

RIVER CLEANUP

Global annual report 2024





THOMAS DE GROOTE
Founder & CEO

In 2017, my sister challenged me to clean up litter for 10 minutes. This small action opened my eyes to a global problem: plastic pollution. It can be found anywhere around the world. When large plastic objects break down, they do not biodegrade but fall apart into tiny pieces, called microplastics. These microplastics make their way into ecosystems, the global water cycle, and even our food chain. After a few years of organizing cleanup actions and learning about the effects of plastic pollution, I founded River Cleanup as a non-profit organization in 2019.

In 6 years time, we mobilized over 288 000 people in 101 countries along more than 450 rivers. To date, we have permanently removed 3,6 million kg of waste from the environment. The main focus in 2024 was the launch of our Clean River Model. This holistic approach tackles the root causes of plastic pollution by empowering people, preventing pollution and accelerating change. We will prove the efficacy of the Clean River Model along 3 rivers in 2025, expand to 100 rivers by 2030, and roll-out to 1000 rivers by 2050.

It has become my personal mission in life to make rivers plastic-free. I'm very thankful for the continuous support of our partners and happy to see so many others joining our community every year. Together we can work towards a better future.

Together for clean rivers!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas".



THE PLASTIC POLLUTION CRISIS

Every day, 1.3 million kg of plastic ends up in our oceans. Seven times more, around 10 million kg, ends up in nature and rivers on a daily basis. Global plastic production only keeps rising, and waste management and recycling can't keep up. If we don't act now, there could be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050.

Furthermore, plastic has been found in all ecosystems, from ocean and coast to mountains, cities and rural areas. Recently, researchers even discovered plastic particles in Antarctic snow. The same properties that make plastic so interesting (durability, resistance to degradation,...), make it nearly impossible to break down in nature. So far, it just breaks down into smaller plastic particles, called microplastics. This widespread plastic pollution makes its way into the food chain, affecting animals and humans world wide.

The science is clear: unless the plastics value chain is transformed in the next two decades, the compounding risks for marine species, ecosystems, our climate, our economy, and our communities will become unmanageable. There is no time to waste.

Sources: Kaandorp et al., 2023, doi: 10.1038/s41561-023-01216-0 - Lau et al., 2020, doi: 10.1126/science.aba9475 - Ellen MacArthur Foundation - The Guardian





VISION

Plastic-free rivers.

MISSION

River Cleanup is a global network organization on a mission to clean rivers by empowering people, preventing pollution, and accelerating change.



TIMELINE

A simple 10 minute cleanup challenge was the start of our mission to clean rivers.

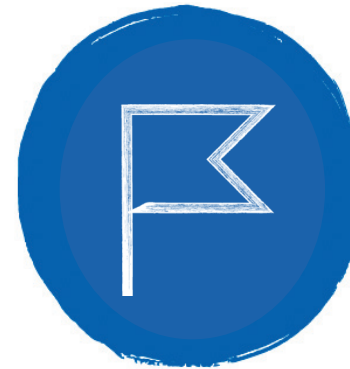
Over 10 000 people joined the RhineCleanUp in 60 cities and 5 countries on one day.



2017
10 minutes



2018
10 000 people



2019
Foundation



2020
100 000 people

Official registration of River Cleanup as a non-profit.

100 000 people took action in 45 countries, and we deployed our first river technology.



After 4 years, we collected our 1 000 000th kg of river waste.

One year later, our impact tripled to 3 million kg collected in and along rivers.



2021
1 million kg



2022
3 million kg



2023
100 countries



2024
Clean River Model

The River Cleanup community reaches 100 countries worldwide.

Launch of our new approach.



