

## **China-Zimbabwe Trade Relations in the 21st Century: An Analysis of the Trends, Patterns and Prospects**

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### **Abstract**

This study analyses the trends, patterns and prospects of Zimbabwe-China trade relations for the 16 years between years 2000 and 2016. The essence is to establish the direction of trade, trade intensity and trade composition of Zimbabwe-China trade as well as present a comparative analysis and assessment of the share of Zimbabwe-China trade vis-à-vis other trade partners. The study uses both primary and secondary data sources for analysis. The findings point to the fact that although Zimbabwe enjoyed a positive balance for the years preceding 2005, the country has since been recording widening trade deficits in its trade with China. With regard to trade intensity, the study reveals that on average, Zimbabwe's trade with China accounts for less than 5 per cent of Zimbabwe's trade with other African countries and the Rest of the World (RoW). In respect of trade composition, the study further found out that whilst Zimbabwean exports to China are largely dominated by the exportation of low value semi-processed and/or non-processed mining and agricultural commodities, China mainly exports high-end manufactures and consumer goods to Zimbabwe. As part of its recommendations, the study proposes the adoption of import regulation measures, export-oriented industrialization, establishment of China-Africa industrial capacity cooperation, and investment in manufacturing and industrial processing plants.

**Keywords:** *Zimbabwe-China, trade, exports, imports, industrialization*

### **1. Introduction**

The socio-economic and political relations between China and African countries have been intensifying especially at the turn of the millennium. In terms of trade relations, China still ranks as Africa's largest trading partner,

surpassing the continent's traditional trade partners such as the European Union (EU), United States (US), India, and other Asian and Latin American countries. Just as many African countries, Zimbabwe's trade with China has also been rapidly booming especially after the year 2000. This has been accompanied by several socio-economic opportunities and challenges to both China and Zimbabwe. For the benefit of trade policy and political economy analysis, it is very pertinent to undertake a thorough empirical investigation of the trends, patterns and prospects of China-Zimbabwe trade relations. This is fundamental in providing an informed basis for trade policy review and reform in order to strengthen trade relations with a view to promote mutually beneficial trade between the two countries. This paper analyses the China-Zimbabwe trade relations in the 21st century, with a specific focus on the trends, patterns and prospects of the trade relations. In terms of sectionalisation, the paper is organized into the following sections: methodology, background, literature review, analysis of trends and patterns of China-Africa trade, conclusion and recommendations.

## **2. Methodology**

This paper relies on both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. It utilizes trade data or statistics mainly from the United Nations (UN) Comtrade International Trade Centre Statistics Database, Trade Map and the National Bureau of Statistics of China. To build evidence based arguments, primary and secondary data sources are utilized. Primary data sources used are mainly pronouncements or policy statements made by government officials from either countries as well as official reports. On the other hand, secondary data sources used for the research comprise mostly journal articles, textbooks, newspapers and online media reports.

## **3. Background to China-Zimbabwe Trade Relations**

Trade relations between Zimbabwe and China historically date back to around the 15th century when the Ming and Qing dynasties established trade and cultural contacts with the Munhumutapa Empire (Manyeruke and Mhandara in Zhang, 2014: 5). The relations were politically consolidated following material support rendered by the Chinese towards the liberation struggle against colonialism in Zimbabwe. The establishment of official diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1980 paved way for deeper trade and commercial relations.

At the turn of the new millennium, China-Zimbabwe trade intensified, as with other African countries, mainly due to the emergence of China amongst global economic giants, and the consequent strengthening of its foothold on

the African continent as it sought to expand its markets for raw materials and finished products at the back of rapid domestic industrialization (see Ado and Su, 2016; Brautigam, 2010; Carmody, 2017; Kim, 2017). Trade ties between the two countries were partially strengthened following the adoption of the “Look East Policy” as the Zimbabwean government sought to pragmatically engage China, and other countries in the Far-East in apparent response to deteriorating relations with the Western countries (see Stiftung, 2004; Youde, 2007).

Structurally, Zimbabwe and China have different economies and the two are at different levels of socio-economic development. A structural and historical analysis of the Zimbabwean economy would reveal that the country, which has an estimated population of 14 million, has been largely agricultural-based. Since independence, agricultural and mineral commodities have consistently contributed more than 60 per cent share of national exports (see Chigumira, 2015; Hawkins, 2009; Newfarmer and Pierola, 2015). However, when the economy shrank by more than 40 per cent in the decade preceding 2010, it resulted in reduced capacity utilization across all economic sectors (Government of Zimbabwe, 2012).

Zimbabwe’s subdued economy especially since the turn of the millennium has affected the quality of the country’s trade potential. This has continued to diminish the country’s export performance whilst increasing the import bill and widening the trade deficit. For instance, the National Budget for 2017 states that Zimbabwe’s total exports for 2016 totalled US\$3.365 billion, itself a 6.9 per cent reduction from the US\$3.614 billion recorded in the year 2015 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2017: 23). The World Trade Organization (2015) ranks Zimbabwe number 121 and 130 in terms of exports and imports, respectively. China remains among Zimbabwe’s top five largest trading partners.

