



Understanding the environmental protection policy-making process in FOCAC

This policy brief aims to illustrate how ideas and learning provide a roadmap for policy-makers to address the cause and effect relationship of problem areas in environmental protection. To draft and implement a sustainable policy for the future, information shared from the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Action Plan 2012 and Johannesburg Summit 2015 can inform the action plans of environmental protection and climate change negotiated at the Beijing Summit in 2018. Shared ideas among stakeholders and policy-makers structure action plans, advance cooperation and provide solutions to the challenges faced in environmental protection.

Rational and conceptual overview

Cooperation cannot be completely explained without reference to the beliefs and ideas of the parties (the member states or role-players involved with the issue), the interdependence of environmental issues and the knowledge available to realise specific goals. Cooperation is affected by the capacity of parties to process information and learning. Ideas and learning are integral in the decision-making process because they provide a roadmap for cooperation along pathways of knowledge sharing. By elevating the importance of learning, policy-makers can follow certain lines of action and draw up plans and programmes based upon common objectives, negotiated during the [decision-making process](#).

Decision-making is a process of helping parties establish their objectives in relation to the problem at hand and the outcomes they want to achieve. The [outcomes](#) of the decision-making process are implemented as policy and define the courses or principles of action the parties are going to take. With respect to environmental cooperation, decision-making formulates objectives on many of the smaller issue-areas and is a practical way to regulate interactions between parties. It is also instrumental in creating long-term sustainability programmes.

The FOCAC ministerial meetings of 2012 and 2015 established objectives (see Boxes 1 and 2) regarding environmental protection and climate change with China playing a greater role

in tackling these issues. Role players within FOCAC face similar environmental problems as developing countries, therefore, ideas and learning contribute to setting general procedures and rules or shared understandings, principles, norms, and beliefs among the parties. Based on this, cooperation could echo a unified commitment to draft action plans and find solutions. Cooperation is understood in terms of what the parties learned from each other and the value shared-knowledge have for policy implementation.

The evolution of ideas at ministerial meetings

The ministerial meetings of 2012 and 2015 raised concerns regarding environmental protection and climate change that affected all the parties, i.e. China and participating African states. Consequently, the aforementioned concerns were recognised as problem areas and considered for discussion in FOCAC. Setting goals and outlining plans of action would be completed during agenda-setting and creating appropriate courses of action through policy formulation.

The ministerial meetings are viewed as the first instances where active negotiations around environmental protection and climate change occurred. Parties started to share their views and understandings of proposed environmental action plans and programmes and laid the foundation for an evolution of ideas. This evolution of ideas supports both China and Africa's global environmental efforts as well as values in international relations

Box 1: The 2012 FOCAC Action Plan

4.6 Environmental Protection and Climate Change

- Closer policy dialogue and exchanges in the area of climate change
- Enhance capacity building in meteorological infrastructure, forest protection, treatment of desertification, ecological protection, environment management and sustainable development
- Share data from the China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite and advance weather monitoring
- Share the experience of applied space technology to disaster reduction and drought surveillance

and cooperation. Early attempts at cooperation indeed showed that China and Africa opted to find a balance between economic growth and environmental protection, erasing poverty through sustainable development, the rational use of resources and effective environmental protection. For instance, functionalism and multilateralism as approaches in international relations are used to advance cooperation in environmental protection and climate change. [Functionalism](#), suggests cooperation should begin with efforts aimed at resolving specific regional or transnational problems. A typical example of a [functional approach](#) is the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which makes explicit reference to promoting conditions of higher living standards, economic and social progress, and development. In addition, [multilateralism](#), the process by which states work together to solve common problems and social structure, is an arrangement based on ideas, norms, values, and shared beliefs. The [United Nations Conference on Environment and Development \(UNCED\)](#), also known as the Earth Summit is a good example of world leaders commitment to mutual cooperation in ways that would protect the Earth's environment and non-renewable resources.

