



**FRIEDRICH
EBERT
STIFTUNG**
ZIMBABWE

The Special Economic Zones Act 2016

Fighting Decent Work in Zimbabwe?

MAGNUS BOLTEN

A RESEARCH REPORT

Published by:
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Zimbabwe Office
6 Ross Avenue
Belgravia
Harare
Zimbabwe

© Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Zimbabwe 2018
© Magnus Bolten

All rights reserved.

This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part and in any form for educational or non-profit uses, without special permission from the copyright holder, provided full acknowledgement of the source is made. No use of this publication may be made for resale or other commercial purposes without the prior written permission of FES.

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of FES, but those of the individual author.

ISBN: 978-0-7974-8597-6

The Special Economic Zones Act 2016

Fighting Decent Work in Zimbabwe?

MAGNUS BOLTEN

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Abstract

1. Introduction

2. The Zimbabwe Situation

2.1 Zimbabwe's current socio-economic and political situation

2.2 The Sino-Zimbabwean bond

2.3 Sino-African relations

3. Decent Work Country Programme for Zimbabwe 2012-2015

3.1 The concept of Decent Work and its objectives

3.2 Background and priorities of DWCP for Zimbabwe 2012-2015

3.3 Focus – Priority two of the DWCPZ

4. The Special Economic Zones Act 2016 and Decent Work

4.1 The SEZs Act's effect on Decent Work in Zimbabwe

4.2 Recommendations concerning Decent Work and SEZ implementation

Conclusion

References

About the Author

List of Abbreviations

DW	Decent Work
DWCPZ	Decent Work Country Programme for Zimbabwe
EDTZ	Economic and Technological Development Zone
EMCOZ	Employers Confederation of Zimbabwe
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
ERZ	Early Reform Zone
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Office
ILS	International Labour Standard
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRC	People's Republic of China
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
UN	United Nations
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
ZimAsset	Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation
Zimstat	Zimbabwe National Statistics Office
ZUNDAF	Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework

Abstract

Zimbabwe in an economic rut. China is on the rise. With the launch of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, China went public with its interests in Africa. The continent is rich in resources and so is Zimbabwe. But China does not only seek to reap benefits from an unbalanced relationship. Since 'Going Global 2.0' commenced, China has aspired to make wise investments abroad and promote a sustainable and fair image around the globe. The People's Republic proclaims it considers its African partners as equal partners. Considering the economic power and political influence of Zimbabwe internationally, it is questionable whether the Sino-Zimbabwean partnership is even-handed. To attract Chinese Foreign Direct Investments, the Zimbabwean Government under former President Robert Mugabe (in office 1980-2017), passed the Special Economic Zones Act 2016. This Act is meant to regulate the implementation and administration of Special Economic Zones as have been established in Victoria Falls, Harare, and Bulawayo. When reading the Bill, it becomes clear that it favours Business. There are no standing rules on working conditions. Zimbabwe has been an International Labour Office (ILO)-member state since independence in 1980. Government, Business, and Labour supposedly have been working with the ILO and other pro-labour organisations to ensure International Labour Standards (ILS) and apply the ILO Decent Work concept. This paper aims to identify whether the Special Economic Zones Act 2016 fights or supports Decent Work in Zimbabwean Special Economic Zones.

Key words

Decent Work, ILO, Special Economic Zones, People's Republic of China, Zimbabwe, FOCAC, SEZs Act 2016, Labour Standards, Foreign Direct Investment

The Special Economic Zones Act 2016

Fighting Decent Work in Zimbabwe?

1. Introduction

The Labour Act (Chapter 28:01) and the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act (Chapter 14:33) shall not apply in relation to licenced [sic] investors operating in a special economic zone (The Insider, 2016).

The quote stated above stems from the draft of the Zimbabwe Special Economic Zones Bill, which was rejected by the then Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe in September 2016 because it “seeks to suspend the Labour Act whose [the suspension’s] effect would have exposed workers to serious abuse by employers” (The Herald, 2016). The amended Special Economic Zones Act has been in place since 1 November 2016. This paper seeks to examine its effects on Decent Work (DW) under the leading question:

According to section 56 of the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Act 2016, does the Government of Zimbabwe support Decent Work in SEZs, as proposed by the International Labour Office (ILO)?