The economic structure and economic profile of China, in contrast, depicts a different picture altogether. Having gone through challenges of underdevelopment until the late 20th century, China embarked on socio-economic reforms that resulted in rapid economic growth, accelerated industrialization, boosted productivity across all economic sectors, burgeoning international trade, and increased domestic consumption. This ‘growth miracle’, fuelled by increased productivity in China’s industries, increased the country’s appetite for energy and crude oil, minerals and metal products as well as huge volumes of other raw materials for its rapidly expanding industrial manufacturing base (Ado and Su, 2016; Brautigam, 2010; Busse *et al.*, 2016; Cáceres and Ear, 2013; Carmody, 2017; Johnston *et al.*, 2015). Africa became one of the sources of these raw materials as well as opportunity for new markets for China’s finished products.

With Zimbabwe being endowed with a diversity of mineral deposits, comprising more than forty different types of minerals that include diamonds,

nickel, gold, chrome, copper, lithium, and platinum, among others as well as several agricultural commodities, such as tobacco, cotton, sugar, fruits, and other products (Government of Zimbabwe, 2012), the trade partnership between the country and China has been fostered. However, China's trade dominancy, even at global level should be taken into context as one analyses the China-Zimbabwe trade partnership. In terms of world trade, China is now ranked the largest exporting country and the second largest importing country in the world (World Trade Organization, 2015). In 2016 alone, China recorded a total trade volume of US\$3.68493 trillion, made up of exports worth US\$2.09744 trillion and imports worth US\$1.58748 trillion, thereby recording a positive trade balance of US\$509.96 billion (MOFCOM, 2017).

The China-Zimbabwe trade relationship is regulated and facilitated by a number of trade agreements and existing institutional frameworks. The two countries trade under the Trade, Investment and Technical Cooperation Agreement signed in 2004. Most of the technical trade and market access issues are discussed within the framework of the Zimbabwe-China Joint Permanent Commission together with strategic issues of bilateral cooperation such as investments, and other cross-sectoral partnerships. In terms of trade policy regimes guiding the China-Zimbabwe trade relations, Zimbabwe is mainly guided by its National Trade Policy (2012-2016), National Industrial Development (2012-2016), and the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET, 2013-2018). Overall, in its policy, national vision and trade objective, Zimbabwe seeks to increase the volume, value and diversity of its exports through the maximum exploitation of its comparative and competitive economic advantage as well as engaging in high-end value addition, beneficiation and export-led industrialization so as to promote sustained economic growth and development.

On the other hand, China is broadly guided by strategic plans. As of now, the country has the 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development for the People's Republic of China (2016-2020), 13th Five-Year Plan for Boosting Foreign Trade (2016-2020), 13th Five-Year Plan for Trade in Service Development (2016-2020), and the 13th Five-Year Plan for Business Development (2016-2020). All the trade-related frameworks have the policy intention of comprehensively upgrading and transforming China's international trade performance and further deepening the country's integration into the global value chains (GVCs).

#### **4. Literature Review**

Whilst the trends and patterns of international trade have increasingly become very unpredictable, depicted by the boom and bust cycles, what can no longer be ignored is the rising trade influence of China on the continent as a trade

partner of most African countries especially at the turn of the millennium. As the China White Paper on China-Africa on Economic and Trade Cooperation (2013) affirmed, China is now Africa's largest trade partner, with Africa considered as China's "major import source". In the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Johannesburg Action Plan (2016-2018: 17), China and African countries agreed to "scale up trade and try to elevate the China-Africa trade volume to US\$400 billion in 2014" and maintain growth and ensure trade balance.

In explaining the trends and patterns of trade between China and several African countries, classical economic theories of absolute advantage and comparative advantage propounded by Adam Smith and David Ricardo respectively, as well as Heckscher-Ohlin neo-classical theory of trade have always been necessarily handy, although not very sufficient. In examining the determinants of international trade, a considerable number of studies by authors such as Bahmani-Oskooee (1986), Morrow *et al.* (1998), Warner and Kreinin (1983), and Gourdon (2009), have revealed that the main determinants of trade, trade flows and trade patterns are factor endowments, import and export demand and supply, trade intensity, technology differences, trade policy and/or supporting government policies, consumer preferences differences, costs of trade, persuasion and/or political and economic diplomacy, and exchange rates, among other factors. These determinants have different impact and influence on trade partners, as context of trade relations invariably differ.

