MAPAS
- Marcha Mundial por Justiça Climática / Marcha Mundial do Clima
- Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos
- Mekong Community Institute Association

- Mekong People Network
- Mekong Watch
- MENSCHENRECHTE 3000 e.V., Working Group Uranium Network
- Mesopotamia Ecology Movement
- Metta Development Foundation
- Milwaukee Riverkeeper
- Mlup Promviheathor Center (MPC)
- MMC
- MNLE69
- Mom Loves Taiwan Association
- Mongolian Sustainable Development Bridge NGO
- Mongolian Women's Fund
- Mon Region Land Policy Affairs Committee
- Mountain Club "Jabagly-Manas-C" (ОО "Горный клуб "Жабaглы-МанасЦ")
- Mountains and People Association of Bulgarian Mountain Leaders and Mountain Guides
- Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens
- Movimento Tapajós Vivo
- Movimento Xingu Vivo Para Sempre
- Mulheres - PT RO
- My Village
- Nam Ing River Group
- National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE)
- National Ecological Centre of Ukraine
- National River Saving Movement (NRSM)
- Nature Foundation
- Nature Iraq
- National Parks Association of NSW
- Nepal River Conservation Trust (NRCT)
- NGO "AGENS"
- NGO "FAaN "
- NGO Forum on Cambodia
- NGO Green Home
- NGO "Terra-1530"
- NGO ARD Habitat
- NGO Union for Defence of the Aral Sea and Amudarya
- NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark
- NUPÉLIA - Nucleo de Pesquisas em Limnologia, Ictiologia e Aquicultura
- Nupelia-PEA-UEM
- OASIS
- Observatório Ibérico Energia
- Obsetvatório Nacional de Justiça Socioambiental Luciano Mnedes de Almeida (OLMA)
- Office of Fisheries Chiang Rai
- Ohrid SOS Citizens' Initiative
- ONG PADJENA
- Organic Agriculture Association
- PA Angel
- PA ECOM
- Pace on Peaceful Pluralism
- Pak Chom, Chiang Khan Group
- PAN (Pesticides Action Network)
- Parjanya
- Pashan Area Sabha
- Patrulha Ambiental Do Rio Ivai Pari
- Paung Ku
- PCoЭC
- Peace Valley Environment Association
- Peace Valley Landowner Association
- People and Nature Reconciliation
- Perangua Network
- Pindos Perivallontiki
- Planète Amazone
- Plataforma de Toledo en Defensa del Tajo
- Pofoma
- Projeto Saude e Alegria
- Pró Ivai/Piquiri
- Puelo Patagonia
- Puelo sin Torres
- Punarbharan Foundation
- Rak Chiang Khong Group
- RAVEN (Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs)
- Reach to Unreached (RUN)
- REDAR PERU
- Red Uruguay de ONGs Ambientalistas
- REDE AMABIENTAL DO PIAUI
- Research-Intellectual Club "Dialogue of Generations
- Réseau Camerounais des Organisations des Droits de l'Homme (RECODH)
- Réseau CREF
- Riverreach Consulting
- River Collective
- River Research Centre
- Rivers without Boundaries Coalition-Mongolia
- Rivers without Boundaries International Coalition
- Riverwatch
- Rubyn Territory of Communal Self-Government of Irkutsk City (Территориальное общественное самоуправление (ТОС) "Рубин, г.Иркутск, Иркутская область, председатель региональной группы "Народные инициативы-общественный контроль
- SaciWATERS
- Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia)
- Salviamo il Paesaggio Valdossola
- Samuchit enviro tech
- ഝန-SaNaR(Save the Natural Resource)
- SANDRP: South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers & People
- Save Our Rivers
- Save Pune Hills
- Save the Tigris Campaign
- Save The World's Rivers
- Save the Zambezi - a Watershed Project
- Scientists4Mekong
- iSchool-Myanmar
- Secretaria de Educação. SEEDF
- Seoulrivernet Secretary General
- Scientists4Mekong
- Shaqovian Organization for Development and Culture (منظمة شاقوفيان للتنمية والثقافة)
- Shoal
- Social Action for Community and Development (SACD)
- Sociedade civil
- Sobrevivencia
- Socio-ecological Union International
- SOS Durance Vivante
- SOS-Forêts
- SOS Loire Vivante
- Southen Youth Development Organization
- South Durban Community Environmental Alliance
- Sunshine Coast Alliance4Democracy
- Sustaining the Wild Coast
- Synchronicity Earth
- Taiga Research and Protection Agency
- Tajik Social and Ecological Union
- Tampadipa Institute
- Terra-1530
- Terrasonica
- The Altai Project
- Tigris River Protector Association | Humat Dijlah
- Thai Mekong People's Network from Eight Provinces
- The Mekong Butterfly
- Tinada Youth Organization (TIYO)
- Trend Asia
- TOKA : The Organization to Conserve the Albanian Alps
- TOGETHER Asbl
- Toxic Action Network Central Asia
- Tsavo Trust
- UMR CNRS, University of Tours
- Un Ponte Per
- Union for Chemical Safety (Союз "За химическую безопасность")

