

INTERVIEW with Madame Jin Jiaman,
Executive Director of the Global Environmental Institute in China

China-Africa dialogue pushes sustainable forestry

by Meindert Brouwer

Between 2014 – 2020 the Global Environmental Institute (GEI) in Beijing participated in two projects to foster dialogue between African and Chinese stakeholders in forestry and promote pro-biodiversity and pro-poor Chinese investment and trade. Both projects were funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) - now Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) - in the United Kingdom. In the China-Africa Forest Governance Project (2014 – 2018) GEI teamed up with Chinese Academy of Forestry (CAF), International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) based in London and Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). GEI's Executive Director Madame Jin Jiaman explains.



Madame Jin Jiaman

'We wanted to encourage Chinese investors, forest companies and traders to engage in sustainable forest management and involve local communities.'

The China-Africa Forest Governance Project was coordinated by IIED. What was it about?

JJ: 'The goal of the project was to contribute to improving forest governance in Africa in which Chinese stakeholders play a role. We wanted to encourage Chinese investors, forest companies and traders to engage in sustainable forest management and involve local communities. And we wanted to curb illegal timber trade. In order to achieve all this, we established the China-Africa Forest Governance Platform which facilitated dialogues at all levels between organisations in China and those in Cameroon, DR Congo, Uganda, Mozambique, Madagascar and Gabon. Project partners were government agencies, research institutions, civil societies and non-governmental organisations.'

What were the results?

JJ: 'We organised four international symposiums in China and in Africa, during which challenges facing China-Africa forestry cooperation were discussed. In 2018, a bilateral forestry cooperation agreement was signed between the Chinese government and the government of Mozambique and in 2019 between the Chinese government and the government of Gabon.'

JJ: 'Secondly, the project analysed the wood source, commodity structure and trends in Chinese timber import and African timber export, based on information gained from researches and reports as well as forestry-related trade data from Chinese and African customs authorities. (For reports go to the box text, ed.) We also promoted the development of a trade information system in Mozambique that was based on the exchange and discussions between the General Administration of Customs of China and the Mozambican customs and forestry authorities.'

JJ: 'Thirdly, the project sponsored five Chinese journalists to conduct investigations in Africa and objectively tell the true stories of China-Africa trade and investment. Articles on China's investment in the African forestry sector were published in Chinese and foreign media. In addition, we organised capacity building trainings for Chinese and African journalists in Cameroon, DR Congo, Uganda and other African countries, and gatherings for Chinese and African journalists were held in China.'

NEEDS In 2018 the China-Africa Forest Governance Project came to a close. Then GEI continued in a new two-year project financed by DFID. This time the focus was on central and western Africa, with an emphasis on engaging Chinese stakeholders. Its aim was to strengthen policy coordination, promote responsible trade and investment and mobilize local stakeholders. With regard to the Congo Basin region, the project investigated 'the understanding and needs of local social organisations and stakeholders in Cameroon and DR Congo regarding Chinese investment and related

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL INSTITUTE (GEI)

Global Environmental Institute (GEI) is a Chinese environmental NGO, based in Beijing. GEI works alongside key policymakers, businesses, scientists, civil society leaders and local communities to foster dialogue and innovative solutions to protect the environment and enhance economic opportunity within China as well as in Southeast Asia and Africa. The GEI's program areas include Energy and Climate change, Ecosystem Conservation and Community Development, Marine Conservation and Overseas Investment, Trade and the Environment. GEI works according to a method of three steps: research, pilot projects and policy recommendations.

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PHOTO: SIMON LIM

The China-Africa Forest Governance Platform is a mechanism for exchange and strategic policy intervention for African policy researchers and opinion formers and their Chinese counterparts, with a focus on issues of forest governance, investment and trade.

environmental and social policies. According to their needs, relevant training contents are being designed for local social organisations.'

Which Chinese stakeholders are we talking about?

JJ: 'Stakeholders include China's Forestry Administration (policy decision-makers), timber companies, timber industry associations, policy and planning research institutes, and environmental NGOs.'

What are the needs of local social organisations in this context?

JJ: 'Based on preliminary understanding, the main needs of local NGOs include a better understanding of relevant policies in China regulating the environmental conduct of Chinese companies as they carry out outward foreign investments and trade; how they can start engaging in dialogues with Chinese companies investing in their countries; and whether it is possible to use policies to constrain and improve corporate environmental conduct.'

