

Where Rivers Run, Life Flows Celebrating World Rivers Day

Photo credit: Getty Images Signature

Rivers are vital for sustaining human life, economies, ecosystems, and cultures.

That's why initiatives like

World Rivers Day

(endorsed by the UN) call for global attention and action.

WHY RIVERS MATTER



**Supply
Drinking
Water**



**Feed
Agriculture**



**Support
Biodiversity**



**Power
Homes with
Hydropower**



**Connect
Cultures and
Economies**

Source: The United Nations World Water Development Report, 2023; FAO – Water for Sustainable Food and Agriculture, n.d; WWF Living Planet Report, 2022; International Hydropower Association (IHA), n.d.

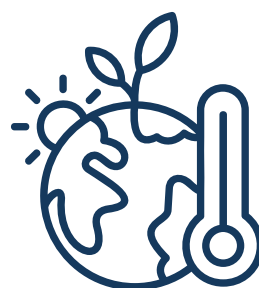
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Rivers worldwide are under pressure, many nearing a breaking point



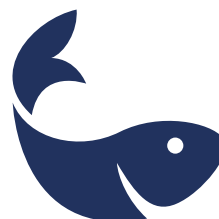
Rivers are major conduits of **plastic and chemical pollution**, which **threaten aquatic ecosystems** and **human health**.



Climate change alters river flow, timing, and seasonal availability of water, **increasing** the risk of **floods** and **droughts**.



In many regions, river **water is extracted at unsustainable rates** for agriculture and industry, leading to **drying rivers** and **aquifer depletion**.



Freshwater species populations have declined by 83% since 1970, faster than any other biome.



Only one-third of the world's rivers longer than 1,000 km remain free-flowing due to **damming** and **diversion**.



Only **37% of rivers longer than 1,000 km remain free-flowing** in their natural state.

Source: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2021; FAO AQUASTAT, n.d; World Wildlife Fund (WWF), 2019; IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, 2022; Living Planet Report WWF, 2022; WWF, McClain et al., 2019.

Southeast Asia's rivers are lifelines, but they're also at a crossroads



Photo of Mekong river landscape

From the Mekong to the Musi, **Southeast Asia's rivers face growing threats: climate-driven floods and droughts, unregulated sand mining, and rapid urbanization.** Yet across the region, **communities are stepping up with local, nature-based solutions to protect and restore their rivers.**



Photo of Musi river in Palembang, Indonesia

Source: World Bank, 2021; United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2019; Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2020.

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Across the globe, countries are adopting practical solutions to protect rivers and communities. **Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)** is improving how water is governed across sectors, while **nature-based solutions** like reforestation and wetland restoration help reduce flood risks and restore ecosystems.

In shared river basins like the Mekong, **transboundary cooperation** ensures countries work together for long-term water security. At the same time, **early warning systems** supported by CREWS, WMO, and GWP are helping vulnerable communities prepare for climate shocks like floods and droughts.

6.5.1 INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT



6.5.2 TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION



Source: United Nations (UN) Water, 2021; United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2021; The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and The World Wide Fund (WWF), 2020; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), 2021; The Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS), 2023; World Meteorological Organization (WMO), 2022.

You Can Help!



By **conserving water**, **avoiding dumping waste into drains or waterways**, and **joining local cleanups** to reduce pollution.



Supporting policies that **protect river health** and learning about local river stories **strengthens community awareness**.



Most importantly, **sharing knowledge** can inspire collective action and ripple change far beyond your own riverbank.



Source: United Nations (UN) Water, 2023; United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2021; The World Wide Fund (WWF), 2022; The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), 2020; The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2021.

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