



BSR Conference 2008 | Sustainability: Leadership Required Community-Based Environmental Activism in China: Tackling Water Issues with Success

Breakout Session Summary

Friday, November 7, 2008 | 10:30 a.m.–noon

Speakers

- **Tom Cooper**, Corporate Water Programs Manager, Intel Corporation
- **Daniela Salaverry**, Co-Director, China Program, Pacific Environment
- **Wei Dong Zhou**, Director, China, Business for Social Responsibility (moderator)

Highlights

- The Chinese environmental NGO movement is evolving extremely rapidly as the country grows. There are both well-developed, Beijing-based NGOs that are more than 15 years old, as well as small, local entrepreneurial environmental NGOs.
- The panelists noted that NGOs and multinational corporations are often holding the government accountable for enforcing regulations that are on the books, and strengthening standards by demonstrating that they are attainable.
- An Intel employee in the audience noted that a company can no longer go it alone when addressing environmental issues in China, and multinational companies are beginning to develop a common approach that is breaking down industry silos.

Memorable Quotes

- “One giant misconception is that Chinese regulation is lax. It is far from lax.”
—Tom Cooper, Intel Corporation
- “Corporate social responsibility creates channels for companies to gather information about the challenges they face, as well as opportunities for NGOs to create pressure for change.” —Wei Dong Zhou, Business for Social Responsibility
- “I encourage companies to identify local stakeholders or local organizations that they can build a partnership with.” —Daniela Salaverry, Pacific Environment

Overview

Zhou, Cooper and Salaverry began the session by discussing the tremendous growth of China, some of the negative environmental impacts resulting from that growth, and the related proliferation of environmental NGOs.





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Cooper noted that Intel has built plants in arid regions, both in China and the U.S., but the company considered this when siting the facility and would not construct plants if they would significantly diminish local water resources. In addition, the plants include aggressive water conservation strategies such as the use of waste water in their facilities, and in some cases the company has built sewage treatment plants to accompany new Intel facilities.

Zhou commented on the wide range of international, national, and local NGOs as well as entrepreneurial individuals working on environmental issues in China, and stressed the importance of communication between multinational corporations and NGOs. Salaverry agreed, noting that continuous dialogue is essential because of the extremely rapid pace of change in China. Trust, based on transparent operations and goals, is also incredibly important when working with Chinese NGOs.

Zhou and Salaverry discussed China's new policy of publicizing wastewater, emissions, and other environmental data, and the work being done by the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs. That organization has created a public water quality map with 27 thousand polluters listed in a visual, user-friendly online tool.

Salaverry emphasized the opportunity available for NGOs and companies to expand their range of stakeholders. If all of China's 1 billion people feel like they have a voice, then that's going to help China develop by supporting the country's social and economic goals.

Cooper pointed out Intel's leadership in the Electronics Industry Citizenship Coalition—an initiative launched by Business for Social Responsibility (BSR)—working to ensure their supply chain meets a very high standard for environmental and social issues. The company holds suppliers accountable for compliance with laws, and is setting up milestones for which they will be accountable.

Linda Hwang, Manager, Environmental R&D, BSR, noted that progress is being made as international actors like the American Bar Association help government agencies address law enforcement and other issues. Salaverry followed up by noting the importance of understanding the leverage points that groups can use to make improvements in communities. Local groups are only starting to understand the laws they can use, and there are only a few newly-created public interest law firms that can be overwhelmed with work. She emphasized that companies should make sure that their NGO partners feel that the company is engaged in a truly open dialogue.

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