

DAWN *Informs*



**GENDER IMPACT
OF CHINA'S
ENGAGEMENT
IN THE GLOBAL
SOUTH**

DAWN Informs is DAWN's periodical publication showcasing the organisation's latest analyses, critiques and commentaries.

DAWN provides an analytical framework that has changed the terms of the debate on women's issues worldwide. Its continuing analyses of the interlocking, systemic crises of debt, deteriorating social services, environmental degradation, food insecurity, religious fundamentalisms, militarisms and political conservatisms grow out of the experiences of poor women living in the countries of the economic South.

DAWN Informs is a space for the free circulation of these ideas and has been issued since the 1980s.

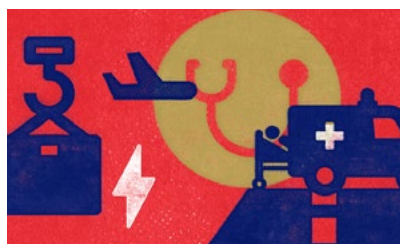


DAWN is a network of feminist scholars and activists from the economic South, engaged in feminist research and analysis of the global environment, working for sustainable development, economic and gender justice.

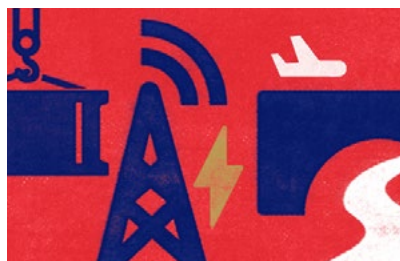
INDEX



5 **Introduction: Co-production of Southern Feminist Knowledge on Global China**
by Cai Yiping



11 **The Impact of Chinese Development Cooperation on Women in Trinidad and Tobago**
by Annita Montoute, Jacqueline Laguardia Martinez, and Deborah McFee



16 **Gender Impacts of China's Engagement in Pacific Island Countries: Case Studies of BRI Infrastructure Projects in Tonga and Vanuatu**
by Vasemaca Lutu



20 **Chinese Mining Projects in Ecuador and Perú: Gender Impacts and Women's Agency**
by Diana Castro Salgado



24 **The Gendered and Environmental Impacts of the Bikita Lithium Mine in Zimbabwe**
by Hibist Kassa and Zinzile Fengu





28 Empowering Women in Nigerian Agriculture: Assessing the Effects of China-Nigeria Agricultural Cooperation on Female Smallholders' Livelihood, Capacity-Building, and Shifting Social Norms +

by Ishola Itunu Grace



33 Implications of Security Agreements on Women, Peace, and Security in Solomon Islands +
A Comparative Case Study on China-Solomon Islands Bilateral Security Cooperation and the Australia-Solomon Islands Bilateral Security Treaty

by Patricia Sango Pollard



37 The Gender Question in China's Soft Power Engagement in the Global South +

by Govind Kelkar and Ritu Agarwal



41 When Civil Society Contests Global China +
Challenges and Opportunities for Gender-Related Civil Society Transnational Action on China-Backed Infrastructure Projects in the Global South

by Laura Trajber Waisbich

back to index 

INTRODUCTION
**CO-PRODUCTION
OF SOUTHERN
FEMINIST
KNOWLEDGE ON
GLOBAL CHINA**

by Cai Yiping



Background

↑ **W**ith China’s expanded global influence on the world stage, there is a heightened research interest in and initiatives and media reports on this subject, focusing on China’s overseas investments, especially the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the political, socio-economic, environmental, and human rights implications in the contexts of global geopolitics and regional dynamics. However, not enough attention has been paid to the gender aspect. China’s leadership has recently reaffirmed its commitment to gender equality and women’s development at the global level, including providing funding to UN Women to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) number five on gender equality and women’s empowerment and mentioning gender equality and women’s development for the first time in China’s international cooperation policy paper, *China’s International Development Cooperation in the New Era*.

In 2022, DAWN, in collaboration with researchers from the global South, conducted a research project to analyse the gender impact of China’s engagement in the global South. This exploratory research involves scholars with comprehensive knowledge and multiple disciplinary backgrounds from various regions of the global South – Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The eight case studies examine the profound and multidimensional implications of China’s global engagement in the global South and how various sectors, including state, business, civil societies, and local communities, react to these.

Co-Production of Knowledge and South Feminist Critique – Case Studies

↑

DAWN has developed an analytical framework paper to guide this research. This paper reviews the trajectory of China's global engagement in the last half century – its transition from a planned to a market-oriented economy by implementing economic reform and opening-up policies since the late 1970s; China's accelerating integration into the neoliberal global economy after joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001; and its ongoing global expansion with the launch of the BRI and new international financial institutions, such as Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and New Development Bank (NDB) or BRICS Bank. DAWN identifies China's global impact in three distinct and interrelated aspects – (1) defending multilateralism and China's proactive role in multilateral mechanisms such as the United Nations (UN) system; (2) reshaping the landscape of international development cooperation through development finance, aid, and loans; and (3) creating new bilateral and multilateral initiatives and mechanisms, such as the BRI, the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, and the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area. DAWN also examines gender politics and feminist activism in contemporary China both nationally and internationally. At the national level, there is a paradox between state policies that commit to promoting gender equality and the persistence of gender inequalities. At the global level, there is a gap between the discourse and practice in China's global engagement – the language of gender equality and women's development articulated in government documents on international development cooperation contrasts with a lack of operational guidelines and weakness in implementation of development cooperation programs.

DAWN acknowledges that the gender impact of China's engagement in the global South is a co-product in a dynamic process of action, interaction, and contestation involving many actors; therefore, it can only be assessed in various locations simultaneously and comprehensively and is especially grounded in the realities of the South. As a Southern feminist network, DAWN strongly believes that the perspectives and experiences of

women from the global South should be at the centre of these analyses, which is only possible through dialogue, collaboration, and solidarity.

In the past two years, DAWN has been working with scholars from global South to conduct eight case studies, summaries of which are presented in this issue of DAWN Informs. Each case study explores one or more of the following questions in a regional or national context:

(1) What role does gender play in China’s global engagement?

(2) How do Chinese investments and aid projects influence gender equality and women’s lives and human rights in local communities?

(3) As a ‘new actor’, do China’s overseas investments and development programs differ from those of traditional donors and investors in terms of gender policies and gender-related impact assessments? If so, how? If not, why?

(4) How do Southern feminist and social movements strengthen women’s rights and gender equality and achieve social and environmental justice in the face of potentially adverse impacts of Chinese foreign aid and investment?

The aim of this collaboration is to challenge the narrow framing of China’s global engagement defined by a state-led top-down approach and thus shake off Western racism and totalitarian control of knowledge production. These case studies contribute to the knowledge realm on global China by examining the different aspects of the gendered impact of China’s global footprint. This work also aims to hold states and corporate sectors, from both the South and North, accountable for safeguarding the human rights and well-being of women and people of the South.

These real-world cases and grounded empirical studies challenge the macro-narrative about China’s global influence by focusing on the local-global connection and prioritising the bottom-up approach. These papers cover a wide range of relevant topics – China’s soft power; women, peace, and security; civil society activism; and investment in mining, infrastructure, and agriculture – and examine the various sectors – from states, business sectors, and financial institutions, to traditional donors and international development

↑

agencies, to local communities, civil societies, women’s organisations, and indigenous groups – while depicting the complexity and interdependency of the process of the development of China’s global footprint and the new world orderings these engagements help to create. They put women’s agency at the centre rather than seeing women merely as passive victims or a vulnerable group. They juxtapose holding Chinese state and business actors accountable and the capacity building of developing countries to negotiate with China and other development actors. Therefore, this exploratory research challenges the dominant monolithic image of the rise of China and the victimisation of the South, which is often biased by colonialism, orientalism, and the yellow peril narrative, to explore the possibility of a new South-South relationship. As a new development actor, China’s engagement with the global South should not simply reinforce the donor-recipient dependence syndrome that has traditionally plagued the global South in development partnerships. Gender equality and women’s development are achievable goals and should be put high on the agenda in China’s development cooperation, with appropriate operational guidelines and adequate financial resources. This should not be regarded as contradicting China’s non-interference and non-conditionality principle in foreign policy. These case studies suggest that recipient countries as active agents are responsible for promoting their own gender agenda in development cooperation projects executed with China and any other development partners. Only in this way does reimagining a South-South relationship and a meaningful transnational feminist dialogue become possible.

Looking Forward

DAWN considers this research project an exemplary Southern feminist collaborative knowledge production as it provides the space for dialogue, critique, debate on the subject, and reflection on each other’s positions, rather than pursuing consensus. For example, scholars often diverge over the issues of ‘Western-centric’ vs. ‘China-centric’ approaches, how to assess impacts when some Chinese projects are not even being implemented, and whether some concepts and categories, such as neocolonialism, state capitalism, state feminism, neo-imperialism, and the Beijing Consensus, can be applied to China without appropriate contextualisation and problematisation. DAWN also recognises that the subject of this research, Global China, is constantly developing; therefore, it requires sustained feminist collective analyses to understand its complex dynamics.

