

Look East Policy: The Case of Zimbabwe–China Political and Economic Relations Since 2000

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Victor Ojakorotu
Rumbidzai Kamidza

Abstract

This article maps the evolution of Zimbabwe's Look East Policy (LEP) and specifically the bilateral relationship with China through the lens of Zimbabwe's domestic politics. It argues that political elite in Zimbabwe has a vested interest in a close economic and political relationship with China at the cost of the interests of the people of Zimbabwe. The author establishes that Zimbabwe's LEP was intended to respond to the economic sanctions imposed on it by Western nations. From the descriptive account of the LEP provided in the article, it appears that the LEP has been successful in doing that by having a broad-based economic and political relationship with China. The author further critiques the impact of Chinese investment in Zimbabwe as detrimental to the interests of the people.

Foreign policy is an instrument that governs and protects the interests of governments, nationals, institutions, organisations and entities within the lenses of bilateral relations between the countries concerned. The Zimbabwe–China relations point to the fact that the latter China is politically and economically committed to engage and develop the former. However, at the heart of commitment and development in Zimbabwe lies questions of interests and the nature of the relationship which is affecting development and commitment to take place. Hence, this article argues that the failure of Zimbabwe to yield satisfying results from the bilateral relations lies mostly on the political and economic weaknesses of the Zimbabwean government and leadership. The fact that the LEP is not formally and publicly developed and disseminated to key stakeholders and the general public and that it remains largely an oral secret public policy statement affects the interests of Zimbabwean economy and interested stakeholders. This also reflects a weak foreign policy directive. As long as Zimbabwe continues to deny to engage with other superpowers and global institutions, the LEP will remain doomed as China will continue to manipulate and exploit the relationship knowingly that Zimbabwe has no other friends and partners for development and cooperation.

Corresponding author:

Victor Ojakorotu.

E-mail: victor.ojakorotu@nwu.ac.za

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Introduction

Zimbabwe–China relations are referred to as a microcosm of China–Africa relation because of its economic and resources aspects (Chun, 2014). Zimbabwe–China bilateral relations have developed over years covering mainly prioritised economic and political sectors in support of the country’s development. Further, Look East Policy (LEP) was introduced to promote Zimbabwe–China bilateral relationship as a sign of commitment by the two countries to support each other against Western governments in global dialogue engagement and platforms. Ramani in the *Diplomat* magazine, 11 January 2016 stated that ‘China’s close ties with Harare can be explained by historical legacies, normative convergences, and practical economic benefits.’ Thus, the adoption of the ‘look east policy’ (LEP) programme in 2003 by the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government was a direct response to the country’s deteriorating political and economic instability, and bilateral conflictual relationship with both the Western governments and international development partners (donors and global financial institutions—GFIs). Chingono (2010) observes LEP as a strategy adopted by the ZANU (PF) government towards East-Asian countries, particularly China with the objective of ensuring enhanced and heightened bilateral cooperation between the two governments in all economic sectors. Indeed, LEP has been largely a strategy to counter Western governments and GFIs imposed targeted economic sanctions and travel prohibitions on the ZANU (PF) leadership and associated companies (Kamidza, 2017; Portela, 2014). This was in line with Bomba and Minters (2010) who observe that sanctions refer to a wide variety of international measures penalising certain actions of individuals in order to alter their respective behaviour. However, the restrictive sanctions on ZANU (PF) leadership and associated companies imposed collectively by Western powers and GFIs significantly damaged their legitimacy and political moral standing in the eyes of the international community. However, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Report (2010) refutes the claim that sanctions in Zimbabwe are ring-fenced and targeted on a few individuals, and instead argues that in reality, the tight grip of the declared and undeclared sanctions has been felt throughout the entire economy.

Maroodza (2011) argues that Zimbabwe came up with an LEP centred on renewed, broader engagement with China and other Asian countries, which President Mugabe said it could be an alternative economic and political cooperation development partner to replace Western governments, which collectively isolated the country through smart economic sanctions against the ruling party leadership and associated companies. Indeed, China has remained an ally of the Mugabe regime since 2000 following the imposition of Western countries’ sanctions against ZANU-PF ruling elites and associated companies on account of deficiency in human rights, and multilateral governance and democratic credentials (Kamidza & Grynberg, 2012). This pro-eastern countries’ foreign and economic

policy was largely expressed as a direct rebuff to the increasingly hostile Western governments and international donors. In this respect, LEP became not only an alternative to the traditional trade and development relationship with Europe but also a strategy that could provide policy space and options to reduce the negative impacts of imposed sanction-related pressure by the way of identifying alternative markets for Zimbabwean products and sources of imports for goods and services that meet national requirements (Bond, 2007; Kamidza, 2017). Robert Mugabe thus boastfully remarked that Western governments and GFIs increasingly became hostile to us, and we deliberately declared an LEP, where the sun rises than the west, where it sets (Youde, 2013). The main objective of LEP is, therefore, to counter Western governments and GFIs by cooperating economically and politically with Asian countries, particularly China. In this regard, Zimbabwe increasingly relied on the support of her Asian allies, China and Russia on most United Nations-led political and economic engagements whose intention was to result in the imposition of internationally recognised punitive measures. In this way, the allies assisted ZANU (PF) government in defending her sovereign right to empower ordinary Zimbabweans through populist and contestable politically motivated broad-based fast-track land reform¹ and the *indigenisation* and economic *empowerment programmes*.² This position is supported by Friedrich–Ebert–Stiftung Policy Briefing Report (2004), which states that LEP is politically motivated to respond economic necessities in the absence of Western donor support.

Mutori (2016) notes that the introduction of LEP in 2003 reflects an emphasis of a change in national trade and investment policy from Western economies that focus towards those of the eastern bloc. Youde (2013) alludes that the logic that inspired Zimbabwe's LEP was generally inspired by the belief that a new group of allies would engage the country and its leadership irrespective of serious deficiencies in domestic politics including violation of human and property rights, electoral disputes, partisan national socio-economic policies and corruption. Further, eastern countries have publicly expressed interests in respecting the country's sovereignty notwithstanding pressure from Western governments and GFIs. The Asian nations have also been patient enough to wait for ZANU (PF) government to release an outlined and well-articulated economic blueprint document in line with LEP sentiments. Maroodza (2011) observes that foreign policymaking in Zimbabwe reveals that the domestic policy plays an important role in shaping the foreign policy that facilitates interaction with other nations. On the basis of the previous description, this article seeks to assess how LEP has been effective in supporting social and economic development.

An Overview and Context of Zimbabwe–China Relations

Zimbabwe–China relations were developed and intensified during the colonial era when Beijing assisted ZANU (PF) during the liberation war with arms, military strategies and training of former freedom fighters (Zindiye, 2015).