When applied to trade relations between China and African countries, the main determinants have been natural resource endowments, China's raw materials demand dynamics and scale economics. In *China-Africa Trade Patterns: Causes and Consequences*, Eisenman (2012) explored the causes as well as the economic and political effects of trade patterns characterizing the trade relationship between China and African countries. The author identifies five factors causing trade between the two trade partners namely the comparative advantage of China with respect to labour- and capital-intensive production, Africa's vast natural resource reserves, accelerated economic growth in China, the infrastructure development model used by China in Africa, and the increasing economies of scale recorded by Chinese shipping and manufacturing firms (Eisenman, 2012). Consistent with the author's findings, Biggeri and Sanfilippo's (2009: 31) empirical exploration of the determinants of the China-Africa economic partnership found that China's increased economic activities on the continent was propelled by "strategic interaction among three channels (FDI, trade and economic cooperation)" and the factor that African countries have abundant natural resources and offer market potential.

The findings by Eisenman (2012) as well as Biggeri and Sanfilippo (2009), especially the 'natural resource endowment' factor, have been

consistent with several studies which have attributed the rising stock of China-Africa trade to the rapid industrial productivity and increased urbanization experienced gradually after the post-1978 economic reforms, and rapidly at the turn of the new millennium. This ‘growth miracle’, fuelled by increased productivity in China’s industries, increased the country’s appetite for energy and crude oil, as well as huge volumes of other raw materials for its rapidly expanding industrial manufacturing base (see Ado and Su, 2016; Brautigam, 2010; Busse *et al.*, 2016; Cáceres and Ear, 2013; Carmody, 2017; Johnston *et al.*, 2015; Zafar, 2007). For instance, Pigato and Tang (2015: 1) pointed out that “rapid urbanization and heavy industrialization continue to spur robust Chinese demand for coal, oil and natural gas” which has resulted in the rise of trade between China and African countries from a low level of 2.3 per cent recorded in 1985. This is not new in global economic history and international economics. Just like any other country, it is rational to expect China’s foreign economic and trade policy to be driven by strategic commercial factors to satisfy domestic demands.

The continued export of unprocessed raw materials by most African countries to China, and in return importation of finished products in the form of mainly consumer goods, however, has been a disturbing narrative. Pigato and Tang’s (2015: 5) analysis of China-Africa trade from the period 1996 to 2013 has revealed that African countries exports to China are increasing in both volume and value than its imports thereby “generating a large, positive trade balance”. The authors argued that most of the exports from Africa are largely primary commodities such as oil, minerals, timber products, coffee, cocoa and cashew nuts whilst the imports comprise mainly clothing and textiles, footwear, electronics and capital goods. As part of their recommendations to strengthen China-Africa trade relations, Pigato and Tang (2015) suggested that African countries should embark on intensive economic diversification and institute measures for economic competitiveness for their imports to compete with Chinese imports. Nevertheless, Eisenman (2012: 810) warned:

Given relative factor endowments of resources, labor, and capital there is little that can be done to reduce some African countries’ overwhelming dependence on natural resource exports to China or African consumers’ preference for low-cost, decent quality Chinese consumer goods.

This trade pattern is not very beneficial and sustainable on the part of Africa in terms of the continent’s industrial development aspirations. As Ademola *et al.* (2016: 69) suggested, African governments need to adopt “concerted policy measures” that are “carefully crafted” to allow for access into the Chinese market whilst also addressing “the binding supply response capacity constraints” in most African countries. However, as Eisenman (2012: 810) rightly observed, access into the Chinese market “remain a source of

frustration and concern” for those African countries that are not endowed with natural resources and intend to embark on export diversification. In addition, transforming from a commodity-export dependent economy, and let alone harnessing natural resources for socio-economic growth and development, requires comprehensive measures and political will. Venables’ (2016) study, for instance, revealed that developing countries need to secure judicious investments from the private sector within the extractive resource sectors and such processes should be guided by progressive fiscal and related policies to ensure success.

However, such undertakings usually require huge capital and sophisticated technology realizable through international investment capital. Perhaps, the implementation of initiatives similar to those affirmed in China’s Second Africa Policy (2015) and the FOCAC Johannesburg Action Plan (2016-2018) with regard to boosting industrial productivity capacity cooperation, industrialization, agricultural modernization, technology cooperation and knowledge sharing may be helpful.

Failure to address this, however, exposes exporting African countries to the vagaries and vicissitudes of global commodity price fluctuations. In *China and Africa: Expanding Economic Ties in an Evolving Global Context*, Pigato and Tang (2015), concluded that whilst the global economy has been slowing down, including the Chinese economy, trade between China and most African countries has continued to expand. However, the authors stated that African countries, which export mainly agricultural and mineral commodities to China, have been vulnerable to changes in global commodity prices and fluctuating demands in China’s domestic economy (Pigato and Tang, 2015). This has gradually reduce the African export share of Chinese market on certain products such as agricultural exports. However, at its peak in the first decade of the 21st century, China’s demand for natural resource commodities led to an increase in commodity prices, which led to the massive gross domestic product (GDP) growth in most Sub-Saharan African countries especially net oil exporters such as Angola, Gabon and Sudan (Zafar, 2007).

