

China's Global Environmental Leadership (CGEL) Database

**Codebook Version 1.0
November 2025**

Introduction

The CGEL database is the first and most comprehensive database that gathers granular data on cross-border environmental governance initiatives led by Chinese state and non-state actors in the 21st century. The database collects in a systematic manner key information on the efforts made by Chinese actors to lead governance initiatives that address different environmental issues and through different channels, including multilateral, bilateral, and transnational initiatives. The first version of the database consists of 29 variables. We will create a dedicated website to host the database and maintain it through regular updates.

I. The criteria for including and excluding prospective governance initiatives:

The unit of analysis in the CGEL database will be a governance initiative. Therefore, to determine which initiatives are eligible for inclusion in the CGEL database, we must adhere to these guidelines:

- Governance initiatives during the period from 2000 to 2024 (Note: We aim to record all governance initiatives that have been active during this period, including those that started before 2000 and those that ended before 2025.)
- As we use the term 'governance' to refer to institutionalised arrangements, a governance initiative must involve substantial actions rather than just lip service. To be qualified as 'governance', an initiative needs to involve **steering** (an intentional, directed process) and be recognized as **authoritative** by the individuals and organizations that constitute its network.
- These initiatives should primarily aim to address environmental issues or at least have environmental issues as one of their key concerns.
- As our interest is China's global efforts (beyond its territory), the initiatives included in the database should be aimed at multilateral, bilateral, or transnational levels of governance. In other words, those that do not involve any non-Chinese actors or have no activity beyond China's borders should be excluded. (Note: if you are unclear if we should exclude a case based on this criterion, please note the case and report back.)
- The initiatives to be included in the CGEL database should be either (co-)created by Chinese actors or their operation is mainly led by Chinese actors. (Note: if you are unclear if we should exclude a case based on this criterion, please note the case and report back.)

II. 29 variables to be recorded (listed according to the order in the database):

1. Name: the full name of the initiative

2. Chinese Initiative Name (if applicable)

3. Acronym: note the acronym of the initiative if there is one

4. Start Year: As the year in which an initiative was launched might differ from the year it started to operate, to ensure consistency, we use 'the year' in which the initiative was launched.

5. Status. If a given initiative is in progress, enter 'Ongoing'; if a given initiative was completed, enter 'Completed'.

6. End Year: If a given initiative is completed or terminated, indicate the end year.

7. Governance Level: A categorical variable describing the level at which a governance initiative is operating with 3 possible values: transnational, multilateral or bilateral. If you find it difficult to define the governance level of an initiative, please use ‘other’ option to indicate and add your notes.

*The table below explains how we define three different governance levels

Feature	Transnational	Multilateral	Bilateral
Primary Focus	Non-state actors, networks, corporations, NGOs, subnational entities	States and intergovernmental organizations	States
Structure	Decentralized, informal networks involving non-state actors and without state enforcement	Formalized agreements or arrangements among multiple states (established through instruments such as treaties, Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs), joint declarations, or action plans)	Formalized agreements or arrangements between two states (established through instruments such as treaties, MoUs, joint declarations, or action plans)
Nature of Cooperation	Often informal, cross-border coordination	Formal agreements, policies, and regulations	Formal agreements and regulations
Example	Green Investment Principles for the Belt and Road Initiative (GIP)	Paris Agreement	Sino-German Cooperation on Climate Change

8. Geographic Scope: This variable identifies the regions or countries that are affected by or involved in the initiative (e.g., South Asia, North America, Europe, etc.). For the classification of geographical regions, we follow the United Nations typology, which includes six regions: **Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania.**

If an initiative spans more than one major region, the scope should be defined as “Global.”

9. Brief Description. This includes the specific outputs, functions and achievements of a given initiative, such as the adopted actions, implementation plans, or standards developed. You can provide a summary of the initiative based on the information you accessed.

10. First Environmental Problem Addressed

11. Second Environmental Problem Addressed

Please choose from the following list the two primary environmental problem(s) that the initiative seeks to address. Our categories are developed based on the [IISD typology](#). If you can identify one or two primary target

problems, please record them in the columns 'Environmental Problem Addressed 1' and 'Environmental Problem Addressed 2'. If you can only identify one problem, then leave the 'Second Environmental Problem Addressed' column blank. If you can identify two problems, please choose the most important one in the first column.

