



# Discussion Paper

A STUDY OF PERSPECTIVES ON HOW TO ENHANCE  
BOTSWANA-CHINA RELATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

China's relations with Africa date back to the 1950s but they have transformed in scope and depth since the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000. The increased interactions between African countries and China have brought important benefits to both sides in a variety of areas, from trade and investment to cultural exchange. Nevertheless, stresses and strains have also arisen and it is apparent that for optimal cooperation purposeful measures have to be undertaken to promote positive relations. Botswana's experience parallels that of the continent as whole. Engagement with China has developed very rapidly in recent years. However, although Botswana's current relationship with China has positive dimensions, it also has significant tensions. In this situation, it is timely to consider how improved bilateral relations can be promoted at both the state and non-state level.

The aim of the study was to investigate the perspectives of key informants from both countries on the nature of current relations between the two countries and on how the relations may be enhanced. The study was shaped by a conception of international relations which considers both state and non-state actors as playing an important role, which recognises a wide variety of issue-areas within bilateral relations and which posits that bilateral cooperation can be actively promoted. The purpose of the study was to make empirically-based recommendations for policy-makers and stakeholders on measures that could be taken to enhance Botswana-China relations. The research design used a qualitative approach based on 24 in-depth interviews with respondents from both countries drawn from four occupational groups, namely diplomats/government officials, academics, media practitioners and business community members.

The study was structured around three research questions. The first question sought to identify respondents' perceptions of the most important dimensions of Botswana-China relations. The findings show that economic issues were viewed as fundamental, whilst development assistance and formal political/diplomatic exchanges constitute important components of the state-to-state relationship. Additionally, relations at the level of ordinary people form a dimension of interaction between non-state actors that was significant for Chinese respondents.

The second question asked for views on the current state of Botswana-China relations. The analysis of responses shows that the identification of positive elements in the relationship was far outweighed by the perceptions of problems and tensions. Hence the language used to characterise bilateral relations ranged from negative descriptions like "dismal" to half-hearted remarks like "lukewarm". It is notable that there were no responses which were unreservedly positive. It is concluded that there are a variety of problems within the bilateral relationship. Additionally, for many respondents there was a perception that the relationship has declined during the current Presidency and specifically since 2013 when the President and senior members of the Botswana Government became publicly critical of China.

The respondents' perception of deteriorating relations validated the study and gave significance to the final research question on what practical measures can be taken to strengthen Botswana-China relations. On the basis of the findings, the study has produced recommendations that will be useful for policy-makers and stakeholders in the Botswana context, and which may be relevant to other African countries.

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

The emergence of China as a world power is a major feature of contemporary international relations. This is particularly the case in Africa where the establishment of the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 marked the beginning of a new era of relations between African countries and China. These relations, that date back to the 1950s, have been transformed since 2000 by the changing role of China in the global political economy, driven economically by its need for raw materials, export markets and, increasingly, cheaper offshore labour, and politically by its aspiration for greater influence in world affairs. Hence China's engagement with Africa has grown rapidly in scope and depth since the beginning of the 21st century, not only with intensified economic, political, diplomatic and security relations but also with significant migration of Chinese people into the continent. This new situation has inevitably led to challenges in Africa-China relations.

## 1.2 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

It is increasingly evident that whilst there may be mutual benefits from the relationship there are also growing tensions, especially from the point of view of Africa. Some African politicians have been critical of China's role. For example, in Zambia, when Michael Sata was an opposition leader he claimed that the Chinese are "the new colonisers of Africa" and criticised Chinese companies for exploitation. After his defeat in the 2009 elections there were anti-Chinese riots in Lusaka (Bwalya, 2011: 228-232). The tensions have also been recognised by Chinese politicians. In particular, President Xi Jinping during his visit to Tanzania in 2013 noted the existence of problems in Africa-China relations and said:

[...] in addressing problems in cooperation with Africa, China will be sincere. China will face squarely and sincerely the new developments and new problems confronting relations with Africa. And the two sides should properly handle any problem that may arise in a spirit of mutual respect and win-win cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2013).

The statement was an important development in Chinese diplomatic discourse on Africa, which usually emphasises friendship and common benefits and glosses over difficulties in relations. It was translated into official policy in 2015 in the White Paper China's Africa Policy which articulated the principle of "good faith":

"Good faith" means China cherishes good faith and the settlement of problems in an appropriate manner [...] China stands ready to strengthen policy coordination and communication with African countries, adheres to the principles of mutual respect and win-win cooperation, faces squarely and sincerely the new developments and problems confronting their relations through equal and friendly coordination [...] (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2015: 2).

It is in recognition of the actual and potential problems in the relationships between African countries and China that scholarly analysis has begun to address the issue of how to enhance Africa-China relations. For example, the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum initiative launched by Zhejiang Normal University in 2011 under FOCAC has an aim "to offer constructive advice on China-Africa cooperation". This is illustrated by a sub-topic of the Third Meeting of the Forum in Beijing in 2013 which was entitled "Upgrading Sino-African relations: dynamics, directions and measures" and a number of papers were presented on this topic (Zhejiang Normal University, 2013). Academic and think-tank researchers are now beginning to consider what practical measures can be undertaken to ensure good relations between the two sides. Against this general background

for the continent as a whole, it is important to consider individual country cases (for example, Amin [2013] on Cameroon). Botswana, like other African countries, has also seen tensions develop in its relations with China over the last few years.

Botswana established diplomatic relations with China in 1975 and enjoyed good relations for many years, receiving development aid in areas such as railway rehabilitation and the health sector and pursuing diverse forms of diplomatic cooperation. From the 1990s Chinese contractors became active in the construction sector and initially established a positive reputation for reducing costs on Botswana government projects. In the early 2000s, Chinese entrepreneurs migrated to Botswana and established small retail businesses. The increased involvement of the Chinese in the local economy began to lead to friction and negative media reporting. However, government-to-government relations remained warm as evidenced by President Mogae's participation in the 2006 FOCAC Heads of State summit in Beijing. But a number of significant national projects undertaken by Chinese companies, including an international airport and a major power station, ran into cost and quality problems that caused public concern and political controversy. Senior government officials began to develop negative attitudes particularly in respect to the problems with Chinese contractors in the construction sector and to the proliferation of Chinese shops in the retail sector. In 2013 both President Khama and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation made public statements that were highly critical of the Chinese in Botswana. My review of Botswana-China relations in 2013 concluded that

“It is clear that a deterioration in political and economic relations has taken place in recent years [...]. This situation gives urgency to measures to strengthen relations” (Youngman, 2013:10).

I identified this deterioration in bilateral relations as a problem and deemed it valuable to undertake an empirical study focused on the issue of how to enhance Botswana-China relations. In line with Botswana's research regulations, permission was sought from the relevant line ministry to undertake the study and this was granted in September 2015 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MOFAIC).

### **1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study of Botswana-China relations was to investigate the perspectives of a number of key informants from both countries on the nature of current relations between the two countries and on how the relations may be enhanced.<sup>1</sup> The informants included diplomats/government officials, academics, media practitioners and business community members. The use of respondents from both countries was an important element of the study as it enabled a comparative analysis of the responses by country of origin to determine patterns of similarity and/or difference. The purpose of the study was shaped by a conception of international relations based on Complex Interdependence Theory which considers both state and non-state actors as playing an important role, which recognises a wide variety of issue-areas within bilateral relations, and which posits that collaboration can be actively promoted. It was an applied study that sought to provide practical recommendations within the Botswana context. It built on the foundations of my earlier paper that considered the topic of strengthening Botswana-China relations on the basis of desk-based research. The paper concluded that empirical research was required for a more comprehensive set of measures (Youngman, 2013:14). The purpose of the study was therefore to make empirically-based recommendations for policy-makers and stakeholders on measures that could be taken to enhance Botswana-China relations.

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## **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study made two key assumptions. Firstly, it assumed that positive bilateral relations at all levels are in the interest of the majority of state and non-state actors in both countries. Secondly, it assumed that specific measures can be taken at different levels to promote bilateral relations. However, there has been no empirical research to provide a guide for action for key actors who would like to enhance relations between Botswana and China. This is the knowledge gap that the study sought to fill. It is envisaged that the new knowledge which has been generated will have practical usefulness for policy-makers and stakeholders in the Botswana-China context, thus the research has policy relevance and social importance.

Furthermore, as an empirical study of a particular country, its findings will contribute to the development of a wider body of knowledge that may enable transferable conclusions on the kinds of measures that could enhance relations between other African countries and China. Ideally, it will stimulate other detailed country-level studies. Finally, it will add to the growing body of published research from within Africa on the relationships between African countries and China, thus offsetting the dominance of publications generated in Western countries (Carayannis and Olin, 2012; Amin, 2013).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this section is firstly to identify an appropriate theoretical framework for exploring the research problem. Secondly, it provides a review of the literature on Africa-China relations in order to illustrate the components of the theoretical framework and identify the responses to the growing stresses and strains in bilateral relations. Thirdly, the historical development of Botswana-China relations is reviewed to show the relevance of the research topic and to provide the rationale for the study. Finally, the research objectives and research questions are stated. The literature reviewed is in English.

### **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study sought to provide an analysis of the dimensions and current state of Botswana-China relations and to make recommendations on how to enhance these relations. The literature on International Relations theory was therefore reviewed in order to identify a theoretical framework relevant to the research problem and the realities of the Botswana-China situation.

Traditionally, International Relations theory has focused primarily on studying the relationships between states, emphasising diplomatic and military interactions and foreign policy formulation and implementation. Whereas the realist paradigm stresses the struggle for power between states, the liberal paradigm argues that much of international politics is not conflictual and problems can be solved through international cooperation (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2012). In this liberal view, a major priority in international relations must be to promote international collaboration through a variety of means, from establishing international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) to undertaking peace education. The promotion of collaboration between countries addresses the research problem and therefore liberal theory was seen as relevant to the overall purpose of the study

With the advent of globalisation and the increased permeability of national borders, it has become evident that countries interact across borders in many different ways and that the influence on international relations of non-state actors such as business enterprises and migrant communities must be taken into account. But much of liberal theory such as liberal institutionalism is state-centric and does not encompass a plurality of actors both within the state and outside the state (D'Anieri, 2012). Yet it is clear that the realities of the Botswana-China relationship are complex and multi-dimensional, involving various agencies of the state (such as different Government departments) and a number of non-state actors (such as business enterprises). Furthermore, the state is not unitary (for example, actions to restrict visas by one government department can impede efforts to attract foreign investors by another department) and also non-state actors have an influence (for example, the misbehaviour of private businesses can sour bilateral relations). From this perspective, it was deemed that the most appropriate framework within the liberal paradigm of International Relations theory for analysing the nature of the Botswana-China relationship is Complex Interdependence Theory, developed by Keohane and Nye (1989).

Complex Interdependence Theory has a number of key postulates about international relations that are relevant to this study, as follows:

- a) There are “multiple channels” which connect countries across borders, including different components of the state bureaucracy and non-state actors, and all of these channels exert an influence on the relations between countries.
- b) There are many different “issue-areas” between two countries, ranging from trade and investment to cultural exchange, and their significance varies from time to time according to changing circumstances. The existence of a diversity of issue-areas means that there are a number of different goals that each side may be pursuing simultaneously.
- c) Security is seldom the dominant issue-area and military force is not necessarily the most important foreign policy instrument.

