



**China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development
2017 AGM**

**Open Forum on Environment and Development
9 December 2017
Beijing, China**

Yangtze River Protection and Innovative River Basin Governance

FORUM OBJECTIVE

The Yangtze River Economic Belt (YREB) is the most economically dynamic region in China. With the focus on development and eco-protection of YREB, this Forum will provide a platform for frank exchange among the relevant departments of the Chinese government, the stakeholders of the river basin management and international experts. The main topics of the forum include: green development and protection plan of the YREB, participation of international and non-governmental organizations in the Yangtze River integrated governance mechanism and experience sharing and cross-boundary cooperation.

VALUE OF THE FORUM

CCICED Phase VI (2017 – 2021) research will place emphasis on the identification of integrated approaches to planning and management, especially at regional levels. Such an approach is associated with the UN SDG2030 initiative, and the approach being followed in green development and ecological civilization in China. The discussion of the forum will contribute to the policy recommendations to the State Council of China and provide guidance for further work within CCICED.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1. How can various departments of the government work together more effectively in the Yangtze River Economic Zone under the existing Eco-Environmental Protection Program? What are the lessons from international experience of such programs?**
- 2. How can financial organizations promote green finance in basin governance?**
- 3. How can Intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations play a more effective role in Yangtze River Basin protection?**
- 4. What kind of capacity building is necessary for ecological protection and green development in the Yangtze River Basin?**

BACKGROUND

The Yangtze River, the longest and largest river in China (and the 3rd longest in the world), represents the cultural and political identity of the nation. It is also the country's social- economic powerhouse. Covering nine provinces and connecting two major municipalities (Chongqing and Shanghai), the river provides water to over 584 million people living in the Yangtze River Economic Belt. The Yangtze River accounts for 45% of fresh water resources and 60% of the hydropower resource

reserves in China, and has a rich aquatic life and huge navigation potential. The Yangtze is the waterway with the highest freight volume among all inland waterways in the world. Furthermore, the total population and GDP in the Yangtze River Economic Zone account for over 40% of national population and GDP.

Thus, the Yangtze is a national strategic water resource. With increasing intensity of human activities and climate change, the Yangtze River basin and surrounding regions are, however, facing challenges and threats in terms of water resource quantity and quality and aquatic ecology. The coordination issue between watershed development and ecological protection is becoming increasingly urgent.

The development of the Yangtze River must take into account the long-term interest of the whole of China. Indeed, during a national meeting on 5th January 2016 in Chongqing, the path of holistic ecological protection and green development along the Yangtze was emphasized by President Xi Jinping. He noted that only under this path could “clear waters” and “green mountains” bring significant ecological, economic and social benefits to sustain the vitality of the “mother river”. He proposed that economic activities involving the Yangtze River should stick to the condition that ecological environment must not be destroyed.

Although progress has been made in terms of the ecological environment protection work in the Yangtze River Economic Belt in recent years, the ecological environment situation is still grim, with co-existence of challenges and opportunities. China should make full use of the new opportunities and new conditions, properly deal with various risks and challenges, and realize the green development of the Yangtze River Economic Zone.

At the same time, we must also recognize the complexity of the watershed ecological environment protection work. The situation of its upper, middle, and lower reaches is clearly different but interrelated. The tributaries, lakes, and wetlands within the Yangtze River Basin are faced with a wide set of challenges, such as balancing the water quality, water distribution, power generation, shipping interests and other issues related to the various stakeholders. In addition to the river basin management agencies and local governments, a number of departments are involved in the management and protection of the Yangtze River Basin. These departments are linked to ministries of development and reform, industry and information, transportation, environmental protection, water conservancy, agriculture, forestry and so on. Therefore, collaborative management across departments must be the main element of a comprehensive governance of the Yangtze River Basin.

Taking into account the impact of the Yangtze River on China's overall economy, society and people's livelihood, the multi-party cooperation and joint participation in the comprehensive management model is the key to ensure the Yangtze River protection and development. Under the auspices of the government, social institutions, enterprises, and international organizations are the backbone of the joint protection of the Yangtze River.

Given its scale and the presence of very major existing water, air and soil pollution issues affecting close to half of China's population and the health of China's “Mother River”, the Yangtze River Economic Belt is an excellent place to focus CCICED attention on integrated pollution control policies. The findings and policy proposals arising from studies there are likely to have broad applicability elsewhere in China.