Afghanistan	Bolivia	Colombia	Eq. Guinea	Hungary	Kenya	Mozambique	Poland	Singapore	The Netherlands
Albania	Brazil	Costa Rica	Ethiopia	Iceland	Lebanon	Namibia	Portugal	Slovakia	The Philippines
Argentina	Bulgaria	Cote d'Ivoire	Finland	India	Liberia	Nepal	Puerto Rico	South Africa	Togo
Australia	Burundi	Croatia	France	Indonesia	Lithuania	New Zealand	Romania	South Korea	Trinidad & Tobago
Austria	Cambodia	Cuba	Gambia	Iran	Luxembourg	Nigeria	Russia	South Sudan	Tunisia
Bangladesh	Cameroon	Czechia	Germany	Ireland	Madagascar	North Macedonia	Rwanda	Spain	Ukraine
Belarus	Canada	DR Congo	Ghana	Italy	Malawi	Oman	Saudi Arabia	Sri Lanka	United Kingdom
Belgium	Cayman Islands	Denmark	Greece	Japan	Malaysia	Pakistan	Senegal	Sweden	United States
Benin	Chile	Egypt	Guinea-Bissau	Jamaica	Mexico	Panama	Serbia	Switzerland	Venezuela
Bhutan	China	El Salvador	Haiti	Kazakhstan	Morocco	Peru	Sierra Leone	Tanzania	Zambia
									Zimbabwe

