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## **Abstract**

Governance architectures that take the form networks and public-private partnerships are often seen as carriers of neoliberal norms of governance. When they are applied to new drivers in global governance, for instance China, gaps become manifest between norms and institutions of global governance and those found in the domestic context. It seems unlikely, for instance, that the Chinese authoritarian state context would not to some extent defy certain norms in global governance. First, some norms in global governance were defined when China was a relatively weak player (a second-mover) in global governance; second, China has become more important as a driver in global governance helping to shape and sometimes defying global governance norms. This raises the question how the partnerships, that find their origin in global governance, are accommodated to the Chinese context. Do partnerships constitute a new form of partnership governance, specifically: governance through partnerships between civil society, enterprises, science, and government agencies. Rather than a particular form of organization, partnership governance refers to a generalized pattern of governance where these actors associate and dissociate continuously as they rely on each other's resources (reputation, funds, knowledge, authority, et cetera).

The empirical focus is on the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), a global biodiversity conservation program supported by international organizations, NGOs and some governments. The CEPF challenges established political norms and institutions in China. It promotes independent civil society partnerships as the backbone of biodiversity governance; even when state dominance and state control over civil society persists. Quantitative and qualitative data (obtained from the CEPF, documents and observers of the CEPF) are analysed to consider to which extent CEPF's global approach has been accommodated to the Chinese context; which are the financial and participatory implications of CEPF's accommodated approach; and whether and how CEPF introduced partnership governance in China's biodiversity conservation by fostering new dependencies between different state and non-state actors.

## **Keywords**

Biodiversity; China; governance; partnerships

### **1. Introduction**

The concurrence of China's biodiversity richness and a high rate of biodiversity loss make conservation particularly urgent. The Chinese government has responded with legislation, regulations, and policies (Xu, Wang, and Xue 1999; Liu et al. 2003). Administrative efforts seem to have paid off in terms of protected area. In 1991 638 nature reserves had been established amounting to an area of approximately 550,500 km<sup>2</sup>, or 5.7% of the total area of the PRC (Xu and Giles 1995, 20). By the end of 2007 2,531 protected areas had been established accounting for 1.52 million km<sup>2</sup> or 15.2% of China's territory (Yu 2010b). In spite of the development of a "relatively sound domestic legislation framework" (Xu, Wang, and Xue 1999, 820), and the growth of area

under protection, biodiversity continues to decline (Xu, Ding, and Wu 2012). The discrepancy between a growing body of formal conservation policies and the practice of continued loss of habitat and biodiversity indicates that state mandated policies alone are not sufficient to ensure better conservation outcomes. While organisations of the state continue to fulfil a central role in devising policies and strategies, a number of short-comings of a traditional top-down approach to biodiversity conservation have been described in scholarly literature: local stakeholders and local officials often do not have the incentive to implement central policies (McBeath and McBeath † 2006); institutions lack credibility (Ho 2006); too few resources are made available for park management (Liu et al. 2003), etc. This results into a 'low governance environment' (Yu 2010a): while policies and nature reserve systems exist on paper, policing and enforcement systems are ill equipped. Rather than devising more policies and legislation, new governance mechanisms are reconsidered that reassess the role of government and other stakeholders and that leverage new (non-state) resources.

In this chapter I investigate 'partnership governance', specifically governance through partnerships between civil society, enterprises, science, and government agencies. Partnership governance can be contrasted with generally predominant Chinese approaches where a state agency monopolizes policy areas in a top-down manner (Saich 2001; Lieberthal 1995). The emerging use of partnerships in governance is not unique. In global governance public-private partnerships have been promoted as implementation mechanisms to achieve sustainable development (Biermann et al. 2012). Partnerships in global governance have been seen as a 'Trojan horse' of neoliberalism (Miraftab 2004) as they allegedly introduce privatization, and remove government responsibilities in developing countries. However, the role of national governments and non-governmental organizations in this process cannot be disregarded (Chan 2009). Partnerships may often be seen as carriers of Western norms of governance, but when they are applied to the context of developing and emerging countries they do not necessarily lead to Westernized governance. The westernizing effect of partnerships partly will depend on a country's position in global governance. The position of China in global environmental governance is definitely one of a latecomer. Institutional first movers (Hinich and Munger 1996) – in particular the US and Europe – have largely defined the international system by the time the People's Republic made its entrance onto the world political stage in the early 1970s. However, China has also become defiant with regard to the international system as a driver (Kaplinsky and Messner 2008; Messner and Humphrey 2006). It seems unlikely that China as an authoritarian driver in global governance (Messner and Humphrey 2006) would simply submit to partnerships and allow an open challenge to the predominant role of the state. This does not necessarily mean that the Chinese government will redefine partnerships; rather transnational partnerships that want to operate in China will probably have to accept norms and institutions in China, for instance limitations to civil society and political organization. While partnerships accommodate to the Chinese context, partnership governance represents a significant departure from more traditional statist approaches. According to some scholars, partnerships promise greater effectiveness in implementation (Haas 2004), and, a certain kind of democratization ('incremental democratization') (Yu 2010a). By distinguishing 'partnerships' as a form of organization (e.g. Brinkerhoff 2002) from 'partnership governance', I emphasize that partnerships are not merely more or less fixed constellations of two or more parties pooling resources and creating 'win-win' situations. Instead, building partnerships has become a mode of governance involving multiple partners (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998), where government and transnational actors collaborate to

achieve common goals. Therefore partnership governance does not refer to a particular organization, much less the 'governance of a partnership'. Rather, in partnership governance actors associate and dissociate continuously as they rely on each other's resources (reputation, funds, knowledge, authority, et cetera).

The empirical focus of this chapter is on the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), a global biodiversity conservation program supported by international organizations, NGOs and some governments. CEPF's global approach to biodiversity conservation would seem to challenge established political norms and institutions in China. CEPF's biogeographic focus seems to ignore China's political geography, and CEPF's emphasis on independent civil society alliances seems to be at odds with constraints on Chinese civil society. This raises the question how the CEPF has rendered itself acceptable in China. The CEPF had to adapt its global approach and reformulate it for its China operations. Moreover, as one of the earliest transnational partnerships in China's biodiversity governance, CEPF has influenced some features of partnership governance in China, in particular: which partners are included, which type of actors is empowered, and which methodologies are employed.

To understand this process of the accommodation of CEPF's partnership approach to China, this chapter follows the local application of the global approach, and assesses CEPF's impact on China's biodiversity governance. Two research strategies were combined, one consisting of interviews with stakeholders at different locations, and one consisting of quantitative analysis of data. Interviews were held at the UN Headquarters during two consecutive sessions of the Commission for Sustainable Development, at the World Bank and at Conservation International headquarters. In China, interviews were held at project sites in Yunnan province, Conservation International (CI) in China and at Shanshui Conservation Center. Secondly, financial data and data about participation was analysed from reports<sup>1</sup> which are available on CEPF's website. This chapter proceeds to discuss CEPF's global approach to biodiversity governance, focusing on the explicit aims of the CEPF, and how the CEPF sees itself as distinct from other biodiversity governance approaches. Subsequently the discussion turns to CEPF's activities in China, in particular how the local approach diverged from the global approach. The remainder of the paper discusses CEPF's influence on biodiversity governance in China (beyond the initial CEPF activities), and describes how the CEPF fits into a wider application of partnership governance in China. The conclusion summarizes and discusses the opportunities and limitations of partnership governance in China.

