



Policy Plan 2025–2026

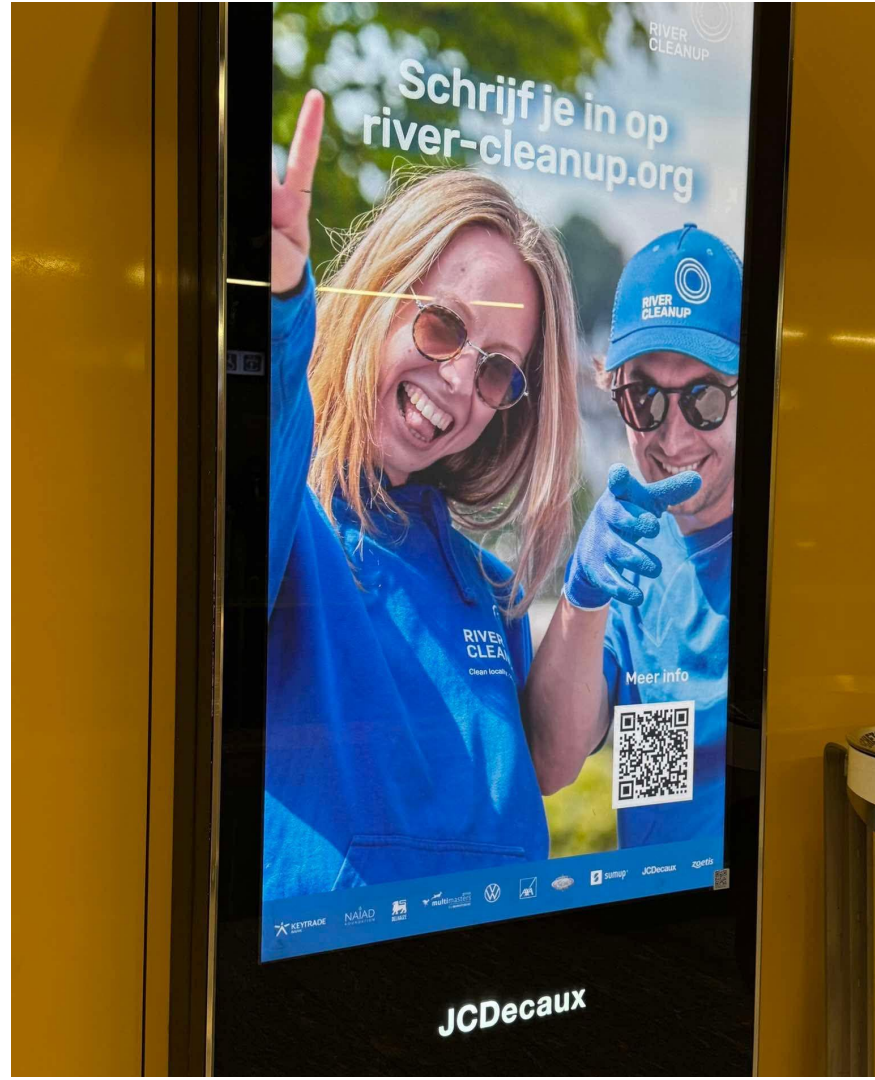
In Dutch: Beleidsplan



**RIVER
CLEANUP**

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1. THE CHALLENGE

How do we hand over the planet to our children and grandchildren? Clean and prosperous with a healthy living environment. Or polluted with an enormous financial and health bill due to (micro-) plastic pollution.

Our vision of making rivers plastic-free as River Cleanup is based on the belief that plastics can be very useful, but plastics do not belong in nature, in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat or in (y)our bodies. Yet every day an extra 1.3 million kilograms of plastics enter our oceans and seven times that volume, [10 million kilograms](#), leak into river and land-based ecosystems.

The science is clear: unless the plastics value chain is transformed in the next two decades, the compounding risks for marine species and ecosystems, our climate, our economy, and our communities will become unmanageable ([Breaking the Plastic Wave](#)). The consequences of plastic pollution spill over into another global challenge: under a business-as-usual scenario, plastics could emit 19% of global greenhouse gas emissions allowed under a 1.5°C scenario by 2040. Preliminary estimates of the annual social and environmental costs linked to plastic pollution range between USD 300-600 billion per year, with some estimates above USD 1.5 trillion per year.

There is no time to waste. Let's act today and use the opportunities for change we still have today, that will not be available to our children and grant children. to prevent and reduce plastic pollution.



2. THE SOLUTION

The good news is that if we act today, we still have a window of opportunity to reduce plastic pollution by 80% compared to a Business-as-Usual scenario, saving society 70 billion USD over 20 years, creating 700.000 jobs and achieving a 25% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions ([BtPW](#)).