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

TOTAL SINCE 2019

3 action zones

3 647 460 kg total

2 562 007 kg plastic

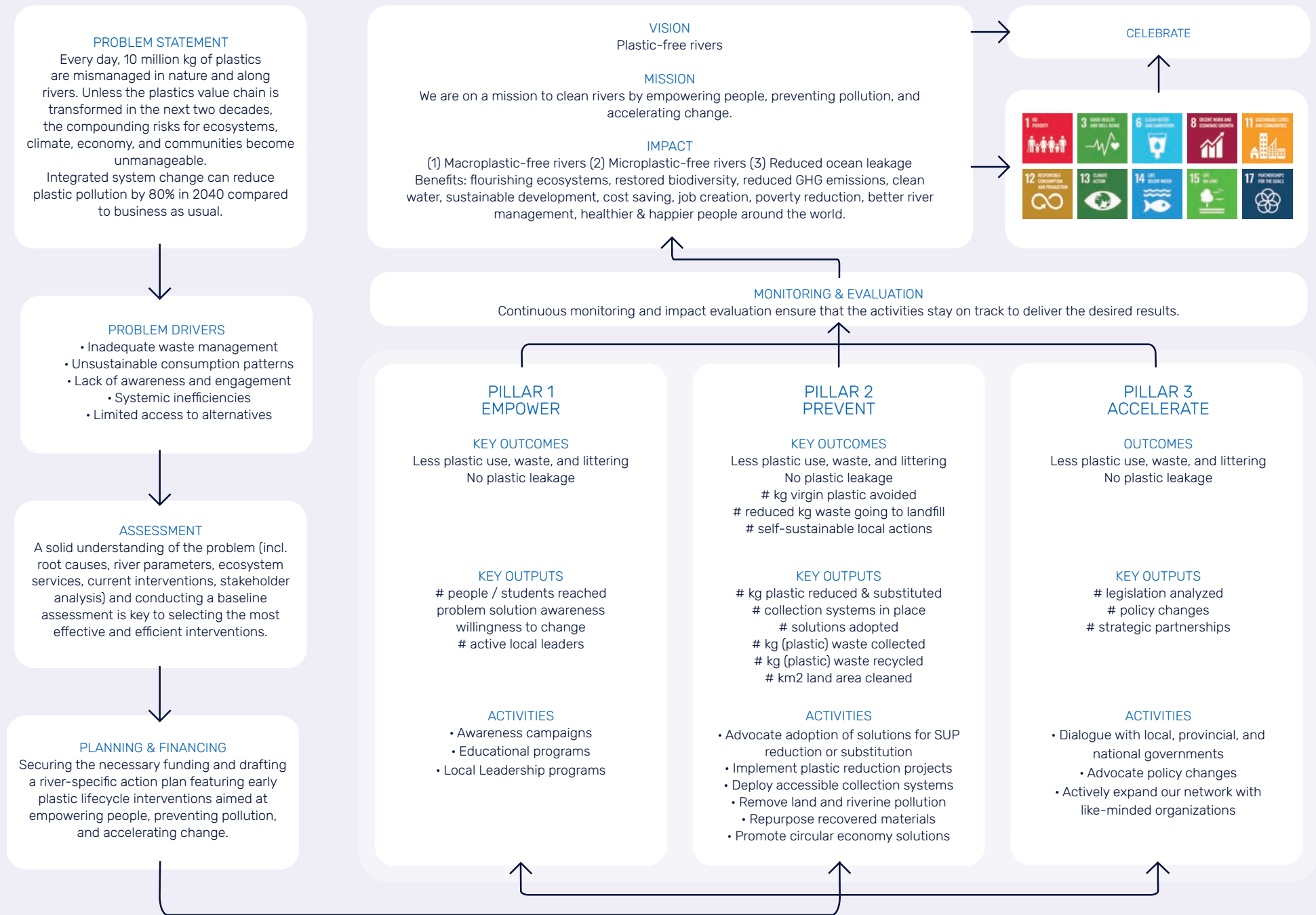
288 880 people

101 countries

210 schools



THEORY OF CHANGE



CLEAN RIVER MODEL

We developed the Clean River Model as a holistic approach specifically tailored to address the multifaceted issue of river plastic pollution. It's a structured framework based on our experience, best practices, and academic research. It's designed to be adaptable and scalable, making it suitable for different contexts and regions.

The model consists of strategic interventions in the plastic lifecycle. It is organized around 3 integrated pillars, 3 enablers, and aligned with our 5 values:



PILLARS



EMPOWER PEOPLE

The Empower pillar aims to cultivate a sense of responsibility and active participation among individuals, schools, and communities toward avoiding plastic pollution. It focuses on raising awareness of the **causes & consequences** of plastic waste, empowering people to **become ambassadors**, and activating **communities** to take action for a cleaner environment. Through **awareness campaigns**, **educational programs**, and **the empowerment of local leaders**, this pillar seeks to build a community-driven force toward plastic-free rivers.



PREVENT POLLUTION

The Prevent pillar aims to **reduce single-use plastics** by adopting sustainable alternatives, implementing plastic reduction projects, and sharing knowledge & best practices. It focuses on preventing plastic waste from entering nature by **deploying accessible collection systems** and **removing riverine pollution**. We recycle and repurpose recovered materials at their highest value and promote **circular economy** solutions.



ACCELERATE CHANGE

This pillar aims to accelerate change by generating data, providing insights, and informing authorities on sources of river pollution. We propose short-term remediations, promote **structural solutions**, and **advocate policy change**. We actively engage and collaborate within a **network** of like-minded organizations, both nonprofit and for-profit.

ENABLERS



ASSESSMENT

The assessment establishes a comprehensive baseline, guiding the Clean River Model's interventions by examining plastic pollution through legal, socio-economic, cultural, security, and environmental lenses. It ensures that solutions are informed, data-driven, and tailored to local conditions.



PLANNING & FINANCING

We develop a detailed, actionable plan and secure the necessary funding for its implementation. Based on insights from the assessment, the action plan outlines specific interventions for preventing plastic pollution and conducting cleanup operations.



MONITORING & EVALUATION

This enabler focuses on tracking the progress and effectiveness of the Clean River Model interventions by regularly monitoring key performance indicators (KPIs) and evaluating outcomes against established baselines.



