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Occasional Paper

**Towards greater Civil society involvement in Africa's
engagement of China: the case of Zimbabwean civil society**

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Abstract

The need for greater civil society participation in issues relating to Africa-China engagements is pressing. Utilising the case of Zimbabwe, this paper details the important roles that are being played by the few CSOs already involved but makes the clarion call for more organisations to do research and dissemination to ensure that African people are informed on the impacts of Chinese investments, loans and other activities on their communities. The study also underlines the need for more CSOs to be involved in advocacy initiatives that ensures the interests of the voiceless local communities impacted by Chinese activities can be heard. Capacity building through training of legislators to thoroughly interrogate deals involving Chinese interests is critical as is the training of community and traditional leaders to bargain and negotiate effectively with Chinese companies operating in their communities or their representatives.

Key Words: Africa, China, Civil Society Organisations, legislators, Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Zimbabwe's engagement with China has been described as an all-weather friendship which is based upon the principle of mutual gains and mutual respect for each other's sovereignty. Indeed, such a narrative is also consistent with China's engagement with African countries across the continent. The founding principles of the Forum on Africa China Cooperation (FOCAC) also reflect some of these ideals and values. However, this description masks a lot of challenges that have also dogged the Africa-China relationship in general and the Zimbabwe-China engagement specifically. It has become a truism that China's active engagement of Africa from the early 2000, coinciding with the Asian country's 'going out strategy' has seen complaints about environmental damage, abuse of workers' rights and other ills increasing. Although China has made efforts to ensure these issues are addressed by its State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and private investors in Africa, these efforts appear largely to have fallen on deaf ears.

African governments, and Zimbabwe in particular, on their part have also not done a good job in ensuring the effective enforcement of available laws, rule and regulations to ensure the protection of the environment and labour rights, for instance. The corruption that is rampant in African institutions mandated with enforcing available rules is a weakness that Chinese actors are willing to exploit to ensure they make higher profits at little cost. In addition, the tax regulations and structures are reportedly being waived for some Chinese investors. This is disadvantageous to the local people who may not be able to get anything of value from these investments except for creation of low paying jobs as well as token Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives that may not go far in addressing community challenges.

What makes the challenges of China's engagement with Zimbabwe more peculiar are reports of Chinese business people boasting of being protected by government officials. The implication of this is that Zimbabwe appears to lose agency in its engagement with Chinese actors because of a variety of reasons including the political connectedness of Chinese investors or players to the ruling ZANU PF government, corruption among law enforcement agencies and lack of negotiation and bargaining ability on the part of the central government as well as at the local community level.

It is against this background that this study prescribes the involvement of civil society organisations in a more coordinated way in Zimbabwe's engagement with Chinese actors. It is evident that civil society has traditionally been seen as a western appendage to create challenges for authoritarian governments and brew 'illegal regime change'. Thus, in most African countries, there is a love-hate relationship that has seen the state trying to cox Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) into areas that are not very political and closing the space for their operations in politically and economically sensitive areas. In such politically sensitive areas as human rights and civil liberties as well as areas involving important diplomatic and economic relations with China, civil society organisations are often viewed as rubble rousers and noise makers with nothing 'positive' to contribute yet their involvement especially in the issue under study can enhance Africa's and Zimbabwe's agency when engaging the Chinese.

The argument in this paper is that China is a global power with massive hard and soft power capabilities at its disposal and African countries are weak and largely powerless actors in the absence of well laid out strategies to engage the Chinese. This is the more reason why the agency of African states needs to be strengthened through the participation of not only state actors but also civil society organisations who are able to pinpoint the loopholes in the relationship in an unbiased manner. This enhances the agency or the capacity of African actors to gain more concessions from Chinese actors as they engage. The case study of Zimbabwe is used to demonstrate the need of this multi-faceted form of agency that includes CSOs as major players, a development that may help Zimbabwe reap significant benefits from its engagement with China. But, of course, the CSOs themselves need to exercise their own agency in policing the Zimbabwe-China relationship because the invite they need from the government may never come.

In Zimbabwe's relationship with China, this study recommends that CSOs can assist through advocacy for transparency and accountability, research on specific issues as well as information dissemination and building the capacity of government negotiators, parliamentarians and community leaders.