China supported ZANLA forces with military hardware and received intense training in China while Russia backed Zimbabwe's People Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) forces of Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Hence, Mugabe commented soon after the independence that '... we will continue to maintain and deepen our alliances with those who have been our truest friends' (Alao, 2014, p. 6). Furthermore, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army³ (ZANLA), the military wing of ZANU (PF), adopted Mao Zidong theories which motivated them in their quest to free the country from the colonial rule under Ian Smith. Thus, the foundation for modern-day bilateral relations was established during the cold war era when China in the 1960s and early 1970s not only willingly trained most African countries' freedom fighters in the revolutionary ideals but also provided scholarships to most children of African freedom fighters and ruling elites (Zhou, 2006). Subsequently, upon the attainment of independence on 18 April 1980, the two countries immediately established formal diplomatic bilateral economic and political relations. These diplomatic bilateral ties were cemented when both the first post-independent foreign minister, Simon Muzenda, and the Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe, visited Beijing in 1980 and 1981, respectively, primarily to express gratitude to China's support during the protracted armed struggle against the settler regime. Since then, the bilateral relations between the two countries have remained mutually beneficial to both parties. Thus, the growth of Zimbabwe–China bilateral relationship has since been characterised by the exchange of financial loans, development and business programmes and projects, and official visits at various state levels. Out of this bilateral relationship, Schwersensky (2007) argues that Beijing harvested the political capital from the investments of the 1960s and early 1970s including the invitation of constructing hospitals and the National Sports Stadium in the 1980s. All along the relationship between Zimbabwe and China was largely political, requiring timeous and frequent bilateral engagement in related to political activities. However, this relationship strength was undermined by the fall of communism which marked the end of cold war, leaving Western governments and GFL-led capitalism becoming the driving engine of supporting social and economic development in developing countries including Zimbabwe. But Zimbabwe–China bilateral relations remained strong despite the end of socialism. In this regard, since 2000, their economic relations have been growing from strengths to strengths during the wake of the Zimbabwe's crisis on account of the country's constitution and fast-track land reform (Chun, 2014). The two countries have continued to support each other despite strong criticism including deficiencies in democratic practices, human and property rights, and disputed electoral process from the international community, especially the Western governments.

Chun (2014) observes that western governments which are also members of NATO including the USA, the European Union (EU) and the UK, imposed smart sanctions on ZANU (PF) leadership and associated companies in support of the 2001 Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA), but Mugabe administration firmly improved bilateral relationship with China thereby cushioning bruised ego. As a result, Mugabe regards China as 'all weather' friends. In return, China's benefits from this bilateral relationship include access

to extractive minerals, investments in the across all the sectors of the economy and booming trade since Zimbabwe has increased the importation of cheap commodities from her bilateral partner. In this close bilateral partnership, China has been much stronger politically and economically than Zimbabwe. For ZANU (PF) government, China has since remained a reliable ally at global level. Subsequently, the Chinese investors focused on yielding profits regardless of the negative impacts associated with their operations in the country. But, Zimbabwe continues to sign opaque business and investments contracts, deals and agreements with China, which benefit mainly the ruling elites by entrenching them in power (Shinn, 2009). The process and outcome excludes the ordinary Zimbabweans as evidenced by limited signs of social and economic development associated with Chinese financial assistance. Indeed, today, most of the Chinese companies are being awarded most contracts for large infrastructural development projects such as the construction of roads, dams, power stations, railways and government buildings. Zindiye (2015) observes that between 2000 and 2012, approximately 128 Chinese official development finance projects were established in the country. While this reflects Chinese business and investments expansion, there has been little corresponding local expansion in social and economic development. Further, notwithstanding the continued Zimbabwean turbulent political environment that overshadows the prospects for social and economic growth and development, the late Vice President of Zimbabwe, Joseph Msika, in 2008 heaped praises to the Chinese government for its continued support in the face of economic sanctions imposed by Western nations and GFIs in line with LEP programme.

Despite evidence of human rights and rule of law violation, China continues to cooperate with Zimbabwean government in pursuit of her economic and political interests. However, the Zimbabwean citizens decried the predatory character of the Chinese investors asking why the government allowing them to steal national minerals. This is supported by Simbaneuta Mudarikwa, the Member of Parliament for Uzumba Marambapfungwe, who argued that the government should thoroughly investigate the Chinese business and investment operations in the country due to claims of them looting national minerals despite evidence of lack of sustainable social and economic development (*New Zimbabwe news*, 20 November 2016). The above is further supported by Robert Mugabe's acknowledgement that diamonds worth more than US \$15 billion were looted in the Chiadzwa mining area in Marange (*The Herald*, 4 March 2016). While China blames colonisation for the underdevelopment of Africa (Ajang, 2012), Western countries accuse her for predatorily exploiting Zimbabwe's natural resources. Meanwhile, in the millennium, the bilateral relations between Zimbabwe and China further blossomed, especially after the former was not only suspended from the Commonwealth Club of countries on 19 March 2002, but also when the EU as a bloc and individual European countries imposed targeted sanctions and travel bans against ZANU (PF) leadership and associated companies in 2003. The above developments resulted in capital flight and fast withdrawal of domestic and foreign investors from the economy leading to serious economic depression characterised by 8 consecutive years of negative economic growth since 1999. Under such a desperate economic trajectory, China increasingly became a reliable political ally of the

ruling ZANU (PF) in major global political and economic platforms such as the UN Assembly. China also increasingly became economically ready to invest in an economy largely considered by Western governments, GFIs and investors as politically and economically risky. Since the millennium, the bilateral relations between the two countries were evidenced by not only LEP but also official state visits at the most senior levels, and a series of bilateral trade agreements and influx of aid and loan inflows from China to Zimbabwe.

The convergence of Zimbabwe's 'Look East' policy with the establishment of China's Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) had a knock-on effect on the emerging 'special relationship' meaning that Beijing and Harare friendship is distinctive and deep-rooted with mutual understanding coupled with cooperation, development and peace (Chun, 2014). Hence, President Hu Jintao in 2006 during the Harare visit stated that developing friendly relations between China and Zimbabwe is an unshakable policy (Alao, 2014). For the past three decades, Zimbabwe has been relying on China as an ally in international platforms, especially the UN Security Council (UNSC) discussing governance, pluralistic democratic processes, human and property rights, and electoral processes, blocking the adoption of tough measures against Mugabe government. China also engages Zimbabwe as a trading partner in its quest for sustainable development. This is supported by Kwaa Prah (2007) who notes that the Chinese deputy foreign minister, Zhou Wenzhong, supported the above notion by labelling China's presence and activities in Africa in 2005 as purely based on business interests.

However, China's commercial approach and engagement in Zimbabwe have been ad hoc and without clear policy to regulate and guide the bilateral relationship. Moreover, ever since Zimbabwe adopted LEP, there has been an insignificant improvement in the country's social and economic development, especially the welfare of the ordinary people. This led Sadomba (2011) to describe LEP as a strategy by Robert Mugabe to frame his leadership as a victim of Western governments, GFIs and other leading international donors, and in process, successfully received sympathy from China, Africa and other world leaders. This provided ZANU (PF) with enough policy space to blame Western governments for his leadership failure to properly manage and administer the country's social, economic and political affairs. In particular, Chun (2014) argues that China has played a critical role in Zimbabwe's political crisis for three reasons, namely, her veto power in the UNSC, exploitative linked socio-economic development support and non-interference policy in the unfolding national political development.

