

China's role in implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

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Policy insight

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Summary

This policy insight explores China's role in promoting the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). While the nation's domestic policies and progress in biodiversity conservation, as well as its influence in global climate action, have been widely explored, its potential for supporting global efforts in the fight against biodiversity loss has so far been neglected.

With the trend towards biodiversity loss and its impacts intensifying, at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Biodiversity COP15) in Montreal, Canada, in 2022, the international community reached consensus on halting and reversing nature loss by 2030 under the GBF. However, national commitments and actions since then have fallen far short of halting the crisis, and growing geopolitical fragmentation, weakening multilateral cooperation and recent setbacks in international environmental governance have further widened this gap.

Within this global landscape, China is emerging as a 'great power' in biodiversity. With its vast territory, China houses a rich array of species and ecosystems. Through its overseas infrastructure projects and investments, as well as its large demand for natural resources from abroad, China's influence on biodiversity reaches far beyond its borders. Since adopting the GBF, China has actively translated the global commitments into national action and has achieved outstanding tangible outcomes. As the presidency of Biodiversity COP15 and subsequently, China has demonstrated a strong capacity in shaping global environmental politics, from initiating agendas and coordinating efforts to building consensus and promoting action. As the world fears another decade of failure on biodiversity and urgently seeks leadership to advance the GBF, China stands in a position to take a lead on and further enhance its influence in international environmental governance.

Key insights

- As a driving force in biodiversity conservation, China has enormous potential that could be leveraged to support global biodiversity conservation efforts. In the years since the GBF was endorsed, China has systematically embedded international biodiversity objectives into its national implementation actions, resulting in substantial and verifiable progress. By sustaining this strong trajectory and deepening its national efforts, China is well positioned to lead by example and help drive broader, global progress towards achieving the goals of the GBF.
- The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's global investment and infrastructure development project aimed at boosting trade and connectivity, has a huge impact on biodiversity while also representing a significant vehicle for promoting global implementation of the GBF. By addressing biodiversity loss as a priority in the development of a green BRI, China could contribute significantly to advancing global biodiversity progress. By protecting rare species and all ecosystems along the BRI's route, expanding biodiversity financing and enhancing biodiversity conservation in the development of BRI infrastructure projects, China could set a path towards a win-win for the environment and development.
- As one of the world's megadiverse countries, China has a deep understanding of biodiversity and has accumulated rich experience in biodiversity conservation. By actively promoting knowledge exchange and sharing best practices, success stories and lessons learned, China could influence and inspire biodiversity conservation practices in other countries.
- Among the world's frontrunners in digital advancement, China has the capacity to strengthen global cooperation on innovation and deployment of digital technology in

support of global biodiversity conservation action. By exploring key biodiversity-related digital technology and policies through international communication and cooperation, as well as helping the Global South gain better access to global advances in these technologies, China could contribute significantly to enhancing digital technology's role as part of the solution to biodiversity conservation.

- As the developing world is struggling with a debt crisis and a lack of resources to protect nature, China's engagement in global debt efforts and its financial offerings could substantively support developing countries in their biodiversity conservation endeavours and effective implementation of the GBF.
- Halting and reversing nature loss is everyone's business and the implementation of the GBF requires an urgent increase in global confidence, momentum, political will, solidarity, awareness and engagement. By means of diplomatic efforts, China could bring biodiversity to the fore and help build consensus, strengthen cooperation and assemble the global force in nature conservation and restoration.

1. Introduction and context

Biodiversity is essential for healthy ecosystems that support all life on Earth. However, every indicator that tracks the state of nature at a global level warns that it is being lost at an alarming rate and “dangerous tipping points are approaching” (World Wide Fund for Nature [WWF], 2024: 7). In 2022, at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Biodiversity COP15) in Montreal, Canada, the international community reached consensus on halting and reversing the loss of nature by 2030 under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which was hailed as a ‘Paris Agreement for Nature’. However, the progress made so far on implementing the framework has been disappointing. The 16th meeting of Biodiversity COP (Biodiversity COP16), the ‘implementation COP’, held in Cali, Colombia, in late 2024, showed that national commitments and practical action had fallen far short of halting the crisis in the natural world (Galli, 2024).

Multilateralism is currently under immense pressure (World Economic Forum, 2026). As the world faces complex global challenges, from climate change and biodiversity loss to armed conflict and the threat from artificial intelligence (AI), nations are increasingly less able to cooperate. At the close of 2024, international talks on curbing plastic pollution and soil degradation successively failed to reach agreement. And at the beginning of 2025, the US withdrew from the Paris Climate Accords, which has had a chilling effect on other nations’ participation in the negotiation and implementation of international environmental law. Following withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the US also chose not to attend the resumed Biodiversity COP16 talks in Rome in February 2025 in its position as observer. In early January 2026, the US announced that it will exit 66 international bodies, including 33 UN entities and many related to climate, biodiversity and environmental cooperation (Taylor, 2026), which will greatly weaken global efforts to combat environmental challenges. US President Donald Trump’s cuts to foreign aid for climate and nature purposes have also left a big financial gap and created significant uncertainty. At such a divided time, the chances of successfully implementing the GBF have diminished.

China’s role in biodiversity conservation

Within this global landscape, it is important to consider China’s role in biodiversity conservation. China has made a number of concrete and effective moves and shown significant engagement since adopting the GBF in December 2022 (as detailed in Sections 3 and 4 of this report). As one of the world’s great powers and an advocate of multilateralism, China is also a ‘great power’ in the field of biodiversity. Covering a vast territory, the nation is home to exceptional biodiversity, encompassing nearly all terrestrial ecosystem types and hosting thousands of endemic and threatened species. Through its infrastructure projects and investments overseas, as well as its large demand for natural resources from abroad, China’s influence on biodiversity reaches far beyond its borders. Domestically, China’s biodiversity efforts and progress are impressive. And globally, the nation’s capacity to push for consensus and promote solutions to biodiversity threats are gaining recognition. Multiple high-level UN officials, including UN Secretary-General António Guterres, former Executive Secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Elizabeth Maruma Mrema (2020–23) and UN Environment Program (UNEP) Executive Director Inger Andersen, have praised China’s biodiversity achievements, domestically and through its global leadership role in biodiversity negotiations and implementation (Li, 2022; Shan and Bai, 2024).

Within the existing literature, discussions on China’s role in global environmental governance mainly focus on climate change, and while studies on the difficulties of implementing international environmental agreements, including those related to biodiversity, abound, China’s role in strengthening global ambition in this area and addressing associated challenges has been overlooked. China’s domestic biodiversity conservation policies have also been widely examined, but the question of how China could leverage its various roles and assets to promote the implementation of the GBF has not received enough attention. This report aims to fill this research gap by exploring China’s role in promoting implementation of the GBF.

Structure of the report

- **Section 2** identifies the key barriers to progress on implementing the GBF.
- **Section 3** examines China's influence in the field of biodiversity and discusses the opportunities and potential for China to strengthen its leadership in global biodiversity action.
- **Section 4** analyses how China's multiple strengths can be leveraged to support the implementation of the GBF.
- **Section 5** provides concluding remarks.

2. Barriers to implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Multilateral environmental agreements are critical for the success of the global governance of biodiversity conservation, but implementation remains a challenge (Pettersson and Stoett, 2022). After a decade (2011–20) in which all 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets¹ to save ecosystems and wildlife went unfulfilled, following four years of hard negotiations, nation states reached a new global biodiversity deal to halt the destruction of nature. In December 2022, parties to the CBD adopted the GBF. With four overarching global goals and 23 action-oriented targets, the GBF aims to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030 (the ‘30x30 target’) and to achieve the ultimate vision of ‘living in harmony with nature’ by 2050.

A strong commitment and ambitious goals are the highlights of the GBF, but its success depends on whether this global blueprint for saving nature can be implemented at the national level. Two years after its adoption, parties met at Biodiversity COP16 in Cali, Colombia, in 2024 to review the global implementation status of the new framework. Disappointingly, the first phase of Biodiversity COP16 was suspended due to disagreements between developing and developed countries over finance, particularly the establishment of a new global nature fund. In the resumed session in Rome in February 2025, delegates finally reached a deal. There were some wins, such as an agreement for a “permanent arrangement for the financial mechanism”, the launch of the Cali Fund to enable benefit-sharing from the use of digital sequence information, the adoption of the indicators for the monitoring framework, and progress on ensuring a stronger Indigenous representation (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2025a). However, as with many other international environmental agreements, the GBF faces a set of fundamental challenges.²

Weak political will and commitment

As the first global gathering following the adoption of the GBF, Biodiversity COP16 aimed to ascertain whether countries had followed through on their promises to preserve biodiversity and determine how much progress they had made since 2022. Countries were expected to present their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), the frameworks they would use to set national targets and report on progress.

The number of NBSAPs submitted is therefore an important indicator of how seriously countries are taking the agreement. Disappointingly, only 33 of the 196 parties had submitted their NBSAPs before the conference. Some countries had only updated their National Targets, which are part of the NBSAPs, while most of the countries arrived at the Summit empty-handed. By the end of Biodiversity COP16, 44 parties had submitted their NBSAPs. As of January 2026, only 69 parties had produced their NBSAPs (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, n.d.). Some megadiverse³ countries like Brazil and Ecuador have yet to submit their NBSAPs.

Countries may have various reasons for failing to produce their NBSAPs before the deadline. Some, for example, need more time to complete a whole-of-society plan (Greenfield and Dunne, 2024) or a “complex, multi-decade strategy” (Greenfield, 2024), some have said that “technical difficulties” and “structural barriers” have stopped them from meeting the deadline (Dunne and Greenfield, 2024), others might simply lack the will and ambition to do so (WWF, n.d.). Several developing countries have reported a lack of the financial and technical support necessary to undertake the process, which also indicates a low level of commitment from developed states to follow through on their promise to provide necessary aid to poor countries.

¹ The Aichi Biodiversity Targets were adopted at Biodiversity COP10 and are the predecessor of the GBF.

² For discussions that examine the technical aspects of the implementation challenges, such as how to set proper global targets or how to integrate local knowledge and values into expert insights, see, for example, Li et al. (2023) and Phang et al. (2020).

³ The term megadiverse refers to countries or regions that contain an exceptionally high level of biodiversity.