Defining civil society

Civil society can be understood as the space found outside the family, market and state. Since the 1980s, when the term first became popular, what constitutes civil society has developed and grown. It now signifies a wide range of organised and organic groups including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trade unions, social movements, grassroots organisations, online networks and communities, and faith groups (Cooper, 2018). Cited by Naidoo and Borren (2014), the World Alliance for Citizens Participation defines civil society as "the arena, outside of the family, the state and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions to advance shared interests" (CIVICUS 2012: 8). Cited by Naidoo and Borren (2014), Diani and Bison (2004) define civil society as the "informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups, or associations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity."

Moyo (1993:2) also defined civil society in the following way;

scholars have tended to view civil society as that part of society which is outside the control of the state apparatuses or the part outside the state sphere. There is thus a presumed basic duality between the state and civil society as separate social entities. This duality is generally seen as something good in industrialized liberal countries which purport to be pluralist, whereas in developing countries the tendency of the ruling authorities to seek to eliminate this duality in favour of the party-controlled state. This is achieved by expanding the scope of the state by fusing the political, ideological and productive hierarchies into one single unified organizational structure as an affirmation of the supposed virtues of democratic centralism.

Civil society thus covers a wide range of organised social movements that seek to champion certain agendas beneficial to a certain constituency. With the increasing number of issues emerging at both the national and global community level, there is also an increasing number of CSOs that are emerging every day.

Civil society in Africa

The traditional role of civil society in Africa is aptly explained by Larry Diamond (1997:24) as follows:

civil society performs many...crucial functions for democratic development and consolidation: limiting the power of the state more generally, and challenging its abuses of authority; monitoring human rights and strengthening the rule of law; monitoring elections and enhancing the overall quality and credibility of the democratic process; educating citizens about their rights and responsibilities, and building a culture of tolerance and civic engagement; incorporating marginal groups into the political process and enhancing the latter's responsiveness to societal interests and needs; providing alternative means, outside the state, for communities to raise their level of material development; opening and pluralising the flows of information; and building a constituency for economic as well as political reform

From Diamond (1997)'s point of view, the major role of civil society includes monitoring various state-related trends and activities as well as education of citizens regarding their rights among other objectives. This gels well with the argument of this article that civil society must play an active role in policing Zimbabwe's engagements with China as well as educating citizens regarding their individual and corporate rights in the context of this relationship. However, African states have traditionally disdained civil society organisations. They believe that civil society disturbs unity and is un-African since its major objective is to introduce Western style multi-party democracies that are not original to Africa. For more authoritarian minded African leaders, the one-party state, as what pertains in China should be the only way to go, politically speaking. In a statement that details the African leaders' mindset in the 80s and 90s, but which is also applicable to a number of modern day African leaders, Makumbe (1998:307) says

Indeed, some of the most active civic groups and coalitions in Africa were instrumental in the overthrow of authoritarian regimes and the installation of democracy in their countries. Post-independence Africa witnessed a continent-wide drive towards authoritarian one-party systems of governance, some of which claimed to be socialist in nature. The main argument advanced in favour of this approach as opposed to the multi-party system of Western democracies was that the one-party state was African in character, and therefore more suited to the style of governance for Africa. Multi-partyism was viewed as divisive, splitting the people, and therefore a negation of national unity, that essential ingredient of national development. Democracy was seen as alien to Africa, and a costly luxury in a backward continent in dire need of development.

The argument then was and continues to be that development must precede democracy. Economic rights are more critical than civil and political rights. Although not specifically stated in China's foreign policy or white papers for engaging Africa, the appeal of the Chinese model or the Beijing consensus to African leaders is quite evident. Indeed, in the face of chronic development challenges of poverty, unemployment and disease, a number of African leaders seem to have taken the route of sacrificing civil and political rights in favour of economic rights.