The development of ideas is illustrated through a [cause and effect relationship](#) (the connection between the reason for something and its consequences). For example, during the ministerial meetings' negotiations focus on unregulated greenhouse gas emissions as a cause of air pollution and the debilitating effect on human health or the demand for illegal animal products in the international market and the possible extinction of certain animal species. Causes for the problems are due to unregulated human behaviour, increasing demand, urbanisation, and over-population which impacts local communities, complicates cross-border patrols, and limits the implementation of sustainability programmes. Changing ideas serve as an incentive to find the root causes of the problem, examining the consequences and coming up with possible solutions. Over the past 12 years, the FOCAC has instituted a number of [meeting and dialogue mechanisms](#) at various levels

and in different forms, including the Ministerial Conference, political consultations between Chinese and African foreign ministers on the side-lines of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, Senior Officials Meetings (SOMs), and the consultation between the Secretariat of the Chinese Follow-up Committee and the African Diplomatic Corps in China. Within the framework of environmental cooperation, mechanisms proposed at the ministerial meeting of 2015, include the [China-Africa Green Envoys Programme, China-Africa Joint Research Centre, and the China South-South Cooperation Fund](#) (see Box 3).

Decision-making in environmental protection

The next section presents a framework for describing environmental protection decision-making and focuses on the parties involved, the process and outcomes. Each element discussed below makes a contribution to the overall decision-making process and how outcomes are implemented.

a) Parties

China and Africa have their own parties involved in negotiations on environmental conservation. While smaller parties such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) may participate in the negotiation process, the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(MOFA\)](#) and the [Ministry of Environmental Protection \(MEP\)](#) are the leading parties from China's side. Africa is represented by African foreign ministers and officials from the [African Union \(AU\)](#). Each member state have unique challenges with respect to protecting the environment, but in FOCAC common ground is found based on a shared understanding of what the action plans and programmes should contain. Member states could also unite their expectations, principles, rules and decision-making procedures and thus promote cooperation that is beneficial to all parties. Ministers, local governments, civil society and scientific-knowledge groups, should use ideas and information-sharing to influence the steps of policy-making. The steps of policy-making include recognising problem areas, listing the

Box 2: The 2015 FOCAC Action Plan

4.6 Environmental Protection and Tackling Climate Change

- Management of border facilities, search, seizure and destruction of poached resources and intelligence gathering to undermine the responsible syndicates linkages to organized crime
- Introduction of the “China-Africa Green Envoys Programme”, setting up the China-Africa Environment Cooperation Centre and launching the China-Africa Green Innovation Project
- Promote the development of the “China-Africa Joint Research Centre”.
- Strengthen cooperation in the area of wildlife protection, improve protection capabilities, build capacity of rangers and jointly fight against the illegal trade of flora and fauna products
- Setting up the China South-South Cooperation Fund to support African countries combat climate change and implement climate change mitigation and adaptation actions
- Setting up a multi-level disaster reduction and relief cooperation and dialogue mechanism and expand exchanges in post-disaster response and recovery, risk assessment, disaster preparedness and recovery education programmes

issues to address, creating appropriate courses of action, approving policy proposals, allocating resources for implementation, carrying out policy and lastly evaluating the policies by establishing processes of implementation. The seventh ministerial meeting in Beijing is a golden opportunity where steps can be put into practise.

b) Process

The WWF report of 2015, *FOCAC: China and Africa building a sustainable future*, points to the influence of ideas on environmental protection that creates a cause and effect relationship between what the parties perceive as the reasons for environmental degradation and the consequences for local communities, national policies and transnational cooperation. In addition, the [Johannesburg Action Plan 2015](#) lists areas of interest for mutual cooperation, especially the “[Green-Africa Envoys Programme](#),” where the sharing of common ideas and information will influence decision-makers plans and programmes for sustainable development. Identifying a cause and effect relationship serve as motivation for decision-makers to act on specific concepts of development such as the impact of animal migration on cross-border control, the effect of oil spills on local communities, and what human settlements adjacent to national parks means for the long-term viability of the park. South Africa provides a good example of how they have managed to incorporate local communities into national park structures and programmes. This is something that other countries, especially China, can learn from South Africa. Also, on the cross-border control South Africa established a transnational park with neighbouring countries so that animals can migrate easily, and all countries are involved in park management.

