



Climate Profiles : Climate China

China Climate Change Profile Part 4: Strategy

Growth is China's first concern. To sustain it, the country needs resources. Foreign and internal policies are dedicated to this aim. So far, environment and nature took a backseat, but public pressure is growing.



China-Africa Summit

China's search for oil and other resources has made it the most important investor in Africa. The China-Africa Summit gathered the leaders of 48 African countries in Beijing in November 2006 (Photo: Reuters)

Energy Policy

China's is running out of energy. Its continued growth depends on its ability to find new sources of energy. The search has led to heavy Chinese investment and close relations with oil-rich African countries, such as Angola and Sudan. China is also looking into alternatives to simply burning more coal and importing more oil from abroad. The Renewable Energy Act of 2005 aims to supply 10 percent of China's energy from renewable sources, such as solar, wind, and biomass by 2020 (the EU wants to achieve 20 percent renewable energies by then).

Related Articles

- China Climate Change Profile
Part 5: Opportunities
- "If China does not shift, there will be no hope for the world's climate"
- India Climate Change Profile
Part 1: Growth vs. Climate Protection?

Olympic Ambitions

China wants to use the 2008 Olympic Games to showcase its growing affinity for renewable energy. The new National Olympic Stadium in Beijing has been fitted with advanced solar technology, reportedly making it the most "green" sporting facility in the world. Officials in many of China's major cities announced plans to scale-back factory production next summer to ensure cleaner air for the throngs of visitors from abroad.

Lax Enforcement

Despite ambitious plans to protect the environment, China's State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) is not yet ready to

effectively enforce existing legislation. Mandatory environmental impact assessment prior to the construction of a new project can be bypassed at relatively low cost - even in a government-sponsored program. According to figures published by the China University of Political Sciences and Law in 2005, only around 10 percent of environmental laws and regulations on the books are actually regularly enforced.

Growing Public Concern

China's latest push towards "green development" can be seen as an answer to fears that environmental degradation could lead to civil unrest. Figures from SEPA show that environmental petitions from the public are rising at an annual rate of 30 percent. During 2001-05, Chinese authorities received over 2.5 million letters from petitioners demanding that the government address environmental conditions.

In June 2007, the Chinese government released its first comprehensive plan for adapting to and tackling climate change. The plan took two years to draft and included participation from nearly twenty government departments. Along with renewable energy, it outlined China's aim to cover 20 percent of the country with forests, improving efficiency, and technology exchange with other countries.

International Policies

On the international stage, the Chinese government has ratified the Kyoto Protocol, but refused any of the limits on carbon emissions accepted by other industrialized countries, claiming such commitments would obstruct national development. Government officials say it is up to developed countries like the United States to make the first steps in reducing their carbon emissions.

Unless the prospect of technology transfer with industrialized nations lures China into negotiations over emissions caps, Chinese authorities are unlikely to budge on the issue anytime soon. China has nonetheless participated in UN-facilitated negotiations about post-Kyoto international climate policy. It has also agreed to open a carbon trading exchange in Beijing together with the UNDP. As a member of the informal "AP-6" group of countries, China has committed itself to voluntary measures and technology exchange to mitigate climate change, though analysts generally consider non-binding agreements ineffective tools in cutting emissions.

Neither China's national or international climate policy has come anywhere close to compensating for the nation's surging carbon emissions. Germanwatch's 2007 Climate Change Performance Index, which evaluates national policy and emissions trends, acknowledged some positive climate policymaking in Beijing. Nonetheless, the sheer scale and growth of carbon emissions caused China to drop 25 places on the survey's international ranking of climate-friendly countries. Chinese authorities will have to take bigger actions if they are to successfully curb the country's GHG emissions.

Much like the United States, China's ability and willingness to devise an

effective domestic policy and actively participate in international efforts is critical to the success of any international initiative to fight climate change. As one Financial Times analyst wrote in March 2007, "even if China only changes slowly - no climate policy can get anywhere without the booming giant."

Sources: Worldwatch Institute, SEPA, Worldchanging, Germanwatch, Der Spiegel, China Daily, Financial Times

editor: Valdis Wish

publishing date: August 6, 2007

© Allianz 2007, All Rights Reserved