

TRUE FRIENDS IN DIFFICULT TIMES, CHINA AND ZIMBABWE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RELATIONS DURING COVID-19 PERIOD, (2020-2022)

MIMINA CHINAMHORA

School of International Studies, University Utara Malaysia.

Dr. MUHAMMAD FUAD BIN OTHMAN *

Professor, School of International Studies, University Utara Malaysia.

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

The aim of the study was to examine the relations between Zimbabwe and China during the Covid-19 outbreak between 2020 and 2022 based on the claim that the two countries are “all weather friends”. The ties between Zimbabwe and China can be traced back to the days of war for the independence of Zimbabwe and the Look East Foreign Policy of 2003, which signaled Harare’s shift from its Western allies to the Chinese, after a fallout and accusations of human rights abuses. The research sought to understand how the relationship between Zimbabwe and China unfolded during the pandemic. The research used secondary research meaning that desktop research was conducted by going through journal articles, newspapers, and other credible sources of information, such as official government statements from both governments. The findings revealed that China and Zimbabwe helped each other during the pandemic by increasing frequency of praise rhetoric on international platforms and this helped China a lot due to Covid-19 backlash it faced at the time. China increased support for mining and agriculture in Zimbabwe during the period under review and also invested heavily in power generation projects in Zimbabwe thereby demonstrating the closeness of the ties between Harare and Beijing during the uncertain phase of global history. However, Chinese companies devastated the environment in Zimbabwe and were accused of gross worker rights violations and the government of Zimbabwe was powerless to stop such actions. Furthermore, Chinese companies benefitted a lot from contracts worth billions of dollars (USD) as they were awarded tenders for jobs that came from the Chinese loans, meaning China left Zimbabwe with debts but improved its economic output. Therefore, whilst Beijing and Harare demonstrated to the world that they are indeed “all-weather friends”, there was nothing friendly about the conduct of Chinese organisations in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: All-Weather Friends; Covid-19 Pandemic; Look East Foreign Policy; Difficult Times.

1. BACKGROUND

Zimbabwe and China’s historic and deep ties are cemented by the fact that China sponsored Zimbabwe’s war for independence which makes China a very important part to the history of Zimbabwe, Colvile, (2023). The liberation war movement cum, political party, ZANU PF, remains in power over 4 decades after the liberation struggle and enjoys cordial relations with the regime in Beijing. These ties have helped to keep the ZANU PF government in power despite decades of sanctions due to alleged human rights abuses and election tempering, Tendi (2020). Zimbabwe has also been important for China because they continue to support China unconditionally in international relations and this is important for China in their war for world dominance with the United States of America (USA).

The biggest step in cementing the relations between Zimbabwe and China came in 2003 when Zimbabwe implemented the “Look East Foreign Policy” as Zimbabwe sought new friends after the fallout with the West and China was eager to become Zimbabwe’s biggest trading partner due to the vast amounts of minerals that Zimbabwe has and also as a way to frustrate the West Colville, (2023). The Look East Foreign policy paid off for Zimbabwe as trade between Zimbabwe and China increased by 476% between 2002 and 2013 surpassing 1 billion dollars in value thereby weakening the effect of the Western imposed sanctions on the establishment in Harare, Colville, (2023). It is also important to note that whilst Zimbabwe and China did enjoy good relations prior to the Look East Foreign Policy, the government of Mugabe had chosen to trade more with the West and not China after independence due to the Eastern bloc losing the cold war, amongst other reasons. This means Zimbabwe turned to China after they fell out with the countries they had perceived to be their allies for over two decades.

Zimbabwe earned moniker “all weather friend” in 2015 from Chinese President Xi Jinping, a title only reserved for 14 countries that China feels are its most reliable and dependable allies in their economic and political struggles with the West, Colville, (2023). China, being a one party state, has been accused of not being democratic and is also accused of human rights abuses and this record for lack of democratic institutions is something they share with Zimbabwe and fighting Western notions of governance is something both countries have shared for a long time, Tendi, (2020). Therefore, China and Zimbabwe have found themselves in a friendship of convenience given that they share the same enemies in international relations with their struggles against Western powers both well documented.