List of environmental problems:

- Agriculture & Food security
- Atmosphere
- Biodiversity
- Chemicals & Wastes
- Cities
- Climate change
- Disaster & Humanitarian relief
- Energy
- Forests
- Ocean & Coasts
- Water

If you identify any environmental issue that falls outside these categories, please highlight it, and we can discuss further.

*Attention: For Variable 10 we should specifically focus on the **primary** or **prioritized issue** that an initiative aims to address. While a given initiative may encompass a broader scope by tackling multiple environmental problems, we record its priority concern as the First Environmental Problem Addressed.

However, if it is challenging to identify a single priority—particularly for initiatives having a very general focus—coders can use “N/A” and classify it as addressing “Broad Environmental Issues” in Variable 12. Coders should be cautious when coding this as “N/A.” If uncertainty exists, please mark it and bring it forward for broader discussion in CGEL group meetings.

It is also not mandatory to choose an environmental problem for Variable 11. If there is no clear evidence of a distinct second problem or if the additional issue is significantly associated with the primary environmental problem, you can leave Variable 11 blank.

12. Broad environmental issues

Not all cases can be clearly attributed to a specific issue, and some initiatives may address a broader range of concerns (i.e. 3 or more problems). If this is the case, we note the related initiative address 'Broad environmental issues'. This is a binary variable so we code 'Yes' if this is the case and 'No' if not.

Noting that this variable is not dependent on the two previous variables. If an initiative addresses a range of issues, but you can still identify the first two most important issues, please still record the first two primary issues under the previous two variables.

13. SDGs Covered: Although a given initiative may broadly cover or impact several SDGs, we note only the goals that are directly addressed by each initiative. Please use a semicolon (;) to separate different goals (e.g., SDG 1; SDG 2; ...)

14. Primary Initiative Type

We use a categorical variable to code initiative types (using 1-6) defined by governance functions, and these types are not mutually exclusive:

- 1- Information sharing and dialogues
- 2- Capacity-building and training
- 3- Direct action and demonstration
- 4- Provision of funding
- 5- Research and scientific knowledge production
- 6- Rule-making and standard-setting initiatives

If you identify any initiative types that fall outside the above categories, you can mark them and then discuss them with other coders.

For the variable – “Primary Initiative Type”, we assign the code that best represents the initiative’s major focus or characteristic. For instance, although ‘Sino-German Cooperation Centre on Climate Change’ also plans to strengthen the capacities of China on international climate cooperation, the centre was established to mainly support knowledge exchange in all climate-relevant areas. Hence, we use ‘1- Information sharing and dialogues’ as this initiative’s primary type.

15. Secondary Initiative Type

In addition to its primary classification, an initiative may also fall under other categories. This variable allows you to identify and specify the secondary, but still significant, classification of the initiative. Indicate the next most relevant category in the column for this variable.

***Instructions on how to define and code different initiative types**

The rationale of this variable is to identify the key functions of each governance initiative. You need to look at the **mission statement** and/or **vision** of the initiative and also the **concrete activities** (or projects) organized by the initiative. Based on such information, you need to identify the key functions fulfilled by the initiative and code this variable accordingly. In some cases, it is not very straightforward to categorize an initiative into specific types, so you need to make some judgment based on the available information. It is also common that the same initiative has multiple functions, and for this reason, each initiative can be coded for up to 3 types (*but **only if the information shows clearly that that initiative falls into multiple categories; in contrast, an initiative should be only for one type if it has no feature of other types***). When coding more than one type for an initiative, ideally we want to order their functions and code the initiative’s primary function as the primary type, secondary function as the second type etc.

1. Information sharing and dialogues

This type of initiative has a broader scope with the main function of bringing together different actors and facilitating information sharing and dialogues among them. The activities organized by this type of initiative include international fora, (high-level) dialogues, and multi-stakeholder meetings. Through these exchanges and discussions, the relevant initiatives foster collaboration between Chinese and international actors on specific issues.