These postulates address the realities of the Botswana-China relationship and therefore have analytical value. Firstly, a wide range of different actors can be observed and their different impacts on the relationship need to be assessed. Secondly, there are diverse issue-areas which can be identified and whose relative significance at any given point can be evaluated. Cross-border interactions of all kinds (diplomatic, economic, social, cultural and informational) are taking place between Botswana and China creating a variety of influences on the relations between the two countries that need to be understood. Thirdly, it is difficult to conceive of a situation in which military force will be a factor within the relationship between the two countries.

It was therefore concluded that the liberal paradigm of International Relations, and in particular Complex Interdependence Theory, provided an appropriate theoretical framework for the study.

## **2.3 CONTEMPERORY AFRICA-CHINA RELATIONS**

In consonance with China's expanded presence in Africa since 2000, there has been a proliferation of literature on many aspects of Africa-China relations, including a dozen books, many academic articles and papers, numerous policy reports and extensive media commentary (Shinn, 2015). This section will not attempt a comprehensive review of this literature but will consider three key components of the theoretical framework, namely: a) the multiple actors that influence relations; b) the diversity of issue-areas within the relationship; and c) the actions taken to enhance relations, especially in response to emerging tensions.

A number of writers have made the point that China is not monolithic in terms of its presence in Africa (Huliaras, 2012) and therefore there is need to “disaggregate” the Chinese actors (Mills and McNamee, 2012). For example, while the Chinese state is the dominant feature in relations, it is itself composed of many different actors. Fijalkowski (2011) provides a comprehensive discussion of the large number of government agencies involved in formulating and implementing policies on Africa, of whom the most important are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission responsible for state-owned enterprises (SOEs), the Export-Import Bank (EXIM), and provincial and city governments. These actors do not act in a unitary fashion – for instance, there are examples of SOEs acting in ways contradictory to official policies such as the China National Petroleum Corporation in Sudan (Huliaras, 2012:430). Although the state is dominant, non-state actors also play a role, in particular the migrant communities which have arisen through independent private initiative and are very influential with respect to popular images and sentiments about China held by Africans. It is estimated that there are one million Chinese migrants in Africa today (French, 2014).

It is also true that Africa is not monolithic as there are 55 very different countries within the African Union (AU) and multiple actors within each country. The literature shows that state actors such as government departments play a significant role in bilateral relations. But non-state actors are also influential – for instance, the private media play an important part in shaping public opinion about the Chinese presence in Africa as Wasserman (2012) shows in the case of South Africa. An important argument here is the significance of “African agency”. While it is clear that the relationship between China and any particular African country is asymmetrical in terms of economic and political power, it is inaccurate to treat African actors as “passive and lacking agency” (Mohan and Lampert, 2012: 92). Mohan and Lampert discuss how both state and non-state actors shape the dynamics and outcomes of engagements with China, giving examples of how the Angolan state elite negotiated oil for infrastructure agreements and how local entrepreneurs in Ghana and Nigeria sourced partners, workers and goods through Chinese migrants. They conclude

“African actors have been able to shape these relationships [with China] in ways that advance their own interest and aspirations and/or produce forms of wider social benefit” (Mohan and Lampert, 2012:109).

On the basis of the literature, it is possible to categorise as follows the various state and non-state actors that have an influence on relations between African countries and China, whilst noting that the state/non-state distinction is not always clear-cut especially as the institutional role of the state is more extensive in China than most African countries:

a) State actors:

- Political leaders
- Central government ministries and departments
- Embassies
- Local government authorities such as provincial and city governments
- SOEs and parastatal bodies
- State media

b) Non-state actors:

- Private sector companies, ranging from large multi-national corporations to small family businesses
- Civil society organisations such as trade unions, environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and charitable bodies

- Intellectual institutions including universities, research centres and think-tanks
- Private media
- The general public, comprising host country citizens and Chinese migrant communities

In sum, the literature confirms and illustrates the concept of the “multiple channels” that influence relations between countries. Thus an analysis of relations in a given African country must encompass this complexity and explore the “multi-dimensional interdependencies between Chinese and local actors” (Giese, 2014:7). In particular, measures to enhance bilateral relations must recognise the variety of actors that have a role to play.

The extensive literature on Africa-China relations confirms the postulate of Complex Interdependence Theory that there are multiple issue-areas which vary in significance from country to country and from time to time. Thrall (2015) has categorised the issue-areas into three main groups – economic, political and security-related. The economic area has received most attention within the literature because economic interests are China’s primary reason for engaging with Africa and this engagement has had a significant impact since 2000 on the continent’s economic growth and overall development. This is well discussed by Johnston (2015) who considers three facets of economic interaction. Firstly, there is investment by China in Africa on a commercial basis through SOEs and private companies. This foreign direct investment (FDI) has focused on the resources sector and infrastructure but is increasingly going into manufacturing, as seen in recent developments in Ethiopia and South Africa. Secondly, there is the area of trade with imports and exports taking place in both directions. China became Africa’s largest trading partner in 2009. Thirdly, there is foreign aid from China in the form of grants, interest-free loans and concessional loans, and technical assistance. The key concentrations within this aid are agriculture, infrastructure, health and education. The political/diplomatic issue-area is driven by China’s aspirations for greater international influence, seeking support from African countries in international forums such as the UN and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and building its “global leadership image” (Thrall, 2015:xvi). It also involves China’s determination to isolate Taiwan and formal diplomatic relations are predicated on non-recognition of Taiwan (i.e. acceptance of the “one-China principle”). The third category of issues is security-related. China seeks to protect the security of its own nationals, as exemplified by the evacuation of Chinese citizens from Libya in 2011, and to safeguard its investments, for example through conflict resolution efforts in Sudan and South Sudan. In consonance with its international leadership role it has also begun to participate in UN peace-keeping missions, for example in Mali since 2013. Within each of the three issue-area categories there are a number of different facets, each of which has its own profile.

The limitation of the categorisation by Thrall (2015) is that it focuses very much on the formal level of interactions between China and different African countries. However, there is an expanding literature that highlights the informal everyday interactions between the Chinese migrant communities and their host societies (Mohan et al., 2014). The literature includes a number of ethnographic studies that look in depth at Africans and Chinese in terms of their relationships as employers, employees, consumers, neighbours, friends and so forth (see for example, Strauss, 2013 and Giese, 2014). This issue-area of community relations is a significant domain of opportunities and threats for both sides and non-state actors are involved in most of its different facets such as the trade unions in Zambia pressing for better working conditions in Chinese-owned mines or the Association of Chinese Enterprises in Mozambique promoting the reputation of its members through disaster relief donations. It is important to make a conceptual distinction between these informal “people-to-people *interactions*” and formal “people-to-people *exchanges*” that are sponsored through official development assistance processes such as FOCAC.

The nature of Africa-China relations has been well summarised by Thrall (2015: xi) who characterises them as “diverse, multifaceted and evolving”. The literature does indeed show that there is a variety of issue-areas, each issue-area is multifaceted, and the issues are changing over time. Thus it is concluded that issue-areas must be differentiated in order to determine what measures will be helpful at any given time to promote good bilateral relations between a particular African country and China.

The diversity of actors and issue-areas creates complex bilateral relations and inevitably tensions and challenges have arisen between the two sides. A recurring set of problems emerges from the literature with respect to the activities of Chinese actors from the perspective of Africans. These are as follows: low quality consumer goods, unfair competition with respect to local retail businesses, deindustrialisation, poorly built infrastructure projects, illegal trade in wildlife products, corruption, environmental pollution, exploitative labour practices, employment of Chinese nationals to the exclusion of locals, low levels of skill transfer, lack of social integration and racism. These problems have led to outbreaks of anti-Chinese sentiment in many countries and occasionally there have been violent riots such as those in Madagascar in 2014 (Horta, 2015) and in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2015 (Mail Online, 2015). Some politicians have mobilised anti-Chinese populist movements such as Michael Sata’s Patriotic Front in Zambia (Hess and Aidoo, 2014). It is therefore evident that there are problems within all of the four main issue-areas of political, economic, security and community relations.

The literature shows that Chinese academics have recognised the problems in Sino-African relations for some time. Zhan (2008) reports on a conference convened in 2006 by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences think-tank with representatives of the Government and other researchers on the theme “Sensitive issues in contemporary Sino-African relations”. The participants discussed practical ways of deepening political trust, expanding cultural exchange and cooperation in international affairs, and “appropriately handling emerging problems in cooperation such as trade frictions [...]” (Zhan, 2008: 31).

In fact, there is evidence that the Chinese have made policy changes and have taken a range of initiatives to respond to the problems that have emerged in their relationships with African countries:

China has not maintained a static policy in the face of such obstacles; rather, Beijing has responded to both foreign and local pressures by modifying its approach to the continent. In an effort to make Chinese trade and investment appear less one-sided, Beijing has promoted “sustainable” economic development through “win-win” commercial deals that generate tangible, long-term economic benefits for African nations in the form of jobs, training, and technology. It has also increasingly worked to shape broader Sino-African relations through people-to-people ties, cultural and educational exchanges, Mandarin language training, and a robust public diplomacy campaign (Hanauer and Morris, 2014: xii)

The initiatives mentioned in the last sentence of the quotation have been discussed quite extensively in the literature, often using the concept of “soft power” to conceptualise strategies designed to develop an attractive image of China and exert a positive influence on African policy-makers and public opinion (see for example, Cooke, 2009; Fijalkowski, 2011; King, 2013).

The literature shows that China have been proactive in taking measures to build a positive image and enhance relations, though there does not appear to be studies that analyse this in detail at the level of a single country. Furthermore, there is very little that has been written on how and to what extent African countries are managing their relationships with China to the best effect. It appears that few African countries have explicit foreign policy strategies towards China, though South Africa is an exception and Amin (2013) has provided a case-study of Cameroon’s pragmatic foreign policy with respect to China. Mostly, it seems that relations are handled on an ad hoc basis, with governments responding to problems when there is pressure from non-state actors such as local business groups, the private media, trade unions or NGOs. Cooke (2009: 42) gives an interesting example from Gabon in 2006:

[...] a consortium of Gabonese and international environmental NGOs accused SINOPEC (China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation) of falsifying an environmental impact report associated with an oil-prospecting project in Loango Park. Ultimately the government ordered SINOPEC to shut down operations and withdraw.

The impression given by the literature is that the responses of African governments to emerging problems are essentially reactive. Furthermore, little has been written by African academics and think-tank researchers to propose proactive strategies. An interesting exception is a policy briefing by Esterhuysen and Kane (2014) which identifies the potential for negative impacts in the China-Mali relationship and recommends concrete measures that the Malian government can take to avoid them such as renegotiating trade deals to encourage technology transfer.

Overall, the literature is relatively sparse in terms of how the tensions in Africa-China relations have been managed and what measures have been taken on both sides to promote trust and enhance relations. This study on Botswana-China relations helps to fill the gap in the literature by providing a country-specific case study whose analytical and prescriptive conclusions may also be relevant for other African countries.

## **2.4 BOTSWANA-CHINA RELATIONS**

There have been a small number of academic studies on the relations between Botswana and China. The first analysis of the topic was undertaken by Taylor who published two articles and a book chapter between 1997 and 2007 (Taylor 1997, 1998, 2007). Then Bolaane (2007) published a major book chapter that undertook a historical study of bilateral relations from Independence to 2005. Subsequently, Youngman (2013) produced a discussion paper that reviewed relations up to 2013 with a view to proposing ideas for strengthening relations. Much of the analysis that has been undertaken is based on document analysis of articles in the press and Moahi (2015) has recently studied the portrayal of Botswana-China relations in the print media in the period 2004-2014. The discussion below is based mainly on these studies augmented with an opinion piece by former President Mogae (2009) and with recent newspaper articles.