## **2. CEPF's global approach**

The word partnership is relevant to the CEPF at many levels. Established in 2000, CEPF is a partnership – in an organizational sense – between the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the McArthur Foundation, Conservation International (CI) and the governments of Japan and France, it is a “partnership from the top down, (...) six donors came together to support one program”<sup>2</sup>. CEPF's global partnership is matched by a global organization. The managing team of the CEPF is conveniently located in Arlington, at the headquarters of Conservation International (CEPF's

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<sup>1</sup> Reports were in Chinese or English.

<sup>2</sup> Interview John Watkin 11-02-2008, Conservation International, Arlington, VA

administrating partner), a stone throw away from its major partners, the US government<sup>3</sup>, the GEF, and the World Bank. Major decisions are taken by the Donor Council consisting of prominent members of partner organizations. The CEPF team in Arlington should ensure that the CEPF approach is consistently applied across more than 20 biodiversity hotspots worldwide, that funds are allocated to civil society led projects, and that implementation of activities level are consistent with investment strategies (so-called 'biodiversity hotspot profiles') approved by the Donor Council. In 2002 CEPF became registered as a 'Partnership for Sustainable Development' during the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. These partnerships were defined as tools to implement internationally agreed accords, such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Convention on Biodiversity (see e.g.:Biermann et al. 2012; Bäckstrand 2006; Kara and Quarless 2002). Finally, CEPF also wants to introduce partnerships: "We have partnership in our title, and that is our (...) way of implementing"<sup>4</sup>. By building civil society alliances locally the CEPF wants to provide a governance solution in the face of lagging implementation and poor outcomes of international environmental agreements. While these different notions of partnership are quite different, they share the basic premise that effective biodiversity conservation requires the joint effort and pooling of resources by multiple actors at every level of governance, from the global to the local. Therefore, the CEP "fosters many layers of partnership"<sup>5</sup>. Especially the lowest layer of partnerships, local civil society partnerships, CEPF regards as its ultimate goal; 'a revolution in conservation' (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) 2010).

The basic tenets of CEPF's global approach are geographic prioritization and empowerment of local civil society.

## 2.1 Geographic prioritization

CEPFs ultimate aim is to protect large swaths of biologically rich systems around the world, by providing "strategic assistance to nongovernmental organizations and other private sector partners to help conserve biodiversity hotspots, Earth's biologically richest and most threatened regions"(Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) 2009). Interestingly, the CEPF does not emphasize political geography; instead of countries, CEPF refers to biodiversity hotspots. Biodiversity hotspots are scientifically and bio-geographically prioritized regional entities. They were defined through profiling on the basis of biogeographic characteristics. Originally introduced in the early 1980s (Odum and Cooley 1980), profiling consisted of an assessment of ecosystem properties before a project is initiated, and a similar assessment afterwards, in order to determine impacts on the ecosystem. The first list of biodiversity hotspots was suggested in 1988, consisting of ten tropical forest areas with 'exceptionally high levels of endemism' which 'face exceptional degrees of threat' (Myers 1988). Myers' initial listing relied on basic data such as the number of vascular plant species, the level of plant endemism, as well as personal experience. The list was further expanded to include Mediterranean type ecosystems (Myers 1990) using newly formulated quantitative criteria: hotspots should contain at least 1,500 vascular plants as endemics, and should have 30% or less of the

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<sup>3</sup> Although the US government is not formally listed as a partner, in practice the US treasury's consent is necessary for the GEF to agree within the Donor Council to GEF investments in the CEPF. Interview with Lauren Kelly 2008, 11-02-2008, World Bank Headquarters, Washington DC.

<sup>4</sup> Interview John Watkin 11-02-2008, Conservation International, Arlington, VA

<sup>5</sup> Interview John Watkin 11-02-2008, Conservation International, Arlington, VA

historical habitat cover. The listing remained highly arbitrary in spite of these quantitative criteria, not in the least because the size of areas was not defined until much later, when area size was limited to one million hectares (Mittermeier et al. 2003). Although not specifically mentioned as a criterion, listed hotspots were mostly areas in developing countries. According to Myers, hotspots in wealthy parts of the world, for instance Hawaii and Queensland, also face threats, but the threat does not so much stem from a lack of (financial) resources, but political unwillingness (Myers 1988). Interestingly, the singling out of areas in developing countries is the only, if implicit, political-geographic criterion in the listing of hotspots. This leads to diverging suggested approaches vis-à-vis developing an developed countries; while biodiversity protection in developed countries is assumed a function of politics, in developing countries biodiversity protection is assumed to be a function of science and (often Western) funding. This apolitical approach towards developing countries resonates discussions in governance scholarship on 'limited statehood' (Cheng and Wang 2009; Risse and Lehmkuhl 2006) and 'weak governance' (Yu 2010a) that question the legitimacy and effectiveness of developing country governments, especially where they concern non-democratic polities. Not only do these governments lack capabilities and capacities to effectively protect the environment, they are also too corrupt (Laurance 2004). Subsequently, alternative modes of governance could and should emerge to fill the functional gap in environmental protection. CEPF, which was the first to apply the hotspot profiling methodology on a large scale, seems to fit in this apolitical governance gap. While the CEPF considers government policies as part of the profiling exercise, governments are also considered as one of the (many) stakeholders, not the political sovereign (Litzinger 2006). Governments are even considered a threat as they "fail to address the causes of biodiversity loss" and government policies are "incorrectly targeted" and "incompatible" with plans and policies by other sectors<sup>6</sup>. Instead, CEPF's ecological and social mapping exercise allegedly represents a more 'rational' and 'scientific' strategic intervention in biodiversity conservation as it directs investments towards scientifically defined priorities in scientifically delimited biogeographic regions.