One major issue that compromises the capacity of African civil society organisations in executing their roles is funding. They must either get funding from the state or from foreign donors. Getting finances from the former is almost impossible either because of unavailability of funds or most probably because the CSOs are viewed as enemies of the state. Those that do get some funding have to compromise on their chief mission to pander to the interests of the state. The only viable option for funding thus remains western donors. Even with this option, the independence of African civil society to pursue their set agendas is jeopardised since donors have their own interests as well. This is aptly explained by Makumbe (1998:311)

The majority of civic groups in Africa, are not capable of sustaining themselves without the support of either the state or foreign international donors. Thus, their autonomy is seriously compromised from the start. Those civic groups that depend on the goodness of the state for space and resources quickly find out that they have to toe certain lines that are determined by the state—which, obviously, restricts them to only those areas of operation that the state may feel comfortable in delegating to such groups. Civic groups that are dependent on resources provided by international donor agencies equally find themselves constrained to be mere implementors of the donor agencies' agenda. Their own political, social and economic programmes will have to be consistent with those of their benefactors if they wish to receive these resources. It must be understood that most of the more vibrant civic groups in most of Africa cannot sustain themselves for more than a few months from the annual subscriptions paid by their registered members. This weakness is evident in the majority of African civic groups, including labour unions

Civil Society in Zimbabwe

In the immediate post-independence period in the 1980s, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) ruling government in the Southern African country sought to destroy civil society and put every such organisation under its arms arguing these organisations were counter-revolutionary. In line with this,



Moyo (1993:) states that

..... the ruling party, ZANU(PF), took maximum advantage of an under-developed civil society by claiming that ZANU(PF) was the sole legitimate representative of the people. Under the guise of this claim, the party declared itself to be the umbrella organization of all social movements and went about destroying civil society associations in the name of 'the revolution'. All 'legitimate' organizations were challenged by ZANU(PF) to join the ruling party as a way of proving their revolutionary and patriotic commitment.

This position curtailed the development of civil society in the country in those early days. However, during the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1990s, a number of other organisations including student movements, employer's organisations as well as labour movements were instrumental in dismantling the ZANU PF hegemony in the political space.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU) which was formed to represent the interests of workers by ZANU-PF in the 1980s was an act of proverbially shooting self in the foot since the organisation rebelled in the 1990s, led workers to engage in wild cat strikes around 1997-1998 and became one of the founding organisations of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Morgan Tsvangirai, the secretary general of the ZCTU became the MDC's founding President. By the end of the decade, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) had been formed to challenge the crusade for a new constitution spearheaded by the government. The NCA was influential in the rejection of the proposed new constitution in a referendum held in 2000. This organisation had in 1999 also worked together with the ZCTU, student organisations such as the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU), the church and other social movements to form the opposition MDC. After 2000, the number of CSOs increased owing to the increase of human rights abuses and political repression in a period where ZANU PF had become more desperate.

Currently, Dendere and Taodzera (2023) point out that Zimbabwe has over 35,000 formally registered (and hundreds more that operate informally) civil society organizations that remain crucial in maintaining space-albeit limited- for democratic discourse. Chipato et al (2020) highlights that Zimbabwean politics cannot be understood, nor can it exist without civil society. Examples of such organizations include churches, community groups of women and youth, groups representing minorities, especially in the disabled communities, non-governmental organizations, and ordinary citizens working informally to solve community and political issues. The structure of Zimbabwe's civil society is influenced by the regime's whims forcing CSOs to constantly shift their strategies in response to the prevailing political climate (Chipato et al, 2020).

There was hope that the coming in of Emmerson Mnangagwa as the President of Zimbabwe in 2017 through a military assisted transition would open more space for CSOs operating in politically sensitive areas of human rights and civil liberties. However, the same old Mugabe era tactics continue to be relied upon by the 'new' regime as witnessed through the amendment and strengthening of the Private and Voluntary Organisations Act, via the Private Voluntary Organisations bill currently under consideration. This has an effect of shrinking the space of manoeuvre for CSOs operating in different spheres.

A key concern on not only Zimbabwean CSOs is that as they seek to foster accountability and good governance, they are themselves paradoxically plugged by corruption and weak corporate governance. This results in abuse of funds. As a result, donors are withholding their funding. Indeed, there have been allegations against a number of these organisations as arenas of leadership squabbles, their penchant for useless conferences and jet-setting. This implies that if civil society is to maintain its credibility, it has to have high ethical and moral standards.

