

Climate Change and Public Interest – New ways of participation

On 31 March 2012 Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung|Shanghai and the Research Center for Environmental Law (RIEL) at Wuhan University jointly organised a workshop on the role of civil society in climate and environmental policy.

Welcome Remarks

Dr. Peter Hefele, Director of the KAS | Shanghai, pointed out that climate and environmental protection has become a significant part of Germany's foreign relations and is of special importance for the bilateral relations with China. Several platforms and cooperation projects between German and Chinese NGOs show the expanding exchange between the two societies. China faces huge challenges in climate protection. In order to cope with them an enhanced legal framework, a professional environmental journalism as well as powerful NGOs are required.

Prof. Dr. QIN Tianbao suggested that in the process of exploring new ways of public participation in climate change issues especially in China, the role of law must be improved and strengthened. And only based on a legal framework, media, NGOs and individuals can impose their influences in decision-making of climate change and protect the public interest.

Session 1: Reform of the Legal and Institutional Framework in China's Environmental and Climate Policy

Emission Trading System in China: Problems and Prospect

Prof. Dr. ZHANG Jianwei, School of Law, Henan University

Prof. Dr. ZHANG Jianwei described the prospects of China setting up a carbon emissions trading system. The Kyoto Protocol has recommended three market oriented mechanisms to reduce green house gas (GHG) emissions: The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), the Joint Implementation (JI) and the introduction of Emissions Trading Systems (ETS). ETS are transforming GHG emissions into tradable commodities. The worldwide market value of carbon credits amounted to 123 billion USD in 2009 and could have an overall market volume of up to 3.5 trillion USD by 2020.

China and other emerging countries such as India, Brazil and Chile (which are also making the first steps towards the introduction of carbon emission trading systems) can gain from the various experiences made globally. The EU emission trading system (EU ETS) which has been introduced in 2005 as well as other regional and voluntary schemes, i.e. in the US, in Canada, in New Zealand and in Australia provide valuable experiences.

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The EU ETS has just entered its third phase (2012–2020): only five industries had been subdued from 2008 till 2012. From 2012 on it will include aviation – where most of the (future) growth in CO₂ emissions comes from - and many other industries.

As China has become the world's largest emitter of CO₂, the international pressure on the country to contribute to international emissions reductions has grown immensely. Prof. Zhang sees this pressure as a positive factor to strengthen the already made efforts within China. The state council has decided to establish a nation-wide emissions trading system in China by 2015. Regional pilot projects are already being launched in 7 provinces and cities during the 12th five year plan period (2011-2015). For the establishment of a national ETS several obstacles have to be overcome. These obstacles are: 1.) an insufficient legal framework, as no climate change law has been established yet 2.) a lack of public awareness as well as 3.) Insufficient technical knowledge, i.e. in measuring carbon emissions, which makes the correct allocation of emission rights difficult.

Current Challenges for Germany's Climate Policy against the Background of the Abolition of Atomic Energy

Christoph Bals Policy Director, Germanwatch

Christoph Bals explained the major challenges for Germany in implementing the so called "Energiewende" (energy transformation). Germany plans to reduce its CO₂ emissions by 80% until 2050 (as compared to 1990) and to increase the share of renewable energies (RE) in electricity production to 80% within the same period of time. To achieve this goal, i.e. 2% of all buildings are supposed to be refurbished with an advanced insulation every year. The federal government has also decided to shut down all nuclear power plants by 2022. According to Mr. Bals this should not be seen as an additional challenge, but rather as a chance. Because the profits made from old nuclear plants have made electricity companies reluctant to invest in renewable energies so far.

He calls the "Energiewende" the "first big experiment to transform the energy system of an industrialised country". In order to achieve this goal the participation of civil society is of utmost importance. For the moment there is broad consensus among political parties as well as among the German population. The support by companies is growing as well, because they have realized that there are many opportunities to profit from it. By now already more people work in the field of renewable energies than in nuclear and coal power production combined. Therefore the transformation might increase employment opportunities in the end.

According to Mr. Bals the goals set by the federal government are technically and economically feasible: costs for wind and solar energy capacities continue to decrease. For a certain period of time the share of gas power plants has to be increased as they can quickly step up their production if there is not enough wind or sunshine. Furthermore gas power plants can use hydrogen or methane gas, produced by excessive wind and solar power plants. In the short term, the shut down of the nuclear power plants might slightly increase CO₂ emissions but in the long run, the am-

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bitious goals for the reduction are realistic due to the growing energy efficiency and the use of RE.

Discussion

Is the abolition of atomic energy also viable for China despite its constantly growing energy consumption? Christoph Bals answered that China has reviewed the construction of new plants after the Fukushima disaster and will probably invest even more in the security of new plants. Building new atomic power plants is getting more and more difficult not only due to high risks but also because of economic reasons. Thus fewer plants will be built than planned today. Due to the tremendous construction costs Mr. Bals predicts a decline in the use of atomic energy on the global level. For China the most important challenge remains the reduction of its dependency on coal, as the main source of the immense air pollution.

