



A Holistic and Proactive Approach to Biodiversity and Green Development from the Perspective of a Chinese Non-Governmental Organization

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1- Introduction

To provide a little perspective, let me start by confessing that I was born in November 1942 and have witnessed firsthand from a variety of vantage points the long and arduous march of the Chinese people from the enslavement of hunger, poverty, illiteracy toward, but still at an appreciable distance from, a society where all have access to the basics material and immaterial requirements for a decent life with wellbeing, dignity and opportunity.

Despite many difficulties and setbacks the progress made by China in eradicating starvation and alleviating poverty is one of the great accomplishment of humanity and one that owes much not only to a grand vision and to the labours of the Chinese but to the selfless contributions of people and institutions from around the world. Our ancient proverb states: "When you drink sweet water from the well, never forget those who have helped you build it." Let me assure you that the China has a long memory.

As a deeply involved and responsible citizen, as many others, I observed that China's rapid growth was increasingly based on high energy consumption, excessive pollution, high emissions and low efficiency. At that time, I and others urged government and business to focus on sustainable development. The term "green locomotive" was born and the task of "Building a green locomotive for China" had as its mission to pull the country into the global economy while sustainably enhancing the quality of life for all Chinese citizens and increasing China's capacity to contribute to building a better world for all.

As all can appreciate, this shift in direction for a giant and fast moving entity is fraught with challenges, barriers and perils and demands time and care to effect. It required total refocusing, embracing different sets of values and identifying new priority structures, it necessitated building awareness and enhancing education, it required the creation and adoption of new technologies and above all it could only succeed with strong government leadership, policies as the buy-in and commitment of the people.

2- China: A Broad Panorama

As progress was being made against the goals of hunger eradication and poverty alleviation, Mr. Deng Xiaoping enhanced the ancient concept of "Xiaokang" – "a relatively well-off society for all" with the insight that this could only be achieved and maintained with due attention and care paid to nature and that development to be beneficial must be truly inclusive and truly sustainable.

Following this and the insistence that development must be people centered, China understood the need to focus on the national long term task of building a harmonious society and the understanding that to be truly and enduringly harmonious the harmony must not only extend beyond the borders of China and include all peoples of the world but above all it must include harmony between human beings and nature.

My own father, Mr. Hu Yaobang, during his tenure as the leader of China stated "In the past, in the mountains we only paid attention to investments in engineering or construction. We paid no attention to biological investments with the result that the biological environment was destroyed. ... We must as soon as possible turn Taihang Mountain the Yellow Dragon into a green dragon."

More recently, Mr. Xi Jinping has given voice to the national vision which can be termed "China's Dream"; it is the dream of a prosperous life style reconciled with a sustainable lifestyle. To bridge the gap between the reality of today and this dream requires radical restructuring where the needs of people and nature are the fundamental concern and at the heart of all development where green technology is promoted and wide spread conspicuous consumption is reduced.

Flowing from a shared understanding that "everything is closely related" and that "today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis." The basic concept encoded in Pope

Francis term “integral ecology” is deeply imbedded in China’s direction and approaches as it has been ingrained in the deep culture and spirit of the Chinese people.

From the Chinese perspective, this is the context in which the world should receive and assess the teaching of the Encyclical “*Laudato Si*” which Pope Francis underscored most forcefully days ago by describing our destruction of the environment as a sin that is turning our planet into a “polluted wasteland full of debris, desolation and filth”.

These strong words and powerful description ring true in China where we understand that what the Pope is talking about is not some distant future but that the impacts of environmental degradation, climate change, the destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity loss are becoming clearly evident to all as is the fact that even in the short term the less privileged members of society, the poor are the most and most cruelly affected.

As around the globe, in China it is becoming clear, as Pope Francis has preached in words and example that the resolve to live differently should affect our various contributions to shaping the culture and society in which we live.

We understand that political, social, scientific, academic and business leaders must stop thinking of short-term gains and work for the common good. And as we know, in China as in the rest of the world this conversion is neither easy nor fast, but a process that demands the involvement of all.

