



THE COST OF COEXISTENCE

Farmers Battle Drought and Elephants in Chama

By Ennety Munshya

While much of Zambia enjoyed normal rainfall last farming season, Chama district in Eastern Province faced a different reality. Here, farmers are struggling not only with the devastation of drought but also with elephants encroaching on their fields, turning survival into a daily battle for land and food.

For 49-year-old Julius Ngulube, the struggle has been even more painful. After securing a K40,000 loan from the government-supported Sustainable Agriculture Financing Facility (SAFF) to expand his farming, he lost his entire maize crop—withered by drought and ravaged by elephants.

“I am heartbroken and hopeless. I got a loan to improve my farming, but what followed was disaster and heartache,” said Ngulube of Kaozi Scheme in Chama District.

At his home in Kaozi, Ngulube sat outside one of his huts with his two wives and children, the family’s empty granary standing as a stark reminder of loss. Visibly devastated, he explained that he acquired the SAFF loan in December 2024 through NATSAVE, hoping to improve his farming and lift his family’s living conditions.

From the loan, K4,000 was given to him in cash, while the rest was used to buy 26 bags of fertilizer, four 10-kg packs of maize seed, and chemicals. From the three hectares he planted, Ngulube expected a bumper harvest of nearly 500 bags. Instead, drought and elephants wiped out the entire field.

He vividly recalled the day the elephants invaded his maize field in April 2025.

“The animals got into the field around 19:00 hours,” Ngulube recounted. “We screamed and made all sorts of noise, banging buckets to chase them away, but nothing worked. We lost our voices from shouting. We could only watch helplessly as they destroyed the crops. I was devastated, even now, I am not okay.”



The Cost of Coexistence Farmers Battle Drought and Elephants in Chama Cont....

A farmer for over 18 years, Ngulube depends on his farming activities to provide for his family, but now he feels trapped, unsure how he will repay the loan.

He managed to harvest only 15 fifty-kilogramme bags, which he sold to the Food Reserve Agency (FRA), leaving nothing for home consumption. FRA is buying maize at K340 per bag, meaning Ngulube will earn just K5,100, far below the K40,000 he owes.

His fate now depends on the bank’s response after deducting the FRA payment from his account.

“I don’t know what the bank will say,” he says quietly. “I’m waiting for FRA to deposit the money, and then the bank will deduct it. After that, they will summon me to explain why I failed to pay back the loan. I’m just waiting.”

Ngulube hopes that if he can be granted another loan, he could find alternative land less prone to wildlife incursions and repay both loans.

Ngulube isn’t alone. Many other farmers in the area share the same struggle.

Kaozi lies within the Musalangu Game Management Area, which borders North Luangwa National Park—home to Zambia’s only black rhino population, one of the fastest growing in Africa. The park is also a predator stronghold and hosts the country’s largest, most stable, and only growing elephant population, according to the Frankfurt Zoological Society.

A report by the Ministry of Agriculture in Chama, seen by MakanDay, confirms the damage to Ngulube’s farm by elephants and details the extent of the loss. It states that half a hectare of maize was eaten, resulting in an estimated 70 percent reduction in yields from the affected area.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, the Sustainable Agriculture Financing Facility (SAFF) is designed to empower small-scale farmers by providing access to essential financial resources. Its goal is to enhance productivity and sustainability, bridging the financing gap faced by smallholders and enabling them to invest in improved farming techniques, purchase inputs, and increase yields.

Malawi | Sixteen Unseen Girls

Josephine Chinele

Late last year, the world was alerted to the disturbing news that Russia was recruiting hundreds of young African women, aged 18–22, to manufacture drones in a military-industrial compound called Alabuga, 1,000 km east of Moscow. Reports also said that the recruits—from at least 15 African countries—were promised good salaries and skills training, but once there, they were often trapped, facing tax deductions, dangerous working conditions, strict surveillance, and difficulties returning home.

In the past six months, a ZAM team in seven African countries investigated the Russian recruitment exercise—and why so many young Africans take the chance to go, sometimes even after being warned. In this Malawi chapter, Josephine Chinele tries to find her compatriots.

A Malawi flag on a stage where young women are dancing to celebrate their welcome into Alabuga is the only physical sign of participants from my country in all the material emanating from this industrial compound east of Moscow. The photograph shows dancers in traditional chitenje dress, but one cannot tell if they are Malawian, since the chitenje is used widely across Africa.

