

Project “Brazil and China facing global environmental challenges: notes to a bilateral agenda”

CONCEPT NOTE

Updated on May 24, 2019

Introduction

The project “Brazil and China facing global environmental challenges: notes to a bilateral agenda” is a partnership between the Brazilian Center for International Relations (CEBRI) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) in Brazil. It has the goal of debating and proposing topics and guidelines for the development of a new environmental agenda between Brazil and China, considering the role multilateralism plays in the promotion of sustainable development worldwide.

Brazil and China are strategic players in the global environmental and sustainable development agenda. The challenges imposed by the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda create an opportunity to go beyond the current initiatives and develop new cooperation arrangements. This could lead to an innovative and transformative political alliance and a collective effort that converges the bilateral interests of China and Brazil. It could result in significant gains for the global and regional multilateral sustainable development agenda and the strengthening of the south-south cooperation.

The project is being led by Izabella Teixeira, Brazil’s former Minister of the Environment, who is currently a Senior Fellow at CEBRI. The project has organized four round-tables to discuss environmental and sustainability issues, as well as produce policy and analysis papers concerning the environmental situation in Brazil and China, and recommendations on possibilities for a new China-Brazil environmental cooperation agenda. Additionally, the initiative aims to consolidate a network of specialists and stakeholders from both countries who work with these subjects.

The round-tables covered the following topics:

- First round-table, September 18, 2018: Dialogue between Brazil and China regarding the international climate change and sustainable development agenda
- Second round-table, November 12, 2018: Sustainable cities
- Third round-table, December 5, 2018: Biodiversity
- Fourth round-table, May 30, 2019: Green Belt and Road

Background

The project has selected four main thematic areas to focus its research and discussion: climate change; sustainable cities; biodiversity; and Green Belt and Road and resource efficiency. It has identified these topics as strategic for the advancement of a new framework for cooperation between Brazil and China, taking into account the following considerations:

The cooperation between Brazil and China in the environmental area is defined both in the bilateral and multilateral spheres, and has notably gained more relevance and significance over the past decade. The Brazil-China cooperation agenda has been intensifying since 1974, gaining complexity, and emphasizing the strategic importance of the bilateral dialogue.

Since 2009, China has taken a leading role in Brazil's exports. This extends into the field of investments. China is becoming one of Brazil's biggest investors in the areas of infrastructure (energy, mining, ports), industry (metallurgy/steel), science, technology and innovation, telecommunications, automotive manufacturing, and agribusiness. Meanwhile, Brazil has been making important investments in China in the areas of mining, aeronautics, food, metallurgy (steel and iron), paper and cellulose, and banking.

In the bilateral context, Brazil and China established a Collaborative Action Plan in April 2010 that identified the topics of climate change and environmental protection as common interests. This plan has been renewed, amplified, and extended until 2021 as an addition to the 10-Year Cooperation Plan, which was signed during the Rio+20 Conference. The agreement focuses on science and technology, energy and infrastructure, trade investment, and cultural cooperation. The Sino-Brazilian High-Level Concertation and Cooperation Commission (COSBAN) is the main political body responsible for the documents pertaining to and the future of the bilateral relations between the two countries. In 2015, both countries signed a Joint Statement on Climate Change and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for a private partnership aimed at protecting the Amazon. In addition, at the UNFCCC's Paris Conference, the Presidents of China and Brazil worked together during the negotiations that led to the adoption of the Paris Agreement, which was based on the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR).

In the multilateral context, BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) and BRICS stand out due to the political importance they can bring to the dialogue and partnerships regarding global environmental issues, and especially those pertaining to the climate change agenda.

The political and economic dialogue between Brazil and China is oriented toward development priorities, with broad possibilities to jointly seek solutions for global issues such as climate change, hunger and poverty, and the inefficient use of natural resources (particularly water). It should be noted that China's engagement with other countries, such as Brazil, is based on a long-term vision, and seeks to change the paradigm of how natural resources are used (resource efficiency), and establish new standards regarding infrastructure, energy (energy transition), food production (food security and sustainable agriculture) and industry 4.0.

Two new aspects should also be considered in the context of the Brazil-China dialogue on global sustainability themes. The first one involves the recent reform of the UN system and the priority given by the Secretary General to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The current multilateral efforts focus primarily on supporting countries in their development processes, with social and political inclusion, the reduction of inequalities, and environmental protection. The critical challenges are the 2030 Agenda's funding gaps, the availability of natural resources to supply the growing demands from developing societies, climate change, and the search for a more fair and sustainable global trading system that will consider the differences between the economic performance of developed and developing countries. There is a need for an "ex ante" action by UN entities in the evaluation of the possible consequences or implications arising from political positions related to these issues.

The second aspect concerns the recent agreement between China and the UN Environment establishing the Green Belt and Road Strategy (Green BRI). The agreement aims to incorporate the principles of environmental sustainability in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)'s focus areas, strengthen the national and regional environmental governance of the participating countries, and ensure that the investments planned will contribute toward achieving the 2030 Agenda globally.

In this context, it is important that Brazil can discuss the possibility of advancing a sustainability agenda as it moves forward with its cooperation with China. A new partnership between the two countries could emerge in the context of the BRI, particularly within the framework of the Green BRI, with important possibilities in the areas of infrastructure and development of low-carbon economies and knowledge. It is also important to highlight the potential to broaden the dialogue in the search for synergies in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the fight against environmental pollution, particularly in urban centers.

Project's Activities

The project's team has been holding meetings for content discussions and planning. It has also been interviewing key environmental and/or China studies specialists, to discuss and gain insights about the project's proposed themes and strategies. This is part of the project's efforts to bring together a network of specialists and stakeholders who work with related subjects in Brazil and China. So far, the project has held twelve team meetings, and twelve meetings with specialists and partners, two of which included UN Environment representatives.

The first round-table event was held on September 18, 2018, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Its theme was "Dialogues between Brazil and China in the international climate change and sustainable development agenda". The following guest speakers participated in the session: Ambassador José Antônio Marcondes de Carvalho (Under Secretary-General for the Environment, Energy, Science and Technology); Ambassador Paulo Estivallet de Mesquita (nominated Ambassador of Brazil to China); Mr. Antônio Igor Queiroz Brandão (Agribusiness Manager at the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency - Apex-Brasil), representing Ambassador Roberto

Jaguaribe, President of Apex-Brasil); and Minister Benoni Belli (Secretary for Diplomatic Planning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Minister Izabella Teixeira, CEBRI's Senior Fellow, moderated the discussions.

The second and third round-tables were held in November and December 2018, respectively. The fourth round-table will be held in May 2019. The team has prepared materials regarding the project's content and planning, and has been writing reports for each of the four round-tables. It will also write a final policy paper, to be released in the first half of 2019, with conclusions and recommendations considering all the project's research, activities, and discussions.