Of the small number of submissions, some are considered not ambitious enough and others, unactionable. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has established an NBSAP Tracker to systematically and critically evaluate the NBSAPs submitted and to provide insights into their effectiveness (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Country analysis comparison (updated NBSAPs)

Regions	ASSESSMENT SUMMARY						NBSAPS WE NEED CHECKLIST AREAS				
	Does it include the 23 targets?	Does it apply a drivers approach?	Does it tackle the most relevant local issues?	Does it include action plans?	Does it make links to national policy?	How well does it include IPLCs?	1. Ambition	2. Whole of Society & Govt	3. Implementation	4. HRBA	5. Tracking
Africa											
Burkina Faso	MIXED	POOR	MIXED	GOOD	GOOD	MIXED	44%	67%	60%	50%	77%
Asia											
Afghanistan	MIXED	GOOD	MIXED	MIXED	MIXED	MIXED	58%	44%	23%	50%	17%
Australia	MIXED	MIXED	GOOD	POOR	MIXED	MIXED	37%	28%	23%	75%	23%
China	GOOD	MIXED	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	MIXED	75%	67%	67%	50%	73%
Indonesia	GOOD	GOOD	MIXED	MIXED	GOOD	MIXED	65%	72%	69%	50%	81%
Japan	GOOD	GOOD	MIXED	GOOD	GOOD	MIXED	83%	72%	70%	25%	77%
Jordan	GOOD	MIXED	MIXED	MIXED	GOOD	MIXED	58%	67%	77%	88%	88%
Malaysia	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	MIXED	GOOD	MIXED	64%	83%	52%	63%	65%
Republic of Korea	GOOD	MIXED	MIXED	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	66%	72%	47%	50%	58%
Americas											
Cuba	GOOD	MIXED	MIXED	GOOD	GOOD	MIXED	59%	72%	25%	0%	17%
Canada	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	MIXED	GOOD	GOOD	60%	61%	55%	100%	67%
Suriname	GOOD	GOOD	MIXED	GOOD	GOOD	MIXED	68%	89%	83%	88%	69%
Europe											
Austria	GOOD	GOOD	MIXED	MIXED	GOOD	MIXED	46%	67%	30%	50%	44%
France	GOOD	GOOD	MIXED	GOOD	MIXED	MIXED	84%	94%	75%	38%	81%
Hungary	MIXED	POOR	MIXED	MIXED	GOOD	POOR	52%	22%	37%	0%	46%
Ireland	MIXED	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	63%	83%	83%	75%	75%
Italy	MIXED	GOOD	MIXED	GOOD	GOOD	POOR	64%	89%	48%	0%	65%
Luxembourg	MIXED	GOOD	MIXED	MIXED	GOOD	POOR	52%	83%	58%	0%	88%
Netherlands	POOR	MIXED	POOR	POOR	GOOD	MIXED	23%	44%	42%	33%	19%
Malta	GOOD	MIXED	MIXED	MIXED	GOOD	POOR	52%	56%	48%	25%	31%
Norway	GOOD	MIXED	MIXED	MIXED	GOOD	GOOD	38%	33%	53%	83%	19%
Spain	MIXED	MIXED	MIXED	POOR	MIXED	POOR	50%	39%	52%	0%	29%
Switzerland	MIXED	POOR	MIXED	MIXED	MIXED	POOR	25%	44%	17%	0%	10%

Note: The analysis is based on five criteria, including ambition, whole of society and whole of government approach, means of implementation, human rights-based approach (HRBA), and tracking progress and accelerating action over time. The Tracker currently covers 23 of the 69 parties which have submitted NBSAPs. IPLCs = Indigenous peoples and local communities; Govt = government.

Source: WWF (n.d.; reproduced with permission)

WWF's assessment has identified a series of significant weaknesses in the submitted plans, such as inadequate implementation information or measures, a disconnect between stated commitments and the level of ambition presented, a lack of true revision efforts, and neglect of Indigenous peoples and local communities. Some developed countries also fail to mention any funding mechanisms to developing countries in their NBSAPs.

Protected Planet reports updated global statistics on protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures on a monthly basis. As of January 2026, its data showed that only 17.62% of territorial areas and 9.85% of marine areas were either protected or conserved (Protected Planet, n.d.), which is far from the 30x30 target. Though commitments were made in Montreal in 2022 to protect and restore nature loss, a lack of urgency and a shortage of continued momentum are evident.

Large finance gap

Adequate financing is key for the effective implementation of multilateral environmental agreements. The lack of sufficient and consistent funding was one of the major causes of the failure of the Aichi Targets (Obura, 2023). The GBF sets specific financial targets by mobilising at least US\$200 billion annually from all available financial sources by 2030, including US\$20 billion in financial aid from wealthy governments to poorer ones by 2025, rising to US\$30 billion by 2030.

The biodiversity financing gap is widely cited to be around US\$700 billion per year, which could be closed with less than 1% of annual global gross domestic product (GDP) (Deutz et al., 2020). A recent BloombergNEF report suggested the gap has in fact widened to US\$942 billion, "as a modest increase in investment activity failed to keep pace with inflation" (Bromley, 2024: 2). There is also criticism of the view that biodiversity loss can be averted simply by allocating US\$700 billion to conservation, as this perspective "simply equates money with success, ignoring that so much spent on conservation has ambiguous or even adverse outcomes" (Standing, 2024).

To help close the large biodiversity funding gap, member parties of the GBF are expected to identify US\$500 billion of environmentally damaging subsidies in their public spending by 2025. However, according to the UK's Biodiversity Finance Trends Dashboard 2025, only 35 countries and two regional entities have either completed or started to undertake an assessment of their harmful subsidies (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2025). Even after the identification phase is completed, the process for actually removing or reforming harmful subsidies is politically and socially difficult and protracted.

Currently, domestic public expenditure accounts for the largest part of the global financial resources allocated to biodiversity conservation and the share of public biodiversity-related finance remains small (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2024). In addition, on average, just 0.5% of overall government expenditure from 2010 to 2019 was on nature-positive investment, whereas 1.37% was on nature-negative expenditure (Selomane et al., 2025).

Private finance is essential to fill the gap. Though growing fast from US\$9.4 billion in 2020 to US\$102.1 billion in 2024, it is still well short of estimated need (Smith et al., 2024). In its 2023 report on the state of finance for nature, UNEP estimated that private finance flows that invested in nature-negative industries totalled US\$5 trillion, 140 times more than private contributions to nature-based solutions (UNEP, 2023). The Group of Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries (LMMC), comprising 20 parties that are home to 70% of the planet's biodiversity, argued at Biodiversity COP16 that the role of private sources is to "complement public funding" and they cannot replace the legal responsibility of developed countries with regard to scale, speed and predictability (LMMC, 2024).

The US\$20 billion of financial aid provided by developed countries, though representing a small fraction of overall finance, is indispensable for supporting developing countries to implement their action plans (Landry et al., 2024). At Biodiversity COP16, an additional US\$163 million was pledged to the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) (The Nature Conservancy, 2024), which was established at Biodiversity COP15 with the aim to support the implementation of the

GBF by scaling up financing. This pledge brought the total funding committed to the GBFF to around US\$396 million (ibid.), under 2% of the amount developed nations had promised to contribute by 2025. The collective nature of the US\$20 billion pledge also creates a risk that developed countries will circumvent their individual responsibilities (Pettinotti et al., 2024). With the 2025 deadline now passed, there is no evidence that the US\$20 billion commitment for nature has been met. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) projects that official development assistance will have fallen by between 9% and 17% in 2025 (OECD, 2025), which could negatively affect international financial aid for biodiversity and the likelihood of meeting the US\$20 billion a year interim target and the US\$30 billion a year final goal (The Nature Conservancy, 2025).

Tension between developed and developing countries

Developed and developing countries have been in dispute continuously over the matter of funding from Biodiversity COP15 to COP16, and from biodiversity negotiations to climate talks. Compared with the climate domain, where the causes of and responsibilities for climate change are relatively easier to identify, the field of biodiversity is much more complicated. Many factors contribute to the decline of nature (Charpiot, 2023) and the burden of conservation efforts falls disproportionately on developing countries, where biodiversity is high but resources are limited (Obura et al., 2021). The megadiverse countries, which together hold 70% of the world's biodiversity, are mainly located in the Global South and have historically faced challenges related to economic development.

Developed countries have committed to providing financial assistance to developing nations to support their biodiversity efforts. However, these commitments have often not been met, leading to a lack of trust and resentment in developing countries (Greenfield and Weston, 2024). As Mark Opel, the finance lead at Campaign for Nature, has commented, "financing is a currency of trust", which "is fundamental to building trust between the Global [N]orth and the Global [S]outh" (Weston, 2024).

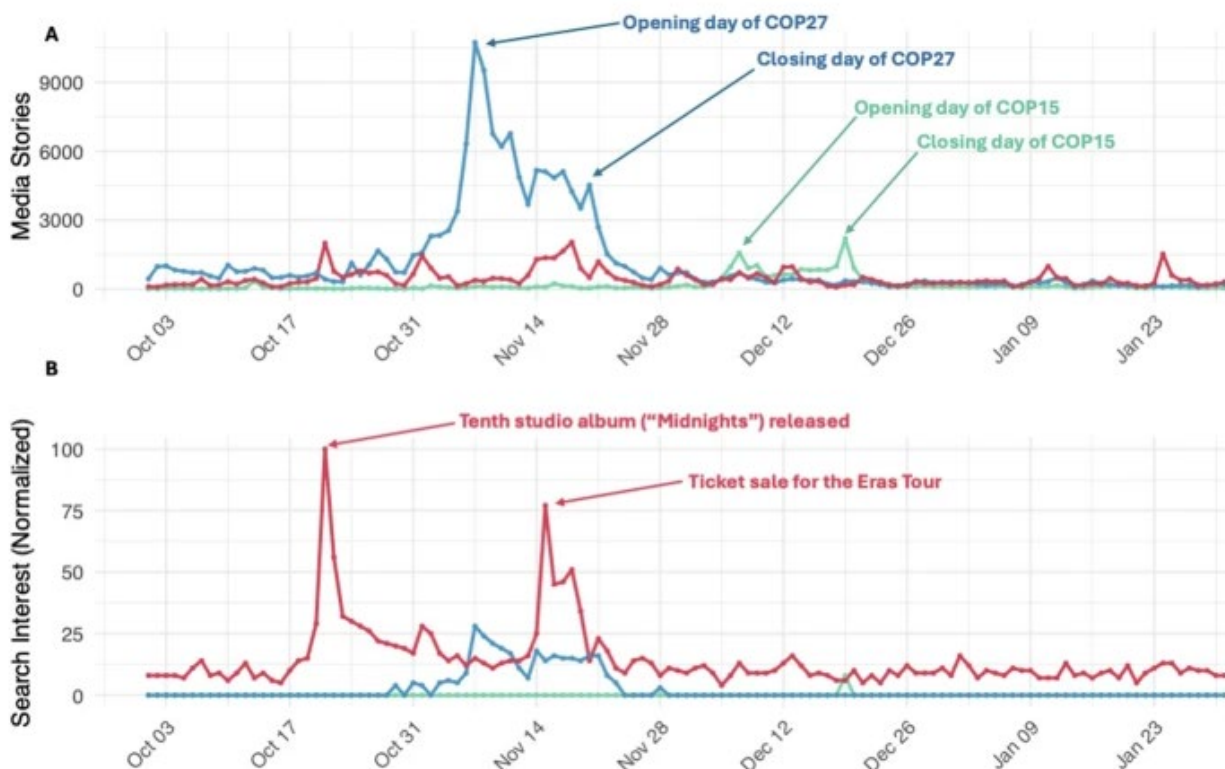
In addition, the accessibility, equity and effectiveness of existing biodiversity finance mechanisms, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), are areas of concern (Tsioumani et al., 2025). The proposal to set up a new fund was blocked by developed countries at Biodiversity COP16, which irritated African and Latin American nations and resulted in some refusing to take part in talks on other matters (Ferryhough, 2024). Beyond financial resources, other issues like technology support and capacity building also contribute to the tensions between developed and developing countries.

Attention shortfall

While both are critical environmental threats, climate change receives much more attention than biodiversity loss. Compared with the Biodiversity COP, the Climate COP is more widely covered in the media and attracts greater attention from world leaders and the public (Mammides and Campos-Arceiz, 2025). Research has shown that Biodiversity COP15, which led to the adoption of the GBF, received "significantly less attention" than the 27th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Climate COP27), the climate-focused world gathering that took place a month earlier (see Figure 2.2), and is not comparable to the unprecedented global attention generated by Climate COP21 in 2015, which adopted the Paris Agreement. A review of global internet searches between 1 October 2022 and 31 January 2023 reveals the same pattern, where public interest in Biodiversity COP15 was much lower than that in the Climate COP27, and far from that in the celebrity Taylor Swift⁴ (ibid.).

⁴ The authors include the comparison with American singer Taylor Swift because her "popularity underscores the intense competition for media focus and highlights how public attention can shift away from urgent global environmental issues" (Mammides and Campos-Arceiz, 2025).