The following excerpt taken from Chapter 14:34, section 56 (2) of the Special Economic Zones Act passed in November 2016, which will be used to guide the central analysis, states:

The Authority must in consultation with the Minister responsible for the administration of the Labour Act [Chapter 28:01], provide rules for conditions of service, termination of service, dismissal from service and disciplinary proceedings that apply within every special economic zone.

To understand the general circumstances in which this paper answers the research question, the paper introduces the Republic of Zimbabwe’s current socio-economic situation considering China-Africa relations including SEZs with a focus on China-Zimbabwe relations (Chapter 2).

Chapter 3 deals with the latest Decent Work Country Programme for Zimbabwe (DWCPZ), which was developed jointly with the Zimbabwean Government and the International Labour Office (ILO). The chapter envisages the Decent Work concept, contextualises the programme with the justification for its implementation, and investigates the programme’s second priority to answer the research question.

In Chapter 4, The Special Economic Zones Act 2016 and Decent Work section 56 of the November 2016 Bill will be presented and possible consequences with regards to Zimbabwean labour standards in SEZs identified.

Possible avenues for ensuring Decent Work in SEZs, and suggestions on how to broaden its scope of influence for the entire country, are discussed in subsection 4.2. The conclusion highlights benchmarks and offers a way forward for the stakeholders of Sino-Zimbabwean SEZs to promote Decent Work within the zones.

Literature on Decent Work in SEZs is limited, especially with regards to data on the recently passed Zimbabwean SEZs Act (as at September 2017). The main works used for this analysis focus on the general idea of Chinese SEZs on the African continent. For example, two of the World Bank's collections; firstly, *Special Economic Zones in Africa: Comparing Performance and Learning from Global Experience* and, secondly, *Special Economic Zones. Progress, Emerging Challenges, and Future Directions*, were published in Washington, 2011.

Similarly, the ILO offers fruitful submissions on Decent Work and Zimbabwe and on the African continent. Implications on critical issues concerning the topic were found in the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Zimbabwe office publications.

2. The Zimbabwe Situation

The Republic of Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in Sub-Sahara Africa with approximately 13 million citizens according to the 2012 census, two thirds of whom are below the age of 25.

With the launch of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in October 2000, China intended to build a closer co-operation with African countries within its foreign policy frame, according to the Centre for Chinese Studies (2008). The far-reaching and historic Sino-Zimbabwean relationship, however, started approximately four decades before China's Going Global Strategy in 1999 or the launch of the FOCAC in 2000.

An important policy tool in this context is the Special Economic Zone, the general concepts of which derive from sea trade regulations from the 13th century. Nowadays, SEZs as utilised in the Sino-African context have been developed and are used by the Chinese Government to promote development on the African continent, and for the People's Republic of China (PRC) to simultaneously profit from the revenue created (Baissac, 2011).

Generally, 'Special Economic Zones' serves as an umbrella term for different types of geographic areas in a country, which are favoured by host governments with pro-business regulations to attract foreign investment. Time limited Export Processing Zones (EPZs), one of the first types of SEZs, which since the 1930s, has served the purpose of converting the economic systems of developing, import-reliant states to export-based economies (Auty, 2011).

In comparison, the second generation Early Reform Zones (ERZs) serve a broader purpose of not only advancing the economic situation of a country, but also of improving the respective country's infrastructure and addressing questions of property rights and the implementation of rule of law within the zones. Accordingly, SEZs in Zimbabwe as defined by Ishenanesu Chirisa in the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's 2016 Discussion Paper, fall under the category of ERZs:

The term 'Special Economic Zone' (SEZ) refers to a specific geographic area within a country wherein business and trade laws are entirely different to those of the country and for which there are clear financial policies in place. The rationale for SEZs includes increasing trade and investment and creating jobs. These zones are also intended to enhance global competitiveness through the modernisation of local earnings from foreign exchange; encourage exports; and develop new technologies (Charisa, 2016, p1).

With the use of SEZs by China in Africa and considering the long-standing relationship between the East Asian state and the Republic of Zimbabwe, the following subsections will identify Zimbabwe's role in the Sino-African context.

