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SINO-ZIMBABWE RELATIONS AND MINERAL EXTRACTION IN HWANGE DISTRICT, 2015-2025

BY

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A Dissertation submitted to the Department of Peace and Governance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science in International Relations Degree

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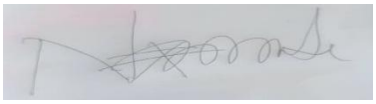
Abstract

This study investigates how Chinese-backed coal extraction in Hwange shapes the interplay among resource diplomacy, environmental governance, and community agency, revealing the socio-economic and ecological implications of neo-extractivism in Zimbabwe. It is grounded in a problem context punctuated by opaque investment agreements, environmental injustices, including deteriorating environmental conditions, and unequal benefit and burden sharing. Theoretically, the study adopts green trade theory and liberal theory. Together, they strengthen the study's theoretical architecture by bridging normative expectations for environmental governance and the structural logic of inter-state economic cooperation. The study is anchored in a qualitative, multi-sited case study research design comprising semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, documentary reviews, and community-centred environmental observations. The population included local communities affected by mining operations, representatives from the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development and Chinese mining companies, as well as representatives from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the Hwange Rural District Council (RDC). The research findings reveal several (in)justices, including governance failures, resource exploitation, land degradation, pollution, occupational hazards, and losses and gains across the entire coal extraction value chain. Furthermore, localized experiences of excessive water contamination, dust pollution, land degradation, and livelihood disruption contrast sharply with official claims of the national economic recovery agenda. Despite a constrained political space, communities show adaptive and resistive agency through monitoring, advocacy, informal negotiation, and NGO collaboration. The research concludes that Sino-Zimbabwean coal cooperation reflects a Faustian bargain in which short-term macroeconomic gains are traded for long-term ecological

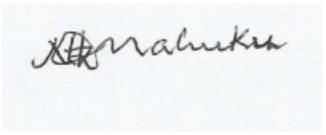
and social costs. The research recommends a governance realignment anchored in social and environmental justice, transparency, enforceable environmental regulation, community benefit-sharing, and binding investor obligations to achieve equitable and sustainable natural resource governance.

Declaration form

I, Nxolelani Ncube, B241330B, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been published or submitted to any other institution.

Signature 

Supervisor Dr D Mahuku

Signature 

Chairman Dr J Kurebwa



Signature……..

Dedication

This Research project is dedicated to my late brother Melokuhle Ncube He had also managed to get his Masters in Archives and Record Keeping, but due to life circumstances, he passed on as he also wanted to pursue the same Masters. I say rest in peace, my brother. Secondly, I want to dedicate this piece of work to my parents who always want to see me excel. To the people of Zimbabwe, I must say the resilience and tenacity that we have shown towards economic and political resilience are much appreciated as the country thrives on peace and tranquillity.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CBMS - Community Based Monitoring Systems

CDA - Community Development Agency

CNRG - Centre for Natural Resource Governance

CSO - Civil Society Organisation

CSR - Corporate Social Responsibility

DEI - Diversity Equity and Inclusion

EMA - Environmental Management Agency

EMS - Environmental and Social Management Systems

ESG - Environmental Social and Governance

FGI - Focus Group Discussion

FOCAC - Forum on China Africa Cooperation

KII - Key Informant Interview

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

RDC - Rural District Council

SSC - South South Cooperation

ZELA - Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Since the beginning of the 21st Century, the dynamics of Sino-African relations have drawn considerable scholarly and policy attention, particularly regarding the intersection of economic diplomacy, natural resource extraction, and sustainable development. Zimbabwe, like many African countries, has embraced China as a strategically imperative development partner under the rubric of South–South cooperation and the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) framework (Moyo et al., 2020; Batsani-Ncube,2026). However, emerging observations pinpoint that this partnership has been marked by both promise and controversy. On the one hand, there lies a promise in the form of desperately needed investment in infrastructure and extractive industries; on the other, controversy in the form of environmental degradation, opaque contractual arrangements, and uneven distribution of economic gains (Brautigam & Huang, 2026).

In its official and diplomatic engagements with Africa, China has reiterated that its engagement is grounded in the principles of the Bandung Conference (Tudoroiu, 2019; Brautigam & Huang, 2026). It is not surprising, therefore that the narrative of China-Africa relations is often couched in the benevolent language of "South-South Cooperation" (SSC), and "win-win development", (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021; Banik & Mawdsley, 2023). Since the turn of the millennium, Zimbabwe has been grappling with prolonged economic paralysis and international isolation after diplomatic fallout with Global North countries, including the United States, Britain, Canada, and the European Union, over, among other things, human rights and the handling of the land reform program. As a result, Harare alternatively and aggressively pursued a Look East policy for

trade and development finance partners, which initially focused on Asian nations including Russia, Belarus, Singapore, and Indonesia, among, others, but as will be argued anon, it now exclusively focuses on China. While there has been growing interest in China-Zimbabwe mineral resource exploration, arguably a pivotal yet understudied area of this partnership centers on Chinese coal mining and extraction in Hwange District.

Hwange District of north-western Zimbabwe stands as a microcosm of the broader complexities characterizing Sino-Zimbabwean economic engagements. Since 2015, Chinese companies–most notably Tsingshan Holdings, Afrochine Energy, and Sino Hydro, among others–have intensified coal exploration and extraction in Hwange, ostensibly to meet Zimbabwe's rapidly increasing energy demands and to bolster economic recovery (Togarasei, 2023: 688). Notably, these developments have unfolded amid growing concerns about environmental degradation, green transition, local displacement, and limited transparency in the utilization of revenues.

"The Faustian Bargain" metaphor captures this paradox aptly. The concept emanated from Doctor Faust, who, dissatisfied with the limits of human knowledge, sold his soul to the devil in exchange for unlimited knowledge and earthly pleasures (Evans & Wolf, 2019). In modern usage, it often depicts a situation in which a country sacrifices its integrity or principles for short-term benefit (Evans & Wolf, 2019). The compromise has dire long-term consequences. In this context, it symbolizes Zimbabwe's willingness to trade environmental and social sustainability for short-term economic survival and political expediency. Arguably, as China rises, Zimbabwe's economic dependence deepens, raising questions about resource management sovereignty, environmental governance, and the broader ethics of development diplomacy (Brautigam, 2015).The purpose of this study is to examine how Chinese-backed coal extraction in Hwange shapes the interplay among resource diplomacy, environmental governance, and community agency–revealing the socio-economic and ecological implications

of neo-extractivism in Zimbabwe. This chapter sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of the political, economic, and environmental dimensions of coal extraction in Hwange within the context of Sino-Zimbabwean relations between 2015 and 2025.

The relationship between Zimbabwe and China is deeply rooted in history, dating back to the liberation struggle of the 1970s, when China supported nationalist movements against colonial rule (Ojakorotu, & Kamidza, 2018; Moyo et al., 2020). After independence in 1980, this relationship evolved into one of political solidarity and economic cooperation (Mkodzongi & Spiegel, 2019, p. 843;). Accordingly, Chari (2024, p. 453) contends that it was the Look East Policy, adopted by the Mugabe government in the early 2000s following the imposition of Western sanctions as a riposte to the Land Reform Program and the land dispossession of white farmers., Coinciding with China's go-out strategy, it significantly strengthened the bilateral partnership. This policy reoriented Zimbabwe's foreign policy focus toward Asian economies, with China emerging as the country's principal economic and political ally (Moyo et al., 2020, pp. 82-83).

In the post-2000 era, Chinese engagement has been particularly prominent in Zimbabwe's extractive sector, spanning mining, energy and infrastructure. For Chipaike & Bischoff (2019, pp. 66-67), coal extraction in Hwange has since become a bull-necked strategic pillar of this cooperation, as both nations have conceptualized it as mutually beneficial. Whereas China has sought access to raw materials and investment opportunities, Zimbabwe has consistently sought foreign direct investment (FDI), employment creation, and energy security, among other things. As such, the period 2015–2025 represents a decade of intensified coal-related activity, characterized by the profuse entry of multiple Chinese firms into Hwange's energy landscape.

Nevertheless, this cooperation has been punctuated with contestations. Local communities have raised alarms over environmental and ecological injustices and the destruction of ecosystems, particularly in areas bordering Hwange National Park. Civil society organizations and environmental watchdogs have accused both the Zimbabwean government and Chinese investors of prioritizing profit over environmental and human security (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Moreover, allegations of non-transparent revenue inflows, lack of local beneficiation, and limited corporate social responsibility (CSR) have consequently eroded public confidence in these partnerships.

Against this backdrop, this research interrogates how the macro-economic benefits of Chinese investment in coal miningcompare with the micro-level socio-environmental costs borne by local communities. In addition, the study further investigates how state institutions, civil society, and local actors respond to these emerging tensions through resistance, negotiation, or adaptation strategies. At its core, this study contributes to existing research by situating bilateral Sino-Zimbabwean coal diplomacy within the broader discourse on resource extraction and resource governance, and by investigating whether Chinese partnerships genuinely support sustainable development or simply perpetuate new forms of dependency and environmental and ecological injustice.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study examines how Chinese-backed coal extraction in Hwange District shapes the interplay among resource diplomacy, environmental governance, and community agency in Zimbabwe.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The central problem underpinning this study lies in the paradoxical nature of Sino-Zimbabwean relations within Hwange's coal mining sector–where narratives of economic

recovery and energy security sharply contrast with lived community experiences of environmental degradation and social injustices (Maheve, 2026, Marumahoko et al., 2023). While the Government of Zimbabwe has positioned Chinese investment in Hwange as a linchpin of national industrialization and post-crisis economic reconstruction (Manyeruke, 2021); there is severe environmental and ecological degradation (Maheve, 2026). There is air and water contamination, forced relocations and socio-economic marginalization of local communities that are linked to Chinese-operated coal mining projects (Ndawana & Ngwaru, 2026). Consequently, the case of Hwange illustrates how Zimbabwe's engagement with China risks reproducing resource extraction dependencies that may favor short-term state revenue inflows and geopolitical alignment over sustainable development and human security (Maheve, 2026). This study therefore aims to examine how Chinese-backed coal extraction in Hwange shapes the interplay between resource diplomacy, environmental governance, and community agency, revealing the socio-economic and ecological implications of coal extraction in Zimbabwe.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To identify the defining characteristics of Sino-Zimbabwean relations in the context of coal extraction in Hwange between 2015 and 2025.
2. To investigate how revenues and economic benefits from the Hwange coal sector are managed and distributed at national and local levels.
3. To examine how the macro-economic gains of coal extraction contrast with the socio-environmental costs experienced by communities in Hwange.
4. To evaluate the strategies employed by local communities, civil society, and state institutions to resist, negotiate, or adapt to coal resource extraction in Hwange.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the defining characteristics of Sino-Zimbabwean relations in the context of coal extraction in Hwange between 2015 and 2025?
2. How are revenues and economic benefits from the Hwange coal sector managed and distributed at national and local levels?
3. In what ways do the macro-economic gains of coal extraction contrast with the socio-environmental costs experienced by communities in Hwange?
4. What strategies have local communities, civil society, and state actors employed to resist, negotiate, or adapt to Chinese-led coal mining activities?

1.6 Research Assumptions

1. The Sino-Zimbabwean coal partnership in Hwange is driven primarily by Zimbabwe's quest for economic recovery and China's demand for natural resources.
2. The economic benefits of coal extraction are unevenly distributed, with limited trickle-down effects for local communities.
3. Local communities and civil society actors possess limited but evolving strategies to contest or adapt to the environmental and economic challenges arising from Chinese coal mining projects.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on China–Africa relations, resource politics, and environmental governance. With a primary focus on Hwange, the research offers a localized and empirically grounded analysis of how global economic forces intersect with local environmental and social realities. The study locates itself within ongoing debates on political ecology in Africa and the Global South and engages with the discussions of dependency, political ecology, colonial legacies, and neo-colonialism in Global South

studies. enriches theoretical debates in international relations concerning South–South cooperation, neo-extractivism, and environmental security, illuminating how power asymmetries and state interests shape resource diplomacy in the Global South. It is common cause that many studies have focused on Zimbabwe-China engagement in the extractive sector, mainly on gold, lithium, and chrome, among other minerals (Mude, 2016; Marumahoko, Ngorima, & Nhede, 2023; Mkodzongi, 2024; Bushu, 2026). As such, focusing on coal offers different nuances of the subject matter.