African civil society and Africa-China engagements

In spite of the traditional disdain by some African state leaders on CSOs involvement in domestic political issues and in diplomatic or strategic cooperation issues, a number of African CSOs are becoming visible in challenging negative patterns in the China-Africa engagements. A few examples can suffice here. In Ghana, the government together CSOs managed to compel Sino Hydro to allow trade union activity at the Bui Dam construction project site, something which the Chinese company had resisted for a time. The Bui Dam project

was funded by the China Export and Import (EXIM) Bank in a loan deal backed cocoa supplies (Chipaike and Matarutse, 2018).

Chipaike and Matarutse (2018: 13-14) state that;

while Chinese corporations in general do not allow trade union activity, in Ghana, they have been forced to abide by local laws and regulations to allow workers to exercise their rights in this way. In the Bui Dam project, Sino hydro had initially disallowed workers to engage in labour union activity. However, a deputation from Ghana's Trade Union Council (TUC) argued that this fundamental labour right was enshrined both in Ghanaian law and in the contract. This interplay of elite and non-state agency in effectively laying out procedures and ensuring that they are followed is a reflection of Ghana's assertive agency in an environment in which 'local laws are well elaborated and more importantly enforced

Another example from Ghana is important in reflecting the importance of Civil Society in China-Africa relations;

Another civil society organisation, the Danquah Institute, has played a central role in advising the government with regard to various development assistance and investment deals with the Chinese. For example, following the signing of the US\$3 billion (commercial) loan (in 2010) for the development of the Western Corridor Gas Infrastructure Development Project for the revitalisation of roads, ports and oil and gas processing facilities, the Danquah Institute protested that the project did not amount to value for money. This was because it was thought the agreement would grant 60% of the value of the contracts involved in the gas project to Chinese vendors. These protestations were also based on the fact that Ghana was building up large debts; the level of national debt increased from US\$8 billion to US\$20 billion from 2008 to 2015. Indeed, partly owing to this position, the Ghanaian government could not draw down the whole US\$3 billion, opting to use only half of the amount. The Chinese tried to renegotiate the loan agreement on the back of the plummeting oil prices, but the Ghanaian government, backed by parliament and civil society, rejected the Chinese initiative.

This goes to show that in an environment where the state and CSOs work together, Chinese actors cannot abuse worker's rights and damage the environment among other abuses or ills associated with their operations in African countries. In another example reflecting the same point mentioned above, Chipaike and Matarutse (2018:14) give another instance of effective agency stemming from state-civil society cooperation. They say;

Another example of state-civil society cooperation is found in Gabon. Gabonese civil society organisations forced a halt to Sinopec's oil exploration activities in the country in 2006. Indeed, having been awarded the Lotus exploration block in the Loango National Park, the Chinese oil company started its seismic exploration activities based on a poor Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) by a Dutch company. This led to an international outcry led by Gabonese NGOs, supported by international NGOs from Western countries resulting in the stopping of exploration and subsequent redoing of the EIA by the Dutch company which had previously done it together with Enviro-Pass (a Gabonese organisation) and the World Wide Fund.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) (2011) notes that partnership between the African state and CSOs is not only required to enhance effective policing of Chinese activities, but also to ensure effective governance, transparency and accountability. CSOs play critical roles in this regard especially in the extractive sector where there are huge revenues and the potential for corruption is high. African labour unions have also protested against low wages, poor working conditions and general mistreatment of workers by Chinese managers. In Zambia, protests and strikes at copper mines owned by Chinese investors have resulted in the closure of some mines by the government as well as forcing the two governments to discuss the issue at a bilateral level.

Owing to pressure for the inclusion of civil society's view in the engagements between Africa and China, the FOCAC has availed a number of interaction platforms bringing together 'Chinese civil society' and African civil society to discuss common issues. It should however be mentioned that the Chinese concept of civil society is narrow and parochial since so-called civil society organisations in China are appendages of the Chinese Communist Party. This then becomes problematic since the major part of African civil society exists outside

the state sphere.

Civil Society and Zimbabwe-China relations

Though the voice of civil society in Zimbabwe is still in its nascent phases, there now appears to be a realisation among civil society organisations that their voice in issues regarding China-Zimbabwe relations is critical. A few organisations including through research, publications and advocacy as well as litigation among other measures have managed to bring attention to the most pressing issues stemming from Chinese involvement in different sectors of the Zimbabwean political economy.

