

Green Belt and Road: China-Latin America Partnership for Sustainable Development

Speaker 1



Forum 1

Green Development Agenda

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Abstract

Within the larger framework of international relations, the China-Latin America cooperation has become a compelling focal point in the search of a sustainable global future. The innovative Green Belt and Road program, a forward-thinking project that aims to balance ecological responsibility with economic progress, is at the center of this partnership. With a focus on tackling the urgent issues of climate change and biodiversity preservation, this chapter delves into the complex interactions between China and Latin America and examines their shared commitment to sustainable development within the framework of the Green Belt and Road.

Historically based on economic exchanges, the alliance between China and Latin America has developed into a complex relationship encompassing much more than just trade and investment. The two areas have realized that they must immediately reevaluate the parameters of their partnership in light of the compelling need to address environmental concerns, socioeconomic disparities, and the requirement of ecological stewardship.

This redefined approach is embodied in China's grandiose Belt and Road program (BRI), which is expanded upon by the Green Belt and Road program. It imagines a web of initiatives aimed at promoting environmental sustainability as well as economic progress. The concepts of green infrastructure, renewable energy, biodiversity conservation, and responsible resource management are all woven into the international relations fabric by this revolutionary framework, which reflects the common understanding that biodiversity loss and climate change represent two of the most pressing global issues of our day.

"I would like to start by thanking the organizers of the WGSD 2023. It is a pleasure to be here with you today. Today, we're delving into the intricate and

evolving partnership between China and Latin America within the framework of the Green Belt and Road Initiative. This partnership is not just a mere collaboration; it's a transformative approach reshaping sustainable development paradigms globally, with significant implications for the Global South."

The Importance of China-Latin America Partnership

"Let's begin by understanding the existing partnership between China and Latin America. This cooperation isn't just another link in international relations but a pivotal force in the realm of sustainable development. In a world grappling with challenges like environmental degradation and economic disparities, the symbiotic relationship between these prominent global actors becomes crucial. Today's world faces an existential threat posed by the environmental degradation initiated by the Industrial Revolution, which made it possible for Global North countries to achieve high degrees of development, leaving the Global South vulnerable to the negative effects and underdeveloped. The Green BRI by China stands at the center of this partnership, redefining sustainable development, representing an alternative to the Bretton Woods model of development, and reflecting a deep-rooted history of civilization connections, notably the Silk Road."

Historical Context - The Silk Road

"The Silk Road, a term that evokes the extensive network of trade routes connecting China, Central Asia, India, and the Middle East, was more than just a path for goods. It was a cradle of cultural and idea exchange, a network that wasn't just physical but intellectual. As Peter Frankopan notes, it was a melting pot of cultures and ideas, very different from the European expeditions that started in the 1500s in which the main purposes were extractivism and slavery. The Silk Road's significance in shaping civilizations and the beginning of globalization sets the backdrop for understanding China's modern initiatives like the BRI."

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

"The BRI, launched in 2013, is a monumental endeavor by China to rejuvenate the Silk Road's spirit in a modern context. It's about building a network of infrastructure and trade across continents. The initiative's scope is vast, covering over 2,600 projects with an investment value of around \$4-8 trillion. It's a fresh perspective on development, emphasizing connectivity, economic cooperation, and reshaping the global economic landscape. It has people-to-people exchanges as the civilizational component and not just the economic dimension."

Green Belt and Road Initiative (Green BRI)

"An essential evolution within the BRI is the Green BRI, introduced in 2017. It reflects the internal environmental gains in China in its foreign policy framework. This approach integrates sustainable development into China's grand vision. It's about making the Belt and Road Initiative environmentally

sustainable, focusing on projects that prioritize environmental protection and clean energy sources. The Green BRI is not just an economic plan; it's a pathway to an ecological civilization that seeks harmony between humans and nature."