This research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which made it extremely difficult for researchers to go to the field to collect first-hand empirical data because of

lockdowns, mobility difficulties, and financial constraints. Some researchers expressed their frustrations about getting responses from key informants and a lack of data and communication from the actors they intended to investigate. Moreover, current geopolitics and the deeper ideological divide between China and the West can make any meaningful dialogue become impossible and even irrelevant. The researchers identified these as common challenges. Thus, the question for Southern feminists is: Can South-South feminist dialogue and solidarity detoxify misogyny, patriarchy, militarism, nationalism, imperialism, colonialism, and neo-liberal capitalism and enable us to re-imagine a feminist agenda that posits human rights, dignity, and self-determination, as well as gender, economic, and ecological justice, at the centre? DAWN invites Southern feminist scholars and activists to work and think together to explore answers. ●

Bibliography

Alexander, M. J. and Mohanty, C. T. (eds.). (1997) *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. Routledge.

Cai, Y. and Yu, Y. (2022) *An Analytical Framework on the Gender Impact of China's Global Engagement in the Global South*. Suva: DAWN. [\[online\]](#)

Lee, C. K. (2022) Global China at 20: Why, How and So What? *The China Quarterly* 250 (June): 313–31.

Rofel, L. and Rojas, C. (eds.). (2022) *New World Orderings: China and the Global South*. Duke University Press.

State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (SCIO). (2021) *China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era*. [\[online\]](#)



Cai Yiping

Cai Yiping is a member of the Executive Committee of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). She co-leads DAWN's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) thematic analysis team together with Vanita Mukherjee. She was associate researcher at the Women's Studies Institute of China (2006-2008) and was a journalist for China Women's News (1995-2005), writing extensively on the issue of women's human rights and development. Her research focuses on the transnational feminist movement, especially in the global South, sexual and reproductive health and rights, media, and communication. She served as a member of the UN Women's Asia-Pacific Civil Society Advisory Group from 2013 to 2016 and is an advisor for the Asia-Pacific CSO Regional Engagement Mechanism, established in May 2014. She is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Global and International Studies, University of California, Irvine, on the theme of gender and Global China.



**THE IMPACT
OF CHINESE
DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION
ON WOMEN IN
TRINIDAD AND
TOBAGO**

*by Annita Montoute,
Jacqueline Laguardia Martinez,
and Deborah McFee*

Women's and gender issues are rarely present in research work about China-Caribbean relations. In light of the gender blindness in academic literature and policy practices relating to China-Caribbean cooperation, this paper examines women in Chinese development cooperation in the Caribbean via the cases of the e TecK Phoenix Park Industrial Estate and the Couva Hospital in Trinidad and Tobago. To undertake this exploration, we have posed the guiding question: What are the impacts of Chinese development cooperation projects on women, i.e., how does Chinese development cooperation empower or disempower women in the Caribbean context? By examining specific projects and focusing on communities and women, the paper favours a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach where possible rather than the typical state-centred, hierarchical framing of Chinese development cooperation.

For the purpose of this paper, it is recognised that women's rights are human rights. The protection of these rights requires specific and targeted approaches to economic development that make room for the peculiarity of women's economic, political, and social positionings. We recognise that women and gender are not interchangeable; one cannot be substituted for the other. Women is used to represent those persons who are sexed female while gender is understood as a more complex social construct. The construction of gender and the process through which we seek to analyse the place of women is largely informed by Caribbean post-modernist theorising, a form of Third World feminism focused on the Caribbean.

To determine how Chinese development cooperation empowers or disempowers women in the Caribbean, we started by providing a general approach to China's development cooperation to situate the policy framework of its engagement with the Caribbean. We assumed a qualitative research method based on an interpretivist paradigm.

In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, the Chinese presence has been largely experienced within the construction sector. As a largely male dominated sector with the movement of Chinese men as workers, one does not observe a clear correlation between the employment of women and the movement of Chinese capital into the country. It must be noted that although some women have operated in management in many of these companies, the sector remains largely dominated by males.

The analysis of the impact of two Chinese development cooperation projects shows limited involvement of civil society organisations and activism dealing with women's issues. In the case of the e TecK industrial park, no business focus was identified in sectors in which women traditionally operate. They did not make a gender needs or impact analysis or think about the needs of women specifically in designing the project. The gendered needs as they relate to the dual roles of care and work for Caribbean women within the workplace were not part of the planning in these two cases.

The research does not establish a clear correlation between the employment of women and the movement of Chinese capital into the country, particularly in the case of the industrial park. This project has not targeted women's employment specifically, nor has it sought to make broader gendered labour concerns and inequities a guiding principle in the cooperation process. While there are spaces for small and micro enterprises, which tend to have significant participation by women, this did not emerge out of a deliberate strategy, nor was it part of the procurement process to attract businesses owned and operated by women or to promote possibilities for women's entrepreneurship.

In the case of the Couva Hospital, it is clear, however, that women benefit tremendously from the various services offered, many of which are in high demand by women and their children. The nursing training facility housed at the hospital is accessed by women disproportionately as the nursing profession is female dominated.

Based on the research results, we consider that beyond China's policy positions in favour of gender equity, women empowerment, and agency, there is a need to transfer this to their international development cooperation strategy. China is to practice gender mainstreaming in its development cooperation engagements as a strategic approach for attaining gender equality and women's empowerment. The country may promote gender mainstreaming by assessing development needs and ensuring that development cooperation initiatives favourably impact gender equality during the formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the project.

The findings showed that the workers in the two projects were predominantly male. As such, general services such as safe, clean washroom facilities were provided for everyone, including women, who also benefited by default. There are no provisions for equity in pay between men and women or day care facilities for working mothers on site to enhance the working conditions of female workers.

In the execution of these initiatives, security measures to ensure women's access without risking their physical and psychological integrity are considered. For instance, it is key to make sure that projects allow for women to gain safer access to sanitary facilities, install sidewalks and streetlights, and facilitate access to credit and childcare services.

The practice of gender mainstreaming in development cooperation promoted by China has to be present as early as the negotiations stage with recipient countries. All parties should be involved in the promotion of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment while considering national and local contexts. Chinese cooperation authorities and facilitators should encourage the participation of women as counterparts in the political dialogue at all stages from planning to monitoring and evaluation of cooperation projects.

While China should assume this responsibility, Caribbean governments should not be relegated to being passive agents in the process with China doing all or most of the acting. This stance simply reinforces the donor-recipient dependence syndrome which has traditionally plagued the Caribbean's relations (and indeed that of the rest of the global South) in development partnerships. We position the Caribbean as active agents in their relationships as sovereign independent states with the capacity to shape and influence the nature and substance of development projects executed with China. ■

Bibliography

Gonzalez Vicente, R. and Montoute, A. (2020) 'A Caribbean perspective on China-Caribbean relations: global IR, dependency and the postcolonial condition', *Third World Quarterly*. Vol. 42, No.2, pp. 219-238.

State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. (2019) *Equality, Development and Sharing: Progress of Women's Cause in 70 Years Since New China's Founding*, White Paper, September 19. [\[online\]](#) (Accessed: 14 March 2023).

Parpart, J. (2014) 'Exploring the Transformative Potential of Gender Mainstreaming in International Development Institutions', *Journal of International Development* 26(3), pp. 382-395.



Annita Montoute

Annita Montoute is a Senior Lecturer and Acting Director at the Institute of International Relations (IIR), The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago. She was a research fellow at the European Centre for Development Policy Management. Her research interests include civil society and global governance, the Caribbean's external relations, and China in the Caribbean. She holds a PhD in International Relations, from The University of the West Indies. She is a trained teacher with a graduate certificate in Education from the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College.



Jacqueline Laguardia Martinez

Jacqueline Laguardia Martinez, PhD, is a senior lecturer at the Institute of International Relations at The University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago. Previously, she worked as an associate professor at the University of Havana and researcher associate at the Cuban Institute for Cultural Research 'Juan Marinello'. She has participated in academic events, delivered lectures, and undertaken teaching responsibilities in North America, Latin America, and Europe. She is a member of the Cátedra de Estudios del Caribe 'Norman Girvan' at the University of Havana and the Coordinator of the CLACSO Working Group on 'Crisis, respuestas y alternativas en el Gran Caribe'.