All other efforts to find Malawians in Alabuga have been fruitless. They must be there: the flag, and Alabuga’s own brochures and website, say so. But no one in Malawi seems to have seen them leave, nor do many seem interested in establishing what happened to them. Even when there is a list of sixteen applicants that was shared with the government as early as two years ago.

Brick wall

At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, over six phone calls have resulted in little more than nothing. “Aren’t you the one who is supposed to call me?” says Jane Ngineriwa, Director of the Europe Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

after I finally get through and ask why I haven’t received any callback after several messages. The response is then: “Unfortunately, I still cannot help you. We are still waiting to put together information on the issue,” with the promise that a spokesperson will contact us “as soon as information is ready.”

The spokesperson does not.

I am not the only one who hits a brick wall with the government. In the wake of alarming international reports, an NGO called the Human Rights Consultative Committee (HRCC) has asked the government for help tracing Malawi’s recruits at Alabuga. But, “the answer we received from Principal Secretary Mwayiwawo Polepole was a request that we submit details like the names of Alabuga girls or their families. The ‘evidence’ should be provided by us,” says HRCC director Robert Mkwezalamba.

“Reporting it would be suicide to them”

The demand was puzzling because how was the HRCC going to do that? Many Malawians, especially from poor backgrounds—the section of society most likely to flock to the all-expenses-paid opportunity the Russians were offering—would be unlikely to have contacts for the NGO, know of its existence, or find its calls for information on the internet. And then, as Mkwezalamba points out, families whose children have gone to Russia may hesitate to complain, since they would probably be hoping for financial remittances. “They wouldn’t want their daughters, who are breadwinners, to return home. Reporting to us would be suicide to them.”

Also, the request seemed disingenuous. Firstly, because Malawi’s government can simply ask for such details from another government. Secondly, because Malawi’s Department of Foreign Affairs has had a list of 16 Alabuga applicants for the past two years, since August 2023, to be exact.

I find out about this when Malawi's ambassador to Russia, Joseph Mpinganjira, tells me he gave the Ministry of Foreign Affairs such a list at the time. The reason was that Mpinganjira felt uncomfortable with a Russian request for the speedy processing of 16 passports for young women on the list. He passed it to his superiors at the Ministry to ask for guidance.

Too attractive to be true

Talking to ZAM from Berlin, where the Malawi embassy to Russia is located, Mpinganjira says that already from November 2021, his office had been receiving requests from Russia to promote the recruitment for the project. He had ignored emails about this at first because “the perks on offer were too attractive (to be true).”

He had wanted to ‘authenticate’ the nature of the Alabuga project before cooperating.

He had asked his deputy to do background checks on Alabuga, he says, but the person “found nothing.” When Mpinganjira himself sent questions to the Russian Embassy in Berlin, “we got no answer.” Then the embassy “received another email,” he adds, “signed by another person, not the guy who was writing the (previous) emails. In this one,”—he chuckles—“they were asking us if we could support 16 girls to get passports. The names were given to us, and even their phone numbers.”

No feedback came from the meeting with the Russian ambassador

He then passed the list to the Ministry, asking what he was to do, since he hesitated to contact the envisaged recruits themselves “because of privacy issues.” In response, the Ministry “informed me that Principal Secretary Mwayiwawo Polepole had summoned the Russian Ambassador.”

Mpinganjira never received feedback regarding what happened at this meeting or guidance from the Ministry on the matter. But he is, he says, fairly sure that “if there are Malawians in Alabuga, none of them was sent through official means.”

Queries at the Ministry of Labour indeed confirm that there is no formal labour export agreement with Russia, but a spokesperson admits that recruits may have gone there unofficially. “If at all there are Malawians working in Russia, they might have gone there without the knowledge of the ministry,” says spokesperson Nellie Kapatuka.

Labour export

Malawi is a sieve when it comes to such unofficial labour export. There have been quite a few scandals around exploitative labour in Gulf States and elsewhere, facilitated by different agencies.

From these scandals, it has repeatedly emerged that there is scant monitoring of these agencies’ operations by the state, and that the government does not record their activities, raising questions about its sincerity regarding the protection of its youth.

