



PRESS RELEASE | COP27: Groups warn of severe climate and human rights risk of new hydropower dams and schemes

Dams and hydropower schemes create major loss and damage, including producing significant amounts of methane, biodiversity loss, and community displacement. In a warming world, droughts and flooding make hydropower an unreliable energy choice and an increasing danger to downstream communities. An urgent shift away from false solutions that harm people and ecosystems is essential.

For Immediate Release: November 15, 2022

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COP27 Side Event [photos](#)

Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt—Today, a global river and human rights coalition at the United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference (COP27) called both on governments to avoid including new large

hydropower projects in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and financiers to avoid funding projects due to the climate and human rights risks associated with hydropower.

The Rivers for Climate Coalition of, a collective effort of environmental, indigenous, and human rights groups pointed to the immense loss and damage suffered by the more than half a billion people impacted and displaced by hydropower dams, especially Indigenous Peoples. They also highlighted the multiple recent [studies](#) showing that emissions, especially methane, at hydropower plants are [much higher](#) than previously understood. In some cases, hydropower dams emit [twice as much carbon](#) as they store. A 2018 study, showed [14 dams in the Mekong River basin](#) release more carbon emissions than fossil-fueled power plants, with researchers determining, “hydropower in the Mekong Region cannot be considered categorically as low-emission energy.” Another study last year found that hydropower in the Amazon river basin [and the tropics have significant greenhouse gas emissions](#). This is especially worrisome as most new planned hydropower is in tropical areas.

In the lead-up to last year’s climate meeting, UN agencies [urgently warned](#) the world of the dangers and opportunity to reduce methane emissions - a greenhouse gas more than 80 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere.

“We applaud the latest global effort to tackle methane emissions announced at COP27 last week, but most countries still don’t measure hydropower emissions to include in their calculations. When measured, methane emissions from reservoirs are significant and much larger than expected. This is a major problem when hydropower is being falsely marketed as “clean,” “green,” or “carbon-emission free.” This narrative must be challenged, and accurate data provided so decision-makers can make the best investments to reduce emissions and harm. By not using accurate information, we’re heating up the world even faster with these false solutions,” the coalition said.

Last year, a coalition of over 350 organizations from 78 countries delivered a [declaration](#) to the UNFCCC demanding that hydropower be excluded from UN climate finance mechanisms. The groups, representing civil society, Indigenous communities, and scientists, warned that scarce climate dollars could be wasted if the implementation plan for the Paris Agreement renews previous carbon trading schemes that incentivized large dams.

In addition to their troublesome emissions, hydropower dams become risky and fail to deliver reliable energy due to climate change. This year, the world saw unprecedented droughts in China, Europe, the US, Brazil, and Africa. Hydropower production dropped drastically and caused economic stoppages. In countries overdependent on hydropower, like China, this has caused a move backward to fossil fuels rather than forward to better and cleaner alternatives like wind, solar, and community-centered energy production. Another study showed how [dams have caused unprecedented changes to the world’s rivers](#), exacerbating the biodiversity crisis.

Next month, world leaders come together in Montreal to discuss and agree on the global biodiversity framework. As many now realize, biodiversity loss and climate change are two sides of the same coin. Loss of species, water justice, Indigenous rights and climate goals and solutions must be interlinked and tackled together for the world to succeed in its goals for a liveable planet.

New large hydropower projects have no place in energy transition plans in a world working to address catastrophic climate change, human rights, clean water access, and mass biodiversity loss. We have no time to waste on false solutions.

Quotes from coalition participants:

"This year's COP27 focuses on loss and damage for a reason. Fossil fuel companies have created major havoc for the world's most vulnerable, but dams are close behind", said **Oswaldo Durán-Castro of Fecon and Latin America Rivers Network**, organizations working on environmental defense and social justice in Costa Rica and throughout Latin America. "Between 40-80 million people have been displaced by hydropower dams. Dams are false solutions to the climate crisis--they're expensive, destructive and steal the little time we have left to make the profound social and economic shifts which this unprecedented moment demands."