From a policy perspective, the findings provide critical insights for Zimbabwean policymakers, environmental regulators, and civil society organizations. The research helps identify policy gaps in the governance of foreign investment, resource revenue transparency, and environmental accountability. It also offers practical recommendations for balancing economic development objectives with ecological sustainability and community rights. For local communities, the study amplifies subaltern voices often marginalized in state-corporate discourses, thereby providing a platform for documenting lived experiences of coal resource extraction and enabling more inclusive and equitable policy responses.

1.8 Delimitation of the Study

The study focuses on Hwange District, located in Matabeleland North Province, as the primary site of inquiry. Hwange's significance stems from its position as Zimbabwe's largest coal-producing region and the epicentre of Sino-Zimbabwean mining cooperation. The temporal scope covers the period 2015–2025, reflecting a decade of intensified Chinese investment and activity in Zimbabwe's extractive sector. Thematically, the study concentrates on the intersection of foreign relations, economic diplomacy, and environmental governance, specifically examining how Chinese coal investments affect Zimbabwe's economic recovery narrative and local sustainability. While it references broader national and global contexts, the study does not attempt a comprehensive analysis of all Zimbabwe-China engagements such as

in infrastructure development or manufacturing, but instead focuses on coal mining and extraction in Hwange.

1.9 Limitations of the study

A critical appraisal of this study's design reveals several inherent limitations that warrant acknowledgement alongside proactive strategies for their mitigation. Foremost among these are potential access constraints, as the sensitive nature of the extractive industry may lead Chinese corporate entities or Zimbabwean state institutions to circumscribe information flow, thereby limiting the pool of official perspectives. To mitigate this, the researcher employed strategic rapport-building with gatekeepers and rigorously triangulated data by drawing on documented evidence and alternative stakeholder accounts and perspectives to cross-verify findings.

Furthermore, the profound political sensitivity surrounding Sino-Zimbabwean bilateral relations and environmental governance could foster apprehension among participants, thereby undermining open discourse. This was counterbalanced by stringent ethical protocols that guarantee anonymity and confidentiality. However, a practical limitation arises from language barriers during interviews with Chinese personnel and certain local community members. This was addressed using professional interpreters to preserve accuracy.

Finally, while the temporal scope of 2015–2025 effectively captures a decisive decade of transformation under the New Dispensation, it necessarily limits the depth of retrospective historical analysis. However, this delimitation is accepted as a necessary focus for a contemporary policy analysis, with key historical antecedents incorporated contextually where required to illuminate present dynamics. Through these deliberate mitigative efforts, the research upheld its analytical rigour, depth and credibility notwithstanding these acknowledged constraints.

1.10 Definition of Key Terms

1. **Sino-Zimbabwean Relations**: This generally refers to the diplomatic, economic, and political interactions between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Zimbabwe, particularly as they pertain to trade, investment, and foreign policy cooperation (Chari, 2024, pp. 451-452; CNRG, 2022).

2. **Resource Diplomacy**: According to CNRG (2022), resource diplomacy denotes the strategic use and negotiation of natural resources within international relations to advance political and economic interests.

3. **Neo-Extractivism**: As defined by Finkelday (2023) and Gudynas (2013, p. 24), neo-extractivism is a model of development in which resource-rich states depend heavily on raw material extraction to finance public spending, often reproducing dependency and environmental degradation.

4. **Environmental Governance**: Hilson (2020, pp. 102-103) conceptualizes environmental governance as the processes and institutions through which societies manage environmental issues and natural resources in ways that aim to ensure sustainability, accountability, and equity.

5. Politics: Politics is defined as the art of government. As a process, it is understood as a distributive process through which people and communities preserve, create and make rules under which they live (Heywood; 2013, p.2).

6. International System: The international is an arrangement of states defined by anarchy, defined by an ordering principle, like states, and the distribution of capabilities (Waltz, 1979, p. 88).

7. International relations: It is the study of how states and non-state actors interact, focusing on the distribution of power and how it produces global outcomes within global institutions (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2020, p. 6).

8. Faustain Bargain: Within the academic discourse, it is a metaphorical pact used to describe individuals' and states sacrifices of their moral principles or long-term values for short-term power, capital gain and knowledge (Evans & Wolf, 2019).

1.11 Dissertation Chapter outline

The study is structured into five major chapters. Chapter one introduces the study. The Research aim, objectives and questions are presented in this chapter. Chapter two constructs the conceptual and analytical framework that forms the basis for analysing the Sino-Zimbabwean relations and mineral extraction in Hwange District. The chapter also discusses the study's analytical frameworks. Chapter three discusses the study's methodology. Chapter four focuses on data presentation and analysis. Lastly, chapter five constructs a summary of the findings and discusses the implications of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents existing literature on China–Africa resource relations. It further identifies how past studies and research have conceptualized the interplay between foreign investment, natural resource exploitation, and sustainable development in Africa. Furthermore, it connects these perspectives to theoretical frameworks relevant to this study–specifically the green theory and the liberal theory of international relations. In synthesizing the key arguments and findings from previous studies, this chapter demonstrates that while China's economic involvement in Africa is widely celebrated for its developmental potential, it simultaneously engenders new forms of dependency, environmental degradation, and socio-political contestations that remain underexplored in the Zimbabwean context.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical framework is anchored in the green trade theory and the liberal theory. Incorporation green trade theory and liberal theory into the existing theoretical framework provides a broader, more analytically rich lens through which the dynamics of Sino-Zimbabwean mineral extraction in Hwange can be understood. Both theories help illuminate the complex interplay between international economic norms, environmental governance expectations, and state–market relations at the center of China's involvement in Zimbabwe's coal sector. Their integration not only complements the previously employed theories of resource diplomacy, neo-extractivism, weak environmental governance, and community agency but also advances a more comprehensive, normatively grounded interpretation of the extractive politics that defined the 2015–2025 period.

2.2.1 Green Trade Theory

This Theory was advanced by scholars such as Bhagwati (2004), Tay (2010), and Frank Biermann (2002), who emphasize the need to integrate environmental sustainability norms into international trade and investment. The theory argues that economic exchange should not occur at the expense of ecological integrity and that states and corporations have an obligation to

align commercial practices with global environmental standards, including pollution controls, ecosystem protection, and climate mitigation. Green trade proponents highlight the concept of ecologically embedded trade, whereby environmental safeguards become part of trade conditionalities and investment practices (Biermann, 2002; Bhagwati, 2004).

Applied to the Hwange coal-mining context, Green Trade Theory provides a critical normative benchmark against which to measure the conduct of Chinese coal firms and Zimbabwean regulatory institutions. It exposes the contradiction between China's global posture as a climate governance leader especially after its commitments under the 2015 Paris Agreement, Focus on China Africa Meetings and its externalization of coal-intensive, high-pollution projects to vulnerable African regions (Urban & Nordensvard, 2013; Power et al., 2012). More importantly, the theory explains Zimbabwe's failure to leverage international environmental law or sustainable trade conditions in mineral agreements due to weak bargaining power, elite collusion, and regulatory capture. Thus, Green Trade Theory helps interrogate not only corporate conduct but also state complicity, showing that Hwange's extractive arrangement represents a departure from evolving global norms of green trade.

2.2.2 Liberal Theory

Drawing on classical and modern proponents such as Immanuel Kant, Richard Cobden, David Mitrany, Robert Keohane (1984), and Joseph Nye (1977), liberal theory argues that international cooperation, economic interdependence, and strong institutional frameworks can mitigate conflict and promote mutual prosperity. In its contemporary form, liberal institutionalism suggests that predictable rules, transparent governance mechanisms, and regulatory institutions encourage stable investment environments while constraining arbitrary state power.

In the Sino-Zimbabwean context, liberal theory offers two major insights. First, it provides a framework for understanding China–Zimbabwe cooperation as part of broader

patterns of South–South economic interdependence, where investment flows are facilitated by political goodwill, diplomatic agreements, and a shared interest in development. Second, Liberal Theory exposes the paradox of this relationship: although cooperation should, in theory, strengthen institutions and promote rule-governed trade, the Hwange case shows how institutional weakness, opacity, and patronage politics undermine the liberal promise. Instead of institutional deepening, Sino-Zimbabwean engagement in Hwange has contributed to regulatory erosion, where environmental safeguards, transparency norms, and community rights frameworks have been systematically subordinated to elite economic interests.

Thus, while Liberal Theory explains why state–state cooperation emerges, it also helps critique how the absence of strong institutions distorts the benefits of such cooperation. The Hwange case becomes emblematic of liberal theory's conditional logic: cooperation without institutional checks produces asymmetrical outcomes.

2.2.3 Synthesis and Relevance

Together, Green Trade Theory and Liberal Theory enhance the theoretical architecture of this study by bridging normative expectations in environmental governance and the structural logic of inter-state economic cooperation. Green Trade Theory foregrounds sustainability deficits in Chinese coal extraction, while Liberal Theory illuminates the institutional weaknesses that allow these deficits to persist. By integrating these perspectives, the study gains a deeper capacity to explain how Sino-Zimbabwean relations produce a Faustian bargain—where economic survival is exchanged for ecological sacrifice and weakened governance. These theories thus enrich research's explanatory power and sharpen its critique of extractive politics in Hwange.

2.3 From History to Future Trajectories

The history of natural resources management dates to the colonial era. Among the major perspectives, the key issues underpinning this discussion include resource diplomacy, neo-

extractivism, interdependence, and environmental governance. In essence, resource diplomacy has evolved from the broader field of International Political Economy (IPE) and foreign policy analysis. Its intellectual origins can be traced to realist scholars such as Hans Morgenthau (1948) and Kenneth Waltz (1979), who underscored the strategic role of resources in state power. Later, energy security theorists such as Andreas Goldthau (2011) and Daniel Scholten (2018) expanded this notion to encompass economic interdependence, bargaining asymmetries, and geopolitical leverage derived from access to natural resources.

Resource Diplomacy posits that natural resources function as strategic assets that states deploy to secure geopolitical influence, national development, and foreign policy objectives (Lee, 2021). It emphasizes the strategic instrumentalization of natural resources in diplomatic negotiations, often producing asymmetrical relationships between resource-seeking and resource-providing states (Carmody & Kragelund, 2016).

In the context of Sino-Zimbabwean relations, Resource Diplomacy Theory illuminates China's use of economic and technical cooperation under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), as a diplomatic tool to secure access to minerals while projecting soft power across Africa (Alden & Alves, 2008; Power et al., 2012). It also contextualizes Zimbabwe's strategic embrace of China under the Look East Policy, viewing resource concessions as instruments of state survival amid Western sanctions (Chipaike & Bischoff, 2019).

Moving on, neo-extractivism is a critical theory rooted in Latin American political economy, advanced by scholars such as Eduardo Gudynas (2009, 2013) and Maristella Svampa (2019). It evolved as a critique of neoliberal resource policies and explores how post-2000s developing states—especially in Latin America and Africa—reasserted control over natural resources while maintaining extractive capitalist logics (Veltmeyer & Petras, 2014).

Neo-extractivism argues that states justify intensified natural resource extraction as a developmental necessity, often under progressive rhetoric of poverty alleviation and economic sovereignty (Gudynas, 2013). However, this model perpetuates dependency on commodity exports, ecological degradation, and socio-environmental inequalities (Burchardt & Dietz, 2014). It combines resource nationalism with foreign capital penetration, leading to what scholars call the "paradox of plenty" (Auty, 2001).