For instance, the Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association (ZELA) in 2021 conducted research on Chinese involvement in Zimbabwe's economy and published a document entitled "The Handbook of Zimbabwe-China Economic Relations". The objectives of the research were stated in the following way;

The research arises from ZELA's desire to generate a deeper and holistic understanding of Chinese investments in Zimbabwe in particular and Africa in general. The research had a number of objectives. The first was to analyse the impact of Chinese investments in Zimbabwe's minerals sector especially gold, diamond and chrome in addition to the nature and role of its development. finance. It hopes to provide evidence to better understand the nuances of Chinese engagements in the mining and financial sectors in Zimbabwe. Secondly, it sought to understand the relationship that exists between Chinese and Zimbabwean actors at the grassroots and question the authenticity of claims that there are significant negative perceptions that surround Chinese investments and engagements in the mining and financial sectors. Thirdly, it evaluated the implications of China's increasing engagements in Zimbabwe on democracy, good governance and sustainable development. In its analysis, the research strove to step away from mere perceptions and conjecture by providing substantive information to support various arguments. The research which resulted in the Handbook, is therefore an objective account of the prevailing situation in Zimbabwe clearly setting out the positive and negative impacts of Chinese investments through a human rights lens. Fourthly, the research also sought to build capacity and facilitate knowledge transfer among young researchers.

The research report highlighted a number of issues that are affecting different communities especially in the face of the huge interest of Chinese investors in the mining sector where lithium has attracted wide Chinese attention. These issues include the displacement of people from their ancestral lands without fair compensation, environmental degradation, inadequate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and poor working conditions among others. The need for the amendment of the Mining Act and inclusion of traditional and community leaders in the process was highlighted as key enablers to transparency and sanity in the sector.

Besides highlighting the above issues in their 2021 research report, The Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers in 2020, successfully protested against the government's envisaged plan to award mining rights to Chinese companies to mine coal in the Hwange National Park, a development that would have affected 40 000 animals including endangered species. The government capitulated and banned all exploration and mining activities in game parks. The foregoing reflects that with more initiative and resolve, civil society is able to meaningfully contribute to the effective management of Chinese activities in Zimbabwe in a manner that brings benefits to local communities.

Besides the ZELA, the Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) has also been highlighting a number of issues relating to Chinese businesses in the Zimbabwe's extractive sector more or less along the same trajectory as the ZELA's work mentioned above. They have also criticised the deplorable working conditions of workers at Chinese run mines as well empowering communities to defend their rights against corporate power in the extractive sector. As has become well known, Chinese investors are the ones dominating Zimbabwe's extractive sector in contemporary times. In 2023, the CNRG together with other CSOs put out a combined position on Chinese investments in Zimbabwe where they called for community voices to be respected. The communique was entitled "Civil Society Statement on Chinese Investments in Zimbabwe: Communities' Sentiments Should Be Respected". The mandate of the CNRG is summarised as follows;

We defend the rights of communities affected by extractive industries. We have seen how extractive industries expose rural communities to an avalanche of rights violations which include land and water grabbing, water and air pollution and direct violence by a combined force of state and corporate power.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has also been vocal in its criticism of Chinese companies' violations of labour rights in Zimbabwe. For instance, in October 2022, the ZCTU circulated a press release that highlighted Chinese disrespect of labour rights as a threat to Zimbabwe's labour movement. The title of the press release was "Chinese Labour Violations an Existential Threat To The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe". Some of the highlights of the communique/press release are cited below:

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) notes with concern, the continued blatant disregard of labour laws by Chinese employers across all sectors of the economy despite concerted engagements at all levels on the matter over the years. We have observed serious labour violations torture, beatings, gender based violence, underpayments and a host of other unfair labour practices one can think of have been perpetrated on locals by the Chinese. Workers are constantly raising grievances to the effect that that their rights were habitually violated as most of them are paid less than the stipulated industrial minimum wages/salaries. Workers in Chinese establishments are generally exposed to unsafe working conditions, and noncompliance with labour standards, they are denied their basic fundamental rights which include: -

- The right to membership to Trade Unions or a Workers Committee.
- The right to prohibition of forced labour.
- The right to protection against discrimination.
- The right to fair labour standards.
- The right to democracy at workplace.