2.1 Zimbabwe's current socio-economic and political situation

Former President Robert Mugabe (1924-) was in office from Zimbabwean independence in 1980 to November 2017. His party, ZANU-PF, has been the leading party in Government. The political landscape is unstable with inconsistent political party formations, manipulated elections, and scrutinised freedom of speech.

In 2007 and 2008, Zimbabwe faced a harsh economic crisis. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) sank by 50% and has still not recovered. Since January 2009, the industrial sector's efficiency has been below 10% as compared to the years leading up to 2008. According to the United Nations (UN) Delegation Zimbabwe, the ever-present consequences are, among others, poverty 72.3% (2013), deterioration of infrastructure, an increase in informal economy workers as well as food and currency shortages (United Nations, 2014).

To prevent an economic collapse, in February 2009, the Republic of Zimbabwe adopted a multi-currency system and abandoned the Zimbabwe Dollar in 2015. After the 2013 elections, the current government including the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) drafted the 2013-2018 Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset) as a resilience building and sustainable development action plan.

In the World Bank's 2017, 'Ease of Doing Business Index', Zimbabwe ranks 161 out of 190 countries. The country is characterised as one of the lowest income countries analysed, and, consecutively, as one of the countries in which conducting business faces high impact difficulties. Nonetheless, Zimbabwe's business situation improved by ten ranks in comparison with its position in the World Bank's 2014 index.

2.2 The Sino-Zimbabwean bond

An increase of 5000% in the PRC's direct investments in Zimbabwe from 2009 to 2013 supports conclusions on China's impact on Zimbabwe's improved ranking in the World Bank index (Chun, 2014).

With Chinese exports of weapons, military technology, and training strategies to Zimbabwean soldiers fighting for independence during the Second Chimurenga War from 1966-1979, the Sino-Zimbabwean relationship commenced. Their relationship has been reinforced in recent years not only through the FOCAC but also by a common disdain of Western countries that disapprove of China's and Zimbabwe's domestic politics (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2014).

The partnership has resulted in intensified economic and trade co-operation between the two countries, for instance through Zimbabwe's 'Look East Policy' introduced in 2003, or earlier, in 1995, when the Zimbabwean Government passed the Export Processing Zones Act (EPZs Act) as the first regulatory framework for SEZs in the country.

Additionally, the alliance with Zimbabwe serves as a significant example of China strictly adhering to its 'Eight Principles of Foreign Policy'. The principles, including the principle of non-interference in other countries' interior politics, allow the PRC to collaborate with countries no matter their poor governance practices without having to contemplate legal regulations, for example, the labour rights in SEZs (Library of Congress, 2017).

EPZ regulations changed over the years from 1995-2007 when under the nationwide economic crisis EPZs had to be written off as a failed project. With the SEZs Act 2016, the Zimbabwean government passed a smarter version of the 1995 EPZs Act to try and induce an economic rise. For example, in the 2016 Bill, opposed to the 1995 Act, three territories were named pilot zones: a financial hub in the tourist destination Victoria Falls in the West country, Sunway City Integrated Industrial Park in the capital Harare, and an industrial hub in the second largest city, and capital of the Matabeleland Province, Bulawayo (Chirisa, 2016).

The 2003 directive, in which the Zimbabwean Government outlined its intentions of turning towards China when Western donors refused to support the country economically, indicates Zimbabwe's dependency on China being in favour of former President Robert Mugabe's regime. Examples of China's independency from Zimbabwe and involvement on the African continent since 1992, and as at 2012, include activities in 127 Economic and Technological Development Zones (EDTZ) (Chun, 2014).

China also sets the SEZs' objectives: SEZs are designed to attract Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) to host countries, alleviate large-scale unemployment through job creation in the zones, implement economic reform strategies within the zones, and are to serve as laboratories for new policies and economic approaches (Farole and Akinici, 2011).

It is questionable how the Chinese efforts represent an eye-level approach. At least officially, the Chinese Government does not acknowledge the PRC's superiority to the host countries.

