

# International Rivers Annual Report 2019

Photo by Saymon Sami, Pexels




INTERNATIONAL  
**RIVERS**  
PEOPLE · WATER · LIFE

# Our Impact in 2019

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An indigenous woman on  
the Sesan River, Ratanakiri  
province, Cambodia.

Photo: Oxfam

# A Letter From the Executive Director

The future of our waterways is as uncertain as ever. As climate change wreaks havoc on some of our world's most vital and life-sustaining ecosystems, the rivers that give these places life are often the first places where the harm is most acutely felt. Freshwater sources for drinking and agriculture are rapidly being converted into methane-emitting reservoirs, impacting local livelihoods, indigenous cultures, and vulnerable biodiversity hotspots that rivers sustain.

What's not uncertain is the resilience of people's movements for the protection of our rivers and waterways. To counter the global rollbacks of environmental protections and the persecution of environmental and human rights defenders, the network of river defenders continues to grow. Through globally-connected local action, we are advancing a shared vision for a world in which rivers are protected as the life-giving arteries of the Earth that they are... truly clean energy solutions are locally owned and accessed...and the rights of local and indigenous river protectors are respected.

At International Rivers, it is the fearlessness and innovative-thinking of our river defender partners around the world that give us hope. As you'll see in the highlights below, 2019 marked a milestone year in the global call for permanent river protection. We took leaps in our advocacy to hold corporations and financiers accountable for the destruction of our rivers. And International Rivers now has 24 staff critically engaged in movements to protect dozens of vital river basins, with particular focus on the Amazonian rivers of Brazil, Peru, and Colombia, Chile's Patagonia, Southeast Asia's Mekong and Salween, South Asia's Ganga-Brahmaputra-Megna system, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Congo River.

Leveraging our global position to resource and support our partner organizations at local and regional levels – as described in the partnerships section – is key to strengthening this movement. Ultimately, we could not do this work without our global network. To each of you who have contributed, we thank you, and through our work, we honor our shared vision for a healthy future for our rivers.

Sincerely,



**Michael Simon**  
Interim Executive Director

# 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.**



# Strengthen Movements for Healthy Rivers

## *Building a Network of Women River Defenders*

Women are often at the heart of local movements to protect water, and in many places they are the primary stewards and defenders of freshwater resources. But women face systematic exclusion from decision-making processes, from the local level to transnational levels. At the inaugural Women and Rivers Congress convened by International Rivers and our partners in March 2019, we heard countless stories of women who fought for their voices to be heard as they spoke up for clean water... of women who banded together to block the intrusion of male-led workforces that had come to build on their rivers... of women who are creating locally-owned energy projects... and of women who have spent their lives engaged in research and advocacy on the governance and management of rivers.

The event brought together close to 100 women from more than 30 countries to celebrate the fundamental role women play in defending and stewarding freshwater resources, as well as to spur collective action to challenge the deep-rooted, gender inequities that women face in safeguarding rivers and river ecosystems. For three days, we shared our common struggles and willing strategies for advancing gender equity to conserve rivers. We emerged with a collective commitment – to continue our fight to protect free-flowing rivers and the lands, forests and territories they sustain, to ensure women's leadership in decision-making at all levels over freshwater resources, and to strengthen and build alliances and grow our movement, for our families and communities, our rivers and our planet.

Congress participants jointly developed a Celebratory Statement, and a roadmap for collective action. Each participant represented an extraordinary wealth of knowledge and committed to pursuing coordinated actions. Visit [WomenAndRivers.com](http://WomenAndRivers.com) to read our collective roadmap for growing the network.



Women and Rivers Congress 2019, group photo.