Figure 2.2 Global patterns in media stories and internet searches of COP15, COP27 and Taylor Swift between 1 October 2022 and 31 January 2023



Note: Panel A illustrates the total number of media stories in the Media Cloud database for COP27 (blue line), COP15 (green line), and Taylor Swift (red line). Panel B shows the total number of internet search trends worldwide for each of the three terms during the same period, according to Google Trends.

Source: Reproduced with no changes from Mammides and Campos-Arceiz (2025). This figure is licensed under Creative Commons [BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

There was a similar story with attendance at the two conferences. Only six heads of state and 23,000 people attended Biodiversity COP16 in Cali (in 2024) whereas Climate COP28 held in Dubai the previous year was attended by over 150 heads of state and 85,000 people (Ravindran, 2024). There is also a difference in meeting frequency, with the climate summit taking place annually while the Biodiversity COP meets every two years.

Addressing the global biodiversity crisis requires the active engagement and collaboration of all stakeholders. Compared with climate change, addressing biodiversity loss relies more heavily on local engagement and participation (Mammides and Campos-Arceiz, 2025). The involvement of community land managers, Indigenous peoples and farmers in areas such as habitat conservation and sustainable land use is a key element of effective biodiversity policy and practice. A study by Danielsen and colleagues (2024) shows that citizens could help contribute to 51% of the programmes that require data to track progress on global biodiversity goals. The low media presence at and public awareness of Biodiversity COP and other high-profile biodiversity-related events, which are crucial for capturing attention, driving change, gathering momentum and mobilising action, indicate a failure of communication on the importance and urgency of biodiversity conservation to stakeholders from all levels and sectors.

Though efforts are underway to elevate biodiversity's profile on the global agenda, levels of communication and public awareness have not kept pace, resulting in significant challenges for global conservation action.

3. China as a 'great power' in biodiversity

The concept of environmental power

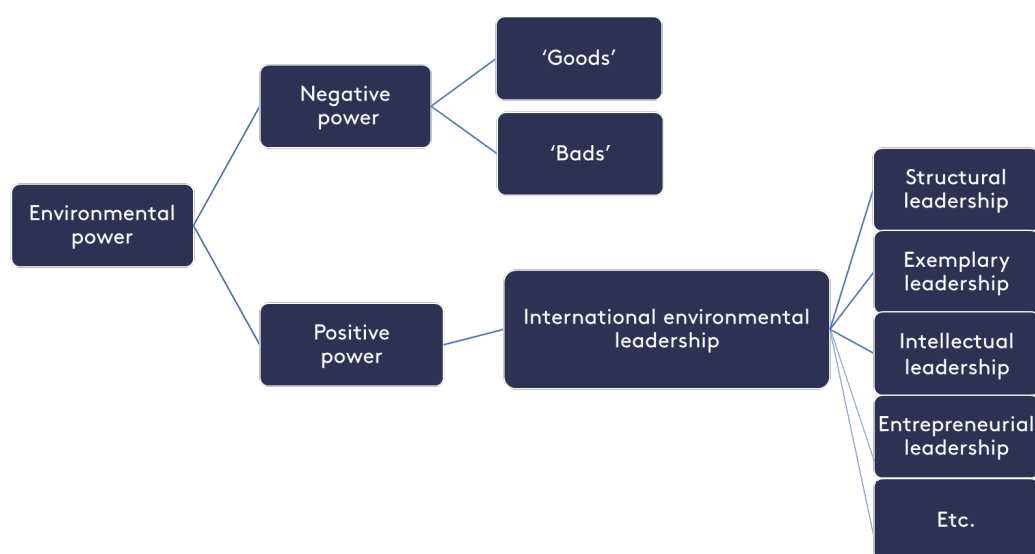
To analyse China's influence in the field of biodiversity, it is helpful to refer to the theoretical conceptualisation of environmental power developed by Buzan and Falkner (2022). The concept of environmental power is crucial for understanding a state's ability to influence the international environmental landscape, from shaping the global environmental agenda, process and outcomes to affecting other states' interest in and behaviour towards environmental issues.

Environmental power can be understood in both positive and negative terms (see Figure 3.1). Negative power refers to a state's control over certain environmental 'goods', such as having large shares of natural resources or ecosystems, and/or its ability to cause/generate environmental 'bads' in the form of environmental degradation, such as through excessive resource consumption and high emissions of pollutants. Both cases can empower a state to have a negative impact on global environmental efforts. Control over significant environmental 'goods' can mean a state has the potential to damage ecosystems or interfere with international environmental efforts; while a state that produces environmental 'bads' can cause environmental harm that impacts other nations and the global environment.

Positive power reflects a state's ability to drive positive change in global environmental policy and action. The constructive use of power is closely linked to the concept of international environmental leadership. As Kopra (2020) argues, such leadership is indispensable for successful collective action to address global environmental problems. Several different types of leadership have been identified in the literature, for example structural leadership, exemplary leadership, intellectual leadership and entrepreneurial leadership (see *ibid.*).

Structural leadership is based on a state's economic, military and political power to influence another actor's behaviour through incentives and sanctions. Exemplary leadership involves acting as a role model to inspire others. Intellectual leadership is exercised through the creation and dissemination of innovative ideas. Entrepreneurial leadership involves promoting consensus and creating coalitions through diplomatic skills. In addition to the traditional Western typology of leadership, Chinese scholars propose a concept of facilitative leadership based on Chinese leadership practices, which focus on features described as cooperative, win-win, attractive and empowering (Chen et al., 2018).

Figure 3.1 Conceptualisation of environmental power



Source: Produced by the author based on the theoretical conceptualisation of environmental power developed by Buzan and Falkner (2022)

China's emergence as a 'great power' in biodiversity conservation

When applying the above theoretical conceptualisation of environmental power to the context of China's biodiversity, it can be concluded that China is a great power in the field. In terms of negative power, China controls a significant share of environmental 'goods'. It is one of the world's megadiverse countries, encompassing a vast array of diverse ecosystems and 155,364 species and subspecies, including many, like the giant panda, endemic to China (State Council Information Office of China, 2024). At the same time, China's influence on biodiversity extends far beyond its borders through overseas infrastructure projects and investments, as well as its large demand for natural resources from abroad. As for environmental 'bads', China's large population, rapid economic growth, as well as the fast development of urbanisation and industrialisation in the country inevitably put pressure on the environment. Factors like the loss and destruction of natural habitats, over-utilisation of natural resources and environmental pollution have resulted in the loss or degradation of China's ecosystems, species and genetic diversity (Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China, 2024). The Belt and Road Initiative's (BRI) large-scale infrastructure projects can also pose environmental risks (Yi et al., 2024). (The BRI and its impacts are discussed in greater detail in Section 4.)

When considering positive power, China has the ability to bring positive change to global environmental politics, from initiating agendas and coordinating efforts, to pushing for consensus and promoting actions.

As the presidency of Biodiversity COP15, China showcased its strong ability to exercise entrepreneurial leadership. It actively advanced negotiations, convening a total of 37 Biodiversity COP15 Bureau Meetings and presiding over four Working Group Meetings in collaboration with the CBD Secretariat (Huang, 2022), and managed to pull together an excellent draft which reached consensus and was adopted by almost 200 parties. Since the adoption of the GBF, China has on several occasions coordinated and communicated with all relevant parties on advancing the implementation of the new global biodiversity plan. During 'Nature Day' at Climate COP28, for instance, China took the lead in launching the Action Initiative of the GBF, to "consolidate the political will of all parties to implement the [GBF]" (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2023: 1), which "marked a significant milestone in the efforts of China to promote international cooperation on biodiversity conservation" (Zhang et al., 2025: 4).

China has exercised exemplary leadership by making the first move and setting a good example for others to follow. China was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the CBD and the first emerging market economy/developing country to submit its updated NBSAP. Since 2019, China has been the largest contributor to the core budget of the CBD and its protocols, as well as the largest developing donor country for the GEF (Zhou, 2024). China launched the Kunming Biodiversity Fund (KBF) and took the lead by pledging 1.5 billion yuan (US\$212 million) to support biodiversity protection in developing countries (Stanway, 2021). Domestically, China has developed effective biodiversity policies to comprehensively upgrade its ecological governance and has made significant progress towards its 'ecological civilisation'⁵ and 'Beautiful China'⁶ initiatives.

China is also a leading innovator, from the design and implementation of a comprehensive governance framework for nature conservation to the development and application of technology for supporting biodiversity efforts. For example, China's ecological redline system, an innovative policy developed to safeguard ecological security by delineating areas for strict ecological protection, shows evidence of effectively balancing conservation and development (Wang et al., 2024) and "provid[es] a model which could be adopted around the world" (Choi et al., 2022). Brazil and Nepal have both expressed interested in adopting the system (Zhang, 2024). China has successful biodiversity conservation experience to share with the world and has actively engaged in knowledge exchange, for example at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment

⁵ A development paradigm which promotes the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature.

⁶ A national initiative with the aim to create a sustainable and environmentally friendly country.

Assembly (UNEA-6) in February 2024 (*China Daily*, 2024). As a frontrunner in high-value technologies, China has also increasingly used innovative technologies such as big data, remote sensing and AI to enhance its biodiversity protection efforts, while also sharing these technologies with other countries (Li, 2024) (see further below).

China also has the capacity to increase other countries' ecological ambitions and support them to change their priorities in favour of biodiversity conservation and sustainability, through financial aid, investment opportunities, capacity building activities and other forms of assistance. China is a globally significant donor of financial support for environment protection in developing countries through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms such as the KBF, the BRI and South-South cooperation. As a major global creditor, China is empowered to promote more sustainable development pathways in borrowing countries. Additionally, China's position as a major global consumer of natural resources enables it to improve the sustainability of its supply chains (see Section 4).

China's potential to take a lead in global biodiversity action

Historian Yuval Noah Harari, in one of his best-selling books, stated that the big 21st-century challenges are global and actions to address them must be taken on a global level (Harari, 2018). However, global divides are growing deeper, with UN Secretary-General António Guterres lamenting in 2022 that the international community is "gridlocked in colossal global dysfunction" (Guterres, 2022). The global environmental crisis requires urgent collective action, but the world is in a leadership deficit. With the US backing away from multilateralism, and the EU facing security challenges and largely restricted to leading by example (Hale and Sun, 2025), there is increased expectation for China's role in global leadership (Dinoo, 2025). It is an opportunity for China to fill the leadership void and start a new era characterised by win-win cooperation.

According to Erik Solheim, Vice President of the BRI International Green Development Coalition (BRIGC) and former Executive Director of UNEP (2016–18), China has moved from the backseat to being a frontrunner in the environment arena over the past decade (Ma and Yan, 2023). On climate change, China has contributed significantly to multilateral negotiation processes, and made its "30-60" decarbonization commitment,⁷ the 'no new coal abroad' pledge⁸ and played a key role in the global energy transition through its leading position in renewable energy supply chains, large-scale deployment of clean technologies, and sustained investment in research and development. Inger Andersen, the current Executive Director of UNEP, said China "has had a tremendous success in demonstrating climate leadership in recent years" (Xinhua, 2019). And Climate COP30 President-Designate Andre Aranha Correa do Lago commented that other countries may look to additional leadership from China in the field (Lee, 2025). As the presidency of Biodiversity COP15 and subsequently, China has demonstrated an ability to exercise different types of leadership to promote global biodiversity efforts. The important contribution that China has already made in addressing biodiversity loss and combatting the global climate crisis paves the way for further strengthening its leadership in global environmental governance. Its various assets and roles can be leveraged to facilitate this governance and implementation of the GBF (see Figure 3.2).

