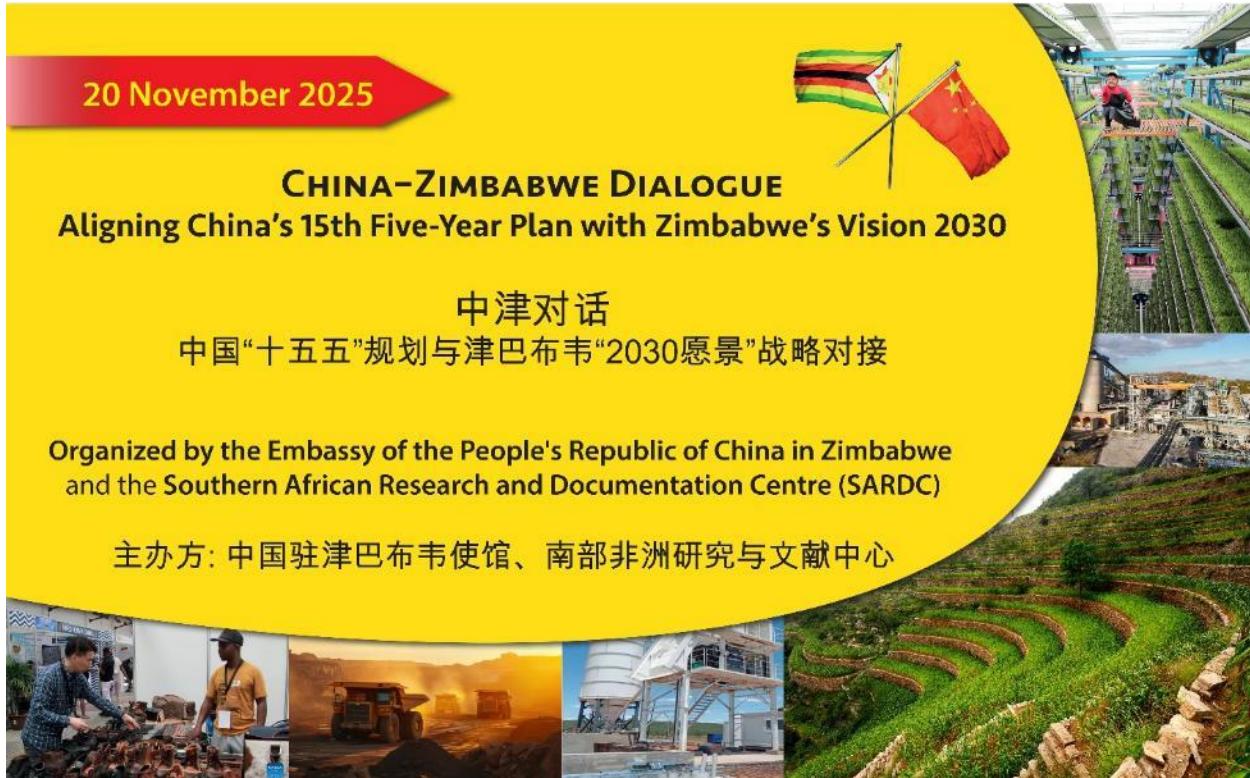


Seminar Report

China-Zimbabwe Dialogue

Aligning China's 15th Five-Year Plan with Zimbabwe's Vision 2030



Southern African Research
and Documentation Centre

Report by Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC)

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Overview

The Embassy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Zimbabwe, in conjunction with the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC) held a half-day seminar on 20 November 2025 with the objective of bringing together stakeholders to discuss and explore how the two countries can align their development plans.

The theme of this seminar under the CHINA-ZIMBABWE DIALOGUE was “Aligning China’s 15th Five Year Plan with Zimbabwe Vision 2030”.

The seminar was a platform for dialogue, mutual learning, and the identification of synergies between national development plans and strategies such as the National Development Strategy 2026-2030 (NDS 2) for achieving Vision 2030.

The dialogue follows the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (20-23 October 2025), and the 22nd National People's Conference of the ZANU-PF Party (13-18 October 2025), and was attended by a wide range of stakeholders including parliamentarians, trade unions, think tanks, academics and the media, as well as the Government of Zimbabwe, the ZANU-PF Party, and the PRC Embassy in Zimbabwe.