China has become Zimbabwe’s largest trading partner and unconfirmed reports suggest that they now control as much as 90% of the mining industry in Zimbabwe directly or indirectly thereby giving China access to most of the mineral deposits in Zimbabwe, Colville, (2023). This has fueled allegations of China ripping off Zimbabwe and other African countries as well as corruption emanating from dealings between Chinese companies and Zimbabwean government officials, Chipaike et al., (2023). China has also been accused of gross human rights abuses in Zimbabwe with Chinese nationals allegedly paying workers beneath minimum wage and at times even physically abusing the workers with the Zimbabwean government not doing much to stop them despite widespread complaints, Chitagu, (2024).

After the COVID19 pandemic broke out in late 2019, with China identified as the epicenter of the outbreak, there was a lot of backlash and international pressure on China as it was accused of not having shared information of the outbreak in time for others to contain it and others went further to claim China had invented the virus in a lab in Wuhan, Ameyaw-Brobbe, (2021). More than ever, China needed the support of its allies to show the world that it was doing all it could to help contain the virus and that it had not done anything wrong or through malice. The support from the Zimbabwean government and governments of other countries became important in this cause and resulted in further

cementing of ties during the outbreak itself as China moved to clear its name and show the world that it was still a leader in South to South Aid, Kobierecka, (2022).

Considering Zimbabwe's well documented chronic economic challenges, the help from China to fight the pandemic and to also grow the economy in times of international uncertainty were important to saving lives and the industry of the country, Doherty et al., (2021). Funding massive energy projects and the refurbishment of the biggest airport in Zimbabwe not only helped repair the image of Zimbabwe but also served as a welcome distraction from the multiple challenges Zimbabwe was facing prior and during the pandemic and it was all part of efforts to repair the damaged image of China on the international scene, Ameyaw-Bobbey, (2021).

2. METHODOLOGY

The study made use of the extensive desktop research. Various publications on the relationships between China and Zimbabwe, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, were viewed with the intention to understand how the two countries behaved towards each other in bilateral spaces as well as in the international arena. The internet was used as primary source of information as well as journal cite and google scholar also used to identify relevant literature. Critical commentaries and newspaper articles were also examined as credible sources of information in the study.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Economic Relations

During the Covid-19 pandemic, China increased its commitment to helping Zimbabwe meet its energy and power requirements by signing several hydroelectric agreements to help finance construction of new energy sources in the Southern African country, AFB, (2021). China agreed to expand existing coal power plants at Hwange and also build new plants to the tune of USD 3 billion which signified a massive investment in the energy sector of Zimbabwe, Colville, (2023). Whilst most of the funding for these projects was in the form of loans to be serviced over long periods of time with little or no interest, they represented huge commitment by China during a time of uncertainty when most international lenders were taking a wait and see approach due to the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although many perceived China's increased global spending in the developing world as a way of winning international support due to the backlash of the outbreak, Zimbabwe benefitted as it moved towards meeting its energy needs which had crippled the industrial output for years, AFB, (2021).

More importantly for Zimbabwe, the energy infrastructure that China and its companies invested in during the pandemic are owned by the state of Zimbabwe which guarantees long term energy efficient for Zimbabwe, AFB, (2021). It was not just Zimbabwe that benefitted from the projects, China and its companies also benefitted as well. Matiache, (2023) noted that several Chinese companies were contracted to carry out the massive projects meaning that most of the money that was loaned to Zimbabwe to build various

infrastructure also went back to China's economy as income and profit. By investing in the third world developing countries like Zimbabwe, China can dictate the terms of agreements, and are able to help these countries meet their needs and at the same time also create employment for their companies that need big overseas jobs in order to make profits that are good for Chinese economy.

In a major show of commitment and confidence in Zimbabwe, a team of over 200 Chinese experts arrived in Zimbabwe in October 2020 to help with the technical aspects of setting up new Hwange colliery power plant due to work having fallen behind because of the pandemic, Matiache, (2023). The arrival of the experts also followed that of various business people and a team of medical experts who had come to help to strengthen Covid-19 response systems. Thus, despite the dangers and risks of traveling during Covid-19, Zimbabwe and China still found ways to cooperate and help each other during the pandemic which showed and expressed their deep affection and friendship even in tough times.

China and Chinese companies also invested in other major projects in Zimbabwe during the Covid-19 outbreak. The Robert Mugabe International Airport expansion to the tune of USD 153 million and the USD 100 million new parliament building in Harare are some of the major projects that made the headlines and helped to provide excitement and hope during the difficulties of Covid-19, CTGN, (2023). Despite accusations of China bringing its own expert labour to Zimbabwe that already has a high unemployment, the projects employed a lot of people and also helped with skills transfer to local professionals who benefitted from Chinese expertise during the pandemic, CIDCA, (2022).