## 2.2 Civil society

Observed or assumed weak governance in biodiversity conservation does not necessarily lead to a strategic focus on non-governmental actors. In fact, one option to improve effectiveness of biodiversity conservations seems to be the enhancement of state capacity, for instance by fighting corruption. However, most scholars on biodiversity hotspots (Smith et al. 2001; Mittermeier et al. 1998; Dalton 2000) and CEPF seem to avoid this option, rather they emphasize the role on non-governmental actors and scientists. The participatory quality of the process is emphasized (see also: Visseren-Hamakers, Leroy, and Glasbergen 2010), however, it is a particular form of participation that largely excludes government (e.g. Litzinger 2006). The apolitical and government-avoiding framing of the biodiversity hotspot approach has led some scholars to call CEPF a neo-liberal regime (Litzinger 2006). Civil society is considered a counterforce, a private and participatory alternative to ineffective and undemocratic governments, filling legitimacy and effectiveness gaps in governance (Gemmill and Bamidele-Izu 2002). This diametrical opposition of civil society and government is illustrated by a scientist who promotes the hotspot approach because it would "introduce more

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<sup>6</sup> See e.g.:

[http://www.cepf.net/where\\_we\\_work/regions/asia\\_pacific/indo\\_burma/ecosystem\\_profile/Pages/cepf\\_niche.aspx](http://www.cepf.net/where_we_work/regions/asia_pacific/indo_burma/ecosystem_profile/Pages/cepf_niche.aspx). Accessed 20-11-2003.

reality” in conservation planning, he argues that when governments “don’t like biodiversity” civil society organizations and international donors should to “talk to the opposition” (Dalton 2000). The global CEPF approach conforms to this view in its direct appeal to civil society organizations through “coordination and collaboration with non-traditional conservation partners” (Thomsen 2005, 9). The antithetical positioning between traditional (government) and non-traditional (non-governmental) approaches is enabled by what CEPF calls ‘flexible funding’. According to Jack Tordoff, CEPF Grant Director, flexible funding “refers to the ability to deliver grant support for conservation action in a range of contexts, (...) in different political contexts”<sup>7</sup>. In operational terms, flexibility of funding means that CEPF’s partners, the World Bank and GEF in particular, channel funds through CEPF, while CEPF allocates funding to non-state actors. This funding mechanism represents a remarkable departure from regular World Bank and GEF international transactions that are directed through national treasuries. Now CEPF acts as a linking pin between these large international donors and local civil society organizations. The implication of this flexible funding mechanism is that global funding organizations circumvent the state and might even support opposition groups in developing countries.

### **3. Transposing and accommodating CEPF’s partnership approach**

The tenets of the global CEPF approach suggests that it transposes a form of governance in biodiversity conservation that avoids government as a partners, that does not allow the support of government agencies, that circumvents the state by directly funding (oppositional) civil society, and that disregards the political geography of developing countries by focussing on hotspots that crosscut national and international administrative borders. Instead, CEPF fosters civil society and private actors to substitute failing governments in biodiversity conservation. Since 2000, CEPF has implemented 20 hotspot strategies, invested in 53 countries and territories and supported 1,653 partners<sup>8</sup>. Does this imply that the CEPF has circumvented 53 governments and substituted these governments in biodiversity hotspots by transposition? Such a conclusion would imply a global applicability CEPF’s approach and the willingness on the part of governments to not only host the CEPF but also accept its ‘anti-government’ methodology. Such paradox involves the denial of politics both on the side of governments of developing countries and on the side of the CEPF. In reality, CEPF’s activities in a certain country do not rest solely on the approval of CEPF’s donor council, but also on the approval by the governments in respective hotspots. To gain this approval negotiations take place and compromises are made on the CEPF’s global approach. China seems to be a case in point, where CEPF’s operations were not so much a function of transposing of an approach, but the negotiation and the accommodation of an approach.

The application of new governance mechanisms and partnerships in China that seemingly substitute a government-heavy top-down approaches is not a new phenomenon (Cheng and Wang 2009; Chan 2009). Most observers, however, concluded that application is not a matter of transposition of ‘best-practices’, a copying of ‘successful’ approaches, rather application also assumes some degree of institutional accommodation. The questions should therefore be raised how and to which extent

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<sup>7</sup> Personal Communication. The meaning of flexible funding is not clearly defined in CEPF documents. CEPF executive director Patricia Zurita refers to the fact that grantees’ funding is conditional upon delivering conservation outcomes, therefore the funding process varies according to speed and accountability.

<sup>8</sup> CEPF (2011) Facts and Figures. CEPF at a Glance. Available at: [www.cepf.net/about\\_cepf/Pages/facts\\_figures.aspx](http://www.cepf.net/about_cepf/Pages/facts_figures.aspx), Accessed: 30-11-2012.

these government approaches are adapted to the domestic context (Chan 2009). While describing political processes in China is complicated by the obscurity a lack of transparency, close examination of CEPF operations in China and its financial allocations reveal the divergences from the global CEPF approach.

### 3.1 CEPF's accommodated approach for China

Three biodiversity hotspots identified by the CEPF are (partly) located in the People's Republic of China and have been considered for developing CEPF activities: "the Mountains of Southwest China" (MSW), "the Eastern Himalayas" and the "Indo-Burma hotspot". Only one hotspot (MSW) received government approval for CEPF investments. What made the difference? At the launch meeting of the CEPF in November 2000 "the Mountains of South-Central China", later renamed MSW, was mentioned in a list of possible hotspots for CEPF investments<sup>9</sup> and preparations were undertaken for a CEPF investment in China. Endorsement by the Chinese government only came at the end of 2002<sup>10</sup>. Approval came late for the Mountains of Southwest China hotspot, and did not come at all for the Indo-Burma and the Eastern Himalayas hotspots, according to CI, because "focal points mistakenly see CEPF as a potential threat to their national allocations"<sup>11</sup>. This indicates that the CEPF's planned operations in China were controversial and talked about at the highest political levels. Chinese government officials in their dealings with the GEF/World Bank were used to working with state partners, the direct support of transnational actors through the CEPF was something new, the CEPF partnership would delegate coordination, management and negotiations to an international NGO. Even more controversial was the possibility that GEF/World Bank funds would flow directly to civil society actors, circumventing the state. So the outlier really seems MSW. The crucial difference lies in the fact that the MSW area is almost entirely within China's boundaries, whereas in the Indo-Burma and Eastern Himalayas hotspots, only (smaller parts) of the area is under Chinese jurisdiction. This moreover, this proposal would represent a much lower investment, because it would be shared among different countries. Investments in the Indo-Burma and Eastern Himalayas hotspots would represent a much lower investment, because it would be shared among different countries. But of greater importance is the fact that CEPF's approach for the MSW could be fully accommodated to the Chinese context, since all operations would be within the Chinese jurisdiction. The MSW proposal emphasized the complementarity of its investments to existing government policies, aiming "to focus on developing conservation leadership and capacity... against the backdrop of several opportunities in China, including the 10-year logging ban and several multi-billion governmental initiatives to convert farmland into forest and reforest previously logged areas"<sup>12</sup>. Such direct link to existing government policies and investments was missing in the Indo-Burma and Eastern Himalayas hotspot proposals. Even when the central government (Ministry of Finance) agreed on CEPF's MSW investment, it underscored the (global) biodiversity outcomes of the investment rather than the governance complications "China will not only gain from, but also

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<sup>9</sup> GEF communication, between Mahamed T. El-Ashry Chief Executive Office and Chairman of the GEF and Lars Vidæus, GEF Executive Coordinator. Office Memorandum 3-4188, 7 November 2000. [http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/repository/Global\\_Critical\\_Ecosystem.pdf](http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/repository/Global_Critical_Ecosystem.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> CEPF (2002) China: Endorsement Letter for the CEPF Project Mountains of Southwest China Hotspot. Available at: [www.cepf.net/Documents/SouthwestChina\\_focal\\_point\\_endorsement.pdf](http://www.cepf.net/Documents/SouthwestChina_focal_point_endorsement.pdf). Accessed: 30-11-2012.