INDONESIA

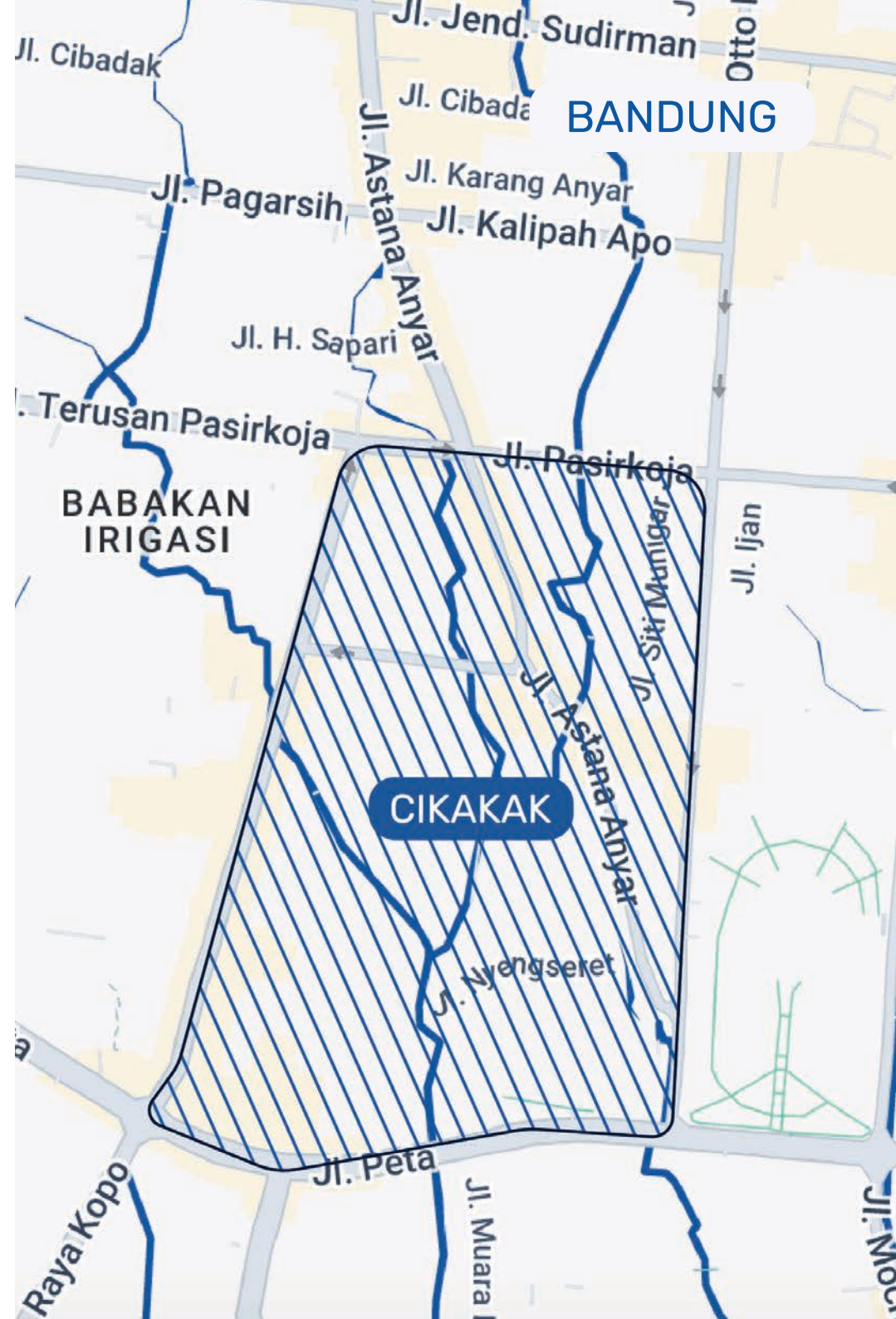
Indonesia has been a focus country right from the start. The rivers flowing through Bandung belong to the most polluted rivers in the world, that's why we chose it as one of our main project locations. It's amazing how the projects and community in Indonesia have grown over the past few years.

In September of 2024, we officially launched our Clean River Model in the Cikakak action zone. This is the moment years of gaining experience, thinking and planning, turns into real, targeted action. At the kick-off, local leaders of the neighborhood signed a memorandum of understanding, agreeing to join and support our efforts to make the rivers in this area plastic-free.

We also installed 2 new trash barriers in the action zone, expanded our network of EcoBins from 11 to 21, and continued our school program in 17 schools. Combining all actions, a total of 108 082 kg of river waste was collected in Indonesia this year!

"River Cleanup Indonesia has significantly impacted the community in North Bandung, bringing about a sense of pride and a commitment to sustainability. Through the clean-up efforts, the community has witnessed a transformation in the river's health and a renewed sense of ownership among its residents. This initiative has not only improved the local environment but also served as a model for other communities to take action and address environmental challenges."