The area that the Zimbabwe- China relationship really improved and brought about the most mutual benefit is the mining sector of Zimbabwe. In 2020, the Chamber of Mines Zimbabwe, (2022) reported that the mining industry generated USD 5.6 billion which was an improvement from USD 5.1 billion in 2021. The increase in mining output was credited to the expansion of Chinese mining operations as well as the new Chinese mining ventures in Zimbabwe during the pandemic. The mining industry employed 38 000 formal employees and over 500 000 small scale and artisanal miners also taking part as it became one of the biggest sources of employment in Zimbabwe and much of it was credited to the various investments made by Chinese companies, Chamber of Mines, (2022).

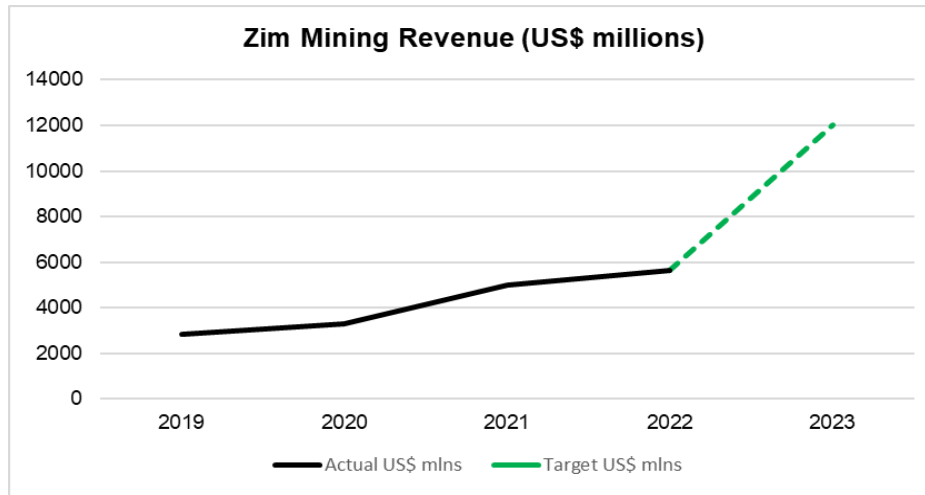


Figure 1: Zimbabwe Mining Revenue 2019-2023

(Chamber of Mines 2023)

The figures above show the increase in production in Zimbabwe’s mining during the pandemic. It also shows that mines did not slow down despite the challenges of the pandemic but actually increased profitability. The Chinese did not only increase their investment in new mines and the expansion of existing mines, they also started to help small scale and artisanal/illegal miners (makorokozas) by providing them with cheaper but efficient Chinese made mining equipment that they could access on loan and pay off once they began to produce and deliver their outputs, Muzavazi, (2024). This approach helped to increase the number of minerals delivered through formal and informal channels in Zimbabwe during Covid-19. Therefore, China helped to increase mineral production thereby creating employment and improving the lives of Zimbabweans whilst it also benefitted from accessing more minerals at a relatively cheaper price.

During Covid-19, China continued to show strong support for Zimbabwe’s response by donating vaccines to Zimbabwe. CIDCA, (2022) reported that as much as 95% of all vaccines used in Zimbabwe had been supplied by China with most of them being donations made to Zimbabwe by China as a gesture of good will. This good will helped to relieve economy and resources pressures on the Zimbabwean government that was faced with dwindling sources of revenue due to the impact of global economic lockdowns which characterized international response to the pandemic outbreak. Accessing vaccines for free not only helped to save lives in Zimbabwe, it also allowed the government to allocate the few resources available in other critical needs.

In 2024, Chinese ambassador to Zimbabwe announced that China would be cancelling some of the estimated USD 2.1 billion dollars debt that had been accrued since 2015 meaning that China continued to donate to Zimbabwe during Covid-19 despite the existence of outstanding debts, Olander, (2024). Thus, as China helped Zimbabwe fight Covid-19, it also made sure the country recovered quickly so that it could continue its wide spread and profitable mining operations in the Zimbabwe thereby creating a mutually

beneficial arrangement. Whatever China's reasons could be, there is clear evidence of deliberately helping Zimbabwe to stay afloat during the Covid-19 pandemic and post Covid-19 by continuing to support the Southern African country practically through financial assistance.