Hwange's coal sector epitomizes neo-extractivist contradictions. For instance, thestate's reliance on Chinese investment for macroeconomic recovery contrasts with the localized environmental and social injustices borne by affected communities (Maponga & Mutemererwa, 2022). Zimbabwe's government rationalizes Chinese coal projects as part of economic reconstruction, yet this deepens ecological degradation, livelihood disruptions, and community displacement (Mkodzongi & Saunders, 2021).

Relatedly, environmental governance theory emerges from ecological economics and institutionalism. Pioneering works by Elinor Ostrom (1990), Daniel Esty (2006), and Young (1997) conceptualized governance as the coordination of state, market, and civil society actors in environmental regulation and policy implementation. The theory posits that sustainable resource management depends on multi-level governance structures that promote transparency, participation, and accountability (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006). It critiques state-centric and technocratic models that exclude local voices from decision-making, arguing for inclusive frameworks that integrate local communities into environmental oversight (Cash et al., 2006).

Environmental governance provides a normative lens for assessing how Zimbabwe's regulatory institutions such as the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) interact with Chinese mining companies in Hwange. Weak enforcement mechanisms, corruption, and limited community consultation illustrate governance deficits that facilitate ecological

exploitation (Muchadenyika, 2020; Togarasei, 2023). As a result, this study further emphasizes the paramountcy of balancing the costs associated with mineral resource extraction and the benefits accruing to the communities in which mining operations take place.

2.4 Sino-Africa Resource Relations: South Africa and Zambia

In both South Africa and Zambia, investor–state relations in coal and broader extractive sectors are shaped by a confluence of political economy interests, institutional capacity, and the strategic priorities of foreign investors (Lee, 2018; Manduna, 2026). In South Africa, the coal industry sits at the nexus of national energy policy, labor politics and regional development agendas. The state has historically played an active role through parastatals (e.g., Eskom) and regulatory bodies in structuring contracts, licenses and infrastructure provision; yet it has also become the arena for contending interests between capital (both domestic and foreign), organized labor, and community stakeholders (Bridge, 2004; Kotsadam & Tolonen, 2019). The framing of coal as essential to electrification and economic stability has produced an investor-state compact that prioritizes supply security, often smoothing governance bottlenecks for established firms while generating contested outcomes for affected communities.

Zambia's recent history with Chinese investors illustrates a somewhat different configuration: Chinese firms entered sectors traditionally dominated by Western capital (notably copper) and later diversified into upstream and downstream activities, including coal-linked projects for power and smelting. Studies of Zambia's Copperbelt show that Chinese investors obtained rapid access to concessions and benefited from regulatory flexibility, while state actors sought investment to revive industry and create jobs (Mohan et al., 2012; Lee, 2017). Investor state relations in Zambia therefore reflect a bargain in which the state, confronted by fiscal gaps, prioritizes rapid capital inflows and operational continuity, sometimes at the cost of more deliberative oversight.

Comparatively, both countries reveal that investor–state relations are not mechanics-free market transactions; rather, they are political bargains embedded in domestic priorities (energy security in South Africa; industrial recovery in Zambia) and conditioned by the negotiating power of investors and the administrative capacity of the state (Keohane, 1984; Power et al., 2012).

Revenue management and benefit distribution follow divergent trajectories in South Africa and Zambia. South Africa's relatively stronger rule-of-law and fiscal institutions (compared to many regional peers) mean that royalties and tax regimes are more formalized and can, in principle, support redistributive programmes; however, leakage, governance failures, and the malaise afflicting public utilities complicate actual benefit realization (Bebbington et al., 2018). Local communities in Mpumalanga and other coal regions commonly report limited trickle-down effects, with benefits captured by political and corporate patronage networks rather than translating into sustained local development (Kotsadam & Tolonen, 2019).

In Zambia, where mining revenues have historically been critical to state budgets, the pattern often involves centralized capture with weak fiscal decentralization (Fraser & Lungu, 2007; Lee, 2018). The literature on Zambia highlights how revenues are channelled through national budgets with limited legal mechanisms to guarantee host-community benefits; this produces local grievances, even where macroeconomic indicators improve (Fraser & Lungu, 2007; Lee, 2017). Both cases illustrate an enduring governance tension: the existence of formal revenue instruments does not automatically ensure equitable local benefit distribution—implementation, transparency, and participation matter.

Across South Africa and Zambia, there is a recurring pattern: macroeconomic indicators (production volumes, exports, or fiscal receipts) often mask stark micro-level socio-

environmental burdens. In South Africa, the coal economy contributes to national baseload generation and export earnings, yet proximate communities experience dust, water contamination, land loss and health problems; the distributional impacts are spatially concentrated and socially stratified (Kotsadam & Tolonen, 2019). In Zambia, copper and coal-adjacent operations have produced national revenues and employment, but local populations report environmental degradation and livelihood disruption—especially where regulatory enforcement lags (Fraser & Lungu, 2007; Lee, 2017).

These contrasts magnify the conceptual core of neo-extractivism critiques: resource wealth can underwrite macroeconomic stability while simultaneously generating localized social and ecological liabilities (Gudynas, 2013). The South African case shows that institutional robustness mitigates, but does not eliminate, local harms; Zambia's experience underscores how rapid investor entry in contexts of fiscal urgency can produce significant externalities for host communities.

Communities in South Africa and Zambia have developed diverse repertoires of response. In South Africa, organized labor (miners' unions), community movements, and NGOs have combined litigation, protest, and policy advocacy to secure compensation, rehabilitation, and employment commitments; in some cases, these actions have forced renegotiations of CSR packages and regulatory scrutiny (Bebbington et al., 2018). In Zambia, community strategies have included petitioning state authorities, mobilizing through civil society coalitions, and leveraging media attention—though effectiveness is frequently curtailed by limited access to formal grievance mechanisms and political sensitivities around strategic investments (Fraser & Lungu, 2007; Lee, 2017). Notably, both contexts illustrate that civil society, and community agency can generate partial redress—documenting impacts, shaping public debate, and securing incremental concessions—but structural asymmetries in political power and corporate capacity often circumscribe transformative change.

Beyond Hwange, Zimbabwe's extractive landscape presents several notable sites and sectors—each offering distinct lessons relevant to the four objectives. The Marange diamond fields are widely studied as an exemplar of rapid resource capture, elite enrichment, and contested institutional control; scholars highlight opaque contract awards, security-led governance, and weak community benefit mechanisms (Moyo & Chambati, 2013; Raftopoulos, 2016). The Marange experience demonstrates how investor–state relations can become securitized, with royalties and revenues diverted into discretionary channels and social outcomes subordinated to elite interests.

The Great Dyke—Zimbabwe's geological backbone rich in platinum group metals, chrome and nickel—has attracted multinational investors and state partnership projects (Campbell, 2013). Scholarship emphasizes the Great Dyke's potential to drive industrialization, but also flags concerns over environmental management, land access for smallholders and the equitable distribution of mining rents (Mawowa & Lamba, 2014). Here, analysts point to the necessity of rigorous EIAs, negotiated community development agreements and stronger local governance mechanisms to avoid repeating extractivist patterns observed elsewhere.

Gold mining districts in Midlands and Mashonaland (e.g., Kwekwe, Kadoma) provide further evidence of the micro-level environmental and livelihood impacts associated with artisanal and industrial extraction—mercury contamination in artisanal gold mining, water use conflicts, and land degradation are recurrent themes (Sibanda & Tichagwa, 2018). Scholars argue for differentiated governance responses that recognize the distinct regulatory challenges posed by artisanal versus industrial operations and for stronger community engagement in monitoring and remediation.

Collectively, the Zimbabwean literature (Chipaike & Bischoff, 2019; Mkodzongi & Saunders, 2021; ZELA, 2023) converges on several points relevant to the study objectives: investor–state bargains often privilege macroeconomic imperatives; revenue governance is frequently opaque with weak local re-investment; macro gains coexist with substantial micro-level harms; and communities, though increasingly organized, confront significant institutional and political constraints. These studies underscore the imperative of aligning contractual terms, environmental governance, and community participation to ensure that extraction advances development rather than entrenching exclusion and ecological harm.

The comparative cases of South Africa and Zambia illustrate that investor–state relations, revenue governance, socio-environmental trade-offs, and community responses are shaped by each country's broader political economy and institutional architecture. Zimbabwe's other resource frontiers (Marange, the Great Dyke, gold districts) resonate with these regional patterns: without transparent contracts, enforceable environmental safeguards, and meaningful mechanisms for local benefit-sharing, extractive projects risk reproducing neo-extractivism outcomes despite short-run macroeconomic gains. Addressing these challenges requires multi-scalar interventions that combine stronger institutions, accountable investor practices, and empowered community participation—lessons that are salient for all three countries considered here.

2.5 China–Africa Resource Diplomacy

Resource diplomacy, according to Goldthau & Witte (2010), refers to the strategic use of natural resources and investment as instruments of foreign policy and influence. Within the China–Africa nexus, it encapsulates Beijing's deliberate use of 'development' aid, bilateral trade and infrastructure financing to secure access to critical minerals and energy resources essential for sustaining China's industrial growth (Alden & Alves, 2008; Lee, 2021). Scholars such as Carmody and Kragelund (2016: 1136-37) describe this as a latent form of "geo-

economic statecraft" that blends and amalgamates commercial interests with diplomatic leverage.

Over the years, scholarship in China–Africa relation has as matured from descriptive accounts of trade and aid to critical analyses that interrogate power asymmetries, political economy, and the governance implications of Chinese engagement (Brautigam, 2009). In this context, two broad narratives dominate literature. The first–often advanced by policymakers and some development economists–emphasizes win-win cooperation, wherein Chinese finance and infrastructure fill investment gaps, stimulate growth, and provide practical alternatives to traditional donors and financing mechanisms (Brautigam, 2009). For example, the Chinese model of engagement is anchored on the FOCAC, which promotes principles of mutual benefit, non-interference, and "win-win" partnership (Alden, Large & Soares de Oliveira, 2008). Notwithstanding that, empirical evidence indicates an asymmetry in outcomes, with African states frequently conceding resource control and regulatory flexibility in exchange for infrastructure and financing (Carmody, Taylor, & Zajontz, 2021).

The second narrative, common amongst critical scholars and investigative journalists, portrays China as a new resource-seeking actor that can reproduce patterns of external dependency and weak governance, particularly in resource sectors such as oil, copper, and coal, where institutional capacity is limited (Brautigam, 2009; Dike, 2024). Brautigam's foundational work remains essential in that she documents the diversity of Chinese actors (state, SOEs, private firms), financing instruments (loans, lines of credit) and the institutional mechanisms (bilateral agreements, FOCAC) shaping engagements (Brautigam, 2009). More recent systematic reviews substantiate the heterogeneity of China's African engagements while underscoring the tendency of Chinese investment to concentrate in resource-rich areas – a pattern that produces distinct governance challenges when host states possess weak regulatory capacity (Dike, 2024). Within Hwange, for instance, Chinese state-owned enterprises such as

Sino–Hydro and Zhongxin Coal Corporation have secured multi-million-dollar coal and power generation contracts–and while these investments contribute to national energy output, ZELA (2023) and Human Rights Watch (2023) document and emphasize extensive environmental degradation, illustrating how resource diplomacy may reproduce exploitative patterns under the guise of development.

As highlighted in preceding arguments, resource diplomacy refers to the strategic pursuit of natural resources through various mechanisms including bilateral relations, trade, and investment arrangements, among others. In the Chinese model, this often involves packages combining infrastructure, commodity off-take agreements and concessionary finance, for instance, infrastructure-for-resources deals. Empirical work indicates that such packages deliver speed and scale (large projects delivered quickly) but sometimes at the expense of transparency and environmental safeguards (RAND, 2025). The pragmatic appeal of these packages is especially strong for states like Zimbabwe that face capital constraints and political isolation in Western financial markets.

Critical studies point to recurring features: (1) presidential or executive-level deals that circumvent ordinary procurement and oversight; (2) complex ownership structures (joint ventures, shell companies) that obscure revenue flows; and (3) an emphasis on extractive projects that can generate immediate export earnings or fuel industrial projects (e.g., steel, power) (Matanzima, 2024). These structural tendencies make resource diplomacy a double-edged sword; that is, it can deliver rapid economic relief but can also magnify governance risks if countervailing institutions (parliaments, auditors, civil society) are weak.