"Before governments commit public resources to the promotion and development of new green hydrogen or any other "proposed climate technology", the full range of the social and environmental impacts must be examined. When that is done, it becomes clear that any green hydrogen scheme that includes hydropower-to-hydrogen is going to cause more loss and damage. This includes the proposed Inga Dam on the Congo River in the DRC which will cause harm to more than 40,000 people while not providing local energy to them. The damage caused to the people, fish and biodiversity shows this is not "green" hydrogen or clean energy" said **Emmanuel Musuyu, Executive Secretary, Coalition des Organisations de la Société Civile pour le Suivi des Réformes et de l'Action Publique (CORAP)**

"The UN continues to recognize hydroelectric dams as clean energy, giving countries and investors the greenlight to finance these destructive projects in developing countries where we still have native forests and highly biodiverse areas intact. This allows countries and hydropower companies to claim they're reducing carbon emissions, but in reality, they are helping to destroy our forests, rivers and displacing the indigenous people from their territories. This is egregious greenwashing continues a legacy of loss and damage," said **Nicole Cuqui of the San José de Uchupiamonas indigenous community in the Bolivian Amazon**. "Financiers and countries' investments need to move away from fossil fuels and outdated technologies like hydropower dams that destroy ecosystems and harm Indigenous communities, territories and rights."

Danielle Frank of Ríos to Rivers and youth leader of the Hupa Tribe in the Klamath River Basin said, "Indigenous resistance to dams has been constant. We have known since the beginning that cutting off the flow of rivers destroys not just the fish and ecosystem, but the people who depend on these food sources and the cultural connections rivers provide. Cultures grew up on rivers--without rivers, we would not exist. Our people have suffered enough for the profit of others."

"Hydropower dams significantly alter and destroy the essential processes and benefits rivers provide. Only about a third of the world's longest rivers remain free-flowing, and just 17% of rivers globally are both free-flowing and within protected areas," said **Chris Wilke, Global Advocacy Manager for Waterkeeper Alliance**. "We have no time to waste in protecting and restoring life-sustaining rivers for fish migration, community livelihood, and food sovereignty, as well as the immense freshwater biodiversity they support."

"Along with the riparian peoples of the DRC, it is especially women who are facing constant challenges from the increasing impacts of climate change affecting their water, soil and lives. They are living with the disastrous consequences of large hydroelectric dams such as Inga 1 and Inga 2.

This new proposed Inga hydropower dam project will cause additional displacement and will not benefit Congolese but rather export so-called “green” hydrogen to Europe, continuing the history of loss and damage to the global south from the global North” says **Mignonne Mbombo, coordinator of Femmes Solidaire (FESO) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**

"In a warming world struggling with water scarcity, climate justice, and energy reliability and access, it's immoral to use freshwater ecosystems, the most threatened and degraded in the world, for ill-conceived energy options like large hydropower when better, more effective energy sources exist," said **Siziwe Mota, Africa Program Director for International Rivers.**

"Considering the negative and potentially catastrophic effects global warming and changing precipitation patterns have on the effectiveness and security of hydropower plants, it should become clear that building more dams is not the road to follow to mitigate climate change. Over the last years, many countries that depend heavily on hydropower for their energy supply, have suffered power shortages due to droughts or heavy rains that have damaged the machinery of hydropower plants," says **Thilo Papacek, Project Officer for GegenStrömung.**

"In 2024, four of the six Klamath River basin dams will be removed after a fight that has lasted longer than some lives of the indigenous peoples fighting for the revitalization of the lands and culture these dams are destroying. This will be the largest dam removal project in history, and the people who have spent their lives advocating for these waters are counting the days. Although the legal fight for the removal started in 2002 after one of the largest fish kills in history for this river basin, the fight for healthy water and the right to cultural resources provided by these rivers has been ongoing since colonization started. The removal of these dams gives us hope for a future with clean energy that is actually sustainable," says **Brook Thompson, Yurok Tribe member, and Karuk.**

"As the world grapples with both the climate and biodiversity crisis, it's encouraging to know that simply letting rivers flow freely is a significant solution." says **Weston Boyles, Executive Director of Ríos to Rivers**

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