The government has recently also become more open about its intentions behind labour export deals, using terms like the country’s “marketability” when referring to its facilitation of workers’ migration, including to places where such migrant workers are then subject to abuse. A current labour export deal between the governments of Malawi and Israel to export Malawian farm workers has been welcomed by Malawi Finance Minister Simplex Banda, who reported in February last year that the “labour export” from his country to Israel had already “generated US\$735,000.”

Migrant workers’ ‘bad’ behaviour makes Malawi “less marketable”

After several of the workers in Israel subsequently complained of abuse and unkept promises—in some instances reportedly abandoning their jobs—Banda’s colleague, then Labour Minister Vitumbiko Mumba, publicly admonished them, saying that they “abandoned posts, engaged in unauthorised vending and were seeking asylum as gays,” and that this was causing Malawi to be “less marketable to the Israeli government”

According to an Afrobarometer report from July 2025, “half of Malawian youth are not working and looking for a job, and half have also thought about moving abroad.” This may be one of the factors pushing Malawians to join the Russian war machine. In a comment under a Facebook post that warned about exploitation at Alabuga, a user called Paulinoh Kambiya wrote, “Being exploited in a developed country like that one may be better than being exploited here at home.”

US\$1000 per Malawian

President of the Association of Malawian Students in Russia, Nelson Magombo, says in a WhatsApp conversation that he is not aware of any Malawians in Alabuga, but that there may well be, since many “do not follow official procedures to get Russian opportunities.”

According to Magombo, there were 59 Malawians in Russia in 2024, the majority students who connected with each other through a WhatsApp community.

“I cannot say anything bad about Russia”

Calling Malawians, either already in Russia, about to go there, or just returned, I find that several have been approached to either join the army or recruit others. Sending me screenshots of a Russian intermediary promising a monthly US\$2,500 salary and a US\$35,000 payment upon completing the military service contract, John* says he was “promised US\$1,000 per Malawian that I bring to the army. But I ignored this... I can’t risk my country’s people to fight a war they know nothing about.” Another confirmed that this was happening but was reluctant to talk further, saying: “I cannot say anything bad about Russia.” He adds that there may well be more students from Africa who join the Russian military once they are in the country. “There are poster adverts pasted all over.”

Phoning the Russians

Phoning the Russian embassy is quite another experience. My first question, about the nature of the Alabuga project, elicits an assertion that it is an “honest, transparent and mutually beneficial cooperation” (and an example of) one of the enduring priorities of Russia’s foreign policy. I am also told that in 2023–2024, 327 people from 44 countries participated in the programme. But my next questions about the number of Malawians in Alabuga and the possible use of African youths in military drone factories are met only with a curt “I do not have any additional information,” by attache Anna Verkhovtseva.

“Please retract such comments”

When I explain that this issue is in the public interest, that the public needs to know what is happening to their daughters in Alabuga, and ask whether she can help facilitate contact with any of the participants there, Verkhovtseva’s answer is: “We cannot share this information when it concerns the privacy of other citizens.”

When I still press further, saying that we are not about to reveal identities; we just need to know if, and if so, how many Malawians are there and whether they are safe, she doesn’t budge, repeating that she cannot give information. When I finally put to Verkhovtseva that we will have to flag to our audience how unhelpful the embassy is being, the last answer I receive is: “Please retract such comments.”

*Name changed



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“Boys are dangerous. We are OK with them taking girls”

Late last year, the world was alerted to the disturbing news that Russia was recruiting hundreds of young African women, aged 18–22, to manufacture drones in a military-industrial compound called Alabuga, 1,000 km east of Moscow. The reports also stated that the recruits—from at least 15 African countries—were promised good salaries and skills training, but once there, they were often trapped, facing tax deductions, dangerous working conditions, strict surveillance, and difficulties returning home.

In the past six months, a ZAM team in seven African countries has investigated the Russian recruitment exercise—and why so many young Africans take the chance to go, sometimes even after being warned. Emmanuel Mutaizibwa finds that his country is slowly turning into a trafficking station, sending young women to Russia while at the same time offering itself as a dumping ground for migrants from elsewhere.