Table 1: Zimbabwe's external debt

Total Public and Publicly Guaranteed External Debt-end December 2022 (US\$ millions)

	DOD	PRA	IRA	Penalties	Arrears + Penalties	Total
External Debt(a+b+c) (including RBZ debt)	1,913	2,858	1,665	2,150	6,673	12,827
External Debt (a+b) (excluding RBZ debt)	1,913	2,858	1,665	2,150	6,673	8,586
a.Bilateral Creditors	1,695	1,711	548	1,936	4,194	5,890
Paris Club	94	1,361	468	1,837	3,667	3,761
Non-Paris Club	1,601	349	80	99	527	2,128
<i>Of which China</i>	1,538	333	77	86	497	2,035
b.Multilateral Creditors	218	1,147	1,117	215	2,479	2,697
World Bank	134	709	703	-	1,412	1,546
African Development Bank	28	280	384	-	664	692
European Investment Bank	11	144	25	215	384	395
Others ¹	45	14	5	-	19	64
c.RBZ Debt	4,241	-	-	-	-	4,241
<i>Of which</i>						
<i>Regional Multilateral Creditors</i>	1,985					1,985
<i>Bilateral Banks</i>	121					121
<i>Airlines, Fuel and Grain Suppliers</i>	499					499
<i>Private Sector Blocked Funds</i>	534					534
<i>Other Running Facilities</i>	946					946
<i>Other Financial Institutions</i>	156					156

Source: Zimbabwe Public Debt Management Office

The figure above shows that Zimbabwe's external debt has risen to over USD 12 billion by the end of 2022 and whilst most it is because of chronically failing economy, some of it can be alluded to the impact of Covid-19 on the Zimbabwean economy. By 2024, Zimbabwe's debt had grown to over USD 14 billion making any form of debt cancellation, particularly during the Covid-19 outbreak, a significant economic boost, ADB, (2023). With Western institutions no longer lending to Zimbabwe until they can service their debt and also commit to various economic reforms, Chinese debt cancellation has helped to ease debt pressure on the Harare regime.

3.2 Political

Although vaccine diplomacy, as explained by Hotez, (2014) is a term that has been used for a long time and has been linked to China in the past, Covid-19 diplomacy was a term that was developed to help explain China's conduct after the outbreak of pandemic. Although Covid-19 vaccines significantly helped to meet health emergency demands in the global South that had not been prioritised by Western responses, China also used the

vaccines to achieve non-medical objectives, Chipaike et al., (2023). Despite the contested reasons for the supply of vaccines, Zimbabwe benefitted immensely from vaccine donations from China ensuring that it could help protect its people and at the same time, show the world that China was indeed an all-weather friend. Delivering vaccines to Zimbabwe and other developing countries was very important considering global shortages in the vaccines and the costs of Western manufactured vaccines. This made the Chinese donations extremely important to Zimbabwe during the pandemic.

At the invitation of the Zimbabwean government, a team of medical experts arrived in Zimbabwe in May 2022 to help with effective Covid-19 response as well as handing over various Covid-19 and non Covid-19 related medical supplies, Kobierecka, (2022). Whilst this was not isolated to Zimbabwe and part of a larger international Covid-19 response effort by the Chinese government, it helped Zimbabwe to make sure that it had effective systems in place and also show the deep level of cooperation between the two countries. By roping in Chinese private players like the Jack Ma foundation and Alibaba to participate in its African Covid-19 assistance programs, China was also able to project Chinese organisations as global leaders doing their best to help countries that could not afford appropriate responses, Kobierecka, (2022). Thus, Zimbabwe benefitted immensely from varied Chinese international relations related strategies during the pandemic.

The outbreak of Covid-19 saw China take a lot criticism from the international community for allegedly not communicating about the outbreak on time thereby allowing the pandemic to spread all over the world and this required a strong international response to save China's reputation. Zimbabwe's executive increased their praise for China on international and local forums to help shore up the image of China and help maintain its reputation as a global economic and political leader, Colville, (2023). Thus, the constant exchange of well calculated praises between China and Zimbabwe increased during Covid-19 pandemic, as both countries deliberately took the opportunity to promote their images and show the world that their friendship was strong and effective in times of hardship and crisis, Chipaike et al., (2023). During the pandemic and post pandemic, Zimbabwe and China have continued to support each other's international standing by constantly presenting each other in good light on global forums which shows the extent of the friendship between the two countries.

