

Do the Chinese come to Zimbabwe to invest or to pillage our resources?

The Zimbabwean by Tendai Ruben Mbofana

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Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) 2024. Photo credit: © AP Photo / Greg Baker (added from Internet)

President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa has returned from China, where he attended the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).

During the visit, Mnangagwa visited quite a number of companies, including Huawei, as well as giving a speech at the FOCAC, and later addressed the 8th Conference of Chinese and African Entrepreneurs.

In a statement, the president declared: This is the best time to invest in Zimbabwe.

Oh really, Mr. President! What a bold thing to say!

However, has there been any genuine investments by the Chinese in Zimbabwe?

Or are they just buccaneering pirates who have done nothing except pillaging our resources without any discernible benefit to Zimbabwe?

Let us look at this supposed 'investment' by the Chinese, particularly in our country.

China accounts for 18 percent and 15 percent of Zimbabwe's exports and imports, respectively.

In 2023, China exported US\$1.41 billion worth of goods to Zimbabwe, whilst Zimbabwe's exports to China were valued at US\$1.28 billion.

The main products imported from China include machinery, electronics, and vehicles – while Zimbabwe’s main exports are tobacco, nickel, diamonds, platinum and lithium.

These statistics may appear to validate Mnangagwa’s excitement over Chinese ‘investment’ in Zimbabwe.

Indeed, at least on paper, ‘this is the best time to invest in Zimbabwe.’

Yet, is this really what is happening on the ground?

What have these impressive figures done for the people of Zimbabwe?

Are the people of Chiadzwa (Marange) better off today – after nearly 20 years of diamond mining by predominantly Chinese companies, such as Anjin Investments (Marange Resources and Diamond Mining Corporation)?*

According to a report by ZELA (Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association), these companies have been accused of discharging untreated waste material into the Odzi, Singwizi, and Save rivers.

The discharges have heavily polluted the rivers, causing them to become ‘silted, muddied, dirty and loaded with chemical and metal deposits including iron, chromium, and nickel’.

Villagers living on the banks of these rivers are heavily depend on the rivers for their subsistence, such as using the water for drinking, fishing and watering livestock.

However, as a result of the pollution, the river water is no longer fit for such purposes.

The pollution has also destroyed aquatic life and disturbed the ecosystem in the rivers.

In fact, a biological and chemical study carried out by the University of Zimbabwe on behalf of ZELA confirmed that these discharges exposed the villagers to risks of contracting diseases such as cancer, cholera, typhoid, dental and skeletal fluorosis.

These are not isolated cases by any stretch of the imagination.

The CNRG (Centre for National Resource Governance) released a report, titled: [“The Tarnished Horizon: Unveiling the Dark Side of Lithium Mining in Bikita.”](#)

A visit to Bikita by the organization unearthed debilitating environmental consequences associated with lithium extraction at the hands of Bikita Minerals.

The Chinese-owned mining company has also engaged in a brazen act of land grabbing, encroaching upon the ancestral lands of the Bikita community, and internally displacing the locals.

Families have been uprooted from the land they have called home for generations, their heritage torn asunder for the sake of profit.

The scars of these injustices run deep, leaving the community embittered and dispossessed.

Promises of community development and involvement have proven to be empty words.

The wealth generated by the lithium mining industry has flowed into the coffers of foreign entities, while the Bikita community remains neglected and forgotten.

Mining has highlighted the sorry state of social service delivery with schools crumbling, healthcare facilities languish in disrepair, and essential services remain woefully inadequate.

The hopes and dreams of the people have been eclipsed by a dark cloud of exploitation and the reality that communities will not benefit much from resources mined in their backyards.

To exacerbate the plight of the community, unfair employment and labour practices have become the norm.

Local inhabitants are overlooked in favour of foreign workers, denying them the opportunity to benefit from the wealth drawn from their own land.

Exploitative working conditions and meagre wages further deepen the wounds inflicted upon the community, perpetuating a never-ending cycle of poverty and despair.

In my hometown of Redcliff, Chinese cement manufacturer Livetouch Investments has been fingered in causing significant environmental damage, which is posing a health risk to residents.

The ACT-SA (Anti-Corruption Trust of Southern Africa) alleged that emissions from Livetouch Investments' Diamond Cement plant were causing respiratory illnesses, including silicosis, in the surrounding community.

According to ACT-SA, Livetouch has not taken sufficient action to address the dust emissions despite their negative impact on public health.

In Mutoko, Kaseke villagers faced eviction from their ancestral land after a Chinese mining company, Heijin, was given a special grant to extract black granite on land covering 300 hectares.

A similar scenario was in Chivhu, where Chinese multinational company Tsingshan Group Holdings displaced hundreds of villagers to kick-start its DISCO (Dinson Iron and Steel Company).

In Hwange, 600 Dinde villagers are fighting against a proposed coal mining project by Chinese mining company Beifa Investments, fearing displacement.

I could go on and on, but this has been a common trend amongst almost all Chinese companies, especially in the mining and manufacturing sectors, operating in Zimbabwe.

These Chinese companies are notorious for paying salaries late, failure to provide payslips, forcing employees to work without sufficient protective wear, and for their refusal to register employees with pensions authority NSSA.

Those displaced from their ancestral lands are even poorer than before the mineral resources were discovered in their areas.

If anything, most of these communities now live at great risk of health complications due to massive environmental damage and degradation.

They have never directly benefited from the gold, diamonds, lithium, coal, or platinum God blessed them with.

As a matter of fact, truckloads of these minerals, in their raw form, are moved across the border on a daily basis – with scant benefit for the country.

According to renowned activist Farai Maguwu, who is also the CNRG Director, Zimbabwe is estimated to be losing US\$2 billion each year to the smuggling of our mineral wealth.

This is US\$2 billion, in addition to the revenue officially declared, that should be uplifting the lives of these local communities, the workforce, and the country at large.

Therefore, can we then claim, in all honesty, that there is really any Chinese investment in Zimbabwe?

Can the flagrant pillaging of our national resources as well as abuse of the citizenry ever be described as 'investment'?

I think not!

The Chinese have done more harm than good to the people of Zimbabwe.

The only people who have benefited are the Chinese themselves and a small ruling clique in Zimbabwe who have their hands in these activities.

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<https://www.thezimbabwean.co/2024/09/do-the-chinese-come-to-zimbabwe-to-invest-or-to-pillage-our-resources/>

*Anjin (joint venture Anhui Foreign Economic Construction & Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation), New Reclamation, Mbada Diamonds (joint venture New Reclamation Group & Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation), Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation (ZMDC), Grandwell Holdings Ltd (joint venture) New Reclamation & Marange Resources.

<https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/the-pollution-fallout-from-zimbabwes-blood-diamonds/>