Impact on Global South

"The Green BRI is particularly consequential for the Global South. It's not just about economic growth; it's about fostering environmental sustainability and addressing the pressing issues developing countries face. By focusing on sustainable infrastructure and energy projects, the Green BRI offers a development model that balances economic needs with environmental conservation, a critical concern for regions like Latin America that are on the frontline of environmental challenges. Energy transition projects financed under the Green BRI umbrella in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, for instance, are essential for the region to accommodate the need for development and the protection of nature. There should be no doubt that the coupling of interests between China and Latin America have as primary drivers their national interests, which does not invalidate or reject the proposed argument of the Global South cooperation based on the existence of non-material forces encapsulated in the Bandung spirit"

Criticisms and Adjustments

"Since its inception, the Belt and Road Initiative has undergone a number of changes, which makes sense given the breadth and complexity of the projects as well as the variety of countries and legal systems involved. At first, there was a lot of criticism about the participating countries' large infrastructure projects' lack of labor and environmental standards. However, this was eventually addressed and helped to change the legal frameworks in the countries that received the investments. Acknowledging these concerns, significant adjustments have been made over the years, demonstrating China's commitment to evolving the initiative in line with global standards. This adaptability is crucial, as it showcases the BRI's resilience and responsiveness to the complex dynamics of international development."

BRI as an Alternative Development Model

"The Second World War and the subsequent decolonization movements paved the way for the rise of globalization as a dominant force in shaping the global order. International institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO), known as the Bretton Woods institutions, seek to impose a development model to integrate countries into the global economy through liberalization, privatization, and market-oriented reforms. The countries we pushed to prioritize economic indicators over social welfare and environmental sustainability, which often entailed reliance on export-oriented industries, foreign direct investment, and debt financing, perpetuating a cycle of dependency and inequality. Scholars, activists, and policymakers argue that this model neglects social development, exacerbates income disparities, and undermines environmental sustainability,

thus perpetuating the dominance of global economic powers, leading to a state of neocolonial relationship between the Global North and the Global South. In contrast to the post-WWII Western development models, the BRI and Green BRI offer an alternative paradigm. They are not merely economic alliances; they represent a shared pursuit of sustainability and a resistance to traditional industrialization-focused development models. These initiatives echo the 'Bandung spirit' of solidarity and transcend materialistic dimensions, challenging the norms set by developed nations and offering a more equitable development path for the Global South."

Challenges and Future Prospects

"Looking ahead, the BRI and Green BRI present both opportunities and challenges. Their potential to redefine global development paradigms is immense, but they must navigate complex geopolitical landscapes. The initiative's commitment to inclusivity and sustainability will be key to its success and its ability to mitigate potential geopolitical tensions and environmental concerns. Latin America is not a single country, but a patchwork of several, each with its own distinct political, cultural, and historical contexts. This variability points to significant geographical variations in the application and consequences of the Green BRI. Certain countries may gain from infrastructure and energy developments, but others may face challenges due to variances in their sociopolitical circumstances or ecological sensitivities. Projects funded by the Green BRI should therefore take Latin America's diverse cultural context into account. Indigenous cultures, for example, are closely linked to their natural surroundings. Initiatives that ignore these cultural connections run the danger of running across opposition and causing strife. "

Conclusion and Call to Action

"In conclusion, the Green BRI represents a significant turning point in the history and prospects of Latin American development, as it is marked by a deliberate shift towards ecological responsibility, sustainable growth, and mutual respect in international relations. It offers a different course of action for more balanced and equitable progress, eschewing the traditional paradigms of power dynamics and development. China and Latin America are cooperating under the Green Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which requires improvement but is based on mutual respect, shared interests, and a shared commitment to sustainable development rather than a rerun of past colonial endeavors. As they engage with the Green BRI to expand their capacity to create a future that is both rich and aware of the earth and all of its people, Latin American nations are at a turning moment in their development trajectory. For the benefit of both the present and the future generations, this cooperative project thus symbolizes a promising future in which growth coexists peacefully with the environment."

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