Contrary to this perspective that African commodity exports to China are spurring growth and consequently development in Africa, the trade pattern has given rise to what Johnston and Cheng (2015) called “fears of renewed African economic subjugation”, a view inclined to the ‘China neocolonizing Africa’ narrative (see the often cited Sanusi, 2013), or the establishment of what Maswana (2015) termed “China’s zones of influence”. However, for those African countries that are not endowed with natural resources, it has been difficult for them to benefit more from trade partnership with China. Findings from Ancharaz and Tandrayen-Ragoobur’s (2010) in-depth empirical study on the impact of China-Mauritius trade relations on the Mauritian economy revealed that African countries with abundant natural

resources will immensely benefit from the partnership as opposed to their resource-poor counterparts as their industrial products struggle to outcompete Chinese imports.

In terms of the political dynamics between China and its African trade partners, some studies have indicated that China has tended to trade more with countries with low ratings on the governance index. In *African trade dynamics: Is China a different trading partner?*, De Grauwe *et al.* (2012) used a standard gravity model to assess the quality of governance in 53 selected African countries trading with China, France, Germany, United Kingdom (UK), and the United States of America (USA) from 1996 to 2009. The authors' findings were that "only China is consistently willing to import more from African countries with a lower governance standing" (De Grauwe *et al.*, 2012: 15). Although this has been widely criticised (see for instance Bader, 2015; Dreher and Fuchs, 2015; Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small, 2008; Kishi and Raleigh, 2015), China maintains that it adheres to its foreign policy principle of non-interference. As stated in China's Second Africa Policy (2015),

The Communist Party of China stands ready to expand and deepen diverse forms of exchanges and cooperation with friendly political parties and organizations in African countries based on the principles of independence, equality, mutual respect and non-interference in each other's internal affairs [...] This will also enable them to better understand and recognize each other's governance systems and philosophies, learn from each other, improve governance capacities together and contribute to the development of state-to-state relations.

A number of studies have been conducted on trade relations between China and some individual African countries. For example, Ayoola (2013) examined the Sino-Nigerian trade relations for the period between 2000 and 2010. The author revealed the existence of trade imbalance against Nigeria and recommended the imposition of restrictive tariffs by Nigeria in order to create a "level playing field" for Nigerian manufacturers, huge investments in export-oriented industries, extending cheap credits to manufacturers and building infrastructure to boost local industry competitiveness (Ayoola, 2013: 101). The author's proposal for the adoption and imposition of protectionist tariffs maybe noble, but will only be effective if preceded by a thorough analysis of the levels and rates of protection required by each industrial sector. Just like Ayoola (2013), findings from Ridnap (2015: 18) and Salter-Mthembu's (2009) studies on Nigeria-China economic relations both pointed to the fact that there was "excessive trade imbalance in favour of China" with Nigerian exports dominated by oil and that the poor state of infrastructure was impeding Nigeria's ability to compete with China, hence the need for diversification and infrastructure upgrading.



In a Policy Briefing on Sino-Egypt trade and investment relations, Scott (2015) reveals that although trade relations between the countries are growing, there has been a trade imbalance which is increasingly worsening in favour of China since the 1980s. In terms of product analysis, China exports high-end value-added manufactured goods to Egypt whilst China's imports from Egypt comprise unprocessed primary goods and "light products" (Scott, 2015). As part of possible corrective measures, the author suggested that China and Egypt may partner to establish joint ventures for the production of value added goods to address the trade imbalance. Similarly, Abu Hatab *et al.*'s (2012) exploration of Egypt-China bilateral trade, using qualitative research methodologies found out that trade complementarity between the two countries was increasing but Egyptian exports to China were declining whilst Chinese exports to Egypt were on the increase. The impact of this on the Egyptian industry, if not corrected, may not be very desirable.

