Meet Dr Samir Seddougui, River Action’s Campaign Researcher

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Q1. Tell us about yourself

Hi I’m Samir, I grew up in the West Midlands but have spent the last decade living in Bristol where I recently completed a PhD in Social Policy. I have always enjoyed being in water, often spending a lot of time on canals in and around Birmingham, which has more (miles of) canals than Venice! I’m now enjoying spending more time on naturally occurring bodies of water. Having lived in Bristol for the last decade, I have spent a lot of time around the River Avon, and enjoy cycling alongside the river on the way to Bath.

I have family across the world from Morocco to Australia, so I love to travel and explore new places and cultures. During my PhD I worked for several think tanks conducting research on corporate lobbying, Islamophobia and far-right organisations across Europe and North America. Throughout my time in Bristol I have been involved in many social justice campaigns, and strongly believe that social justice and environmental justice are interconnected. This is one of the reasons I am so excited to begin working at River Action and contribute to such important and impactful campaigns.

I've recently moved to South East London, and really enjoying the variety of amazing cuisines from around the world.

Q2. How did you become interested in river protection?

Like many people, I found nature to be a solace during the Covid pandemic. It was around this time that I began to use Surfers Against Sewage's SSRS sewage map to make a risk assessment on whether the nearest body of water was safe to swim in. This led me to wanting to find out more about the degradation of British rivers and wanting to collectively transform a broken system.

Q3: You have had a very impactful career, investigating Islamophobia and racism, and supporting victims of hate crime. What have you enjoyed most about this kind of work and what have been its biggest challenges?

Having spent around a decade fighting for racial justice, one of things I found most rewarding was being able to work closely with and support many individuals who have experienced hate-crime and discrimination. The criminal justice system is often complex to navigate with many obstacles to traverse, so being able to offer practical and emotional support is a really important service. I was also able to work closely on several landmark cases of racial discrimination and Islamophobia that led to change.

Working within racial justice often felt like swimming upstream against a tide which was constantly getting stronger. This continues to be a major challenge for the sector which has seen consecutive governments underplay the prevalence of systemic racism and the rise of far-right attitudes within society. River Action's determination and optimism for the future really drew me to this role.

Q4: What are your greatest passions outside of work?

Having spent the last decade in Bristol I have really enjoyed exploring the various stone circles and neolithic sites that are in the South West, particularly Stanton Drew and Avebury which are great to really immerse yourself in the standing stones and their ancient history. I do like to be inside too, and spend a lot of time at gigs watching live music. Bristol has an incredible DIY music scene with amazing venues like Strange Brew and The Exchange. One day might be a 9-piece folk band, and the next a Chelsea Manning DJ set. I really value the diversity and forward thinking nature of the music scene there.

Q5. Tell us about your new position as River Action's Campaign Researcher, What can we expect to see from your role in 2025?

In my role as campaign researcher I will be supporting the RA team by conducting analysis on river pollution across the UK so river action campaigns are evidence driven and reflect the reality of the current state of our rivers.

Q6. Finally, in your opinion, what is further needed/what needs to change to rescue Britain's rivers?

We need to radically rethink the system and start putting the environment and the public before the profits of corporations. For too long the system has ignored the degradation of Britain's rivers and as a result the health of the Rivers across the UK are in crisis. The impact of climate change and extreme weather patterns becoming more regular, only makes this more urgent. River Action are amongst several environmental organisations that are at the vanguard of driving positive change and a roadmap to address decades of policy failures.