<sup>11</sup> Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund Thirtieth Meeting of the CEPF Working Group Conservation International, Arlington, VA. 15 November 2011, available at: [http://www.cepf.net/Documents/WG\\_Nov2011\\_Cover\\_Focal%20Point%20Endorsement.pdf](http://www.cepf.net/Documents/WG_Nov2011_Cover_Focal%20Point%20Endorsement.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Approved minutes of the Third Donor Council. Available at: [http://www.cepf.net/Documents/approved.dcmminutes\\_3rdmeeting.pdf](http://www.cepf.net/Documents/approved.dcmminutes_3rdmeeting.pdf). Retrieved: 14/02/2012.

contribute to (...) global biodiversity conservation”<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, the finally approved hotspot profile for the MSW contained several clauses that seemed to be aimed at limiting the governance complications of CEPF’s operations.

The concern over direct financing of civil society actors was addressed through strategic accommodation of the CEPF global approach with changes in definitions and procedures. CEPF China prides itself as unique since it was “the first time MOF (the Ministry of Finance, central government) has endorsed a project for a non-governmental organizations” (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund in China (CEPF China) 2003, 5). After the approval of CEPF’s China activities, however, adjustments were made to CEPF’s global approach. In particular civil society was redefined. The CEPF defines a local civil society group as “one that is legally registered in a country within the relevant hotspot and has an independent board of directors or similar type of independent governing structure” (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) 2009, 4, note 5). Under Chinese NGO regulations, NGOs need to have a dual registration, they need to be registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, moreover they need a supporting government agency, a so-called ‘popo’ (mother-in-law) (Ho 2001). Especially the latter requirement clashes with this notion of NGO independence. In fact, many registered NGOs are commonly referred to as Governmentally Organized Non-Governmental Organizations (GONGOs). Registered NGOs in China are structurally disposed towards complementarity to (central) government aims, even when some NGOs and even GONGOs have attained a greater deal of independence (Wu 2003). CEPF’s aim to construct an independent civil society alliance on the basis of registered NGOs was therefore limited by China’s regulated NGO environment. On the one hand relatively few NGOs managed to register officially (especially in the early first decade) to qualify for CEPF support. On the other hand few of the registered NGOs were sufficiently developed in terms of knowledge and resources to handle CEPF funds. In fact, in the early years of CEPF operations the Chinese NGO sector was in its infancy, and few domestic NGOs had the capacity to lead projects. CEPF simply could not get enough NGOs to submit proposals<sup>14</sup>. According to Li Zhang, CI China director, “some of the local NGOs don’t know how to write a proposal (...) even a proposal in Chinese is too difficult for them”<sup>15</sup>. Li Zhang, director of Conservation International’s China office, felt compelled to revise the definition of civil society “The problem is [that] it’s difficult for NGOs to register here, that’s why we have individuals as grantees or local communities”<sup>16</sup>. In fact, the definition of civil society was not only widened to include individuals. The MSW hotspot profile stated: “Given the political and economic landscape in China ... it is important to recognize that the definition of civil society should not be strictly limited to NGOs but should also include research institutes, universities, associations, community groups, private sector, and even individuals” (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) 2002). In the further course of CEPF’s activities in China, natural reserve management bureaus and even local governments were also funded, in spite of CEPF’s explicit international approach that it would only assist non-governmental agencies.

The contradiction between the CEPF’s global approach (which has been called “decidedly anti-state” (Litzinger 2006)), and CEPF’s accommodated China approach seems to be most pronounced in the funding of capacity building activities for government agencies. Yang Fangyi, at Shanshui

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<sup>13</sup> CEPF (2002) China: Endorsement Letter for the CEPF Project Mountains of Southwest China Hotspot. Available at: [www.cepf.net/Documents/SouthwestChina\\_focal\\_point\\_endorsement.pdf](http://www.cepf.net/Documents/SouthwestChina_focal_point_endorsement.pdf). Accessed: 30-11-2012.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Li Ling, regional director WWF, Chengdu, 17-04-2010

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Li Zhang, Conservation International China, Beijing, 7-09-2009

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Li Zhang, Conservation International China, Beijing, 7-09-2009



Conservation Center (lead partner of the CEPF China team since 2007), defended an amended CEPF approach in contestations against the rigidity of the global approach by CEPF's international coordination team in Arlington "It was very hard to convince donors in Washington, for instance when some nature reserves were willing to apply for CEPF grants we received [their] applications. When we regarded them as good we gave a positive recommendation to the international office. And sometimes they said 'oh this is government, we cannot fund', so we had to find other ways." These "other ways" comprised of revising granting procedures. CEPF found a partner in other international NGOs with China programmes to grant, and these grants were sub-granted to projects aiming at building capacity of local government, in particular nature reserve management; "We can support TNC, and in that project they will support nature reserves through sub-grants"<sup>1718</sup>.

CEPF's China team further engaged local government by granting them programmatic influence. They were invited to participate in a committee of reviewers that revised the initial hotspot profile. The committee consisted of Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge (CBIK) a local Yunnan NGO, The Nature Conservancy (Yunnan office), WWF (Beijing, Sichuan and Yunnan offices), CI, State Environmental Protection Agency, Sichuan Forest Department, Yunnan Forest Department, and Sichuan Provincial Planning Committee. This Committee narrowed down CEPF themes to ecotourism, the protection of sacred lands, wildlife trade campaign, natural regeneration, NGO networking, sustainable/alternative livelihoods and conservation, and, nature reserve capacity building. The CEPF recognizes that its China operations are rather closely coordinated with government agencies, compared to other hotspots. According to the CEPF, this "coordination mechanism ...does not exist in other CEPF invested areas ... a review committee that not only reviews project[s] but link CEPF project ideas to the on-going government and non-government initiatives, making CEPF projects more coordinated. It's the first time CEPF uses this type of coordination mechanism and may adopt it in other CEPF regions as well" (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund in China (CEPF China) 2003, 4). According to CI China, "(t)he coordination mechanism works very well so far and has become a model for CEPF design in other regions" (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund in China (CEPF China) 2003, 19). This remarkable departure from the initial idea of CEPF to merely support civil society, independent of government, is perhaps CEPF's greatest adaptation to the Chinese governance context.