Introductory Remarks by the Moderator



SARDC Executive Director Munetsi Madakufamba

The moderator of the Seminar was Munetsi Madakufamba, the Executive Director of the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC) who delivered the introductory remarks highlighting the longstanding and deepening partnership between China and Zimbabwe, set within the context of aligning China’s 15th Five-Year Plan with Zimbabwe’s Vision 2030.

He emphasised the strategic evolution of China-Zimbabwe relations, now at the level of an all-weather community with a shared future, and noted major areas of collaboration such as food security, rural development, infrastructure, digitisation and green growth. He framed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI) as important vehicles for South-South cooperation, offering opportunities consistent with Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and the African Union's Agenda 2063, which is also reflected in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Vision 2050.

He drew lessons from China's successful poverty alleviation model that is built on strong leadership, a people-centred approach, green and innovation-driven development and a whole-of-society implementation strategy. These experiences, he said, hold valuable inspiration for Zimbabwe's own development ambitions.

Concluding with reflections from Chinese philosophy and President Xi Jinping, he called on participants to become actively involved in shaping a new development narrative for Africa, based on strong institutions, effective governance and shared prosperity.

Remarks by PRC Ambassador to Zimbabwe



Ambassador Zhou Ding

Ambassador Zhou Ding noted that 2025 marks a significant year for both China and Zimbabwe, with major political and developmental achievements in each country. He presented the outcomes of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee and the formulation of China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030), stressing its focus on long-term strategic planning, high-quality development, technological innovation, public participation, and continued global economic engagement. The Ambassador framed the plan as a source of stability and opportunity for partners such as Zimbabwe.

He highlighted the rapid growth and achievements in China–Zimbabwe relations over the past five years, including a trade volume that reached US\$3.8 billion in 2024, large-scale Chinese investment projects, and significant support in energy, infrastructure, digital transformation, and capacity building. Examples include power station upgrades, airport expansions, nationwide borehole drilling, digital connectivity projects and

solar energy developments. Human capital cooperation has also grown, with thousands of Zimbabwean students and officials benefiting from scholarships and training in China.

Looking ahead, Ambassador Zhou noted that President Mnangagwa's recent visit to Beijing elevated the relationship to an "all-weather community with a shared future."

With Zimbabwe launching NDS-2 and China entering its next planning cycle, he identified four core areas for deepened cooperation:

- expanding trade and investment under new zero-tariff policies,
- strengthening clean energy partnerships,
- enhancing infrastructure development, and
- continuing to invest in human resource development.

These areas align with Zimbabwe's national priorities, including digital transformation, food security, and economic growth on the path to Vision 2030.

Ambassador Zhou underscored mutual responsibilities, stressing that all enterprises, including Chinese companies, must adhere to the laws of Zimbabwe, and warned that disinformation and misinformation threaten public trust and investment confidence. He concluded by reaffirming China's readiness to work with Zimbabwe through the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and global initiatives to strengthen cooperation, modernisation efforts and shared prosperity.

Remarks by the Representative of the Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe



Deputy Minister Kudakwashe Mupamhangwa

The Deputy Minister of Youth Empowerment, Development and Vocational Training, Hon. Kudakwashe Mupamhangwa praised China's transformation from an agrarian society to a global economic powerhouse, noting the country's success in lifting over a billion people out of poverty through its governance model.

The Deputy Minister focussed on China's 15th five-year plan which aims to promote sustainable development, innovation, technology, green growth and social equity. He said the plan aligns with Government of Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and emphasized the shared goals between the two nations.

The Deputy Minister highlighted the importance of equipping youth with the necessary skills to drive economic transformation. He underscored the need for collaboration with China that can enhance vocational training and inspire innovation among young people.

He also highlighted China's Zero Tariff Initiative for Zimbabwe, which offers critical advantages to local farmers by allowing tariff-free agricultural exports to China. This initiative, he said, is expected to boost local economies and improve food security. Further, the Deputy Minister underscored the need for agricultural modernisation and collaboration with China to adopt advanced technologies, thereby increasing yields and ensuring food sovereignty for Zimbabwe.

Coming to economic diversification, the Deputy Minister said both nations are prioritising economic diversification and sustainable development, aiming for industrialisation and modernisation of agriculture by 2030. He concluded by emphasising the importance of strengthening ties between Zimbabwe and China, focusing on mutual benefits in youth empowerment, agricultural cooperation and economic growth.