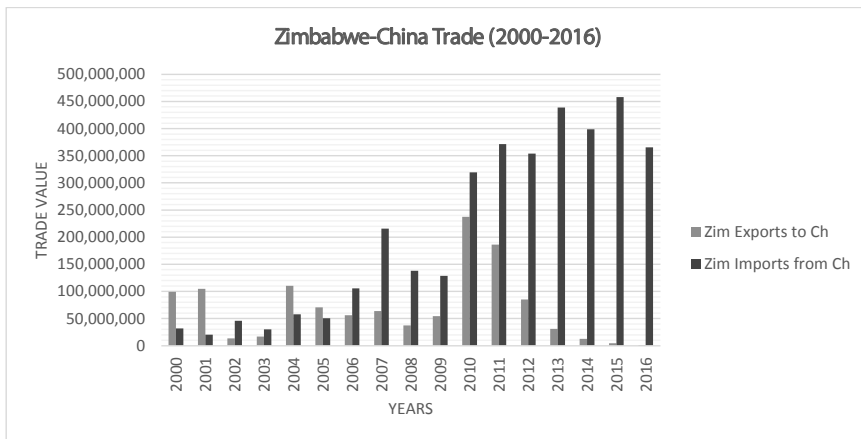
When it comes to relations between Zimbabwe and China, the subject of trade has always been dominated by arguments of the existence of asymmetric relations, suffocation of domestic industries by the influx of comparatively cheaper imports from China, proliferation of what consumers regard as 'low quality' Chinese products, and overdependence of Zimbabwe on the exportation of tobacco and mineral products to China (see for instance Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2004; Zhang, 2014; Matahwa, 2007). Describing the China-Zimbabwe trade partnership, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2004: 2) hinted that it is "characterized by the classical pattern of trade between developing and developed economies".

Zimbabwe's overall trade performance has been argued to be still suffering from the economic contraction experienced prior to 2009. In *Zimbabwe's Foreign Trade Performance during the Decade of Economic Turmoil: Will Exports Recover?*, Kaminski and Ng (2011) argued that Zimbabwe's exports have been falling since 1997 due to poor economic performance. There has been less diversity with natural resources exports dominating trade (Kaminski and Ng, 2011). To revive national exports, the authors recommended the Government of Zimbabwe to implement measures that attract investments to revive private sector business, improve the cost of doing business to enhance competitiveness, among others.

## **5. Analysis of Trends and Patterns of China-Zimbabwe Trade (2000-2016)**

Figure 1 presents statistics of trade between Zimbabwe and China from the year 2000 upto 2016. From the graph, it can be noted that Zimbabwe has been recording negative trade balances except for only four years, that is in 2000, 2001, 2004 and 2005. Specifically, Zimbabwe has been consistently importing

**Figure 1** China-Zimbabwe Trade from 2000-2016 (US\$)



Source: Author’s compilation based on data extracted from the UNCOMTRADE Database (2017) except for imports for the year 2000 and trade data for the year 2003 which was extracted from the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2017).

more from China than the country exported to China, for the decade between 2006 and 2016, thus essentially recording a significant positive trade balance for that period.

There is a steep rise of Chinese exports into Zimbabwe in years 2006 and 2007, wherein China exported products worth US\$105,457,998 and US\$215,895,172, respectively. However, there was reduced Chinese exports to Zimbabwe in the years 2008 and 2009, with China exporting products worth US\$138,061,357 and US\$128,760,413, respectively. This was a remarkable surge considering that Chinese exports to Zimbabwe had reached a peak of US\$215,895,172 in the year 2007. The surge in Chinese exports to Zimbabwe in the two years of 2008 and 2009 may have been triggered by the knock-on effect of the global financial crisis experienced in 2008.

As further depicted on the graph, Chinese exports to Zimbabwe have been increasing exponentially, albeit in a non-consistent fashion, between the years 2010 and 2015, before surging in 2016. The highest Chinese exports to Zimbabwe were recorded in the year 2015 when the total value of exports reached a massive US\$458,160,013; with a trade balance of US\$453,724,162. This was a 22.38 per cent increase from the total Chinese exports to Zimbabwe recorded in the year 2001.

With respect to Zimbabwe’s exports to China, Figure 1 shows that Zimbabwe recorded a positive trade balance for four years, that is, in the years

2000, 2001, 2004 and 2005. The country recorded its highest positive trade balance of US\$84,329,370 in the year 2001.

From 2004 upto the year 2008, Zimbabwe's exports to China depict a gradual decrease before picking up in the years 2009 and 2010. Perhaps, this may be explained by the deteriorating economic conditions and low productivity and production across all sectors, which constrained national exports.

For the period under review, Zimbabwe's exports to China recorded a peak of US\$237,339,658 in 2010. From that year upto the year 2016, the country's exports to China declined precipitously, perhaps reflecting the de-industrialization and gradual reduction of industrial capacity utilization in the country coupled with liquidity challenges. To this end, Zimbabwe's exports to China recorded the lowest level of US\$882,504 in 2016, with the highest negative trade balance of US\$364,613,985.

## **6. Analysis of China-Zimbabwe Trade Composition**

In terms of trade composition, specifically structural and sectoral distribution of traded products as shown in Annex 1 depicts the top five products traded between China and Zimbabwe from 2000-2016. It can be noted that Zimbabwe's exports to China are mainly in the form of mineral products and agricultural products. For the period under review, the most traded products forming part of Zimbabwe's exports to China are tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; iron and steel; salts and sulphur, lime and cement; raw hides and leather; machinery and mechanical appliances; ores, slag and ash; vegetables plaiting materials and vegetable products; precious stones and metals; works of art; electrical machinery and equipment; and articles of leather and animal gut.