The literature therefore predicts some of the key features observed in Hwange: rapid project implementation, limited local value-addition, opaque contract terms and friction with local communities (Marumahoko et al., 2023). Nonetheless, existing China–Africa literature

has paid far more attention to oil, copper and strategic minerals than to coal–creating a disciplinary gap that this thesis addresses.

Neo-extractivism is a post-2000s development paradigm rooted in Latin American political economy, characterized by renewed state control over extractive industries coupled with persistent dependence on raw commodity exports (Gudynas, 2013; Svampa, 2019). Unlike neoliberal extractivism, which privileges private capital, neo-extractivism legitimizes intensified resource extraction through state-led narratives of social welfare and national sovereignty (Burchardt & Dietz, 2014). At its core, neo-extractivism represents an updated analytical language for describing 21st-century reliance on large-scale resource extraction as a development pathway. Gudynas (2010) articulates ten theses that problematize contemporary extractivism policies: despite rhetorical redistributive claims, state-led extractivism reproduces dependency, concentrates benefits, and imposes ecological costs. This paradigm integrates earlier resource-curse theory with attention to the political and social dimensions of extraction (Gudynas, 2010).

In Africa, the return of extractivism development models, often financed by China, has reignited debates on the "resource curse" (Auty, 2001; Ross, 2015). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Global Witness (2020) revealed how Chinese-backed copper and cobalt projects generated minimal community benefits while enabling elite accumulation. In Mozambique's Tete Province, Castel-Branco (2014) documents how coal mining by Chinese and Brazilian firms displaced thousands of families under state-sanctioned "development" rhetoric. Similarly, in Ghana, Hilson (2017) observes that Chinese participation in small-scale gold mining (galamsey) led to severe river pollution and forest degradation, despite official claims of modernization and employment creation.

Consequently, neo-extractivism literature emphasizes three linked phenomena relevant to Hwange: (a) export-oriented resource rents that do not catalyze domestic industrial transformation; (b) the creation of sacrifice zones where environmental costs are concentrated; and (c) the re-assertion of state authority via resource contracts that frequently bypass democratic scrutiny (Gudynas, 2010; Finkeldey, 2023). These concepts are useful to interrogate whether Zimbabwe's coal focus constitutes a sustainable development pathway or a short-term rent extraction strategy.

Altogether, empirical studies across Latin America and Africa show consistent patterns: extractive booms often produce temporary spikes in GDP or public revenues but rarely sustain diversified economic transformation (resource-curse dynamics) (Manduna, 2026; Matanzima, 2024). In African contexts, foreign firms (including Chinese SOEs and private companies) have been implicated in accelerating resource extraction without guaranteed local beneficiation (value-addition), leaving critical gaps in employment quality, local procurement and long-term industrial linkages (IDEA, comparative governance studies) (Matanzima, 2024a). In many cases, the state positions extractivism as the only immediate route to foreign exchange and industrial inputs, a temptation particularly acute in Zimbabwe after macroeconomic shocks (Manduna, 2026).

While neo-extractivism compellingly captures macro-level risks, several critiques temper its explanatory reach. First, it risks presenting host states as passive bystanders; African governments often actively negotiate terms, select partners, and seek technology transfer (Brautigam, 2009). Second, resource types of matter: the political economy of coal (fuel for domestic power) differs from oil (export commodity) or rare earths (strategic minerals), implying that coal projects can have distinct domestic value chain logics that warrant tailored analysis (Poudineh, 2025). Third, the presence of Chinese capital introduces heterogeneity: Chinese investment patterns differ by firm type (SOE vs private) and by project design (export

vs captive use) (Marumahoko et al., 2023). These nuances advise caution against overgeneralization and motivate the present study's attention to sectoral specificity (coal) and local outcomes in Hwange.

2.6 Environmental Governance in Extractive Contexts

Environmental governance refers to the institutional and procedural mechanisms through which states, markets, and communities regulate environmental use and sustainability (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006). It emphasizes principles of transparency, participation, and accountability (Ostrom, 1990; Young, 1997). In essence, environmental governance encompasses the institutions, legal frameworks, monitoring mechanisms and political practices that regulate resource use, mitigation, remediation and compensation. Key governance elements in extractive contexts include Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), permitting regimes, corporate social responsibility (CSR), community consultation, and post-closure remediation obligations (Campbell, 2009). Robust governance requires transparency, public participation, accountability, and technical capacity to monitor environmental indicators.

A substantial literature documents recurrent governance weaknesses in African mining sectors: weak enforcement of EIAs, political interference in licensing, limited community participation, opaque revenue channels and inadequate remediation (systematic reviews and country case studies). These deficits exacerbate environmental harm because formal rules exist, but enforcement is patchy due to capacity, corruption, or political priorities (Campbell, 2009). Global finance patterns can compound these weaknesses when investors prioritize rapid returns. Hence, the African Union has developed the Africa Mining Vision of 2009 to foster a transparent, equitable and optimal exploitation of mineral resources to underpin broad-based sustainable growth and socio-economic development (African Union, 2009)

Across sub-Saharan Africa, governance failures in the mining sector stem from weak enforcement of environmental laws, inadequate monitoring, and political interference (Hilson & Potter, 2005). In Zambia's Copperbelt, Fraser and Lungu (2007) found that limited state capacity allowed foreign mining firms to bypass environmental compliance. Similarly, in Tanzania's gold mining sector, Lange and Kinyondo (2016) observed that environmental impact assessments (EIAs) are often procedural formalities rather than genuine safeguards.

Empirical assessments of Chinese projects in Africa reveal mixed findings. Early critiques argued that Chinese firms were less rigorous than Western counterparts on environmental safeguards; public finance management; investigations documented projects with insufficient mitigation, limited technology transfer for pollution control, and inadequate community engagement (Brautigam, 2009; Brautigam, 2015; Brautigam & Huang, 2026). Yet more recent research and policy documents suggest incremental improvements: some Chinese firms now incorporate CSR, and Chinese financiers show growing interest in environmental safeguards. For instance, China's policy banks and evolving environmental guidelines), though practice remains uneven (Dike, 2024; RAND, 2025). This mixed evidence implies that the environmental governance outcomes of Chinese investment are mediated by host-state oversight and project design.

2.7 Zimbabwe: A Roadmap

In Zimbabwe, the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) is mandated to regulate mining activities, yet empirical evidence indicates persistent governance deficits. Muchadenyika (2020) attributes this weakness to bureaucratic capture and politicization, whereby environmental oversight is subordinated to political and economic priorities. In Hwange, Togarasei (2023) reports that Chinese mining companies frequently operate without adequate community consultation or EIA compliance. Water contamination in the Deka River and deforestation in Dinde Ward have triggered repeated community protests (CNRG, 2022),

exposing the fragility of environmental governance and the tension between developmentalism and ecological accountability.

Community-based monitoring in Hwange documents concrete environmental harms consistent with governance gaps: the Deka River studies found elevated concentrations of manganese, nickel and arsenic exceeding national and international standards, fish kills, livestock mortality, and community health concerns (Ruppen et al., 2021). Investigative reporting corroborates these findings, documenting dust, land degradation and contested water access (Oxpeckers; Groundwork reporting). Such empirical convergence (scientific monitoring + journalism + community testimony) strengthens the claim that environmental governance failures in Hwange are materially consequential and not merely discursive.

While much of the literature frames communities as victims of extractivism, emerging scholarship underscores their capacity for resistance and agency (Scott, 1985; Escobar, 2008). Community agency theory posits that marginalized groups mobilize collectively through protests, advocacy, and negotiation to reshape the terms of resource extraction (Temper et al., 2015). The literature on resource politics has shifted from viewing communities as passive victims to recognizing their roles as political actors with agency (political ecology, environmental justice). Communities engage in multiple repertoires of contention: protests, litigation, participatory monitoring, alliances with NGOs, and negotiation for benefits. This literature stresses the importance of local knowledge, social capital and transnational advocacy networks in shaping outcomes (Ogude & Mushonga, 2023; Finkeldey, 2023).

Empirical studies across Zimbabwe reveal a spectrum of responses: direct protests and blockades; legal action using constitutional or environmental law; community monitoring generating evidence for advocacy; co-option through jobs and CSR; and everyday adaptation (migration, diversification of livelihoods) (Marumahoko et al., 2023, Matanzimba, 2024,

Matanzima, 2024a, Manduna, 2026). The effectiveness of these strategies depends on legal frameworks, political openness, and the capacity of civil society to mobilize resources and media attention. In contexts of strong executive bargains with foreign investors (as in some China–Africa deals), communities face higher barriers to success but can still achieve concessions through persistent mobilization and evidence-based advocacy. Mining-affected communities have leveraged NGOs to demand corporate accountability (Bushu, 2026). Communities opposed to Chinese-financed coal projects (un)successfully mobilized legal action that halted operations on environmental grounds (Mkodzongi, 2024). . These examples illustrate that local resistance is both a moral and political response to extractive domination.

The literature on community responses to Chinese investments in Zimbabwe is growing but still nascent. Case studies reveal that communities often struggle with firms operating in close partnership with host governments; nonetheless, when communities employ scientific monitoring and media strategies (as in Hwange), they can increase visibility and pressure regulators to act (Ruppen et al., 2021). Comparative analyses suggest that international NGOs and transnational networks can amplify local claims, but success remains contingent on domestic political opportunity structures.

In Hwange, documented community strategies include community-based water monitoring, public protests, media engagement, appeals to regulatory agencies (Ruppen et al., 2021) and investigative reporting. These activities have produced data that challenge official accounts and have, in some instances, pressured regulators and companies to respond, though outcomes have often been partial and slow. The Zimbabwe experience therefore exemplifies both the potential of local agency and its limits when faced with powerful investor–state coalitions. In Zimbabwe, civil society organizations with climate justice oriantation such as the Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) and the Hwange Residents Trust have emerged as critical actors advocating for social, environmental, and ecological justice (CNRG,

2022). Local chiefs have mobilized traditional authorities to oppose forced relocations, while affected villagers have engaged in environmental monitoring and petitions against mining expansion. Despite state repression, these forms of resistance reveal the persistence of local agency within an asymmetrical political economy dominated by state and corporate actors (Mkodzongi, 2022).

2.8 Synthesis and Research Contribution

The reviewed literature reveals several intersecting themes that directly inform and contextualize this study's examination of Sino-Zimbabwean coal relations in Hwange. Firstly, the literature on China–Africa resource diplomacy underscores the heterogeneity and duality of China's engagements on the continent. While China's model of development assistance and investment is often framed as cooperative, evidence suggests that it prioritises speed, infrastructure delivery, and access to strategic minerals (Alden & Wu, 2021; Brautigam, 2020). This approach often sidelines participatory governance and due diligence processes, relying instead on state-to-state agreements that bypass local accountability structures (Power et al., 2012). The outcomes, as highlighted in comparative studies from Zambia's copper sector (Lee, 2017) and Ghana's bauxite industry (Aidoo & Hess, 2015), are heavily mediated by host-state governance capacities—weak regulatory oversight amplifies socio-environmental harm, while robust institutions can moderate negative impacts. In Zimbabwe, this dynamic is magnified by a fragile governance environment characterised by elite capture and limited transparency (Saunders & Mkodzongi, 2021; Takaendesa, 2023).

Secondly, the neo-extractivism framework remains a powerful analytical lens interpreting the trade-offs inherent in mineral-led development. As Gudynas (2013) and Svampa (2019) argue, neo-extractivism predicts that governments in resource-rich developing countries pursue short-term macroeconomic gains—through taxes, royalties, and infrastructure—at the expense of long-term ecological sustainability and social inclusion. In

the case of Hwange, the state's prioritization of coal extraction for industrialization and energy security exemplifies this contradiction: while macroeconomic growth indicators may improve, micro-level realities reflect escalating air pollution, land degradation, and public health crises (CNRG, 2022; ZELA, 2023). Similar patterns are evident in Mozambique's Tete coal basin, where local livelihoods have deteriorated amid large-scale Chinese-led mining expansion (Power et al., 2012).