Botswana became independent in 1966 and in 1967 it established diplomatic relations with Taiwan. However, in 1971 Botswana voted in favour of the People's Republic of China (PRC) taking the seat for China at the UN (Parsons et al., 1995: 302) and in 1975 diplomatic relations with Taiwan were terminated and established with the PRC. Bilateral relations over the next 25 years were positive though relatively low key, undertaken largely on a state-to-state basis. China gave diplomatic support to Botswana during the period of liberation struggles in the region (including provision of light weapons in the late 1970s) and provided some technical assistance in areas such as railway rehabilitation and the health sector. Economic cooperation was small scale with a limited number of Chinese companies entering the construction sector from the mid-1980s. There were few Chinese people living and working in the country. However, Botswana's rapidly growing economy made it increasingly attractive for Chinese investment and trade and in 2000 bilateral agreements on investment and preferential loans were signed, as well as on the implementation of agricultural and cultural cooperation (Bolaane, 2007: 162). From 2000, Botswana-China relations became more diverse and more significant, reflecting the wider trend on the continent. There is no evidence in the literature that in the period prior to 2000 there were any problems within the relationship.

Bilateral relations since 2000 have become increasingly multi-dimensional, involving both state and non-state actors. The issue-areas have diversified and now encompass political/diplomatic relations, economic relations (trade and investment, public works contracting, technical assistance in fields such as agriculture, education and health) and community relations (Youngman, 2013). A wide variety of government ministries are engaged with China, including not only the Office of the President and the MOFAIC but also the ministries responsible for sectors such as agriculture, defence and security, education, the environment, tourism, health, infrastructure, home affairs, minerals, trade and industry, and youth, sports and culture. Parastatal bodies are

also involved, such as the Botswana Power Corporation and the Botswana Development Corporation. There is also a diversity of non-state actors interacting with China's officialdom and the expanded Chinese migrant community now resident in the country, including private businesses, the media, the University of Botswana (UB), and civil society organisations. Furthermore, the general public has daily interactions with Chinese migrants running small shops and working on construction sites.

The nature of Botswana-China relations has therefore become much more complex since 2000. The high point in terms of the political/diplomatic dimension came with President Mogae's state visit to China in November 2006 to attend the FOCAC Beijing Summit. He made clear at the time that he highly valued the relationship, including its economic benefits. He subsequently noted that there were problems in the relationship but these were outweighed by its advantages:

On our part in Botswana, we are grateful to China for the various projects completed under our joint efforts [...]. This doesn't mean that there haven't been bumps in the road; there have been [...]. We have issues to sort out and in that regard we encourage the Chinese to heed our aspirations to hire more of our local workers, to help us further with capacity building, to not consider our countries as dumping grounds, and not to overrun our countries with Chinese businesses [...] I am reminded that Rome was not built in a day. We have gained much ground in our relationship with China, with great potential going forward (Mogae, 2009: 22–27).

The problems in the relationship have been primarily in the economic dimension, though Botswana has had differences on a number of diplomatic issues, such as China's veto in the UN Security Council of a resolution on Syria in July 2012. Despite active interventions by the Chinese Embassy (including diplomatic activity, media coverage, meetings with Chinese companies, donations to local schools and charities, cultural events and so forth), there is public evidence that the Botswana government's attitude towards China have deteriorated in recent years. In early 2013, President Khama gave a newspaper interview in which he was very negative about China. In the interview the Head of State expressed dissatisfaction with three aspects of relations with China, namely: a) the poor quality of work by Chinese construction companies on major government projects; b) the excessive level of Chinese migration into the country; c) the fact that Chinese people were undertaking economic activities and jobs that could be done by Botswana. When asked if other African presidents had similar views he responded:

"They probably won't say it publicly but when I've spoken to others they've expressed frustrations as well," he said. "People feel that China is now the second-biggest economy in the world. You say things like that, do you really want to upset such a huge power? But there's no point in having a huge power investing in a country if those investments at the end of the day don't do you any good" (Kotch, 2013:2).

Subsequently, in July 2013, the MOFAIC spoke critically at a reception for the new Chinese Ambassador and warned him to ensure better behaviour by the Chinese community (Basimanebotlhe, 2013).

While Botswana's government ministers continue to make positive formal statements on the bilateral relations such as the Minister of Health on Chinese medical assistance, negative views persist among significant state actors about the extent of Chinese small businesses in the retail sector and about the performance of Chinese construction companies on major government projects. This is reflected in a newspaper report of remarks attributed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation on July 1, 2015 after returning from a visit to China, including a meeting with her counterpart:

Dr Venson-Moitsoi said in an interview that government had “drastically reduced” retail licenses to Chinese nationals. “Retail is a preserve for Botswana and it is an area where we believe that Botswana should have a higher percentage because we are seeking jobs and employment for Botswana,” she said [...]

“We need a spell of cooling in our relations because over the last couple of years, we have had a few projects that failed and thought it was necessary that we spoke at a higher level with Chinese government to express our feelings and ensure that we remove misunderstandings,” she said [...]

“I had to meet him to inform him that our country suffered because of Chinese companies which did not invest in the country, but only came on contracts to make money and go out after delivering the jobs,” she said (Motsamai, 2015).

In response, the Chinese Embassy gave a press briefing on July 7, 2015 in which, according to newspaper reports, it made public its frustrations with visa and work permit problems, sudden deportations, the insecurity felt by Chinese investors and the tendency within Botswana to regard all Chinese construction companies as problematic (Piet, 2015). Subsequently, the MOFAIC found it necessary to make a press release on July 8, 2015 stating that “relations between the two countries remain excellent and mutually beneficial” (BOPA, 2015). Nevertheless, a public impression had been created of significant tension in the bilateral relations.

This tension was exacerbated in February 2016 when the Government of Botswana through the MOFAIC issued a press release criticising China’s approach to its territorial claim to islands in the South China Sea (Government of Botswana, 2016). This was regarded by China as a public attack on its core national interests and it reacted with extreme displeasure that the press release was inaccurate and that diplomatic channels had not been followed (Ontebetse, 2016). Botswana’s Ambassador in Beijing was called into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and admonished. Undoubtedly, this diplomatic dispute was the lowest point reached in state-to-state relations since diplomatic relations were established in 1975 and it impacted very negatively on political/diplomatic trust between the two nations. The dispute reflects the wider trends in Botswana’s foreign policy that have emerged during the presidency of Ian Khama, whose personalised and idiosyncratic approach has led to a number of differences with the policies and behaviours of his predecessors (Osei-Hwedie and Mokhawa, 2014).

The trajectory of the Botswana-China relationship since 2000 can be tracked in the print media where journalists have documented and interpreted many aspects of the relationship. An important analysis of the print media has been undertaken by Moahi (2015). She analysed the content of stories related to China in four Botswana newspapers in the period 2004 to 2014. She identified 154 stories that were positive, portraying China as a development partner and friend of Botswana offering opportunities in business, finance, trade and investment and pursuing cooperation in the fields of education, health and culture. 93 stories were negative, focusing on issues like the poor performance of Chinese contractors, unfair competition by Chinese in the retail sector, allegations of bribery and corruption, illegal trade in wildlife products and the lack of social integration by the Chinese community. She found that the negative reports began to emerge from 2005 and it is noteworthy that in this year the Chinese Embassy called a press briefing to encourage more positive reporting because of its concerns about anti-Chinese sentiment in the press (Bolaane, 2007:167).

On the basis of her analysis, Moahi (2015) concluded that:

The results showed that the people-to-people, cultural and technical exchange activities were positive, and that Botswana could learn a lot from the Chinese development model. However, there was some scepticism expressed in certain quarters, and certain aspects of the Chinese people’s conduct in business and economic areas were viewed negatively, and these tended to spill over into other dimensions such as the political and diplomatic and community relations. Overall, the print media portray a relationship that has promise and

potential, but which requires more work on both the Chinese and Botswana side to ensure that mutual understanding and mutual benefits are achieved.

The conclusion highlights the need for active measures to be taken to develop mutual understanding and to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship.

This literature review of the history of Botswana-China relations shows that it has become increasingly complex over the years. While a number of dimensions are seen as positive, negative attitudes have arisen on both sides about some aspects of the relationship and these sentiments can be found amongst both state and non-state actors. Overall, the literature shows a deterioration in bilateral relations in recent years. It is therefore concluded that both sides need to give attention to solving problem issues and to promoting positive relations. Thus the core purpose of the research project is to identify what practical measures can be taken by both sides to enhance Botswana-China relations on a continuing basis.

## **2.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

In light of the literature review, three objectives for the study were determined, namely:

- 1 To identify which are the most important dimensions (issue-areas) of the Botswana-China relationship
- 2 To analyse different perspectives on the current state of Botswana-China relations
- 3 To gather suggestions and make recommendations on practical measures that can be undertaken by both sides to enhance Botswana-China relations on a continuing basis

## **2.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In order to meet the research objectives articulated above, the study addressed the following research questions:

- 1 Which are the most important dimensions of the Botswana-China relationship?
- 2 What is the current state of Botswana-China relations?
- 3 What can be done practically to enhance Botswana-China relations by both sides?

# **3. METHODOLOGY**

## **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This section describes the research methodology that was used in the study to address the research questions. It explains the research design, sampling, the data collection method and instrument, the data analysis procedures and the ethical considerations that were taken into account.

## **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The aim of the study was to capture, illustrate and interpret the views, opinions, ideas, perceptions, insights and suggestions (in short, perspectives) of key informants on the nature of Botswana-China relations and how they can be enhanced. It was a pragmatic study insofar as its central concern was not theory-generation but a contribution to practical knowledge. The choice of research design was therefore based on the most appropriate approach to addressing the research questions and describing and making meaning of the perspectives sought from the informants within the particular context of Botswana. A broadly phenomenological approach was deemed best suited for capturing and interpreting the subjective viewpoints

of the informants. Hence a qualitative research design was adopted. It should be noted that this kind of interpretive approach is increasingly used in research on international relations (Klotz and Prakash, 2008).

### 3.3 SAMPLING DESIGN

The target population for the study was professionals and opinion-leaders whose work involves them in engaging with Botswana-China relations on a regular basis and who thereby have experiential knowledge of the topic. Four occupational categories were selected, namely (i) diplomats (and government officials involved with foreign affairs); (ii) academics; (iii) media practitioners; and (iv) business community members. A non-probability sampling design was used to identify respondents from each country and each occupational group. A purposive sampling strategy was used whereby I selected the sample members based on the extensive knowledge of those involved with the topic that I had developed since 2005 through my own professional and academic activity (Youngman, 2014). A total of 24 respondents were interviewed, 12 from each country. The respondents were coded by nationality (B or C) and by occupational category (D, A, M or B) as shown below, with each interviewee given a number for reporting purposes – for example BD1 or CB4.

**Table 1: Respondents' codes**

<b>OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY</b>	<b>BOTSWANA CODE</b>	<b>CHINA CODE</b>
<b>Diplomats (and government officials involved with foreign affairs) (D)</b>	BD	CD
<b>Academics (A)</b>	BA	CA
<b>Media practitioners (M)</b>	BM	CM
<b>Business community members (B)</b>	BB	CB

### 3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The data collected for the study were the perspectives of key informants. These perspectives were the subjective attitudes of those who hold them and are valuable because of the particular experience and knowledge of the respondents with regard to the topic of the study. The appropriate way to gather this information was to use a semi-structured face-to-face individual interview that would enable a combination of focus and flexibility on the part of the interviewer. In social research methodology, in-depth, open-ended interviews are regarded as the best way to gather detailed information on individual's subjective viewpoints about a topic (Creswell, 2007). The interviews were conducted in a conversational mode designed to encourage trust and openness. One interview was conducted with a group comprising several members of the Chinese business community but for consistency it has been treated as an individual respondent. The interviews were held in Beijing, Gaborone and Shanghai.

