

Economic policies: a key influencer to biodiversity

Author: Huang Qihan

Abstract:

Today's economic policies are at the cost of nature and biodiversity. All nature conservation efforts combined cannot offset the damage to biodiversity caused by unwise economic policies. The article suggests that biodiversity should be mainstreamed to all national policies and standards.

Key words:

Ecological civilization, economic policies, wetland park, forest-based health and wellness bases, over-packing, industrialized forestation, environmental public good litigation, people's participation

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Recently, Dr. Zhou Jinfeng, Deputy Director-General and Secretary-General of China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation (CBCGDF) shared his view of economic policies and its influence on biodiversity on a high-level closed-door policy advisory seminar. He said that today's economic policies are at the cost of nature and biodiversity. All nature conservation efforts combined cannot offset the damage to biodiversity caused by unwise economic policies. He suggested that biodiversity should be mainstreamed to all national policies and standards.

Profit-driven capitalism featured by industrial civilization set the unsustainable development mode in human society for over 200 years. The overuse of natural resources has put all life on earth into current desperate situation. Fortunately, most countries in the world are now aware of this emergency. Active actions worldwide are taken to protect the future of mankind.

Dr. Zhou gave many vivid examples and hands-on experiences on how economic policies had greatly influenced biodiversity.

“In China, some economic policies were made without even taking biodiversity into account.” he said, “For example, a new national pest-control policy was launched without mentioning biodiversity conservation.” He also pointed out that, many economic policies with the intention to prevent biodiversity loss had achieved exactly the opposite results in the end.

We often overemphasize endangered species in environmental impact assessment, while the value of wilderness is completely ignored. One example is when Beijing planned to build the Nanyuan Wetlands Forest Park to conserve biodiversity, a team

of scientists was rush into doing an EIA (environmental impact assessment) statement. Naturally the result is a hasty conclusion that there was no endangered species in this area and therefore all original plants could be removed for the new park's sake. What missing in the EIA report was that the original natural and wild status showcased exactly the meaning of biodiversity. According to the observation by volunteers, over 40 species of birds used to live in this wasteland before the park was built. However, only a few species left in the big and fancy new wetland park.

Another example is the forest-based health and wellness bases in China, which created a very popular industry attracting large flow of capital, prioritizing forest resource utilization rather than environmental protection and could damage the forest in a shocking way. Let's take the List of National Forest Health Bases (the first batch) published in March 2020 as an example. In the documents issued by the four ministries and committees about the construction of forest health and wellness bases, the protection of forest and ecosystem is not considered at all, although the documents claimed to be closely related to forest, wildlife and habitat protection. The main body of project recommendation and review is the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, without effective supervision mechanism.

Behind economic policies are the battle for interests among various stakeholders. The case of Xinghualou Group's mooncake over-packaging is a vivid example. Mooncake over-packaging is prevailing in China, while all the reports from market regulation department showed that these packaging were qualified. Because the assessing standard on over-packaging was wrong – the national standards was developed exclusively by food enterprises and investors together without negotiation with third-party evaluation authorities and NGOs.

Profit-driven tendency leads to construction of aquariums in cities lacking water resources, not to mention how many illegal trades of wild animals they have bred. Driven by commercial interests, the aquarium industry is more likely to fuel illegal wildlife trade. In 2019, CBCGDF followed up with the news that among the 10 captive spotted seals (*Phoca largha*), 6 were captivated by the Spotted Seals Aquarium of Pigeon Nest Park in Qinhuangdao. The owner claimed the new cubs did not violate any law, but CBCGDF doubt its legitimacy. Therefore, CBCGDF continued to investigate as well as wrote to relevant departments to ask for thorough investigation and verification. It was finally confirmed that 4 of the 6 seal pups were illegally captured from Liaoning province. Another example is that the shocking poaching case of 100 spotted seal cubs in Dalian in 2019, of which 2/3 died when police arrived in the spot. Later, the investigating authorities confirmed that the illegal poaching case was driven by market demand of the aquariums.

People's participation and NGOs' roles are getting more important in biodiversity conservation. Taking CBCGDF as an example, lots of work has been done to push forward the evolution in environmental policies and the seeds of good deeds have been planted. As the plastic pollution becoming a global environmental challenge

facing our times, CBCGDF once received a complaint from parents that many schools forced their students to wrap their new textbooks with plastic book covers. If they don't follow the rules, children will be criticized or even be punished. CBCGDF communicated the harm of plastic pollution with the Ministry of Education of the PRC, suggesting authoritative department to issue a new policy to prohibit schools from forcing primary and secondary school students to use plastic book wraps. A month later, China's four ministries and commissions joined hands and issued an unprecedented new Plastic-free School Season Regulation Policy.

Now CBCGDF is introducing ecological civilization into production. In the past 6 years, over 183 CCAfas (Community Conservation Areas) across the country have been established. BCON (Biodiversity Conservation in Our Neighborhood) as a novel idea proposed by Dr.Zhou has been introduced to many places in China and has achieved fruitful results.

The revised Environmental Protection Law of the PRC (effective in 2015) allows NGOs to file environmental public interest litigation (EPIL), which is a great step forward. All EPIL litigation cases CBCGDF filed were widely known by the public. No matter what the outcome it achieves, the process itself is a very good awareness promotion to the general public. More NGOs should get involved in and contribute to environment protection. Together, real change can be made.