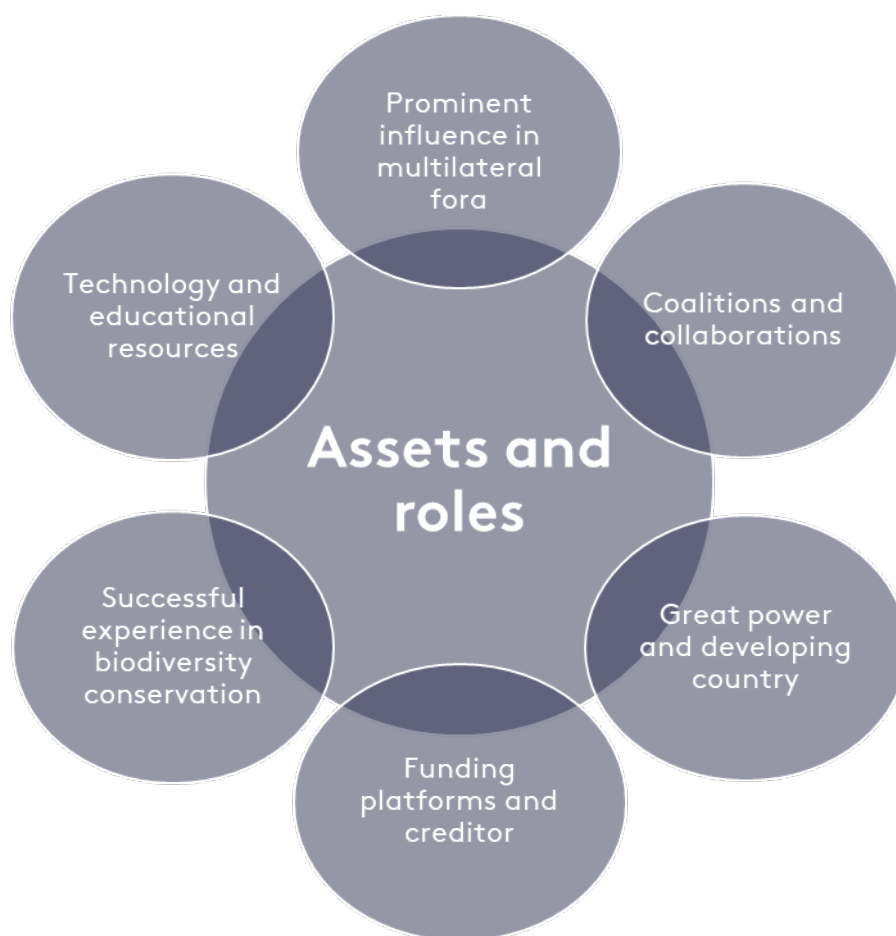
Today, China plays a prominent role and is a significant voice in various multilateral forums, including the UN, BRICS, G20 and many others, which gives it plenty of leverage in shaping the global environmental agenda, priorities and policy discussions as well as when setting and implementing programmes. For instance, China is increasingly influential at the UN. Since 2000, China has made the largest increase in required payments to the UN's regular budget (Leppert, 2025). It is currently the second largest contributor (behind the US) to both the UN regular budget and the peacekeeping budget, contributing more than 20% of both (ibid.). China's

⁷ In September 2020, President Xi Jinping pledged that the nation would reach peak carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060.

⁸ In September 2021, President Xi Jinping announced at the United Nations General Assembly [UNGA] that China will not build new coal-fired projects abroad.

influence as a permanent member of the Security Council is clear. And the participation of Chinese nationals within the UN development system has shown an upward trend (Baumann et al., 2022). Over the past decade, China’s involvement and influence in UN environmental conferences and agreements have also grown significantly (Shabirah et al., 2025). Furthermore, research indicates that China’s global initiatives have become embedded in UN discourse, for example, the phrases ‘BRI’ and ‘Community of Shared Future for Mankind’⁹ appear in many UN documents. A study by Garcia-Herrero and colleagues states that, “[w]hen it comes to words, China’s global initiatives are sometimes louder than the West’s” (Garcia-Herrero et al., 2024: cover). They also show that countries around the world have tended to be more closely in alignment with China than the US in their UNGA votes since 2000, especially emerging markets and developing countries (ibid.).

Figure 3.2. China’s potential for leading the way in global biodiversity conservation



Source: Author

In addition to UN high-level forums, many other platforms and collaborative initiatives, such as the BRI, the Global Development Initiative, the International Alliance for Green Development, the Action Initiative for the GBF and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), are spaces in which China could enhance dialogue and cooperation for addressing biodiversity concerns and promoting sustainable development.

China’s unique dual identity, as a great power and a major developing country, positions it as a bridge between developed and developing countries, fostering North–South dialogue and collaboration as well as facilitating South–South cooperation. China’s role is crucial for promoting

⁹ A concept proposed by President Xi Jinping that is at the core of China’s diplomacy.

equality and solidarity and for contributing to the development of an effective and well-coordinated global framework for biodiversity conservation.

China's role in a variety of funding initiatives, including the KBF, the GEF and the China Trust Fund, could also be leveraged to support global biodiversity actions. As the financing gap is the bottleneck for the implementation of the GBF, especially in developing countries, good management and operation of global funding platforms would offer substantive support to countries in their biodiversity conservation endeavours, enhance international exchanges and promote practical cooperation on global biodiversity conservation. In addition, China's position as a major global creditor enables it to play a leadership role in bringing together global goals for biodiversity and sustainable economic development (China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development [CCICED], 2024).

China's vast territory hosts diverse species and ecosystems, while also facing diverse biodiversity challenges. Over the years, the country has adopted strong policies and taken effective action in combatting its biodiversity loss (see Section 4), and accumulated valuable lessons and best practice examples. This successful experience, on the one hand, lends legitimacy to China's leadership in global biodiversity efforts and builds confidence in the rest of the world, and on the other hand, can be shared with other countries, providing inspiration and solutions for their biodiversity conservation efforts.

Science and technology are powerful engines for biodiversity efforts. China's technological advancement can be translated into international cooperation, from technology transfer between nations to the initiation of joint projects and research collaborations, contributing significantly to global biodiversity actions. In addition, Chinese universities and research institutes can offer support for students from developing countries. The valuable educational resources of these institutions are essential for equipping young people with the necessary knowledge and skills to be involved in and contribute to biodiversity actions.

4. China's role in supporting implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

This section explores how China can strengthen its engagement and leadership in advancing the GBF. It examines how China is translating the global commitments into national policies, implementation measures and measurable outcomes, while exploring ways it can further enhance its national implementation action. It discusses the importance of the BRI in global biodiversity conservation and explores how China can further embed sustainability into the Initiative. Also considered, is how China can promote knowledge exchange and technology cooperation across regions to drive faster progress in biodiversity conservation worldwide. The funding mechanisms China can use to support developing countries to meet global biodiversity targets are analysed, and diplomatic opportunities that China can use to boost global momentum and cooperation towards shared environmental goals are explored.

Maintaining national progress on implementing the GBF

Since the GBF's adoption at Biodiversity COP15 in 2022, China has proactively implemented international pledges domestically. In January 2024, China released its updated NBSAP, which contains four priority areas,¹⁰ 27 priority actions and 75 priority projects (Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China, 2024). The NBSAP provides responses to all 23 GBF targets and, in the WWF's assessment, "reflects a high degree of ambition and commitment" (WWF, n.d.). Sub-national authorities are encouraged to develop or revise their local biodiversity strategies and action plans to align with national goals (Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China, 2024). China aims to build a '1+N' policy system to implement the GBF and build biodiversity governance, with '1' representing the NBSAP and the overall implementation programme, and 'N' the biodiversity management programmes across key sectors such as resources, energy, transport and agriculture, as well as specific industries.

China has adopted a 'whole-of-government and whole-of-society' approach to biodiversity conservation. A coordinated central government mechanism oversees biodiversity governance across departments, with assigned tiered management and supervision responsibilities (Huang, 2025). Engagement of the private sector is promoted through initiatives like the China Business and Biodiversity Partnership, encouraging enterprises to adopt biodiversity-friendly practices, advance green transformation, and promote sustainable value chains (ibid.). Research institutes, social organisations, enterprises and the public are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process, and inclusion of vulnerable groups in biodiversity conservation activities is also emphasised in the updated NBSAP (Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China, 2024).

By making biodiversity conservation a national strategy and with large-scale, integrated and science-driven initiatives, China has achieved significant conservation and ecological outcomes. China's ecological redlines, which delineate areas for strict ecological protection, cover over 30% of the national territory (Huang, 2025), forming the backbone of its 30x30 target. It is also building the world's largest national park system, with five major national parks already established, covering a total area of 57 million acres (O'Connell, 2025). The populations of iconic species like the giant panda and 300 other rare and endangered wildlife species are also increasing (Huang, 2025).

China is home to the world's largest man-made forest and grassland areas (Xinhua, 2025a). In 2024 alone, China planted nearly 4.45 million hectares of trees, restored 3.22 million hectares of degraded grassland, and harnessed 2.45 million hectares of desertified land (State Council of

¹⁰ Mainstreaming biodiversity, addressing threats to biodiversity losses, sustainable use of biodiversity and benefit-sharing, and modernising biodiversity governance capacity.

China, 2025a). Over decades of sustained greening efforts, China has cumulatively afforested over 773 million hectares, and its forest coverage now exceeds 25%, making it the country with the largest increase in green coverage globally (China Global Television Network [CGTN], 2025a).

As part of China's efforts to protect its wetlands, over 8,800 hectares of mangroves have been planted, and an additional 8,200 hectares have been rehabilitated over the past five years (State Council of China, 2025b). The total area of its mangrove forests has reached 30,300 hectares and it has become one of the few countries in the world with a recent net gain in mangrove coverage (ibid.). In 2024, the first International Mangrove Center was inaugurated in China's coastal city, Shenzhen, with the aim to promote global cooperation and joint action in mangrove conservation and strengthen the implementation of environmental commitments including the GBF (International Mangrove Center, 2026).

China has made significant progress in tackling challenges arising from agricultural practices, which are among the major drivers of biodiversity loss. By significantly reducing the use of pesticides and fertilizers, the country has promoted more sustainable farming practices and has become the world's fourth-largest producer of organic agricultural products (Zhao, 2025). Policies, regulations and public awareness campaigns have been reinforced to combat food waste and overconsumption (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China, 2021). As the largest importer of agricultural goods, China is also contributing to the protection of global tropical rainforests by enhancing the transparency and sustainability of its supply chains, working closely with international partners such as WWF (Zhao, 2025).

Additionally, a series of effective programmes underscore China's commitment to biodiversity conservation. For example, a ten-year fishing ban on the Yangtze River basin came into full effect in January 2021, as a measure to restore the biodiversity and ecological functions of the river basin (*China Daily*, 2023). In the same year, China launched a campaign to build 'beautiful rivers and lakes' across the country, aiming to curb water pollution and restore aquatic ecosystems (Wang QY, 2025). China was also the first country to adopt the 'Sponge City' urban design and planning model to tackle urban flooding while improving biodiversity (ARKANCE, 2026). Through the Green Rural Revival Program, which started in 2003 in Zhejiang province, China has also worked to improve the rural living environment and protect nature (Dou et al., 2023). The programme has expanded widely since its inception and, in 2018, won the Champions of the Earth award, the highest environmental honour granted by the UN (ibid.).

However, China's biodiversity efforts also face notable obstacles, including a large funding gap (Marino, 2024). There is no specific domestic financing roadmap dedicated to biodiversity (WWF, n.d.). Currently, most biodiversity funding comes from public sources, while private sector participation remains limited (World Economic Forum, 2025). Financial institutions struggle to expand nature finance, and both private capital and public welfare funds encounter barriers to entry (CCICED, 2024). The government is "relatively active" in mobilising resources for biodiversity conservation, but it still does not prioritise the issue to the same level as it does for climate change (ibid.).