Thirdly, environmental governance in African extractive economies remains institutionally weak and politically compromised. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), though mandated by law, often function as procedural formalities rather than substantive safeguards (Bosshard, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2023). Regulatory agencies in countries like Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania frequently face political interference, under-funding, and a lack of enforcement capacity. Consequently, extractive operations proceed with minimal environmental accountability, creating localized zones of sacrifice where communities bear disproportionate ecological and health burdens. Empirical reports from Hwange corroborate these systemic governance failures, citing contamination of the Deka River, deforestation, and unrehabilitated mining pits (ZELA, 2023; CNRG, 2022).

Fourthly, the literature emphasizes the significance of community agency and resistance in reshaping extractive outcomes. Contrary to the perception of local communities as passive victims, studies reveal varied strategies of adaptation and resistance—ranging from formal legal mobilization (through NGOs like ZELA) to informal protest, negotiation, and transnational advocacy (Mkodzongi & Lawrence, 2019; Kirshner & Power, 2015). Although such an agency often operates within asymmetrical power structures, it can influence policy reforms, environmental remediation, and corporate behavior. For instance, communities in Kenya's Lamu coal project used legal channels to suspend Chinese-led operations on environmental grounds (Bosshard, 2021). In Hwange, similar patterns of resistance are

emerging as local civil society organizations and affected households mobilize against displacement and pollution.

Taken together, these intersecting literatures illuminate a complex interplay of global, national, and local forces—linking China's strategic ambitions, Zimbabwe's developmental aspirations, and community struggles for justice. The convergence of these themes underscores the analytical necessity of a multi-scalar framework that integrates resource diplomacy, political ecology, and community agency to fully grasp the dynamics of coal extraction in Hwange.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has synthesized multidisciplinary literature that informs the thesis. China–Africa resource diplomacy, neo-extractivism, environmental governance and community resistance together frame the Hwange case. The review demonstrates that while high-level narratives emphasise macroeconomic benefits from Chinese investment, robust empirical evidence, particularly community-based monitoring in Hwange reveals substantial socio-environmental costs and governance deficits. The literature thus both justifies and directs the thesis's empirical inquiry to trace how Sino-Zimbabwean coal engagements are negotiated and implemented, how revenues and benefits are managed, what environmental impacts accrue to local communities, and how those communities respond. Above all, the theoretical framework provides a holistic foundation for understanding the multidimensional nature of Sino-Zimbabwean relations in Hwange's coal sector. Through its integration of geopolitical, economic, institutional, and grassroots perspectives, the framework allows for nuanced analysis of how power, development, and resistance intersect in contemporary African resource politics. The following chapter presents the study's research design and methods.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological framework adopted to investigate the complex dynamics of Sino-Zimbabwean relations in Hwange's coal mining sector from 2015 to 2025. To achieve this, the research required a methodology that captures nuanced perspectives and multi-actor dynamics. The methodology is thus designed to produce an evidence-based understanding of the political economy and lived realities of coal extraction in Hwange. Consequently, the chapter details the research design, approach, sampling strategies, data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations, as well as the limitations of the study and the chapter summary.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The study follows an interpretivist epistemological philosophy and a constructivist approach. Interpretivism, on one hand, holds that social reality is constructed through meanings, perceptions, and interactions (Bryman, 2016). This aligns with the study's aim to understand how different actors, such as state officials, Chinese investors, civil society, and

local communities, interpret and experience coal extraction and its impacts. A constructivist approach, on the other hand, is appropriate because it acknowledges the coexistence of multiple realities and interpretations of the Sino-Zimbabwean partnership (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This research approach is particularly tailored to the research topic for two reasons. On one hand, it allows for the investigation of the real but often unobservable structures and mechanisms–such as international capital flows, state-corporate partnerships, and neo-colonial power relations that generate the actual events and empirical experiences of the "Faustian Bargain" in Hwange's coal mining sector. On the other hand, it acknowledges that the accounts of different stakeholders are partial, requiring critical interpretation to uncover the underlying causal agents underpinning the observed conflicts.

3.3 Research Methodology

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. The study will be guided by qualitative research design so as to know the Sino-Zimbabwe relations and mineral extractions in Hwange district, 2015-2025. Qualitative research is a type of social science research that collects and works with non-numerical data and that seeks to interpret meaning from these data that help us understand social life through the study of targeted populations or places (Crossman, 2019). It uses questionnaires and interviews to collect, analyse, and evaluate data Zohrabi (2013). Bryman (2016) notes that using the qualitative methodology is important as it allows for a deeper exploration of stakeholder's views and it uncovers barriers and unintended consequences through interviews which quantitative methodology cannot uncover alone.

3.4 Research Design

The study adopts a case study research design. According to Yin (2018: 11), a case study design is appropriate as it facilitates an in-depth, contextual and multi-faceted exploration of complex contemporary social phenomena within their real-life context. The case is bounded

as the Sino-Zimbabwean mineral extraction linkage in Hwange from 2015 to 2025. At its core, this design enables the use of multiple data sources to triangulate findings and construct a robust and empirically rich explanation. As the epicenter of Zimbabwe's coal industry and a focal site of bilateral Sino-Zimbabwean investment, Hwange represents a critical case study for understanding broader trilateral patterns of resource diplomacy, neo-extractivism, and environmental governance in Africa. As a result, this research design facilitates the integration of multiple data sources–including interviews, policy documents, environmental reports, and community testimonies–to build a holistic and comprehensive analysis

3.5 Population and Sample

The study targets actors directly and/or indirectly involved in or affected by coal extraction in Hwange, including local community members (particularly those in affected wards), traditional leaders, environmental NGOs (e.g., ZELA, CNRG), local government officials, representatives from Chinese mining firms, officials from the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development, and the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) as well as journalists and environmental activists monitoring extractive industries. This diverse population ensures representation of multiple perspectives across state, corporate, and community levels.

3.6 Sampling Methods

Given the qualitative nature of the research, the study utilizes purposive sampling to select participants who possess specific knowledge or experience relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that seeks depth over breadth. Initial participants are identified through secondary documentary sources and publicly available contacts. Snowball sampling is also employed strategically, whereby initial participants refer the researcher to other key informants within their networks (Bryman, 2016). Snowballing is particularly useful for accessing hard-to-reach populations, such as company

insiders or wary community members. Research participants will include community members – selected from at least three villages most affected by coal mining operations- and NGO representatives from organizations engaged in environmental advocacy or policy analysis. In addition, government officials from EMA, the Ministry of Mines, and local councils will be complemented by representatives of Chinese companies to capture the investor perspective on environmental and economic issues. Tentatively, the researcher will interview an estimated 15-20 key informants and 30-35 local community members and conduct 2 FGDs.

3.7 Data Collection Methods

The study applied multiple qualitative methods to enhance data richness and triangulation strengthening the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research data. As a result, data were collected through the utilization and triangulation of three primary methods and one secondary method to guarantee validity and reliability.

In research, semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility to explore emerging themes while maintaining focus on key research questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). In essence, the interview method was central to capturing the perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of the major players in the coal-mining sector in Hwange. Interviews were conducted using a combination of English and local languages such as IsiNdebele and Nambya. Key interview themes included perceptions of Sino-Zimbabwean partnerships, revenue distribution and benefit sharing, environmental impacts and governance enforcement; as well as community adaptation, resistance, and coping mechanisms.

Two FGDs (composed of about 8-10 participants each) were conducted among local community members to explore collective perceptions of environmental and social change. Balanced in terms of gender demographics, these group interactions revealed community narratives and shared experiences often absent and generally overlooked in individual

interviews. In addition, interview guides were tailored to each stakeholder identified but designed to further explore common themes, ranging from community members' views on the benefits and costs of Chinese mining operations in their respective locations to the tripartite nature of state-corporate-community relations, as well as accountability mechanisms and experiences of environmental and social change.

Secondary data was also very important in complementing data from other sources. Secondary data was gathered through reports and investigative research from various sources, including environmental community-based organizations, NGOs, EMA, as well as the Hwange RDC. Altogether, this data contributed to triangulation andstrengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

This study adopted the framework established by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Instead of using quantitative measures like validity and reliability, this research was guided by the qualitative principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. A rigorous and systematic strategy was integrated into the research design to fulfil each of these criteria, thereby ensuring the integrity and persuasiveness of the findings.

First, credibility was achieved by ensuring the findings n accurately reflected reality as perceived by the participants. The primary strategy for this is triangulation, which means using multiple sources of information to cross-check the results (Bryman, 2016). In this study, interview data werecompared juxtaposed with insights from official documents and direct participant observations. This helped in crafting a consistent and well-supported understanding. Additionally, member checking was extensively utilized. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), in member checking, the key interpretations are shared with a selection of participants to confirm that their views have been correctly understood and represented.

The second principle, transferability, refers to the degree to which the findings can be useful to other contexts. Since the goal was deep understanding rather than broad generalization, this study aimed to provide a thick description of the research setting by offering a detailed and rich account of the Hwange context, the participants involved, and the specific processes studied. By providing this level of detail, other researchers can assess how relevant the findings might be to their own research scenarios.

Moving on to the third principle, dependability – it ensured that the research process is logical, traceable, and consistent. This was maintained by keeping a clear and transparent record of the entire research process. This included documenting how participants were selected, how interviews were conducted, and, crucially, the step-by-step process of how the data were analyzed. This transparent approach to research allowed others to audit and understand the process.

Lastly, confirmability is about demonstrating that the findings arise from the data itself and not from the personal biases or preferences of the researcher. To ensure this, the researcher practiced reflexivity by keeping a journal to reflect on how their own background and perspectives might influence the research. Furthermore, a clear audit trail was maintained, linking the final conclusions back to the original data, so that anyone can see how the interpretations were systematically developed.

Over and above all, through the deliberate application of triangulation, thick description, audit trails, reflexivity, and member checking, this research design rigorously addressed the criteria of trustworthiness. This multifaceted strategy ensured that the study's conclusions regarding Sino-Zimbabwean relations in Hwange's coal mining sector are credible, well-grounded, and the result of a transparent and dependable research process.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

According to Creswell and Poth (2013), validity refers to the degree to which a sample of test items accurately reflects the test's content. Any measurement device must have it as a necessary component. It has to do with how suitable the tools used are in terms of methodological soundness. It shows how well the data collection and analysis for the study capture the reality being studied (Mahajan,2017). Assessing the quality and acceptability of research is significantly influenced by its validity. To gather primary data, assess the study's validity of the study, and employ the panel of experts' judgment, semi-structured interviews were used. Based on the suggestions that were made, additional questions were included.

Reliability is the consistency, stability and repeatability of research measurement or findings, (Taherdoost,2022). Creswell and Poth (2023), notes that a reliable method produces similar results under consistent conditions, ensuring that the data is dependable and free from random error. Mahajan (2017) comments that data that is dependable, genuine, trustworthy, sure, infallible, authentic, and reputable. Reliability was ensured through structured interview guides, recording of how participants were selected, interviewed and analyzed to allow replication, sharing preliminary findings with a few participants to confirm accuracy and triangulation by comparing interviews with policy documents and academic studies.