Summary of Panel Discussions and Interactive Session

Moderated by the SARDC Executive Director, the panel was made up of:

- Hon. Fortune Chasi, Member of Parliament (MP) and Member of the ZANU PF Political Bureau, Deputy Secretary for Legal Affairs
- Hon. Stanley Sakupwanya, MP
- Hon. Mutsa Murombedzi, MP
- Pilate Machadu, Group Chief Executive of Jester Media Services
- Amanda Makausi, Vice General Manager of Bikita Minerals and Secretary of the Lithium Producers Association
- Dr Pindai Sithole, Coordinator at the Africa Leadership and Management Academy.



The Panelists

Several areas of strong alignment emerged from the Dialogue that can drive deeper collaboration and cooperation between China and Zimbabwe. These synergies fall into several strategic areas:

1. Shared Development Philosophy: Innovation, people-centred growth and poverty reduction

Both countries emphasise:

- Innovation and technology as the new engines of economic transformation
- People-centred or inclusive development, improving livelihoods and ensuring dignity
- Sustainable development, green growth and long-term planning.

China's strategic principles, high-quality development, whole-process people's democracy, technological advances and poverty reduction mirror Zimbabwe's goals under Vision 2030 and the NDS2 priority clusters.

These shared values create a foundation for long-term policy alignment and mutual support.

2. Trade and Market Access: Zero-tariff regime and expansion of Zimbabwean exports

In June 2025, President Xi Jinping announced a zero-tariff market access for products from 53 African nations with whom China has diplomatic ties. China's market reforms align with Zimbabwe's export ambitions. This creates an enlarged and predictable market, and a high-volume export pathway that supports Vision 2030's growth and inclusive rural development. Opportunities for Zimbabwe include:

- Expanding exports of tobacco, horticulture produce, livestock products and agro-processed goods
- Leveraging tariff-free access to reinvest in rural communities and advance land reform outcomes
- Development of policies that promote rural revitalization and modernization to participate in industrialisation.

3. Industrialisation and Strengthening Value Chains

China is the world's largest manufacturing economy and is looking to deepen industrial and supply-chain cooperation with partners.

Zimbabwe is pushing industrial diversification, value addition, beneficiation, and manufacturing growth under Vision 2030.

This means there are opportunities for synergies in creating joint industrial parks, special economic zones, manufacturing clusters, mineral beneficiation (for example lithium) and other supply-chain industries.

This underpins Vision 2030's goal of transforming Zimbabwe from a commodity exporter into a value-adding, industrial economy. Related to this, there was emphasis for Zimbabwe to put in place consistent policies that promote value addition and beneficiation.

4. Infrastructure, Energy, and Connectivity

China's engineering capacity and Zimbabwe's infrastructure gaps present opportunities for continued collaboration and support for critical projects across different sectors that can enable growth.

Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 prioritises:

- Modern roads, railways, airports, smart cities, and digital networks
- Green energy, especially solar.

China has expressed willingness to:

- Expand investment in renewable energy
- Continue major infrastructure partnerships (energy plants, airports, digital networks, boreholes, smart cities)
- Support transport and logistics upgrades to boost intra-African and China-Zimbabwe trade.

5. Agricultural Modernisation and Food Security Cooperation

A key message on agricultural modernization and food security cooperation is that due to China's advanced agricultural technologies and the availability of vast arable land in Zimbabwe, there are massive opportunities for mutual benefit through supporting Zimbabwe to develop a modern, efficient, export-driven agricultural sector in alignment with NDS2 food security goals. Key areas of collaboration:

- Technology transfer in precision agriculture, irrigation, seeds, fertilisers and mechanisation
- Agro-processing and value-addition to meet China's high-value market demand
- Joint ventures in livestock, dairy, horticulture, grain processing, and cold-chain logistics.

6. Human Capital Development, Skills Training, and Vocational Education

Human capital development is at the centre of any development agenda. China has gone to lengths to support Zimbabwe's human capital development with over 5,000 Zimbabweans having been trained in the last five years through scholarships and other professional programmes.

As a result, potential synergies exist for establishment of joint training centres, youth exchange programmes, and technical institutes to create a skilled, future-ready workforce supporting industrialisation and modernisation.

7. Digital Transformation and Bridging the Digital Divide

China's strength in the digital economy aligns very well with Zimbabwe's digital innovation and youth empowerment agenda to drive skills development, innovation hubs, e-commerce growth, and ICT-based job creation using Artificial Intelligence.

