

## Policy Brief

# China-Zimbabwe Dialogue

Aligning China's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan with Zimbabwe's Vision 2030

## *A Think-Tank Agenda for Action: From Dialogue to Implementation*

### Introduction

The year 2025 marks a defining moment in the enduring relationship between China and Zimbabwe, as the two nations celebrated 45 years of diplomatic ties and elevated their partnership to new strategic heights. The visit of His Excellency President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa to China in September 2024 and September 2025 reaffirmed this deepening bond, culminating in a series of high-level engagements that strengthened the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation and underscored the shared commitment to build an *all-weather community with a shared future*.

Against this backdrop, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Zimbabwe and the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC) co-hosted the *China–Zimbabwe Dialogue: Aligning China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030) with Zimbabwe's Vision 2030* on 20 November 2025. The Dialogue was part of the broader implementation framework emerging from President Mnangagwa's visit and the outcomes of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. It sought to identify actionable synergies between Zimbabwe's forthcoming National Development Strategy 2 (NDS2) and China's 15th Five-Year Plan, both of which emphasise sustainable, innovation-led, and people-centred development.

This event was not only a think-tank initiative but a multi-stakeholder platform bringing together senior government officials, parliamentarians, diplomats, academics, business leaders, and the media. It reflected the growing consensus across both countries that sustained cooperation, grounded in shared priorities and mutual respect, is essential to achieving Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 and China's development goals under its new five-year plan.

### Background

Opening the seminar, Munetsi Madakufamba, Executive Director of SARDC, welcomed participants and highlighted the historic evolution of China–Zimbabwe cooperation, from solidarity during the liberation struggle to the present focus on economic transformation, technology transfer, and sustainable growth. He emphasised that the partnership has matured into one defined by *innovation, inclusivity, and long-term strategic vision*, and that aligning the

two countries' development blueprints provides a framework for translating goodwill into measurable outcomes.

In his address, Ambassador Zhou Ding outlined the major outcomes of President Mnangagwa's September 2024 visit to China, noting that it elevated the China–Zimbabwe relationship to a new stage of practical cooperation anchored on mutual benefit and high-quality development. He reaffirmed China's commitment to support Zimbabwe in critical areas such as clean energy, digital transformation, agricultural modernisation, and infrastructure development. The Ambassador cited the growing trade volume, which reached US\$3.8 billion in 2024, and highlighted China's decision to extend zero-tariff access to Zimbabwean exports starting June 2025 as a tangible sign of partnership. He also stressed the need for responsible communication and fact-based reporting to sustain public confidence in the bilateral relationship.

Representing the Government of Zimbabwe, the Deputy Minister of Youth Empowerment, Development and Vocational Training, Kudakwashe Mupamhanga, commended China's remarkable transformation from an agrarian economy to a global leader in innovation and technology. He underscored the importance of skills development and youth empowerment, noting that cooperation with China could expand vocational training, promote technology transfer, and inspire entrepreneurship among Zimbabwean youth. The Deputy Minister also lauded the Zero-Tariff Initiative, which he said would “open new frontiers for Zimbabwe's agricultural exports, improve rural livelihoods, and reinforce food security.”

Panel discussions reinforced this shared optimism, including parliamentarians, private sector, and think tanks. Hon. Fortune Chasi called for policy consistency to sustain investor confidence, while Hon. Stanley Sakupwanya emphasised the need to localise cooperation through community participation. Amanda Makausi, representing the Lithium Producers Association, urged stronger linkages between industrial policy and bilateral investment, particularly in the emerging lithium sector. Pindai Sithole, from the Africa Leadership and Management Academy, stressed the importance of results-based planning that follows the full cycle -- from consultation and problem identification to strategy design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

These perspectives underscored that the 2025 Dialogue was not a single-institution event, but a collective national and bilateral undertaking supported by government agencies, the legislature, business, academia, and civil society -- all working to align development frameworks and expand opportunities for cooperation. It also reaffirmed Zimbabwe's and China's shared belief in South–South cooperation, mutual learning, and solidarity among developing nations as drivers of a fairer, more sustainable global order.

### **Ten Key Proposals for Think-Tank Follow-Up**

Think tanks such as SARDC can act as catalysts in translating the shared aspirations highlighted during the 2025 Dialogue into sustained, people-centred cooperation. Building on the outcomes of President Mnangagwa's China visit, and the perspectives of key stakeholders, the following ten proposals outline actionable pathways for operationalising the China–Zimbabwe partnership.

## **1. Institutionalising the China–Zimbabwe Dialogue Series**

### **Framework:** Policy Dialogue and Institutionalisation

The Dialogue should evolve into a permanent, multi-level platform with four national seminars annually, complemented by provincial and sectoral meetings. Jointly managed by SARDC, the Chinese Embassy, and partner institutions, this institutionalisation ensures continuity of engagement, policy coherence, and broad participation — reflecting the multi-stakeholder nature of the 2025 Dialogue.