Deborah Mcfee

Deborah Mcfee has worked at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus, at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies since 2005. She has worked in the area of gender and development in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Anglophone Caribbean since 1998. Deborah has worked on the development of three regional national gender policies and co-edited with Prof Michelle Rowley the 2017 special issue of the *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* (CRGS) entitled 'Tool or Weapon?: The Politics of Policy Making, Gender Justice and Social Change in the Caribbean'. Her peer-reviewed publications address research on national gender policies and the politics of policy-making in the Caribbean, rethinking gender mainstreaming in the Caribbean, and women, gender, human security and the national gender policy in post-genocide Rwanda. In 2011, she was the visiting researcher at the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), conducting research in the areas of gender and human security and rape as a crime against humanity. Deborah holds a PhD from the Department of Global Governance and Human Security, University of Massachusetts Boston, McCormack Graduate School of Public Policy and Global Studies.



**GENDER
IMPACTS
OF CHINA'S
ENGAGEMENT IN
PACIFIC ISLAND
COUNTRIES: CASE
STUDIES OF BRI
INFRASTRUCTURE
PROJECTS IN
TONGA AND
VANUATU**

by Vasemaca Lutu

The purpose of the paper is to provide a comprehensive analysis of China's engagements in infrastructure projects in two Pacific Island countries (PICs), namely, Tonga and Vanuatu, with a view to particularly highlighting the gender impacts of these projects.

In terms of advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, Tonga and Vanuatu have both signed the Beijing Platform for Action and adopted the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. At the national level, both Tonga and Vanuatu incorporate national gender policies and frameworks such as the National Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Tonga Policy and National Sustainable Development Plan 2016 to 2030. At the global level, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has also been adopted by both countries. Meanwhile, China reaffirmed its commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in 2015 and subsequently announced its ten-year plan (2021 to 2030) as part of its plans to promote gender equality.

China has risen as a major new player in the development world by financing projects with lucrative loans to Pacific governments under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Sea, land, and air transportation are all critical for PICs in their pursuit of social, economic, and technological advancement. These small island nations have sought donor partner support through multilateral and bilateral agreements to secure funding and technical support for the expansion, construction, and maintenance of roads, airports, ports, buildings, and other infrastructure related projects (Naidu, V. et al., 2022). As a result, ten PICs have signed bilateral memorandums of understanding with China to be included in the BRI, namely, Papua New Guinea, Niue, Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Cook Islands, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Tonga, and Vanuatu (Li, 2022). Indeed, China has developed a platform through the BRI where participating PICs are now important trade and economic partners.

The two case study countries of Tonga and Vanuatu are both large debtors to China because of the accumulation of non-payments of concessional loans over the years. Both countries suffered catastrophic natural disasters. Tonga suffered a volcanic eruption followed by a tsunami in January 2022 while Vanuatu was hit by two consecutive

cyclones in February and March 2023 – both natural disasters caused havoc, the loss of lives, and severe damage to infrastructure such as houses, buildings, roads, bridges, and communication lines. China was quick to respond to both events, assisting in the provision of medical supplies, food, basic necessities, water tanks, temporary housing make-shift containers, and tents and the deployment of medical staff. China has also re-constructed various infrastructure components that were damaged due to the disasters in addition to the implementation of other BRI projects in these countries.

Improved infrastructure plays an important role in achieving gender equality goals and in enhancing women's economic and social empowerment. The sector provides vast benefits through employment and business opportunities while being developed and improves livelihoods and quality of life when the work is complete. As China's BRI projects are developed in PICs, development partners continue to bring their expertise in promoting gender equality in those projects. In Tonga and Vanuatu, it was found that China's aid is heavily influenced by infrastructure and that its BRI projects do not appear to have operational guidelines in place that could help implement its gender equality and women's development policies in the sector even though China has made commitments to promoting gender equality and ensuring women's rights.

Views expressed by non-state actors such as civil society organisations in both countries indicate that although China has assisted immensely in infrastructural development and accessibility, women are not directly addressed in the infrastructure projects. Women tend to play an indirect role in the form of support services, for example, catering and cleaning. China's assistance through cultural exchange or 'soft power' has opened the door for education and technical training opportunities in the form of scholarship and grant programmes. Additionally, capacity building workshops and the donation of various items such as laptops to community-based training for women are also acknowledged by key observers; however, they are not aware of any gender development initiatives carried out in these infrastructure projects.

Observers in both countries also reiterated that Chinese funding is 'government to government' collaboration; hence, another issue is the lack of communication between local governing bodies and civil society organisations, women's groups who assess the gender impacts and allocation of funding and resources to the intended beneficiaries. Moreover, China's lack of transparency in identifying priority areas in which they offer assistance to the public impedes clarity.

On the other hand, development partners such as Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) and the Asia Development Bank (ADB) both have gender development frameworks in place to guide their operations in infrastructure programmes in Tonga and Vanuatu. However, some observers question the long-term sustainability of these gender development programmes as regards the implementation phase and follow-up processes with local communities and women’s groups and whether these gender programmes actually benefit women in the long run.

To help bridge these gaps, some elements China might incorporate in the implementation of its BRI projects are: accessibility and transparency in its gender equality operational guidelines and implementation; re-visiting the urgent need to include women’s agency and development in its projects; and allowing for open communication and dialogue with local non-state actors such as civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), women’s groups, and other marginalised groups. Also, PICs must actively participate in bringing gender equality to the forefront of their infrastructural development needs and work closely with China and other development donors in facilitating the much-needed progress in this key area. 🌟

Bibliography

Li, C. 2022, *The Belt and Road Initiative in Oceania: Understanding the People’s Republic of China’s Strategic Interests and Engagement in the Pacific*, University of Hawai’i at Manoa, Department of Asian Studies, viewed 15 February 2023, [\[online\]](#)

Naidu, V.; Lutu, V. and Asi, C. (2022) *Regional Report on Pacific geopolitics and infrastructure development: a four-country study for PANG* (Pacific Network on Globalisation), Suva (Not yet publicly released).



Vasemaca Lutu

Vasemaca Lutu is a Fijian independent researcher. Her field of research is development studies focusing on Pacific Island countries. Some key focus areas in her previous projects include poverty, sustainable development, geopolitics of infrastructure development, social protection and early warning systems focusing on the fisheries sector, workplace policies in regards to child protection, disability, domestic violence, gender mainstreaming, climate change, and occupational health and safety. She is also a member of the Bia i Cake Women’s Co-operative, her local village women’s group with a mission of “Building alternative livelihoods through sustainable natural resource management”, located on Fiji’s second-largest island of Vanua Levu. Va holds a Master’s degree in Leadership for Sustainability from Malmö University, Sweden, and is currently a trainee pilot at the South Pacific Aviation Training Institute (SPATI) in Nausori, Fiji.



**CHINESE
MINING
PROJECTS IN
ECUADOR
AND PERU**
**Gender Impacts
and Women's
Agency**

by Diana Castro Salgado

Mining activities change societies in many ways, and these transformations have disproportionate impacts on women due to their direct relationship with nature and caring for life. This study aims to explore the impacts of the Las Bambas (Peru) and Rio Blanco (Ecuador) mining projects on women in local communities and these women's agency in the defence of nature and the land. We conducted interviews with women from the communities where the mining projects are located and reviewed the most relevant Chinese guidelines for Chinese international operations in the mining sector in the last five years to assess if there are specific safeguards related to gender or women.

↑ The two mining projects have been controlled by Chinese companies since 2014 and 2013, respectively: Las Bambas by MMG, whose main shareholder is China Minmetals Corporation, and Rio Blanco by Ecuagoldmining, owned by the Chinese company Junefield Gold Investments. In both cases, environmental and social conflicts are latent, and women have played an active role in the resistance processes.

Although some researchers have found that Chinese mining companies do not act significantly differently than transnational companies from other nations (Valderrey and Lemus, 2019, p. 398), others argue that Chinese operations evidence 'capitalism with Chinese characteristics' and have some particularities. According to Rubén González-Vicente (cited in Sacher 2017, p. 137-140), Chinese mining investments abroad have three specific characteristics. First, Chinese companies have relative independence from private shareholders and short-term profitability requirements. Second, Chinese companies negotiate, along with mining acquisitions, other contracts for infrastructure construction, which allows them to create alliances or consortia with other actors and control the supply chain. And third, Chinese companies have shown themselves to be unprepared to address the demands of local communities regarding aspects of transparency, accountability, and human rights and they lack effective mechanisms for due diligence, comprehensive risk assessment, dialogue, and compensation.

Over the past few years, as Chinese companies have become more internationalised, Chinese government authorities, regulators, and business associations have issued a growing number of guidelines which increasingly refer to compliance with international agreements and standards to promote good performance by companies operating abroad. While in the most relevant guidelines for international operations, gender specifically is largely absent, in the mining sector there has been progress largely due to the guidelines issued by the China Chamber of Commerce of Metals, Minerals & Chemicals Importers & Exporters (CCCME). Unfortunately, the guidelines are not binding, which creates a large gap between narrative and implementation in reality. The Latin American case and, in particular, the projects analysed in this study illustrate this.