These products, as revealed in their description under the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) Code on the ITC Trade Map Database (2017), are mainly exported in their raw and semi-processed form. This may be a crystalline reflection of the lower levels of industrial development in Zimbabwe, lack of technological sophistication, and relatively limited manufacturing value-added index of the country when compared to China, its trading partner.

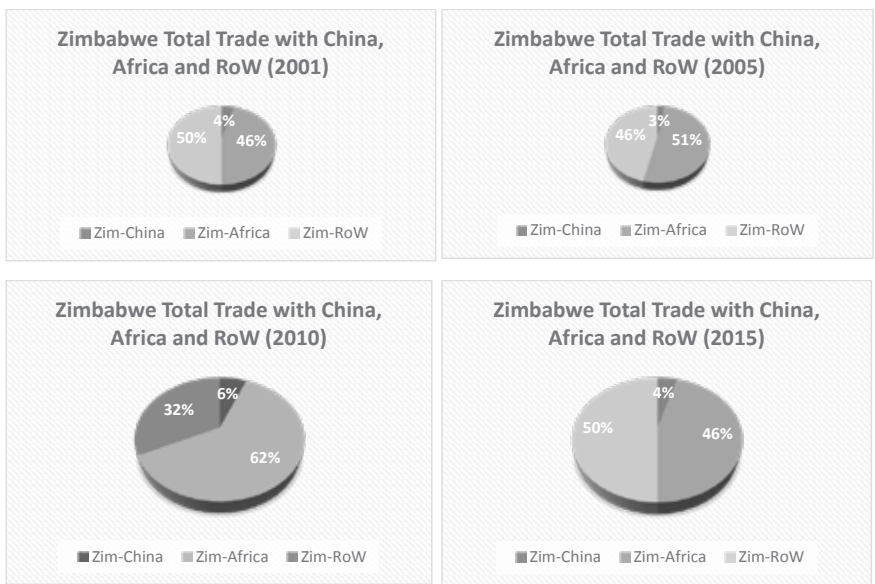
On the contrary, the frequently traded products that constitute China's exports to Zimbabwe for the period under consideration, as presented in Annex 1, are mainly high value machinery and mechanical appliances; vehicles and accessories; organic chemicals; electrical machinery and equipment; articles of iron or steel; fabrics; plastics; and chemical products. This may explain the existence of high-end manufacturing, advanced industrialization and superior manufacturing value-added index in China as compared to Zimbabwe.

### 7. Comparative Distributional Trends and Patterns of China-Zimbabwe Trade

As shown in the pie charts below, it can be noted that Zimbabwe-China trade as a share of the country’s trade with other African countries and the Rest of the World (RoW) has declined from six per cent in 2001 to four per cent in 2005. This can be explained by the fact that during this period there were limited trade flows between the countries. As explained above, this was at a time when the Zimbabwean economy was still experiencing high turbulence and economic contraction.

However, Zimbabwe-China trade as a share of Zimbabwe’s trade with African countries and the RoW doubled by the year 2010 before recording a two per cent reduction in 2015. This was partly due to the economic recovery experienced from the year 2009 following the dollarization of the economy and adoption of cross-sector economic reforms under the Inclusive Government which boosted exports. In addition, the phenomenon can also be explained by the accelerated growth of the Chinese economy which resulted in the country’s massive exportation to the whole world, including Zimbabwe.

**Figure 2** Trends and Patterns of China-Zimbabwe Trade for Selected Years between 2000-2016 (US\$)



Source: Author’s compilation using Trade Map – International Trade Centre (2017).

In the overall, for the period under review, it can be deduced that Zimbabwe-China trade remain relatively low as the country trades more with other African countries as shown by the peak in 2010 when Zimbabwe's trade with its African trade partners constituted 62 per cent. It has to be pointed out, however, that even the four per cent that constitutes Zimbabwe-China trade share of the country's trade with other African countries and the RoW is as a result of Zimbabwe imports from China as evidenced by huge trade deficits recorded from the year 2006 upto 2016. Thus, as at 2015, African and the RoW accounted for 96 per cent of Zimbabwe's trade, with China's share standing at 4 per cent.

The trends and patterns depicted on the pie charts reveals the trade potential between Zimbabwe and China. Whilst China remains an important trade partner to Zimbabwe, its share of trade compared to other players, namely Africa and the RoW, remains relatively low. Evidently, there is scope for Zimbabwe to expand and raise its trade stock, especially with respect to exports which may improve the share of Zimbabwe-China trade.