– **Nugi Herdian**, Vice Chairman CAI, Kumintas Tjipanti river (community focused on river conservation)



INDONESIA - IMPACT

TOTAL 2024

108 082 kg total

104 675 kg plastic

3 475 people

4 945 students

17 schools

22 partners

21 EcoBins

2 trash barriers





CAMEROON

Around 5 291 000 kg¹ of plastic flows through the Wouri River in Cameroon every year. It's one of the most polluted rivers in Africa. That's why it was chosen to be one of our focus areas.

In 2024 the community actions and River Cleanup School program continued. Over 12 000 students from 20 different schools joined the program and learned about plastic pollution! Two winning schools received funding to develop their own sustainable projects such as a green garden and better waste management at school.

Throughout the whole year, the community came together for River Cleanup Days, World Cleanup Day and many more cleanups. 3 760 River Warriors joined at a total of 149 actions!

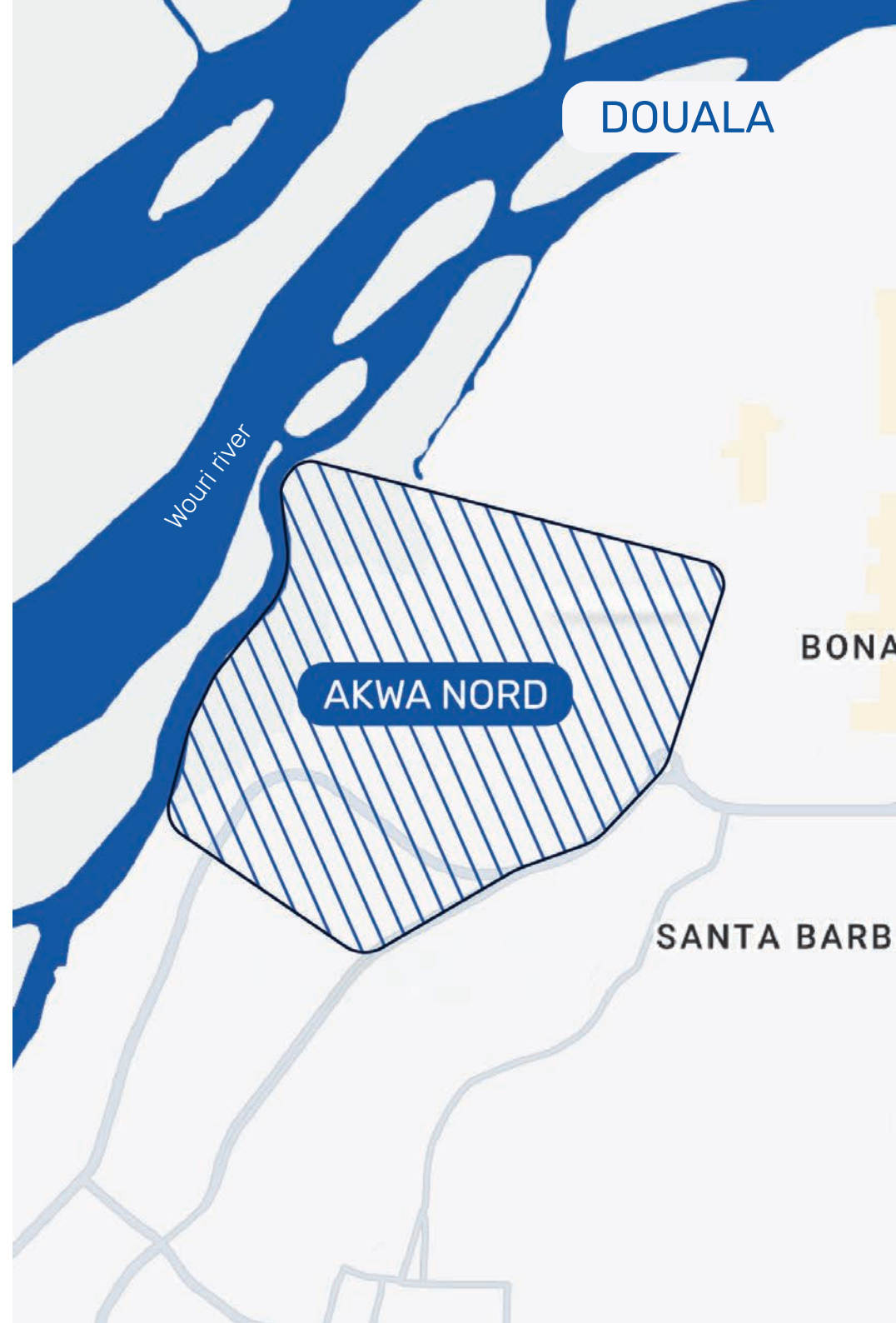
The local River Cleanup team also put a lot of work into defining the action zone where the next steps of the Clean River Model will be carried out in 2025. The upcoming year will be very interesting for Cameroon!