We also know what we need to do: reduce plastic-use to decrease waste, increase waste collection to prevent leakage into the environment and clean up legacy plastic pollution on land and in rivers. Single solution strategies cannot stop plastic pollution. Integrated system change is most effective.

Our strategy

Our strategy is based on our practical experience and the latest scientific insights. By working holistically with strategic and early interventions in the life cycle of plastics, we can maximize our impact cost-efficiently. Plastics that are not produced because they have been avoided/reduced cannot become waste and therefore do not need to be cleaned up. Plastics that we collect before they become litter do not pollute our rivers and do not break down into microplastics. Preventing pollution is essential. Once in the environment, cleaning up is the only solution, but it's expensive and plastics from rivers are often difficult to recycle.

We have translated this strategy into a publicly available, practical, highly scalable and holistic model for plastic-free rivers: the Clean River Model. We aim to test the Clean River Model locally in 2025 and 2026. The ultimate goal is to expand the Clean River Model to 100 rivers in 2030, 1.000 rivers by 2050.

That's how we turn off the tap on new plastic pollution and clean up existing plastic pollution most effectively and cost efficiently.



3. CLEAN RIVER MODEL

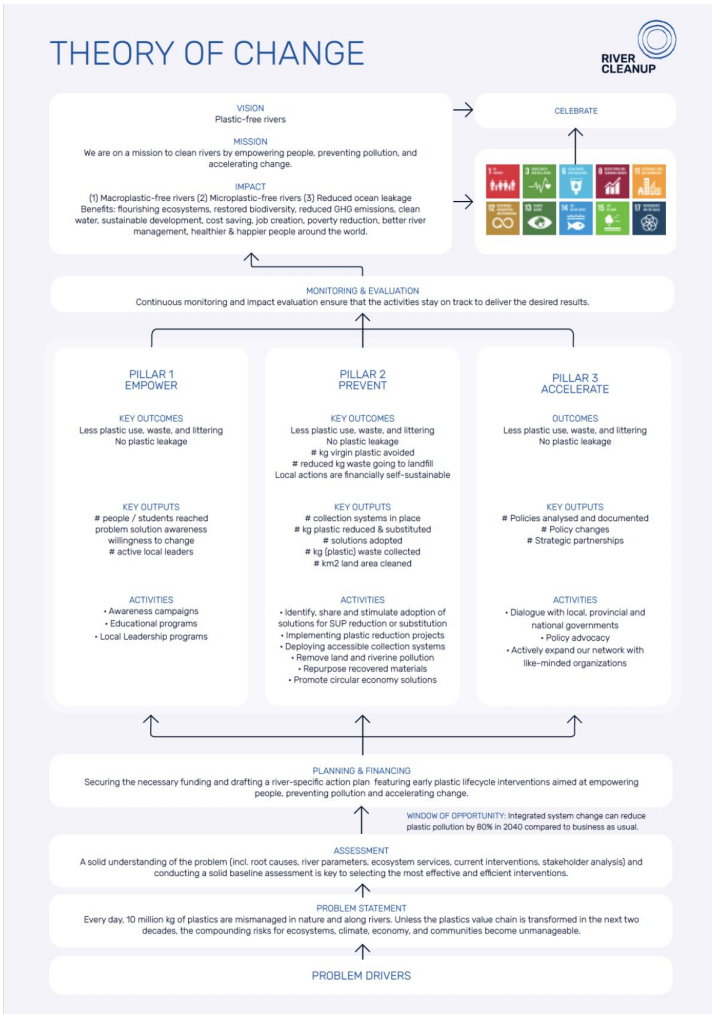
In 2022 we went back to the drawing board with our field experience, the latest scientific insights and one single question in mind: how do we make rivers plastic-free most effectively and cost efficiently? The answer is our Clean River Model. It's more than a list of ingredients, it's a recipe for plastic-free rivers.

Five reasons why the Clean River Model is unique

1. Designed for maximum impact & scalability: it's a holistic with strategic early interventions in the plastic lifecycle. We prevent new waste and clean up legacy plastic pollution.
2. Built on science, including [Breaking the Plastic Wave](#), in combination with the field experience of removing 3,5 million kg of river (-bound) waste from nature.
3. River-focused: plastics in the environment often end up in rivers. The Clean River Model is fully aimed at preventing plastic from ending up in rivers by reducing plastic use and pollution on land. Cleaning up plastic pollution in rivers is a crucial last step.
4. Practical & concrete: the integrated workflow makes it a hands-on Theory of Change. There is no time to waste.
5. Open-source: by making the Clean River Model and tools publicly available, we aim to empower individuals and organizations globally to have more impact faster.