Stanislaus (2015) states that in 2010, Zimbabwe's exports to and imports from China were valued at US \$237 million and US \$557 million, respectively, giving the former (Zimbabwe) a trade deficit of US \$320 million. China has growing demand for natural resources including minerals and all agricultural products, especially tobacco. The above provides evidence that China has been benefitting more in the bilateral trade relationship. More so the government has allowed the Chinese to operate on a tax-free environment in mining, agriculture and business sectors, a development that is causing the country to lose millions of dollars in form of revenue (*Quartz Africa*, 2016). *The Standard* newspaper (2016, April 26) observes that the Zimbabwe government's hopes for economic revival were all

based on LEP, resulting in intensification of business linkages with Asian businesspeople, especially the Chinese. For instance, following the adoption of the multicurrency regime, there has been an influx of Chinese business people into the country, a development supported by government claiming that their presence as business related. *IOL International Business News* (Karombo, 2015) observes a significant increase in the number of Chinese companies operating in Zimbabwe though there are no corresponding records showing that these firms were remitting tax revenue to government the treasury. The paper quotes Finance minister, Patrick Chinamasa saying:

As we speak, the Chinese are becoming quite strong in terms of their investments in the country. For instance, we already have more than 100 Chinese companies who have invested in the economy. Further, Chinese investors have shown a lot of interest in all sectors of the economy.

Equal Times news (24 September 2012) reveals how the former minister of Finance, Tendai Biti, expressed his discontent towards the Chinese Aijin diamond mining company, claiming that its operations in Marange had not remitted 'a single cent' in taxes to the Zimbabwe government's treasury. He further claimed that at least US \$30-million from illegal sales of diamonds remained unaccounted for (*Mail & Guardian*, 24 July 2010). The above is evidence that the diamond-mining company was exempted from paying tax through obscure arrangement it entered with the ZANU (PF) ruling elites despite making huge profit from extracting the country's diamonds. Unfortunately, the treasury in particular was denied access to such huge stream of tax revenue that could have improved the salaries of civil servants, most of whom were earning and/or are still earning an average US \$400 per month as well as arresting country-wide decaying infrastructure and social and economic development. This also denied the economy and the necessary resources to stimulate industrial operations at a time the Inclusive Government was struggling to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) into the country. The above further reflects the weak application of the indigenisation and empowerment policy since diamond mining production continues without a corresponding remittance of tax revenue to treasury. Lastly, this demonstrates how the Chinese companies have been exploiting the conflictual bilateral economic and political relationship between Zimbabwe and Western governments.

One of the strategies China has used to strengthen its relations with Zimbabwe through ZANU-PF leadership and gain good will is its continuous claim efforts of financing infrastructure projects such as power, water and road construction (*Reuter News*, 1 December 2015), investments in ICT, agriculture, water rehabilitation. *Sunday News* notes that between January and November 2015, Zimbabwe received US \$4,653 million from China in FDI, and mega deals agreements. This is supported by *The Herald*, which states that Zimbabwe signed nine landmark agreements in support of sustainable socio-economic transformation. But, Willias Madzimore, the People's Democratic Party's (PDP) secretary for international relations, rejected the above claim saying that 'China has contributed nothing of value to the nation except to aid a corrupt and repressive political system while looting national resources' (*Quartz Africa*, 2016). He further lamented that China

in return has largely aided ZANU-PF party and government militarily with campaign materials, radio jamming device used to counter independent radio stations during elections, riots control gear, other military weapons as well as the building of the state of the art military school. The above is another evidence of how China stands accused of bleeding Zimbabwe's economy through its bilateral economic and political relationship with ZANU-PF notwithstanding continued gloomy economic growth prospects characterised by cash shortages and about 90 per cent unemployment (*Quartz Africa*, 2016), all fermenting social unrest driven by social media platforms including #Tag This Flag and #Tag Tajamuka led protests.

The exploitative tendencies of China have since been opened on the labour market. For instance, there were reports of gross labour abuse such as poor working conditions, underpayment, long working hours, poor sanitation, safety conditions and lack of safety clothing from most diamond Chinese mining companies (Kabemba, 2012), which the Government of National Unity (GNU) failed to decisively intervene and resolve. Another major concern has been the language barrier, which undermined better employer–employee relationship. Recently, the Chinese made headlines in the local newspapers on account of abusing Zimbabwean workers by beating them up as a form of work-related punishment (Moyo & Mdlongwa, 2015). This is supported by Longhi (2012) who argues that the Chinese companies seem to have diplomatic protections from both the then GNU government and current ZANU (PF) administration that despite evidence of them violating labour laws with impunity in the country. Again, this is evidence of government's failure to protect a worker from work-related exploitation and abuse. In this way, the Chinese companies have succeeded to exploit and maximise commercial profit from the bilateral relationship between Harare and Beijing. For instance, some Chinese companies are arguing that 'it is luxury to offer Zimbabwean workers proper workforce attire as they are doing them a favor by rebuilding their dilapidating country' (Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS) Commentary Report, 2014, p. 18). But Longhi (2012) observes that workers are accusing the Chinese companies for disregarding their welfare due largely to their pursuit of profit maximisation agenda.

In as much as the ruling party is lamenting and glorifying LEP, indeed the majority of Zimbabweans have not benefitted from the policy direction. In this instance, major beneficiaries of the policy are only few ruling elites and top military officers.

Zimbabwe and China have signed many deals and memoranda of understanding under the look east banner including China–Africa Sunlight energy limited which plans to invest US \$2.1 billion to develop coal mines in the country, dualisation of Beitbridge–Harare, Harare–Nyamapanda, Harare–Chirundu and Mutare–Harare highways as well as thermal station in Sibukwe (*Daily News*, 3 June 2016). However, the implementation of various agreements signed with Beijing raises more questions on the quality of the deals. For example, since President Mugabe signed the much hyped 'mega deals' in 2015, however, little progress has been recorded. The above reflects that the relationship might not be a win-win as claimed by Zimbabwe authorities. Indeed, there is a general strong feeling that

Zimbabwe–China bilateral relationship through LEP only benefited few ruling elites from the ruling party. In this respect, the Chinese are accused of pursuing elitist infrastructural development projects and country-wide mining adventures wherever there is a presence of minerals. The ownership of such mining ventures is managed by community ownership trust. In this respect, community ownership trust is therefore a scheme launched by government under the indigenisation and economic empowerment policy whose goal is to ensure equitable distribution of national wealth, that is, foreign-owned mining companies operating in Zimbabwe dispose 51 per cent stake to local communities, of which 10 per cent of this equity is spared for the local community in which the firm operates (*Newsday*, 29 November 2012). Gibbs Dube observes that at least 50 community share ownership trusts, each worth US \$10 million, have so far been set up by the government in collaboration with foreign-owned mining companies following the launch of the indigenisation programme more than 2 years ago. However, the disbursement of these funds remains a challenge since local villagers, especially those in Chiadzwa area in Marange, are leaving in abject poverty despite the Chinese firms having started mining in that area (Election Resource Centre, 2014). Meanwhile, most people leaving the above-mining areas were displaced without compensation and left homeless. Further, the share ownership scheme, dubbed the success story of the indigenisation policy, has been destroyed by political meddling whereby board members of the scheme and other officials are reportedly awarding themselves hefty allowances to the detriment of service delivery (*Newsday*, 28 July 2015).