From a multidimensional perspective (Anderson, 2022), we argue that gender-based violence and impacts occur in diverse spheres such as the economic, environmental, political, and sociocultural. The two case studies showed that in the economic sphere, mining projects alter the agrarian structure in which land tenure is in the hands of men. This in turn hinders women's access to sources of survival and care (crops, water, and food) and services (housing, security, and health). As guardians of life and community, women also have the additional burden of repairing or rebuilding what has been lost (Pérez, De la Puente and Ugarte, 2019).

In the environmental sphere, women are affected by the destruction and contamination of water and land sources, the main resources for family and community sustenance. This has an impact on their daily life of care, as well as on their health and that of the community. In the political sphere, women, particularly leaders and advocates, are persecuted, threatened, and criminalised in the context of the conflict and resistance processes. They suffer discrimination and humiliation for raising their voices and participating. In addition, there is evidence of disproportionate use of force by public forces and private guards allied with companies and the government. In the socio-cultural sphere, the main impact is the rupture of the social, community, and family fabric. In this context, the studied Chinese mining companies tend to take advantage of the weak presence of the state to control the population and land through economic compensation mechanisms, negotiation tactics, and social services that break social cohesion and polarise communities.

We also found that the mining activities have been fertile ground for the emergence and consolidation of women leaders and women's social movements. Women have exercised their capacity for agency, enabling the reconfiguration and occupation of new spaces in the social environment and thus carrying out actions that transform the order or practices

in which they are immersed and from which they have been historically excluded. For example, in the case of Rio Blanco, women created the ‘Sinchi Warmi’ organisation, and their resistance was key to achieving protection measures and the suspension of mining activities in 2018. In the Las Bambas project, women leaders gained popular legitimacy, and the women’s organisation has been strengthened by the elaboration of a rights agenda with a gender focus in local and governmental institutions.

In both cases, as Valderry and Lemus (2019, p. 404) point out, these resistance movements ‘propose a different model of understanding the relationships between human beings, work and nature’. Consequently, they constitute a paradigmatic challenge to the extractive-patriarchal model that historically underpins the transnational mining dynamic, of which China is now a part. ▲

Bibliography

Anderson, K. (2022) *Building Power in Crisis. Women’s Responses to Extractivism*. SAGE Fund. [\[online\]](#)

Pérez, L. M.; De la Puente, L.; Ugarte, D. (2019) *Las cuidadoras de los mineros: género y gran minería en Cotabambas*. Research Paper No. 12. Lima: University of the Pacific. [\[online\]](#)

Sacher, W. (2017) *Ofensiva Megaminera China en los Andes. Acumulación por desposesión en el Ecuador de la ‘Revolución Ciudadana’*. Quito, Editorial Abya Yala. [\[online\]](#)

Valderrey Villar, F. J.; Lemus Delgado, D. L. (2019) Minería, movimientos sociales y la expansión de China en América Latina. *Desafíos*, 31(2), pp. 375-410. [\[online\]](#)



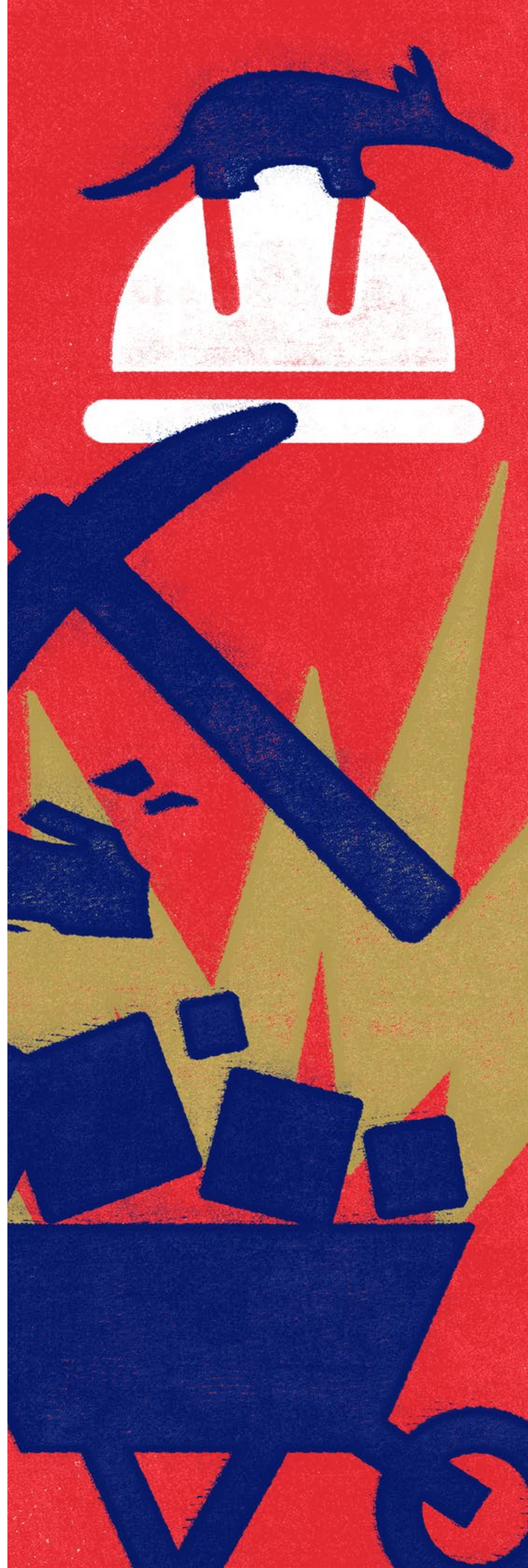
Diana Castro

Diana Castro is a researcher at Latinoamérica Sustentable (LAS), an Ecuadorian NGO that supports the protection of the environment and local communities within the context of Chinese investments in Latin America. Diana is a doctoral fellow in the Latin American Studies Program and holds a master’s degree in international development cooperation at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar (UASB-Ecuador). Since 2014, Diana has studied Latin America-China relations, with a particular emphasis on Chinese financing mechanisms for development and infrastructure investment projects. Her doctoral research traces the effects that these projects have on institutional capacities of the state, the environment, and local development, delving into the Ecuadorian case. Diana has published several articles and a book on these topics. She has also worked in various Ecuadorian universities and collaborated on international research initiatives on the relevance of China in Latin America.



**THE
GENDERED AND
ENVIORNMENTAL
IMPACTS OF
THE BIKITA
LITHIUM MINE
IN ZIMBABWE**

*by Hibist Kassa
and Zinzile Fengu*



Extractivism, in its essence, refers to uneven relations in global trade and exchange that leave countries where resources are extracted with a lower share of value while they bear a larger share of environmental, health, and labour costs. This relies on asserting control over land, labour, and natural resources, which relies on violence to dispossess and preserve conditions of impoverishment and exclusion. This disproportionate distribution of the true cost of extractivism effectively subsidises mining entities and their host countries who benefit from poor regulatory environments, cheap labour regimes, and unpaid care work; mine host communities (and the women in them) are on the frontline of extractivism. These relations have largely benefited Global North countries and corporations. The entry of corporations based in China, which has rapidly moved from the periphery to the centre in the global economy, begs the question: is China replicating those relations, or is it operating differently? (Lee, 2017). The selected case of Zimbabwe enables the analysis of agency, class, and gender relations that arise in the Bikita district of Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe's indigenisation policies on land and natural resources have aimed to reconfigure their ownership and control to redress historical injustices from colonisation and apartheid (Moyo and Yeros, 2011). These measures also converged with students' and trade union protests against liberalisation (Seddon and Zeilig, 2005; Saul and Saunders, 2005). Sanctions were imposed over human rights violations, political repression, and undermining democracy and the rule of law (Gov.Uk, 2022; Global Affairs Canada, 2023). These accelerated crisis conditions constrained access to development finance and investments (Dendere, 2022). China, as an alternative developmental partner, has been a lifeline.

The government of China asserts its common cause with Zimbabwe's pursuit of an 'independent development path', drawing on a similar history of the pursuit of national liberation and independence, for which it is imperative to deliver meaningful developmental outcomes in conditions in the periphery. China's ambassador to Zimbabwe highlights these investments as 'revitalising the resources that were long idled by western companies' (Guo, 2022). Despite these intentions, there are reports of labour violations and a lack of social engagements with communities that largely remain excluded from the benefits that largely accrue to the state and political elite with proximity to public institutions.

The fieldwork in this study draws on data collected between 2019 to 2022 in Bikita in the Masvingo province of Zimbabwe. Focus group discussions were held with twenty women, and snowball techniques were used to identify ten women for individual interviews.