China's broad response to the pandemic also included established international organisations in order to show its capacity and willingness to engage and help established institutions. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFP), handed over reproductive health medical equipment and medicines worth USD 1.2 million to support the Zimbabwean government's Health Assistance Project for Women and Girls, UNFPA, (2021). When cyclone Idai occurred in 2019, devastating some parts of Chimanimani and Chipinge districts of Zimbabwe, China again partnered with UN agencies to provide a swift and effective response to help those affected, UNFPA, (2021). Thus, by partnering what have been traditionally Western sponsored institutions to bring effective response to the various challenges in Zimbabwe, China showed its willingness to play its role in

ensuring that all stakeholders play their part to tackle challenges in Zimbabwe during the pandemic.

3.3 The Downside of China-Zimbabwe Relations

Despite genuine benevolence and increased donations to Zimbabwe and other developing countries, the role of China in Zimbabwe can be best described through its foreign policy goals which informs how it relates to other countries. Mohale, (2023), found that China was funding African countries through loans and other financial arrangements for the purpose of controlling African countries through alliances tied to debts that African countries cannot pay back. Therefore, Chinese investments can be viewed as the extension of its political and policy influence in Zimbabwe and not as a result of true friendship as friendship with a small economy like Zimbabwe that also does not have a strong military offers no real advantage to China.

China has played a pivotal role in the development of Africa in more recent times with loans to 49 African countries exceeding USD 170 billion by 2023, Kluiver, (2023). The figures show that China has played its part in making sure that African countries can access loans for various projects crucial for development. However, it is to China's advantage that developing countries have adequate infrastructure in place such as roads and adequate power supply because these are crucial to its mining and industrial operations in the third world, Tendi, (2020). Therefore, by investing in Zimbabwe, China is actually investing in its interests and not really showing good will to Zimbabwe.

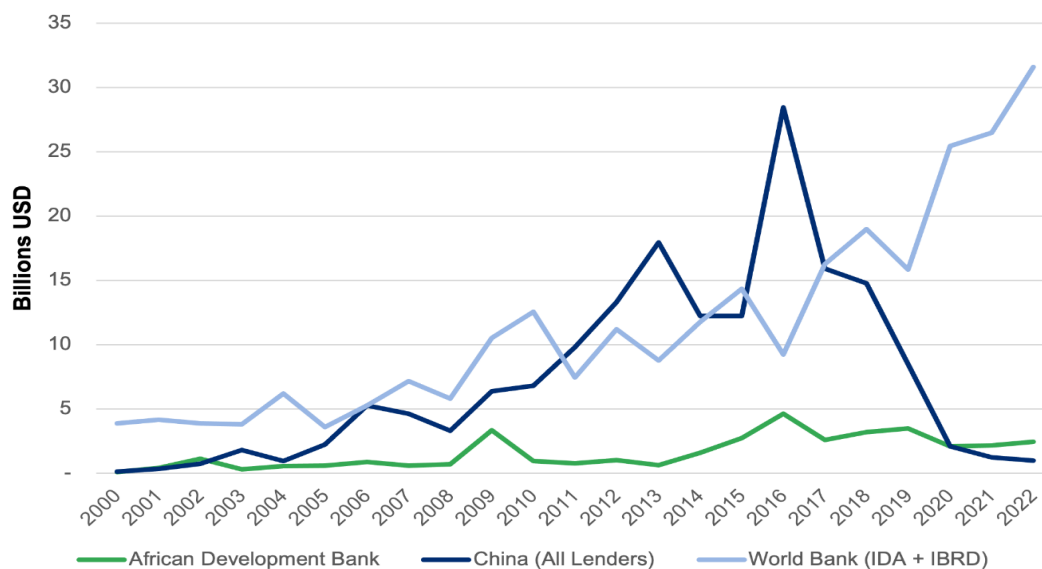


Figure 2: Chinese, ADB & WB Loans to Africa 2000-2022

(Africa Development Bank 2022)

The figure above shows how China has contributed significantly to the growth of African economies by being a significant source of financial assistance along with the traditionally

Western lending institutions. Despite China's lending having gone down between 2020 and 2022, they still remained a significant source of funding and the provision of millions of free vaccines to developing countries can also explain the decline in financial aid from China during the period. The figure above also provides evidence of growing Chinese influence in the African economies that has resulted in China attaining greater control of policy and resources.