Gappah (2009) observes that the ruling party has sold the country to the Chinese, hence derogatorily refer as ‘zhim zhim for zimbabwe’. He further argues that the ruling party’s compliance towards the Chinese people and companies through LEP has not been strategy of importance and value. What suffers is Zimbabwe’s social and economic developmental agenda. Zindiye (2015) supports the above by noting that Zimbabwe has become a bondage to China, causing most people, especially the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations to detest ZANU-PF’s continued economic development relationship with Beijing. The Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS) Commentary Report (2014) argues that the Chinese-related challenges in the country are intertwined with issues pertaining to lack of good governance, illegal mining and lack of accountability and transparency thereof, a development that is further worsened by increasing negative perceptions of the Chinese companies, some of which seem to have secured immunity from Robert Mugabe government. The perceptions are also fuelled by reports of high levels of corruption among government officials, weak legal frameworks and the growing presence of informal channels of trade, all of which create conditions that perpetuate exploitation from foreign-owned Chinese companies. This is supported by Willias Madzimore, PDP secretary for international relations, who observes thus:

The Chinese are killing the country twice: (i) by aiding and abetting the criminal tendencies of Mugabe regime; and (ii) by siphoning billions of dollars from the country. Further, Chinese alliance with ZANU (PF) are sustaining and perpetuating worst tendencies of oppression while ensuring that the Zimbabwean present and future

generations are economically disempowered and disinherited permanently. This is the worst kind of imperialism, hence the call for Zimbabweans to collectively rise and resist it. (*The African Exponent*, 2016)

Implications of Look East Policy on the Domestic Policy

The isolation of ZANU (PF) government by Western governments and international community deepened the country's social, economic and political crisis notwithstanding China's commitment and intensification over the years to offering financial aid and loans. In this regard, Maxwell (2011) observes that Zimbabwe and China recently concluded an agreement valued at US \$585 million in trade that was quickly followed by a US \$700 million loan deal. While against this backdrop, China's aid, trade and investments in Zimbabwe reflected potential supportive pillar in support of the country's social and economic development. However, the country-wide outcome largely serves the commercial interests of China at the expense of the national economy which since 2000 struggled to support the social and economic development and the improvement of welfare of citizens. This is because the bilateral economic and political deals between the ZANU (PF) government and China framed lacked the leverage to support the country's deteriorating economic and social status including the living conditions of ordinary Zimbabweans. This is supported by Kamidza (2017) and Pentz (2010) who have observed a potential tsunami of Chinese commercial goods into the Zimbabwean market resulting in business tension with local entrepreneurs as well as employer–employee tension. This is evidenced for instance by the Chinese mining company operating in Chiadzwa which has displaced local people thereby causing grave friction among the homeless people (now demanding justice and replacements), the government and the respective company. Further, the government though expressed its commitment to both LEP and indigenisation and economic empowerment programme, surprisingly exhibit open preference support to the Chinese businesses operating in the country including those without operating licenses at the expense of local entrepreneurs facing stiff market competition. In addition, some Chinese companies have not been employing Zimbabweans as evidenced by the huge presence of potential workers found roaming on the streets. This is supported by Kabemba (2012) who observes that the Chinese are instead bring in workers from their own country. Further, the Chinese business operators have preferred their own workers instead of hiring local people. In the case in which local people are hired, they are underpaid and working on conditions that undermine labour laws and regulations.

The 'go global' policy that was announced in 1999 by the Chinese government encouraged all Chinese entrepreneurs and corporations to focus their investment opportunities in Africa (Pentz, 2010). This shows China's agenda in Africa in terms of grabbing and dominating resources and markets, respectively. Thus, China disguises its agenda mission by showing signs of commitment through pouring financial aid and loans to the Zimbabwean government. A serious concern

therefore is that national industries and small-scale entrepreneurs cannot compete with Chinese goods because Zimbabwe's prevailing economic entrepreneurs do not have the capacity to produce quality and competitive goods to supply at the local market. Hence, by flooding the Zimbabwean market with cheap products, the Chinese are destroying local industries, thereby forcing some of them to shut down, resulting to more unemployment, capital flight and fewer profits to support business revival and expansion. The above are examples of negative consequences arising from the operations of Chinese business and traders.

China's continuous close relation with Africa is motivated by a craving to secure the sources of raw materials and energy for its constant economic growth and its quest to open up a new export market (Goldstein, 2006). This is evident in Zimbabwe because the LEP has more to do with China penetrating the mining sector while dominating the markets as well. The LEP promotes coexistence and non-interference in each other's political space, governance accountability and democratic value transparency systems, and hence, it has comforted the government of Zimbabwe to ally with the China in international platforms including UNSC processes. But this exposed Chinese government shortcoming in the building of Zimbabwe's social, economic and political transition processes. The non-interference policy is an important policy that also respects Zimbabwe's sovereignty (Pentz, 2010). This alliance allowed Zimbabwe to overshadow the evil and the ills of the government. It has since been difficult due to secrecy that deals to hold the government accountable to weakness of LEP and unfolding negative implications of the bilateral relationship in the country. Unfortunately, LEP has promoted capital flight, tax evasion and embezzlement of state funds, thereby raising more questions on China's commitment to the development of Zimbabwe.

The Chinese's presence failed to make any efforts to integrate with ordinary Zimbabweans not only through employment creation and fair business practices but also through cultural, language and work ethics. Even at local level, the message from China is clear that sovereignty consideration is more than highly valued than human rights issues in the current bilateral relationship. With respect to human rights, China prioritises subsistence and economic rights ahead of individual and personal rights, a preference of Western governments (Taylor, 2006). The Chinese have no regards for human rights, governance and democratic values wherever their business entrepreneurs operate and/or invest. For instance, Chinese work-related brutality and insensitiveness towards the Zimbabwean workers have along been underreported in reports of human rights violations taking place in work places, displacement of locals, failure to uphold social corporate responsibilities and their obliviousness towards the environment. In 2011, the Zimbabwe's environment minister Francis Nhema observes that the Chinese multinationals were 'operating like *makorokoza* miners' (illegal gold panners) (*The Times*, 4 February 2011). Chinese operating in Zimbabwe do not operate on prevailing terms and conditions but rather on 'everything goes', hence their tendency to disrespect national labour laws. Regardless of the above, Mugabe continued to turn a blind eye towards the concerns of Zimbabweans who have been ill-treated by Chinese entrepreneurs, describing Beijing an 'unselfish ally' while pursuing the agenda to counter smart sanctions from the Western governments.