Sinomine Resource Group, or China Mineral Resources, has invested \$380 million in the Bikita mine in Zimbabwe, which has 11 million tonnes of lithium, the largest deposit in the world. China Mineral Resources has expanded the initial extraction of minerals, which was for ceramics and glass production, to battery inputs. China Minerals Resources is one of eighty Chinese state-owned enterprises in Zimbabwe since 2005, which have a value of \$10.45 billion.

Zambia and Zimbabwe have both adopted a new National Mineral Development Policy. However, women are considered only in terms of owning mineral rights and being included along the value chain. While consistent with the Africa Mining Vision, this is a limited approach that does not explicitly address questions of consent rights throughout the lifecycle of mining operations (not just consultation) (Kengne, n.d.).

Lithium mining in Bikita district of Zimbabwe intersects with the political, socio-economic, and environmental problems that are at the centre of land conflicts, where women are particularly adversely affected. Women in Bikita face multiple challenges that emanate from mining activities that have a disproportionate impact on mine host communities. The prevalence of artisanal lithium mining in Bikita has also reproduced elements of the challenges arising from large-scale mining in a fragile environment. Limits to land access, water scarcity, boundary disputes, and social problems are further aggravated. Altogether, this creates insecurity, social reproductive work, and food insecurity and erodes the bodily autonomy of women.

Agrarian livelihoods are vulnerable to extreme weather conditions and environmental pollution because of the lithium extraction process and land conflicts. Bikita is a rural area where, after land redistribution, people were resettled as smallholder farmers and offers a typical case of the dynamics at play in Zimbabwe as it seeks to overcome persistent crisis through an autonomous development path. This case study examines how gender relations are impacted by Sinomine Resource Group operations. The paper concludes that although Chinese investments have been important in developing productive capacity and capabilities in Zimbabwe, the exclusion, marginalisation, and violence women experience in mining operations remain the same. Environmental impacts also increase the burden of social reproductive work. There is a need for companies like Sinomine to pursue inclusive policies that overcome the marginalisation and exclusions inherent in extractivism, especially in the fragile socio-economic and environmental conditions of Bikita. This should begin with community engagements to understand the priorities and concerns of communities, especially women, and should not fall into the targeted and tokenistic corporate social responsibility interventions that have largely failed to stabilise operations but rather ensure inclusion, equity and improved environmental and social outcomes. ■

Bibliography

Dendere, C. (2022) *Zimbabwe: The Long Shadow of Sanctions*. June 29. [\[online\]](#)

Guo, Shaochun. (2022) *China remains the true friend of Zimbabwe on its development path forever*. [\[online\]](#)

Lee, C. K. (2017) *The Spectre of Global China: Politics, Labour and Foreign Investment in Africa*, The University of Chicago Press.

Moyo, S. and Yeros, P. (2007) 'Intervention the Zimbabwe question and the two lefts', *Historical Materialism*, 15(3), pp. 171-204.

Seddon, D. and Zeilig L. (2005) 'Review of African Political Economy', Vol. 32, No. 103, *Imperialism & African Social Formations* (March 2005), pp. 9-27.

Sydney B.; Pettitt, J.; and Baldwin, S. (2023, March 9). *Why all eyes are on Zimbabwe's lithium industry*. [\[online\]](#)

Gov.UK, *Financial Sanctions, Zimbabwe*, 18 March 2022. [\[online\]](#)

Kengne, G. (n.d.). *Understanding the Right to Say No*. [\[online\]](#)



Hibist Kassa

Hibist Kassa is policy interface fellow at the Institute for Environmental Futures, University of Leicester. She is an associate editor with the Agrarian South Network Research Bulletin, a tricontinental network of researchers in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Hibist was awarded her doctorate in sociology from University of Johannesburg. She holds an MPhil in political science and a BA in political science and geography and natural resource development from the University of Ghana. She has worked in feminist organisations and policy research institutes in Africa for over a decade and is a former DAWN Executive Committee member. She is currently working on her forthcoming book on petty commodity production and artisanal and small-scale mining. She has published on academic and popular platforms on artisanal mining policy, land, social reproduction, imperialism and conflict in Africa, and the political economy of natural resources.



Zinzile Fengu

Zinzile Fengu is an avid researcher and independent consultant. She holds a BA in language and communication and a special honors degree in monitoring and evaluation from Lupane State University, and a Master of Science Degree in development studies. She has worked in the human rights sector for over 12 years and has experience in trauma healing, lobby and advocacy, and feminist movement building. She's currently studying for a PhD in development studies, and her thesis work focuses on feminist organising in Zimbabwe. Her research interests are feminist perspectives on environmental issues, extractivism, livelihoods, disaster management, and sexual reproductive health rights.



↑

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN NIGERIAN AGRICULTURE:

Assessing the Effects of China- Nigeria Agricultural Cooperation on Female Smallholders' Livelihood, Capacity- Building, and Shifting Social Norms

by Ishola Itunu Grace



China's engagements with Nigeria and other African countries via establishing various intergovernmental organisations, partnerships, and investments have experienced exponential growth in recent years. The rapid progress of China-Nigeria cooperation has occurred in many sectors, including agriculture. Agriculture is vital for the Nigerian government's intention to diversify the local economy to reduce its reliance on oil and gas, prompting efforts to incentivise agriculture investments. China's successes in addressing food security and achieving economic growth position it as a valuable partner for Nigeria's agricultural development since many countries in the global South seek to replicate China's development model. Between 2003 and 2014, across its thirty-six states Nigeria hosted about 650 Chinese agricultural experts, who provided training and technical assistance on agriculture-related issues for at least two years (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2019). In 2017, China's Tidfore Heavy Equipment Group invested about \$200 million (USD) in Nigeria's agriculture sector (American Enterprise Institute, 2023). Such investment follows a cooperation modality involving establishing agriculture technology demonstration centres (ATDC) and joint ventures with equity partnerships, offering technology transfer, technical training and scholarships, and land investments. Despite these cooperation modes, little is known about how smallholders benefit from this cooperation. Thus, this study examines Chinese government-funded agricultural training conducted by Green Agriculture West Africa Limited (GAWAL) in Abuja, Nigeria, from 2016 to 2019. It focuses on assessing the benefits for female smallholder farmers and explores how the training has influenced income levels and gender norms in Nigeria's agriculture sector.

This study investigates the effects of China’s agricultural engagement in Nigeria on female smallholders’ income levels and livelihoods. It explores how local Chinese agribusinesses overseeing ATDCs implement agricultural aid via training and business exchanges with Nigerian communities. This study draws on existing literature, media articles, policy reports, gender studies, and semi-structured interviews with key participants in Chinese-led agricultural training in Abuja. The research aims to offer a holistic understanding of the phenomenon by combining content analysis and interview responses, blending theoretical perspectives with real-life experiences.

Key findings

- GAWAL conducted annual agricultural training sessions between August and October from 2016 to 2019. Each session, lasting five to seven days, benefited approximately 400 government officials, farmers, and agriculture experts from various Nigerian states. Meanwhile, the number of participating female smallholders remains undisclosed due to the company’s confidentiality policy and insufficient documentation. However, insights from the study indicated limited female smallholders’ involvement. Participants received training to cultivate and process Chinese hybrid rice and cassava stems and on agrochemical usage, food processing, and operating various farm machinery and equipment.
- The impact of Chinese-led agricultural training on the income and livelihood of male versus female smallholders shows a significant disparity. Female smallholders experience less improvement in income and livelihood opportunities after the training due to institutional barriers, credit access, and occupational segregation. Male smallholders, compared with female smallholders, reported higher yields, credit facilities for scaling up production, and participation in GAWAL’s out-grower scheme, resulting in increased income.
- Despite the limited direct economic impact, the training increased female smallholders’ willingness to adopt modern agricultural technologies and techniques, fostering food security and rural development. Post-training, they share their newly acquired skills with other smallholders in their communities, indirectly contributing to increased yields and income for those unable to access the training directly.

- The study reveals significant gender disparities in agriculture-related gender norms, especially given the prevalent perception designating some cash crops, such as wheat, millet, cocoa, rice, and sesame, as ‘male crops’. The finding underscores the awareness among Nigerian female smallholders of the existing glass ceilings in the agriculture sector, including the lack of access to land, agricultural extension services, and credit facilities. Many female smallholders address or mitigate these limitations via initiatives like knowledge sharing, financial contributions, and participation in multiple community-based (religious, township, and farmers) associations. While the study does not establish direct links between Chinese-led agricultural training and these efforts, it suggests that female smallholders acquiring skills in growing rice, millet, and cassava stems through the training may engage in cash crop farming more efficiently, ultimately increasing their farm produce and income over time.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study is a forerunner that provides a micro-analysis of China-Nigeria agricultural cooperation from a gendered perspective. It aims to help scholars, activists, the Chinese and Nigerian governments, and other stakeholders understand the nature and impacts of international agricultural support efforts on female smallholders in Nigeria, providing insights to inform their future engagement plans vis-à-vis China-Nigeria agricultural cooperation. Specifically, this report proposes the following action steps:

- Integrate gender equality into the agriculture sector: The Nigerian government needs to promulgate new policies to boost inclusion and sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria. Though women contribute significantly to agriculture and food production, they are not considered active actors in agricultural development and have less access to vital resources – land, credit, and extension services.
- Increase gender consciousness in localised training programmes: Organisers of Chinese-led agricultural training programs in Nigeria need to involve local actors in planning and implementing training programs. They should provide more diversified training programs, including horticulture and food processing, for women who do not want to grow cash crops like rice, cassava, and millet.