How the Clean River Model works

The Clean River Model, is made up of 3 pillars and 3 enablers. Together, they encompass the entire lifecycle of river plastics.

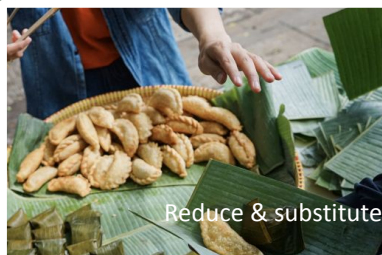


CLEAN RIVER MODEL ACTIVITIES & RESULTS

Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact	SDG
EMPOWER - Awareness campaigns - Educational programs - Local Leadership programs	# people reached % problem & solution awareness, willingness to change # active local leaders	- Less plastic use - Less plastic waste - Zero/reduced litter: m2 land (incl. riverbank) reduced macroplastic levels	(1) Reduced macroplastic pollution in rivers (macroplastic-free) (2) Reduced microplastic pollution in rivers (microplastic-free) (3) Reduced downstream leakage from our intervention zone (nature, oceans, rivers)	
PREVENT - Advocate adoption of solutions for single-use plastic reduction or substitution - Implement plastic reduction projects - Deploy accessible collection systems - Remove land and riverine pollution - Repurpose recovered materials - Promote circular economy solutions	# kg (plastic) waste collected # kg (plastic) waste recovered # kg plastic reduced & substituted % change in kg waste collected % kg recycled waste/kg landfill waste	# kg plastic waste avoided via reduce and substitute # kg virgin plastic avoided - Zero/reduced litter: m2 land (incl. riverbank) reduced macroplastic levels # less kg waste in landfill		
ACCELERATE - Dialogue with local, provincial and national governments - Advocate policy changes - Actively expand our network with like-minded organizations	# policy changes recommended	- Less plastic use - Less plastic waste - Zero/reduced litter: m2 land (incl. riverbank) reduced macroplastic levels		

BEFORE

Cleanup

AFTER

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.



4. RIVER CLEANUP ORGANIZATION

River Cleanup was registered as a Belgian non-profit organization in 2019. What started as an event-driven cleanup organization has since then evolved to a holistic approach centered around our Clean River Model aimed at preventing, reducing and cleaning up plastic pollution.

Key achievements 2019 - 2024

- 6.200 events in 100 countries along 450+ rivers
- 285.000 people mobilized for a cleanup
- 3,5 mln. kg river waste removed from the environment
- Innovative holistic Theory of Change developed (Clean River Model)

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.

We are a network organization because we believe in active cooperation. No single person or organization can solve this problem on its own. We all have specific strengths, skills and expertise and only by bringing these together can we hope to solve the plastic crisis. That's why we are building a global network of action-oriented people working together towards plastic-free rivers.

Values

Positive, inclusive, expert, responsible, impact-driven





Meeting with the mayor in Bandung

5. STRATEGIC GOALS

We will develop, test and validate the Clean River Model in 2025-2026 along rivers in action zones in Belgium, Indonesia and Cameroon. We aim to demonstrate that the combined activities of the three pillars of the Clean River Model deliver the desired outputs, outcomes and impact KPIs to make rivers plastic-free.

Our plans for 2025-2026 are three-fold. Firstly, we will implement the Clean River Model in three action areas in Belgium, Indonesia, and Cameroon, while simultaneously launching projects in India and the Democratic Republic of Congo (or another country if the security situation does not improve). Secondly, we will further develop and scale up innovative cleanup solutions, including the use of drone and smartphone technology for pollution mapping, artificial intelligence for waste tracking, and circular economy initiatives to repurpose collected plastic. Thirdly, we will further professionalize our operations by strengthening good governance, diversifying fundraising, improving HR policies, and optimizing financial management to support sustainable growth.

In 2027-2028 we scale ourselves, both the number and the size of the action zones, and then from 2029-2030 onward we empower others to scale. Together we can start the Clean River Model in 100 rivers by the end of 2030.

Long-term strategic goals

- 2050: The Clean River Model is implemented in 1 000 rivers
- 2040: The Clean River Model is implemented in 300 rivers
- 2030: The Clean River Model is implemented in 100 rivers

6. GOVERNANCE

River Cleanup vzw (BE0719.610.237) is a Belgian nonprofit organization established on the 30th of January 2019. We believe that good governance is essential to our mission and vision.

There are three governing bodies, guided by the statutes, internal policy and code of conduct. The **Board of Directors** sets the policy and provides oversight and guidance to the **daily management team**, lead by Thomas de Groote, which is responsible for the day-to-day operations. These board members are appointed by the **General Assembly**.