Whilst the exact value of loans and donations to Zimbabwe remains unclear, as is with most African countries due to the secrecy surrounding Chinese loans, ISS, (2023), estimated Zimbabwean debt to China to be around USD 3 billion dollars and this is significant given Zimbabwe has not been able to access the funding it needs from the World Bank (WB) and International Monitoring Fund (IMF) due to outstanding debts that have not been serviced. However, Kluiver. (2023) noted that the Chinese loans are a form of debt trap because they have allowed China access to mining rights in Zimbabwe and preferential treatment by the government in exchange for the favours of debt cancellation or new loans and donations. Thus, the government in Harare, short of friends in the international system, have made a lot of concessions to China they otherwise would not have done due to their lack of options. Countries normally act in ways that protect and advance their national interests so when there a country lacks the ability to pursue its interests by itself it can be exploited by other countries and this is the situation with Zimbabwe and China.

The Loans from China are different from those from traditional lenders like the IMF and WB because Chinese financial institutions often work in secrecy and have confidentiality clauses that do not allow for public scrutiny of terms of loans advanced. Muyangata & Shumba, (2023) observed that most of the mining rights and agreements that are being awarded to the Chinese companies are rumoured to be tied to various loans and donations meaning China is using debt as a way of obtaining cheap mineral concessions in Africa. In Zimbabwe, China is reported to control 80% of key mining industries. Essentially, this means that China owns rights to most of the essential minerals in Zimbabwe, like lithium, and they are taking the valuable minerals at discounted rates due to the nature of the loans that they have extended to Harare. Furthermore, involvement in policy matters in developing countries like Zimbabwe means that China is just like the Western institutions it has sought to replace in Africa whose loans also come with various policy conditions that make it hard for countries to service debts and be in control of their own policies and resources. This shows that through loans, China has some control over Zimbabwe's policies and this takes away some of Zimbabwe's sovereignty as it has done with many other developing countries that China has engaged under the same policies and conditions.

Research by Aid Data found that whilst the Chinese government is renowned for providing interest free loans and constantly donating money to developing countries, its privately-owned financial institutions that are also providing loans do not extend the same friendly terms and are the ones used to tie up mineral resources as well as enforce various economic policy systems on developing countries, ISS, (2023). Whilst it remains to be

established how much of Zimbabwe's debt to China is actually to the government of China and how much is owed to private financial firms, the same strategy extended to other developing countries is used with Zimbabwe as well meaning that China has some control of Zimbabwe's policies through the trap created by accumulated debt.

The lack of transparency over Chinese funding has resulted in information gaps and allegations of corruption. The secrecy which characterises the Chinese lending in developing world, which has been termed "hidden debt", poses serious challenges to financial accountability because it does not satisfy standards of public funds accounting, Kluiver, (2023). Chinese loans are not always presented as sovereign loans and this gives corrupt regimes flexibility to misuse some of the funds by channelling them to their own private enterprises or outright theft. Muyangata & Shumba, (2023) noted that this has resulted in a lot of anti-Chinese sentiments in Zimbabwe as citizens accuse China of helping the government steal funds or rather, turning a blind eye on Zimbabwean government's misuse of funds that it has provided which essentially belong to the people of Zimbabwe.

Some of the most powerful criticism of the relationship between China and Zimbabwe stems from the former's policy on non-interference in the domestic affairs of countries that it provides loans and aid to. Cisse et al., (2023) noted that China's foreign policy does not concern it with the internal governance systems of developing countries as it focuses on economic activities and this has propped up undemocratic regimes such as the one in Harare. This is ironic considering China manipulates policies and natural resources allocation through its debt trap. The Zimbabwean government has benefitted from the policy in China that turns a blind eye to allegations of human rights abuses and lack of rule of law because it continues to benefit from plundering the natural resources of Zimbabwe. Therefore, Zimbabwe has not benefitted as much as it should have from its relationship with China with only a few elites that are directly involved in the illegal dealings benefitting.

