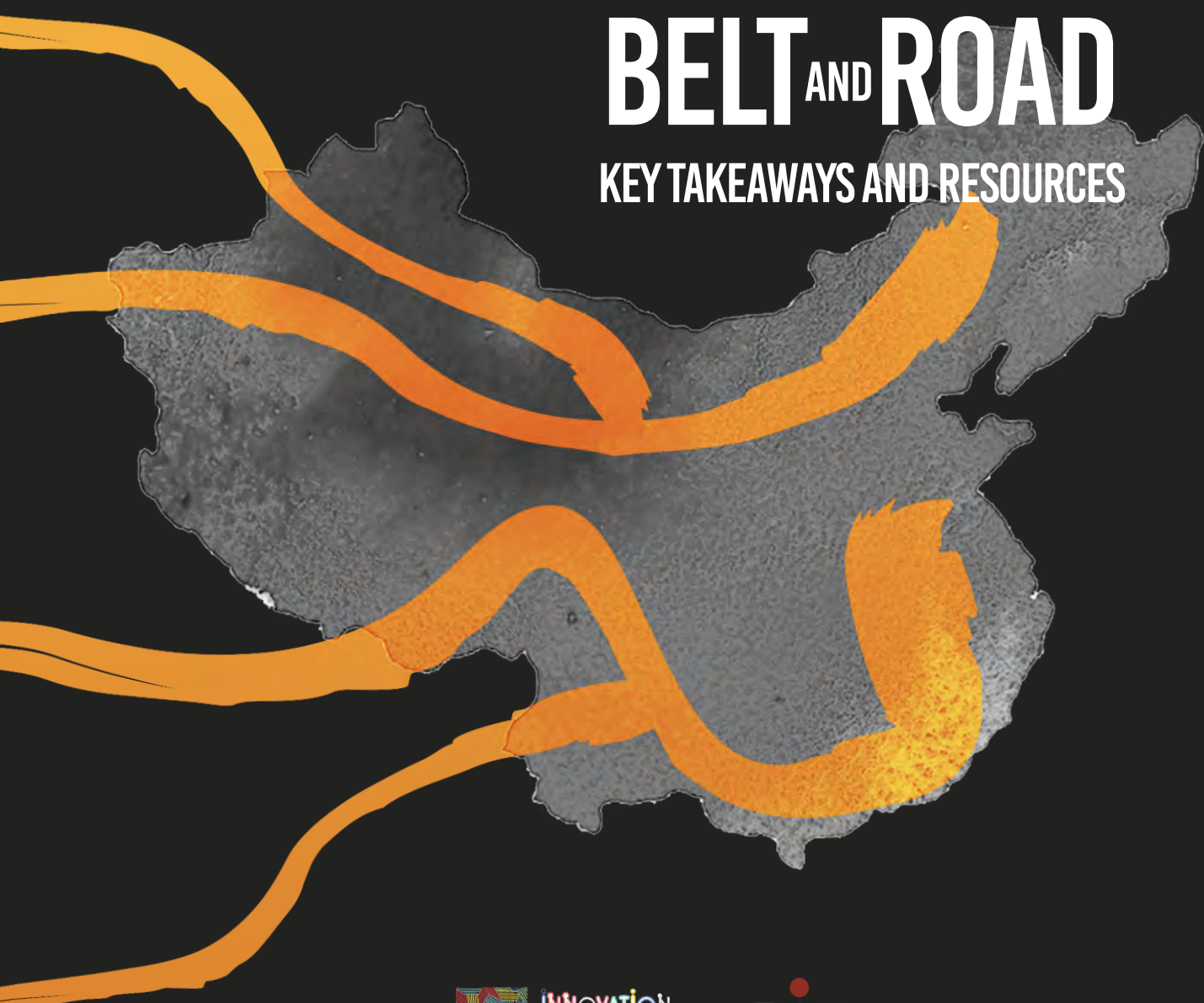


LEARNING SPACES BRIEF 2:

CIVIL SOCIETY'S ADVOCACY ON
CHINA'S
BELT AND ROAD
KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RESOURCES



JULY 2021

KEY TAKEAWAYS



**For me, it's very important to
be here because I can learn
that some Chinese actors
want to work with NGOs.**

- Webinar Participant from Kazakhstan

THE CONCLUSION FROM OUR FIRST LEARNING SPACES WEBINAR ON MARCH 11, 2021:

We have entered a period in which there are more opportunities for civil society to engage Chinese stakeholders in the BRI and advocate for them to address the social and environmental impacts linked to their projects.