- Union for Defence of the Aral Sea and Amudarya
- United Institute for nuclear Research Объединённый институт ядерных исследований
- United Tasmania Group (UTG)
- Universidade Estadual de Maringá
- Urgewaldurgewald
- Vasundhara Swatchata Abhiyan
- Vayali Folklore Group
- Vietnam National University of Forestry
- Vietnam River Network (VRN)
- Wainui Consulting Limited
- WALHI - West Java (Friends of The Earth Indonesia)
- Water Beyond Borders (Initiative)
- Waterkeepers Bangladesh
- Watershed Poetry Mendocino
- Water Justice and Gender
- WET - Wildwasser Erhalten Tirol
- Witness Radio - Uganda
- WomanHealth Philippines
- Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO)
- WoMin African Alliance
- World Fish Migration Foundation
- World Heritage Watch
- Yayasan HAKA
- Youth For Environment Education And Development Foundation (YFEED Foundation)
- Youth Group on Protection of Environment
- Za Zemiata - Friends of the Earth Bulgaria
- Observatório Ibérico Energia
- Obsetvatório Nacional de Justiça Socioambiental Luciano Mnedes de Almeida (OLMA)
- Office of Fisheries Chiang Rai
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- Planète Amazone
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- Projeto Saude e Alegria
- Pró Ivai/Piquiri
- Puelo Patagonia
- Puelo sin Torres
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- REDE AMABIENTAL DO PIAUI
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- Réseau CREF
- Riverreach Consulting
- River Collective
- River Research Centre
- Rivers without Boundaries Coalition-Mongolia
- Rivers without Boundaries International Coalition
- Riverwatch
- Rubyn Territory of Communal Self-Government of Irkutsk City (Территориальное общественное самоуправление (ТОС) "Рубин, г.Иркутск, Иркутская область, председатель региональной группы "Народные инициативы-общественный контроль")
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- Toxic Action Network Central Asia
- Tsavo Trust
- UMR CNRS, University of Tours
- Un Ponte Per
- Union for Chemical Safety (Союз "За химическую безопасность")
- Union for Defence of the Aral Sea and Amudarya
- United Institute for nuclear Research Объединённый институт ядерных исследований
- United Tasmania Group (UTG)
- Universidade Estadual de Maringá
- Urgewaldurgewald
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- Watershed Poetry Mendocino
- Water Justice and Gender
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- Witness Radio - Uganda
- WomanHealth Philippines
- Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO)
- WoMin African Alliance
- World Fish Migration Foundation
- World Heritage Watch
- Yayasan HAKA
- Youth For Environment Education And Development Foundation (YFEED Foundation)
- Youth Group on Protection of Environment
- Za Zemiata - Friends of the Earth Bulgaria
- Zelenyi mir
- 2018 Baikal Headwaters Expedition
- 3S Rivers Protection Network
- 350 Africa
- 생태보전시민모임
- 오산천살리기 지역협의회



MEKONG RIVER |  
Photo courtesy of Pai Deetes.

Take Action, learn more,  
& read the full report at:  
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INTERNATIONAL  
**RIVERS**  
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RIVERS WITHOUT  
BOUNDARIES