## **2. Aligning Strategic Frameworks and Development Plans**

### **Framework:** Policy Harmonisation and Strategic Alignment

Technical task forces should map synergies between Zimbabwe’s Vision 2030/NDS2 and China’s 15th Five-Year Plan, particularly in clean energy, agricultural modernisation, digital transformation, and green industry. Grounding cooperation in measurable priorities will ensure that investments and policy interventions translate President Mnangagwa’s strategic commitments into tangible outcomes.

## **3. Deepening South–South Cooperation within BRI and GDI Frameworks**

### **Framework:** Global Partnerships and South–South Cooperation

Think tanks can help Zimbabwean institutions leverage the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Global Development Initiative (GDI) opportunities. Producing joint feasibility studies, policy briefs, and project proposals will facilitate access to finance, technology, and expertise — strengthening the shared South–South vision underscored by Ambassador Zhou Ding.

## **4. Enhancing People-to-People, Academic, and Youth Exchanges**

### **Framework:** Cultural and Human Capital Diplomacy

To reinforce the generational continuity of bilateral cooperation, an annual China–Zimbabwe People-to-People Exchange Programme is proposed to link universities, innovation hubs, youth organisations, and media institutions. Deputy Minister Mupamhanga highlighted the importance of youth empowerment; structured exchanges will enhance vocational skills, entrepreneurship, and cross-cultural understanding.

## **5. Expanding Trade and Market Access under China’s Zero-Tariff Initiative**

### **Framework:** Trade and Economic Integration

The Zero-Tariff Initiative, operational from June 2025, offers Zimbabwe an unprecedented opportunity to grow exports. Think tanks should work with trade agencies to provide market research, value-chain analysis, and exporter capacity building — particularly in agriculture, processed foods, textiles, and minerals — ensuring benefits reach rural communities.

## **6. Strengthening Knowledge Generation, Data Systems, and Research Networks**

### **Framework: Evidence-Based Policy and Knowledge Management**

A Zimbabwe–China Development Knowledge Hub located in the SARDC Institute for China-Africa Studies in Southern Africa can consolidate research, datasets, and policy analysis to support informed decision-making. Such knowledge infrastructure enhances policy implementation, enables evidence-driven planning, and provides a platform for joint publications, reflecting the high value placed on informed reporting and fact-based dialogue by both governments.

## **7. Driving Innovation, Community Engagement, and Poverty Reduction**

### **Framework: Innovation and Community-Based Development**

To take think tanks beyond research, researchers can venture into pilot projects such as smart villages, renewable-energy cooperatives, and agro-innovation centres, adapting China's experience in poverty alleviation to Zimbabwe's local context. These initiatives will convert strategic commitments into visible community impact, aligning with the all-weather, people-centred vision emphasised by participants during the Dialogue.

## **8. Building Skills and Vocational Capacity for Industrialisation**

### **Framework: Human Capital and Skills Development**

Partnerships between Chinese technical universities and Zimbabwean institutions should establish Joint Technical and Innovation Centres offering vocational education, technology transfer, and sector-specific internships in ICT, agriculture, and engineering. Such collaboration addresses Deputy Minister Mupamhanga's call for youth skills development and prepares Zimbabweans for industrialisation and digital transformation.

## **9. Enhancing Monitoring, Evaluation, and Impact Tracking**

### **Framework: Governance and Accountability**

Coordinated through SARDC ICASSA, think tanks should design a China–Zimbabwe Cooperation Monitoring and Learning Framework with clear indicators, annual progress reviews, and public scorecards. Transparent evaluation will reinforce trust, enable timely corrective action, and provide replicable models for other South–South partnerships.

## **10. Strengthening the Ecosystem of Think Tanks as Drivers of South–South Cooperation**

### **Framework: Institutional Capacity and Policy Support**

Building on partnerships already created by SARDC ICASSA, a Zimbabwe–China Think-Tank Network will enhance joint research, policy advisory capacity, dialogue facilitation, and innovation support. Serving as the intellectual engine for bilateral cooperation, think tanks ensure that Vision 2030, the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, and broader South–South goals translate into actionable and measurable outcomes.

## Conclusion

The China–Zimbabwe partnership exemplifies a modern, high-impact South–South cooperation model grounded in solidarity, mutual benefit, and shared learning. President Mnangagwa’s visits to China in 2024 and 2025, complemented by the insights from the recent China–Zimbabwe Dialogue, demonstrate the political commitment to a partnership that moves beyond diplomacy into tangible development outcomes.

Through sustained dialogue, strategic alignment, evidence-based research, and community-focused innovation, Zimbabwe and China can transform their relationship into a living model of an “all-weather community with a shared future.” This approach not only advances Zimbabwe’s Vision 2030 and China’s 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan but also provides a scalable blueprint for Africa’s broader development trajectory and South–South collaboration.

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**Note:** This Policy Brief draws on the outcomes and recommendations of the *China–Zimbabwe Dialogue: Aligning China’s 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030) with Zimbabwe’s Vision 2030*, co-hosted by the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Zimbabwe and the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC) on 20 November 2025 in Harare. The proposals presented herein synthesise the insights shared by government representatives, diplomats, parliamentarians, business leaders, academics, and civil society participants during the Dialogue.

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