Existing cooperation which has resulted in support for the High-Performance Computing Centre and the NetOne broadband initiatives among others, can be upgraded to enhance digital literacy, digital infrastructure, and e-governance as well as supporting youth participation in the digital economy.

8. Empowering women to contribute to the development agenda

Women should be placed at the centre of the development agenda, requiring us to address the persistent inequalities and under representation of women in decision-making processes and positions.

LESSONS FOR ZIMBABWE

During the discussions, delegates raised several points of interest where Zimbabwe can learn from China in its development process, such as:

- National interest versus Personal Interest**

China has managed to accelerate its development because citizens understand the importance of national interest versus personal interest and gain.

- Wide Consultations, Explaining the Vision to Citizens, Whole of Society Approach**

In developing policies, China is able to ensure that citizens and businesses participate in the process. Therefore, citizens are aware of and support what government is trying to achieve, while businesses link their growth plans to the national vision.

- Consistency in Implementation of Short- And Long-Term Plans**

Delegates noted that China develops both long-term and short-term economic development plans. The short-term plans are not separate from the long-term plans, they are complementary.

- From Plan to Strategy**

After developing economic plans which define what needs to be done, it is imperative to follow up with strategies which outline how the goals will be achieved, the timelines, and the resources required to achieve the targets.

- Legislative, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), Value Addition**

Participants proposed that Zimbabwe legislates ESG models so that business do not need to act out of benevolence, and to regulate value addition across sectors instead of raw exports as this will support the growth of local industries and create jobs as well as economic growth.

- **Need for Policy Consistency**

Policy consistency is imperative to drive economic development and to attract investment. Delegates emphasised the necessity for Zimbabwe to address policy inconsistencies and ensure that policies, once enacted, are not randomly changed as this dampens investor and business confidence.

- **Infrastructure as a Public Good**

Government must prioritise provision of infrastructure such as roads, energy and water and not leave this to private sector, as this diverts from their core business. Provision of infrastructure is especially important in Special Economic Zones, a concept which Zimbabwe also adopted from the methods used in China.

- **Discipline Critical to Development**

Zimbabwean society, with government playing its part needs to emphasise the importance of discipline to drive development. This is linked to the lesson on national interest versus personal gain, especially as it relates to addressing corruption and greed.

- **Availability of Disaggregated Data to drive Development**

Availability of data is the foundation for evidence-based decision making, which is necessary to drive development. Delegates emphasised the need for the Zimbabwean government to drive and support institutions whose role is to drive research which is key to aiding development processes in the country.

- **Government and Media Collaboration to Bridge the Information Divide**

The media must not be an enemy of the state. Rather the two must partner in the drive to ensure that society is well-informed of government plans and initiatives to ensure a whole of society approach. Government must create an environment that allows the media to play its role of information-sharing and educating society, thus allowing citizens to participate fully in the development process.

- **Joint Labour Dialogues**

A key proposal to address labour disputes between investors and employees is to bring stakeholders together for joint labour dialogues. This allows investors to learn about local labour laws and culture. Misunderstandings of these key issues are a major cause of conflict.

Participants engage during the China-Zimbabwe dialogue session



Stories of China-Zimbabwe Friendship through Historical Photos Project

Raymond Ndhlovu, the Project Manager for SARDC's History Today program, announced at the Dialogue that SARDC in collaboration with the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Zimbabwe are working on an initiative to tell the *Stories of China-Zimbabwe Friendship through Historical Photos*. The initial photos will be mainly from the liberation struggle for the independence of Zimbabwe.

Ndhlovu said old photographs serve as gateways to the past, capturing moments that tell rich stories of culture, history, and personal experiences. The project aims to preserve and present these narratives, stretching from pre-colonial exchanges, focusing primarily on support during the liberation struggle for independence, and sampling current experiences that continue to shape the relationship.

These rich historical narratives of China-Zimbabwe cooperation are fading from collective memory, and younger generations may not be familiar with these stories. He said for better understanding of this history and its impact today, it is necessary to document and share these narratives, especially through visual materials and short stories on various platforms and in print.

“By documenting these stories, we can ensure that future generations in both countries have access to this knowledge, and can appreciate the significance of this historical partnership.”

Group Photo of delegates who attended the China-Zimbabwe Dialogue