CEPF China's redefinition also emphasized the role of scientists which can be interpreted as a return to the original hotspot approach. In earlier work on biodiversity hotspots civil society was barely mentioned as an actor (Mace et al. 2000). Instead, the emphasis was on scholarship. Indeed, the popularization of the hotspot approach depended on the strong activism displayed by several scholars; it was "a specific instance of ecological science-as-politics" (Youatt 2008). For instance, in 2000 a group of ecologists presented the hotspot approach as a scientific consensus on the best approach to conservation (Dalton 2000). In a rather similar fashion, the greatest proponents of the hotspot approach in China were scientists. The role of scientists in the early planning stage was to draw up the initial hotspot profiles. Lü Zhi, a biologist at Peking University, is credited as the main

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Yang Fangyi, officer at Shanshui Conservation Center, Beijing, 30 July 2012

<sup>18</sup> A similar sub-granting partner was found in the WWF, although these funds were also aimed at capacity civil society building. With offices in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, WWF had already established a network of domestic civil society organizations it supported through grants. CEPF, faced with difficulties to find suitable local civil society applicants, therefore integrated its small grants facility with WWF's existing China programme.

author of the MSW hotspot profile. Although the hotspot profiling was supposed to be a participatory process, in fact the input was reduced to a five day workshop with Chinese and foreign experts, conservation biologists and staff members of TNC, CI, and WWF (Litzinger 2006, 74-75)<sup>19</sup>. During CEPF's China operations, scientists continued to refine methodologies, designating new – yet unprotected – 'key biodiversity areas' (KBA) within hotspots, while arguing for a wider recognition and adoption of the CEPF's 'science based' approach. The supporting role of Peking University remains throughout CEPF's work in China, as the supporting organization of Shanshui Conservation Center which also hosts the CEPF China management team. According to Yang Fangyi, officer at Shanshui Conservation Center, "One [of the biggest CEPF impacts] is science based implementation. CEPF aims at scientific information exchange, after the CEPF ended, academics continued to work together to share information and to provide biodiversity information for the policy makers and for the public, local communities. So this kind of scientific approach is already accepted by the region [provinces of the MSW]"<sup>20</sup>.

While CEPF China strategically accommodated and contradicted some elements of the global approach, it could be a rhetorical means to convince Chinese state partners and to obtain approval for the development of operations in China. In spite of interviews and document research it remains obscure how CEPF China navigated between two partly contradictory partnership approaches, one which excludes the state and employs a narrow definition of civil society, and another one which intensively collaborates with the state and employs an expanded definition of civil society. To determine which of the two approaches finally was most influential in CEPF's China activities, I will proceed to analyse financial patterns and patterns of participation in the CEPF China portfolio.

#### **4. Financial and patterns of participation of China's CEPF operations**

Although CEPF's global approach emphasizes the strengthening of local civil society, in the accommodated approach civil society was redefined. Did this redefinition substantiate in the funding of the 'new categories' of civil society: individuals, science and government agencies? Or did CEPF China revert to the global approach, and mainly support local NGOs? In the latter case the strategic accommodation of the global approach for China would mainly be rhetoric, perhaps to entice Chinese officials to approve and collaborate with the CEPF. To answer these questions, data was gathered from eighty individual CEPF grant projects. CEPF grantees are obliged to report their activities and progress in reports to the CEPF team in China. These reports are made publicly available on the CEPF website ([www.cepf.net](http://www.cepf.net)) and contain information on the grantee, the collaborating partners in the grantee project, description of actions, amounts of investments (including leveraged resources), and dates of actions. This data was collected in a database to allow for an aggregate view of CEPF's investment in China. This analysis features some inherent weaknesses. The data relies on self-reporting by the grantees who may be inclined to present their project outcomes more favourably, limiting the possibility to assess effectiveness in terms of changes in biodiversity indicators. While categorising grantees and partners by type (science and research institutions, local or international NGOs, government, et cetera) I tried to trace the type of organization e.g. by reviewing their websites. Categorisation was sometimes difficult; however, as some facto NGOs would seek an alternative registration, for instance as a for-profit company and other NGOs style themselves as

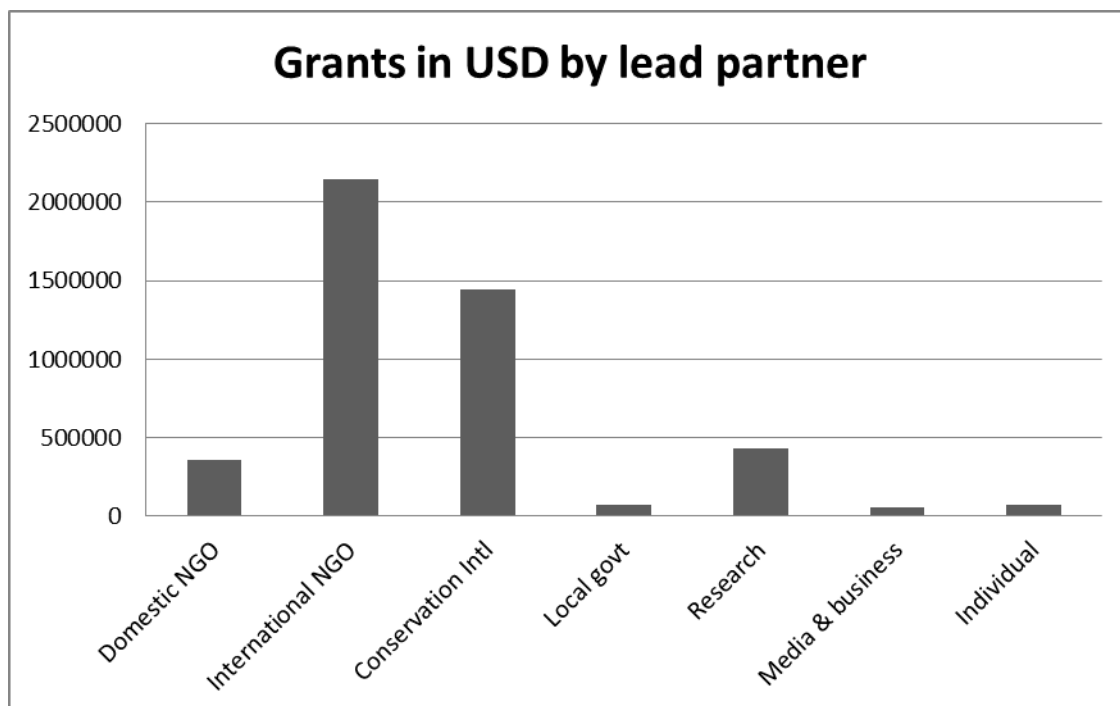
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<sup>19</sup> According to Litzinger, many individuals and representatives of local NGOs felt excluded from the meeting.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Yang Fangyi, officer at Shanshui Conservation Center, Beijing, 30 July 2012

‘institute’ even when they are not registered as a science and research organization. In these cases I categorized as much as possible by self-descriptions of the respective organization. Finally, I also classified NGOs by whether they are international or domestic. The distinction is important since the global CEPF approach seeks to support local civil society, and the global lead partner (CI, later Shanshui) would also like to avoid the suggestion of only supporting large international NGOs. However, in practice it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a NGO is Chinese (national or local) or international. Generally, I regarded China programmes of international NGOs as international rather than domestic. However, in the case of CI China, the organization split up between the original CI China branch and a domestic branch, Shanshui Conservation Center. Shanshui gained its own identity and became organizationally independent from CI China in 2007; therefore I regard Shanshui after 2007 as a domestic NGO.

