

The Zambia-China Relationship: State Accommodation and Public Disaffection

AGNES NGOMA LESLIE

My research focuses on the Zambian leadership and its relationship to the Chinese government and private companies during the first government of Kenneth Kaunda (the 1970s through the 1980s), from the 1990s with Frederick Chiluba, during the third government of Levy Mwanawasa (2002-2008), and during the current period under Rupiah Banda. The objective of the research is to assess the strength of the Zambian state by examining how a weak economy, a fragile political climate and the leadership collaborate with international economic partnerships and the resulting impact on society and human rights.

There has been much controversy regarding the role of China in Africa. At present, China is Zambia's third largest investor, after South Africa and the United Kingdom. The number and scope of economic partnerships between the two countries continues to expand. Chinese private investments have also grown. I went to Lusaka, Zambia to investigate the impact of these developments on the society and Zambian views regarding the impacts of this expansion. I used various methods to collect the data including archival documents research, interviews, surveys and field visits to various Zambia-China business enterprises. I surveyed members of parliament (MPs) to examine their views regarding Chinese investments in the country and MPs' roles in enacting laws, which promote economic conditions that benefit the country and workers. I also surveyed and interviewed faculty from the University of Zambia, personnel from major newspapers, business professionals and government authorities in various ministries, including the Ministry of Labor and Social Services.

Part of my study investigated the nature of Chinese business operations and the conditions and benefits of the workers in these enterprises. I toured Chinese businesses including a steelmaking company to study working conditions and worker safety concerns, health and compensation. My findings indicate government weakness in defining the roles of foreign investors in development and implementing laws and policies that adequately benefit the country and safeguard the health, security and economic rights



of Zambian workers. The majority of the people interviewed believe there is a role for Chinese investment in Zambia in large-scale developments such as schools, roads, and stadia where most Zambian companies cannot compete. However, Chinese competition in small-scale enterprises has provoked the ire of local business people. While there is a strong relationship between the two countries at the top leadership, there is unease in the general population regarding the uncontrolled growth of Chinese private investment in Zambia.

Agnes Ngoma Leslie is Senior Lecturer and Outreach Director for the Center for African Studies.