

Research note

Climate Protection Governance and Participation in the People's Republic of China

Berthold M. Kuhn*

Summary

In the last five years China has passed new laws and regulations and has formulated new policies and targets for climate protection. The country's private sector is also making contributions to this new focus, in terms of technology development, green investments, public-private partnerships, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting. Civil society organizations, meanwhile, have built networks and launched campaigns and projects at local and national level. Against this backdrop, this paper examines China's efforts at addressing climate protection from a multilevel governance, collaborative governance, multi-stakeholder, and trisectoral cooperation perspective. It is argued that China is currently implementing a policy mix of command-and-control and market-based mechanisms to address climate change. The case study of Xiamen highlights that local governments in China use low-carbon policies as a marketing tool, but lack strong incentives to actually implement such policies. The case of Xiamen illustrates some policies and potentials of low-carbon reforms and initiatives, but it also discusses the hereto missed opportunities for stakeholder interaction — in particular regarding the involvement of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in projects and campaigns.

Manuscript received on 2014-08-27, accepted on 2014-09-30

Keywords: climate protection, collaborative governance, low-carbon policies, participation, stakeholder interaction

Introduction: The growing political relevance of tackling climate change in China

The actions that China has recently taken at both the national and local levels to tackle climate change are of growing political and academic interest in China and worldwide. A growing number of people in multiple Chinese cities are now feeling the effects of air pollution and extreme weather events. Media interest in the subject has also increased (Kuhn and Zhang 2014). Environmental protests by Chinese

* I am grateful for the many fruitful exchanges I have had with: Mr. Xian Hao, Founder and Chief Executive of Green Zhejiang; Ms. Liu Xi Ying, Assistant Professor, Department of Energy Economics, Xiamen University; Ms. Ma Tiannan, Founder and Chief Executive of Xiamen Green Cross Association; Professor Zhang Yangyong, School of Public Affairs, Xiamen University; and, Professor Zhijia Zhou, School of Public Affairs, Xiamen University.