Over the last few years, China's leaders have made public commitments to addressing environmental, social and governance (ESG)¹ risks, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and "high-quality, sustainable, resilient, affordable, inclusive and accessible infrastructure projects..." along the BRI.

In addition, Chinese financial institutions, industry groups, and companies are slowly beginning to incorporate social and environmental standards, although much work remains to be done.

¹ESG here is used in the broader sense of considering the human rights risks of business operations, and taking steps to mitigate those risks.



**High-quality, sustainable,
resilient, affordable,
inclusive and accessible
infrastructure projects.**

- President Xi Jinping



CIVIL SOCIETY IS BEGINNING TO MAKE AN IMPACT

In our **second Learning Spaces webinar held on April 8, 2021**, we learned that International NGOs, Chinese NGOs and local NGOs in host BRI countries are playing different roles in addressing the environmental and social impacts of Chinese business operations.

Note: The tables below include examples of NGOs working on issues related to Chinese overseas development and are not meant to be exhaustive.

INTERNATIONAL NGOS

operating at the international and transnational level were some of the first to look at the social and environmental impacts of Chinese overseas investment, sometimes in partnership with Chinese NGOs.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Issue Area/ Project</u>	<u>Chinese stakeholders targeted or engaged</u>	<u>Partnership with Chinese civil society?</u>	<u>Geographical focus on BRI</u>
Business and Human Rights Resource Centre	Chinese Responsible Business Newsletter	Companies, financial institutions	No	Global
Global Witness	Developing Chinese responsible business guidelines	Industry groups in the natural resource sector	Yes	Africa, Asia
Inclusive Development International	Capacity building, research and advocacy on Chinese overseas investment	Companies, financial institutions and government agencies	No	Global
Mercy Corps	Development and humanitarian assistance (e.g. Imagine Program)	State-owned and private companies	Yes	Africa
Asia Foundation and Stimson Center	Mekong Safeguards applying ESG standards to infrastructure projects	Policy makers, financial institutions, developers, contractors	Partnering with the Chinese NGO, Global Environmental Institute	Mekong region of Southeast Asia

CHINESE NGOS

are relatively young and in the early stages of operating overseas. As China Development Brief's [Map of Chinese NGO Projects Overseas](#) shows, most of these NGO projects are focused on humanitarian and livelihood assistance. There are a few NGOs, however, monitoring Chinese-invested projects and working with other Chinese stakeholders to strengthen transparency and accountability of those projects.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Issue Area/ Project</u>	<u>Chinese stakeholders targeted or engaged</u>	<u>Geographical focus on BRI</u>
<u>Global Environmental Institute</u>	Developing social and environmental safeguards for Chinese overseas investment	Policy makers, and financial institutions	Asia, Africa
<u>Greenovation Hub</u>	Environmental impacts of finance	Financial institutions and academics	China
<u>Social Resources Institute</u>	Research on socially responsible investment and community engagement	Companies and financial institutions	Southeast Asia
<u>Syntao</u>	Corporate social responsibility and community engagement	Industry groups and companies	China

Map of Chinese NGO Projects Overseas



Source: China Development Brief

CHINESE INDUSTRY GROUPS/CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

are another category of Chinese NGOs. These groups are non-governmental in principle but many enjoy a close relationship with the Chinese government. Some industry groups are beginning to develop guidelines on responsible business practices with the support of international donors and NGOs.