"Thanks to this program, we were able to raise awareness within the educational community about the impact of plastic on the environment and the need for collective action to protect aquatic ecosystems in particular. The highlight of this initiative was the absence of plastic bottles along the street leading to the school every Friday, the chosen day for our Cleanup Day. This was a true demonstration of the positive impact of everyone's involvement."

- **Mrs. Clarisse**, Leading teacher of Lycee d'Akwa Nord



1. source: The Ocean Cleanup



CAMEROON - IMPACT

TOTAL 2024

20 297 kg total

15 468 kg plastic

3 760 people

20 schools

11 partners

18 EcoBins





BELGIUM

Belgium is home to River Cleanup's headquarters, but also an important country for innovative projects and the validation of the Clean River Model for high-income countries.

The INSPIRE project addresses the pressing global issue of plastic pollution through a multifaceted approach, involving 25 partners from all over Europe. River Cleanup is part of the test case in Temse. We completed multiple river bank monitoring activities and organized community cleanups as part of the testing of our Clean River Model. Our project partners VITO and VLIZ also performed drone observations and different types of sampling of the water.

After three years of hard work, we can finally say we cleaned up the aftermath of the 2021 floods in the south of Belgium. 7 500 River Warriors cleaned 500 km of riverbanks and collected more than 300 000 kg of river waste along the Vesdre and the Ourthe.

The Transform Project also came to an end. Over the course of 2 years, several Belgian companies joined the program and actively reduced their plastic use. The results of the project are the new Single-use Plastic database on our website, a guide with tips & tricks for companies to tackle plastic use, and a list of recommendations to companies and the Flemish government on how to stimulate and adopt more sustainable practices regarding single-use-plastic.