On the role of technology transfer, Mr. Bals explained that "this topic is not a great success story" due to the fact that companies in the Western world are mainly interested in patent protection and profit generation. Even without a direct transfer of technology, cooperation with developing and emerging economies in the field of climate protection is possible. As an example he pointed out a project Germanwatch is involved in South Africa, in which several countries support South Africa with cheap loans in transforming its energy system, which is up to the present dominated by coal. The South African government is advised in setting up a feed in law for RE and a number of joint ventures in this area are set up.

What is the best way to subsidize RE? The "readiness" of the population is a key to success. In Germany the "transitory costs" are shared by all consumers. The allocation of subsidies should support both the growth of the RE industries and give an incentive to reduce costs as well. A major challenge for carrying out the "Energiewende" in Germany is the extension of the grid and adequate storage facilities.

Session 2: Changing the Mind and Behaviour – The Role of Media in Environmental and Climate policy

During the second panel the role of media for spreading knowledge about climate change, its effects and possible solutions were discussed. The Chinese journalists highlighted the role of media in the fields of climate and environmental protection in China. They scrutinize the data published by the government and stimulate the debate on certain issues. They also support initiatives of NGOs or even organising their own ones.

The Influence of Media on the Formulation of Climate Policy – The Case of PM 2.5 Monitoring Policy

Cao Haidong, Southern Weekly (Nanfang Zhoumo)

Fine particles of less than 2.5 micrometer (PM 2.5) in the air are extremely dangerous to human health as they directly enter the human body. The topic gained prominence in China during the Beijing Olympics. Mentioned by several "opinion leaders" on *Weibo* (Chinese micro blog service similar to Twitter) it became a hot topic in the Chinese internet. Traditional media also widely reported on the topic and thereby exerted

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pressure on the government. As a result, at the beginning of this year the government decided to monitor P.M. 2.5 in several cities and to publish the data. Media continues to scrutinize this data by comparing it to other sources (such as the American embassy in Beijing and individual measurements) and demands improvements in air quality. They widely cooperate with NGOs and political advisors.

Platforms for Communication on "Green Intelligence"

Sun Yang, Editor, Eco-nomy Magazine

In her presentation **Sun Yang** stressed the role of specialized media for a sustainable, eco-friendly lifestyle and technical solutions for environmental challenges. The Eco-nomy magazine focuses on "green economy" and reports on new concepts all over the world.

Presentation by

Andreas Landwehr, German PressAgency. Beijing Office Director

Andreas Landwehr stressed that media has to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge on climate change and daily life experiences to influence awareness and behaviour. Media shall also provide a 'rational' forum for discussions on conflicting opinions and interests. Last not least the press should give people who suffer from environmental degradation a voice.

In China people are increasingly turning to social media, because they have lost trust in official media. Independent and credible media is therefore required, especially in a society in which information – including rumours – spreads fast through social media.

New Approaches of Online Media in Promoting Public Participation in Environmental Protection

Zhang Huan, Editor-in-Chief, green.sina.com

Zhang Huan described the growing significance of internet journalism in the area of climate and environmental issues. More than 400 newspapers and magazines have specialised on environmental issues and several hundred websites exclusively report on this topic. These websites make dissemination of knowledge and mobilization for campaigns faster and more effective. Meanwhile three Chinese web portals (Sina, Sohu and Tencent) offer special coverage and professionalize reporting.

Sina.com promoted the projects "Earth Hour" and "Air con 26 degrees". The later was proposed by NGOs in China in 2004 and implemented by the government since 2007. UN climate talks are increasingly covered: In Bali 2007 less than 10 reporters from China reported, whilst in 2010 the number has already grown to more than 100, greatly contributing to the knowledge among the Chinese population.

New media like micro blogs offer new possibilities such as online polls, online interviews, online conferences and workshops on very specialized topics. Green.sina.com, founded in 2010, promotes low carbon lifestyle and supports the development of a "green economy" in China. It regularly reports on the impact of climate change on China presenting con-

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create examples from different regions and providing online learning tools. Funds can be donated via this platform i.e. for planting trees.

Session 3: The Role of NGOs in Environmental and Climate Policy

Development of Environmental NGOs and their Role for Public Participation

Prof. Dr. Zhou Zhijia, Associate Professor, School of Public Affairs, Xiamen University

Prof Dr. Zhou Zhijia gave an overview over the development of environmental NGOs in China. In 1978 the first government organised civil environmental protection institution was set up and in 1991 the first environmental NGO was established by a local community. Since then the numbers of grass roots organisations (like Friends of Nature, Green Earth and Global Village) and their influence on the political process have grown very fast. In 2008 in mainland China more than 3000 environmental NGOs and GONGOS (government organised NGOs) could be found (37% set up by the government, 39% by students, 14.3% by grass roots organisations; 2.5% were branches of international NGOs). Grass roots organisations mainly rely on private and corporate donations for their funding (60% of their funds). They contribute to the environmental education of pupils, provide legal help to victims of environmental degradation, give advice to local government and take part in international exchange and conferences.