3.9 Data presentation and analysis

Data presentation can be defined as the organized and systematic display of collected information in a visual, textual or tabular format to facilitate understanding, analysis and communication of research findings (Tufte,2020). Data is going to be presented using policy implementation timelines and qualitative analysis. The information that was gathered from the questions and interviews was utilized to determine the participants' experience, knowledge, and perspectives on the study. Inductive reasoning is a type of data analysis in which the researcher

takes detailed observations and then derives conclusions about larger, more general occurrences. Data analysis is the process of systematically examining, cleaning, transforming and interpreting data to extract meaningful insights and to answer research questions. In this case, data analysis includes organizing and interpreting qualitative data to identify patterns, trends and key findings.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

This research involved significant ethical implications, which were addressed rigorously in four interrelated steps. Firstly, written informed consent (Sivanadarajah et al., 2017), and, where necessary, verbal recorded consent was obtained from all participants. Clear information explained the purpose of research, procedures, risks, and the right to withdraw at any time. Secondly, given the politically sensitive nature of the topic, ensuring the confidentiality of data and the anonymity of participants was paramount. All identifying information was removed from the final thesis and ensuing publications. More importantly, pseudonyms were used for individuals and, if necessary, for specific organizations. Thirdly, to minimize harm, the researcher was acutely aware of the prevailing power dynamics and potential for retribution. As such, interview questions were framed in such a way to avoid putting participants at legal or political risk. Lastly, with reference to data management and security – all digital data was stored on password-protected and encrypted devices. Physical documents and transcripts were kept in a locked cabinet, and data will be retained for a period of ten years after project completion – as per standard university protocols.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the research design and procedures that guided the study. While employing a qualitative case study approach grounded in interpretivist epistemology. The

combination of interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and observation ensured a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between resource diplomacy, environmental governance, and community agency. The following chapter focuses on data presentation, interpretation and analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings gathered from fieldwork, documentary analysis, key informant interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions conducted in Hwange District in 2025. The presentation is organized according to the study's four specific themes, and these are: Sino–Zimbabwean relations with a special focus on coal extraction in Hwange; revenues and benefits from the coal sector are utilized; strategies employed by local

communities, civil society, and state institutions to resist, negotiate, or adapt to coal resource extraction in Hwange.

4.2 Sino-Zimbabwean Relations in the Context of Coal Extraction in Hwange

Across community interviews, there was a widespread perception that Chinese companies came to Hwange primarily for resource extraction, with limited commitment to long-term local development. However, in contrast, government officials in Hwange explicitly linked coal production to national sovereignty, arguing that energy independence strengthens Zimbabwe's developmental state ambitions. This reflects neo-extractivism ideological dimension, where extraction is framed as a patriotic project, even when communities experience environmental injustices and harm. Nonetheless, locals argued that coal mining operations only serve the interests of the elite at the expense of the local population. For example, one elderly respondent stated:

> "The Chinese are here for coal, that is the truth. They are not here for us. If the coal finishes today, they will pack their things and go. What will this leave us with? We really have nothing to show of the coal being extracted daily from our community"

Furthermore, many participants linked Chinese investment to state-level agreements between Harare and Beijing. Respondents frequently described these relationships as unequal:

> "Our government needs money, so they agree to anything. China has power, and money that we do not have and desperately need to finance our development programs as a country." (Local Resident, Interview)

However, a minority of business-oriented participants viewed China's presence more positively, citing job creation and energy supply benefits:

> "At least the Chinese are doing something. Some companies closed years ago. They revived operations here. Most of our people were taken back to those mines and are getting a living from those jobs" (Small Business Owner)

In addition, interviews revealed limited community knowledge of the specific terms of the mining agreements. Participants repeatedly emphasized that no consultation took place during contract negotiations:

> "We only saw machines arrive. No one came to explain what deal was signed." (Young Adult, FGD 2)

Local government officials also reported they did not have full details:

> "Even as district officers, we do not always see the agreements. They come from the central government and all the documents signed." (District Official)

Consequently, it was noted that this lack of transparency contributed to feelings of exclusion and mistrust. In essence, the findings reveal that China's involvement in Hwange's coal sector cannot be understood in isolation from the strategic patterns of resource diplomacy that have characterized Chinese engagements across the African continent. Across interviews, particularly with the key inormants including the local councilors, district officials, and former Ministry of Mines employees, respondents described Chinese coal investment not only as part of a bigger national plan, tied to Zimbabwe's energy security needs and Beijing's geopolitical positioning but also tied to the ruling party's financial and political survival.

Community members and local leaders consistently framed Chinese firms as arriving with strong backing from Harare and operating within a political environment in which agreements are mediated at the highest levels of state-to-state cooperation. This perception aligns with scholarship showing that Chinese resource investment is typically facilitated through government-to-government frameworks such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and bilateral mineral agreements (Gu, 2026; Eisenman & Shinn, 2023). These frameworks often emphasize speed, scale and long-term resource access, sometimes at the expense of granular, community-level consultations.

In Hwange, this strategic logic manifested in visible patterns. Local people noted that mining licenses were issued rapidly, environmental impact assessments (EIAs) were completed fast, and Chinese firms often arrived with equipment already on site before meaningful community consultations occurred. District officials quietly acknowledged that pressure to fast-track development processes came from central government ministries, illustrating how resource diplomacy creates a top-down governance environment which has undermined environmental, ecological and social justice outcomes in Hwange District. Community participation is central to achieving just extractivism. EIA, in this context, serves to ensure community participation. This process ensures that the fundamental principles of environmental justice, including recognition, restoration, distributive, participation, and capabilities justice (Bullard, 1996; Schlosberg, 2007), are incorporated into mining operations.

The study's findings also reveal that local actors understand Chinese investment as part of Zimbabwe's attempts to leverage international partnerships to overcome Western sanctions and economic isolation. To be clear, Western countries, particularly Washington, Brussels, and London among others, disinvested their capital from Zimbabwe after disagreements over a variety of issues, including property and human rights (Moyo et al., 2020). In interviews, villagers frequently described Chinese investment not as a local development project but as a national political alliance. This reflects that communities felt structurally excluded from decision-making. This exclusion reflects a broader pattern in China–Africa relations, in which national elites and foreign investors negotiate deals that produce uneven benefits across scales. The exclusion meant that the distribution of coal extraction benefits and burdens was not evenly shared. The community bears a larger share of burdens than benefits. Thus, the findings confirm the first theoretical proposition of the study: Chinese resource diplomacy shapes local extractive projects by creating governance conditions, particularly speed, elite-driven approval

processes, and political shielding that influence how mining operations unfold at the community level.

4.3 Socio-Economic Benefits and Environmental Impact of Chinese Coal Mining

The research findings reveal a consistent pattern of short-term macro gains vis-a-vis long-term socio-environmental burdens. At the national level, officials described the coal sector as a pillar of energy security and industrial expansion under Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 framework, a roadmap for achieving its ambitions for middle-income status. To this end, the Chinese firms were praised for injecting capital, restoring outdated infrastructure, and boosting electricity supply. However, at the community level, the study findings reveal a stark contradiction: villagers consistently described the exact opposite: environmental degradation, loss of grazing land, reduced water quality, declining agricultural productivity, and persistent dust pollution affecting health punctuate their everyday lives. This contradiction embodies a core neo-extractivism tension: the state's celebration of macro-level gains masks the micro-level externalization of social and ecological costs onto peripheral communities.

Firstly, one of the key issues emerging from the research findings concerns the opportunities and frustrations associated with Chinese coal mining operations in Hwange District. While Chinese-operated mines have created employment, respondents described jobs as temporary, low-paying, and insecure:

> "People are hired today and fired tomorrow. No contracts, no safety equipment." (Former Mine Worker)

Several workers reported language barriers, strict supervision, and limited opportunities for advancement:

> "The Chinese supervisors shout at us in their language. We do not know what they are saying." (Current Employee)

Women emphasised that they largely remained excluded from skilled jobs, with only a few employed as cooks, cleaners or ticketing clerks. Thus, the Chinese capital has gender-injustice outcomes. From a capabilities justice perspective (Schlosberg, 2007), coal mining in Hwange District should focus not only on the distribution of goods but also on the transformability effect of those goods for local communities. This is particularly relevant when focusing on women. The contamination of Water bodies, which are ostensibly scarce in Hwange District, located in agro-ecological regions 4 and 5, means that women will bear an extra burden. In this context, offering them sustainable job opportunities not only alleviates burdens but also ensures a flourishing life for women within coal mining communities.

Secondly, regarding revenue flows and benefit sharing, respondents reported feeling excluded. Across groups, respondents said they did not know how revenue from the mines was used:

> "Coal leaves every day. But schools still have no roofs, clinics have no medicines." (Ward Councillor)

Some respondents believed elite capture was occurring:

> "The money benefits those in offices, not us who live with the pollution." (Youth FGD Member)

Furthermore, environmental pollution and degradation were reported to be one of the most devastating impacts of Chinese mining operations. Environmental impacts were the most frequently mentioned concerns in interviews and FGDs. That local communities feel entitled to profits from privately owned and operated coal mines in Hwange District reveal a disconnect between policy and practice. For the avoidance of doubt, the community share ownership trust established under the now-defunct Indigenization and Empowerment Act is not operationalized in Hwange District coal mines. It stipulated that the community should own 10% of mine. This was obviously meant to cushion the community against environmental injustices and channel the profits towards community development, including schools and clinics. Additionally, the

complaints reveal that the EIA processes were not done comprehensively and genuinely. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is not legislated in Zimbabwe. Thus, the role of building local infrastructure and providing social amenities is shared by both the central and local governments. These private companies, in turn, are expected to pay their taxes to the government. Respondents consistently highlighted the following issues:

a) Water contamination

Villagers in Makwika and Mwemba areas described changes in both taste and color of water:

> "Our borehole water used to be clear, now it is brownish. We think it is the mine." (Village Head)

Women—who are primarily responsible for water collection—emphasized increased burdens:

> "We walk further now because our usual wells are polluted." (Woman, FGD 3)

Community testimonies about water discoloration, foul smells from rivers, and skin irritations after bathing point to systemic failure in water quality monitoring. When villagers reported pollution, officials either delayed inspection or claimed that test results were "within acceptable limits," generating mistrust. EMA's reactive rather than preventive approach allowed environmental damage to accumulate without being addressed. These communities also reported increased stillbirths among their livestock after the livestock drank this water. Considering the centrality of livestock, that is goats, sheep and cattle, to the community and households, their losses attributable to drinking contaminated water are an injustice. In Addition, these communities relied on aquatic life for relish and vending, but this is no longer possible, as these species are now extinct in the district. This ecological crime brings the questions of environmental policy and governance to scrutiny. In particular, EMA's failure and lack of whipping of Chinese miners reveal its limits. EMA officials revealed minimal funding

and a lack of legal and political support from the central government. The Local RDC is further constrained by its subordinate role to the central government. Ultimately, the environmental catastrophe unfolding in Hwange is left unabated.

b) Air pollution

Residents living near haulage roads and processing plants cited recurrent dust clouds, constant coal smoke, and breathing difficulties among children and the elderly.

> "When trucks pass, the whole house shakes, and dust enters through the windows. Children cough all the time." (Mother of Three)

Interviews and observations showed that dust was the most universally cited grievance. Yet there were no systematic dust-suppression mechanisms in place, and air-quality monitoring equipment was reported as broken or unavailable. These systems are required by law in Zimbabwe. That they are not in place reveals collusion with those in power. This confirms academic findings that air pollution governance in Southern African mining zones is chronically weak.

c) Land degradation and blasting effects

Communities reported devastating land degradation and cracks in houses due to blasting:

> "Our walls have cracked. When we complain, they tell us blasting is normal." (Homeowner)

Farmers noted reduced crop yields due to dust settling on fields. Thus, this undermines local communities' agrarian livelihoods.

d) Deforestation

Several respondents reported loss of grazing areas and forests:

> "Our cattle now walk far to get grass. The mine cleared everything." (Livestock Farmer)

Overall, villagers consistently reported worsening environmental conditions: polluted rivers, dust-covered crops, cracked homes from blasting, and livestock illnesses. These experiences were not merely discomforts; they reshaped livelihoods, gender roles, and household economies. Women faced increased labor burdens as they walked further for water, tended relocated gardens, and managed health issues from dust-related illnesses.