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT**

Data was collected through the means of an interview guide using the three research questions posed in an open-ended way in order to elicit rich responses. The basic structure of the guide ensured consistency of coverage of the key topics but provided flexibility for the interviewer to explore unexpected and new dimensions of the topic that might be raised by the respondent:

An interview guide is prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of enquiry are pursued with each person interviewed. It provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe and ask questions that will indicate and illuminate that particular subject (Patton, 2002:343).

The researcher's own knowledge enabled probing follow-up questions for further clarification and elaboration, though care was exercised to avoid leading questions. The responses were recorded by hand rather than by voice recording because of the sensitivity of the topic for some respondents.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

The interview transcripts constitute a large volume of raw data comprised of the respondents' expression of what is meaningful to them with regard to the questions asked. The typed transcription of the notes was sent to each interviewee to make additions, subtractions and amendments as they saw fit. This "member check" procedure (Creswell, 2007) undertaken prior to the analysis of data ensured that the respondents agreed to the accuracy of the data, after self-editing the transcript if they wished. The transcripts comprised approximately 30,000 words of data content. The researcher then took an inductive approach to the data using content analysis in order to identify the themes that emerged. The standard approach for analysing qualitative data was used, namely systematically studying the interview transcripts to assign codes to particular ideas and phrases and subsequently to create categories of recurrent patterns within the codes (Bogdan and Biklen, 2006). The interpretation of these categories provided the themes that were used in the discussion of the findings. During this process, the researcher also identified illustrative quotations which capture key themes in the words of the respondents themselves.

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Interview-based research with adult respondents has four key ethical principles to take into account, namely: voluntary participation, informed consent, privacy and anonymity, and confidentiality (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). The relations between Botswana and China have a number of sensitivities and it was important that interviewees felt unrestricted in their responses. Voluntary participation in the interviews and the guarantee of confidentiality were therefore essential. The request for an interview included a full explanation of the purposes and modalities of the research and this was repeated prior to the interview itself so that interviewees were fully informed and were able to withdraw if they so wished. Only on the basis of voluntary participation and informed consent was an interview undertaken and respondents signed an Informed Consent Form. In the event, only one prospective respondent withdrew.

The interviews were undertaken at appropriate venues to ensure privacy. Because of the sensitivities of the topic and the desire to have respondents express their views freely, the interviews were recorded only in written notes and not by voice recording. As noted above, the subsequent transcription of the notes was sent to the interviewees to give them the opportunity to make additions, subtractions and amendments and approve their self-representation. The transcripts were anonymous and identified only by an interview number, the date and place of the interview, and the occupational category and nationality of the interviewee. The transcripts are held by the researcher on a confidential basis and the write-up of findings has ensured that individual respondents are unidentifiable.

The purpose of the study was to gather, present and interpret the perspectives of key informants and the implementation of these ethical considerations has protected the interests of the respondents whilst enhancing the authenticity of the data collected.

### 3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The respondents were from most of the relevant professional groups with the exception of political leaders, who are important stake-holders. Political leaders were excluded because of the difficulty for the researcher of accessing Chinese politicians. Thus the range of stake-holders was restricted. Additionally, the respondents do not include members of the Botswana general public or of the Chinese migrant community resident in Botswana, for whom a different kind of study would be required. Another limitation is that all interviews were conducted in English, which may have been a limitation for some respondents. Furthermore, the dynamic of bilateral relations is constantly evolving and the detailed situation changed during the course of the study – for example, the majority of interviews were held before the major crisis in relations in February 2016 following Botswana’s press release on the South China Sea issue. Such developments might change respondents’ perceptions of the state of bilateral relations.

### 3.9 SUMMARY

The key areas of the research methodology are summarised in the table below:

**Table 2: Summary of the research methodology**

<b>AREA OF DECISION</b>	<b>CHOICE</b>
<b>Research orientation</b>	Phenomenological
<b>Research design</b>	Qualitative
<b>Sampling design</b>	Non-probability sampling
<b>Type of sampling strategy</b>	Purposive sampling
<b>Data collection method</b>	In-depth interview
<b>Data analysis procedures</b>	Transcription, member check, coding of data and creation of categories, elaboration of themes, interpretation
<b>Ethical principles</b>	Voluntary participation, informed consent, privacy and anonymity, confidentiality

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings of the study are based on a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and uses illustrative quotations to present key points in the words of the respondents themselves. This section is structured around the three Research Questions of the study.

#### **Research Question 1: Which are the most important dimensions of the Botswana-China relationship?**

One of the postulates of Complex Interdependence Theory is that there is a diversity of “issue- areas” in bilateral relations which have different relative significance and whose relative importance changes over time according to changing circumstances. At any given time, different actors in the relationship may prioritise different issues and may be pursuing different goals, creating a situation of complexity. In order to analyse this in the Botswana context and to provide relevant background information, the first research question sought the views of respondents on what they regarded as the “most important dimensions” (i.e. “issue- areas”) in the Botswana-China relationship. Five issue-areas emerged from the interviews, namely: the economic dimension; development assistance; the political/diplomatic dimension; the people-to-people dimension and security.

### 4.2 THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION

The first issue-area is the economic dimension. Chinese businesses have operated in Botswana since the mid-1980s and have a high profile in the construction industry and the retail trade, though little involvement in the manufacturing sector. It was not surprising that the majority of respondents viewed the economic dimension as the most important, as expressed by a Botswana academic:

“Economic activity by the Chinese is the major area of the relationship, though surprisingly there is no significant Chinese presence in industry/ manufacturing” (BA1). This view was reinforced by another Botswana academic who saw trade as the most important dimension: “for the ordinary people in the street or in the rural areas [...] the perception of China is simply as a source of affordable goods like gadgets, clothes, etc.,” (BA3). Respondents of both nationalities used similar language to convey the centrality of the economic dimension: “The most important area is business” (CA3); “[...] the current relationship is a purely business one” (BM2).

Whilst there was agreement amongst the majority of respondents that the economic dimension is the most significant dimension of the relationship, a Chinese diplomat made the important caveat that these economic links are relatively weak compared to other African countries:

The most important component of our bilateral relations is economic but our strategic economic links are not enough. Botswana’s economy is very dependent on diamonds, which are not exported directly to China. Botswana has no strategic resources needed by China. Also, there is very little opportunity for investment in Botswana and a very limited market for China’s consumer products. The economic links are weak in both directions because Botswana has very little to export to China. In most other African countries there are either resources that China needs or a big market and opportunities for investment (CD2).

The Chinese diplomat concluded that “our bilateral relations are [...] very superficial because there are no deep economic links” (CD2).

### 4.3 DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

However, another Chinese diplomat emphasised that

“The Chinese government is not only focused on economic cooperation but also on cooperation in the field of health, education and training. The relationship does not rely on economics to be sustainable” (CD1).

Indeed, many respondents identified development assistance (i.e. aid) as an important dimension of the relationship. Respondents mentioned the development assistance programmes that have been undertaken in the fields of health, education and culture (whilst noting that the potential for cooperation in agriculture had not been realised). One Botswana media practitioner explained why this aid is important:

China has come in at a time when Botswana has been losing partners because of its perceived economic status as a middle-income country. The donors from Western countries have shifted their focus to poorer countries. China has stepped in to fill the gap in development cooperation [...] China has targeted critical areas for the development of Botswana. There are less strings attached to aid compared to that of the West. China is an equal partner working towards the same goal. The background to this is FOCAC (BM3).

Another Botswana respondent stressed the importance of concessional loans for infrastructure projects:

The most important component of the relationship in practice is aid. China has given Botswana soft loans for years. Chinese aid is unlike any other because its loans have longer grace periods etc., which enables the recipient country to invest its own resources in other areas and avoid debt [...]. This is a very important element of the relationship and I am disappointed it is not part of the public discourse – I am baffled as to why this is not appreciated (BA2).

However, the scale of development assistance is comparatively small and one Chinese media practitioner made the point that it is not as significant for the relationship as it is for other African countries:

The Chinese government gives aid for example, for the youth centre in Gaborone, for example, the Chinese medical team has a good reputation [...] But Botswana is rich and does not rely on foreign aid so this is not a significant connection compared to Kenya, Tanzania etc., (CM2).

This point was reinforced by the view of a Botswana academic (expressed prior to FOCAC 6 in Johannesburg):

Botswana participates in FOCAC but currently there is no sense that it is an active participant. For example, two years ago the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation set up an inter-ministerial forum to identify projects that could be funded through FOCAC but it met only twice and fizzled out – there was no follow up. Botswana is not leveraging these available funds, for example, in comparison to Lesotho. (BA1).

In general, the respondents identified development assistance as an important part of the relationship but, as the above quotations show, some viewed it as less significant than in more aid-dependent African countries.

#### **4.4 THE POLITICAL/DIPLOMATIC DIMENSION**

Another issue-area that emerged was the political/diplomatic dimension, which was identified primarily by respondents in the occupational category “diplomat/government official”. Two aspects were highlighted. Firstly, high-level visits in both directions by government officials at the level of Minister or higher were perceived as important vehicles of dialogue between the two sides. For example, reference was made to the visit to Botswana by then Vice President Xi Jinping in 2010. In the words of a Chinese diplomat:

“The first key issue is the political aspect. It is strong and there have been high-level political exchanges for many years [...]. There is a momentum for exchange by high-level officials and politicians to enable sharing of ideas and how to learn from each other in building our countries” (CD3).

Secondly, the diplomatic dimension includes engagement in multilateral forums: “Botswana and China enjoy relations at the multilateral level where they support each other on issues of mutual interest, such as the UN reforms, WTO etc. Botswana and China are both members of the Group of 77” (BD4).

#### **4.5 THE PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE DIMENSION**

The people-to-people dimension of the relationship was raised solely by Chinese respondents who identified as important the relations of Chinese people with the local community through individual interactions and through NGOs like the Chinese Charity Association (CA1). However, the responses recognised differences within the Chinese community. A Chinese academic mentioned the professional Chinese:

The most dynamic part of the relationship from my observation is at the people-to-people level. The Chinese who come to Botswana as professionals and formal businessmen enjoy their stay and want to get involved and make a contribution. The businessmen think they are successful because of the good regulations and policies of Botswana and they want to give back in return through social responsibility activity (CA2).

On the other hand, a member of the Chinese business community who emphasised the importance of relations “at the level of ordinary people” referred to other kinds of Chinese migrants:

Most Chinese in Botswana are poorly educated for example, the construction workers and the Chinese shop owners. They give a particular impression to Botswana – uneducated, impolite, smoking etc. Whereas China is a normal society with all levels of people, only a segment of Chinese society comes to Botswana (CB1).

It was conspicuous in the data that none of the Botswana respondents identified people-to-people interactions as a significant dimension of the bilateral relationship.