Photo by International Rivers

# Strengthen Movements for Healthy Rivers

*Protecting the Congo River by  
elevating the voices of Inga Women*

The Inga 3 dam on the DRC's Congo River would be the largest dam in history, would displace over 30,000 people, and would send the electricity via transmission lines across half of the African continent rather than providing local Congolese with energy. International Rivers has supported communities and civil society opposing the Inga 3 dam by advocating for sustainable and economical sources of energy, and for protection for the Congo River. Earlier we analysed and presented the options for affordable renewable power in the DRC that would help address the grinding energy poverty that exists, and in 2019 we supported a delegation of Inga women to speak to the Permanent People's Tribunal in Johannesburg, and created the short video "Inga Women Speak" to showcase their stories and demands.

Inga Women.

Photo by  
International Rivers.



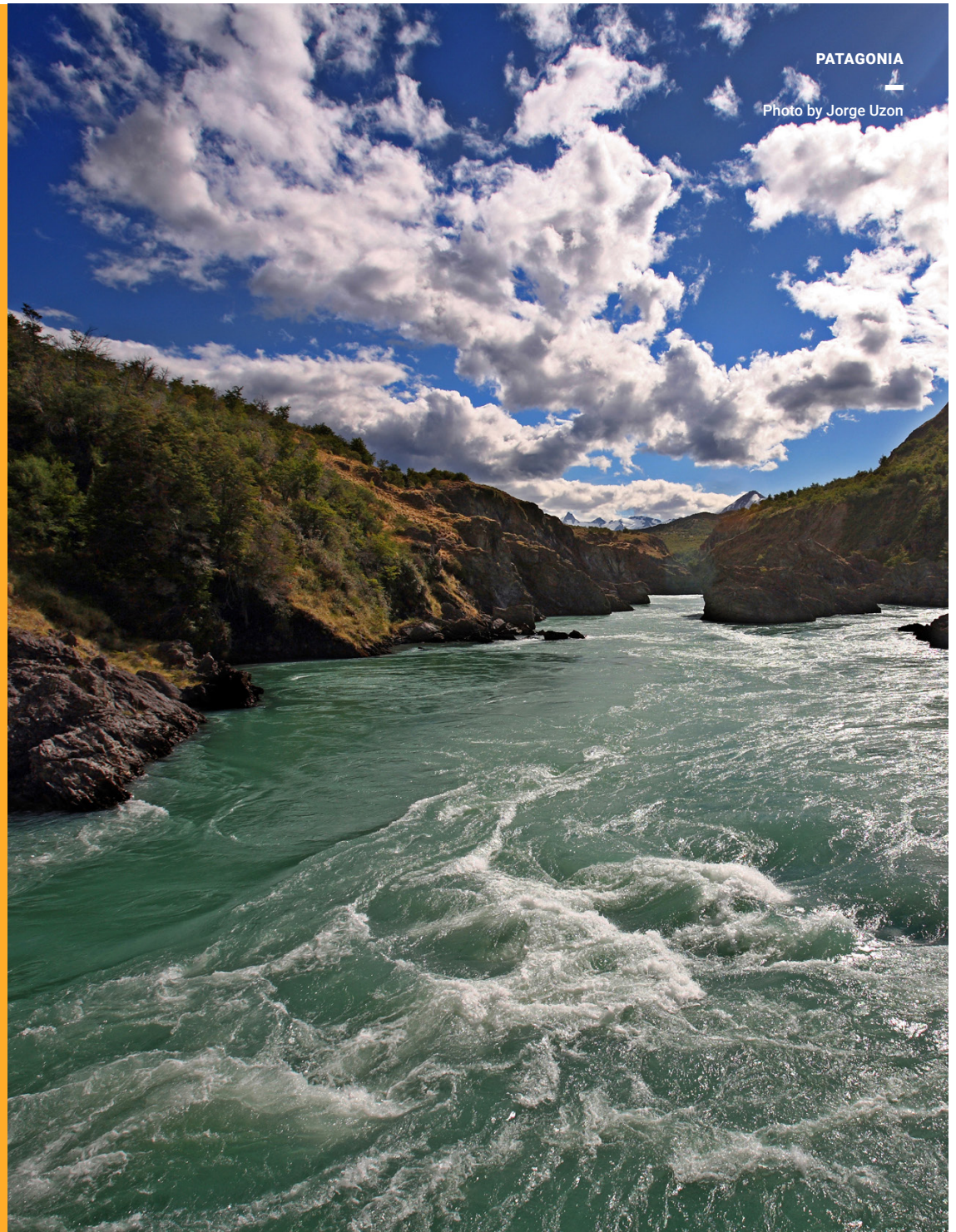
# Gain Permanent Legal Protections for the World's Iconic Rivers