When, on 12 August 2025, nine men were intercepted at Uganda’s Entebbe airport, ready to be flown as mercenaries to Russia, the scandal made headlines for days. The former private military contractors, who had earlier served in Iraq and Afghanistan, had been promised lucrative contracts of over US\$6,250 a month by an opaque firm called Magnit, led by a Russian who is currently under arrest

Responding to the arrests, Ugandan Defence Forces Chief General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, who is the president’s son, warned on X that, “Ugandans are absolutely forbidden from being recruited to participate in the Russia–Ukraine war. Anyone who dares will be punished severely

“They later came asking to take girls”

Female recruits, however, appear to be a different story. “Boys are dangerous. We are OK with them taking girls,” explains MP Edson Rugumayo when our team interviews him in his Kampala office. In the interview, Rugumayo, a member of the governing party and in charge of a ‘youth’ portfolio in parliament, tells us that there has been talk with Russia of “taking male counterparts,” but that “they later came asking to take girls, and we were okay with taking girls because boys are normally deemed to be dangerous. For a country that is at war, there are so many incentives around the country [to enlist for the military], and you would worry about that. A boy can say, if there is higher pay, let me divert and go and participate in the war.”

Bringing recruits to Russia

By the time we talk to Rugumayo, he appears to have overcome the reservations he had expressed in Uganda’s New Vision newspaper in November 2024, after reports of African young women working in the Alabuga drone factory were first published internationally. He reveals that he had already visited Alabuga in March that year “to get a feel of the place” and, while he could not “confirm or know” that any “military equipment manufacturing”.

Uganda | Trafficking Station

was taking place, he assured New Vision that “we were careful that the project was halted until the situation normalised. Because it coincided with war. There was even a drone attack by Ukraine,” he said. “We asked that they stop until the situation normalises, then the project can continue

Though Rugumayo says he went to Alabuga because of “rumours” and to “check on the beneficiaries,” his visit took place eight months after Uganda’s ambassador to Moscow, Moses Kizige, had already met with Alabuga representatives and after Kizige’s December 2022 announcement that Alabuga was offering five scholarships to Uganda “and was ready to offer more” The month of Rugumayo’s visit also coincided with the arrival of a group of African recruits, including from Uganda, at Alabuga on 22 March 2024

The drone attack, in which several unidentified people at Alabuga were reportedly injured, took place on 2 April 2024, just after Rugumayo’s visit. The same news article in which Rugumayo made these comments featured a small interview with a Ugandan female worker at Alabuga who, speaking anonymously, complained about low wages and tough working conditions.

“Even if there were drones, it’s still work”

But Rugumayo now tells us that he has been recommending passport processing for Alabuga-destined recruits himself since. “Some of them approach my office and I assist them [to get] recommendations for passports.” Asked whether he is no longer concerned about the military-adjacent nature of the Alabuga project, Rugumayo says that, when he was there, he “never saw a factory of drones, so I don’t know. But even if there were, it is still work. So I don’t know. I have not maintained contact (...) I think that would now be at a higher level [for other authorities to take on].”



Smear campaign

Regarding those higher authorities, he explains that “there is a working relationship with the [Russian] government, and there are also discussions at the embassy level. (...) The President is also aware. If I remember correctly, it is the President who instructed the ambassador [Kizige] to chase this through so that there is a framework for Russia–Uganda labour. So I think there is a relationship that is ongoing. I think several committees are set up between the Ministries of

Foreign Affairs and that of Labour, Gender, and Social Development.” He adds that these frameworks are not just for Alabuga or even Russia, because “there are many countries that are now recruiting.”

“I didn’t hear any of them complain”

Asked if he thought some of the recruits might be experiencing challenges, he says, “When I went there, I didn’t hear any of them complain,” adding that “our channels are always very open.” He puts all the negative publicity down to a “geopolitical smear campaign” in international media. “They tend to say this, but when you go there, the reality is quite different.”

Rugumayo did not respond to follow-up questions asking if he could put our team in touch with some of the Ugandan youth in Alabuga so that we could ascertain their situation for ourselves and perhaps report back to worried families. He also did not reply to the question of who had paid for his trip.

Open promotion

The recruitment for Alabuga among young women and girls in Uganda has been carried out more or less openly, with a high school among the recruiting grounds and even the former president of the Uganda National Students’ Association (UNSA), Yusuf Welunga, playing a role. “In 2022, our (then) president, Yusuf Welunga, attended a meeting with the promoters of Alabuga, but he acted as an individual,” says UNSA Executive Secretary Fred Toskin Cherukut. Cherukut added that neither he nor UNSA had an issue with this. “If our students can go to the Middle East, (youth, including students, have been going for labour and study opportunities in places such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Iraq), it is very possible for them to go [to Russia] and survive.”