#### **4.6 SECURITY**

Finally, it is noticeable that the issue-area of security has no importance at this time according to the respondents. As noted in the literature review, a significant point in the history of the relationship was China’s donation of small arms to the newly established Botswana Defence Force (BDF) in the late 1970s when Botswana was threatened by incursions of the Rhodesian regime and Western governments refused to provide military support. This was mentioned by two Chinese diplomats/government officials (CD1; CD3) and a Botswana academic (BA2) as a significant act of solidarity by China at a time when Botswana was surrounded by hostile racist regimes. But currently security has no salience and was only mentioned by two respondents, one of whom was a Chinese diplomat who responded to a probing question:

We have no real involvement in this area and it is not a significant issue. Botswana is very peaceful and stable. We provide some small-scale training to the BDF (20 officers per year) and sell a few weapons. Of course, we hope to sell more to Botswana as Chinese military equipment has the most value for money. We can explore further opportunities in this area in the future (CD3).

This finding on the security issue-area is consistent with the postulate of Complex Interdependence Theory that security is seldom the dominant component of bilateral relations.

#### **4.7 SUMMARY**

In summary, the findings show that economic issues are fundamental to Botswana's relations with China whilst development assistance and formal political/diplomatic exchanges constitute important components of the state-to-state relationship. Additionally, relations at the level of ordinary people form a dimension of interaction between non-state actors that is significant for Chinese respondents. Apart from this last issue, the responses are consistent across nationalities and occupational categories, though the relative weight given to issues sometimes has a subjective element influenced by the particular experience and viewpoint. For example, most respondents from the business community focussed only on the economic dimension, whilst most diplomats took a broad perspective of the issues. It can be concluded that the issue-areas in the relationship are shaped partly by the general nature of China's engagement with Africa (ranging from government policies to migration) but more significantly by the specifics of Botswana's political economy (such as its stability and its lack of reliance on foreign aid).

#### **Research Question 2: What is the current state of Botswana-China relations?**

The focus of the study is how to enhance bilateral relations and therefore it was important to seek the perceptions of respondents on the current state of Botswana-China relations in order to identify the positive elements and the challenges of the relationship. It was expected that the responses would provide contextual information for analysing what should be done to strengthen the relationship. Overall, the responses to the question can be categorised into two: a) negative responses which focus on problems that have arisen in the last few years; b) mixed responses which see both the negative and the positive elements of the relationship. To clarify these different perspectives, it is necessary to consider both the main problems and the positive elements which the respondents identified.

#### **4.8 ECONOMIC PROBLEMS**

The first set of problems discussed by respondents is in the economic domain. The majority of respondents cited the difficulties that have arisen since 2010 because of high profile problems with Chinese construction companies undertaking major Government of Botswana projects, in particular the Francistown Stadium, the Shakawe Senior Secondary School, the Sir Seretse Khama International (SSKI) Airport and the Morupule B power plant. These projects have had problems of quality, delays and cost over-runs, which in some cases have led to the termination of contracts, and they have received widespread coverage in the media. The perception of the problems and their impact were common to both Botswana and Chinese respondents. In the words of one Botswana diplomat/government official:

“Currently relations are strained [...]. The problems have arisen during the current administration because of the failed projects [...]. In the Mogae era, no major project failed, though there were operational problems with construction projects [...]. It is the failed projects that have strained the relationship” (BD2). A Chinese academic said: “The relationship is not very close because the Botswana government feels the Chinese companies have not done a good job on projects like the airport and Morupule B. Botswana people feel

that the Chinese companies have cheated them” (CA1). The perceived negative impact was summed up by a Botswana diplomat/government official: “These failures have soured relations very much” (BD1).

Although the problem is essentially economic, the failed construction projects have had significant political ramifications, especially affecting views within the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), which did comparatively poorly in the 2014 elections:

The BDP say they have cost them votes. The failures have undermined the credibility of the government (BA3).

In the build-up to the 2014 elections, people and the media in particular, vehemently lamented these projects. The President felt that the failed projects contributed to the reduced BDP majority. This therefore had a cost on the ruling party (BD 3).

In particular, the failure of the Morupule B power plant was cited by a number of respondents:

[...] Morupule B [...] has created problems for the Chinese – when there is a power cut people say “there goes the Chinese electricity” (BM2).

Morupule B is the key sticking point (BA3).

One Botswana academic was of the view that it had led to the negative position that President Khama expressed publicly in 2013:

President Khama seems to have a dislike of China and distrust of the Chinese as evidenced by his interview in the *Business Daily*<sup>2</sup> in 2013. In particular, the failure of Morupule B has closed his mind. His disdain for the Chinese is captured in the interview, which has nothing positive (BA2).

However, some Chinese respondents argued that putting the blame for project failures solely on the Chinese contractors is unfair:

When the Chinese contractors entered the market over 20 years ago, the Government of Botswana was paying a lot of money to South African contractors. The Chinese companies brought the prices down. Although initially they used skilled people from China, they have trained a lot of people and now use local skills and resources. Very few government projects built by the Chinese have had problems but there have been a few large projects that have had problems like the SSKI Airport and Morupule B. This has led the media to say “All Chinese companies are bad” and this has led to negative opinions amongst top politicians including Ministers and the President [...]. But when a project has problems it may not be the contractor that is responsible, there may be problems in the design or in the supervision. So always complaining about the contractor is unfair. This issue has been politicised and the good work that Chinese companies have done has been forgotten (CB2).

In their discussion of the problem of failed construction projects, a number of Botswana respondents noted that the Government of Botswana also had responsibility for the problem, for example:

We have blamed the Chinese but also the Government of Botswana has not done things right. For example, with the SSKI Airport project the government kept adding new details to the original design, which Sino-Hydro mistakenly agreed to, leading to time and budget problems (BM2).

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<sup>2</sup> See Kotch, N. (2013). *Khama wants fewer Chinese firms to receive state contracts*. Retrieved from: <http://www.bdlive.co.za/world/africa/2013/02/20/news-analysis-khama-wants-fewer-chinese-firms-to-receive-state-contracts>

[Chinese companies] seem to perform better for private clients than for the government, where supervision is poor. The problem is often the client rather than the contractor and in fact private clients have less complaints than government (BB1).

But we shouldn't solely blame the Chinese. The Government of Botswana also had a part to play. It must ensure that Chinese companies given tenders are reputable and competent and it must carry out inspections to ensure specifications are being met. Are our own officers capable? Is there corruption involving our own officers? We should look at both sides (BD1).

We blame the Chinese for problems with projects but we did not do due diligence for example, the Palapye glass factory. We should check Chinese companies with the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission which oversees SOEs. There is a narrative of corruption which blames the Chinese. But we have been complicit and nobody in the government takes responsibility (BM1).

The last two quotations include reference to corruption surrounding the operation of Chinese companies, which was perceived as a problem by Botswana respondents from all occupational categories – for example:

There have [...] been suspicions and actual cases of under the table deals related to construction projects (BA1).

There is also a feeling that Chinese companies may be involved in corruption with respect to the award of tenders and obtaining of work and residence permits (BB1).

The problem of corruption was also mentioned by a Chinese diplomat/government official with respect to the Palapye glass factory project – “Deep corruption problems surrounded this project and the Embassy has given assistance to the Department of Corruption and Economic Crime. The project damaged China's reputation” (CD2).

Although the problems involving large Chinese construction companies predominated in the responses, another commonly-cited economic problem was the behaviour of the small Chinese retailers. In the words of a member of the Botswana business community: “The main friction point is the construction sector. In other areas, like the retail trade, there are simmering tensions” (BB1). The reasons given for these tensions by respondents of both nationalities were poor quality of goods sold, undercutting of local businesses, poor treatment of employees, evasion of tax and non-adherence to regulations. A Chinese diplomat/government official summarised the problem:

The Chinese community running small shops has also created problems. They are from rural areas in provinces such as Fujian and Jiangxi and are not well-educated and have limited resources. Many come to Botswana through family networks. They are not high-level people such as you might find in the Chinese community in the USA. They do not speak English, they are not used to other cultures, they are not law-abiding and they sell low quality products. The Botswana government does not like them (CD2).

Finally, the smuggling of wildlife products, which is a high-profile economic problem in a number of southern and eastern African countries, was hardly mentioned. One respondent, a member of the Chinese business community, said:

There is also the problem of ivory smuggling. In Botswana, the ivory comes mostly from the Zimbabwe region and is sold to foreigners in Botswana, especially those from east and south-east Asia where it is highly valued. China particularly is a market of ivory goods. Since the end of 2012 the police have been stopping and searching Chinese people and the problem seems to have been solved to some extent (CB1).

Whilst the problem of ivory smuggling is low-profile, it is clear that the other economic problems of failed construction projects, corruption and the behaviour of small retailers are perceived to have damaged bilateral relations.

#### **4.9 POLITICAL/DIPLOMATIC PROBLEMS**

The second set of problems are in the political/diplomatic area and the respondents raised two issues. Firstly, the issue of visas and permits. Chinese respondents in each occupational category gave a lot of emphasis to the fact that the Botswana government's increasingly restrictive policy on the granting of visas and work/resident permits has had a negative impact on relations, creating practical problems that undermine Chinese economic activity and generating an environment in which the Chinese feel unwelcome. For the Chinese people, the problem is a burning issue, as illustrated by this quotation from the Chinese business community:

[...] the problems with permits and visas. A permit can take 108 days to be approved. We have a visa application still pending after eight months. The Engineers Institute of Botswana does not recognise the qualifications of Chinese engineers. This is discrimination. Botswana only welcomes white guys from western countries and sees Chinese as bad people. Permits are rejected and the reason given is "national security". We have many examples. Last month a delegation from a major aircraft manufacturer in China was given a visa for only three days which was ridiculous and put off potential FDI. We have had visa applications for our bosses at headquarters in Beijing denied and they think we are hiding something and don't want them to visit us. This all started three or four years ago and now foreigners are seen as enemies. We Chinese are very angry. Our Chinese Embassy does not give locals problems in getting visas for China. Botswana is not open and does not want investment and does not want soft loans from China. It thinks it is rich and it does not want to borrow and does not need a relationship with China. But this is short-sighted as its economy will not grow in the long-term (CB2).

The issue is also a major priority of the Chinese Embassy, as stated by an official:

The Chinese Embassy raised this concern in a press conference in July 2015. After our comments we had candid and frank discussions with the Department of Immigration. We understand that Botswana has strict immigration controls for all nationalities but the Chinese community here is not very large, probably under 10,000 people. Many of them have been here for quite a number of years but their applications for renewal of residence/work permits are delayed and most are rejected on the first application. The matter was also discussed last month between the Ambassador and Minister Batshu. We were told the delays are due to technical problems with the computer system and the lack of staff. But we are concerned also about the rejections. [...]. We did not regard our remarks at the press conference as critical of the government but expressed our unhappiness that this problem is not compatible with friendly bilateral relations. We have had complaints from our Chinese compatriots so it is our duty as the Embassy to follow them up (CD3).

From the perspective of the Chinese Embassy the issue is a major impediment to good bilateral relations as it shows a lack of trust and reciprocity: "Each year we grant 3,500 to 4,000 visas to Botswana and no one is rejected" (CD3). Overall, for Chinese respondents, the problem of permits and visas is perceived as unfriendly and discriminatory and also an impediment to economic co-operation as the problem pushes Chinese entrepreneurs to leave the country, provides a disincentive to FDI by Chinese companies, and is an obstacle to tourism. The seriousness of the problem was highlighted by two Botswana media practitioners:

It is insulting to turn down work permits and visas for no reason with no transparency (BM1).

Because of China's concentration on business, the Government of Botswana changed the rules on the role of foreigners in the economy, putting greater restrictions on visas and work permits. This led to some ridiculous outcomes and the Chinese are very unhappy about this [...]. This is a recent development linked to the new Directorate of Intelligence and Security Services and has hurt relations with China (BM3).