China needs to establish a stable and diversified biodiversity finance system that mobilises resources in support of its GBF commitments. While continuing to increase and better align public funding with the GBF, it is essential to scale up private and social capital by strengthening positive fiscal and financial incentives, developing innovative financing instruments such as biodiversity bonds, and de-risking investment through mechanisms like blended finance (ibid.). It is also important to ensure greater efficiency and impact of biodiversity spending by developing a national biodiversity finance plan and implementing biodiversity disclosure. By aligning fiscal policy and financial markets with biodiversity goals, China could build resilient ecological systems while reinforcing its leadership under the GBF.

In addition, studies suggest that China needs more robust implementation mechanisms for the GBF. Unlike the 30·60 decarbonisation commitment, which has become a rigid requirement for governments at all levels and across most departments (Tian and Su, 2025), the targets under the NBSAP are generally flexible and indicative, with weak enforcement measures. Research

indicates that there are coordination gaps between central policy and local execution, as well as differences in implementation capacity and engagement across regions, which weaken on-the-ground delivery (Liu, 2025). Also, China lacks useful indicators and platforms to track and operationalise the GBF, which makes monitoring, transparency and accountability difficult (ibid.).

To ensure effective implementation, China could enhance measurable and trackable delivery through stronger monitoring, indicators and reporting mechanisms (ibid.). Meanwhile, implementation responsibilities could be allocated clearly between central and local authorities (ibid.), and most of the targets under the NBSAP could be operationalised as mandatory tasks for local party committees and governments at all levels (Tian and Su, 2025).

Given China's influence in the field of biodiversity, its success or failure will be critical to whether the GBF can truly serve as an effective global pathway for halting and reversing biodiversity loss. By sustaining progress and overcoming the challenges in implementing the GBF at the national level, China could lead by example and act as a crucial driver of the GBF's worldwide implementation.

A green Belt and Road Initiative

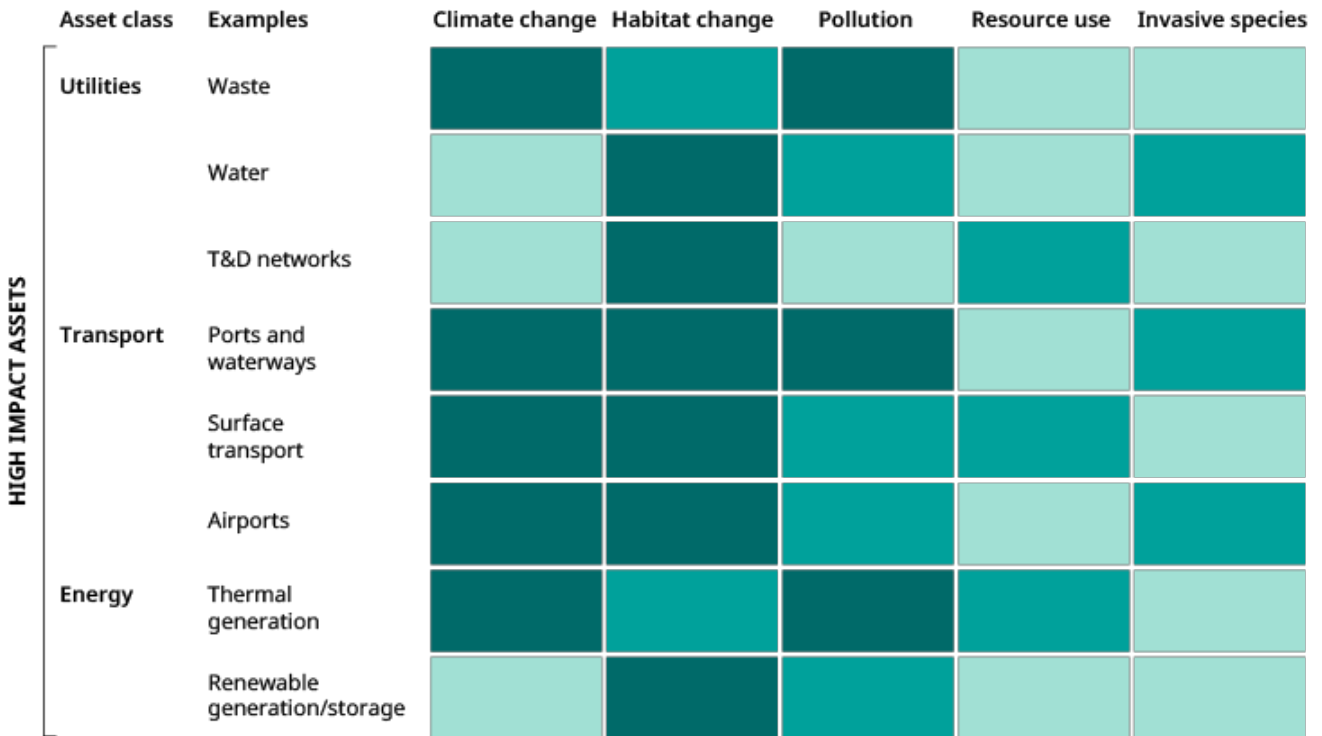
China's biodiversity influence extends far beyond its borders through the BRI, which has expanded its connectivity coverage to most corners of the world. With a decade of development, the BRI has evolved as one of the world's most important investment ventures and is by far the largest infrastructure development of our time. To date, China has signed more than 200 BRI-related cooperation agreements with around 150 countries worldwide (Green Finance & Development Center, 2025). An estimated US\$1.308 trillion has been committed to BRI projects by China since 2013, of which US\$775 billion is in construction and US\$533 billion is in investments (Nedopil, 2025).

The BRI has a significant impact on global biodiversity efforts. It covers some of the world's most biodiverse countries which are facing increasing challenges to their biodiversity and ecosystems (Yue and Nedopil Wang, 2021). There is significant overlap between the BRI and areas that are important for biodiversity conservation, such as biodiversity hotspots, protected areas and key landscapes. The BRI passes through the habitats of 265 threatened species, including 39 critically endangered species and 81 endangered species (BRIGC, 2020a). A total of 32% of the protected area of the BRI's participating countries may be affected (ibid.). This makes the BRI critical to the global effort to reverse and halt biodiversity loss as well as to address the urgent need for developing countries to adopt effective domestic biodiversity conservation standards and policies.

In 2020, Oliver Wyman and WWF published a white paper which revealed that the building and operating of infrastructure is a key driver of biodiversity loss (Oliver Wyman and WWF, 2020). In 2024, another white paper identified five nature impacts through which infrastructure contributes to biodiversity loss (see Figure 4.1): climate change, habitat change, pollution, resource use and invasive species (Oliver Wyman and WWF, 2024). According to that white paper, habitat change or resource use is responsible for 50% of the threats to wildlife populations globally, invasive species and disease account for 13%, and pollution and climate change contribute to 7% and 6%, respectively. This means that efforts to embed sustainability into infrastructure construction and investment are significant for tackling climate change and meeting global biodiversity goals.

Infrastructure projects differ in their biodiversity footprints across the five nature impacts. Among the high-impact assets are those in the utilities, transport and energy sectors. Energy and transport-related projects have long been the major focus of the BRI. The largest share of China's BRI engagement (i.e. construction contracts and investments) is in the energy sector. The first half of 2025 saw the highest energy-related engagement in any period since the BRI's inception, accounting for 35% of the overall share and amounting to US\$42 billion, a 100% growth compared with the first half of 2024. Although dropping to its lowest level since 2013, the transport sector still accounts for a 7.2% share of BRI engagement, reaching about US\$15 billion (see Figure 4.2).

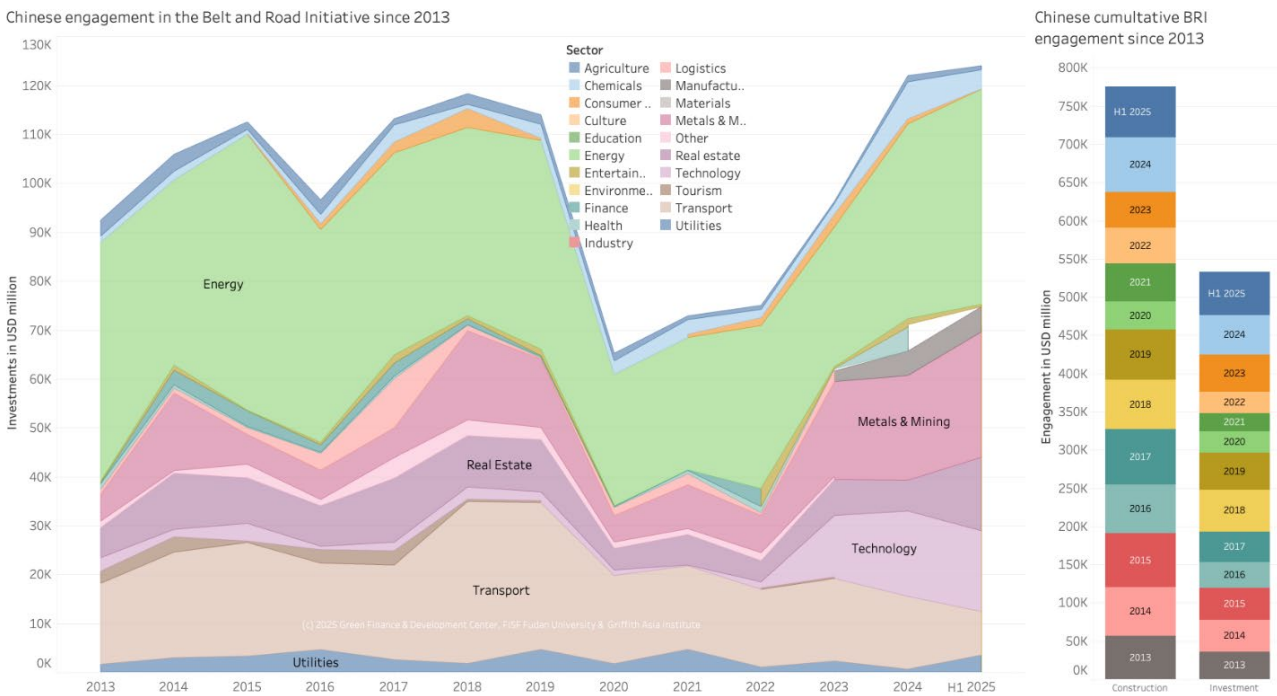
Figure 4.1. Nature impacts by asset class



Notes: Degree of impact: low impact in light green; medium impact in mid green; high impact in dark green. 'T&D' networks = transmission and distribution networks.

Source: Oliver Wyman, WWF, USAID, Center for Large Landscape Conservation, MarshMcLennan (Oliver Wyman and WWF, 2024; reproduced with permission)

Figure 4.2. Chinese engagement (construction contracts and investments) in the Belt and Road Initiative since 2013 (left) and cumulative (right)



Source: Nedopil (2025; reproduced with permission)

China has committed to creating a green and sustainable BRI. Chinese leaders, including President Xi Jinping, on various international occasions, have stressed the importance of building a green BRI (BRIGC, 2023). It is also underlined in China's 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the 2035 Vision of the 5th Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (BRIGC, 2020b).

To put this into practice, the Chinese Government has issued a series of policies to green the BRI. For example, China adopted the Guidelines for Environmental Protection in Foreign Investment and Cooperation in 2013, the first policy that guides Chinese companies in their foreign projects, emphasising compliance with local environmental regulations and standards in BRI states (Ministry of Commerce of China, 2013). Updated in 2021 and 2022, the Guidelines raise the standard from local to international, encouraging companies to apply international best practice for environmental protection and sustainable development where local standards are insufficient (Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China, 2021; 2022). In addition, initiatives such as the BRIGC, the BRI Green Development Institute and the Green Silk Road Envoys Program have been established to facilitate cooperation and exchange among BRI countries in environmental conservation and green development (Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China, 2024).