The recruiter joined the secret service

Welunga is no longer at UNSA, Cherukut says. “He joined the army, and currently his phones are off. It must be the Internal Security Organisation (ISO) — the secret service that has been used against critics of the regime). He got into that programme when he was exiting UNSA.”

Labour export framework

Government sources confirmed to ZAM that there was a “labour export framework” with Russia and that 60 recruits from Uganda are now at Alabuga. However, two senior officials at the Labour Ministry, Commissioner for Employment Services Lawrence Egulu and his deputy Milton Turyasiima, appeared reluctant to give details. “I heard about this thing, but I cannot remember,” said Egulu, and Turyasiima similarly held off, saying that he had “heard about it in the background.”

At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Permanent Secretary Vincent Bagiire denied that young Ugandan women were involved in building drones. “The information is that Alabuga is a special economic zone with various industrial activities, and that there are no Ugandans involved in drone manufacturing. The Ugandans we know of are operating in different industries.” He also said that the Ugandan embassy in Moscow is in touch with Ugandans at Alabuga.

Ugandan Ambassador to Russia Moses Kizige did not respond to questions sent to his WhatsApp asking who the recruits in Alabuga were, how they were recruited, if they were building drones, whether their working conditions were satisfactory, and if they were safe.

Increasing securocracy

Alabuga and the general military cooperation between Russia and Uganda have cast a long shadow over its Western ties. President Museveni, a long-time ally of the West in its war on terror in the conflict-scarred Horn of Africa, was previously viewed as an anchor of stability in the restive Great Lakes region. This proved a boon, as the United States provided significant development and security assistance to Uganda, with a financial war chest exceeding US\$970?million per year.

Uganda has been gravitating towards Moscow

However, as Museveni’s regime has increasingly moved towards life presidency and dictatorship, opposition has been muzzled, and securocrats kidnap and torture critics—coupled with Western Europe often feebly trying to criticise these tendencies—Uganda has gradually been gravitating towards Moscow and the Far East, tightening links between its own military and intelligence apparatus and Russian counterparts.

After a first US\$740 million purchase in 2012 of Russian Sukhoi fighter jets—for which reserves at the Bank of Uganda were raided -

Russia has trained Ugandan Air Force pilots and engineers in both Uganda and Russia. It has also offered hundreds of bursaries to ruling party—favoured students to train at its elite universities in Moscow and Leningrad. Russian military specialists have trained Ugandan soldiers in tank operations, and Russia has donated large funds to the country’s military budgets, see here.

On April 6th, 2025, Museveni told the news channel Russia Today that the country has always “stood with us during our liberation struggles.” In February 2022, Museveni’s son, Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, wrote on X that Russian President Vladimir Putin “is absolutely right” to invade Ukraine.

An ever more watchful eye

Critics of Uganda’s regime fear that the ever-closer cooperation with Russia will help local securocrats keep an ever more watchful eye on the already besieged opposition. In January 2025, Uganda rolled out a digital numberplate system provided by the Russian firm Joint Stock Company Global Security. On the Ugandan side, the system raises the spectre of increased surveillance, since the digital numberplate will be integrated with the country’s Closed Circuit Television system, the motor vehicle registration system, the e-tax system, and the National Identity database.

The country will now become a dumping ground for migrants

The spectre of an increasingly oppressive Uganda, with scant respect for humans, has also been fuelled by a recent deal with the United States’ Trump administration that offers the country as a dumping ground for the US’s unwanted immigrants. According to Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary Vincent Bagiire, “The two parties are working out the detailed modalities on how the agreement shall be implemented.”

The irony, that on one side the West’s undesirables may be corralled here, while Ugandans may be recruited by the East—while those in the middle continue to suffer oppression and poverty—has caused concerns that the country will simply be cashing checks from both sides for operating a trafficking station. The US deal prompted Ugandan struggle veteran General Sejusa to comment: “But why is Uganda getting involved in these shameful things? Have we no pride, no ideological sensibilities, no fibre left, no shame at all?”