*Fighting to Keep Our Rivers  
#ForeverWild*

When the Chilean government approved plans to dam Patagonian rivers for hydropower and mining, Chilean civil society and communities joined by International Rivers waged a ten-year long struggle to keep Patagonian rivers wild and free. In 2017, Chile cancelled the dams and the energy companies returned the rights to two of the rivers. But these rivers remain vulnerable to future projects. In 2019, International Rivers supported Chilean civil society in efforts to permanently protect these massive and pristine freshwater ecosystems that function like arteries for the entire region. We supported a campaign to create a "Rios Salvajes," or wild rivers, law. This places Chile at the forefront of countries using river protections as a means of adapting to and offsetting climate change. The campaign succeeded in raising critical international attention, in part through this opinion editorial by International Rivers and our partners in the New York Times.

Our efforts were also buoyed by recent developments that have seen legal rights granted to rivers in New Zealand and Bangladesh. Many international organizations, among them Rivers Without Boundaries and World Heritage Watch, contributed to the Heritage Dammed report, published in June, which calls for rivers to receive the same recognition and protection as the UNESCO World Heritage Sites they nourish. This could grant renewed protections for some of the world's most cherished rivers—among them the Nu-Salween River—permanent legal protection from damming, diversion and pollution.

The growing movement for permanent river protection gains strength at a critical time. Only one-third of the world's 177 longest rivers remain free flowing, and just 21 rivers longer than 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) retain a direct connection to the sea. If we are to arrest global climate change, prevent the toxifying of freshwater sources, avoid more extinctions in freshwater species and loss of riparian habitat, and do right by all those who depend on rivers for survival, we must return more rivers to their natural state.



# Promote Clean and Fair Finance for Energy and Water Solutions

## *Standing Up to the False Promises of Hydropower*

There is no defensible way to continue damming the world's rivers. That was the message that a powerful network of individuals, NGOs and social movements delivered to the World Hydropower Congress in May. With our partners, we launched a joint declaration on the "False Promises of Hydropower: Why Hydroelectric Dams will Not Deliver the Paris Climate Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals," signed by some 250 civil society organizations from over 70 countries. We assisted in staging protests and supporting three Indigenous Munduruku leaders from dam-affected communities in the Brazilian Amazon, who were eventually invited to speak on a panel inside the World Hydropower Congress about dams and Indigenous peoples. Their ultimate message was: "We don't want dams. Respect our livelihoods, respect our rights, respect our rivers."



Mundurku at the alternative forum to the World Hydropower Congress in Paris.

Photo by International Rivers



# Ensure Corporations are Accountable

## *Pursuing accountability and justice for the Xe Pian-Xe Namnoy Dam collapse in Laos*

One year after the tragic collapse of an auxiliary dam of the Xe Pian-Xe Namnoy Hydropower Project in Laos, International Rivers and Inclusive Development International examined the situation for survivors. Close to 5,000 people made homeless by the disaster remain in temporary camps, surviving hand to mouth on meager rations and daily allowances, and without adequate compensation or redress. The report "Reckless Endangerment: Assessing Responsibility for the Xe Pian Xe-Name Noy Dam Collapse" identifies the various project stakeholders in the hydropower project, including government and corporate actors, financiers and insurers, and their responsibilities for the disaster, calling on them to take immediate action to provide restitution for loss and harm.

Flood affected area.

Photo by  
International Rivers.