The financial institutions involved in funding BRI projects have developed their own environmental guidelines to support the achievement of environmentally and socially sustainable development outcomes. For example, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), as the major development bank financing BRI infrastructure, adopted an Environmental and Social Framework which it has updated several times to make it increasingly demanding (AIIB, 2024). To enhance transparency, the AIIB released its first Sustainability Report in August 2025, positioning itself among the first development banks to voluntarily adopt the International Sustainability Standards Board (AIIB, 2025). And with the aim to "enable clients to build ... green infrastructure with sustainability, innovation and connectivity at its core" (AIIB, 2026a), the AIIB has committed to prioritising green infrastructure investments, including projects that generate local environmental benefits, such as biodiversity conservation and nature-based solutions, while supporting climate mitigation and adaptation (AIIB, 2026b).

Though there is strong political will and comprehensive policies for greening the BRI, concerns have been raised regarding their effectiveness in translating to projects in reality. These policies by their nature are 'soft law' and therefore only advisory and not legally binding. The language used is too general and concentrates on goal-setting while not being robust enough on enforcement and accountability (Chen, 2025). The diverse actors involved in BRI projects also pose challenges in establishing clear responsibility for environmental harm (Coenen et al., 2021). In practice, there is also a lack of effective supervision and oversight of whether the companies involved implement environmental protection measures in their overseas operations (Guo, 2024).

Chinese enterprises vary in their performance on corporate environmental and social responsibility overseas. There are many instances of Chinese companies respecting environmental, social and governance (ESG) requirements in host developing countries (Morris, 2023), but there are also numerous examples suggesting Chinese companies have shown a lack of attention and awareness of the environmental and social risks of their operations and have faced controversies abroad (Chen, 2025). Whether local standards are observed might depend on the regulatory regimes involved and the experience of the investors (Morris, 2023), which reinforces the need to strengthen green regulations and compliance incentives.

Research indicates that the AIIB may have simplified its Environmental and Social Assessment instruments and risk analysis (Júnior and Jukemura, 2022), which could make it necessary to enhance its implementation capacity to ensure that by simplifying standards it does not bring about less sustainable outcomes. So far, the AIIB's accountability mechanism has yet to accept the eligibility of a single complaint from communities at risk from AIIB's investments (Goyal and Day, 2025). Considering the large portfolio of BRI projects over the past decade and the fact that large-scale infrastructure projects can pose potential environmental and social risks, the

accessibility and effectiveness of the AIIB's accountability mechanism may need further improvement (Geary et al., 2023).

The BRI has a significant role to play in supporting global biodiversity efforts and represents a great opportunity to connect biodiversity conservation with economic and social development. In the past decade, the BRI has supported the development and economic growth of the developing world. And over the years, it has demonstrated a growing commitment to environmental concerns, from the ambition to create a 'green BRI' and the 'no new coal abroad' pledge, to the shift to 'Small and Beautiful' projects¹¹ and support for the green economy and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To ensure its sustainability and continue its success, China needs to consider new steps to further green the BRI (Solheim, 2023b). The BRI could be utilised as a pathway along which to "transmit better sustainability norms and practices across borders" (Nurgozhayeva, 2024: 156) and steer other developing countries towards green, high-quality development. A green BRI is also crucial for strengthening China's credibility and influence on the global stage as well as enhancing its legitimacy and effectiveness in international environmental leadership.

Considering the diverse environmental governance landscapes across the BRI countries, the application of 'host country standards' tends to "produc[e] policy inconsistencies, regulatory loopholes, and a lack of accountability from Chinese investors" (Nurgozhayeva, 2024: 156). Meanwhile, the application of international standards may not be attractive because of their advisory nature. To harmonise environmental protection standards along the BRI route, China could raise protection standards, upgrading 'green policies' to 'green laws', and compelling Chinese actors operating overseas to fully respect their environmental responsibilities. Both the 'host country standard' and the 'home country standard' should be considered in each case, and the higher standard of the two should be applied (Guo, 2024).

It is also necessary to enhance supervision and enforcement. Legally binding instruments for overseas investment would provide a legal basis for a supervisory body that has responsibility for ensuring effective supervision on the compliance of environmental protection standards by the enterprises involved in BRI-related projects. A complete and effective regulatory system would mitigate the negative impact of BRI projects, minimise the environmental and legal risks of Chinese investors, and would also be beneficial in proving that the BRI is environmentally sustainable.

Furthermore, the Chinese Government could assist host countries in improving their environmental governance, from their environmental legislation to their supervision and enforcement mechanisms (Morris, 2023). It could also help Chinese investors gain familiarity with local regulations and customs in host countries (ibid.), and equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage with local communities. China could also encourage Chinese environmental non-profit organisations to go abroad, serving as a bridge between Chinese investors and local communities to facilitate communication and build trust and cooperation. It would also be helpful to create the opportunity, or set up learning programmes, for Chinese investors to share their experiences and lessons learned overseas to inspire and learn from each other about responsible business practices.

The AIIB, a key player within the BRI, has great capacity to contribute to a green BRI. With 111 members worldwide and a capital base of US\$100 billion (AIIB, 2026b), the demand for and value added by the AIIB on sustainability is enormous. As it explores the greening of investments overseas, an important first step for the AIIB is to ensure stringent implementation of environmental and social safeguards and to put in place an accessible and effective accountability mechanism. The AIIB could improve the environmental footprint of collaborating companies and their capacity for developing BRI projects in line with local requirements. AIIB President Jin Liqun stated in 2025 that "our mission to finance Infrastructure for Tomorrow

¹¹ A shift in strategy towards smaller-scale, high-impact and low-risk development projects.

requires us to lead by example” (AIIB, 2025). An opportunity for leadership is to take robust and innovative approaches to supporting investments in green and environmentally sound infrastructure, helping members’ economies and societies transfer to a sustainable path while achieving globally agreed environmental and development goals. The AIIB could also actively participate in discussions on the reform of the global financial architecture and amplify the voice of developing countries. In addition, it could take the lead and promote cooperation among international financial institutions to elevate the visibility of biodiversity in the environmental financial landscape, integrate biodiversity considerations throughout the investment process and advance the making and harmonisation of biodiversity frameworks and metrics.

Boosting and broadening knowledge exchange to drive action on biodiversity commitments

A survey conducted by the NBSAP Accelerator Partnership in late 2023, which aimed to analyse the challenges that countries face when aligning their NBSAPs with the GBF, found that strengthening institutional capacity through experience-sharing and knowledge transfer was among the types of assistance that government respondents were interested in receiving from other countries (NBSAP Accelerator Partnership, 2024). Analysis based on the results of the survey highlighted that there is significant interest in peer-to-peer learning opportunities on a wide range of topics relating to biodiversity conservation (ibid.).

Erik Solheim, Vice President of the BRIGC and a former Executive Director of UNEP, has stated that China’s green transformation proves that environmental conservation and development are not necessarily mutually exclusive; instead, prosperity and sustainability can be achieved at the same time (Xinhua, 2025b). China’s green development model provides an important reference point for developing countries in pursuit of sustainable industrialisation (Shabirah et al., 2025), linking biodiversity conservation directly with socioeconomic development. China’s wisdom that “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets” (the ‘two mountains theory’), together with its vision of an ‘ecological civilisation’ and a ‘Beautiful China’, offers valuable inspiration to the global community. Its wide-ranging green endeavours like the ecological redline and national park systems, mangrove and desert restoration projects, beautiful villages and green cities projects, and the tree-planting plan and ten-year fishing ban, are worth sharing with the world (Solheim, 2023a). Similarly, Inger Andersen, the current Executive Director of UNEP, noted in a 2024 interview that “China has valuable domestic experiences in conserving biodiversity, which can be learned and shared with other countries to further global environmental initiatives” (Shan and Bai, 2024).

China has actively engaged in promoting dialogue and knowledge-sharing through various bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms and platforms. For example, it has established bilateral cooperation and exchange on biodiversity with the EU, Germany, the UK, Italy, Norway, the US, Canada, South Africa and many other countries and regions (*China Sustainability Tribune*, 2022). Regular high-level dialogues and expert meetings are held between China and ASEAN to share knowledge and experience on biodiversity. Biodiversity exchange and cooperation is also among the priorities of the China–Africa partnership. China has established a tripartite policy dialogue on biodiversity with Japan and South Korea via which academic exchange and cooperation projects have been carried out. With the help of platforms such as the BRI and through South–South cooperation, China has provided information and resources for biodiversity conservation in developing countries. Via UN events, the G20, BRICS, and many other multilateral platforms, China has also proactively shared valuable experience and expertise on nature protection with the world. In its NBSAP, China mentions a plan to organise an international forum on biodiversity to facilitate policy dialogue and exchange on global biodiversity governance, and support the global implementation of the GBF (Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China, 2024).

At the same time, China has shown a willingness to open the door to international experience and welcome world experts and talent to engage in and support its conservation work. For example, the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development (CCICED)

serves as a platform for collaboration between the Chinese and international research communities, with the aim to explore cross-cutting research, drive peer-to-peer exchange and provide annual policy recommendations to the Chinese Government (CCICED, 2026a). A wide range of policy research projects have been conducted on nature and biodiversity, including those exploring comprehensive solutions to support the achievement of the GBF goals and targets in China and the rest of the world (CCICED, 2026b).

China could disseminate its ideas on biodiversity conservation and success stories more widely, to play an enabling role in supporting other countries' biodiversity action. And by promoting the integration of its vision of ecological civilisation into international agreements and UN documents, China could provide the international community with its knowledge and potential solutions for managing the global biodiversity crisis. In addition to actively engaging in experience-sharing abroad, it could invite representatives of government bodies, research institutes or international organisations to visit China and observe its biodiversity conservation practices in action.

Enhancing digital technology as part of the solution to biodiversity conservation

Digital technology's role in advancing global conservation efforts is critical. In addition to significant contributions to research, analysis, monitoring and preservation, digital technology can also help raise public awareness about biodiversity conservation (WWF, 2018) and motivate community participation in conservation activities (Wilson, 2020).

China is a leader in green technology, contributing significantly to the world's low-carbon transition. It is also a frontrunner in digital technology, which has immense potential for progressing the global move towards biodiversity protection and sustainable development. Digital technology like AI, big data and remote sensing have enabled more possibilities for biodiversity conservation (Ayoola et al., 2024) and have been widely applied by China to species protection (e.g. Li, 2024). Being at the forefront of global digital advancements, China has a distinct edge in promoting cooperation in innovation and deployment of digital technology in support of global biodiversity efforts.

Following 'Made in China 2025', an initiative launched in 2015 with the aim to promote industrial modernisation and advance the country's capacities in high-value and technology-intensive manufacturing, 'China Standards 2035' was launched in 2018 to serve as a roadmap for the Chinese Government and leading tech companies to set global standards for emerging technologies, such as 5G, the Internet of Things and AI (Koty, 2020). In 2023, the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council jointly released a plan setting out the path for a 'Digital China' (State Council of China, 2023). In 2025, an action plan was issued to keep advancing the country's digital development (State Council of China, 2025c). According to the 'Digital China Development Report 2024' released by the National Data Administration, the added value of core digital economy industries accounted for about 10% of China's GDP in 2024 (Fan, 2025). It is important that China prioritises digital progress in ecological fields, in line with the construction of an ecological civilisation. By strengthening research, development and the application of digital technology in biodiversity conservation, China could become a pioneer and leader in biodiversity-related digital technology (BDT), shaping the future direction of tech development in this field.