2.3 Sino-African relations

The road to international South-South cooperation between the Chinese and African Governments took a harsh economic policy turn within the PRC when Deng Xiaoping (1905-1997) officially took over from the late communist head of China, Mao Zedong (1893-1976), in 1979. China subsequently opened-up to the West and gradually transformed from a centrally planned economy to a capitalist market economy (Franz, 2008). Without Xiaoping's open-door policy, a transforming China striving to act as a global player also engaging in development assistance is unthinkable.

Globalisation contributed to China beginning its engagement in Africa in the mid-1990s with the so-called Investment, Trade and Development Centres. In 1999, these ventures were conducted under the 'Going Global Strategy'.

Brautigam and Xiaoyang (2011, p11) also identify Sino-African relations as part of China's Going Global Strategy since the 1990s:

The partnership to develop SEZs is part of a long-term process of strategic engagement between China and Africa. It offers a significant opportunity to contribute to job creation, industrialization, and poverty reduction in the region.

Currently, the overall Chinese foreign policy objective encompasses wiser investment and China's image abroad is referred to as 'Going Global 2.0', as opposed to only pursuing global leadership and co-operation (China Policy, 2017).

As China comes from the political and economic background of a developing country, it has been taking pride in its economic progress over the past decades. China's sustained self-perception as a developing country guides its whole international aid policy: *lisuonengji* and *liangli erxing*, meaning China will not exceed its (financial) capacity and fiscal capabilities, according to the Centre for Chinese Studies (2008). The implementation of SEZs with the respective host government allows just that.

China views its SEZs in Africa as being mutually beneficial to the SEZ hosting country, Zimbabwe, and the PRC by not only supporting African development goals, but also transferring revenue to China (Brautigam and Xiaoyang, 2011).

3. Decent Work Country Programme for Zimbabwe 2012-2015

In Volume 153, number 4 of the International Labour Review, Chris King-Chi Chan (City University of Hong Kong) and Khalid Nadvi (University of Manchester) review recent changes in Chinese labour regulations. According to the researchers, the country is renowned formal-protection of labour rights and low labour standards.

To ensure so-called Decent Work under the Chinese omnipresence in Zimbabwean SEZs, the ILO jointly developed the Decent Work Country Programme 2012-2015 with the Zimbabwe tripartite alliance consisting of the Minister of Labour and Social Services, the President of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) on behalf of Labour, and the President of the Employers Confederation of Zimbabwe (EMCOZ) on behalf of Business. Considering the DWCP, will workers be protected and the zone driven by pro-labour regulations?

3.1 The concept of Decent Work and its objectives

The International Labour Organisation was founded after the end of World War I in 1919 with the intention of ensuring peace by advocating for social justice. The organisation works closely with governments around the globe to promote worthwhile labour standards and the protection of labour laws. Zimbabwe has been an ILO-member state since independence in 1980.

Fundamental to the ILO's work is the definition of 'Decent Work', which serves as its baseline and objective:

It [Decent Work] involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

On these grounds, the first Decent Work Country Programme for Zimbabwe (DWCPZ) was implemented in 2005. Today, the country is benefitting from three programmes implemented under the Zimbabwe Decent Work Agenda, the last – and current – being the DCWPZ 2012-2015. Its goals are outlined in the next chapter in response to the leading question as to how the Zimbabwean Government supports Decent Work in SEZs.

3.2 Background and priorities of DWCP for Zimbabwe 2012-2015

With support from the ILO, the Republic of Zimbabwe, represented by the tripartite-alliance, introduced the third DWCPZ to alleviate the consequences of the economic crisis. The programme specifies four overarching priorities:

1. Promoting productive employment and decent jobs
2. Improving the application and implementation of international labour standards
3. Strengthening social dialogue capacities and processes for sustainable socio-economic development
4. Coverage of social protection increased through mainstreaming elements of the social protection floor.

3.3 Focus – Priority two of the DWCPZ

This section gives a detailed insight into the second priority of the DWCPZ – improving the application and implementation of International Labour Standards.

International Labour Standards (ILS) are legislative tools, which seek to promote rights at work through the application of the ILO's labour recommendations or the ratification of ILO conventions in ILO-member states. The improved application and implementation of such standards is the objective of priority two of the DWCPZ 2012-2015.