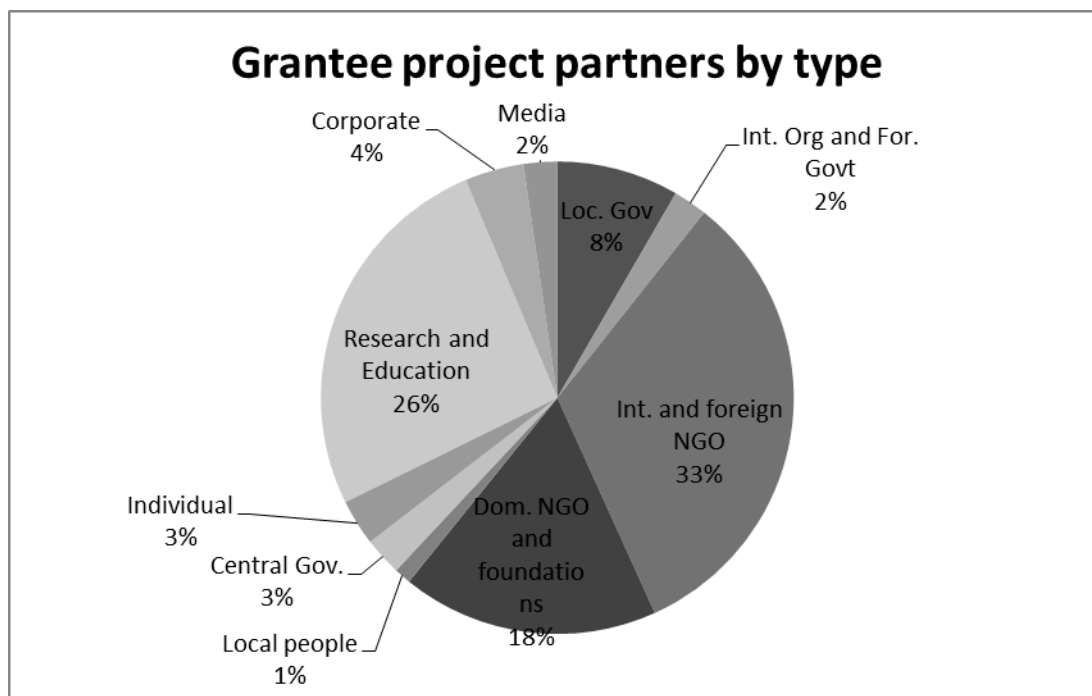
#### 4.1 Who coordinates?



Lead partners are the main grantees of CEPF projects. They are the main applicants for CEPF funding, and report to the CEPF China team. Their organizational role depends on the respective project, whether they are the sole implementer, or the coordinator, or whether they share coordination functions within the partnership project. It can be assumed, however, that lead partners are more often in a coordinating role than other partners. Data on CEPF allocations by lead grantee therefore indicates which actors are empowered in coordinating or managing positions in the partnership governance introduced by the CEPF. CEPF in China seems to live up to the claim in its global approach that it invests in civil society, the lion’s share of CEPF investments (86%) went to NGO led projects. Most of these investments, however, went to project led by international NGOs (78%, including CI), whereas domestic (Chinese national and local) NGOs led projects only received 8% of total investments. This allocation patterns is clearly at odds with to the claim that CEPF supports local NGOs. At the very least it appears that CEPF allocations affirms the coordinating positions to international NGOs, rather than empowering coordinating capacities of domestic NGOs.

While CEPF generally did not put domestic NGOs in coordinating positions within grantee projects, domestic NGOs could still benefit from allocations within the projects. Specific data on how funds were allocated within individual partnership projects is largely absent. One indicator would be to consider the partners within these projects. In one particular project an international NGO led (Shanshui and WWF) partnership sub-granted to grassroots NGOs<sup>21</sup>. While there are clearly financial benefit for domestic NGOs, it is relevant that that the funds only reaches the grassroots in an indirect way. At the same time international NGOs directly dealt with the CEPF team, government authorities, sponsors, and international donors. While lead partners were invited to CEPF meetings, communicated directly with the CEPF, and became part of CEPF's 'civil society alliance'; most domestic NGO beneficiaries were much less involved. Rather than being motivated to deepen partnership governance or form alliances, most domestic NGOs considered the CEPF merely as a temporary donor, for instance, when asked about its involvement with CEPF, one of these sub-grantee domestic NGO representatives initially did even recognize the name CEPF<sup>22</sup>.

#### 4.2 Who participates?



Grantee project partners are all partners within the grant projects that lead partners report. A count of the number and type of partners within these projects reveals who are the final funding beneficiaries. According to the global CEPF approach, it can be expected that most partners would be civil society organizations, in particular domestic NGOs. However, the patterns of participation in grant projects demonstrate a rather low share of domestic NGO partners (18%); the share of research and education organizations is higher (26%), as is the share of international NGOs (33%). The relatively high number of domestic NGOs and education and research partners indicates that lead partners (mostly international NGOs) engaged research and education organizations and (other international NGOs) more as collaborative partners at the project level than domestic NGOs. These

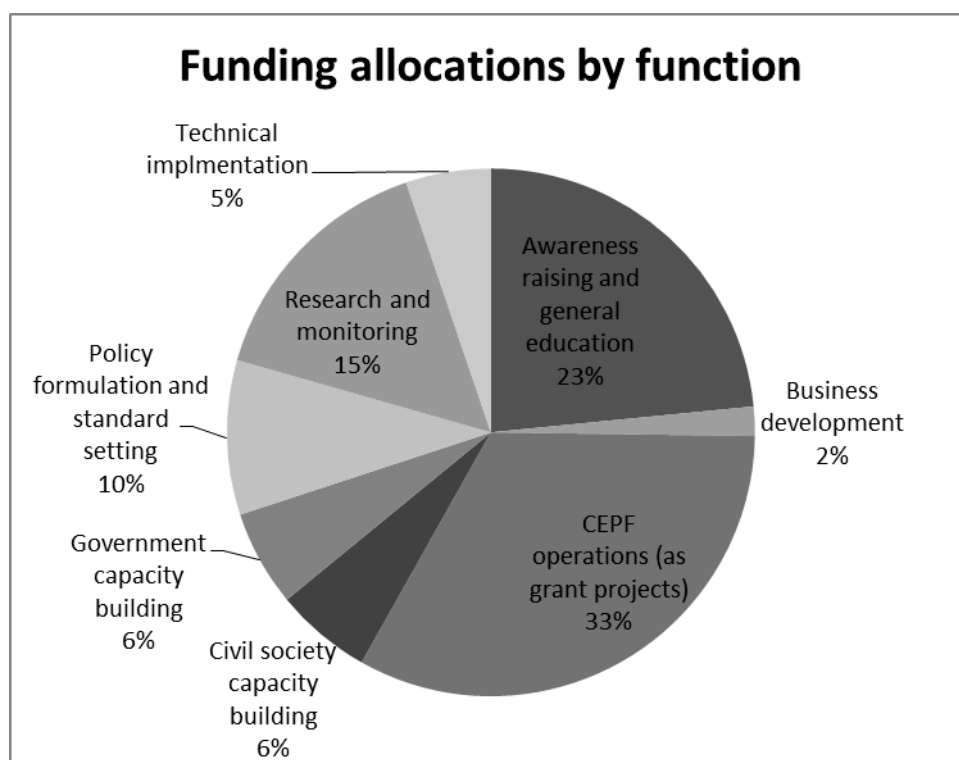
<sup>21</sup> "Managing CEPF's Small Grants Fund to Safeguard Endangered Species and Habitats in Southwest China" allocated a 396,000 USD to 30 smaller projects, some of them benefitting grassroots NGOs.