3- China in Action

As we explore the long march since the dawn of the new China in 1949, the Millennium Development Goals agreed to in 2000 and measured through 2015 provided China with a most objective and useful moment of critical assessment and deep reflection, leading to the development not only of new objectives and approaches but also to marshalling the resources, the will and the commitment to move significantly forward.

In its report on China and the MDGs, the UNDP concluded that China has made notable progress in many areas such as eliminating poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, ensuring healthcare for women and children, controlling and preventing diseases, and protecting the environment.

The report of the UNDP turned a spotlight on five outcome areas:

1. Achieving rapid economic growth, steadily improving overall agricultural production capacity, and making significant progress in eradicating poverty and hunger.
2. Fully achieving “nine-year compulsory education”, steadily increasing Employment and basically achieving gender equality in education and employment.
3. Constantly improving medical and health services, significantly reducing child and maternal mortality rate, and making notable progress in curbing epidemic diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.
4. Reversing the trend of sustained loss of environmental resources, increasing the number of people with access to safe drinking water by over 500 million, and fully launching the government subsidized housing project.
5. Offering support and help to over 120 developing countries to achieve their MDGs under the framework of South/South Cooperation within its capacity.

As a general comment on the environmental targets, the report stated: “From 2000, China fully included the principle of sustainable development into the national economy and social development planning and, as a result, the general situation of the ecological system has taken a turn for the better, while the trend of continuous environmental degradation has been taken under control preliminarily.”

One target, 7B “Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss” was not met and four key causes and challenges were identified:

1. The contradiction between protection and local economic development will persist for a long time to come.
2. Pressure on protection is likely to mount even further.
3. Funding for protection is still lacking.
4. Protection awareness and supervision capacity need further improving.

Please allow me to address these points a little later in my remarks.

While the progress achieved by the peoples of the world and the Chinese people as measured by the MDGs gave cause for celebration, above all it not only imposed on all of us the imperative of setting new and more

daunting goals, it also showed that as human beings we had both the moral obligation and the moral fibre to build a radically better world for all.

Looking forward to 2030, in 2015 in harmony with the Sustainable Development Goals, China set the following strategic direction:

- Eradicating poverty and hunger through targeted measures to alleviate and eliminate poverty, and enhancing agricultural production capacities and food security.
- Implementing innovation-driven development strategies and generating momentum for sustainable, healthy and stable economic growth.
- Advancing industrialization to inject impetus to coordinated development between urban and rural areas and among the three dimensions of sustainable development.
- Improving social security and social services to ensure equal access to basic public services.
- Safeguarding equity and social justice to improve people's well-being and promoting all-round human development.
- Protecting the environment and building protective barriers for eco-security.
- Addressing climate change actively and integrating climate change response into national development strategies.
- Promoting efficient utilization of resources and sustainable energy.
- Improving national governance and ensuring economic and social development in line with the rule of law.

China views the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a systemic project which will demand the proactive involvement and open collaboration of all stakeholders.

Stakeholders, for example the scientific or academic communities, that were to some extent left out of the MDGs process must be included. The Private sector made admirable contributions to progress on the MDGs must be called on to bring its capacities and creativity to help address heretofore intractable challenges. And non-governmental organizations must extend their outreach to include and empower the legions of children, women and men who want to contribute to building the world that they want for themselves and for all.

4- A case study: the CBCGDF

The China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation, also known as CBCGDF, understands its mission to first build awareness and then to help translate that awareness into action that will help and support society and all stakeholders to bring about disruptive change so that China's dream will not implode through the pressures of omission, inaction and the cancer of "selfish" systems that demand and extort "profit at any price" and that social justice ensures that all can participate in the sustainable common wealth.

The CBCGDF has taken to heart all that has been learned from the tremendous investment in resources, effort, innovativeness, dedication that have gone into the MDGs. Failure and success have been great teachers and the needs of the disadvantaged and the requirements of future generations are constantly inspiring and provoking us to critically and proactively assess what must be done, what we must cease doing, to re-examine what we are doing and planning to do in the light of the intricacies and interactions of the whole system.