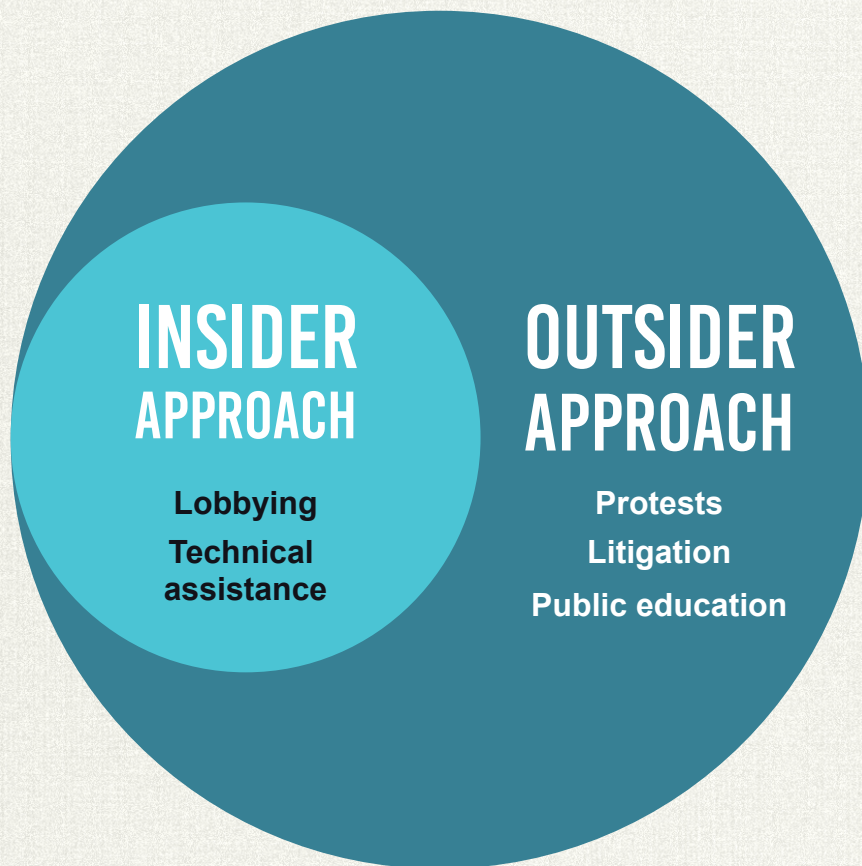
Name	Issue Area/ Project	Stakeholders targeted or engaged	Geographical focus on BRI
<u>China International Contractors Association (CHINCA)</u>	Developing a Community Engagement Handbook to train Chinese companies to improve their engagement with local communities	Multilateral Development Banks and bilateral donors	Chinese companies going abroad
<u>China National Textile and Apparel Council (CNTAC)</u>	Publishes an annual Social Responsibility Report of China's Textile and Apparel Industry and promotes responsible business in the global textile and apparel supply chains	International organizations such as the OECD and bilateral donors	Chinese companies going abroad
<u>China Chamber of Commerce of Metals, Minerals & Chemicals (CCCMC)</u>	Developing guidelines for responsible mineral supply chains and sustainable rubber	International organizations such as the OECD and bilateral donors	Chinese companies going abroad

LOCAL AND REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND TRADE UNIONS

in host BRI countries started more recently to focus on China's overseas investment.

Name	Issue Area/ Project	Stakeholders targeted or engaged	Geographical focus on BRI
Oxfam Hong Kong	Agriculture, climate change, poverty alleviation, rural communities	Civil society and communities, financial institutions	East and Southeast Asia
People of Asia for Climate Solutions	Publishing stories from affected communities in Belt and Road Through My Village	Chinese policy makers, investors and companies	South and Southeast Asia
Innovation for Change - East Asia	Learning Spaces on China's BRI, Short Stories from affected communities, an index of China's global influence	Civil society and communities	Asia and the Pacific

CIVIL SOCIETY IS USING **BOTH AN INSIDER AND OUTSIDER APPROACH** TO INFLUENCE CHINESE STAKEHOLDERS.

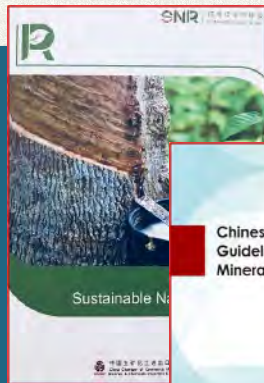


The interesting concept learned [in this webinar] is NGO engagement with Chinese companies because NGOs in Fiji are not actively engaging Chinese companies.