A roadmap for cooperation is achieved when a framework is in place, accumulating the experiences from all parties and expanding the scope of exchanges on environmental protection. Lastly, the influence of international norms and rules summarised in the UNEP is a helpful guide for decision-makers to lay the foundation for environmental negotiations in FOCAC. Principles and rules are important indicators of unity and helps to facilitate cooperation and strengthen mutual respect and beliefs. Conforming to international guidelines will give FOCAC the credibility and legitimacy to be recognised as an important platform for international environmental negotiations. In addition, the Beijing Summit 2018 should focus on the remaining steps to complete a full circle of policy-making. They are: approval of policy proposals, allocating resources for the implementation of the policy, policy implementation and policy evaluation. This process will result in policy-makers learning from experience and completing all the steps, the last of which can be followed by the first.

c) Outcomes

A goal of decision-making is to deliver outcomes. During the meetings’ parties not only exchanged ideas on the causes of environmental concerns but the ideas were also effected into action plans that in the long term will have an impact on sustainability at the global level. The [Beijing Declaration of the Fifth Ministerial Conference \(2012\)](#), acknowledged that the UN Climate Change Conference held in Durban in 2011 identified threats and challenges brought by global issues such as climate change and major infectious diseases, as major destructive causes for the environment. The parties in accordance with the principles and provisions of the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), faithfully implemented the consensus on such

issues as the [Durban Platform for Enhanced Action](#), the second commitment period of the [Kyoto Protocol](#), the [Green Climate Fund](#) and other technical adaptation instruments. The [Declaration of the Johannesburg Summit \(2015\)](#), in addition stated, that all parties in keeping with the principles of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change are to adopt a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention, which provides an effective solution to the global response to climate change with means of implementation required by developing countries. In this sense, FOCAC's environmental negotiations help formulate actions plans that may impact short and long-term objectives, and present FOCAC with an institutional life of its own.

Box 3: China South-South Cooperation Fund

The fund was set up in 2014 as an alternative for direct funding and a mechanism for developing countries to combat climate change. It is based on principles of mutual respect, justice, shared benefit, practicality and efficiency and encourages all developing countries to join. 20 billion yuan (US\$ 3.1. billion) was pledged as an initial amount to launch the fund.

Future prospects

An important goal of the Beijing Summit 2018 will be to review and provide feedback to the mechanisms implemented at the previous meetings. New environmental challenges such as waste disposal, ocean acidification and urban sprawl may lead to revisions of action plans already promulgated. The seventh ministerial meeting should search for strategies to suit the content of the action plans and parties will assess/evaluate previous outcomes and select new ones through the learning process. The Johannesburg Action Plan proposed maritime changes and the possibility of building marine observation stations, which is an area where future cooperation can be significantly advanced, considering [China's successful maritime cooperation](#) with other countries in the world. The African side's welcoming of the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road", and the two sides' commitment to establishing a Ministerial Forum on marine economy, under the framework of FOCAC, is a step in the right direction. The influence of ideas and the sharing of

information on the causes and effects of marine degradation will strengthen dialogue and provide a framework for the understanding of parties' roles and expectations.

Conclusion

This policy brief points out that parties make decisions on a mutual understanding of available information, using the ministerial meetings as platforms to recognise problem areas, take appropriate actions to address the problems and then examine the effects on the environment at FOCAC. Ideas and learning indeed plays a big role in the decision-making process and have an impact on challenges ahead for environmental protection and climate change. Parties should be willing to incorporate a mutually beneficial cooperative framework and consider plans and strategies to take effect. An important discussion point at the Beijing Summit 2018 is to focus on reformulating and extending available action plans and searching for new strategies that could address environmental problems more aggressively. In addition, the implementation of policies should also include strategies to arrive at solutions. Negotiating the establishment of possible environmental work study groups, collecting evidence on the cause and effect of environmental protection and climate change and scientifically analysing the results can provide a framework for future research. This evidence and data can be compiled into a field and reference guideline and made available to researchers and other interested parties. With all this in mind, the process of sharing ideas and learning is starting to take shape and directing a path for successful future negotiations between African states and China.

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