

South China Environment Fund

Who We Are

The South China Environment Fund (SCEF) is a Guangzhou-based philanthropic initiative that takes an innovative approach to help civil society in southern China grow and flourish. Since our founding in 2012, we have been making multiyear, general support grants to grassroots nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in southern China. While China's philanthropy sector is growing rapidly, the vast majority of philanthropies make only single-year, project-based grants. Our approach helps NGOs develop their human resources, get their finances on firmer ground, and think more strategically about how to address environmental challenges.

Three organizations founded SCEF: Guangdong Harmony Foundation, SEE Foundation, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Through SCEF, they can combine their strengths, streamline their giving, and leverage their resources. In this way, domestic and international grantmaking can more effectively support NGOs as they find ways to meet critical needs in China's environmental movement.

Our Innovative Approach

Three features distinguish our grantmaking: our multiyear, general support grants; our focus on environmental issues; and our support for local NGOs. Currently, only about 3 percent of Chinese private foundations focus on the environment and of these, only 20 or so are grantmaking philanthropies. Local NGOs are often overlooked by Chinese and international funders, but our general support grants invest in their technical skills, systematic and scientific analyses, and overall organizational capacity.

We are more than grantmakers: our “grantmaker-plus” model combines multiyear general support grants *with* problem-oriented action research and learning *with* tailor-made capacity-building resources. On the research side, we are helping NGOs build a body of evidence-based research, conduct systematic analysis of problems, and build their own knowledge base in areas like biodiversity protection and environmental pollution. For capacity building, we advise NGOs on how establish a board, mobilize community members to take ownership over activities, and develop training for government officials and staff.

Through these efforts, we are strengthening the role of NGOs and public participation in issues such as green supply chain management and industrial pollution control; watershed pollution prevention and water resources conservation; and sustainable community development amid rapid urbanization.

At Work in Southern China

We make grants to organizations in China's Pan-Pearl River Delta, the 10 southern China provinces and autonomous regions that generate 33 percent of China's GDP and are home to 500 million Chinese. It is a region where environmental pollution—in the air, in the water, and in the soil—is especially acute, and the environmental consequences of its unsustainable practices are felt locally, spread regionally, and, on the international level, contribute to the growing threat of climate change.

Yet southern China also is a pioneer of change. Regulations for NGO registration are more

relaxed in Guangdong province than other areas of China, and the province has set a goal of nurturing 300 key environmental NGOs by the end of the 12th Five Year Plan (2011-2015). Guangdong-based entrepreneurs, including members of the SEE Foundation, are becoming more involved in environmental public affairs. Environmental NGOs are receiving more media attention, as southern China's regional media outlets become more open to news on public interest concerns and the independent sector.

The Guangdong Harmony Foundation's office provides a physical base for our work and a dynamic environment for engaging with the region's NGO, academic, policy, business, and media communities. Our office is located on the campus of Sun Yat-sen University, one of China's oldest and most distinguished higher education institutions. We enjoy a close relationship with SYSU's School of Philanthropy, which is training a new generation of philanthropy professionals and, through its environmental public interest research institute, developing the knowledge base needed to support sound environmental policies. We also benefit from SYSU's Institute of Civil Society

Our Future

Our overarching goal is for China's independent sector to pioneer new forms of collaboration that can help solve China's environmental problems. In the past, few southern China NGOs had the ability to participate directly in policy design, but NGO impact in this arena is growing as these organizations develop a credible track record in policy innovation and effective implementation. Grassroots NGOs are a key link to the concerns and ideas of Chinese citizens and can be significant force in expanding channels for public participation, as they provide on-the-ground service in local communities, engage residents in demonstration projects, and bring the voices of citizens into policy discussions. Our goal is to ensure that these NGOs have the institutional strength, evidence-based research, and collaborative partnerships that will enable them to build a more sustainable future for the citizens of southern China.

We hope our approach will serve as a model that inspires new forms of collaboration between foundations and local NGOs and between Chinese and international foundations. We invite discussions with Chinese and international philanthropists who are interested in supporting grassroots environmental NGOs and the communities they serve in southern China.

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