Ironically, LEP is largely benefiting the Chinese entrepreneurs more than the Zimbabwe's economy and the general public. In this respect, a combination of an influx of the Chinese in the country and failure to positively stimulate the economy through mega-bilateral deals correlates with the continued migration of ordinary Zimbabweans to other countries for greener pastures. The above is supported by Li Hu who points out that Chinese are coming to Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular due to the comfortable environment to visit, work in and trade. Nonetheless, China strategically continues to be Zimbabwe's biggest investor positioning itself to exploit valuable natural resources that are needed to develop her ever-burgeoning economy irrespective of ZANU (PF) bad record of eroding basic freedoms and entitlements of the ordinary citizens. The above reflect LEP's association with signs of greed, corruption and selfishness on ruling elites while disregarding economic and political interests of the majority citizens. Chun (2014) argues that China's economic engagement with Zimbabwe via resource-seeking reflects positive support for the country's 'pariah state' status.

NewsdzeZimbabwe (20 June 2016) notes Mugabe's remark 'it is better for the economy to continue taking a battering than to be forced to change policies by USA and UK in exchange for aid'. This is because aid to rouge states, such as Sudan and Zimbabwe, without conditions has questioned the causal relationship between the flow of Chinese economic and political development assistance with such authorities in particular and other African governments with respect to promoting necessary political reforms including openness and accountability (Zafar, 2007). Subsequently, on 30 September 2005, the former Zimbabwean Vice-President, Joyce Mujuru, officially launched the Zimbabwe-China Business Council whose goal was to complement the LEP (Chingono, 2010) in promoting sound bilateral relations with China despite all negative governance, democratic and human rights reports from anti-ZANU (PF) domestic and foreign allies. For instance, China has vetoed all UNSC political question-related resolutions against ZANU (PF) leadership, blaming the misfortune on the collective decision by Western governments and their respective foreign-based investors and donors who pulled out of the country largely because of the fast-track land reform and indigenisation and empowerment policy. However, domestic and foreign allies dismissed LEP as more of a slogan, observing non-existence of such a document with clear guidelines having been ratified by an Act of Parliament to support the bilateral relationship between the parties. Chingono (2014) concludes that Zimbabwean Foreign Affairs ministry has never released any formal document outlining the tenets of LEP.

Within the confide of LEP, China quickly supported Robert Mugabe's controversial decision to raze shantytowns around Harare through Operation Murambatsina⁴ (Brown & Sriram, 2008). The above operation was condemned by world-wide, especially by Western governments, but China supported ZANU (PF) led policy directive that destroyed and displaced defenceless ordinary people, most of whom MDC supporters from accessing urban markets facilities and other social services. So, LEP failed to improve living conditions of ordinary Zimbabweans, especially those affected by the politically motivated Murambatsvina Operation. Meanwhile, Kamidza (2014) argues that:

the imposition of smart sanctions against ZANU (PF) leadership and associated companies was supported by the Bretton Woods Institutions which denied the Mugabe regime balance of payment support on account of the country's ongoing default on the large (US \$10 billion+) external debt. Since that default began at the end of the 1990s, both the ZANU (PF) (2000–2009) and GNU (2009–2013) administrations failed to unlock financial and technical resources from the international community. (Kamidza, 2017, p. 23)

Theoretical Reflection on Zimbabwe–China Relations

Halsall (1997) alludes that Wallerstein characterises the world system as a set of mechanisms, which redistributes surplus value from the periphery to the core. In this regard, the core represents the developed or industrialised economies while the periphery is the 'underdeveloped', typically raw materials-exporting, poor or least developed countries. Further, the historical economic relationship has been that of the former (the core) exploiting economic resources of the latter (the periphery). Thus, in this bilateral economic and political relation, Zimbabwe occupies the peripheral geolocation while China is the core that dictates the direction of this bilateral relationship. The above bilateral character confirms China's economic dominance over Zimbabwe, giving room and/or creating conditions for the exploitation of the country's natural resources, especially minerals with relatively little cost and easy political persuasion. For instance, developed economies (core countries) in line with the world systems theory have the capacity to set the prices for agricultural and mineral commodities, the only exportables from poor countries including Zimbabwe. Notwithstanding the generally low price for the above commodities, poor developing countries including Zimbabwe continue to rely on those (developed) markets for the generation of foreign currency. This development, for instance, forces small Zimbabwean farmers to abandon their agricultural fields because they no longer afford to pay labour force as well as purchase inputs such as fertilisers, seeds and chemicals. Further, notwithstanding the level of unemployment in Zimbabwe which stands at over 90 per cent (Kamidza, 2016), Chinese companies instead of employing local people in their businesses or projects opt for work force being recruited from China. The above reflects lack of clear policy that governs the engagement between China and Zimbabwe as evidenced by failure to create employment opportunities for ordinary citizens in an economy with estimated over 90 per cent unemployment (*New Zimbabwe news*, 2014).

Martínez-Vela (2001) states that among the most important structures of the current world system is a power hierarchy between core and periphery, in which powerful and wealthy industrial societies dominate and exploit weak and poor peripheral countries. Hence, the world system theory is intertwined with a dependency syndrome as Zimbabwe is now heavily relying on China for economic and political developmental necessities as well as for protection from UNSC punitive measures. The above description support Chase-Dunn and Peter (1995) who argue that peripheral countries are structurally constrained to experience a kind of development that reproduces their subordinate status. Thus, using the above, Zimbabwe's vulnerability to be exploited by such developed economies like

China is exposed. Indeed, China knows that Zimbabwe has no capacity and moral standing to regulate few friendly countries willing to take huge economic risk of investing in an economy that not only disrespects private property rights but also has alarming social and economic challenges including worsening poverty, and growing inequalities and unemployment. Politically, the world system-related concepts highlight nation-states variables and elements embedded within the system. This is supported by Martínez-Vela (2001) who argues that states are used by ruling class elites to pursue their interest even in core countries.

The cores are classified as developed states with vast technological advancement and the periphery are categorised with cheap labour and raw materials which makes the core countries more functional. Therefore, the unequal receiving or exchange relations have been experienced between Zimbabwe and China. China has the capacity to import raw materials and manufacture them to finished goods and export them back to Zimbabwe. Cheap goods from China are daily flooding the Zimbabwe market at an alarming rate, a factor which is affecting local producers as consumers prefer buying them than expensive local products. The Zimbabwean industries are struggling to produce products in volumes that lead to lower prices. Also directly or indirectly, the core economies influence the functioning of the periphery. This is seen on how Zimbabwe relates to the whole world economic system, especially the Chinese interest. This means that Zimbabwe's global political economy is centred over China's interests.

How Effective Is the Look East Policy in the Economy?

African Development Bank Group (2011) alludes that China obviously plays an important role in increasing Africa's development opportunities though not to the extent and levels of the continent's traditional Western development donors. This assertion support Zimbabweans and others who have been accusing LEP of being marred by operational secrecy at private companies' levels while the country's social, economic and political crisis continues unabated.