The tripartite partners involved laid out two strategies to accomplish priority two. Firstly, compliance of Zimbabwean labour legislation with ILS and the respective binding documents must be advanced, meaning advocating for these goals as stepping stones for the broader goals of social justice and a fair working world in co-operation with Civil Society Partners.

Secondly, the Zimbabwean Government must advance on ratifying ILS as an ILO-member state. Thereby encouraging the application of ILS in the world of work. Freedom, equity, security, and dignity, in this case, are the key terms as these lay the foundation for Decent Work as clarified above.

Zimbabwe has been caught in an economic rut since 2007. Adhering to and advancing on ILS may create a way out of the economic and related socio-political dilemmas.

With China actively working in Zimbabwe under the joint SEZ programme, labour standards must not be neglected. Chapter 4 will discuss the weaknesses of the SEZs and ILS. What is the relation, then, between section 56 of the SEZs Act 2016 and Decent Work?

4. The Special Economic Zones Act 2016 and Decent Work

In Zimbabwe, legislation concerning labour rights in SEZs is insufficient. Zimbabwe's former President Robert Mugabe only approved the current Act, the Special Economic Zones Act, in November 2016 after changes had been made to section 56. Contrarily, the Government itself recognised the importance of "strong leadership and high levels of political oversight" three years earlier in December 2013.

Furthermore, Brautigam and Xiaoyang (2011) found that the majority of well-run SEZs are operated according to already existing SEZ legislation in the host countries. Later, in 2016, amendments were made to the Act to meet the requirements set forth by the constitution. Therefore, on the one hand, the exemption of the Labour Act is no longer included in section 56(1) of the SEZs Act 2016. On the other hand, the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act to empower marginalised groups and Zimbabwean citizens are still exempted from the Act.

In addition, the current Act does not support clear and transparent labour law legislation as agreed upon in the third DWCPZ. Rather, labour regulations within SEZs are left as bargaining chips to the administrative Special Economic Zones Authority and the Minister of Labour and Social Services.

So, what is the impact of the SEZs Act on labour rights and how does it assist Zimbabwe to aspire to a positive socio-economic transformation?

4.1 The SEZs Act's effect on Decent Work in Zimbabwe

The SEZs Act 2016 was harshly criticised when it was gazetted in November 2016, the main reason was the transfer of powers to a newly established authority supposed to govern SEZs and their respective internal practices and procedures. This is where the effect on Decent Work starts.

According to section 20 of the SEZs Act, the respective authority is granted unrestricted power to amend, create, and tear down any SEZ to its liking. In combination with section 2 of the same Act, the authority seems to have powers exceeding SEZ premises, because although section 2 is supposed to define what is special about an SEZ it does not.

To implement what looks like a division of powers, the SEZ Authority finds its counter point in the SEZ Board monitoring the executive authority. Unfortunately, the board does not represent the tripartite partners equally. The ministries and business dominate the board and marginalise labour. That is to be viewed even more critically because the Labour Act does not apply unquestioned as its application depends on consistent deals between the Minister of Labour and Social Services and the SEZ Authority. Interestingly, and once more in the interest of business, the content of the SEZ Labour Act falls under the authority of the Minister of Finance and Economic Development which is in conflict with the Constitution. Chapter 4 of which states the rights of the Zimbabwean citizens, and section 44 emphasises the absolute and uncompromised protection of the rights given in Chapter 4. Labour rights and section 65 of the Constitution which deal with safe and fair labour practices and collective bargaining, belong to the same chapter. Though with the powers allocated to the SEZ Authority, the SEZ employees find themselves on unsteady grounds concerning the application of labour rights.

One may question whether the SEZs Act 2016 is intended to override or undermine the Zimbabwean Constitution and omit the duties that were agreed upon even though Zimbabwe is an ILO-member state with also several agreements ratified on ILS.

Officially, the Government disregarded the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act in section 56 (2) of the SEZs Act. The pre-existing labour problems in SEZs are worsened by this disregard. Low-skilled, short-term work has been common in EPZs and will continue in a new form, the so-called SEZs (Chitambara, 2015). The Economic Empowerment Act would have uplifted marginalised groups, such as women and the youth. In combination with the Indigenisation Act, the two could have had a positive influence on the highly precarious employment situation in the country. Without the two, Zimbabwean nationals do not profit from any advantages regarding

employment whilst hosting SEZs in their country. It is highly likely that skilled Chinese workers occupy the positions equally skilled Zimbabweans could have occupied.