Indeed, the question of labour or workplace rights has been a hot issue in every sector where the Chinese are invested across the continent. In Zambia, poor working conditions in Chinese run mines have resulted in disastrous accidents and combined with poor remuneration wild cat strikes have been the result. At some point, other mines were closed down because of a combination of these concerns. In Zimbabwe, research conducted by Chipaike and Marufu (2020) indicated the reality of the issues stated in the ZCTU press release. In the study, workers at Chinese run construction sites complained about inadequate protective equipment, long hours of poorly paid work often below the minimum wage level as well as few opportunities for promotion. Labour bodies therefore need to do more in pushing Chinese employers to respect these rights although the political dynamics of Zimbabwe-China relations often come as a snag in such efforts.

What more can Zimbabwean Civil Society Organisations do?

It is important that Zimbabwean CSOs continue to amplify their voices in the arena of China-Zimbabwe interactions. It is an established fact that the environment in which CSOs operate in the country is not very conducive especially if you are perceived by the government to be interfering in sensitive matters of diplomatic intercourse with their 'all-weather friend'-China. This obviously would mean that CSOs dealing with issues related to Chinese activities in Zimbabwe would require not only erudite strategies to convince state authorities and agencies but intrinsic agency that allows them to chieve their objectives in spite of the challenge of operating in a restrictive and opposing structure. This is made even more difficult by the amended Private Voluntary Organisations Amendment bill recently gazetted with changes by Parliament in March 2024. According to Amnesty International (April, 19, 2024), the bill gives too much power to the minister and registrar which could be used to interfere with the work of CSOs. The President however refused to sign the bill last quarter of 2023 citing the need to streamline the bill to international best practices regarding the abuse of charitable organisations as conduits of funding criminal and terrorist acts. However, other observers believe this amendment bill would restrict freedom of association and also severely stifle CSOs ability to source for donor support.

Presently as the previous section has shown, a number of CSOs have made nascent steps and inroads into arena of Sino-Zimbabwe interactions particularly looking at the impacts of investments on local communities as well

as on labour rights. This particular section points out other niches of involvement that CSOs may need to look at to ensure that China's relationship with Zimbabwe becomes truly mutually beneficial.

Research and Information dissemination

Research is one way CSOs can bring to light the realities associated with Zimbabwe's engagement of China. A few organisations are already doing this as the example of ZELA has shown. There is however need for more CSOs in Zimbabwe to do research in various areas associated with the Zimbabwe-China interactions. The China-Zimbabwe relationship is multi-faceted and multi-layered hence the need to unravel the true impact of such interactions from the state-to-state level, investments in different sectors, Chinese-local community (leadership) relations as well as people to people interactions. In doing this, CSOs can band together with local academics specialised in different fields to do evidence-based research that can convince policy makers even if they were politically ill-disposed to such activities. The research outputs can be shared at conferences or symposia where government agencies or responsible ministry officials can be invited. An example of this kind of initiative took place in October 2022 at a symposium on China-Zimbabwe relations hosted by Ruzivo Media and Resource Centre. At this event outputs from a research survey done on Chinese investments in Zimbabwe were presented. Although at the end of the day it turned out to be a government aligned symposium, independent and objective CSOs can follow in the same trajectory and present their research outputs. This can certainly draw attention to areas that need it. Besides using conferences and symposia, CSOs should disseminate data relating to China's relations with Zimbabwe using the print media as well electronic and social media. This allows the generality of the public to have a general appreciation of what is actually happening regarding China-Zimbabwe relations.

Advocacy

Advocacy is the everyday work of the majority of CSOs. But advocacy can only be effective if backed by evidence-based research. The field of China-Zimbabwe relations including the plethora of diverse actors in the Zimbabwean socio-economic terrain presents a number of issues. However, the specifics and details of transactions involving Zimbabwe and China are normally characterised with secrecy and opacity. This is where advocacy for transparency and openness can begin. For example, the total amount of debt owed by Zimbabwe to China is not known because state officials normally do not give out information regarding this issue. What is available are just estimates. This entails that CSOs need to put out a strong call for more openness and transparency in this area to ensure that the generality of the citizens know exactly what they owe to China. The fears of increasing indebtedness to China are largely a result of this vacuum of information created by the Zimbabwean government's secretive approach regarding such issues. The African Coalition on Debt and Development (AFRODAD) is one organisation doing this type of work but their voice may not be effective if they are not joined by other CSOs in this effort. More voices of this nature hence need to be heard to ensure greater transparency and accountability especially in the area of loan contraction and investment deals with the Chinese.