The tendency to view international dealings, aid and investment opportunities in terms of binaries is akin to a lover who, spurned by a long-time boyfriend, rushes to the next man's arms, not because she has feelings for him or him for her but to spite the previous lover into believing he has lost big time (Moyo & Mdlongwa, 2015). The above expression adequately describes Zimbabwe dumping traditional Western governments and donors, following the imposition of targeted sanctions on ZANU-PF leadership and associated companies in favour of China through LEP. As such, this fuels the perception that the bilateral engagement of Zimbabwe and China symbolically depicts that of a horse and rider relationship given that in all areas of focus, the latter is dominating the process with a view to maximise commercial benefits. But for Zimbabwe, the bilateral relationship is more of the politics of survival given that China has been offering a window of opportunity through aid, investments, trade as well as protection during the UNSC debates. However, indications are that the Chinese investments in Zimbabwe are the least compared to the inflow in other neighbouring countries, such as Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia.

However, according to (Youde, 2013), China has played a particular significant role in Zimbabwe's foreign policy thereby making LEP a reality. With respect economic relationship, trade between China and Zimbabwe has increased significantly over the past decade. ZimStats, the government's official statistics agency, reported that trade between the two countries topped US \$800 million in 2011, doubling the amount of trade value reported in the previous year (2010). There are 53 companies which are members of the Chamber of Chinese Enterprises in the country, employing more than 1200 Zimbabwean employees. However, the above employment figures exclude those workers hired by the Chinese state-owned companies that have pledged large amounts for infrastructure and resource extraction. Anjin Investments invested US \$460 million in Zimbabwe in 2011 to develop the Marange diamond fields in conjunction with the Zimbabwean military. However, the mining relationship created labour-related challenge as most Chinese firms have been bringing in their workforce instead of hiring local citizens in bid to curb the robust unemployment rate Zimbabwe is facing.

The Shandong Taishan Sunlight Group in 2013 has announced plans to invest US \$2 billion to develop coal mines and energy production capabilities in the western part of Zimbabwe so as to ease electricity shortages while the China Development Bank intends to invest US \$10 billion in the country over the next 5 years. China has also sponsored health care initiatives including the 2010 China–Africa Brightness Action in Malawi and Zimbabwe, which provided cataract surgeries to more than 600 need patients. This asserts that China committed its work to improve the deteriorating Zimbabwe social and economic crisis, an example of mutual benefit bilateral relationship. This engagement saved the president Robert Mugabe regime which did not want to appear a coward in front of Western governments, a development that shifts the global paradigm shift of political engagement on the Zimbabwean question. However, Longhi (2012) alludes that China has benefitted a lot from the government of Zimbabwe's oriented LEP.

Despite that, Youde (2007) states that opponents have called it a cynical attempt by Mugabe to bolster a faltering regime with little domestic political legitimacy coupled with clear signs of fragileness of the economic policy incapable of improving the ongoing Zimbabwean socio-economic situation. Youde (2007, p. 12) further questions at whose expense is the Zimbabwe–China relations built upon? Obert Gutu in *The New African* (2010) argues that in today's world, Zimbabwe, as a country, should be wary of continuing to look east without also looking in other global geolocations (west, north and south). He further observes that continuing going east at any rate will inevitably see the country dealing with Western governments and development donors because the east and the west are now two sides of the same coin. This geographical lesson should remind ZANU-PF that while continuously condemning colonialism or neo-colonialism, they should be aware that the anti-colonialism agenda has potential to surrender the country to the Chinese authorities and private companies.

The questioning of Zimbabwe–China relations has been voiced lately due to expectations of the LEP. *New Zimbabwe* indicates that for more than a decade after adopting the so-called LEP, China has profited from the arrangement while Zimbabwe recorded an estimated 90 per cent unemployment rate, the worse in the

country's history, and 4.5 million citizens who are in need of food aid. The above supports the notion that Chinese companies have been economically exploiting the country's natural resources while ordinary citizens continued to experience deep-seated poverty, and living in squalor conditions. They are also clear evidence of looting the country's mineral resources by Chinese firms. This is supported by Youde (2007, p. 11) who quotes Zhakata saying that China publicly endorsed Operation Murambatsvina, a policy that bulldozed the homes of hundreds of thousands of people living in high-density suburbs. The above shows the pretence of Chinese authorities and companies under this bilateral friendship while enjoying mining concessions at the expense of the welfare of ordinary citizens. This is further supported by evidence of forced eviction of local people in order to pave way for Chinese firm Aijin to start mining at Chiadzwa in 2010 in pursuant of the LEP.

Look East Policy and Socio-economic Developmental Challenges in Zimbabwe

The fact, which Mugabe is even hailing LEP and encouraging his counterparts to adopt it, is a serious challenge for Zimbabwe. As *Xinhua* news (4 December 2015) states that 'Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe on Friday hailed Sino-Africa bilateral cooperation that has transformed livelihoods and slammed actions from the west that have derailed progress in the world's second largest continent.' Mugabe insists on stating that the relationship has yielded benefits from both sides notwithstanding claims that China has siphoned millions of dollars out of the country. On the contrary, *The Standard* (2015, February 15) argues that 'Zimbabwe has no LEP document as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the constitutionally custodian of bilateral relationship, has never released any formal document outlining the tenets of the policy, except a sentence in the foreign policy statements, outlining clearly the basic thrust in government pronouncements and the international travel patterns of Zimbabwean officials'. The paper concludes that LEP is more of a slogan than a genuine foreign policy for the country. This signals lack of seriousness on the part of the government towards the relationship with the eastern bloc while implicitly maintains economic and political engagement and relationship with Western governments. In supporting the above assertion, Kamidza (2017) documents renewed re-engagement between ZANU-PF government and the EU and the respective government including the British government (before its successful Brexit referendum) soon after Mugabe ZANU PF won overwhelmingly the 31 July 2013 harmonised elections. He further acknowledges the interim Economic Partnership Agreement signed between the EU and Zimbabwe Government of National Unity on 4 September 2009 and ratified in 2012, which is €7.5 million has been pledged by the EU to assist in the implementation of the new trade regime as indication of resumption of traditional bilateral economic and political relationship between the parties. This explains why LEP seems to have suffered from clear articulation by government and the involvement of other key stakeholders such as the private sector and civil society.

This shows that LEP shows lack authenticity taking in cognisance that all other policies Mugabe regime has formulated are well documented and publicly availed to other stakeholders. Such policies include the Zimbabwe agenda for sustainable economic transformation (ZIMASSET) (2013), the fast-track land reform programme (2000) and the indigenisation and empowerment policy (2008) which were shared with other stakeholders including opposition parties despite being rejected. Ramani (2016) states that despite the introduction of the indigenisation policy, Mugabe's dependence on Chinese investments had risen to the point that he had to exempt China's deals from the nationalisation law, a development that consolidated China's hegemonic position over the mining sector in particular.