In summary, with the SEZs Act 2016 the Zimbabwe Government does not meet the criteria it set for successful Special Economic Zones in 2013. Transparent rules, strong leadership, and political oversight are missing. Instead, it seems the Act is a desperate attempt to attract FDI. Perhaps if the authors of the Bill had observed successful models of this system in countries providing for sustainable labour, they may have been able to implement it more successfully. Why the authors seemingly did not refer to the ILO's recommendations, despite the country being an ILO-member state, raises concerns about the extent to which the country takes its ILO-membership seriously.

A first step towards Decent Work would have been to positively state minimum labour rights in Zimbabwean SEZs. Chapter 4.2 will present an in-depth examination of the way forward.

4.2 Recommendations concerning Decent Work and SEZ implementation

With Zimbabwe's socio-economic situation as outlined in Chapter 2.1 there is the urgent need – and potential – to improve. Otherwise programmes like the DWCPZ or the Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework (ZUNDAF) 2016-2020 to support ZimAsset would not have been pursued by the Zimbabwean Government to begin with.

One must bear in mind that SEZs are not the panacea to cure all the country's economic dilemmas but they are a tool, if used sustainably, to complement the countries' assets and enhance working conditions from the Sub-Saharan norm to Decent Work as envisioned by the ILO. But recommendations cannot jump to Decent Work straight away. The stakeholders involved must create the basis on which to establish and ensure Decent Work. Here, the central question is whether the labour law in SEZs is in line with (inter)national law, agreements, and treaties. A conclusion cannot be reached for Zimbabwe as the application of the national Labour Act, even though it is part of the constitution, has been made optional in SEZs.

Additionally, the economy in Zimbabwe is highly informal. 94.5% of the 6.3 million Zimbabwean citizens defined as employed in the Zimbabwe National Statistics Office's (Zimstat) 2015 survey work in the informal sector (The Economist, 2015). Under these circumstances, no-one can monitor whether employees work decently. Thus, the bulk of the target group cannot be reached and will keep on working indecently.

To ensure the application of the Decent Work concept, the whole economy must be formalised (ILO, 2015). Yet, within the given timeframes of the DWCPZ: 2012-2015 and ZUNDAF: 2016-2020, that seems impossible. However, it is different for SEZs because the respective infrastructure and economic formality can be set up relatively easy, especially with FDI flows for zone construction. The risk then is that the zones will assume enclave-like structures detached from the national economy. Under those circumstances, the objective of SEZs posing as catalysts and examples of socio-economic transformation, such as adhering to the Decent Work concept, cannot be reached.

Apart from being a formal structure, Decent Work requires an enforcement institution. The ILO, for example, provides support with concept development, but it is the government or respective ministry that ensures the application thereof. With the SEZ Board and Authority, good intentions must be acknowledged but the Zimbabwean Government could have done better with a representative board, that does not underrepresent labour.

An integral step is to integrate the national SEZ concept into the overall national strategy. As mentioned above, Zimbabwe has several strategies in the pipeline such as the DWCPZ, ZUNDAF, or ZimAsset with several co-working partners; the ILO and the UN. Despite the different areas of focus, all the strategies attempt a positive socio-economic reformation of the country.

Whether it is the Government, the SEZ tripartite, or an independent institution, one actor should be set to co-ordinate the different (inter)national programmes and define the SEZs' role within them. That way, an interdisciplinary approach will ensure an operational Decent Work concept for different programmes.

Conclusion

“For SEZ [sic] to achieve the desired results, there is need for strong leadership and high levels of political oversight”, summarises The Herald (18 December 2013), in response to the Zimbabwean Parliament's announcement to revive SEZs as an economic instrument to spur on economic development.

Basically, the Parliament draws the same conclusion as Brautigam and Xiaoyang, and what Chirisa suggested in December 2016, one month after the SEZs Act 2016 was passed. It is not clear why the Zimbabwean government did not actually follow its own lead from 2013 but in 2016 passed an act, without clear or transparent labour regulations.