Although one Botswana diplomat/government official referred to the problem of visas and permits as a "minor hiccup" (BD4), it is perceived by a significant number of respondents of both nationalities as a major cause of tension in the relationship at this time.

The second problem in the political/diplomatic area relates to Botswana's approach to foreign policy and to its bilateral relations with China since President Khama took office in 2008. This problem has a number of different dimensions. In the view of Chinese respondents, Botswana's foreign policy is pro-Western and gives priority to the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) rather than China:

The Botswana government does not like China the way it does the US and the UK (CB1).

The top leaders of Botswana are closer to the US on some international issues. For example, the Ambassador was called in to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [and International Cooperation] over China's stand on Syria (CM1).

This viewpoint was elaborated by a Chinese academic:

The Botswana government tries to make judgements on international issues but from the China side Botswana is not seen as neutral. From the Chinese perspective, they don't expect countries to criticise publicly the Chinese government. This goes against the tradition of Chinese psychology. Partners should talk face to face and not criticise in public. This is not acceptable to the Chinese government and causes problems in country relations as we see with the recent South China Sea issue. Botswana is seen as pro-Western and China is not happy with this [...]. Botswana does not understand Chinese political and diplomatic culture (CA3).

The response here not only identifies a Western bias in Botswana's foreign policy but also a lack of understanding of Chinese political and diplomatic culture on the Botswana side. This lack of knowledge and understanding of China was also raised by a number of Botswana respondents. The problem of limited expertise within the Botswana government was explained by a Botswana diplomat/government official:

Currently there isn't much expertise [...]. Within the MOFAIC we do not have a core crop of experts on China, even in the Asia Department. In the Ministry of Trade and Industry I do not believe that there is anyone who fully understands China. The Ministry of Finance and Development Planning is also not very forthcoming, maybe as a result of the controversies over government-funded projects. Similarly, at the Ministry of Infrastructure, Science and Technology, the Ministry is seemingly being cautious. However, there is grave need for pockets of expertise that we don't have. There are some people at the Mission in Beijing, and in parts of MOFAIC, who are somewhat knowledgeable. Overall, there is not enough interaction with the Chinese, which could maybe mould such expertise (BD3).

A Botswana media practitioner took a highly critical view of this situation and contrasted Botswana's approach with China's think-tanks on foreign policy matters:

We don't have China experts and so MOFAIC did not understand and showed a serious lack of understanding of Chinese culture and politics. In fact, MOFAIC is not aware of its own limitations with regard to the understanding of China – for example, it takes no interest in the University of Botswana's Chinese Studies programme. MOFAIC has lacklustre staff [...]. Botswana lacks understanding of the Chinese [...]. The problems at the political/diplomatic level come from a lack of understanding and direction [...] MOFAIC lacks expertise [...]. This compares to China which studies foreign countries intensely. For example, Fudan University has a think-tank on the USA; Zhejiang Normal University has a think-tank on Africa (BM1).

The idea that there is not only a lack of expertise but also a lack of direction in Botswana's approach to its relations with China was reiterated by other Botswana respondents. A recurring point was that Botswana does not have an explicit and coherent policy towards China and it is unable to take advantage of the bilateral relationship for its own interests. The point was expressed by a Botswana academic:

The question is: how do we leverage the relationship to support our own policies such as economic diversification? We need something that will guide us on how we can benefit from the relationship. [...]. Botswana participates in FOCAC but currently there is no sense that it is an active participant – for example, two years ago MOFAIC set up an inter-ministerial forum to identify projects which could be funded through FOCAC funding mechanisms but it met only twice and fizzled out – no follow up – Botswana is not leveraging these available funds (for example, in comparison to Lesotho). As a country, Botswana is not trying to find ways to benefit from relations with China (BA1).

A member of the Botswana business community made the same point from a business perspective:

First and foremost, we must recognise that China has a very outward-looking approach and is trying all ways to participate in Africa. China is genuine in going out to look for friends, unlike other great powers. China is a latecomer and has recently undergone a development process like that of African countries. They are very clear that they want to trade with Africa and that they want allies in African. But the Botswana government has not expressed interest in China as an ally and this I find very wanting. Most African countries are benefitting from China, for example through loans from China's EXIM Bank. But Botswana is not taking advantage [...] Botswana is not trying to benefit and as a business person I get no guidance from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Trade and Industry (BB2).

As we have seen, Chinese respondents expressed concerns about perceived bias by the Botswana government against China, whilst Botswana respondents worried about the government's inability or unwillingness to benefit fully from its relations with China. Respondents of both nationalities expressed the view that the personal attitude of President Khama seems to be negative towards China and this has a major influence on Botswana's current approach to bilateral relations. The following quotations from Botswana respondents of various occupational categories illustrate this perspective:

Current bad relations are a phenomenon to be associated with Ian Khama. The past was different and future governments will also have a different relationship, so it is his personal problem. But because his style of governing is not collegial, this negativity cascades to others in the government. Prior to him, Presidents Masire and Mogae were positive, though because they were mindful of the negative attitudes of the West they did not maximise the relationship to the full. Also, Seretse Khama was very positive, as shown in his decision to overrule Cabinet in 1971 on the issue of the PRC taking up China's seat in the UN.<sup>3</sup> But his

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<sup>3</sup> See Parsons,N; Henderson,W. and Tlou,T. (1995). *Seretse Khama 1921-1980*. Gaborone: Macmillan and The Botswana Society, p.302.

son is a very different person and no improvement in relations is likely before the end of his office in 2018 (BA2).

The Chinese are trying hard to get President Khama to visit China. He is the only President of Botswana who has not visited whilst in office. He seems to be not favourably disposed towards China. For example, the Chinese built and donated a primary school in Serowe [his home village] but he did not attend the official handover. He has not been seen at an official function with the Chinese (BA3).

Unfortunately, the current President has not gone to China since 1976 – if he were to see China today this would make a difference. Those of us who go to China are impressed by the level and speed of development, the technology etc. It is a dynamic and increasingly diverse society [...]. But the President is unsympathetic and his position has worsened in the last few years [...] (BD2).

The government started to become openly critical of China [...] in 2013 [...]. The tone and manner of remarks by [President] Khama and Foreign Minister Skelemani (for example, at Ambassador Zheng's inaugural reception in mid-2013) were embarrassing to China. Botswana government officials followed the lead of the President in their approach to China (BM1).

The arrogance we are displaying as a country is troubling. For example, in 2015 President Xi Jinping was in Johannesburg and invited our President to see him but President Khama chose to send the Vice President instead (BB2).

The same concern about President Khama's approach was expressed by Chinese respondents. This is illustrated by a response from the Chinese business community

When we donated to the President's Housing Appeal there was no feedback, nothing positive. We feel like when one person in a couple says I love you and there is no response. We Chinese are good people and reliable. We remember that we got African support in 1971 to take the China seat in the UN and we appreciate the African people. Our government attaches great importance to Africa. So the Government of Botswana should treat Chinese people nicely. We want to reciprocate. For example, this week FOCAC is meeting in South Africa and President Xi Jinping is attending. But President Khama is not going and is sending his Vice President. South Africa is close by and this was a very good opportunity for President Khama to meet President Xi. What message is the Government of Botswana sending to China? (CB2).

It is also a viewpoint held by Chinese diplomats/government officials:

The change of attitude to Chinese companies and people started in President Khama's time. Before that, the Chinese were welcome. President Mogae was very favourable and invited Chinese projects. But then things changed. Why? [...] [one] cause is the personal character of the President himself. His foreign policy is unique to Africa. He has very different attitudes compared to other African leaders, for example on the International Criminal Court (ICC), Zimbabwe, Syria etc., and he is always out of alignment with Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and the AU. For example, he is more interested in wildlife conservation than economic issues. He has a westernised ideology and he likes western development. He has no preference to look East like other African leaders and in this he is unique in the African context (CD2).

Whilst respondents of both nationalities perceived the negative attitude of President Khama as a cause of poor bilateral relations, a Botswana diplomat/government official made the point that the position of the

President had changed over time because he felt the failed Chinese construction projects had inflicted political damage on his party:

The Chinese Embassy believes that President Khama is negatively disposed towards the Chinese. However, it should be noted that he came into power when the major projects, done by Chinese companies, were failing. In the build-up to the 2014 elections, people, and the media in particular, vehemently lamented on these projects. The President felt that the failed projects contributed to the reduced BDP majority. These therefore had a political cost on the ruling party. He does not personally hate the Chinese. The issue emanates from commercial relations and the failure of the government projects. For example, in 2008, he is the one who spearheaded government's contribution of 1 million pula relief aid to China after the Sichuan earthquake. He reminded colleagues of the history of the relationship with China and proposed this gesture of goodwill. Most of the Chinese construction companies are SOEs (for example, Sino-Hydro). Their failure to deliver therefore becomes China's failure (BD3).

Because of the centrality of the President to Botswana's foreign policy in general and to relations with China in particular, diplomats/government officials on both sides spoke of the importance of arranging for him to visit China. A Chinese respondent pointedly observed that he has visited both Japan and South Korea but not China (CM2). In the view of a Botswana diplomat/government official, the reason that President Khama has not visited is one of scheduling problems, such as those that arose when he was invited in 2011 – "President Khama has never refused to visit China. He is prepared to go any time that he is invited" (BD3). However, at the time of writing no visit had been undertaken.

The existence of these economic and political/diplomatic problems and the perception of their significance for bilateral relations influenced the overall assessment of the Botswana-China relationship by the respondents, many of whom on both sides contrasted the current situation with their view of a more favourable period during President Mogae's term of office, which ended in 2008. This viewpoint was captured by a member of the Chinese business community:

The relationship has gone down since the new President [i.e. Khama] came into office. I am worried. There are many reasons for this situation, including the economic decline of Botswana and the bad things that some Chinese companies have done. At the government level, things seem okay and they say we are good friends. But I know in my heart that it is not like that. It is only talking and it is not deep. It was different in the time of President Mogae (CB3).

#### **4.10 POSITIVE ELEMENTS**

Although the identification of problems in the current relationship predominated in the responses by both Botswana and Chinese respondents, some did mention strong points in the relationship. In the economic area, a number of respondents pointed out that the Botswana government had benefitted from lower construction prices for its projects and that Botswana consumers had benefitted from the availability of cheap goods provided by the small Chinese-owned shops. The value of China's development assistance to Botswana was also mentioned, especially in the fields of health and education. For example, a Botswana academic said: "[...] there are positive areas within the relationship such as the scholarships to Botswana to study in China" (BA3). In the diplomatic/political area, diplomats/government officials on both sides cited high-level exchanges as evidence of positive relations. A Chinese diplomat/government official said:

The political aspect is strong and there have been high-level political exchanges for many years. In 2015, three Botswana ministers went to China (Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security, Tourism) and the Chinese Vice Minister for Forestry came here [...]. There is a

momentum for exchanges by high-level officials and politicians to enable sharing of ideas and how to learn from each other in building our countries (CD3).

Finally, a number of Chinese respondents mentioned that people-to-people relations were positive, such as this viewpoint of a Chinese academic:

People-to-people relations are fine. In my view, both peoples love each other's country. Botswana students like to live and learn in China and the Chinese like to live in Botswana. In fact, some Confucius Institute instructors [...] managed to have a new contract to come back here to Botswana because they like the lifestyle which is relaxed and not so busy and they like the clean environment here (CA3).

A concrete example of positive people-to-people interactions was given by a member of the Botswana business community:

The Chinese participate in our society. For example, you see Chinese at football matches of the Zebras [the national team], but you never see other expatriates. They want to be part of us (BB2).