What will be the focus and content of the training of local social organisations? Who will carry out the training and who will pay for the training?

JJ: 'The main content of the training is intended to include the introduction of China's environmental policies and guidelines regarding outward foreign investment, the introduction of host country policies regarding the management of the environmental conduct due to foreign investments, and case studies of communication and cooperation between local NGOs and Chinese companies. The training will be co-organized by GEI in collaboration with ClientEarth and local NGO partners. Experts familiar with relevant policies and NGO representatives with experiences communicating with foreign investment companies will be invited to share their perspectives and insights. The training expenses will be supported by the Forest Governance, Markets and Climate Programme of DFID.'

What is the role of the Chinese government?

JJ: 'As a major wood processor, importer and exporter, China needs to conduct the whole chain operation from logging to planting in a constrained and planned way, in order to ensure a sustainable utilization of forest resources and obtain long-term economic benefits.'

The role of the Chinese government is to formulate regulations and policies on sustainable forest management, so that the conduct of overseas Chinese enterprises can



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JJ: 'Thirdly, dialogues and exchanges with related countries should be strengthened and bilateral working mechanisms and cooperation agreements should be developed between China and Africa, in order to ensure the objectives of biodiversity protection, economic interests and social needs of the two sides.'

What is the role of national governments of Congo Basin countries in your view?

JJ: 'The role of the national governments in the Congo Basin includes: 1) developing a national plan on the use of forest resources, according to the economic and social development needs as well as the forest sustainability in the country; 2) formulating policies and standards on sustainable foreign investment and trade; 3) regulating the conduct of foreign timber companies, ensuring the sustainability of their use of forest resources and protecting the interests of indigenous peoples.'

What are the benefits of sustainable conduct of Chinese companies in Congo Basin countries for these companies themselves? Please address sustainable forest management, sustainable timber trade, agribusiness, mining and infrastructure.

JJ: 'As an important part of the society, companies are also important vehicles for social and economic development. Sustainable resources will bring long-term economic and development benefits, and companies are the largest beneficiaries. In this sense, tropical rain forests resources in the Congo Basin will bring long-term benefits and economic returns to companies when they are well managed. From another perspective, if companies are acting responsibly in sustainable management, social benefits will occur, which can promote stable long-term economic returns.'

JJ: 'Sustainable forest management has long been a topic of concern for the United Nations and many member states, in particular for developed countries. International NGOs have developed many standards and tools. Released by FAO

be regulated to achieve legal compliance in logging and sustainability in the processing, investment and trade of forest products.'

JJ: 'Let me add that more education and guidance on sustainability should be provided for overseas Chinese forestry enterprises through industry associations, such as the China National Forest Products Association. Research institutes and NGOs can provide case studies for Chinese companies investing overseas on long-term planning and cost-benefit analyses of sustainable business practices, as well as provide capacity building training for companies on community participation best practices, with an aim to demonstrate that sustainability does not only yield environmental and social benefits, but also long-term stable economic returns.'

in 2014 at the request of member countries, the Toolkit for Sustainable Forest Management is a consensus in this regard. Relevant websites have provided tools, references, best practices and training materials for member states to use. However, sustainable forest management is more than a methodological and technical issue. It also involves many more challenging factors, such as capacity building, country-specific policies, incentives, supervision and law enforcement ability and strict control of the international market. This is hard and urgent work.

The core issue of sustainable timber trade is to establish a value chain system. This may require broad international agreement and the establishment of mechanisms that can monitor and verify the trade. It is also a very difficult job.'

JJ: 'Agriculture, mineral extraction and infrastructure construction may be direct threats to nature, caused by continued economic expansion. Apart from promoting higher standards of environmental protection and following best practices, more fundamental issues should be considered, including the ultimate limits of human economic development, the balanced distribution of resource wealth, and the sustainability of human consumption patterns.'



PHOTO: JASON LEE WONG /IIED

Anna Amumpire of The Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE) in Uganda and Zhong Chen from China's Ministry of Commerce at an international learning event of the China-Africa Forest Governance Platform in Pemba, North-eastern Mozambique.

REPORTS

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2. The Trend of China's Investment in Non-forest-land-use Industry and its Impact on African Forestry.
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