- Strengthen Chinese companies' multi-layered partnership with other agro-sector stakeholders: Chinese agribusiness firms should collaborate with Nigerian agri-tech firms, extension officers, farmer organisations, and community associations to enhance grassroots implementation of China-Nigeria agricultural cooperation. Agri-tech companies can provide crucial data on skills and local communities requiring Chinese-led agricultural programs. Besides, extension agents can serve as a communication link between Chinese agribusinesses and smallholders, given their knowledge of and experience with Nigeria's agricultural value chains and local farmers. 📌

Bibliography

Food and Agriculture Organisation. (2019). *Inspiration, inclusion and innovation: FAO-China South-South Cooperation Programme (2009-2019)*. [online] (Accessed: 10 October 2023).

Zheng, Y. and Carayannis, T. (2023). *China and the Global South: A comparative analysis of knowledge networks in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean*, Social Science Research Council.



Ishola Itunu Grace

Ishola Itunu Grace is a 2022 Yenching Scholar at Yenching Academy of Peking University's Masters of China Studies program, majoring in politics and international relations, with a research focus on China-Africa cooperation in education, human capital development, and public diplomacy. Grace obtained her bachelor's degree in Chinese language and international education from Capital Normal University, Beijing. She is fluent in Mandarin and contributes to the field of China-Africa relations through extensive field studies, observations, and interviews conducted with participants from various parts of China. Grace is the current vice president of the prestigious Peking University African Student Association (PUASA). Before this, she served as the liaison officer of the embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in Beijing, responsible for Nigerian students in China between 2019 and 2020. Additionally, she is a member of the academic committee of Africa Diaspora In China Network, Beijing, and serves as an executive assistant for Africa Youth Diaspora Organisation, USA.



↑

**IMPLICATIONS
OF SECURITY
AGREEMENTS ON
WOMEN, PEACE,
AND SECURITY IN
SOLOMON ISLANDS**

*A Comparative Case
Study on China-Solomon
Islands Bilateral
Security Cooperation
and the Australia-
Solomon Islands
Bilateral Security
Treaty*

by Patricia Sango Pollard

This study centres on China’s influence in the global South – and specifically in the Pacific Islands region – by focusing on the impacts of the China-Solomon Islands Security Agreement on women, peace, and security.

Solomon Islands is a country of more than 700,000 people close to Australia in the Pacific. The country has a range of inherent complexities that impede its progress. Women’s development in the country is lagging behind their male counterparts’ due to systematic hindering factors. Nonetheless, Solomon Island women have been agents in the peace building process in the aftermath of major and ongoing unrest (Caso and Pollard, 2023). In 2019, the country changed its diplomatic relationship to China, ending a 36-year relationship with Taiwan. In April 2022, China and Solomon Islands signed a security agreement, making Solomon Islands the focus of geopolitical attention in the region (Agorau, 2022).

The question this study aimed to answer was: *What does the Solomon Islands-China security agreement mean for the situation of women in Solomon Islands and the role they play in peace building and security efforts in comparison to a similar arrangement with a traditional development partner like Australia?* A broad desk review on the subject supplemented by informal interviews carried out with government and civil society representatives and local women was undertaken to gather the needed information.

The governments of China and Solomon Islands maintained that the security agreement was a mutual decision between two sovereign states to assist the latter with its internal security needs. Reactions to the signing of this security pact have reverberated across traditional Western allies and the regional and international community (Agorau, 2022). In Solomon Islands, the agreement seems arbitrary, raising various speculations. There

were arguments against the need for the security agreement and its potential to be a tool for legitimising elite capture. Nevertheless, others claimed the security agreement and the subsequent capacitating of police and defence in the country are timely to deal with the ongoing unrest and losses that the country has been faced with.

Solomon Islands endorsed its Women Peace and Security National Action Plan 2017-2021 (WPS NAP), aligning with both CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30, and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (*UNSCR 1325*), which calls for recognition of women's full and equal participation in peace building processes. The country launched its National Security Strategy (NSS) 2020, which mainstreams gender equality and respects all the pillars of the Solomon Islands WPS NAP (SIG-MWYCFA, 2017). Since 2015, China has been committed to advancing *UN Resolution 1325 WPS* by making progress in gradual reduction of military expenditure, reduction of arms, disarmament, increase in the number of women peacekeepers in UN deployed forces, and engagement in combatting the transnational trafficking of women and girls (Guo and Han, 2022. 284-292).

Despite the above commitments, there has never been any consultation with key women's organizations during the formation of the China-Solomon Islands security agreement. The research has found that Solomon Islands women did not reconcile the security agreement with its impacts on their daily lives. However, they raised concerns about the lack of broad consultations with civil society organisations and of any consideration for the legacy of women's key role in peace building processes in the country. There were also concerns about the likelihood of the use of weapons that may be catastrophic to women and children, as experienced during the ethnic tension of the late 1990s (Fangalasu et al, 2011).

Australia signed a bilateral security treaty with Solomon Islands in 2017 and supported development of Solomon Islands WPS NAP 2017-2021. While Australia's ongoing commitment to WPS supports policy formulation, addressing domestic violence, promoting women to key leadership positions within the police force, and empowering women's agency to contribute to peace and security working through agencies, Australia still falls short when it comes to bringing women to the table in discussing matters of military and security. In this way, Australia's approach to security with Solomon Islands is in congruence with China, where despite the latter's commitment to all WPS resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council, there was no inclusion of women's voices during negotiations on the China-Solomon Islands security agreement.

Nonetheless, there may be some opportunities to maximise benefits from the country’s new partnership with China while leveraging current opportunities with Australia. These include advocating for the inclusion of women’s voices in state security, including military discussions; being open to forging a positive relationship with China to advance women’s development; leveraging geopolitical interests to address root causes of dissent in the country; and strengthening national security policies to ensure optimal outcomes for the country in the face of increasing security instability in the region. ■

Bibliography

Aqorau, T. (2022). Rethinking Solomon Islands Security. *Devpolicy Blog*. [\[online\]](#) [Accessed: 4 May. 2023].

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). (n.d) *Australia-Solomon Islands Bilateral Security Treaty*. [\[online\]](#).

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). (2021). *Australia’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031*. [\[online\]](#) [Accessed 5th May. 2023]

Caso, F and Pollard, P (2023). Peacebuilding and feminist foreign policy: Can Australia rebuild relations with Solomon Islands? *Australian feminist foreign policy coalition: issue number 11*.pp. 1-4. [\[online\]](#) [Accessed 9 April. 2023]

Fangalasuu et al. (2011). *Herem kam: story blong mifala olketa mere. Women’s Submission to the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission* [\[online\]](#). [Accessed 21 April. 2023]

Guo, Y. and Han, Z. (2022). Achieving sustaining peace through preventive diplomacy. [\[online\]](#) *Asian Regional Cooperation Studies*. Vol.6. pp. 284-292.

SIG-Ministry of Women, Youth, Children, and family Affairs (MWYCFA). *Solomon Islands Women Peace and Security, National Action Plan 2017-2021*. Honiara: SIG. pp. 12. [\[online\]](#) [Accessed 5 November. 2022]