In a country with strong state institutions such an ambiguous act may work but looking at the political system of the Republic of Zimbabwe, with a President who was in office since independence was declared more than three decades ago until November 2017, the SEZs Act's solution invites corruption and bribery to politics.

If it had not been for the close co-operation with (inter)national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like the ILO on pro-labour Decent Work concepts, an objective outsider might agree with the 'generate business at all costs' approach as emphasised in the SEZs Act. But the country has been working with several NGOs since independence in 1980, and even its main investor and strategic partner, the People's Republic of China, has taken the first steps towards ensuring labour rights within its geographic boundaries if one trusts King-Chi Chan's and Nadvi's scientific findings. An additional challenge to the political instability is the economic instability. As was the case in 2007-2008, the country's economy is on the decline again (September 2017) (Matigari, 2017). Decent Work needs a sturdy and institutionally protected legal framework, which the SEZs Act 2016 does not offer.

In summary, to answer the research question, the Government of Zimbabwe does not support Decent Work with section 56 of the Special Economic Zones Act 2016. Still, the Act might function as a starting point to achieve the second priority of the DWCPZ 2012-2015.

Formalisation of the highly informal national economy, a stable and accountable political system and leadership, and the safeguarding of basic human rights will need to be achieved first before Decent Work can be assumed as an attainable objective.

In a broader assignment, a more detailed examination of development partners should be pursued as well as a closer investigation into the Chinese trade co-operation procedures with other African countries. That way, decision-making and line of thought in the Sino-African frame will become apparent.

This paper touches on the reasons why the SEZs Act has been left as indefinite as it is. In-depth considerations on the power relations in the Sino-Zimbabwean context promise insights into the rationale of the Act, of which data cannot be delivered given the formal restrictions for this research question. Nevertheless, this paper now belongs to the few scientific works on the SEZs Act 2016 and as such may function as a stepping stone towards a broader scientific engagement with the topic.

References

- Auty, R. (2011). Early Reform Zones: Catalysts for Dynamic Market Economies in Africa, *The World Bank, Special Economic Zones. Progress, Emerging Challenges, and Future Directions*, 207-224.
- Baissac, C. (2011). Brief History of SEZs and Overview of Policy Debates, *The World Bank: Special Economic Zones in Africa: Comparing Performance and Learning from Global Experience*, 23-60.
- Brautigam, D., & Xiaoyang, T. (2011). African Shenzhen: China's special economic zones in Africa, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 49 (1) 27-54.
- Brautigam, D., & Xiaoyang, T. (2011). China's Investment in Special Economic Zones in Africa, *The World Bank: Special Economic Zones. Progress, Emerging Challenges, and Future Directions*, 69-100.
- Centre for Chinese Studies. (2008). *How China delivers development assistance to Africa*, Stellenbosch.
- Chan, C., & Nadvi, K. (2014) Changing labour regulations and labour standards in China: Retrospect and challenges, *ILO: International Labour Review*, 153 (4), 513-534.
- China Policy. (2017). *China Going Global. Between ambition and capacity*, Beijing.
- Chirisa, I. (2016). The Rationality of the Special Economic Zones Act on Labour Rights, *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Zimbabwe Discussion Paper December 2016*, Harare.
- Chitambara, P. (2015, January 16). Special Economic Zones: The pros and cons, *Zimbabwe Independent*. Retrieved from <https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2015/01/16/special-economic-zones-pros-cons/>
- Chun, Z. (2014). South African Institute of International Affairs, Occasional Paper 205. Global Powers and Africa Programme: *China-Zimbabwe Relations: A Model of China-Africa Relations?*
- Farole, T., & Akinci, G. (2011). Introduction. In the World Bank, *Special Economic Zones. Progress, Emerging Challenges, and Future Directions* (pp.1-20). Washington.
- Franz, U. (2008, August 06) Porträt: Deng Xiaoping, *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung Dossier Chin*. Retrieved from <http://www.bpb.de/international-ales/asien/china/44262/deng-xiaoping>
- Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. (2014) The 'Look East Policy' of Zimbabwe now focuses on China. *Policy briefing paper*, Harare.
- Institute for Cultural Diplomacy Inc. (2012). *The Power of Africa – Africa as a Stronger Actor on the International Stage*, Paris.