## *Watered Down: Demanding the hydropower industry better adhere to social and environmental standards*

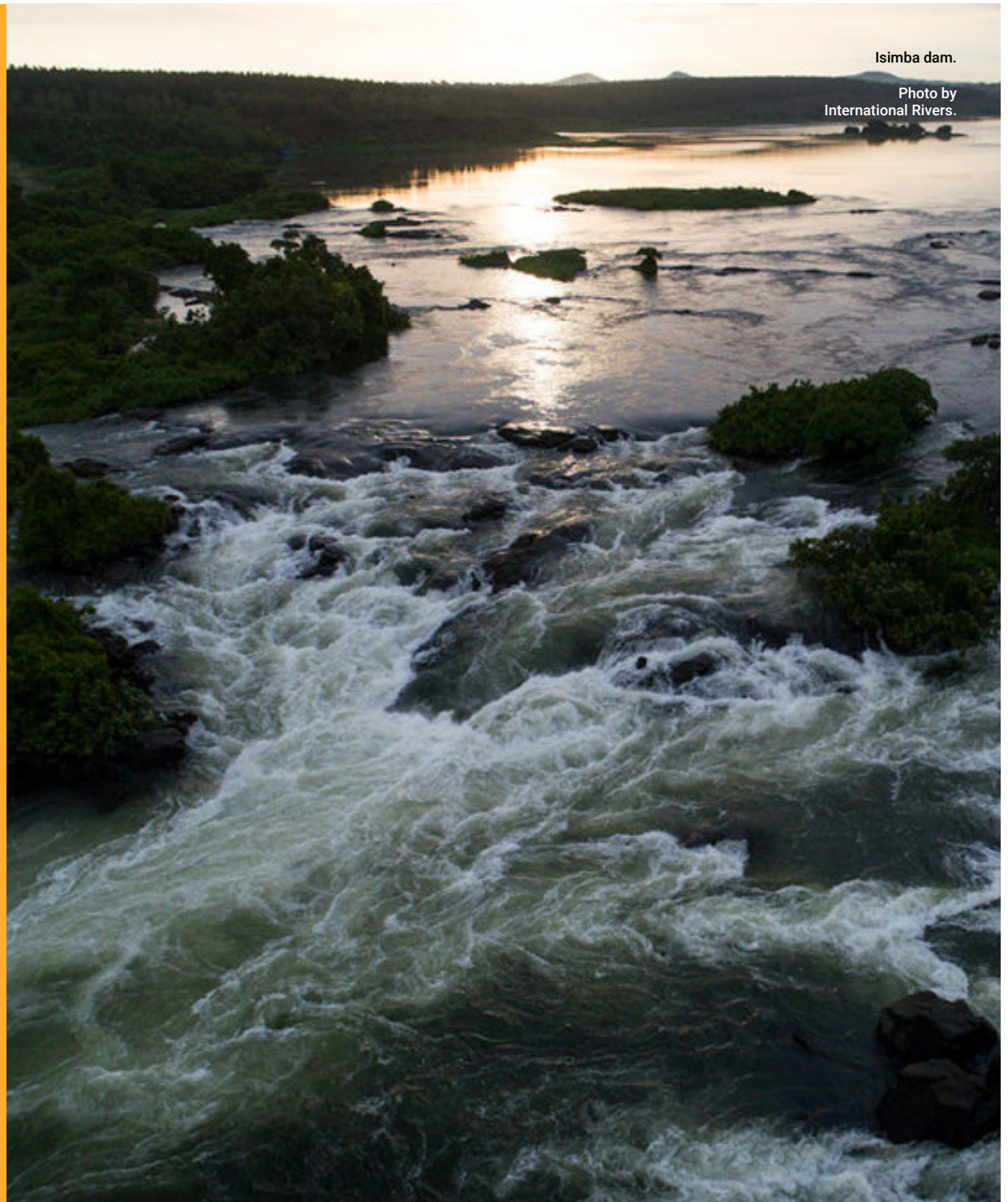
Despite the enormous diversity in size, scale and geography of new dams being built, a relatively small number of corporations are responsible for their construction. Thus the policies and practices of these companies have tremendous implications for rivers and human rights.