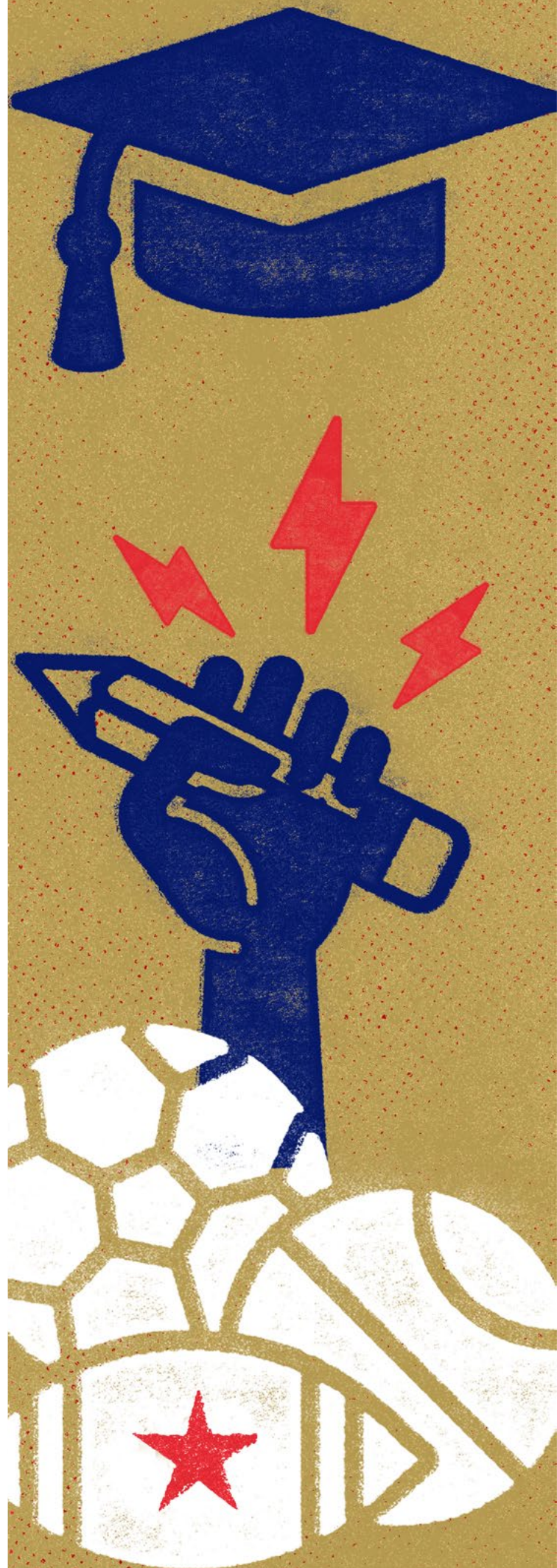


Patricia Sango Pollard

Patricia Sango Pollard is an independent researcher in gender equality, women’s rights, and social inclusion in Solomon Islands. She has experience program managing the Solomon Islands Women’s Rights Action Movement and sits on the boards of organisations advocating for women’s rights and child protection. She is currently engaged with both local and regional organisations and development partners in Solomon Islands providing advice on gender equality and social inclusion. One of her recent works in 2023 was a policy paper to the Australian government on peace building and feminist foreign policy focusing on Solomon Islands, with the La Trobe University in Australia. She graduated with a master’s degree in development studies from the University in the South Pacific in 2014 with a thesis on the impacts of development aid on gender equality programs in the Solomon Islands.

**THE GENDER
QUESTION
IN CHINA'S
SOFT POWER
ENGAGEMENT
IN THE GLOBAL
SOUTH**

*by Govind Kelkar
and Ritu Agarwal*



This study presents an analysis of the gender question in China's soft power engagement with the global South. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) pays sustained attention to how China is seen in the world. Nye's concept of soft power shows three key sources of soft power: culture, values, and foreign policy (Nye 2004:5). China's definition of soft power (软实力, ruǎn shí lì), however, emphasises the cultural dimension; it tends to combine traditional culture with ideology, history, morality, and economic governance. Soft power in the Chinese context is different from soft power as explained by Nye. The Chinese concept of soft power sees fluid boundaries between hard power (硬实力, yìng shí lì) and soft power, seeing them as symbiotic and mutually empowering. In China, soft power is associated with political stability and social cohesion (Repnikova, 2022:52). For example, the internationalisation of Chinese media and higher educational institutions is associated with growing new markets and revenue generation for Chinese universities. Interestingly, China's soft power also has domestic factors in consideration, although these are often subtle, yet discernible. The grandeur and lavishness of expos and sports events have been used as a showcase for the Chinese citizens, a showcase of the power and prosperity of the new China.

After discussing the distinctive characteristics of China's soft power, the paper raises major questions about factoring gender into China's soft power tools. Throughout the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the party and government leadership have repeatedly criticised lingering feudal ideas of patriarchal social relations and made policy corrections for women's social and economic empowerment with asset rights, freedom from familial control, and employment outside the home. Furthermore, the party-state leadership in many multilateral meetings (e.g., CEDAW, SDGs) has acknowledged the important role of women and made commitments to gender equality and women's rights. However, the concern for women's rights and gender equality has not found any place in China's foreign policies or in the trade negotiations with countries in the global South.

Admittedly, China has achieved its soft power objective of creating a positive story of China's economic development, a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics. Research shows that there is an appreciation of China's emergence as a global power with its own cultural and political specificities. Chinese soft power strategies have had significant impact

by way of diplomatic support, investments, higher educational exchanges, and Confucius Institutes in many countries of Asia and Africa. In Nepal and Pakistan, China has become a major destination for students to pursue higher education, including PhD degrees.

Notwithstanding its soft power success, China's experience of socialist development suggests that it is unrealistic to expect that gender equality will automatically follow the establishment of a socialist system. Rather, it suggests that women struggle to resolve gender-specific subordination and exclusion from decision making in social, economic, and political development, which is likely to continue if there is a tendency to subsume gender equality in general socio-economic development, including poverty reduction programmes. The structural patriarchy will at best allow only a marginal change in the gendered position of women as token evidence of non-discrimination and gender inclusivity.

China's experience further suggests that without a fundamental transformation of power relations within the family, women will be unable to free themselves from domestic confinement, and any attempt at building and narrating a 'good China story' is likely to remain inconclusive. The Confucian tenets of women's responsibility, 'family harmony', obedience, and care work as the major components of China's culture are likely to strengthen traditional patriarchal structures of women's inequality within China and with negotiating partner countries in the global South. Further research is needed to see if these tenets were changed or replaced by including women's rights to resources and freedom from the traditional familial system of women's subordination and discrimination.

Importantly, the women's movement in China and numerous women's professional organisations have made concerted demands for realising equal rights to resources, decision making, and sharing of domestic care work. However, it was noted that the PRC policy pronouncements (both at the national and multilateral platforms) address women's conditions of inequality and marginality in social existence. These were hardly followed through, however, due to explicit mandatory patriarchal norms and practices that made the policies null and void. This leads us to conclude that if there is not a fundamental change in perceptions and practices of gender hierarchies, there seems to be little hope of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. This fundamental change lies in 1) a departure from considering women's equality as a subset of poverty reduction or economic prosperity and 2) creating an enabling environment with the policy and practice of gender equality as an embedded or explicit aspect of China's cultural and political system and trade negotiations. Of course, this also requires realising women's equality and dignity as well as freedom from masculine attitudes within the home and in governance structures. The

future of a more powerful China with a ‘good story’ to tell the world lies in the increased agency of women, their unmediated (not mediated through the household and its head) rights to resources and political decision-making, freedom from violence, and control of their lives. ▲

Bibliography

Nye, J. S. (2004) *Soft Power: The Means of Success to World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs.

Repnikova, M. (2022) *Chinese Soft Power, Elements in Global China*, Cambridge University Press.



Govind Kelkar

Govind Kelkar is a feminist scholar, a PhD in the political economy of China. She is a visiting professor at the Council for Social Development and Institute for Human Development, India. She is the executive director of the GenDev Centre for Research and Innovation, India, and was a senior advisor at Landesa, Seattle, USA (May 2013–March 2020). In her concurrent assignments, Professor Kelkar was the international research coordinator of ENERGIA International, the Netherlands, and research lead on gender and energy at Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai. She is a distinguished adjunct faculty at the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand. Professor Kelkar has the position of honorary professor at the Institute of Ethnology, Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, China, and honorary senior fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi. She has authored sixteen books and numerous scholarly publications. She recently co-authored the book *Witch Hunts: Culture, Patriarchy and Structural Transformation*, Cambridge University Press, 2020.



Ritu Agarwal

Ritu Agarwal is an associate professor at the Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. She holds a PhD in Chinese studies from the University of Delhi. She completed her MA in political science at JNU. Her doctoral work explored the micro-level agrarian transformation in Yunnan province, and she is currently engaged in questions of provincial transformation, especially in Yunnan. Her research interests are rural political economy, urbanisation, property rights, gender studies, and provincial and Chinese politics. Dr Agarwal studied Mandarin Chinese at Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing. She was a visiting scholar at Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, Kunming and visiting fellow at Yunnan Minzu University and, recently, Yunnan University. She was also affiliated with the Chinese University of Hong Kong and East Asia Institute, National University of Singapore, Singapore, to collect material for her research work.



**WHEN CIVIL
SOCIETY
CONTESTS
GLOBAL CHINA**
*Challenges and
Opportunities for
Gender-Related Civil
Society Transnational
Action on China-
Backed Infrastructure
Projects in the
Global South*

by Laura Trajber Waisbich

An important facet of Global China is its growing role in international development. China is today a major financier and builder of large energy infrastructure projects in the global South. While crucial to economic growth, internationally financed power projects have prompted local, national, and transnational social mobilisation – including campaigns to suspend projects altogether (Shipton and Dauvergne, 2021; Shieh, 2022; Waisbich, 2022). Civil society contestation of and even resistance to proposed projects have grown out of perceived unevenly distributed negative impacts of large power plants, notably on local communities and the environment (Tan-Mullins, Urban and Mang, 2017; Middleton, 2022). In many cases, women have been at the forefront in challenging these projects (Amar et al., 2022). In recent years, gender impact considerations have gained further salience among traditional international development financiers, with slow but steady efforts to mainstream gender in infrastructure building (see, for example, OECD n.d.). Increasingly there is a recognition that large infrastructure projects, power plants included, impact women differently.