- Webinar Participant from Fiji

THE INSIDER APPROACH

involves constructive collaboration with Chinese stakeholders to raise their awareness about international ESG and human rights standards, and build their capacity to apply those standards to their projects.



EXAMPLE 1

Global Witness's work with the industry group, China Chamber of Commerce of Metals, Minerals & Chemicals (CCCMC), to produce guidelines on responsible mineral supply chains and sustainable natural rubber that identify, prevent and mitigate human rights risks.



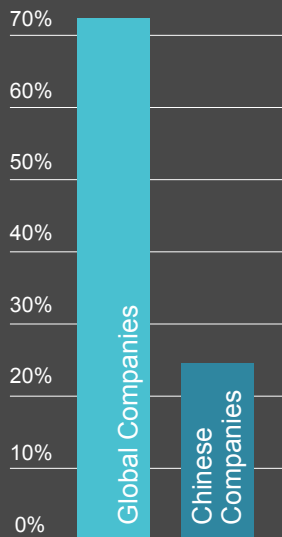
EXAMPLE 2

Syntao, a Chinese CSR consulting company, is working together with an international NGO, the Asia Foundation, and a large Chinese industry group, China International Contractors Association (CHINCA) on developing a Community Engagement Handbook for Chinese state-owned enterprises operating overseas and are using the handbook to conduct trainings of Chinese state-owned enterprises.

THE **OUTSIDER** APPROACH

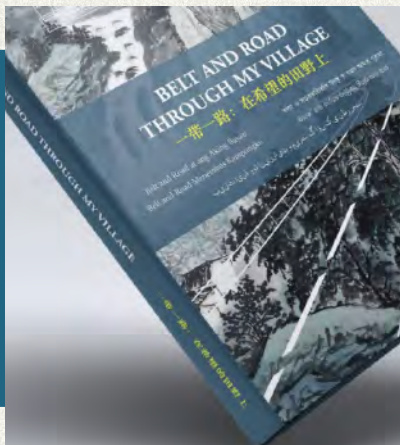
involves working with local or international groups outside of China on advocacy actions to raise Chinese stakeholder awareness of their environmental and social impacts on communities and workers, and pressure them to take steps to reduce those impacts.

BHRRC'S RESPONSE RATES



EXAMPLE 1

Business and Human Rights Resource Center (BHRRC), an international NGO, has engaged with Chinese companies by tracking civil society complaints about those companies and inviting them to respond to the allegations when they find no evidence of the company responding. In one case, BHRRC received detailed responses from the China National Petroleum Corporation regarding complaints about land compensation, safety and forced labor in the construction of the Myanmar-China pipeline, and had follow up discussions with CNPC officials.



EXAMPLE 2

People of Asia for Climate Solutions, a NGO based in the Philippines, has collaborated with other NGOs to publish [Belt and Road through My Village](#), a collection of stories based on interviews carried out in 2019-2020 with over 100 people from communities affected by 7 BRI projects in 5 Asian countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Civil society plays an important part in monitoring and addressing the social and environmental impacts of Chinese overseas investment and holding Chinese and host country stakeholders accountable for those impacts. Our goal is to support local and regional CSOs in building their capacity to understand and respond to the impacts of Chinese overseas investment in host BRI countries. Below are recommendations and next steps for CSOs interested in working in this area. These recommendations and next steps were drawn from the presentations and discussions among participants in our second Learning Spaces webinar.

BUILDING EXPERTISE ON ESGS AND THE BRI

“

There are international standards but those standards are not being adopted.

- Webinar Participant from Hong Kong

“

In developing plans and resources, keep in mind people with low literacy levels.

- Webinar Participant from the Philippines

“

We also need to include social entrepreneurs, offer them something to fulfill BRI's mission.

- Webinar Participant from Pakistan

Recommendations

Develop expertise on environmental, social and other human rights impacts of business in your country/region.

Next Steps

Learn about environmental, social and other human rights standards, and good practices of how those standards are applied locally.