The Board of Directors is made up of experienced leaders from diverse sectors, including Chairman Wim Warnier (former CEO of TWE Group), Antoine Geerinckx (CO2Logic) and Prof. Veroniek Collewaert (Vlerick, KUL),

Additionally, the **Advisory Board**, offers collective and individual advice to the management team. Stefan Langkamp, Valérie de Groote, Klaus Lommatzsch, Martijn Bruyns, Thomas Snoeckx and Kevin De Backer are the current advisory board members.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Veroniek Collewaert 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 Warnier is a CEO with 26 years of experience in Europe, the US, the Middle East, North Africa and Asia. Antoine Geerinckx is co-Founder of CO2-LOGIC, Senior Partner at South Pole and author of 80 Tips for Young People.

7. FUNDING MODEL

With millions of kilograms of plastics entering nature every day there is no time to waste. That's why our plans are ambitious and everything we do is focused on scalability. Our current and primary revenue model to validate the Clean River Model is fundraising. In the period 2025-30 we aspire to develop at least a secondary revenue model to accelerate our scaling.

Primary revenue model

Our fundraising focuses three types of funding: (1) philanthropy incl. donations from individuals, companies and foundations (2) sponsoring from corporate partners (3) government subsidies from, amongst others, the European Commission and the Flemish government.

Corporate partnerships have been our most important source of revenue from fundraising in the period 2019-2024. In 2025-2030 we aim to increase revenue from all partners and sources by continuing to build sustainable, win-win partnerships with all our partners. We seek both core funding and project specific funding.

Secondary revenue model

We realize that accelerating and scaling the Clean River Model may require other funding besides philanthropy and sponsorships. That's why we are actively exploring additional revenue models and, when ready, evolve to a hybrid organizational model to attract impact investments. Secondary revenue models may include revenue from collected plastic, plastic credits and the Clean River Model as a service.



8. FINANCIAL

INCOME	2025	2026
TOTAL INCOME	€2,297,243.37	€2,890,235.54
CORPORATE	€1,382,600.00	€2,024,600.00
INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS	€5,000.00	€55,000.00
FOUNDATION GRANTS	€634,000.00	€580,000.00
GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES	€252,086.08	€181,544.67
SOCIETAL ORGANIZATIONS	€0.00	€0.00
OTHER INCOME	€23,557.28	€49,090.88
COSTS		
TOTAL COSTS	-€2,227,142	-€2,888,519
CLEAN RIVER MODEL - IMPLEMENTATION	-€565,921	-€520,819
COUNTRIES	-€14,950	-€43,200
PROGRAMS - GENERAL	-€324,030	-€408,600
PROGRAMS - ASSESSMENT	-€138,582	-€101,275
PROGRAMS - PLANNING & FINANCING	€0	-€105,000
PROGRAMS - MONITORING	-€150,000	-€250,000
PROGRAMS - EMPOWER	-€281,444	-€459,149
PROGRAMS - PREVENT	-€312,900	-€354,905
PROGRAMS - ACCELERATE	-€13,500	-€104,500
GENERAL ADMIN & FUNDRAISING	-€425,815	-€541,070
OPERATING RESULT	€70,101	€1,717
% general, admin & fundraising costs	19.12%	18.73%

This is the budget as approved by the board for 2025-2026.

Financial policy

Our financial policy is based on realistic income growth and on prudent and correct expenditure. Expenses are made in line with our multi-annual for 2025-2026, as approved by the board.

We work in line with Belgium law and meet the standards for public benefit organizations (ANBI) in the Netherlands. Expenditure by the management team is regulated via our internal policy and supervised by the Board of Directors. Our accountant (Vandelanotte) also monitors throughout the year. The auditor, Callens Vandelanotte, carries out an external audit review of each financial year for approval by the Board of Directors.

Remuneration

Remuneration levels for all staff are in line with prevailing non-profit market rates. The members of the General Assembly and Board of Directors may not receive any remuneration for the work they perform for the institution in that capacity other than a non-excessive attendance fee and/or expense allowance (articles 16.6 and 17.6 of the statutes)

9. COLOPHON

River Cleanup vzw (BE0719.610.237)

Legal address

De Merodelei 1, 2600 Antwerp

Office address

De Merodelei 1, 2600 Antwerp

Statutory objective

River Cleanup vzw is a non-profit, public benefit institution with the core objective of protecting nature and the environment, including the promotion of sustainability and environmental quality, in the Flemish Region, Belgium and the world. The focus is mainly on making rivers plastic-free through activities that (in)directly contribute to the prevention and clean-up of plastic waste and plastic pollution on land and in rivers.

Contact

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www.river-cleanup.org