Examples (please note that this may not be the only type for these examples):

- China-ASEAN Environmental Cooperation Centre (中国东盟环境合作中心) <http://www.chinaaseanenv.org/>
- The BRI International Green Development Coalition (一带一路国际绿色发展联盟) – an initiative from China-UNEP cooperation http://en.brigc.net/About_us/Overview/202009/t20200928_102502.html

2. Capacity-building and training

This type of initiative aims to enhance the capability of environmental governance and management on the ground. Their activities include the development of appropriate policy, institutional and legal frameworks, support for citizen participation, human resource development, and education and training. While human resource development itself cannot capture the work of these initiatives, training and learning in different formats are at the centre of the activities organized by the relevant initiatives. Through these activities, these initiatives would develop the capacity of their target actors to deal with environmental challenges.

Examples (please note that this may not be the only type for these examples):

- Capacity-building Alliance of Sustainable Investment (CASI) (可持续投资能力建设联盟) <https://www.casi.net/>
- International Center on Small Hydro Power (国际小水电中心) <http://gjxsd.mwr.cn/> (Note: This is a prospective case in this category, however the organisation's website seems to be only opened in China, and we need to check if the primary target is environment-related issues.)

3. Direct action and demonstration

This type of initiative takes direct actions to address environmental issues that they target. In doing so, they take the approach of leading by example and their work can serve as a demonstration to others. They can take a broad range of activities, such as voluntarily reducing environmental footprint, piloting and demonstrating new technologies or management systems, and developing best practices on related governance activities.

Examples (please note that this may not be the only type for these examples):

- UNEP International Ecosystem Management Partnership (国际生态系统管理伙伴计划) http://www.unep-iemp.org/article_9.html

4. Provision of funding

This type of initiative serves as funding mechanisms to support environmental governance, environmentally/climate friendly technologies, and other related activities. In these cases, Chinese actors are a key supplier of funding (if not the only one) and the funded activities should not be confined within China.

Examples (please note that this may not be the only type for these examples):

- South-South Climate Cooperation Fund (中国气候变化南南合作基金) – the fund was pledged in 2015 by Chinese President Xi but very little information has been disclosed on its operation (https://obor.nea.gov.cn/v_finance/toFinancialDetails.html?countryId=215&status=2)
- Kunming Biodiversity Fund (昆明生物多样性基金)- this is a new initiative so the information may be limited (http://english.scio.gov.cn/m/pressroom/2024-05/30/content_117222778.htm)

5. Research and scientific knowledge production

This type of initiative focuses on producing scientific research to understand and address different environmental challenges. Through collaboration between Chinese and international actors, the relevant initiatives can advance scientific knowledge and technological development for the environment. The main activities include scientific exchange, collaborative research, and joint monitoring and assessment of environmental data.

Examples (please note that this may not be the only type for these examples):

- Alliance of International Science Organizations in the Belt and Road Region (ANSO) (一带一路国际科学组织联盟) (<http://www.anso.org.cn/>) - the Alliance covers the full range of scientific cooperation, but environmental science and sustainable development has been highlighted as a key focus
- China-Brazil Center for Climate Change and Energy Technology Innovation (CCBCE) (中国 – 巴西气候变化与能源技术创新研究中心) (<https://www.chemeng.tsinghua.edu.cn/info/1022/1509.htm>)

6. Rule-making and standard-setting

This type of initiative advocates a set of norms and establishes specific rules intended to guide and constrain their constituents. The rules set by these initiatives can be in the form of formal technical, process or procedural standards, but also informal rules such as guidance and best practices. Unlike governments and intergovernmental organisations, these initiatives cannot produce legally-binding rules. Instead, the rules and standards set by them are often considered to be 'soft', namely voluntarily accepted and complied with by their constituents.

*(*Note: it may not be easy to identify this type of initiative because in many cases a few organisations entered into collaborative projects and developed certain standards or codes. Hence, we need to record such cases whenever*

we identify some sustainability standards (co-)developed by Chinese actors that can affect actors beyond China)

Examples (please note that this may not be the only type for these examples):

- Responsible Critical Mineral Initiative (formerly Responsible Cobalt Initiative) (关键矿产责任倡议) <https://dialogue.earth/zh/8/98606/>, <https://www.nbd.com.cn/articles/2023-09-28/3040252.html> and specific activities of this initiative can be found at <https://www.cccmc.org.cn/kcxfzzx/> (there is a WeChat account on this initiative)
- Chinese Sustainable Meat Declaration (中国肉类可持续发展宣言) https://wwfbr.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/cleancn_en_sep20_circulated_version_may_13_2017_cnmeat_declaration.pdf initiated by China Meat Association and WWF, which later led to the development of a group standard – the Specification for meat industry green trade (肉类产业绿色贸易规范) <https://webadmin.wwfchina.org/storage/uploads/file/2021/05/18/e811f06ad7d417e43b81ea40f15bc9bf.pdf> and building on these works, the two organisations have launched in 2023 the China Sustainable Meat Supply China Promotion Plan <https://webadmin.wwfchina.org/storage/uploads/file/2023/04/25/9ddc4324afaa64c8b8a627417cfc5f0a.pdf>

