

URL: <https://forgepress.org/student-campaign-aims-to-give-sheffields-river-don-rights-of-a-human/>



The ChangeLab action group “Rights of Nature” seeking to give River Don rights of a human

ChangeLab action group “Rights of Nature” are engaged in a six-month long project instrumental to bringing change to Sheffield’s River Don.

Senaya Fernando, an economics student, and Blesson Ezra, an engineering student have leading roles in the group which partners with the think-and-do tank Opus Independent.

Explaining the importance, Blesson said: "Balance comes to mind, sustainable use comes to mind, accountability comes to mind."

The eventual goal of the project is giving the river the same legal rights as a human, something that has already been achieved in New Zealand.

Important to the process which could one day lead to an impactful bylaw, those in the group explore one key element: ownership data and the exploration of that aspect.

Blesson said: "I also think it's a very exciting problem to solve, not that we'll sort of solve it but I think the sort of the engineer in me and I think some other sort of students involved as well find it quite exciting to see what we can discover and what we can sort of like tangibly contribute."

He emphasised the project's leveraging "of skills and strengths across various disciplines," revealing there are approximately fifteen students, some of which are studying economics, landscape architecture and law.

Seneya said: "I'm really passionate about nature and like tying in economics with other concepts such as sustainability and I was really excited to see what this project had to offer."

The joint-leader linked her motivation to get involved with her past involvement with her school's environmental service group.

She explained: "the whole project seemed very abstract to all of us," describing the group's initial struggle in deconstructing the outcomes – but as weeks went by, and as they focused their energy, they made the objective clearer.



The students work in two integral groups.

The first, the stakeholder engagement group, carries the main objective of identifying key figures engaged with the river, such as the community and businesses.

Secondly, the catchment mapping group, which has the aim is to eliminate obscurity around who already owns the land around the river, planning to gather data and make it public.

They aim to make a visual map that illustrates areas prone to flood risk, pollution and fly tipping – alongside areas identified as being historically significant.