China's Aid to Africa has been accused of being primarily politically motivated and serving its own economic interests thereby ignoring the quality and development of local institutions in recipient countries. Cisse et al., (2023) described this strategy as rogue-aid because it does nothing to build sound institutions upon which a platform can be set for the development of countries that receive aid from China. The same can be said about Zimbabwe whose institutions remain incapacitated to provide quality services despite seemingly sound investment from China. This shows that China is not actually concerned with helping Zimbabwe to develop but seeming like that is the case with big projects but not equipping the country to actually stake meaningful steps towards development. If Zimbabwe was to develop sound institutions and structures then they would have less need for China just like the rest of developing world would not need China and the West so it is important for the centre states to keep the periphery dependent on them so that they can continue to exploit them, Chipaika et al., (2023). Therefore, China is not an all-weather friend, just one who wants to keep Zimbabwe in its political and economic storms for its own benefit.

Mohale, (2023) noted that China's economic investments in the third world are part of a strategic thrust to infiltrate developing countries' governments and form strategic alliances against their rivals who have not been able to invest much in the developing world due to various economic and political reasons. Chipaike, (2020) labelled the political and economic investment of China in Zimbabwe as geopolitical soft power moves rather than friendship. This is true when one looks at how one sided the friendship is with China providing money and Zimbabwe losing its resources. By showing greater benevolence towards Zimbabwe and other developing countries during the Covid-19 outbreak, China was able to create strategic alliances it needs in its geopolitical war with the United States. Kluiver, (2023) noted that China needs support, or at least neutrality, of countries it has helped as it seeks to expand its territory and influence around the world with Taiwan one of the issues it hopes to get support for in the UN assembly from its "allies" and all-weather friends like Zimbabwe. Therefore, China is buying itself friends by showing goodwill to Zimbabwe and its Covid-19 donations to Zimbabwe are proof of that.

Whilst mining activity grew significantly due to Chinese support during Covid-19, the destruction of the environment also increased drastically during the same time frame. Chinese mining methods in Zimbabwe have been described as reckless because they do not consider the various environmental laws that are in place in the country. What has been more concerning is the fact that despite the destruction being well documented, the Zimbabwean government has not done much to make sure that such practices stop and turning a blind eye to such catastrophic destruction of the environment, suggest that China has an upper hand in the relationship, Chitagu, (2024). Rampant and widespread corruption means that some government officials are also part of the syndicates with the Chinese that are destroying the environment so they cannot do much to reprimand or stop them from such practices, Muyangata & Shumba, (2023). There has been widespread outcry against the Chinese in Zimbabwe because they have not only polluted rivers but also been allocated land that traditionally belongs to Zimbabweans who have been forcibly removed by the government and placed in lands that are barren, Chitagu, (2024). The continued disregard for the environment and the traditions, culture and values of Zimbabweans shows that Chinese companies are in Zimbabwe to exploit resources as much as they can and not help build sustainable solutions to help with long term Zimbabwe's development.

4. CONCLUSION

There is clear evidence of the cooperation between Zimbabwe and China prior to Covid-19 outbreak, during outbreak and post the outbreak. Politically, both countries have helped to maintain the image of the other and continue to stand together on many issues, particularly against their common Western foes. Zimbabwe benefitted immensely from Chinese economic support which helped to increase the mining and agricultural output during the pandemic. This was important at a time when the global economy was collectively struggling. Zimbabwe also benefitted from key infrastructures projects that were funded by the Chinese government and Chinese companies during Covid-19 and this helped improve power generations and the capacity for Zimbabwe to expand its

industrial base. At the same time, China benefitted a great deal from Zimbabwe's vast mineral resources as they gained many concessions and favourable pricing deals. Financing multiple projects worth billions of dollars also meant that Chinese firms who worked on the projects having been awarded contracts made a lot of money which was crucial for China's own economic growth.

Chinese help, however, has come at a very high cost to Zimbabwe. The Chinese have provided funding that is generally secretive in nature so does not satisfy the usual regulations that it must if going through parliament. Not knowing how much has been loaned to Zimbabwe and what the terms and conditions are, has also increased the potential of corruption in Zimbabwe. The continued devastation of Zimbabwe's environment as well as internal displacements due to the Chinese activity have hindered sustainable development efforts and violated individual and group rights in Zimbabwe. The silence of Zimbabwe's authorities on such well documented matters shows how lop sided the relationship with China is. Although Beijing and Harare have increasingly shown that they are all-weather friends by their interactions during the pandemic period, the actions of Chinese companies and institutions during the same period in question were nothing but friendly towards Zimbabwe.

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