However, the number of positive elements mentioned by respondents was relatively few.

#### **4.11 SUMMARY**

The analysis of responses shows that the identification of positive elements in the relationship was far outweighed by the perceptions of problems and tensions. On the basis of their views of strengths and weaknesses, each respondent conveyed an overall perception of current Botswana-China relations. These overall perceptions fell into two categories of either “negative responses” or “mixed responses” i.e. those which identified positive as well as negative elements in the relationship. Hence the language used to characterise bilateral relations ranged from negative descriptions like “dismal” (BM1) and “not very close” (CA1), to half-hearted remarks like “lukewarm” (BD2) and “warm but not hot” (CD2). It is notable that there were no responses which were unreservedly positive.

On the basis of the discussion above, it can be concluded that there are a variety of problems within the bilateral relationship. Additionally, for many respondents there is a perception that the relationship has declined during the current Presidency and specifically since 2013 when the President and senior members of the Botswana government became publicly critical of the Chinese. This perception corroborates the conclusion of the literature review that there have been increasing tensions in the bilateral relationship, which reached its nadir in the diplomatic row over the Government of Botswana's press release on the South China Sea issue in February 2016. Indeed, a Chinese academic interviewed after this incident concluded “The relationship is at a low point” (CA2). The respondents' perception of deteriorating relations validates the research problem and gives significance to the final research question on what practical measures can be taken to strengthen Botswana-China relations.

### **Research Question 3: What can be done practically to enhance Botswana-China relations by both sides?**

The perceptions of Botswana-China relations presented above give a picture of bilateral relations that are beset with problems and tensions. However, respondents from both sides made the point that this is an important relationship for both countries and therefore action must be taken to address the problems that have arisen in the last few years. Both sides have an interest in positive bilateral relations. On the Botswana side, there is recognition that China has emerged as a dominant world power with whom it is necessary to have good relations. Thus measures must be taken to improve relations. In the words of a Botswana diplomat/government official:

We must resolve all problems. We cannot ignore China. They are our friends. We need to build strong relations and resolve all challenges (BD1).

On the Chinese side, it was made clear that Botswana with its small market and lack of key natural resources is of less significance than large African countries like Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa or strategic small ones, such as Djibouti. Nevertheless, China takes a comprehensive approach to diplomacy in Africa, as symbolised by the FOCAC. It therefore also has an interest in positive bilateral relations with Botswana, as expressed by a Chinese diplomat/government official:

China attaches great importance to Africa and came up with a win-win African policy based on the foundation of equality and cooperation. Botswana is small in terms of population but China views Africa as a whole and all countries are equal. So we must consolidate relations to the highest standard (CD1).

The question on how to enhance bilateral relations was therefore seen as relevant by all respondents and they all had suggestions on practical measures that could be taken to improve the situation. The analysis of the responses below differentiates three issue-areas for consideration, namely economic, political/diplomatic and community relations, and identifies an over-arching theme of mutual understanding.

## 4.12 ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Within the issue-area of improved economic relations, respondents made suggestions related to five topics, namely the construction sector, the retail sector, Chinese investment, the role of Chinese companies and development assistance. With regard to the construction sector, it was suggested that the main priority was the resolution of the problems surrounding the Morupule B power plant mega project – in the words of a Chinese academic: “There is need to resolve the Morupule B project and ensure a constant power supply – when this problem is solved it will be a big help” (CA1). Respondents concluded that the two governments should solve as soon as possible all of the outstanding issues related to Morupule B. With regard to the retail sector, Botswana respondents proposed that existing policies on citizen reservation should be enforced:

“China shops are all over the country, even in the rural areas [...]. But they should be restricted as some economic activities are reserved areas for nationals and the Chinese are infringing. In fact, we don’t need small shops, we need big investors” (BD1).

The point made in the above quotation about the need for Chinese investment was a recurrent suggestion in the responses. Diplomats/government officials on both sides expressed the view that a focus on attracting FDI from China, especially in the manufacturing sector, would transform bilateral relations:

My opinion is that the economic relationship should be restructured. The only way forward is to encourage China to invest in Botswana. This can create a long-lasting relationship, as then a lot would be at stake for both parties [...]. Possibilities abound, for instance in areas of agricultural mechanisation, water technologies, solar power and power plants among others [...]. This would change the nature of the relationship (BD3).

This view was also articulated by members of the business community on both sides. For example, a response from the Chinese business community made clear the interest in manufacturing investment and the benefits it could bring:

Botswana Investment and Trade Centre (BITC) should be more helpful and facilitate FDI from China. We want to be involved in manufacture. This would bring sustainable development and long-term benefits to local people. Factories would bring skills and advanced technology and reduce the high costs of imports from South Africa. There is potential in areas like pharmaceuticals and cement production [...]. Botswana should open up and welcome foreign investors, like China has done (CB2).

The suggestion that emerges from the responses is that the two governments should focus on restructuring economic relations so that there is more emphasis on investment from China, especially in the manufacturing sector.

Another topic that emerged from the responses related to the activities of Chinese companies. Botswana respondents made clear that they believed that Chinese companies should improve their business practices. A member of the Botswana business community provided a comprehensive perspective on the issue:

There should be a condition in government contracts that enforces skills transfer and training of Botswana, for example, an obligation for the Chinese construction companies to take on apprentices. Some Chinese companies do this, for example, Red Star and Zhengtai, but most do not. If they emphasised the training element this would do wonders for their image. Similarly, there should be conditions on technology transfer. The Chinese construction companies should employ Botswana as accountants and managers. Huawei has managed to do this. The companies must counteract the criticism that there is a lack of citizen empowerment [...]. They should integrate more with the mainstream business community like other foreign groups do for example, South Africans, Zimbabweans, Japanese and Indians. The Chinese remain separate and do things their own way. They have their own association – the Chinese Enterprises Association. But it would be better if they joined the relevant local trade associations. For example, they have not joined the Association of Botswana Construction Companies (BB1).

A number of respondents from the Chinese community agreed that their companies should improve their practices – for example:

As contractors we have to ensure we deliver, we perform well, we undertake training, we deal more openly, we carry out corporate social responsibility, and we respect local laws – our own good work should help to improve the relationship (CB2).

Chinese companies should join Business Botswana [...]. You are not only in the Chinese community, you must go and join the local community and its organisations (CB3).

In sum, respondents proposed that Chinese companies should undertake skills training, engage in technology transfer, employ more locals (including in senior positions), carry out corporate social responsibility programmes and integrate with business organisations such as Business Botswana (the national organisation representing employers).

The final topic within the issue-area of economic relations that emerged was that of development assistance. Responses on the Chinese side highlighted the need for Chinese development cooperation to support Botswana's economic diversification agenda. Examples given were China's expertise with special economic zones (CB4) and with agricultural modernisation (CD3), both of which are important components of Botswana's economic development strategy. The significance of the FOCAC as the vehicle for China's development assistance was emphasised and one Chinese diplomat/government official stated that "Implementation of the FOCAC Johannesburg Action Plan is the main task" (CD3) for improving Botswana-China relations. A key planning and implementation mechanism specified by the Johannesburg Action Plan in November 2015 is a bilateral joint commission. Diplomat/government officials on both sides spoke of the importance of establishing a Joint Economic Commission to be co-chaired by the Botswana Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Chinese Minister of Commerce (whose ministry is responsible for development cooperation). Both sides suggested that the establishment of the Commission was a priority although at the time of writing it had not been set up.

#### 4.13 POLITICAL/DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Responses to the previous research question identified visas and permits as a major source of tension in the relationship. Thus, a number of respondents on the Chinese side suggested that action needed to be taken to improve the situation – for example:

Botswana must change its approach to work and residence permits. National security is not a problem. Some of our friends want to invest here because Botswana is stable and peaceful. But because of the permit and visa problem they do not regard Botswana as a nice place for investment (CB2).

Respondents on the Botswana side recognised the need for action on this issue, though one diplomat/government official made the point that Chinese companies do not always follow the rules closely, concluding

“There should be no pointing of fingers but rather a resolve to come to mutual understanding” (BD3).

It is apparent from the responses that this is a high priority issue and urgent diplomatic action is needed between the relevant ministries of the Botswana government on the one hand and the Chinese embassy on the other in order to resolve immigration issues.

Given the perceptions presented in the previous section on the negative role played by the Head of State in setting the tone of bilateral relations, it is logical that many respondents on both sides stressed the need for a state visit to China. The suggestion was summed up by a Chinese diplomat/government official who said: “My key recommendation is that President Khama visits China soon to discuss how to deepen our cooperation and resolve all the outstanding issues” (CD1).

It was clear from the responses that this is a priority and a lot of diplomatic effort on both sides was being undertaken to make the visit happen although it had not taken place at the time of writing, 12 months before the President vacates office and close to the lame-duck period of the presidency. More generally, respondents emphasised the value of high-level visits between the two sides as a means for strengthening relations.

Another important point which was made by Botswana respondents is that the government does not have an overall strategy for its bilateral relations with China and appears to act in an ad hoc and uncoordinated manner. It was suggested that Botswana needs to be more pro-active in the relationship. An academic respondent said:

On the Botswana side we need to sit down and say, what do we really want out of our relations with China? How can we use this relationship to drive our own policies? – the Government of Botswana does not have a specific Botswana-China policy or strategy, even though President Mogae used to say that China provides an alternative to the Western powers (BA1).

The respondent contrasted Botswana’s lack of a policy with the strategic approach taken by some African countries such as South Africa and Ethiopia. The problem was acknowledged by a Botswana diplomat/government official in response to the probe question “Does Botswana have a strategy towards China?”:

No. This is a problem for the MOFAIC and the country. China is one of the rich countries that are well disposed towards Botswana and has shown willingness to contribute to her development [...]. Botswana has benefitted from soft loans, grants, technical, cultural and educational assistance from China over many years. This undoubtedly justifies a deliberate effort to develop a clear strategy on her relations with China to maximise gains (BD4).

This viewpoint was clearly summarised by a member of the Botswana business community:

The Government of Botswana should take the lead in identifying opportunities for example, for EXIM Bank loans. It should take advantage of the fact that China is asking African countries to be friends, for example in the commercial and cultural fields. Botswana needs a China strategy to take advantage of the huge opportunities that are there. From a commercial point of view, China has a huge range of markets for example, for beef, for diamonds. In general, we do not have a China strategy and so we are not taking advantage of the relationship [...]. The most important thing is that we must have a China strategy as a matter of urgency, driven from the National Strategy Office. We are arrogant out of ignorance, but China is too big and too important for Botswana to ignore (BB2).

The point being made by the respondents is that bilateral relations would be stronger and more purposeful if the government was able to articulate why the relationship is important, what it seeks to gain in terms of national interest and how it will approach relations.

The statement above that “we are arrogant out of ignorance” suggests that the lack of a strategy is due to the lack of expertise on China within the government that was identified in the previous section. A Botswana media practitioner was highly critical of the MOFAIC and recommended changes to the Ministry and to the B.A. degree in Chinese Studies at the University of Botswana (UB):

Revamp MOFAIC in both its structure and its content competence. For example, the Asia-Pacific desk is too broad. We need to invest in the best minds. The UB Chinese Studies programme could play a role but the students are weak and MOFAIC shows no interest. We need specialists. China is the world’s next superpower. We are focused on western missions. We can’t use this knowledge to interpret China. But there is no recognition of this weakness in MOFAIC [...]. We need knowledge about China. The UB Chinese Studies programme needs overhauling and requires top tier professors (BM 1).

