

China's energy policies 'do not tackle climate change'

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[BEIJING] China's economic, energy and environment policies have not been streamlined to fight climate change, according to a new study.

Carmen Richerzhagen and Imme Scholz from the German Development Institute reviewed China's recent climate-relevant policies and actions in a study published last month (3 December) in *World Development*.

They found that China has struggled hard to increase its energy efficiency but many of its policies, while contributing to climate change mitigation, have been motivated by cutting energy costs and increasing energy security — rather than cutting carbon emissions.

The Chinese government has set an ambitious target to reduce energy consumption per unit of the country's gross domestic product by 20 per cent of 2005 levels by 2010. But this objective has been dampened by low energy prices and a lack of market competition.

"Climate change is a cross-sectoral issue, but China considers it mainly as an economic issue," the authors write.

China — the world's second largest carbon emitter — has made no international commitments to cutting carbon emissions, and there are few incentives for it to do so, say the authors.

To deal with international pressure, China has formed the National Coordination Committee on Climate Change. The committee is headed by the prime minister, with the powerful National Reform and Development Commission the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and 13 other ministries and agencies as members.

But the central government's moves to reduce carbon consumption are challenged by local political autonomy and regional complexity, as well as a lack of policy coordination.

In addition, public awareness of the climate change problem is lacking and the influence of nongovernmental sectors — such as the science community, civil society, media, and donors — is limited.

The authors suggest that China should enhance its capacity to deal with climate change by increasing policy coordination between different sectors and mobilising more actors — such as civil society organisations and the scientific community — in the fight against climate change.

Zhuang Guiyang, a senior researcher at the Research Centre for Sustainable Development at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, agrees that it is important to increase China's capacities to cope with climate change.

"But in the current development stage, at which China does not have emission reduction obligations, it could be better to coordinate various efforts under the goal of saving energy," he told SciDev.Net.

Reference: *World Development* doi 10.1016/j.worlddev.2007.06.010 (2007)

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