The fact that LEP only caters for a few top ZANU-PF officials since the bilateral-related deals including those involving Chinese private companies were/are concluded in secrecy, that is, were/are not disclosed to the people of Zimbabwe. This has increasingly strained government–civic relationship in engaging with the implementation of LEP. *The Standard* (2015, February 15) newspaper states that 'It is clear that LEP has failed to reach to the expected benefits'. Engaging with Zimbabwe has through a shoddy deal. It seems the ruling ZANU-PF elites do not want to accept reality that the policy is benefiting investors and people from the eastern bloc in general and China in particular compared to the Zimbabwean masses. This is supported by Alao (2014) who notes the growing tension among senior politicians in ZANU-PF, especially those close to their President Mugabe and officials in the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development over how to handle certain aspects of Chinese mining activities in relationship to national laws in general and labour laws in particular. Furthermore, a high record of violation of human rights, workers' rights abuses and exploitation of the country's natural resources by the Chinese firms operating in the mining sector has been recorded. In this regard, Zindiye (2015) alludes:

Over the last few years, there has been an influx of Chinese businesses of all forms in Zimbabwe. Instead of aiding development and growth of the economy, the Chinese have brought nothing new except exploiting the workers and local people as well as overshadowing them.

The LEP emerged at a time where Zimbabwean economy was struggling as a result of international isolation by Western governments, development donors and GFIs owing among other things, the rushed fast-track land reform programme. As a result, Kamidza (2013) argues that:

The economy suffered eight consecutive years of negative growth, that is, from 1999 the economy fell by nearly 50% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), coupled with significant capital flight and reductions in private sector investment. Indeed, investment all but ceased after the Millennium, resulting in scarce inflows of foreign reserves and a corresponding tight exchange rate regime.

As Mutawa puts it 'Zimbabwe–China bilateral relations are based on loans, aid, Memorandum of Understanding and military weapon deals.' The above alone

excludes the Zimbabwean masses from benefitting from LEP as an instrument that would have guided the bilateral engagement between the two countries. The above also raises the question: why signing military weaponry deal when a country is not at war? The impression created is that Zimbabwe–China bilateral relationship pays no attention to the welfare concern or needs of the local people since the military weapons acquired from the former end up being used to intimidate opposition political party supporters as well as instilling fear into the hearts of the rural people as evidence by widespread reports of torture of those who publicly expressed a contrary opinion to ZANU-PF in some villagers.

Bayano (2008) stipulates that Zimbabwe's President, Robert Mugabe, said that his government's LED is an effective measure to counter collective Western governments imposed sanctions as well as economically empowering Zimbabweans (Bayano, 2008). Thus, to the pro-government allies, LEP has facilitated the empowerment of black majority Zimbabweans who are now engaging in indigenised activities such as mining all kinds of minerals, and farming crops of their choice in any agricultural region. But a respected political scientist, Ibbo Mandaza, founder and executive director of the Southern African Political Economy (SAPES) Trust argues that LEP was rhetorical since the Zimbabwean economy largely remained vertically linked to Western economies in both historical and economical terms (*The Standard*, 2015). This shows that in as much as Zimbabwe sought allies from the eastern bloc they continue to engage with Western governments. A good example is the continued trade negotiations with the EU which culminated with a new trade agreement signed and ratified in 2009 and 2012, respectively, in which the EU has availed €7.5 million to assist the country in implementing it (Kamidza, 2017). Further, Zimbabwe's agreement with international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank exposes Zimbabwean authorities' lack of commitment on LEP despite public pronouncements in defence of poor record of governance and democracy values, widespread but entrenched corruption, absence of rule of law, violations of human rights and private property rights, and poor macroeconomic policies. All the above shadow the ineffectiveness of the LEP.

But, the trade and investment relationship between China and Africa remains largely unbalanced (African Development Bank Group, 2011), resulting in development aid, investments, trade and loans not benefitting citizens, especially in Zimbabwe. The above supports the notion that LEP has impacted negatively on the Zimbabwean economy as citizens and economic agents increasingly consume imported cheap goods from China. The above development negatively impacted in particular on thriving cotton farming and cotton production, resulting in the closure of related cotton ginnery processing plants and subsequent clothing manufacturing sub-sector.

Newsday (2015, September) indicates that Zimbabwe made a number of fatal mistakes when negotiating the terms of trade cooperation conditions with the eastern bloc, especially China. This opened more market for Chinese clothing industry. Indeed, LEP coincided with fast dying of the once successful cotton farming, the cotton ginnery industry and big and thriving textile industry, which during its prime-time before the land grab programme in 2000, employed over

24,000 workers (SOURCE). The demise of land grab in particular led to the closure of some of the leading brands in this industry including Cotton Printers, Merlin, Con Textiles and David Whitehead. With LEP, the government of Zimbabwe opened floodgates for a lot of Chinese textile investors, who continue coming to Zimbabwe to trade with all sorts and manner of textile materials. As a result, almost all local textile companies closed down following the influx of Chinese textiles goods into the country thereby outcompete local cotton products. The scaling down of cotton farming activities and closure of cotton ginnery and textile industry worsened the rate of unemployment in the country as well as depleting incomes to affected families, especially farmers living in agricultural zones most suitable for cotton production than other cash crops. Thus, under such an environment, LEP negatively affected the economy, workers and people, especially in the former cotton farming areas.

The LEP contributed to the development and implementation of the indigenisation and empowerment policy in which the international companies are to surrender 51 per cent of the total entity shares to the government. *The Financial Gazette* (2007) blamed this policy for the closure of most companies in the banking, transport, agriculture and business sectors as well as either withdrawal or hesitance of investors to continue participating in the Zimbabwean economy. Thus, LEP has remained in haemorrhage with very little or nothing to show for the highly publicised romance between Zimbabwe and China. While *The Standard* (2016) reported President Mugabe's own confession of missing diamonds worth US \$15 billion on his 92 birthday bash, his government recently blamed the Chinese companies for looting diamond in the chiadzwa areas. Unfortunately, no investigations or arrests have been made public by the authorities to date. Further, while diamond has been mined in this area since 2006, there are no signs of improved social and economic development in the area while people live in poverty and underdevelopment conditions.

Kabemba (2012) reveals that China's involvement 'neo-colonial' is a purely exploitative relationship, especially in weak and vulnerable economies such as Zimbabwe. In this regard, China has been able to extract significant quantities of natural resources including minerals while offering no sustainable development in return. There was no way the policy would yield expected results for the benefit of the population given the complexity of how the policy was implemented with significant input from key stakeholders. African Development Group (Schiere, Ndikumana, & Walkenhorst, 2011) states that China also is reaping significant benefits from this relationship, through access to raw materials and expanded markets for imported finished products and semi-finished products into the local market. Thus, LEP cannot be labelled a development partnership between the two countries. Rather, LEP is best described as profit maximisation policy to benefit only few ruling elites in Zimbabwe and Chinese companies and citizens. As alluded previously, Chinese companies have not been remitting tax revenue to the treasury. There is high threat in local industries as China is flooding and employing her cheap goods and cheap labour force despite the presence of 90 per cent unemployment, respectively. Skills and technology transfer have been limited since China has done little community developments in areas they are mining or

conducting business. This shows that the Zimbabwean government has overrated the development spinoffs benefits associated with these bilateral relations. *The Financial Gazette* argues that although trade with China has been improving, it is becoming clear to the ZANU-PF government that 'LEP' alone cannot pull the country's economy from the precipice. This has been supported by the fact that Finance Minister, Patrick Chinamasa, went back to the IMF to beg for money and discuss debt settlement terms. The above vindicate those who maintain that Zimbabwe–China bilateral relationship is that of a horse rider, which the former being the rider of the latter.