<sup>22</sup> Interview on 9 April 2010 with Chen Yongsong, at Econetwork, Lijiang.

participatory patterns seem to fit CEPF’s accommodated approach for China, which expands the categories under civil society (at the cost of domestic NGOs).

The ‘individual’ and ‘local people’ category introduced in the expanded civil society definition of the accommodated CEPF approach, were meant to allow for non-registered NGOs and activists to participate in the CEPF. In practice, however, very few received for CEPF funds on an individual or local people basis. In one case the individual grantee was a local government official, who channelled the grant to a natural reserve management office<sup>23</sup>.

#### 4.3 Which governance functions does CEPF support?



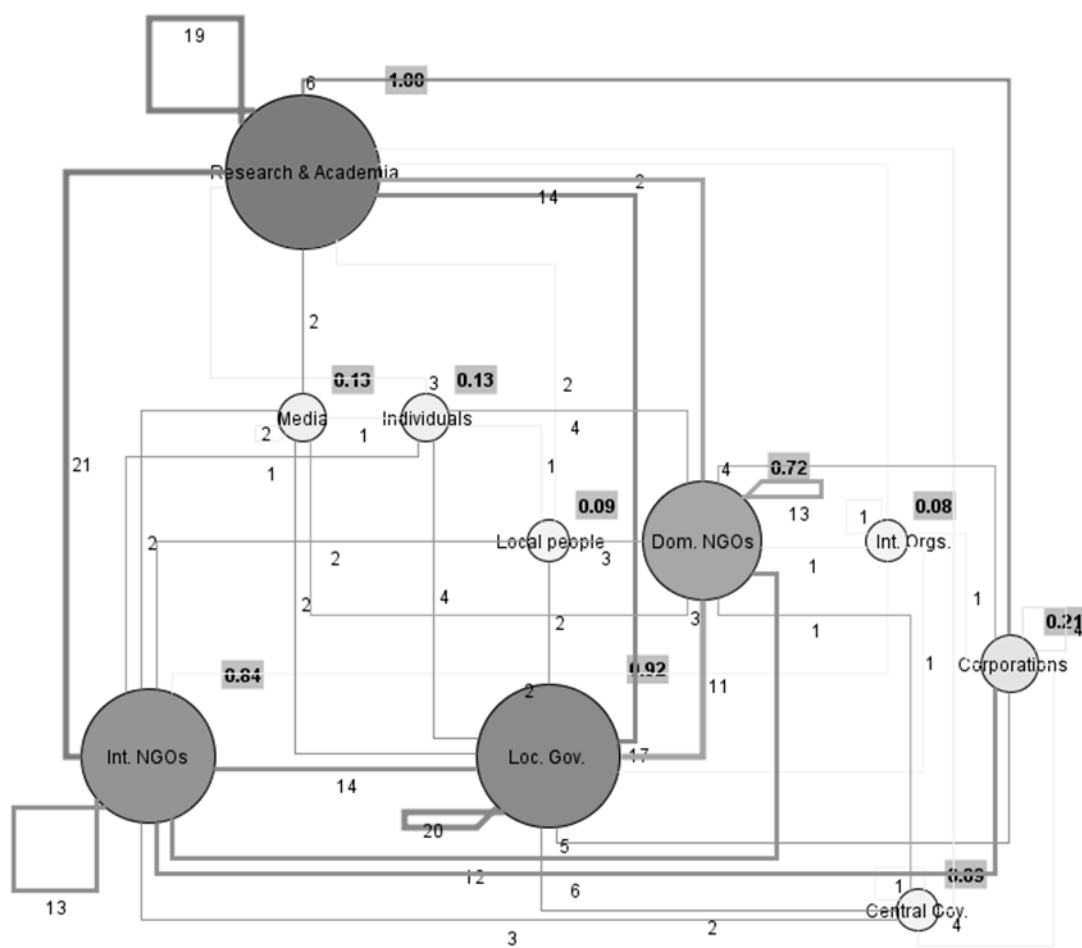
Lead partners describe their projects in reports to the CEPF China team, on the basis of these reports eighty grantee projects were categorized by functions. Although projects could address more functions, one primary function was coded for each project. On the basis of CEPF’s global approach, it is reasonable to expect that funds are allocated towards civil society capacity building. However, only 6% of total financial allocations supported civil society capacity building as the primary function. Functions like ‘research and monitoring’ and ‘awareness and education’ received much more financial support. Government agencies received a similar amount of funding allocation for capacity building as civil society. This is remarkable because CEPF’s global approach explicitly denies support for state agencies. In at least five (smaller) projects, local governments (natural reserve authorities)

<sup>23</sup> CEPF (2004) CEPF Small Grant Final Project Completion Report. 王朗保护区科研平台核心人员参加国际保护会议：保护科研交流及能力建设. Available on: [http://www.cepf.net/Documents/final\\_wanglang\\_nr.pdf](http://www.cepf.net/Documents/final_wanglang_nr.pdf). Accessed 5-12-12.

were grant recipients. In these projects CEPF directly supported the strengthening of state capacity and policing power, by training park guards, setting up security rooms, employing veteran soldiers, and introducing the use of satellite information (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) 2005). In other projects, money was not directly granted to the government, but their aim was still to strengthen government capacity. For instance the ‘Development of the China World Heritage Biodiversity Program’ aimed at engaging different governmental departments to collaborate in the pursuit of a World Heritage status (CEPF (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund) 2005).

### 4.3 Mapping CEPF’s partnership governance in China

What CEPF achieved in China was a network of eighty temporary partnership projects which gathered a host of government institutions, science and education organizations, international NGOs and domestic NGOs, rather than a broad civil society alliance (in the form of NGO networks).