↑
This paper revisits emblematic cases of transnational civil society mobilisation that took place in the 2010s and managed to halt China-backed hydro and coal power plants before their completion and thus before those projects' full impact on the ground. These are the Myitsone and Cheay Areng dams, in Myanmar and Cambodia, respectively, and the Lamu coal power plant, in Kenya. By re-examining what academics and activists widely consider 'successful' transnational mobilisation instances (Kirchherr, 2018; Yeophantong, 2020; Chheat, 2022) in two different regions (Southeast Asia and East Africa), the paper offers a comparative account of past contestation dynamics (actors, issue framing, and strategies) and an assessment of how gender concerns and considerations featured in highly visible transnational campaigns.

Juxtaposed, these past transnational mobilisation instances challenging China-backed projects in the global South offer some relevant research and policy insights. First, national actors, notably local communities (many of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities) and environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), initiated and led the opposition to large power projects. International allies, chiefly international NGOs engaged in environmental advocacy, subsequently backed national groups, making the contestation a transnational affair. Second, civil society groups pursued multiple strategies

to contest projects. While mobilisation primarily focused on reverting policy decisions of ‘host governments’, whenever possible, Chinese stakeholders (government, financiers, and builders) and other international financiers were also approached. Third, civil society actors organised and built their campaigns largely around the environmental risk, harm, and impact of projects on the ground. Human rights and social issues were equally raised, notably regarding community rights, but transnational mobilisation was largely blind to gender issues. Concerns with projects’ impact on women’s rights, livelihoods, and health, gender inequalities, and gender-based violence featured marginally across all the cases analysed. Fourth, civil society actors in China engaged with these ‘controversial projects’, notably those in Southeast Asia, on their own terms rather than openly joining adversarial transnational resistance campaigns. Their in-loco information gathering, stakeholder engagement, and advocacy work revolved mostly around corporate responsibility and environmental issues, showing a similar blindness to gender considerations. Lastly, low salience of both gender issues and Chinese civil society voices in transnational mobilisation does not mean these concerns and actors were not present. Rather, and for different reasons, including organisational politics and tactics, these were not prioritised in public statements and advocacy documents.

↑ Building on these findings, the paper then discusses challenges and opportunities for gender-related civil society transnational activism in the context of China-backed large energy infrastructure projects. It opens by critically unpacking two identified blind spots in otherwise ‘successful’ transnational mobilisations: gender considerations and engagement of Chinese allies. It then closes the discussion by offering recommendations on how to strengthen transnational coalitions that are more sensitive to gender issues and more inclusive of Chinese and China-based voices in the future. These include fostering linkages among organisations within China and between them and those already actively monitoring China’s overseas large infrastructure projects outside China, many of them in the environmental movement. Expanding these coalitions can bridge the gender-environment nexus in the context of Global China, help civil society groups in the global South to further decode and engage with Chinese actors on the ground, and hedge advocacy efforts by groups inside China. Forging new types of ‘inside-outside’ (see Fox and Brown, 1998) collaboration on Global China can contribute to dissuade Chinese stakeholders from planning or agreeing to finance or build ‘controversial projects’ in earlier stages, thus avoiding local resistance and campaigns to halt projects further down the line. Bringing more voices to the conversation, including from women’s organisations and gender experts in ‘host countries’, China, and beyond can also ensure these concerns will gain a more prominent space in Global China-related transnational mobilisation in the years to come. ●

Bibliography

Amar, P., Rofel, L., Viteri, M.A., Fernandez-Salvador, C., and Brancoli, F. (eds) (2022) 'Introduction. China Stepping Out, the Amazon Biome, and South American Populism'. *The Tropical Silk Road. The Future of China in South America*, pp.1-40. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

Chheat, S. (2022) 'Contesting China-funded Projects in Cambodia: The Case of Stung Chhay Areng Hydropower', *Asian Studies Review*, 46(1), pp. 19-35.

Fox, J. and Brown, L.D. (eds) (1998) *The Struggle for Accountability: The World Bank, NGOs, and Grassroots Movements*. Cambridge, Mass. ; London: MIT Press.

Kirchherr, J. (2018) 'Strategies of Successful Anti-Dam Movements: Evidence from Myanmar and Thailand', *Society & Natural Resources*, 31(2), pp. 166-182.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (n.d) 'Gender in infrastructure', *oecd.org*. [\[online\]](#) (Accessed: 11 July 2023).

Middleton, C. (2022) 'The political ecology of large hydropower dams in the Mekong Basin: A comprehensive review', *Water Alternatives*, 15(2), pp. 251-289.

Shieh, S. (2022) 'Civil Society's Multifaceted Response to China's Belt and Road Initiative', *Global China Pulse*, 1(1), pp. 99-109.

Shipton, L. and Dauvergne, P. (2021) 'The Politics of Transnational Advocacy Against Chinese, Indian, and Brazilian Extractive Projects in the Global South', *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 30(3), pp. 240-264.

Tan-Mullins, M., Urban, F. and Mang, G. (2017) 'Evaluating the Behaviour of Chinese Stakeholders Engaged in Large Hydropower Projects in Asia and Africa', *The China Quarterly*, 230, pp. 464-488.

Waisbich, L.T. (2022) "'The Bank We Want": Chinese and Brazilian Activism around and within the BRICS New Development Bank', in P. Amar et al. (eds) *The Tropical Silk Road*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, pp. 190-203.

Yeophantong, P. (2020) 'China and the Accountability Politics of Hydropower Development: How Effective are Transnational Advocacy Networks in the Mekong Region?', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 42(1), pp. 85-117.



Laura Trajber Waisbich

Laura Trajber Waisbich is a South-South cooperation expert. She has over ten years of research and policy experience in the field of development, foreign policy, and human rights. She is a political scientist and international relations expert by training and holds a PhD in geography from the University of Cambridge. Laura is currently a departmental lecturer in Latin American studies and the director of the Brazilian Studies Programme at the Latin American Centre at the University of Oxford (UK). She is also affiliated with three Brazil-based think tanks: the South-South Cooperation Research and Policy Centre (Articulação SUL), the Brazilian Centre for Analysis and Planning (CEBRAP), and the Igarapé Institute.

**PUBLISHED
FEBRUARY 2024**

ISSUE TEAM

Cai Yiping
Sharan Sindhu
Matthew Gill (copyediting)

**DAWN EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

Cai Yiping
Claire Slatter
Corina Rodríguez Enríquez
Flora Partenio
Gita Sen
(General Co-coordinator)
Kamala Chandrakirana
(General Co-coordinator)
Kholoud Al-Ajarma
Kumudini Samuel
María Graciela Cuervo
(General Co-coordinator)
Masaya Llavaneras Blanco
Vanita Mukherjee

DAWN BOARD

Lydia Alpizar
Fatou Sow
Sandra Tarte
Sonia Corrêa
Tara Chetty
Viviene Taylor
(Board Chair)

**DAWN GLOBAL
SECRETARIAT**

Administrator
Sharan Sindhu

Finance Officer
Nailagovesi Vakatalai

Program Coordinator
Lillian Bing

Admin/Program Officer
Kajal Matthew

Admin/ Finance Assistant
Ana Rakacikaci

Research Officer
Sala Weleilakeba

Junior Finance Officer
Simran Singh

Communications Officer
Ricardo D'Aguiar

**Online Communications
Officer**
Leda Antunes

Comms Coordination Officer
Giulia Rodrigues

Lead Designer
Marla Rabelo

Junior Designer
Raquel Cappelletto

Download here the
previous issues of
DAWN Informs.



DAWN Informs

©2024 by DAWN under a Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0
International license. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

JOIN US ONLINE



📍 Global Secretariat, JP Bayly Trust Building,
Level 2, 193 Rodwell Road, Suva, Fiji.

🌱 Please consider the environment: don't print this if you can avoid it.

Acknowledgement

DAWN deeply appreciates the project advisors who contributed to the development of the research framework and the review of the case studies.

Peggy Antrobus

Siran Huang

T. Tu Huynh

Susie Jolly

Yingtao Li

Haifang Liu

Claire Slatter

Chuanhong Zhang

DAWN project associates **Yin Yu** and **Lizhen (Momo) Zhang** contributed to the research framework and coordination of this project.



DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES
WITH WOMEN FOR A NEW ERA