Through the China Guangcai Program we learned that if Government, the Private Sector and Non-Governmental Organizations each bring their core competencies into a collaboration which had as its goal to provide sustainable social and economic development and employment in the poorest regions of China, million and millions could lift themselves and their families from poverty and move steadfastly to a better life today and in the future.

The CBCGDF is in fact nothing more than a solid, yet highly effective platform to provoke, stimulate and empower individuals, institutions as well as informal and formal organizations to think, to build awareness, to seek collaboration in order to act meaningfully.

Allow me to share just five concrete examples of how this works:

Through the Environmental Public Interest Litigation project (EPIL) the CBCGDF seeks to empower and support affected, involved or interested people to exercise their rights as citizens to seek redress for environmental harm from the causer(s) of such harm. To remove apparent financial incentives to externalize costs through action that are detrimental to health and wellbeing, to the material assets of those unjustly affected, to the

environment be it earth, water and/or air. To help such causers understand that there are better ways and to see the advantages of exploring new approaches.

Through a far reaching approach to political and legislative action, the CBCGDF brings together caring individuals and groups as well as experts and decision makers from government, the consultative and legislative bodies and the justice system to interact and collaborate in order to encourage the development, enactment and appropriate enforcement of policies, laws, regulations and projects to effectively support China's drive for people centered development, the strategies and goals for sustainable development, environmental friendliness, biodiversity conservation and green development.

Through encouraging and facilitating open sharing of information and ideas and above all collaboration that crosses silos, boundaries and borders, the CBCGDF is helping expand the expertise and experience and innovative capacities to address old and new challenges that have been deemed intractable in radically different ways.

This spirit and reality of collaboration can be seen today in this Consultation, it can be seen in the collaboration with Buddhists across the world, with faith based entities such as the Amity Foundation. It can be seen in the respect and proactive response to the wonderful provocation of "*Laudato Si*".

Through programmes such as the CCAfa, a citizens driven approach to ensure the creation and quality of protected areas for the preservation of endangered animals, plants, cultural and historical heritage, scenic beauty, assets of great value to all rich and poor.

So far, 22 CCAfas have been established around the country, including China Conservation Areas for endangered animals such as great bustards, relic gulls, Chinese white dolphins etc.; threatened plants like Acer pentaphyllum, old jujube trees etc. The CBCGDF has set up two China Conservation Areas for dark sky at Nagqu and Nagri, Tibet, which are China's first two conservation areas to fight against light pollution.

Through the One Belt One Road project, China is committed to supporting the efforts of billions of people to seek prosperous and sustainable lifestyle in an environment of peace and justice. CBCGDF is committed to work with the people of each nation along the New Silk Road in collaboration with the United Nations and all others in the preservation of biological diversity and promotion of responsible development.

Please understand that while the CBCGDF is a platform, a support, an innovator and a power for radical and disruptive progress toward integral ecology, it is not an outlier but fully in harmony with the spirit and the direction of the government and the people of China.

5- Conclusion

In closing, we must remind ourselves that while the needs and threats are severe and urgent, we must beware of the temptation to place undue hopes on quick fixes, on actions focused on one part of the problem and disregarding the sanctity of the whole and the interdependence of each of its interlocking components.

We must be committed to open sharing of information, experiences and knowledge; we must understand that collaboration within our country and abroad is the most effective route to sustainable development.

And while we must respect the wisdom that comes with age and experience, we must place great emphasis on our youth and focus on ensuring that they can develop the knowledge, the creativity and the character, the moral strength and fortitude and the wisdom to selflessly engage, to become active and innovative contributors in the building of a better world, a world of wellbeing, of harmony and of justice and peace for all.

Pope Francis reminds us that science at its best can help us listen to the cries of the earth, our common home and we know that our hearts help us listen to the cries of the poor, our sister and our brothers.

Our task, our responsibility, our privilege is so very clear.

Xie xie nimen (Thank you)