

IIED's China work

Fostering sustainable development in
China and in its overseas engagement



In brief

IIED's China Team works to foster sustainable development in China and in its overseas engagement. We focus on research and policy exchanges between China and other countries where IIED has strong ties, particularly in Africa. We primarily work on natural resources and land-related sectors (agriculture, forestry, mining and other land-use sectors).

Our work encompasses two themes:

1. China Going Global

Promoting China-Africa relations that benefit the economy, poor communities and the environment.

2. China's lessons for the world

Sharing China's sustainable development practices and lessons with other countries.

Why now?

China is now the second largest economy in the world. It has reduced the number of its people living on less than one dollar per day from 65% of the population in 1981 to less than 10 per cent today. The country also leads the world in several indicators of environmentally-friendly market growth, including wind-power capacity and biomass power.

With such impressive growth it is easy to forget that major disparities and inequalities still exist; China is the largest developing country in the world, with 80 countries ahead of it in terms of per capita income. China's progress has also come at tremendous social and environmental cost both at home and abroad.

With its economic rise, Chinese overseas engagements – in the form of aid, trade and investment – have grown exponentially. It is now Africa's largest trading partner. But while China's engagement in sectors such as forestry, mining, agriculture, infrastructure and hydropower have brought significant economic benefits to the African continent, questions remain for social and environmental safeguards of such investment.

At the same time, reliable data on Chinese investments across the continent is often lacking. There is an urgent need for grounded research on the realities of these activities, as well as constructive solutions-oriented partnerships between Chinese and African policymakers, researchers and NGOs.





Promoting China-Africa relations that benefit the economy, poor communities and the environment

Research rooted in grassroots fieldwork – both in Africa and China – is key to IIED's China-Africa work. We carry out research in the forests of the Congo Basin, rural farming communities in East Africa and the bustling markets in African capital cities. In China, we work directly with policy makers, academics, NGO practitioners and journalists who are reshaping the policy framework for China's overseas engagement.

Our current work includes:

- **China-Africa Forest Governance:** Improving evidence, capacity and joint action for sustainable Chinese investment in Africa's forests.
- **China and Brazil in African Agriculture:** Mapping Chinese agricultural engagement in Africa and developing related case studies.
- **China-Africa Informal Commodity Trade:** Understanding China-linked commodity trade chains in Africa's burgeoning informal economy – the case of timber, minerals and agricultural products

Our past work includes research on Chinese engagements and land-based contracts in Africa and research on sustainability standards in Chinese trade with Latin America.



Recognising informality in the China-Africa natural resource trade

<http://pubs.iied.org/17286IIED.html>



Chinese views of African forests: Evidence and perception of China-Africa links that impact the governance of forests and livelihoods

<http://pubs.iied.org/17569IIED.html>



Chinese agriculture goes global: food security for all?

<http://pubs.iied.org/17146IIED.html>



Narratives of China-Africa Cooperation for Agricultural Development: New Paradigms?

<http://www.future-agricultures.org/publications/research-and-analysis/1639-narratives-of-china-africa-cooperation-for-agricultural-development-new-paradigms/file>

China's environment and development lessons for the world

Facing multiple environmental and development challenges simultaneously, China has become a laboratory of sustainable development 'experiments'. Supporting and sharing lessons from these experiences can help other developing countries cope with increasingly scarce resources and rapid environmental change. Equally, China will become a more effective and responsible agent of change in global development processes if it is able to learn from the experience of other countries.

Our current work includes:

- **Chinese Smallholder Innovation for Resilient Agriculture:** Working to strengthen biocultural systems for food security in the face of climate change in China through research and policy advocacy within China, as well as sharing of methods and insights across three other countries where the project is implemented.
- **New Perspectives on Climate-Resilient Drylands Development:** Striving to reframe pejorative narratives around drylands in China, India and Kenya to ones of potential and resilience in the face of climatic change.
- **Sustainable Agriculture in China:** Assessing different approaches to sustainable agriculture in China through case studies, stakeholder meetings and policy advocacy. Research report forthcoming.

Our past projects include producing an introductory guide to China's path to green economy and sharing key lessons from BRICS' urban transition.



China's path to a green economy: decoding China's green economy concepts and policies

<http://pubs.iied.org/16582IIED.html>



Green China: Chinese insights on environment and development

<http://pubs.iied.org/17509IIED.html>



China's domestic biogas sector must adjust to changing conditions

<http://pubs.iied.org/17185IIED.html>

<http://pubs.iied.org/17185CIIED.html> (Chinese)



Sustainable agriculture in China

<http://pubs.iied.org/17291IIED.html>



Use it or Lose it: Protecting the Traditional Knowledge, Genetic Resources and Customary Laws of Marginal Farmers in Southwest China

<http://pubs.iied.org/G02787.html>

Who we are and our approach

The **International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)** is one of the world's top policy research organisations focusing on sustainable development. A pioneer in the field, it was launched in 1971 by renowned economist and policy advisor Barbara Ward. Now, with partners on five continents, IIED is helping to tackle 21st-century challenges ranging from climate change and cities to the pressures on natural resources and the forces shaping global markets. The institute works with some of the world's most vulnerable people to ensure they have a say in the policy arenas that most closely affect them — from village councils to international conventions. Beyond research and advocacy, IIED also advises governments, business and international development agencies, and publishes widely.

The China Team consists of experienced researchers on China and China-Africa sustainable development issues with rich fieldwork experience. Our work entails grappling with Chinese perspectives, investing in research to better understand Chinese development models, and ensuring that this research informs constructive next steps to influence better development outcomes – both in China and abroad.

IIED brings unique strengths:

- global leadership in shaping sustainable development research and policy
- deep networks with national-level stakeholders in the these regions from 40 years of history, and
- insightful research based on case studies and in-depth interviews with actors in the field

Together with our local partners in research, civil society and government – in China and Africa – we support better decisions on policy, investment and practices for pro-poor and sustainable development.



Get involved

There are many ways to stay in touch, get involved and spread the approach.

Visit our website

www.iied.org/our-China-work

Get in touch with IIED team to find out more about our China work.

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Project
Materials

China

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