China could also explore key BDT and policies through international communication and cooperation. With shared research projects like the BioClima project (Garclá, 2025) and supporting frameworks such as the EU-China Flagship Initiative on Climate Change and Biodiversity (European Commission, 2026), China and the EU have deepened their cooperation in BDT, with AI and monitoring systems among the key areas of focus. China and the UK also committed to strengthening cooperation on digital innovation after a new round of China-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue that took place in January 2025 (Zheng, 2025; UK Government, 2025), and BDT could be a priority area. By leveraging the distinctive expertise and resources of

different countries as well as the diversified strength of universities, research institutes and talent around the world, the innovation and impact of BDT could be greatly enhanced.

The ‘big data’ challenge (Partida, 2025) requires more collaborative and networked approaches to overcome obstacles in data collection, management, integration and application to achieve conservation goals. Existing biodiversity data platforms remain fragmented, constrained by limitations in data integration and accessibility (Sustainability Directory, 2025) and characterised by uneven spatial, temporal and taxonomic coverage (Barreiro et al., 2025). The establishment of a large-scale and integrated data platform would facilitate exchange and cooperation in data sharing while enhancing research and monitoring globally (Li, 2025). China could support the co-construction of this platform by leveraging its technological capacity and extensive data resources.

The sharing of digital technology has been a component of the BRI and South–South cooperation. Through the BRI Digital Silk Road, China extends its technological expertise to developing countries, enhancing their digital connectivity and technology. In addition to the building of digital infrastructure like fibreoptic networks which creates a solid foundation for further digital development, China has also shown its willingness to share high-end digital technology like AI (Goh, 2025), satellite monitoring (Martinez, 2025) and digital modelling (Li, 2024) with developing countries that are in urgent need of technological solutions to advance their biodiversity efforts, such as safeguarding rainforests and wildlife. The Digital Belt and Road Program, initiated by Chinese scientists in 2016, supports the development of a platform to share expertise, knowledge, technologies and data with participating countries to address global challenges, including environmental problems (Guo et al., 2018). Capacity-building activities have also been implemented through the BRI, such as the organisation of training programmes and the establishment of technology transfer centres and joint research laboratories (*Global Times*, 2025).

China’s leading tech firms have a critical role to play in enlarging the reach and scope of digital technology to global biodiversity efforts. For example, with its TECH4ALL initiative, Chinese tech giant Huawei collaborates with partners on biodiversity conservation projects around the world, including in Europe, South America and Southeast Asia (Li, 2024). The Tech4Nature global partnership, jointly launched by Huawei and the International Union for Conservation of Nature, has so far supported 11 flagship projects in eight countries, including initiatives such as jaguar monitoring and protection in Mexico and coral reef restoration and monitoring in Mauritius, delivering tailored technological solutions to conservation challenges (International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2025; Huawei, 2026).

To leverage digital technology in support of achieving global biodiversity goals, collaborative efforts between governments, international organisations, research institutes, non-governmental organisations and tech companies are necessary. Research shows broad consensus among multiple stakeholder groups that the contribution of resources and expertise by digital technology organisations to fill the technological skills gap can be even more valuable than project funding (Wilson, 2020). From the protection of tropical rainforests to the preservation of endangered wildlife across the globe, more and more Chinese tech companies could engage in or lead biodiversity initiatives, making digital solutions more accessible to countries in need, and more impactful for global biodiversity action.

Advancing financial mechanisms to support the GBF’s implementation in developing countries

The Kunming Biodiversity Fund

With the establishment of the New Development Bank, the AIIB, and more recently the KBF, China has become a leader in international development and environmental finance. The KBF represents China’s big move from the traditional donation-based approach to a multilateral environmental fund (Ma, 2024). Its governance structure and operation mode will not only

influence biodiversity conservation efforts in the Global South, but could also diversify the landscape of global environmental finance (ibid.).

The KBF may serve as a mechanism to help mobilise significant financial resources to support the implementation of the GBF. So far, except for China, which allocated 1.5 billion yuan (US\$212 million) to seed the fund, no other contributor has been involved. China could further enhance its efforts to attract contributions to the KBF from various public and private sources. Boosting the confidence of potential new donors and involving them in the deliberation process are essential to ensure the abundance and sustainability of this new international environmental fund.

Frustrated by governance and access issues with the current multilateral financial mechanisms, developing countries have long advocated for reform of the existing system and sought alternatives. China's role in guiding the KBF is vital, particularly in the initial years of its operationalisation, to ensure the efficiency, accessibility and transparency of its management and operation mechanism. By closely supporting the needs of the Global South, and providing more timely and high-quality financing, the KBF could contribute greatly to developing countries' ability to implement the GBF.

In three years, the KBF has transitioned from a proposed new fund to a fully operational Multi-Partner Trust Fund. In October 2025, the KBF announced the endorsement of 22 projects as its first full-size projects, which will support 34 countries across all regions to fulfil global biodiversity commitments (UNEP, 2025). Astrid Schomaker, Executive Secretary of the CBD, stated that "the endorsement of these first full-size projects represents a significant step in implementation of the [GBF] ..." (ibid.).

The KBF seeks to add value by complementing existing biodiversity funds and contributing to comprehensive efforts to reverse biodiversity loss and implement the GBF. The fast approval process and the well-designed, small-scale projects reflect the KBF's flexibility and uniqueness. However, some academics have suggested that the KBF should "take the grassroots community as the project unit and adopt a 'bottom-up' distributed projects expansion path" to enhance accessibility and ensure complementarity (Chen and Xu, 2022: i). The projects listed on the Fund's official website are largely large-scale, multilateral projects implemented by UN agencies or national governments, though many include components aimed at community engagement, local capacity building or Indigenous rights (UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, 2026). China has a role to play in extending the KBF's outreach by ensuring more diverse subnational- and local-level projects are on its funding list.

To maximise the KBF's biodiversity impact, China could seek to collaborate with other financial mechanisms such as the GBFF, which share the same purpose in providing support to developing countries to accelerate implementation of the GBF (Zhang et al., 2025). Furthermore, China could support the KBF to fully utilise its strength by serving as a platform for international exchange and cooperation on biodiversity conservation.

Debt-for-nature swaps as a complementary funding tool

Originated in 1984 in response to both the heavy debt burden and environmental degradation in developing countries (Buckley and Freeland, 2011), debt-for-nature swaps (DNS) have regained popularity in recent years (Simeth, 2025). As an innovative financing model, DNS offer developing countries an opportunity to protect nature while avoiding being involved in a sovereign debt crisis. In return for reducing a developing country's debt burden, the creditor requests their commitment to invest a portion of the relief provided in nature conservation.

As many developing countries are crippled with the burden of debt and a lack resources to protect nature while also needing to address other development priorities, the opportunity to use DNS to tackle the challenge has never been greater or more urgent. Annalena Baerbock, President of the UNGA, noted that with developing nations' debt reaching US\$31 trillion in 2024, scarce financial resources have been increasingly absorbed by debt repayments, leaving little fiscal space for other initiatives (*The Diplomatic Insight*, 2025). In response to the challenge, analysis by the

International Institute for Environment and Development (2024) has suggested that DNS could release up to US\$100 billion to help countries restore nature and adapt to climate change.

Surpassing the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and Paris Club countries, China is now the largest creditor to developing countries (Jiang, 2025). In 2025, the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries owed a total of US\$22 billion to China, mostly as loans issued under the BRI (Duke, 2025). China's overseas lending landscape is also diversified geographically, extending to multiple continents (Jiang, 2025). This position as a major creditor to numerous developing countries provides China with an opportunity to contribute to the implementation of DNS.

By applying DNS, China could restructure its current debt with countries that commit to agreed conservation actions, preventing it from being trapped with unpaid debts while supporting other countries' biodiversity efforts and green development. The application of DNS could also serve as a powerful response to concerns about China's lending, including allegations of 'debt-trap diplomacy' that have been levelled against the nation (Nishizawa, 2025), and "would be a new chapter in China's approach for building a green Belt and Road Initiative" (Yue and Nedopil Wang, 2021: 16). By actively engaging in DNS, China could take a lead in creating a win-win solution for the global debt crisis and global environmental governance.

Promoting implementation of the GBF through diplomatic efforts

Strengthening the momentum of global biodiversity action

The adoption of ambitious global goals and targets for biodiversity conservation is a significant opportunity, but the implementation process is complex and challenging, requiring a constant driving force as well as a focused and concerted effort from all parties, organisations and stakeholders. Importantly, the GBF is not a legally binding agreement, and does not include a mandatory ratcheting mechanism, such as the one within the Paris Agreement, which would ensure actions to deal with biodiversity loss become progressively more ambitious over time. As a result, an increase in political will, engagement level and public awareness is essential for the successful implementation of the new global biodiversity deal.

The various multilateral forums are where China can exert its diplomacy efforts to make biodiversity a global priority and strengthen the political will of governments. In addition to UN high-level biodiversity events, many other important UN meetings, forums and occasions such as the UNGA conference, the meeting of UN Environment Assembly, and numerous UN and international days, are platforms where China could play a significant role in drawing attention to the nature crisis and advocating for global biodiversity efforts.

Rather than being a separate or isolated issue, biodiversity is closely linked to various aspects of social life and well-being, including health, education and cultural heritage. This interconnectedness means diplomacy efforts are not necessarily limited to the environment, but can extend to other areas. China could collaborate with agencies and organisations such as the World Health Organization, UN Food and Agriculture Organization and UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, to strengthen momentum for global biodiversity actions.

The G20 is another important international platform through which China could deepen its diplomatic efforts to support the implementation of the GBF. As the main global forum for economic cooperation, the G20 bears significant responsibility for promoting global sustainable development and addressing environmental challenges. The Annual Leaders' Summit, joined by heads of state and government, is an ideal space for shaping priorities and building political consensus on biodiversity conservation. In 2024, the G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration restated member countries' dedication to "the swift, full, and effective implementation of the [GBF] ... and encourage other countries to do the same" (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2025b). China could use its position to call for continuous commitment to and practical action for biodiversity conservation among the G20 members. The Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate and the Working Group on Environmental and Climate Sustainability

are also appropriate forums where China could enhance cooperation between G20 countries and drive concrete and innovative solutions to biodiversity challenges.

Biodiversity conservation is a collective effort and should be driven by the knowledge, passion and actions of people from all backgrounds. To enhance engagement, China could establish a group of biodiversity ambassadors with diversified backgrounds, from government, business, civil society, academia and youth, to foster collaboration, share knowledge and promote various initiatives in different global settings and at different levels, empowering more people to join global biodiversity efforts.

Effective communication, education and awareness-building are fundamental for garnering public support, encouraging participation and driving action at all levels. Both the Aichi Targets and the GBF emphasise the role of public education and awareness dissemination. However, current communication on environmental challenges frequently foregrounds scientific complexity and severe impacts, leading to a sense of 'doom' among audiences (Andrade, 2024). People in need of biodiversity information are diverse and not limited to those in academia. And while knowing about disasters that are ongoing or are likely to happen might be helpful in enabling our understanding of the seriousness of the threat and the urgency of acting, it is not necessarily the best way to drive motivation and action.

China could contribute a powerful, positive voice to current narratives on biodiversity challenges. It has made significant progress in improving public awareness about environmental issues, from pollution and climate change to biodiversity loss. In recent years, the concept of biodiversity has become popular in China (English-Language Website of China News Service, 2023), shaped by the influence of the 'two mountains' theory, the 'ecological civilisation' vision, and the 'Beautiful China' initiative. The number of internet searches on Chinese search engines like Baidu with 'biodiversity' or 'protected area' as keywords has increased rapidly since 2012, when China launched the initiative to build an ecological civilisation (Wang et al., 2020). China's stories of successfully addressing biodiversity loss are critical for introducing concrete solutions as well as shifting beliefs, building confidence and amplifying actions. By disseminating hopeful messages to the international community and sharing its experience and initiatives with the world, China could be a catalyst for positive change and a source of strength in the global fight against nature loss.