The Zimbabwe Independent newspaper indicates that the Zimbabwe–China relations are a double-edged sword relationship 'whereby despite the government claiming to be benefiting from Chinese "mega-deals and Mugabe touted as "all weather friends" deals as foreign direct investment, very little has manifested to prove that the country is benefiting'. In fact, the country is being milked by the Chinese taking into consideration the exorbitant charges China demanded from Zimbabwe as compared to Zambia over the construction of the Kariba South Power Station. In this regard, Zimbabwe was charged US \$533 million as compared to US \$278 million for Zambia. Despite China's investments in Zimbabwe, there are little benefits accumulated from their involvement in Zimbabwe. Also these deals are kept secrecy to the public, making it difficult for other key stakeholders and the public to hold government accountable in the process.

Chinese trade activities should be monitored as a large quantity of imported goods continues to flood the market. As a result of China's imports, prices of goods on the local market have fallen much to the detriment growth and development of local industries (cited in Mapaure, 2014, p. 12). This shows how China has succeeded in taking advantage of the 'basket case' economy. Although China is playing an important role in bringing the FDI in Zimbabwe, the shortcomings associated with their investment are impacting negatively on the political economy of the country. Mapaure (2014) argues that it is not the Chinese to blame under such circumstances but rather the government who treat them with favours notwithstanding the parameters of national laws and regulations. This led Marongwe (2004) to warn that Zimbabwe risk turning into a nation of merchants as the Chinese goods are slipping into the markets while government appears not interested to monitor and regulate their activities. The scenario is bad as the situation has compromised local products on the market.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Any foreign or domestic policy governing a country should be people-centred to ensure that the interests of citizens are protected. Zimbabwe needs to develop a foreign policy which protects its citizens from exploitation of their natural resources and embezzlement of aid and loans. There is a need for transformation in democracy and governance for LEP to be effective because lack of transparency and accountability on the policy has compromised any intended benefits to the local economy. There is much criticism over LEP, requiring the need for its

documentation, especially the structures and statutes that govern it so as to ensure its efficacy. Though China is playing a significant role in increasing Zimbabwe's development through aid, investments and loans, unfolding and emerging developments support the thesis that the signing of the mega deals is likely to increase the level of indebtedness in the country. However, emerging evidence shows that the influx of Chinese investors seems not to correspond with the flow of money into the economy as well as related benefits of such investments. This is largely due to the fact that LEP has since its inception been shadowed by secrecy thereby making it impossible for it to be fully implemented in the country. The state of the deteriorating economy and social conditions contract ZANU (PF) government's public endorsement of win-win bilateral relationship with China.

Also the fact is that China does not interfere in Zimbabwe's decade long domestic political affairs while comforting ZANU-PF government and ruling elites create perfect conditions for exploitation and corruption. Indeed, China has successfully adopted a non-interfering foreign policy in local political processes and development. This means that LEP has limited direct influence on political developments. Further, LEP adopts a lukewarm approach towards the rejuvenation of the ailing economy. Though the policy was largely political in terms of thwarting Western governments' goal to isolate ZANU (PF) leadership, its failure to recognize worsening social and economic conditions in the country leaves to be desired. Indeed, since the adoption of LEP, the country has been experiencing rising of socio-economic effect challenges including labour abuse, especially in Chinese mining companies; local products uncompetitive amid influx of cheap Chinese imports; serious but growing unemployment; and worsening poverty. The above raises the questions: (a) why allowing countries such as China which does not recognize governance and democratic value systems to have hegemony over Zimbabwe's social, economic and political transformation and development process? (b) Why allowing China's commercial presence to exploit Zimbabwe's natural resources or current weak and vulnerable economic status? (c) Why LEP allowed China's dominance and influence politically and economically to prevail? Already empirical evidence shows that trade patterns, investments and developments are heavily in favour of China. Further Zimbabwe has been accumulating arrears due to loans advanced by China. Taylor and Xiao (2009) argue that China is a neo-imperial or colonial power. The fact that the LEP is not clear on its goals and missions has made China to drive its colonial desires in Zimbabwe. The colonial history of Zimbabwe shows that the colonisation of Zimbabwe by the British was all about mineral resources and looking on both the LEP and China's involvement in Zimbabwe as a hegemon in Africa will lead to further exploitation as long as natural resources are available. The LEP is not adding value to ordinary Zimbabweans but rather protecting a few political elite to loot mineral resources with the aid of China thereby robbing Zimbabweans their right to gain from the natural resources.

Victor Ojakorotu is a graduate from the Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria with Honours degree in International Relations. He also holds a Master of Science degree in International Relations. He was conferred a PhD degree in International

Relations by the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Ojakorotu is widely published in internationally accredited academic journals on the vexing subject of the Niger Delta. He currently lectures at North West University, Mafikeng, South Africa. His research interests are African Politics, Nigeria, Conflict and Peace, Environmental Politics and Security.

Rumbidzai Kamidza holds a BA (Honours) Development Studies Degree from Midlands State University, Zimbabwe. Currently she is waiting for the full results of MA International Relations, North West University, South Africa. Kamidza has special interests in International Relations, and regional institutions/organisations as well as the nexus between politics and governance issues, and socio-economic issues, human rights.

Notes

1. The ZANU-PF leadership from the onset of the fast-track land reform advanced the thesis that the land occupied by white commercial farmers was taken by force during the colonial era, and therefore, they were simply reclaiming it back; hence, only improvements made on it should be compensated (Kamidza, 2017).
2. Indigenous is defined as a person who before 18 April 1980 was disadvantaged by unfair discrimination on the grounds of his or her race, and any descendant of such person, and includes any company, association, syndicate or partnership of which indigenous Zimbabweans form the majority of the members holding the controlling interests. For the avoidance of doubt, this refers to indigenous black Zimbabweans. 'Ownership requirements under the indigenisation programme stipulate that 51% of equity of companies with assets exceeding US \$500,000 belong to indigenous Zimbabweans. While there is broad agreement in the government of the policy, there exist significant differences of opinion regarding pace and modalities of the policy.'
3. The ZANLA was a militant African nationalist organisation that participated in the *Rhodesian bush war* against the white minority rule.
4. Murambatsina in English literally means 'get rid of the trash'.

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