ILO. Conventions and Recommendations. Retrieved from <http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/intro-duction-to-international-labour-standards/conventions-and-recommendations/lang--en/index.htm>

ILO. Decent Work Country Programme for Zimbabwe. 2012-2015.

ILO. Decent Work. Retrieved from <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

ILO. International Labour Review, Vol. 153, No. 4.

ILO. Normlex Retrieved from <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:11003:0::NO:::Z> (retrieved on 19.09.2017).

ILO. Origins and history. Retrieved from <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/history/lang--en/index.htm>

ILO. (2015) Recommendation 204. Recommendation Concerning the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy.

Library of Congress. Regulation of Foreign Aid: China. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/foreign-aid/china.php> (retrieved on 10.09.2017).

Matigari, M. (2017) Opinion – Currency crisis and the art of deception. Retrieved from <http://source.co.zw/2017/09/opinion-currency-crisis-art-deception/>

MDC-T. Our History. Retrieved from <http://www.mdc.co.zw/index.php/about-us-1/our-history>

OECD Benchmark Definition of Foreign Direct Investment. (4th ed.) 2008. OECD

OECD. Task Team on South-South Co-operation. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effective-ness/taskteamonsouth-southco-operation.htm> (retrieved on 20.09.2017).

Parliament of Zimbabwe. (2013). *Constitution of Zimbabwe*, Harare.

Republic of Zimbabwe. (2016). *Special Economic Zones Act*. Chapter 14:34, Harare, South African Institute of International Affairs. (2016). Occasional Paper 205. *Global Powers and Africa Programme*. Johannesburg, 2014.

The Economist Intelligence Unit. (23 June 2015). Zimbabwe. Informal Employment Dominates, Retrieved from <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=453276029&Country=Zimbabwe&topic=Economy> (retrieved on 21.09.2017).

The Herald. (2013 December 18). Govt to revive Special Economic Zones. Retrieved from <http://www.herald.co.zw/govt-to-revive-special-economic-zones/> (retrieved on 23.09.2017).

The Herald. (2016 September 27). President rejects Special Economic Zones Bill, Retrieved from <http://www.herald.co.zw/president-rejects-special-economic-zones-bill/>.

The Insider. (2016 April 11). The Insider Stories. Zimbabwe to exempt Special Economic Zones from labour and indigenisation laws. Retrieved from <http://www.insiderzim.com/zim-babwe-to-exempt-special-economic-zones-from-labour-and-indigenisation-laws/>

The World Bank. Doing Business (2017 September 13). Zimbabwe. Retrieved from <http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploreeconomies/zimbabwe>.

The World Bank. (2011). Special Economic Zones in Africa: Comparing Performance and Learning from Global Experience, Washington.

The World Bank. (2011). Special Economic Zones. Progress, Emerging Challenges, and Future Directions, Washington.

United Nations Zimbabwe. (2014). Zimbabwe Country Analysis. Working Document. Final Draft, Harare.

ZANU-PF: What is ZANUPF? Retrieved from www.zanupf.org.zw/what-is-zanupf (retrieved on 18.09.2017).

Zimbabwe Government. (2013 December 17). Government to revive Special Economic Zones. Retrieved from <http://www.zim.gov.zw/index.php/forums/11327-govt-to-revive-special-economic-zones> (18.09.2017).

Zimbabwe Government. Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. Functions. Retrieved from <http://www.zarnet.ac.zw/dev/govportal/government-ministries/ministry-finance-and-economic-development> (23.09.2017).

About the Author

Magnus Bolten is a Political Science, Sociology, and Law student at the University of Bonn, Germany. His advanced studies focus on International Relations and Government Systems. Throughout his academic and personal career, Magnus has been an advocate for gender empowerment, youth participation in politics, and a fair working world.





Founded in 1925 as the first German political foundation, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a private, non-profit organisation committed to the value of social democracy. The Foundation bears the name of the first democratically elected President of Germany, in 1918, Friedrich Ebert, and seeks to preserve his political legacy: the promotion of freedom, solidarity and social justice. The Foundation pursues these aims through its programmes of political education, international co-operation, scholarships and research in Germany and abroad.

ISBN: 978-0-7974-8597-6