Although the above respondent suggested that the MOFAIC did not recognise its weakness, a Botswana diplomat/government official made clear that change was needed:

Generally, in the government there is a lack of expertise on China and no depth in this area. This is a let-down. China is a very important country. You would expect there to be three or four people in the MOFAIC Division of Asian Affairs who have worked in China or studied there and have the requisite in-depth knowledge and language skills. But there is no deliberate attempt to place/assign officers accordingly. This is the same across MOFAIC, we don’t have areas of specialisation even though there are people with relevant expertise in specific areas throughout the Ministry (BD4).

With regard to the issue of the lack of knowledge and understanding of China within the Government of Botswana, three practical proposals emerged from the responses. Firstly, there should be a deliberate effort across government to ensure there is expertise on China within relevant ministry departments and parastatals. Secondly, within the MOFAIC in particular, a specialised cluster should be formed of staff with in-depth knowledge of China and proficiency in the Chinese language. Thirdly, UB’s B.A. degree in Chinese Studies should be enhanced so that its graduates can provide the capacity that the government needs.

#### 4.14 COMMUNITY RELATIONS

This issue-area was only considered by a few respondents. A member of the Chinese business community suggested that voluntary organisations have an important role to play in strengthening relations between the two communities:

All Chinese as individuals have a responsibility. My face cannot change. We must each do good because our actions affect the image of the entire Chinese community [...]. Chinese voluntary organisations must give back to the country. Then the media will report good things and not only negative things [...]. The number one association at the moment is the Charity Association of Chinese in Botswana. It is visible in the TV and appears and promotes a good image of China. So it is very important and necessary (CB3).

The respondent also mentioned the Botswana-China Friendship Association as another voluntary organisation with potential, although at the time it needed reviving. The key point being made is that civil society organisations as non-state actors can help to form a bridge between the Chinese living in Botswana and their host community, strengthening people-to-people links and promoting good community relations. Thus they should be supported by all stakeholders.

#### 4.15 MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Many responses to the research question on how to strengthen bilateral relations emphasised the importance of enhancing mutual understanding between the two sides and suggested appropriate measures to do this. Respondents argued that each side needs to understand the language and culture of the other. For example, a Botswana diplomat/government official said:

There is need to encourage and expand cultural understanding on both sides. Cultural sensitivity is important. The Chinese need to be sensitised to Africans and they should be pro-active in explaining themselves – they must reach out more [...]. Botswana need to be more knowledgeable about the world as a whole and become more cosmopolitan and educational curricula at all levels should reflect this. Knowledge of China should be part of this and Botswana should visit China, learn Chinese and so forth [...]. We all must learn China better (BD2).

Several respondents proposed that the most important organisation for promoting the process of learning required on both sides is the Confucius Institute at UB (CIUB). The primary mandate of the Confucius Institute is to teach Chinese language and culture to the general public but a Botswana academic suggested that it could also take a role in teaching Setswana language and culture to the local Chinese community:

Botswana should learn the Chinese language and culture. But this should be a two-way thing. We are doing more to learn Chinese culture than they are to learn our culture. Very few Chinese are fluent in Setswana. This is a weakness, for example, in the Chinese medical team which has to work with ordinary people as patients. It is important to develop mutual understanding. The Confucius Institute at UB teaches Setswana to its Chinese staff. Perhaps CIUB should engage with the Chinese community more broadly to teach them Setswana. Mutual understanding can counteract misunderstandings, misconceptions and stereotypes. The bilateral relationship has a cultural dimension but this is weak at the moment (BA3).

Hence a measure for enhancing bilateral relations that emerged from the responses is that the Confucius Institute at UB should play a key role in promoting the mutual understanding of language and culture.

Another proposal relating to UB was made by respondents on both sides to the effect that UB should have a think-tank function with respect to China:

UB has a role to play. It should be a think-tank and make strategic suggestions to the Government of Botswana on its China policy. UB has good relations with the Chinese and can do meaningful things for the government with its research capability (CD1).

Following up on the need for Botswana to have a strategy towards its relations with China, academics can play a think-tank function and offer different perspectives and analyses – we can support government on how to engage positively with the Chinese based on research and information. We can reach out to academics in China and work with them to gain insights into the mind-sets/thinking of the Chinese in relation to Africa and develop a better cultural understanding of how the Chinese think and work (BA1).

An example of the kind of research that could be done was given by a Botswana diplomat/government official (BD2) who proposed a study should be undertaken on the work of Chinese construction companies for the private sector compared to their performance on public sector projects. A Chinese academic summed up the need for applied research as follows:

We are facing many challenges so things must be done. The first thing to do is to research into what the problems are with the business sector and then take action. Solutions must be based on investigation [...]. So there is need for research in many areas such as policy-making and implementation, diplomatic relations, business, educational and cultural exchange (CA3).

A think-tank by definition is a group of experts that studies a particular issue and provides research-based information and advice to the public sector, private companies and civil society. The suggestion by respondents is that UB should develop a think-tank on China whose applied research can contribute to improved bilateral relations through policy advice, problem analysis and so forth.

The role of the media was mentioned by many respondents with respect to their influence on bilateral relations through their impact on public opinion and on politicians. In particular, newspapers are an important vehicle for communication and understanding. The private newspapers had generated negative views on China, especially with their coverage of the failed major projects undertaken by Chinese companies. A number of respondents expressed the view that there is a lack of understanding of China among local journalists which can lead to erroneous reporting:

[...] cultural differences require that journalists who report on these issues need a more sophisticated level of understanding. There needs to be more understanding of China explained by locals. Botswana still think China is a small country. There is lack of knowledge in the journalist profession. For example, when the then Editor of *Mmegi* went there, he came back a changed man and wrote an article to that effect (BA2).

Two of the study's respondents who are Botswana media practitioners attested to their own change in knowledge and attitude following their first visit to China. One of them said:

Sponsored media trips to China are very effective. My perspective on these issues is very different to that of my colleagues who have never been to China. It is a good approach as one can see China's development model first hand and become well-informed (BM3).

A Chinese government official/diplomat noted that

“Each year China funds several media people to visit China to attend training etc. and this makes a big difference” (CD2)

So there was a concurrence of view on both sides that the Chinese government should continue to sponsor Botswana media practitioners for training and study visits in China. It was also pointed out that a local Chinese-language newspaper, the *Oriental Post*, had been started to act as a “bridge to the local Chinese community” (CB3) by translating major local news items and information on laws and regulations. However, its journalists have had work permit problems and this was cited as an example of the Botswana government failing to understand how it could communicate with the Chinese community more effectively:

“The Botswana side must strengthen its capacity to identify the local Chinese who benefit Botswana in terms of economic activity and mutual understanding” (CA2).

Several respondents made the point that action is needed on the Chinese side to promote a positive image of China and counter negative media reports and official statements. The issue was perceived as one of public relations, as expressed by a Botswana academic:

The Chinese need public relations experts in their big companies. For example, Sino-Hydro is a very big company but it did not project itself well in Botswana. Also, the Chinese Embassy does not have a Public Affairs Specialist like the US Embassy, which is more effective and visible. I am disappointed by the muted response of Chinese companies and the Chinese Embassy to the negative reporting, which after all is only about a few companies. This is a PR war (BA2).

Respondents noted that Huawei in Botswana has a Public Communications Manager and that it has been successful in projecting a positive image. This substantiated the suggestion that large Chinese companies should employ public relations experts. In fact, it was stated that the Chinese Enterprise Association was planning to engage a professional journalist to improve their public relations (CB2). On the other hand, a number of Botswana respondents agreed with the view stated above that the Chinese Embassy has been weak with regards to public relations, particularly in comparison to the US Embassy. These perceptions led to a specific proposal by a Botswana media practitioner that “The [Chinese] Embassy needs to set up a strong Public Relations Unit with a clear mandate” (BM3).

## **4.16 SUMMARY**

The respondents on both sides and across occupational groups agreed that the relationship between Botswana and China is important and they suggested a number of practical measures that could be taken to improve it. Based on the analysis of the responses, these suggestions have been grouped into three issue-areas and one over-arching theme. The respondents’ suggestions provide the basis for the practical recommendations on how to enhance Botswana-China relations that are presented in the final section.

# **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **5.1 CONCLUSION**

The study was structured around three research questions. The first question sought to identify respondents’ perceptions of the most important dimensions of Botswana-China relations. The findings show that economic issues were viewed as fundamental, whilst development assistance and formal political/diplomatic exchanges constitute important components of the state-to-state relationship. Additionally, relations at the level of ordinary people form a dimension of interaction between non-state actors that was significant for Chinese respondents.

The second question asked for views on the current state of Botswana-China relations. The analysis of responses shows that the identification of positive elements in the relationship was far outweighed by the perceptions of problems and tensions. Hence the language used to characterise bilateral relations ranged from negative descriptions like “dismal” to half-hearted remarks like “lukewarm”. It is notable that there were no responses which were unreservedly positive. It is concluded that there are a variety of problems within the bilateral relationship. Additionally, for many respondents there was a perception that the relationship has declined during the current Presidency and specifically since 2013 when the President and senior members of the Botswana government became publicly critical of the Chinese.

The respondents’ perception of deteriorating relations validated the study and gave significance to the final research question on what practical measures can be taken to strengthen Botswana-China relations. The respondents on both sides and across occupational groups agreed that the relationship between Botswana and China is important and they suggested a number of practical measures that could be taken to improve it. Based on the analysis of the responses, these suggestions have been grouped into three issue-areas and one over-arching theme. The respondents’ suggestions provide the basis for the practical recommendations on how to enhance Botswana-China relations that are presented below. It is envisaged that these recommendations will be useful for relevant policy-makers and stakeholders in the Botswana context and that they may be pertinent to other African countries.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Economic relations*

- The two governments should resolve expeditiously all outstanding issues related to the problems of the Morupule B power plant.
- The Government of Botswana should ensure that existing policies on citizen reservation in the retail sector are enforced.
- The two governments should concentrate on restructuring economic relations to focus on investment from China, especially in the manufacturing sector.
- Chinese companies should undertake skills training, engage in technology transfer, employ more locals (including in senior positions), carry out corporate social responsibility programmes, and integrate with local business organisations.
- A Joint Economic Commission co-chaired by the Botswana Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Chinese Minister of Commerce should be established as a matter of priority to implement the FOCAC Johannesburg Action Plan.

### *Political/ diplomatic relations*

- The Government of Botswana and the Chinese Embassy should work together urgently to resolve all immigration issues affecting Chinese citizens.
- Frequent high-level visits of politicians and government officials between Botswana and China should be undertaken, with priority given to a state visit by the President of Botswana to China.
- The Government of Botswana should develop a coherent and explicit strategy towards its bilateral relations with China.
- The Government of Botswana should ensure there is expertise on China within relevant ministry departments and parastatals.
- Within the Botswana Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, a specialised cluster should be formed of staff with in-depth knowledge of China and proficiency in the Chinese language.
- The University of Botswana B.A. in Chinese Studies degree should be enhanced so that its graduates can provide the capacity that the government needs.

### *Community relations*

- Civil society organisations with the mandate to promote community relations such as the Charity Association of Chinese in Botswana and the Botswana-China Friendship Association should be supported by all stakeholders.

*Mutual understanding*

- The Confucius Institute at the University of Botswana should play a key role in promoting the mutual understanding of language and culture.
- A think-tank on China should be developed at the University of Botswana to undertake applied research.
- The Chinese Government should continue to sponsor Botswana media practitioners for training and study visits in China.
- Chinese companies should employ public relations experts.
- The Chinese Embassy should establish a strong Public Relations Unit.



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