Our latest report finds the world's largest hydropower corporations fail to meet basic social and environmental standards in preparing and constructing new dams. *Watered Down* provides an in-depth look at how policy meets practice in seven flagship dam projects spanning Africa, Asia, and South America from some of the world's largest hydropower firms. The study focuses primarily on prominent Chinese state-owned enterprises – which account for two-thirds of all large dams built globally – among them Sinohydro International, PowerChina Resources, and China International Water and Electric, a subsidiary of China Three Gorges.

Through research, interviews, and site visits undertaken between 2016-19, International Rivers found that corporate policies and practice fall short of accepted international social and ecological standards, such as those set by the World Bank's International Finance Corporation.

The implication of these failings is considerable. Dams have already fragmented two-thirds of the world's great rivers, displaced more than 80 million people, and negatively affected over 470 million more. They've also been a leading culprit in the 83 percent decline in global freshwater biodiversity. That the small handful of companies responsible for building most of the world's dams do not adhere to basic accepted practice is cause for great concern.

The performance of the companies in the study begs not only for hydro companies to adopt enforceable standards for dam construction in line with international best practice, but for a greater shift in the energy portfolios of corporations to more sustainable alternatives, such as wind and solar.



Isimba dam.

Photo by  
International Rivers.

# Our Partnerships

## *Resourcing a global movement*

Strengthening the capacities of our local partners from grassroots and community levels to national and regional groups is key to the success of the global river protection movement. International Rivers staff leverage our relationships with funders to resource local partner organizations. In 2019, International Rivers facilitated over \$320,000 in small grants to 35 local and Indigenous partner groups, through re-granting, advising granting foundations, and serving as an intermediary pass-through organization.

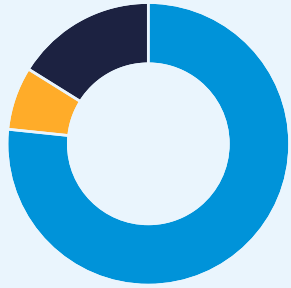
Our partner grantor institutions included: Alex Soros Foundation, Global Greengrants Fund, Tikva Grassroots Empowerment Fund, The Moore Foundation, and Mize Family Foundation.



Woman selling fish caught from the Mekong River

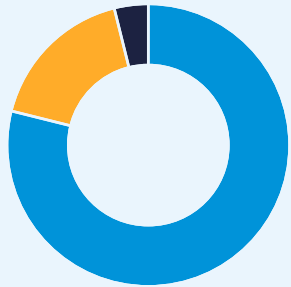
Photo by Oxfam.

# Financial Statement



## 2019 Income:

- Grants: \$1,541,252
- Contributions: \$141,744
- Other: \$322,796



## 2019 Expenses:

- Programs: \$2,176,156
- Administration: \$473,825
- Fundraising: \$100,980



## 2019 Net Assets:

- Beginning: \$2,391,922
- Ending: \$1,646,753

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Schmidt Family  
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American Jewish  
World Service  
The Arcadia Fund  
The Baltoro Trust  
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Investment  
Foundation  
C.S. Mott Foundation  
Conservation, Food &  
Health Foundation  
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Action (GAGGA)  
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The New Place Fund  
Open Society  
Foundations  
Open Society Initiative  
for Southern Africa  
(OSISA)  
Orchard House  
Foundation  
Oxfam America  
Oxfam Novib  
Pledgeling Foundation  
Rockefeller Brothers  
Fund  
Sandy Springs Trust  
Synchronicity Earth  
The McKnight  
Foundation  
Tikva Grassroots

Empowerment Fund  
of Tides Foundation  
Winky Foundation  
Womadix Fund

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Lindsay  
Construction, Inc.  
O.A.R.S. Family Of  
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Read our 2018-22 Strategic Plan here:  
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