## **8. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Zimbabwe-China trade is characterized by a trade deficit in favour of China. The share of Zimbabwe's exports to, and imports from, China continue to be relatively low when expressed as a percentage share of China's total trade with Africa and the Rest of the World (RoW). China continues to export more diversified, high-end manufactures, fabrics and capital goods whilst Zimbabwe's exports to China are dominated by unprocessed and/or semi-processed mining and agricultural commodities without substantial transformation, value addition and/or beneficiation. Although Zimbabwean exports to China are dominantly unprocessed and/or semi-processed commodities from the agricultural and mining sector, there is high trade potential in these traded products. By regional, continental and global comparisons, it is concluded that on average, Zimbabwe's trade with China accounts for less than 5 per cent of Zimbabwe's trade with a huge share of the country's trade being realized with other African countries and the Rest of the World. On the basis of these findings, five recommendations are suggested.

Firstly, the Government of Zimbabwe needs to direct efforts at restoring the positive trade balance with China that it used to record prior to 2005. More fundamentally, it is prudent to develop and implement strategic measures to attract substantial investments in all the productive economic sectors with a view to enhance capacity utilization for industries to export. Since the National Trade Policy (2012-2016), and National Industrial Development (2012-2016) have outlived their lifespan, and the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIM-ASSET, 2013-

2018)'s implementation period will be lapsing in not more than three months' time, it is recommended that the Government of Zimbabwe identifies the implementation gaps inherent in all these policies and develop better policy and implementation mechanisms that boost industrial capacity and national exports. The policies should embody measures that regulate imports in a way that complements the facilitation of domestic industrialization within the scope and confines of trade agreements and other related obligations committed to at regional and international level.

Secondly, it is also recommended that joint venture investments with Chinese firms be secured and targeted at the manufacturing sector, agro-processing and minerals processing. In this light, a minerals beneficiation and value addition strategy is needed for Zimbabwe to fully exploit its comparative and competitive advantages so as to export high value-added precious metals. As a strategy, the Government of Zimbabwe may take the opportunity to exploit the window for industry capacity cooperation with China facilitated by the FOCAC Johannesburg Action Plan (2016-2018) and now the FOCAC Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021) in order to benefit from technology transfer and industrial upgrading. It is worthwhile to note that China is already increasing its investments into Zimbabwe. For instance, it was reported that Zimbabwe received US\$46.53 million from China as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the period between January and November 2015 and that China accounted for over 70 per cent of FDI received in Zimbabwe during the first half of 2015 (*The Sunday News*, 17 January 2016).

Thirdly, whilst these investments were reportedly directed to mining, infrastructure development, agriculture, tourism and services sectors, it maybe recommended that FDI be channelled towards re-industrialization in the manufacturing sector and establishment of processing plants for mineral ores and agro-processing factories. This will boost the value and volumes of Zimbabwe's exports. The reported formation of Beiqi Zimbabwe – a joint venture between Beijing Automobile International Corporation (BAIC), Willowvale Motor Industries and Astol Motors – that will assemble vehicles, initially targeting 3,000 units in three years should be encouraged as the right form of export-oriented FDI that is critical for export growth and import-substitution (*The Herald*, 28 March 2017). This is fundamental in improving the quality of Zimbabwe-China trade.

Fourthly, to lock in export-oriented FDI, export-promotion incentivization are also recommended. With respect to this, competitiveness-oriented complementary initiatives such as infrastructure development, incentivization of exporters through broadening initiatives such as the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Export Incentive Schemes, are highly recommended. However, this may be better supported through intensive negotiations for its potential exporters to access the Chinese market.

Lastly, given the new regional and global trends and patterns in industrialization, created by initiatives such as the SADC Industrialization Strategy and Roadmap (2015-2063), and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Industrialization Strategy (2017-2016) at regional level, the Action Plan for the Accelerated Industrial Development of Africa (AIDA), the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and the African Union Agenda 2063 (2015-2063) at continental level, and the quest for South-South trade cooperation as well as the renewed vigour for deeper integration into the global value chains (GVCs), Zimbabwe may take advantage to forge partnerships and industrial production networks that boost the export capacity of its firms. In a nutshell, what is needed is a regional integration strategy for Zimbabwe that will ensure that the country is strategically positioned to secure optimum trade benefits from its membership to regional economic communities.

#### **Annex 1: China-Zimbabwe Trade from 2000-2016 (US\$)**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Zimbabwe Exports to China</i>	<i>Zimbabwe Imports from China</i>
2000	99,243,008	31,910,000
2001	104,802,448	20,473,078
2002	13,320,950	46,054,568
2003	16,708,000	30,270,000
2004	110,452,352	57,995,517
2005	70,660,805	50,642,868
2006	56,029,683	105,457,998
2007	63,780,258	215,895,172
2008	37,464,041	138,061,357
2009	54,203,795	128,760,413
2010	237,339,658	319,453,240
2011	186,156,926	371,378,784
2012	85,042,438	353,994,101
2013	30,903,125	438,686,302
2014	12,608,194	398,815,981
2015	4,435,851	458,160,013
2016	882,504	365,496,489

Source: Author's construction based on data extracted from UNCOMTRADE Database (2017) except data for imports for the year 2000 and trade data for the year 2003 which was extracted from the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2017).