Fostering a cooperative spirit

Tensions have long existed between developing and developed countries on how to address global environmental challenges. Revolving around the question of finance, a crisis of trust between the Global South and the Global North has been growing, which significantly hinders effective global cooperation for dealing with pressing environmental issues.

From Nairobi and Montreal to Cali and Rome, the dispute over a new global biodiversity fund has dominated difficult negotiations. Developing countries have urged the creation of a new 'bank account' to distribute nature finance, to be controlled by the Biodiversity COP. Developed countries have argued for maintaining the existing fund, housed under the GEF. At the resumed session of Biodiversity COP16 in Rome in February 2025, parties moved a step forward by agreeing to establish a permanent financial mechanism under the authority of the Biodiversity COP to support developing countries. However, the text leaves open the question of the form that the fund will take — it could be a brand-new fund, or an existing fund that has been reformed.

China has played a critical role in bridging the gap between developed and developing countries in global climate and biodiversity negotiations, and has actively pushed for more equitable and just global governance. China could play a part in advancing the new funding mechanism that has been agreed in principle but it needs further defining and operationalising. By promoting a more accessible, efficient and inclusive international financial mechanism, China could contribute greatly to bridging the global biodiversity finance gap.

In addition, the global pledge of US\$20 billion per year of biodiversity finance by 2025 has not been fulfilled. As described above, the first GBF deadline for submission of NBSAPs was missed by

most of the parties, and a subsequent deadline for international funding has also now passed unmet, further undermining a culture of observance. Whether the US\$20 billion promise can be fulfilled is critical to the relationship between developing and developed countries as well as the successful implementation of the GBF. By urging richer countries to honour their pledge under the accord, providing financial aid to poorer countries in a timely manner, China could play a significant role in building trust between developed and developing countries and strengthening confidence in global biodiversity efforts.

Coalition building and joint leadership

Enhancing BRICS's focus on biodiversity

BRICS, as a group, has great potential to play a key role in addressing global biodiversity challenges. The BRICS nations are home to vast ecosystems and abundant natural resources, with members including Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, and South Africa ranking among the world's most biodiverse countries. BRICS members represent diverse economies, political systems, environmental contexts and geopolitical interests, while also facing a variety of serious ecological threats, together making their alliance and collaboration "essential in achieving equitable and sustainable environmental outcomes" (Igarapé Institute, 2025a). As the BRICS alliance continues to expand, its influence on global environmental governance will continue to grow (ibid.).

Since the topic of biodiversity was first mentioned in the 2011 Summit Declaration, it has received increasing attention within the group. Internal cooperation on biodiversity issues has accelerated, and at the same time, BRICS countries have increasingly sought to present a concerted voice at international biodiversity negotiations. As a group united by the shared goal of enhancing the influence of the Global South in international affairs and achieving a more inclusive and equitable global order, BRICS is well positioned to promote fair and ambitious solutions to the biodiversity crisis.

A recent report issued by the Igarapé Institute suggests biodiversity-rich countries, including China, should continue championing this agenda by integrating it with climate change and sustainable development efforts (Igarapé Institute, 2025b). Similarly, considering China's growing influence within BRICS, it could promote a robust unified BRICS in UN biodiversity negotiation processes and on other platforms, and lead more intensified internal exchanges and cooperation on biodiversity issues. The Igarapé Institute report also emphasises the significant role that the New Development Bank plays in the agenda of biodiversity protection. China was pivotal in establishing the Bank and is its host country. It could leverage its leadership role to further prioritise sustainability and resilience in the Bank's funding decisions, and support its collaboration with other international financial institutions to co-finance ecological transition in developing countries while contributing to the UN SDGs.

At the 17th BRICS Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in July 2025, the group's leaders expressed their support for the Tropical Forest Forever Fund (TFFF), an initiative led by Brazil which aims to provide countries with tropical forests in the long-term and large-scale payments for preserving and expanding forest cover (COP30, 2025a). The TFFF has the potential to become one of the world's largest multilateral funds, with more than 70 developing countries with tropical forests eligible to receive funds from it (COP30, 2025b). In September 2025, China expressed its endorsement for this proposal, an action which was observed as "lending weight" and "injecting fresh momentum" to this flagship fund (Patrick, 2025). The Fund was officially launched at Climate COP30 and attracted lots of attention; however, only US\$6.7 billion in sponsor capital was secured which is far from the US\$25 billion target that the Fund aims to raise as its initial base (Ruas, 2025). BRICS countries could enhance their cooperation and make full use of their collective strength to promote this Global South initiative. And China could play an active role in helping shape this new mechanism and calling for support and contributions from other countries.

A coalition of megadiverse countries

The Group of Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries (LMMC) was launched in Mexico in 2002 as a mechanism for consultation and cooperation to promote the interests and priorities of megadiverse countries relating to the preservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Twenty developing countries hold 70% of global biodiversity (LMMC, 2024), which means a disproportionate political responsibility and burden for conservation and biodiversity management rests on the shoulders of a small number of countries. Since the group's inception, this small number of megadiverse countries have coordinated their positions and undertaken joint efforts to address the challenges to implementation of the CBD (Teixeira, 2010). However, the influence of megadiverse countries in international biodiversity negotiations and their potential to drive biodiversity solutions have not yet been fully realised.

These countries could gain inspiration from the Small Island Developing States (SIDs), which are on the frontline of climate change and have evolved as leaders in climate change negotiations. Through various negotiating platforms, including the G77 and the High Ambition Coalition, SIDs have driven ambitious commitment and urgent important global climate action (UN Development Program [UNDP], 2024). Among their achievements are the establishment of a loss-and-damage fund, the 1.5°C target in the Paris Agreement, and the historic UN Resolution requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the legal consequence of the failure to address the climate emergency by polluting states (ibid.). The LMMC can learn from the SIDs' experience to amplify their collective strength in biodiversity advocacy. China could emerge as a leader within the group, to make it a coordinated coalition of developing countries pushing together towards the best possible solution for nature.

At a domestic level, megadiverse countries should strive to accelerate action to implement the GBF. Their conservation policies and efforts are significant as scientists say that the effectiveness of the 30x30 target for reversing the loss of nature is grounded in the progress achieved in protecting the areas of the planet with the most biodiversity (Greenfield et al., 2025). Internally, deepening collaborations among the 20 parties, through knowledge-exchange, joint research projects and technology cooperation, is essential. Internationally, the megadiverse group should actively amplify its voice in global biodiversity negotiations. Through the forums of COP, UN processes and other negotiating blocs, megadiverse countries could use their collective strength to advocate for more ambitious biodiversity plans, secure biodiversity finance, request technology transfer, and call for a more inclusive, effective and transparent international financial system with an elevated share for biodiversity in the overall environmental finance landscape.

China–EU joint leadership

China and the EU are two major forces advocating for multilateralism, supporting globalisation and promoting sustainable development. As the world's two largest economies, and the largest developing country and largest bloc of developed countries, China and the EU have a big opportunity and responsibility to jointly lead global efforts in response to pressing environmental challenges.

Cooperation between China and the EU on the environment and climate dates back to the 1990s. Over the past three decades, cooperation between the two sides has evolved from a development assistance relationship to a green partnership, and the cooperation mode has extended from ad hoc initiatives to high-level institutionalised mechanisms, and from dialogue and exchanges to concrete practical cooperation in various areas (Research Centre for Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization et al., 2024).

In June 2025, China and the EU renewed their commitment to environmental cooperation during the 10th Environment Policy Ministerial Dialogue which took place in Brussels (State Council of China, 2025d). Biodiversity conservation and the implementation of the GBF were the key areas of focus in the dialogue. One month later, in July 2025, the 25th China–EU Summit took place in Beijing, during which the two sides agreed to “demonstrate leadership” to address climate challenges and emphasised that “green is the defining color of China–EU cooperation” (Hancock

and Mooney, 2025). Biodiversity was also highlighted as a key theme of the Summit (CGTN, 2025b).

China and the EU are both important actors for biodiversity conservation and should collaborate as joint leaders in global biodiversity governance. In July 2023, at the Fourth China-EU High-Level Environment and Climate Dialogue, both sides pledged to take swift action to implement the GBF, at home and across the globe (European Commission, 2023). There are opportunities for cooperation between China and the EU to promote biodiversity conservation, from policy exchanges to technology innovation. China and the EU's cooperation can also be extended to cover other developing countries, the so-called 'China-EU+' cooperation model. At the 61st Munich Security Conference in February 2025, the Chinese Foreign Minister stated that "China is willing to synergize high-quality Belt and Road cooperation with the [EU]'s Global Gateway strategy", two initiatives with the shared priority of promoting long-term development and connectivity, "so as to empower each other and empower the entire world" (Wang Y, 2025).

Though there are still challenges such as geopolitical issues and divergent views on trade, the environment is a common and safe ground as well as a powerful engine for China-EU cooperation. Building on the momentum generated during 2025, the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the EU, there is significant potential for leaders to strengthen that bilateral relationship and jointly fill the leadership void in global environmental governance. China and the EU should maintain strong political momentum in international biodiversity action and collaborate to accelerate the implementation of the GBF.

5. Conclusion

The adoption of the ambitious global goals of the GBF by the international community is a great achievement and is important for international environmental governance. However, implementation of these goals is extremely challenging. The 30x30 biodiversity goal is far from being met; similarly, connected targets including the 1.5°C climate goal and the 17 SDGs are significantly off-track. Current commitments and action are falling short, while an increasingly divided world further complicates global efforts to address environmental threats and build resilient development.

Faced with various constraints hindering progress on biodiversity goals, there is growing fear of another decade of global failure on nature. As the world seeks new leaders to address global environmental crises, there is an opportunity for China to fill the leadership gap, in line with its vision of a global ecological civilisation and its responsibility as a great power.

With ambitious commitments, effective policy mechanisms and an advantage in the field of green energy, China has already demonstrated leadership in the global fight against climate change. Biodiversity deserves the same focus and is another area where China could take the lead and enhance its position in international environmental governance.

As a 'great power' in biodiversity, China possesses vast potential to contribute meaningfully to global biodiversity conservation efforts. Following the adoption of the GBF, China has actively translated the global commitments into national action, achieving outstanding tangible outcomes. By maintaining the strong momentum and progress in the national implementation of the GBF, China could set a powerful example and serve as a key catalyst for its broader implementation worldwide.

By prioritising biodiversity conservation in the development of a green BRI, China could make a significant contribution to the GBF's global implementation and demonstrate a model where environmental protection and sustainable development reinforce each other.

With its broad experience and innovative policy ideas in biodiversity conservation as well as its leading position in developing cutting-edge technology, China could further enhance knowledge exchange and technology cooperation globally, to help shape practical and scalable solutions for halting and reversing biodiversity loss.

As a leading provider of funds and a major global creditor, China also has the opportunity to elevate the ambition and awareness of recipient countries on biodiversity conservation and support their efforts in the implementation of the GBF.

Given China's growing global role, it has the capacity to exercise leadership through international biodiversity diplomacy to strengthen the global momentum for biodiversity action and to foster intensified cooperation on fulfilling the global biodiversity goals.

With only a short time left to avert a biodiversity crisis, the need to accelerate conservation efforts has never been more urgent. As China makes progress in its construction of a 'Beautiful China', and with achievements from its Biodiversity COP15 presidency alongside establishment of the KBF and the launch of the Action Initiative of the GBF, it is well positioned to leverage its environmental power to help shape a 'Beautiful World' and a nature-positive future.

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