Besides matters or concerns of lack of accountability and transparency, advocacy by CSOs can also be targeted at protecting local people's land rights, access to water and protection from air pollution especially in areas where mining and quarrying is taking place. Although there may be cases of agency at local community levels, community members' voices are muted by political forces at play hence the need for civil society to fill in this void and speak for the voiceless. In areas where Chinese miners are operating, a lot of water sources have been polluted, air quality drastically reduced and livestock is daily facing risks of death because of wasteland characterised by holes and disused mines.

On the same note, it is known that local artisanal miners are also responsible for such heinous activities but the machinery used by bigger and well-resourced Chinese miners causes even greater harm. The Centre for Natural Resource Governance has been doing advocacy work in this regard in spite of the challenges of sporadic harassment by government officials. But considering the extent of the challenges, more advocacy is needed in this area by CSOs. For example, because of increasing Chinese investments a sizeable number of families have been losing their ancestral lands. Normally, where these people are resettled, there will not be adequate land and social services and compensation given is largely insufficient. The case of the Chiadzwa community resettled in Arda Transau is a case in point.

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Capacity building

Weighed relative to Chinese capacity, African governments' ability to negotiate and bargain effectively is still comparatively weak. This has culminated in the consummation of unfair deals that seem to favour the Chinese in various aspects. This probably also explains why, for instance, in some cases the details regarding resource backed loans are not made available by governments. It is an attempt to hide this handicap. In this regard, civil society can play a significant role in capacitating government officials to be able to negotiate investments and loan deals effectively in a way that benefits the national interest in the long term. Besides training state negotiators, capacitation of Parliamentarians or legislators in general is of utmost importance in order to enhance them to make meaningful interrogations of these deals when they are tabled in parliament. This is critical since the legislative bodies are the ones that should also play a key role in ensuring the accountability of the government and its other institutions. In fact, the Parliament of Zimbabwe already has a working relationship with external agencies and local CSOs that assist in different capacities. The work of the Parliamentary Programme Coordination Unit (PCU) is to coordinate the services of and collaborate with these external organisations and local CSOs. This can become the entry point for CSOs intending to capacitate legislators to effectively debate and interrogate Chinese activities in Zimbabwe.

Capacity building should proceed to the very local level where councillors and other local community leaders operate. These are the people that are on the ground and daily face the effects of Chinese activities in their areas. These should be aided to bargain for better returns from Chinese investments in their communities in the form of roads, clean water, schools and health centres. They should understand the principles of Corporate Social Re-

sponsibility as set out in global norms and should be able to hold the Chinese investors to account for their actions. Traditional leaders as custodians of communal lands and culture should be capacitated with to defend the people's right to their ancestral land, and in the case of displacement to ensure that fair compensation is given.

It is important to highlight that this is not a novel approach. Civil Society has banded in the past helped strengthen the African and developing world's voice at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Climate Change discussions over the years. This has prevented the signing of unfair deals, at the same prolonging the duration of negotiations especially in the WTO where a comprehensive trade agreement is yet to be agreed on since 2001. Building from this success, African countries must rope in civil society to help them negotiate and bargain with China and Chinese actors. This contributes to a multi-faceted and multi-actor form of agency that insulates the ordinary African from exploitation by the Chinese.

Conclusion

Zimbabwe-China relations are a microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic picture of Africa China engagements. However, the increase and intensity of these engagements and interactions also comes with risks of exploitation and consummation of unfair deals especially considering the fact that Africa actors still lack effective negotiating capacity. This study has argued for the greater involvement of CSOs in Africa-China engagements and Zimbabwe-China engagements specifically. Through intensified advocacy for transparency and accountability, research and information dissemination as well as providing capacity building to legislators, community leaders, councillors and traditional leaders. This ensures a multi-faceted and multi-actor form of agency that will prevent exploitation and ensure fairer investment and other deals with the Chinese.

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