**Annex 2: Top Five Products Traded between  
China and Zimbabwe from 2000-2016 (in terms of value)**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Zimbabwe Exports to China</i>	<i>Zimbabwe Imports from China</i>
2000	–	–
2001	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Iron and steel; Salts and sulphur, lime and cement; Vehicles and accessories; Explosives, pyrotechnic products; and pyrophoric alloys	Machinery and mechanical appliances; Vehicles and accessories; Organic chemicals; Electrical machinery and equipment; Fabrics
2002	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Nickel; Salts and sulphur lime and cement; Iron and steel; Cereals and milk products	Machinery and mechanical appliances; Cereals; Electrical machinery and equipment; Fabrics; Chemical products
2003	–	–
2004	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Iron and steel; Cotton; Salts and sulphur, lime and cement; Raw hides and leather	Electrical machinery and equipment; Articles of iron or steel; Aircraft, spacecraft; Footwear; Vehicles and accessories
2005	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Cotton; Raw hides and leather; Ores, slag and ash; Meat and edible meat offal	Vehicles and accessories; Aircraft, spacecraft; Electrical machinery and equipment; Machinery and mechanical appliances; Articles of iron or steel
2006	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Electrical machinery and equipment and parts; Salts and sulphur, lime and cement; Cotton; Aircraft, spacecraft, and parts	Fertilisers; Electrical machinery and equipment; Machinery and mechanical appliances; Articles of iron or steel; Vehicles and accessories;
2007	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Cotton; Ores, slag and ash; Iron and steel; Salts and sulphur, lime and cement	Fertilisers; Vehicles and accessories; Machinery and mechanical appliances; Electrical machinery and equipment; Chemical products
2008	Cotton; Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Vehicles and accessories; Ores, slag and ash; Wood and articles of wood; wood charcoal	Vehicles and accessories; Machinery and mechanical appliances; Electrical machinery and equipment; Articles of iron or steel; Plastics
2009	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Ores, slag and ash;	Electrical machinery and equipment; Vehicles and accessories; Machinery



## Annex 2: (continued)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Zimbabwe Exports to China</i>	<i>Zimbabwe Imports from China</i>
	Inorganic chemicals and compounds of precious metals; Salts and sulphur, lime and cement; Works of art	and mechanical appliances; Textiles; Articles of iron or steel
2010	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Iron and steel; Ores, slag and ash; Cotton; Vegetable plaiting materials and vegetable products	Electrical machinery and equipment; Machinery and mechanical appliances; Articles of iron or steel; Vehicles and accessories; Plastics
2011	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Vegetables plaiting materials and vegetable products; Ores, slag and ash; Cotton; Iron and steel	Electrical machinery and equipment; Machinery and mechanical appliances; Vehicles and accessories; Articles of iron or steel; Rubber
2012	Precious stones and metals; Cotton; Works of art; Live animals; Machinery and mechanical appliances	Machinery and mechanical appliances; Electrical machinery and equipment; Vehicles and accessories; Articles of iron or steel; Rubber
2013	Precious stones and metals; Works of art; Animal products; Mineral fuels, mineral oils and mineral waxes; Tools and utensils of base metal	Electrical machinery and equipment; Machinery and mechanical appliances; Vehicles and accessories; Medical equipment and accessories; Articles of iron or steel
2014	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Precious stones and metals; Works of art; Machinery and mechanical appliances; Raw hides and leather	Electrical machinery and equipment; Machinery and mechanical appliances; Medical equipment and accessories; Vehicles and accessories; Rubber
2015	Tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; Works of art; Live animals; Articles of leather and animal gut; Machinery and mechanical appliances	Electrical machinery and equipment; Machinery and mechanical appliances; Vehicles and accessories; Medical equipment and accessories; Articles of iron or steel
2016	Precious stones and metals; Aircraft and spacecrafts parts; Electrical machinery and equipment; Articles of leather and animal gut; Machinery and mechanical appliances	Electrical machinery and equipment; Machinery and mechanical appliances; Articles of iron or steel; Vehicles and accessories; Plastics

Source: Author's construction based on data extracted from Trade Map – International Trade Centre (2017).

**Annex 3: Zimbabwe-China Trade Share of  
Trade with African and RoW Trade Partners**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Zimbabwe's Total Trade with China</i>	<i>Zimbabwe's Total Trade with Africa</i>	<i>Zimbabwe's Total Trade with the Rest of the World</i>
2001	125,275,526	1,274,298,000	1,399,573,526
2005	121,303,673	2,398,455,000	2,172,896,804
2010	556,792,898	5,584,758,000	2,909,947,102
2015	462,595,864	5,479,812,000	2,763,920,136

Source: Author's construction based on data extracted from Trade Map – International Trade Centre (2017).

### Note

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