Some families reported displacement without adequate compensation:

> "They said we must move for expansion. We were given very little money. We cannot build a house." (Displaced Family)

Traditional leaders highlighted cultural impacts when graves had to be relocated:

> "Moving ancestors is not simple. It brings spiritual problems." (Traditional Leader)

The findings reveal that Hwange's environmental governance system is characterized by regulatory gaps, enforcement weaknesses, fragmented institutional responsibilities, and political interference, all of which enable the unchecked expansion of Chinese coal mining. In general, most respondents reflected on the institutional incapacity of regulatory bodies to address the negativite impacts arising from Chinese mining operations. Local EMA officials acknowledged capacity constraints:

> "We have a small team for a very large area. We cannot monitor everything." (EMA Officer)

Furthermore, communities perceived the government as reluctant to confront Chinese companies:

> "If it was a local company, it would have been fined long ago. With the Chinese, things are different." (NGO Environmental Activist)

Moreover, respondents viewed EIA processes as procedural, not participatory. For instance, respondents consistently reported not being engaged in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) consultations:

"EIA meetings happen in towns, not here. They just sign papers." (Community Leader)

Environmental NGOs stated that EIAs were often "copy-and-paste documents" with limited local content. Notably, many respondents claimed that EIAs were either incomplete, outdated, or poorly communicated to communities. Several community members reported attending "consultation meetings" only after mining had already begun. Zimbabwe's Environmental Management Agency (EMA) officials acknowledged resource constraints, limited staffing, and pressure to approve projects linked to strategic investors. This situation aligns with regional studies showing that EIAs often degenerate into box-ticking exercises in contexts of high political influence and low capacity. Officials openly admitted—off the record—that challenging Chinese firms could "create problems," signaling political interference and fear of repercussions. This reflects a governance environment where regulatory institutions lack autonomy from central political directives. In sum, environmental governance failures were not random or exceptional; they were structural, tied to institutional weakness, political pressure, and inadequate public accountability mechanisms.

4.4 Community Agency, Resistance and Coping Strategies

Communities reported submitting complaints to district authorities, EMA, and the Mines Ministry. Responses were described as slow and ineffective:

"We write letters, but nothing changes." (Village Secretary)

NGOs confirmed that they had received multiple community petitions regarding environmental violations. Some communities attempted direct negotiations with Chinese managers:

> "We met them and asked for a borehole. They promised, but nothing happened." (Community Committee Member)

Others reported partial successes, such as donations of school supplies or food hampers. Youth groups described engaging in peaceful demonstrations:

> "We marched to the gate because the dust was too much. The company sent security to chase us away." (Youth Leader).

Fear of retaliation was widely expressed among community members and research participants. The above responses reveal pockets of community agency within the extractive sector. The environmental and climate justice movements within the community in the mold of CSOs are central to amplifying the voices of the subalterns. It is important to note that Zimbabwe's CSO environment is closed. In this context, it is increasingly becoming difficult to operate in securitized environments, especially those that concern Chinese investments that are treated as a national security issue. While the study findings show a negative correlation between environment and Chinese capital, the focus is on the environmental movements to empower communities and amplify their calls for environmental justice.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

This study explored Sino-Zimbabwe relations and mineral extraction in Hwange District from 2015 to 2025. The study revealed the limits of China-Zimbabwe extraction, particularly those related to environmental, social, and ecological injustices. Coal is a fossil fuel, but it is deeply embedded within Zimbabwe's economy as a major contributor to its energy grid. It also contributes to other industrial processes, including making fertilizers, a process that the government of Zimbabwe has already started. This study's findings highlight the inequities long tied to fossil fuel capitalism. The injustices, including contamination of water sources, displacement of local communities, loss of livelihoods, and the destruction of the local ecosystem, have long punctuated fossil fuel extraction, including coal. This study therefore

feeds into the ongoing debates on fuel energy inequities (Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2022; Riofrancos, 2025).

Zimbabwe's coal accumulation strategy is also marked by weak environmental governance that completely disregards subalterns. Environmental watchdogs, including the EMA, the council's local environmental arm, and CSO, are unable to protect the environment due to financial, policy, and legal constraints. This researcher argues that this is a deliberate, calculated move by the government to protect Chinese capital with the broader intention of collecting rents. Much has been written about rentier states, their discontents, and their disregard for the environment (Yates, 1996; Yates, 2015; Sanghera & Satybaldieva, 2021). The focus here is on the government of Zimbabwe's accumulation strategy, particularly regarding its extractive sector. Its prioritization of Chinese capital at the expense of the community makes it fall short of its social justice obligation.

As shown by the study findings, little has been done by the government of Zimbabwe to protect labor rights in Chinese-operated mines. From a Gramscian perspective, China leverages its global diplomatic power to silence the Zimbabwean government, which needs its capital and global diplomatic coverage amidst human rights accusations from Western countries. What emerges here is a lack of agency among Zimbabwe's policymakers (Moyo & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2025). This is fundamental. The Chinese have argued that they will respect the local laws and will not interfere in local affairs, as they adopt the Bandung Conference principles in their international relations.

Communities in Hwange are not passive victims of extractive expansion; rather, their responses reveal a complex matrix of adaptation, resistance, negotiation, and everyday coping strategies (Marumahoko et al., 2023). Households adopted various coping mechanisms, building makeshift dust barriers, trekking long distances for clean water, shifting agricultural

plots—but these strategies illustrate structural vulnerability rather than resilience. Respondents frequently expressed fatigue and frustration, questioning the sustainability of these efforts. The social, environmental and ecological injustices resulting from coal exploitation in Hwange weaken the people's adaptive capacity, particularly regarding climate change. Hwange is an ecologically dry area; it receives little rainfall and has no perennial rivers. The contamination of the Dekar River is a major injustice.

4.6 Summary of Findings

The qualitative findings presented in this chapter illustrate a complex and multifaceted picture of community experiences with Chinese coal-mining operations in Hwange. The data reveal mixed but cautious attitudes toward Chinese investment, with some respondents acknowledging the economic benefits while many others expressed concerns about the motivations, transparency and long-term implications of China's growing presence. Evidence of widespread environmental harm—including water contamination, air pollution, land degradation and ecological disruption—featured prominently across interviews and FGDs, highlighting the tangible impacts of mining activities on daily life and local livelihoods.

Findings also indicate weak governance and limited benefits for host communities, with respondents repeatedly emphasizing gaps in environmental monitoring, the inadequacy of regulatory enforcement and a lack of transparency around revenue flows and benefit-sharing mechanisms. In this vacuum, communities have developed varied but constrained forms of agency, including adaptation strategies, informal negotiations, petitions and occasional protests—though these efforts are undermined by power imbalances, fear of reprisals and diminishing civic space.

Overall, the findings point to a sharp disconnect between national-level agreements promoting Chinese investment as a driver of development and the local realities of

environmental degradation, socio-economic hardship and limited accountability. These insights set the stage for the next chapter, which will move beyond descriptive findings to provide a deeper analysis anchored in the study's theoretical framework.

4.7 Chapter Summary

The study shows that Hwange's coal sector is shaped by an intersection of global geopolitics, national political economy, institutional weaknesses, and local survival strategies. The evidence gathered from interviews, focus groups and observations paints a complex but coherent picture of how Chinese coal mining is unfolding in Hwange. Communities exhibit a blend of caution and pragmatism in their perceptions of Chinese investment. Across the research sites, villagers consistently described deteriorating water quality, increasing dust levels, noise pollution and the disruption of grazing and farming land. These experiences, which align with independent environmental assessments, highlight the depth of ecological strain associated with expanding coal operations. The following chapter proffers the summary, conclusion and recommendations for this research.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the summary, conclusion, recommendations and areas for further research. Suggested recommendations will be based on the research findings that were carried out and data collected.

5.2 Summary

Chapter one presented the study aim, objectives and questions. This study examined how Chinese-backed coal extraction in Hwange shapes the interplay among resource diplomacy, environmental governance, and community agency in Zimbabwe. Study Objectives were to identify the defining characteristics of Sino-Zimbabwean relations in the context of coal extraction in Hwange between 2015 and 2025?; to investigate how revenues and economic benefits from the Hwange coal sector are managed and distributed at national and local levels?; to examine how the macro-economic gains of coal extraction contrast with the socio-environmental costs experienced by communities in Hwange?; and lastly to evaluate the strategies employed by local communities, civil society, and state institutions to resist, negotiate, or adapt to coal resource extraction in Hwange. Consequently, the study questions were: What are the defining characteristics of Sino-Zimbabwean relations in the context of coal extraction in Hwange between 2015 and 2025?; How are revenues and economic benefits from the Hwange coal sector managed and distributed at national and local levels?; In what ways do the macro-economic gains of coal extraction contrast with the socio-environmental costs experienced by communities in Hwange? and What strategies have local communities, civil society, and state actors employed to resist, negotiate, or adapt to Chinese-led coal mining activities?

Chapter Two synthesises extensive scholarly work on four intersecting bodies of literature—resource diplomacy, neo-extractivism, environmental governance, and community agency—while also incorporating green trade theory and liberal theory to expand analytical breadth. It illustrates how China's resource diplomacy is shaped by its pursuit of energy security, strategic partnerships, and infrastructural footprints, often resulting in asymmetric bargaining conditions in host countries. Neo-extractivist scholars such as Gudynas, Bebbington, and Svampa provide a lens for understanding how states embrace extractive growth while externalizing environmental and social costs to peripheral communities. Environmental governance literature reveals persistent regulatory weaknesses in African extractive sectors, including poor enforcement of Environmental Impact Assessments, political interference, and fragmented institutional mandates.

The literature on community agency shows that affected populations are not passive victims; rather, they deploy adaptation, resistance, and advocacy strategies—although their success depends on political space, civil society alliances, and access to resources. The chapter also integrates green trade theory and liberal theory to illuminate debates on sustainable development, market integration, and the contradictions between global environmental norms and national development imperatives.

Theoretical gaps are identified, including limited coal-specific analyses, inadequate micro-level evidence from Chinese-backed operations, and insufficient attention to how communities mobilise under conditions of authoritarianism and resource dependency. The chapter concludes with a robust conceptual framework that explains why Chinese investments thrive politically, why environmental harms persist, and how communities navigate structural constraints.

Chapter Three explains the methodological design underpinning the study, grounded in a qualitative case study approach that captures the complexity of lived experiences and governance dynamics in Hwange. The chapter outlines the research paradigm, sampling strategy, data collection tools (interviews, FGDs, document review, and observation), and the rationale for choosing qualitative methods—especially their suitability for capturing socio-ecological life-worlds, under-reported impacts, contested narratives, and political sensitivities. It presents detailed interview guides, FGD protocols, and ethical safeguards applied throughout the fieldwork, including informed consent, confidentiality, reflexivity, and participant protection.

The chapter elaborates on triangulation as a method for validating evidence from multiple sources, including community testimonies, government records, NGO reports, and observational data. It also outlines the analytic process—coding, thematic analysis, and interpretation patterns aligned to the four research objectives. Limitations such as access restrictions, political sensitivity, and time constraints are acknowledged, together with the ethical considerations required when researching vulnerable communities exposed to environmental risks. The chapter positions the methodology as rigorous, grounded, and sensitive to the politics of extractive research.

Chapter Four presents empirical findings without analysis, offering a textured, human-centred depiction of lived realities in Hwange. The chapter chronicles diverse community perceptions of Chinese investments—ranging from hope for employment to fear of environmental degradation and cultural disruption. Respondents described intensifying dust pollution, water contamination, land degradation, noise disturbances, and wildlife displacement. Data reveal a pronounced deterioration in public health, with children and the elderly disproportionately affected by respiratory and waterborne illnesses.

The chapter further documents governance failures: weak enforcement of environmental regulations, non-compliance with EIAs, politicized oversight, and limited transparency around revenues and community benefits. It highlights scant employment opportunities for locals, exploitative labour conditions, and unequal distribution of economic gains. Community agencies emerge strongly through local activism, NGO involvement, informal negotiations with mine personnel, and adaptation strategies such as relocating gardens, building makeshift barriers, or walking long distances for clean water.

Village leaders, women, youth, and civil society actors' express frustration at shrinking civic space and state responsiveness. Despite this, communities remain resilient, articulating clear demands for fairness, accountability, and environmental protection. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of key themes: mixed attitudes toward Chinese firms, widespread environmental harm, governance fragility, limited socio-economic benefits, and adaptive yet constrained local agency.