BELGIUM – IMPACT

TOTAL 2024

29 409 kg total

14 157 kg plastic

4 597 people

3 schools

28 partners



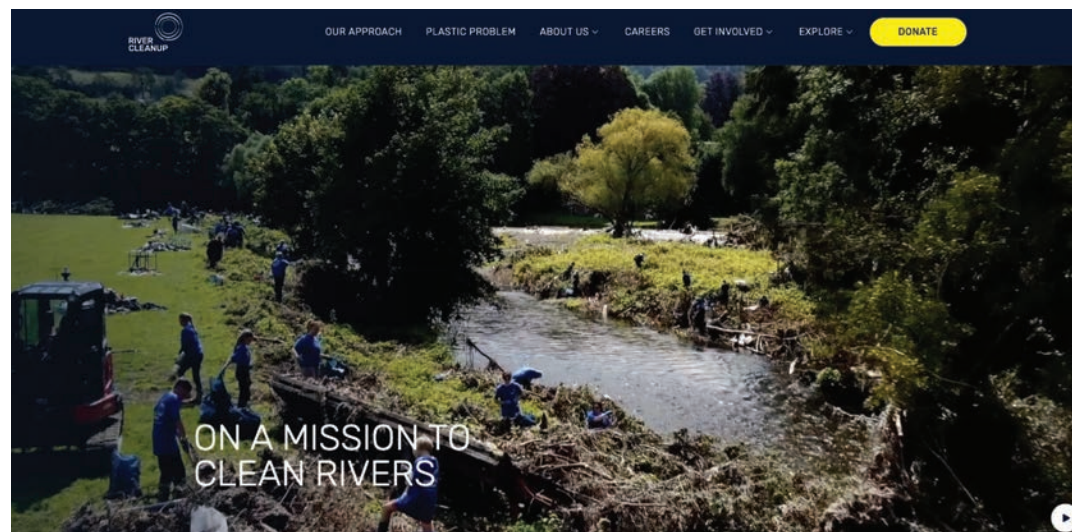


PROJECTS & GOVERNANCE

We welcomed a new executive board, consisting of Veroniek Collewaert, Antoine Geerinckx and Wim Warnier. Veroniek is a Full Professor of Entrepreneurship, Masters' Director at Vlerick Business School, Founder and Director at Vlerick Scale-Up Centre, and Founder and Academic Director of the European Scaleup Institute. Wim is a CEO with 26 years of experience in Europe, the US, the Middle East, North Africa and Asia. Antoine is co-Founder of CO2-LOGIC, Senior Partner at South Pole and author of 80 Tips for Young People.

Our new Board of Directors is based on a number of principles of good governance and the requirements for recognition as a Public Benefit Organization (ANBI) in the Netherlands. We wish to obtain this recognition at the beginning of 2025.

After months of preparations, we also launched our brand new website at the beginning of November. We are very happy with the fresh and clean look, and even happier about the new tools it offers our team and volunteers. We were always able to track results of cleanups, but now we can also keep better track of data related to school actions, EcoBins, Trash Barriers and partners all around the world.



GLOBAL COMMUNITY

River Warriors around the world came together to achieve amazing things again this year! In total, the global community organized 1 175 actions with close to 50 000 people joining.

On World Cleanup Day, our community showed up around the world, with cleanups in 33 different countries! Over 9 000 people joined, and together they removed 25 tonnes of river waste.

One of these countries was the Democratic Republic of Congo. They had an exceptional year as their local community of River Warriors grew to 290 people in just a few months!

We are very grateful for every single person who takes action for plastic-free rivers around the world. Hearing their stories and seeing pictures of these actions is a great motivator to keep working on large-scale solutions. We will keep improving our operations to support our global community in the best possible way.

Together for clean rivers!





AWARDS

We are honored to have received several awards again this year. Getting this type of recognition for our hard work motivates us to keep going strong. Thank you to everyone who helped us bring home these incredible awards this year.

At the Belgium Impact Startup Awards over 15 500 public votes were counted and River Cleanup won the silver award in the category Social & Not-for-profit! A big thank you to the partners and sponsors who made this event possible, as well as to everyone who contributes to the vitality of the startup ecosystem in Belgium.

Our Social Media & Community manager, Noémie, was awarded the Moral and/or Environmental Leadership award by JCI Liège for her commitment to a cleaner, more sustainable environment. The 10 Outstanding Young People Awards were part of JCI Liège's 75th birthday.

At the Lobby Awards, River Cleanup was named Environmental, Social and Governance Leader 2024. The Lobby Awards recognize "inspiring and caring leaders who show the way for the community". What an honor to receive this title!



MEET THE TEAM

Each of our core countries has a motivated team to execute local projects. They actively work together on empowering people, preventing pollution and accelerating change in their country. Here's an overview of all of our team members and their role.

CAMEROON

Jordan: Cleanup Operator
Stephanie: School Coordinator
Freddy: Operations Manager
Hilary: Social Media Officer
Lucien: Country Lead Cameroon

BELGIUM

Noémie: Social Media & Community Manager
Patrick: Logistics Responsible
Arno: Chief Operating Officer
Elien: Program Coordinator
Thomas: Founder and Chief Executive Officer
Nicolas: Country Lead Belgium
Aurélië: Press & Media
Hanne: Education Coordinator
Hans: Head of Partnerships & Philantropy
Christian: Accounting

INDONESIA

Anwari: Daily Cleanup Crew
Arno: on project visit
Candra: Daily Cleanup Crew
Dedi: River Beast Driver
Reina: Finance and Administration
Almira: Brand Auditor
Yevira: Brand Auditor

Yasser: Co-Captain
Erul: Daily Cleanup Crew
Agung: Daily Cleanup Crew
Alip: Daily Cleanup Crew
Indra: Daily Cleanup Crew

Ridwan: Daily Cleanup Crew
Lana: Education Program Coordinator
Elien: on project visit
Hanne: on project visit
Farhan: Tech and Operation
Egar: Country Lead Indonesia