Use strategies and toolkits that have been developed for implementing and adapting international environmental and social standards locally

Collaborate with other like-minded NGOs with ESG and China expertise.

Consider whether insider or outsider approaches (or both) are more appropriate given your organization's capabilities.

When engaging with Chinese companies and financial institutions, use language and communication strategies that are constructive and resonate with Chinese actors but also are grounded in international environmental, social and human rights standards. Emphasize how ESG and human rights impacts can increase the risk for their business (e.g. make a business case).

Be persistent in sharing information and raising concerns with Chinese stakeholders.

Learn about China's key BRI policies and actors (government agencies, financial institutions, industry groups, companies, NGOs).

Learn how China's political and cultural environment shapes Chinese stakeholders' attitudes, language and practices towards ESG and human rights concepts.

Learn skills for researching and monitoring China's overseas investment.

Collaborate with other NGOs with ESG and China expertise, particularly Chinese NGOs or Chinese consultants and experts who are pro-civil society.

Assess the security risks associated with working with Chinese and host country stakeholders, particularly state-supported actors.

BUILDING TRUSTED AND SECURE NETWORKS



Lack of trust creates a vacuum for what the norms and standards should be. In that vacuum, those with power dictate the norms and standards. What Chinese NGOs can we work with? How do we communicate with them?

- Webinar Participant from Malaysia



We need to consider the risks of engaging with Chinese stakeholders. Is the security of the community being compromised?

- Webinar Participant from Thailand

Recommendations

When engaging Chinese companies and financial institutions, collaboration with Chinese NGOs and/or Chinese consultants and experts who are pro-civil society is important.

Next Steps

Establish contacts with Chinese NGOs, consultants and experts who are familiar with, and understand the importance of, civil society (See Contacts listed in Learning Spaces Briefs).

Assess the security risks associated with working with Chinese NGOs, and consider mitigation measures.

Building relationships and trust with Chinese NGOs and other stakeholders such as researchers, industry groups, and consulting companies takes time, but is well worth the investment.

Start with small trust-building efforts, reaching out to trusted Chinese NGOs, researchers and consultants working on responsible business practices, and finding opportunities to talk or meet with them.

LINKS TO RESOURCES ON CHINA'S BRI

To understand the meaning of key Chinese terms in international relations and development cooperation

Check out the **Decoding China Dictionary**, a new guide which interprets the official Chinese meaning of these terms.

For databases mapping investment and NGO projects in the BRI

China's Overseas Development Finance: Geospatial Data for Analysis of Biodiversity and Indigenous Lands This new interactive database allows users to examine the geolocation of China's overseas development projects and explore their proximity to indigenous lands, critical habitats, and national protected areas.

The **People's Map of Global China** is a new resource for sharing and crowdsourcing information about the impacts of BRI on communities, labor, environment and indigenous peoples.

GEI's **Report on Chinese NGOs Going Global (2016)**

China Development Brief's **Map of Chinese NGO projects in the BRI**

Databases for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provides a collection of different databases on BRI.

AIIB Watch documents environmental and social conflicts arising from infrastructure projects financed by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

International Federation for Human Rights' (FIDH) BRI and Human Rights webpage featuring BRI Watch newsletters, descriptions of Chinese projects, and background on the BRI.

For guidance for civil society working on BRI

Inclusive Development International, **Safeguarding People and the Environment in Chinese Investments: A Reference Guide for Advocates.**

Business and Human Rights Resource Center's Portal on **Chinese Investment Overseas.**

For a list of important Chinese principles, policies, plans and guidelines relevant to the BRI

Inclusive Development International, **Safeguarding People and the Environment in Chinese Investments: A Reference Guide for Advocates.**

Business and Human Rights Resource Center's **Guidance by Government, Business and Civil Society.**

Learning Spaces on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Beyond is a collaboration between Social Innovations Advisory (SIA) and Innovation for Change-East Asia (I4C-EA). Our mission is to strengthen Global South civil society's understanding of, and action around, the BRI by 1) organizing webinars/workshops; and 2) facilitating greater regional coordination between activists on strategies and solutions.



CONTACT US

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