Data is also interpreted through the theoretical framework, producing a nuanced and multidimensional analysis. Resource diplomacy explains how Chinese firms secure political protection, fast-tracked licences, and favourable contract terms, often resulting in weak regulatory scrutiny. The findings confirm neo-extractivist patterns in which the state prioritises revenue, energy security and geopolitical alliances at the expense of local welfare, thereby reproducing longstanding extractive inequalities.

Environmental governance illuminates how institutional fragmentation, political interference, and regulatory laxity enable unchecked ecological damage. The study shows that while laws exist on paper, enforcement is inconsistent, reactive, and subject to elite influence. Micro-level socio-environmental harms—including polluted rivers, destroyed grazing lands,

health burdens, and livelihood disruptions—reveal the hidden costs of Zimbabwe's political-economic dependency on Chinese capital.

The chapter also reveals community agency as both adaptive and resistant. Communities mobilize through protest, petitioning, monitoring, and forging alliances with NGOs; however, their efforts are constrained by power asymmetries, intimidation, and limited legal remedies. Comparative insights from South Africa and Zambia further contextualize the Hwange experience, demonstrating that while macroeconomic benefits may accrue at national level, local populations often shoulder environmental and social costs. The findings collectively support the thesis argument that Sino-Zimbabwean resource relations constitute a *"Faustian Bargain*"—one in which short-term gains are exchanged for deep, long-term socio-ecological vulnerabilities.

The recommendations section provides detailed proposals addressing policy reform, strengthening environmental governance, community rights, and investor accountability. Key recommendations include renegotiating mining contracts for transparency, enhancing EIA enforcement, establishing community benefit-sharing mechanisms, integrating independent monitoring, strengthening civic space, empowering local institutions, and aligning extractive activities with sustainability norms and green trade principles. The chapter concludes by underscoring the need for a re-imagined resource governance model—one that centres communities, embeds accountability, and ensures that extraction contributes to long-term social and ecological justice.

5.3 Conclusions

1. Structural Alignment, Not Coincidence: The developments in Hwange reflect an alignment of incentives and constraints across scales—international partnerships, national policy

priorities, institutional capacities, and community strategies—that together shape outcomes. The pattern is systemic rather than accidental.

2. Policy Choices Determine Distribution: How states and investors choose to structure deals, regulatory oversight, and benefit-sharing mechanisms is decisive: different administrative and contractual choices would have yielded different distributions of costs and benefits.

3. Institutional Gaps Amplify Externalities: Where oversight, monitoring and accountability are weak, resource extraction accelerates material harms and social disruption. Institutional design and resourcing therefore operate as primary mediators of extractive impact.

4. Agency Within Constraint: Despite constrained political space and power asymmetries, communities and intermediary organisations exercise meaningful agency—producing evidence, mobilizing claims, and influencing incremental remedies—even if they fall short of systemic transformation.

5. Transition Imperative: Coal-based pathways that do not integrate strict environmental safeguards and credible transition planning risk locking the locality into long-term ecological and public-health liabilities that will outlast short-term macroeconomic gains.

5.4 Recommendations

The findings from this study demonstrate that the challenges surrounding Chinese-backed coal extraction in Hwange do not stem from isolated failures but from a systemic configuration of governance gaps, asymmetric power relations, regulatory weaknesses, and the absence of structured mechanisms for community participation and environmental protection. Accordingly, the recommendations presented here emphasize the need for holistic reforms that strengthen institutional capacity, enhance transparency, establish enforceable accountability

measures, and create meaningful development pathways for affected communities. These proposals are oriented toward transforming extractive relations from opaque, short-term transactions into sustainable and equitable development frameworks. Against this recap, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. With reference to the Government of Zimbabwe, as represented by the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development, the study recommends the strengthening of multi-level governance structures through the harmonization of national, provincial, and local policies as well as the clarification of institutional mandates and the improvement of coordination mechanisms.
2. To provincial and local government authorities, as well as community lobby groups and organizations, the study recommends the enhancement of inclusive stakeholder participation through the institutionalization of community consultations and deliberative forums and ensuring meaningful involvement of civil society and non-state actors in decision making to promote community development and corporate social responsibility. For example, establishing multi-stakeholder oversight committees—comprising local officials, community representatives, EMA officers, and company delegates—would institutionalize dialogue, ensure regular review of monitoring results, and provide structured engagement platforms for grievance handling. Local authorities also require capacity building in contract negotiation, procurement oversight, and project management, reducing the risk that they become overshadowed by more powerful national agencies and foreign investors.
3. To the ministry responsible for environment and wildlife conservation and largely represented by EMA in such matters, strengthening environmental oversight is equally imperative. For instance, EMA requires enhanced statutory authority, resources, and autonomy to conduct regular audits, issue penalties, and impose stop-work orders when

environmental violations occur. The study demonstrated the inadequacy of current monitoring, which relies heavily on company-generated reports. To remedy this weakness, EMA should institute rapid response environmental monitoring units equipped with independent testing capabilities and backed by updated legal provisions that introduce stricter sanctions for non-compliance. EIAs must be made publicly accessible, accompanied by mandatory follow-up audits and disclosure of monitoring results. Such reforms would close the recurrent gap between regulatory intentions and actual enforcement.

4. Lastly, Chinese investors and coal-mining companies, for their part, must transition from minimal compliance to proactive adherence to internationally recognized environmental and social standards. Adoption of robust Environmental and Social Management Systems (ESMS), aligned with international performance standards or similar frameworks, should form the baseline of responsible investment. For instance, public disclosure of ESMS documents, baseline data, and third-party audit reports would enhance trust and verify compliance. Furthermore, companies should negotiate legally binding Community Development Agreements (CDAs) that specify mutual obligations, grievance mechanisms, and benefit-sharing commitments.

5.5 Areas for Further Research

1. Future researchers with access to complete contract annexes, tax records, and corporate financial disclosures could conduct detailed forensic accounting to map precisely how revenues move across state institutions, private actors, and local authorities. Comparative studies across African coal regions—such as Mozambique's Tete province or coalfields in South Africa—would enrich theoretical and empirical perspectives by assessing whether governance patterns observed in Hwange are unique or symptomatic

of broader regional dynamics under Chinese investment. Another important frontier involves longitudinal public health studies.

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Annexures

Appendices

Appendix A*:* Interview Guide (For Key Informants)

The primary purpose of this interview guide is to obtain in-depth insights from key informants–government officials, Chinese company representatives, NGO staff, environmental experts, and traditional leaders–on the political economy, governance, and social dimensions of coal extraction in Hwange.

Structure and Key Themes

Section 1: Background Information

Name (optional for confidentiality): _____

Organization/Institution/Role: _____

Length of involvement in Hwange coal-related activities: _____

Section 2: Understanding of Sino-Zimbabwean Coal Relations

1. How would you describe the nature of Zimbabwe–China relations in the coal sector since 2015?

2. What motivated Zimbabwe to partner with Chinese investors in coal extraction?

3. How do you perceive China's role – as a development partner, investor, or strategic power actor?

4. In your opinion, how transparent and equitable are these partnerships?

Section 3: Economic Benefits and Revenue Utilization

1. What have been the major economic or infrastructural benefits from Chinese coal projects in Hwange?

2. How are revenues from the coal sector managed and distributed?

3. Do you believe these revenues have improved livelihoods in Hwange or the national economy? Why or why not?

4. How does the local government participate in benefit-sharing mechanisms?

Section 4: Environmental Governance and Community Impacts

1. How have mining activities affected the local environment (land, air, water, biodiversity)?

2. What mechanisms exist to regulate environmental impacts of coal mining?

3. Are Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) conducted and enforced effectively?

4. How are local communities informed or consulted before new mining projects begin?

Section 5: Community Agency and Resistance

1. How have communities responded to environmental and livelihood disruptions?

2. What role have civil society organizations played in advocating for environmental justice?

3. How does the government handle protests or grievances raised by local residents?

4. Can you cite any examples of successful community resistance, adaptation, or negotiation?

Section 6: Policy and Future Outlook

1. What policy reforms or governance frameworks could improve the sustainability of the coal sector?

2. How can Sino-Zimbabwean relations evolve to ensure mutual benefit and environmental accountability?

3. What lessons can Zimbabwe learn from other African countries' engagement with China in mining sectors?

Thank you for participating in this research.

Appendix B: Questionnaire (For Local Community Respondents)

The primary purpose of this charger is to capture perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of local residents directly affected by Chinese coal extraction projects in Hwange District. (For literate respondents, this can be self-administered; for others, it can be administered orally in local language.)

Section 1: Demographic Information

Gender: □ Male □ Female □ Other

Age: □ 18–30 □ 31–45 □ 46–60 □ 61+

Occupation: _____

Village/Ward: _____

Years lived in the community: _____

Section 2: Economic Perceptions

1. Have Chinese coal mining companies created employment opportunities for local residents? □ Yes □ No □ Not sure

If yes, what kind of employment (permanent/temporary)? _____

2. Have community members benefited from social projects (schools, clinics, roads)? □ Yes □ No

Do you believe the coal mining revenues benefit local people? □ Yes □ No □ Not sure

Explain your answer: _____

Section 3: Environmental Impacts

3. Have you observed changes in the environment since Chinese mining began? □ Yes □ No

If yes, which of the following have you noticed?

□ Air pollution/smoke

□ Water contamination

□ Soil degradation

□ Loss of livestock or crops

□ Health problems (specify): _____

4. Are there any measures taken by companies or government to address these issues? □ Yes □ No □ Not sure

5. To what extent does the Environmental Health and Safety department effectively address environmental issues affecting the community?

6. How would you describe the effectiveness of these measures?

Section 4: Community Participation and Voice

7. Were local residents consulted before coal projects began? □ Yes □ No □ Don't know

8. Have there been community meetings about mining impacts? □ Yes □ No

9. How do communities express their concerns?

□ Through local leaders

□ Protests or petitions

□ NGOs

Do you feel your voice is heard by authorities or companies? □ Yes □ No □ Sometimes

Section 5: Perceptions of China and the Future

How would you describe China's presence in Hwange:

□ Positive

□ Negative

□ Mixed

□ Unsure

10. What do you think should be improved in the way Chinese companies operate locally?

11. What expectations do you have for the future of mining in Hwange?

Thank you for participating in this research.

Appendix C: Focus Group Discussion Guide

The primary purpose this interview guide is to facilitate collective reflection among affected community members on the socio-economic, environmental, and political dimensions of Chinese coal mining in Hwange.

Group Composition:

8–10 participants per session

Gender and age balanced

Participants from different wards affected by mining

Duration: 30–40 minutes

Facilitator and note-taker present

Discussion Themes and Guiding Questions

1. Perceptions of Chinese Investment

How many Chinese companies are operating in your area?

As residents, how have you benefited from Chinese mining ventures?

What do you think motivates the government to partner with China?

2. Benefits and Opportunities

Have any local residents benefited economically (employment, development projects)?

How do people feel about these benefits compared to the environmental costs?

3. Environmental and Health Impacts

What changes have you noticed in the environment since coal mining began?

How have these changes affected water, farming, livestock, or health?

Are there community coping or adaptation strategies?

4. Community Responses and Resistance

Have there been protests, petitions, or negotiations with the government or companies?

What challenges do communities face in voicing their concerns?

5. Governance and Accountability

Do you trust the government or companies to act on environmental issues?

What improvements would you like to see in how mining activities are managed?

6. Vision for the Future

What kind of development do you want Hwange to experience in the next ten years?

What advice would you give to the government or Chinese investors to make coal extraction more beneficial and sustainable?

Thank you for participating in this research.

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To whom it may concern

This letter serves to confirm that Nxolelani Ncube id No 63-1034044 T 73 with student Reg No B243013B from Bindura University of Science Education has been granted permission to undertake his research study in pursuance of an Msc Degree in International Relations within Hwange RDC jurisdiction titled: **Sino- Zimbabwe Relations and Mineral Extraction in Hwange District 2015-2025.**

The local authority shall look forward to get recommendations from this particular study upon the individual finishing his research study.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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