PUBLIC REACH

*TOTAL 2024

FACEBOOK

24 377

INSTAGRAM

26 537

LINKEDIN

5 666

WEBSITE VISITORS*

75 000

NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS*

209

Forbes

de
tijd
l'Echo

Trends

vr̃

RTL

vtm

The
Economist



LOOKING AHEAD

We are very happy with the results of 2024. We achieved amazing things, and made clear plans to reach our next goals. In 2025 we will be:

- Continuing the validation of the Clean River Model
- Setting up a River Cleanup Response Team
- Starting the River Watchers project
- Launching our new school program with Common Seas in Belgium and Indonesia
- Actively approaching foundations and major donors to expand our funding

We are eager to start these new projects and continue to work with full passion and energy to realize our mission!

Together, we can make rivers plastic-free!



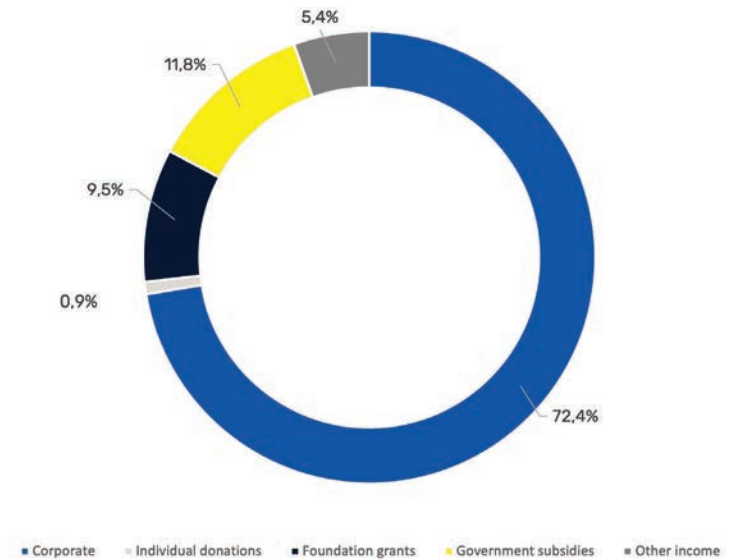


FINANCIALS

TOTAL 2024

INCOME

Philanthropy & sponsoring	€ 1.060.818
• Corporate	• € 927.465
• Individual donations	• € 11.244
• Foundation grants	• € 122.109
Government subsidies	€ 151.492
Other income	€ 69.160
Total	€ 1.281.470



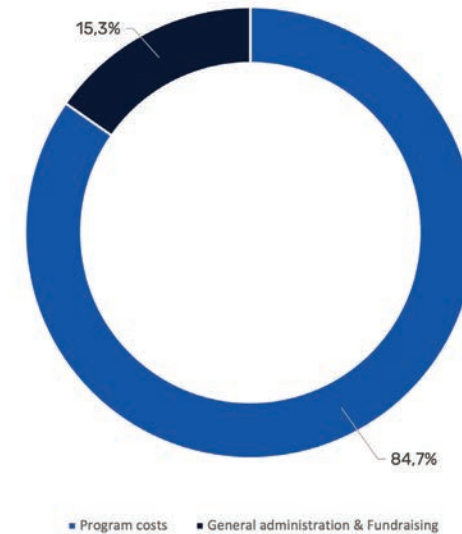


FINANCIALS

TOTAL 2024

INVESTMENTS

Program	€ 1.050.815
General admin & fundraising	€ 189.847
Total	€ 1.240.662



THANKS FOR HAVING IMPACT WITH US!

Thanks to all our **corporate partners & supporters, institutional donors, supporting foundations, individual donors** and all **River Warriors**.

Special thanks to our 2024 official partners:

MISSION PARTNERS



IMPACT PARTNERS



SUPPORTING PARTNERS



We would like to express our profound gratitude to all other people and organizations not individually mentioned here who supported us in 2024. Your support for plastic-free rivers is crucial and means a lot to us.

Want to support us?



Hans Lenders

Head of Partnerships & Philanthropy

hans.lenders@river-cleanup.org

+32 493 18 24 59

Discover how to support us



Together for clean rivers