A visualization through YEd Graph Editor<sup>24</sup> shows which type of actor partnered with which other type. For instance, 21 of the grantee projects featured a partnership between one or more international NGOs on the one hand and at least one or more research and academic organizations on the other hand. And, in 19 grantee projects two or more research and academic organizations partnered up. The frequency of a type of actor partnering in grant projects is visualized by weighted nodes, e.g. in 1 instance where at least one research and academic organization is featured as

<sup>24</sup> yEd editor Version 3.8 (2011)

partner, there is 0.84 instance where at least one international NGO is featured as a partner. Among ten types of partners in CEPF funded projects, four actor types (local government agencies, international organizations, domestic NGOs, and, research and academia) stand out. The fourth heaviest node is domestic NGOs. While this indicates that CEPF partners successfully engaged local civil society (the narrow definition), domestic NGOs are much less central in the network of partnerships supported by the CEPF than one would expect on the basis of CEPF's global approach. The third largest node is international NGOs. Not only do international NGOs feature more in partnerships than domestic NGOs, they are also more often 'lead partner', taking on coordinating roles within CEPF supported projects. The second largest node is local government agencies, which affirms CEPF's collaborative rather than confrontational positioning towards local government in China. In contrast, at the project level the role of central government seems to be negligible. Central government agencies, in particular the Ministry of Finance, played an important role in approving the initial investment, yet stood remote during CEPF's China operations. The largest node is research and academic actors. This is consistent with the emphasis on science and scientists in CEPF's accommodated approach for China. Rather than building a broad civil society alliance, the CEPF's partnership governance emphasises the strengthening of 'science-based decision-making', that is: strengthening the role of scientists to provide input for biodiversity conservation governance. Scientists and science organizations not only feature often as partner in CEPF funded projects, they are also part of the CEPF China team, a large share of funded projects were in the area of research and monitoring (28%), and scientists were strategically involved in the profiling and of the mapping of the MSW hotspot.

#### **4. Consolidating partnership governance**

While the CEPF has involved a wide variety of actors in biodiversity governance in China's SWM hotspot, CEPF's partnership network is in fact a temporary constellation, and does not necessarily become a generalized pattern of governance that could be identified as partnership governance. CEPF's presence (until 2010) presence in China's SWM was fleeting or at least transitory, whether its impact would amount to partnership governance on the longer term remains to be seen, especially because a consolidation programme (CEPF-2) will start in 2013. However, the CEPF as a temporary intervention has demonstrated a certain approach to governance derived from a global biodiversity conservation approach and accommodated to the Chinese context. This approach incorporated certain ideas about the biogeographic focus of hotspots; science-based input in policy making; the inclusion of civil society actors (albeit mostly international NGOs); science actors, and, local government. Moreover, CEPF gave rise to a new and relatively resourceful domestic NGO in biodiversity conservation, Shanshui Conservation Center, which continues to promote the CEPF experience of building partnerships and engaging non-state actors in biodiversity governance. For a post-CEPF partnership governance network to take root a set of minimal requirements should be met: partnership governance should get necessary support and resources, partners should continue to engage (new) partners in conservation, and, the approach should be supported by government authorities.

Support for CEPF's partnership approach has hitherto depended on sources outside of China. CEPF's initial investment in the MSW was 6 million USD. The International Donor council has also approved a consolidation program, adding another 1.35 million USD of investment. On the longer term, relying on donor funding for partnership governance seems unsustainable as more international

organizations and foreign governments withdraw assistance to China and the country is less regarded as a developing country (McBeath and McBeath † 2006, 309). International NGOs within the CEPF have, however, been successful at leveraging private funds in addition to the CEPF funding. The largest share of funds was leveraged with international business (68%). One single donor, the 3M Corporation, accounted for more than half of leveraged funds (3 million USD).

Most recently Shanshui has engaged new funders and partners, in particular from the Chinese business community. In preparation for the 2012 Rio de Janeiro Conference on Sustainable Development, Shanshui partnered with two other NGOs, Greenhub Innovation and Alashan Society of Ecological Entrepreneurs (SEE), to organize a round of dialogues on with corporate entrepreneurs who pledged a 500 million CNY investment to support environmental science, NGOs and communities over the next five years (2012-2017)(Wang 2012). The greater role of private financing in biodiversity conservation strengthens Shanshui and other NGOs' ability to do coordinate and maintain a partnership governance network.

CEPF has taken care to accommodate CEPF's global approach and collaborate more closely with Chinese government authorities. While government authorities have been reluctant to involve NGOs in policy planning, they have been welcoming collaboration with scientists, who sometimes also work for NGOs. Indeed, according to Shanshui, one of the most important legacies of the CEPF is science-based decision-making. Hotspot mapping, the inventory of species, the designation of areas and corridors, are methods that require scientific input. Sichuan and Qinghai provinces have integrated some of CEPF's maps into their respective biodiversity strategies, and Yunnan province also considers this<sup>25</sup>. The importance of science as input in governmental decision-making should be noted. Science-based biodiversity governance refers both to the involvement of scientists (and their methods) and the scientific input (in the form of data, whether collected by scientists or communities). The maps of the MSW area introduced by the CEPF are bringing different actors together on a longer term basis, beyond the duration of CEPF's China operations. This at least contributes to the generalization or at least extension of the pattern of governance that was first introduced by the CEPF in China.

## 5.

## Conclusion

The emergence of partnership governance as a more or less generalized pattern of governance involves multiple actors in policy planning, decision-making, and implementation. Partnerships have been suggested to close certain gaps in global governance, although they have not always been equally as effective. Many partnerships that have been formed at the level of global governance have also been implemented in local context. However, the emergence of partnerships in China's biodiversity governance is not a matter of transposing of a global governance approach, let alone a process of stealth neo-liberalization through transnational partnerships. Rather, global partnerships have to adapt their approaches to China's authoritarian context, with severe limitations to civil society. To gain approval, partnerships approaches cannot openly challenge the predominant role of the state by antithetical positioning government and civil society. Accommodation to the local context is necessary, to complement existing national policies, to comply to laws, but also to renegotiate global governance approaches that seem rather rigid. Global partnership approaches need to be translated to the Chinese context, sometimes leading to contradictions with the global

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Yang Fangyi, officer at Shanshui Conservation Center, Beijing, 30 July 2012



approach. In the case of the CEPF, the roles of the government and civil society were redefined within the CEPF in negotiations between the local coordination mechanism and the global CEPF team.

Nonetheless, when partnerships accommodate their approaches to the Chinese context, the resulting partnership governance can constitute quite a significant departure from more traditional statist approaches. While they do not create an independent civil society alliance, they do create new interdependencies, where government and transnational actors collaborate to achieve common goals. For instance, in CEPF's China operations the interdependence between scientists and government was emphasized, as they provide scientific input for decision-making. Moreover, CEPF consolidated the interdependency between international and domestic NGOs, as the former acts as the coordinator and the latter benefits through sub-grants. It should be noted that this could also be seen as a dependency relationship; rather than establishing an independent local civil society, CEPF reaffirmed the dependence of local civil society on foreign donors and large international NGOs.

The longevity of this particular networked governance of investments into the MSW hotspot will depend on further financial support as well as government endorsement for CEPF's hotspot approach. Shanshui seems to have secured some support with public authorities and the Chinese corporate sector to continue a pattern of involvement throughout in the field of biodiversity conservation in the MSW area. While it is too early to conclude that partnership governance will remain a feature in China's biodiversity conservation, there are some factors that may contribute to the increasing collaboration between partners. The relatively new policy area of biodiversity conservation has not (yet) been monopolized by a certain bureaucratic system, and there are opportunities for alternative governance mechanisms to be tested. Indeed, CEPF's operations can be seen as an experiment to take biodiversity governance beyond the traditional state-dominated approach which has not been considered as effective by most observers.

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