16. Other Initiative Types

If an initiative can be categorized into additional types beyond the primary and secondary classifications, you can list those additional categories in the column for this variable. (Note: this additional type can be one of our existing types or something different from the existing six types)

17. Lead Chinese Actor Name: The main Chinese actor(s) responsible for leading the initiative (e.g., government agency, SOE, private company, or NGO).

A single initiative may involve multiple Chinese actors; however, our focus is on identifying and analysing the leading actor.

To maintain consistency, we use the official names of Chinese government bodies but simplify them by omitting "of the People's Republic of China." For example, "Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People's Republic of China" is abbreviated to "Ministry of Ecology and Environment."

18. Lead Chinese Actor Type: This variable categorizes actors into one of the following groups: 'national government', 'subnational government', 'business', 'civil society', 'university/research institute' or 'others' (if no existing categories can apply).

19. Co-lead Chinese Actor Name: If there are other Chinese actors who have co-developed or co-led the initiative, please note their names. When there is more than one co-lead, please use a semicolon (;) to separate them.

20. Co-lead Chinese Actor Type: The type of the co-lead Chinese actors if there are any. Please choose your answer in the following categories: 'national government', 'subnational government', 'business', 'civil society', 'university/research institute' or 'others' (if no existing categories can apply). When there is more than one co-lead, please use a semicolon (;) to separate them.

21. Primary International Collaborator Name: This refers to the primary international partner or collaborator who co-leads the initiative.

Similarly, while an initiative may involve multiple international members or partners, this variable focuses specifically on identifying and analysing the most important co-lead entity.

To maintain consistency, we use the official names of these institutions or organizations.

If you determine that there are additional co-leading collaborators beyond the primary one, you can list them under the "Other Collaborators" variable, located at the end of the table.

22. Primary International Collaborator Type: This variable categorizes actors into the following groups: 'international organization', 'national government', 'subnational government', 'business', 'civil society', 'university and research institute' or 'others' (if no existing categories can apply).

23. Origin of Primary Collaborator: This refers to the geographical location of the primary collaborator. For businesses and civil society organizations, we use their headquarters as their country of origin. For national and subnational governments, we use their country. For country names, please use the World Bank's list (<https://data.worldbank.org/country>).

24. Other International Collaborator Name: If there are other international collaborators (in addition to the primary international collaborator) for the initiative, please note their names. When there is more than one other collaborator, please use a semicolon (;) to separate them.

25. Other International Collaborator Type: The type of other international collaborators, if there are any (coded as 'international organization', 'national government', 'subnational government', 'business', 'civil society' or 'others' (if no existing categories can apply)). When there is more than one other collaborator, please use a semicolon (;) to separate them.

26. Other International Collaborator Origin: The country of origin of other international collaborators (if there are any). When there is more than one other collaborator, please use a semicolon (;) to separate them.

27. Location of the secretariat or headquarters: Record the country and the city where the initiative's secretariat or headquarters is located. If the initiative has no physical secretariat or headquarters, leave this field blank.

28. Official website: Add the link to the initiative's official website if there is one. If the initiative has no official website, leave this field blank.

29. Other sources: List all other sources, excluding the official website (such as websites, policy documents, and news releases) that are referenced for this initiative. Data from multiple sources will be cross-checked to verify accuracy and consistency.

Finally, in the column "**Comments**": Please add your comments on any aspects of the initiative that need to be emphasized or warrant further attention.

III. Format of the dataset

- Maintain a consistent dataset structure as outlined in the example provided in the shared folder.
- Sort the data by year in ascending order.
- Text format:
 - Use 12-point font size consistently throughout the document.
 - Set the font to Times New Roman.
 - Align text vertically to the middle and horizontally to the left.
 - Set line spacing to single.
 - The first letter of each sentence/phrase is capitalized.