Major problems of NGOs at the moment are: the high political dependence on the government and financial dependence on supporting companies. Therefore independence should be strengthened and their role between government and companies be defined. The government should give more space to act as these NGOs have already developed a high professional competence – not only in the field of environmental protection.

The Role of Local Grassroots NGOs in Energy Conservation Education and Advocacy

Azure Ma, Xiamen Green Cross Association

Ma Azure described several projects carried out by the Xiamen Green Cross NGO. Their work comprises research, environmental education, advice to the local government and projects to raise the awareness and participation. Opinion polls on "green commuting", a workshop on a water reservoir outside Xiamen, a bicycle project to show the advantages of this means of transportation and an "energy saving drawing competition" illustrate the variety of projects. They not only cooperate with the government but also with companies and other NGOs. Awareness among the public is enhanced by cooperation with media.

Ensuring Transparency and Accountability of Carbon Markets - Joint-Challenges for European and Chinese NGOs

Dr. Patrick Schröder, International Advisor, China Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO)

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Dr. Patrick Schröder described the major shortcomings of the first EU ETS and the contribution of NGOs in overcoming them. The ETS has 1.) allocated too many allowances to the industry, which has undermined its effectiveness and resulted in "fat cats" collecting a high amount of surplus allowances (currently worth 4.1 billion Euro) to avoid high costs of mitigation in the future; 2.) Baseline data which has been submitted by the companies has often been inaccurate and 3.) Many projects carried out as part of CDM especially in China have created bad offsets because they derive from projects that would have been carried out anyway (undermining the principle that only additional projects should be promoted).

In the area of carbon trading NGOs should name and shame those companies that abuse the system by accumulating carbon credits. Furthermore pressure can be exerted on the governments to reduce the amount of credits handed over given out to the companies. Cooperation between China and Europe has also been necessary in order to inform about "bad offsets" as part of CDM.

Discussion

How has the interaction with the government changed over time? Ms. Ma explained that most NGOs in China don't choose a confrontational approach but instead seek for cooperation with government institutions and provide concrete proposals for joint projects.

The collaboration among different NGOs was also a topic discussed. The experts explained that quite a number of networks have been created in order to share information and launch joint initiatives across the borders of towns and provinces. One important umbrella organisation is the China Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO), which has greatly contributed to inter-NGO cooperation, including national and international NGOs.

How are NGOs financed and how do they recruit their staff? Dr. Schröder pointed out, that sustainable funding is very difficult and big support still comes from international organisations (UN organisations, EU etc.); this is not sustainable for the future. Ms. Ma added that the personal of Chinese NGOs are mainly volunteers; full-time, professional staff is very limited. She has experienced the problem that companies which finance their activities often expect good publicity in return. This might conflict with the goals of the NGO.

Session 4: Round Table: New Ways of enhancing Public Participation in Environmental and Climate Policy and International Cooperation

In the final round table discussion German and Chinese experts as well as student activists debated how to enhance civil society involvement in the field of climate change.

Prof. Dr. Berthold Kuhn from the School of Public Affairs of Xiamen University explained that the correlation between high education and low carbon behaviour is still too weak and that even well educated people often lack the awareness of their own "carbon foot print". Therefore incentives through prices, taxes etc. are to be combined with new models for

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an alternative lifestyle. Environmentally friendly behaviour and consumption has to be enhanced and labelled positively.

Qin Xudong of the 'China Reform Magazine' pointed out that in China the career of government officials should be linked more strongly to progress in environmental and climate protection to create new incentives. Besides, major projects i.e. infrastructure construction should be discussed with NGOs and the population in an institutionalised way to develop consensus before implementation. The NGOs can also play the important role of promoting positive projects among the people.

Christoph Bals stressed that NGOs are excellent early warning systems by informing on harmful developments and play the important role of acting as a 'counter-lobbyist' against powerful interest groups from the industry.

The participating student activists pointed out that deepening trust between the government and civil society is necessary and that conveying knowledge on environmental and climate change topics should become an integral part of school education.

Recommendations:

- The reform of the legal framework should acknowledge the important role national and international NGOs play in environmental policy in China.
- The exchange between Chinese and European institutions should be strengthened to support China in setting up an emission trading system (ETS) based on experiences made in the EU.
- China and other emerging countries (such as India, Brazil and Chile) should set up platforms to learn from their respective experiences in climate protection and the setting up of ETS (South-South Dialogue). NGOs should be included in the processes.
- The public awareness for climate change has to be strengthened. This shall be supported by professional training Chinese journalists in the field of environmental journalism.
- The knowledge of the German "Energiewende" (energy turnaround) as a positive example of reducing primary energy consumption shall be enhanced worldwide and advice on how to set up a new sustainable development model shall be given.
- Chinese journalists should be increasingly integrated in global discussion processes and reporting on climate change issues.

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- More efforts should be given to education of students on environmental and climate change. NGO can herein play an important role.