Uganda’s democratic opposition is meanwhile also suffering from US President Trump’s cuts to budgets that previously helped civil society organisations. Commenting on the perilous isolation of Ugandan democrats and activists, Christopher Mbazira, Professor of Law and founding member of the Network of Public Interest Lawyers in Uganda, feared there was little chance of rescue or positive change. “There is a global realignment of governments that are relegating human rights to the background for quid pro quo deals in favour of political survival,” he said.

► Comment

Zambia’s \$80 Billion Mining Lawsuit Risks Collapse Without Unity and Leadership

Finally, there is some good news for the victims of Sino Metals Leach Zambia, a Chinese state-owned copper mine whose waste dam failed in February.

According to a report by the BBC, over 170 farmers have filed an \$80bn lawsuit against two Chinese-linked firms, blaming them for an "ecological catastrophe" caused by the collapse of a dam that stored waste from copper mining.

They allege that the collapse of the tailings dam — owned by Sino Metals in Chambishi, Kalulushi district— was caused by numerous factors, including engineering failures, construction flaws, and operational mismanagement.

While this development is encouraging for the farmers, the manner in which lawyers are handling the case is a problem.

It appears lawyers of all kinds are descending on the victims like vultures circling a carcass.

What we have heard from our sources is that the number of farmers who have sued is actually higher than the figure reported by the BBC.

One lawyer is representing 47 farmers, while another firm has sued on behalf of 157. At the moment, it is not clear which group has filed the \$80bn lawsuit.

There is, in fact, an outbreak of lawsuits against Sino Metals, a subsidiary of China Nonferrous Metal Mining Group, which is owned by the Chinese government.

The lack of coordination among lawyers may lead to a divided camp that will not be able to take on the powerful Chinese company.

he hurdles that lawyers are likely to face in the case include proving causation and establishing the amount of damages at the claimed scale of \$80 billion.

Prior settlement agreements some residents have signed may also stand in the way. Moreover, the fact that government has publicly downplayed the risk could further complicate damages and the scope of the class action.

Government should have drawn lessons from the Mariana dam collapse of 2015, one of Brazil’s worst environmental disasters.

The collapse of the dam at the iron ore mine owned by Samarco — a joint venture between Vale and BHP — near the city of Mariana in southeastern Brazil, unleashed a wave of tailings in a disaster that killed 19 people, left hundreds homeless, flooded forests, and polluted the length of the Doce River.

In that case, it was the Brazilian government that filed a lawsuit against Samarco on behalf of its citizens. But in October last year, the government entered into an out-of-court settlement of \$29.85 billion with the company. The annual payments were scheduled until 2043. The staggered payments help deal with future liabilities when the effects of the disaster begin to show years after the pollution. This lawsuit by farmers against Sino Metals is a rare moment of hope in the struggle for accountability after one of Zambia’s worst environmental disasters. But hope alone will not be enough. Unless the legal fight is coordinated, credible, and supported by government leadership, victims risk being re-victimised — this time by the very lawyers meant to defend them. Zambia cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of silence and disunity. The country must draw lessons from Brazil’s example and ensure that justice is delivered not in fragments, but in a way that secures dignity, compensation, and lasting protection for its people.



Damaged bridge in Kalusale

Inside Mutharika's Failed Bid to Secure Atupele Muluzi Alliance - How DPP Internal Politics Derailed Presidential Strategy

As Malawi approaches the 2025 elections next week, fresh revelations about from former President Peter Mutharika's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) suggest an internal power struggle for political control, writes MakaanDay's Special Correspondent in Lilongwe.

Former Malawian President Arthur Peter Mutharika (known locally as "APM") never originally intended to contest the 2025 presidential election, sources within Mutharika's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) have disclosed.

Exposing deep-seated political machinations within Malawi's opposition landscape, Insiders in the DPP hierarchy have disclosed that Mutharika was initially prepared to throw his full support behind United Democratic Front (UDF) President Atupele Muluzi's presidential ambitions.

The revelation comes as Malawi approaches the September 2025 general elections, with Mutharika now having selected controversial former Electoral Commission Chairperson Jane Ansah as his Running Mate.

The dramatic shift in Mutharika's political trajectory, sources reveal, stems from internal party power struggles that ultimately sabotaged what could have been a formidable opposition alliance.

This professional partnership fostered a level of trust that Mutharika rarely extended to other political figures. Sources indicate that Mutharika viewed Muluzi not just as a capable administrator, but as someone who understood the complexities of governance and the weight of presidential responsibility.

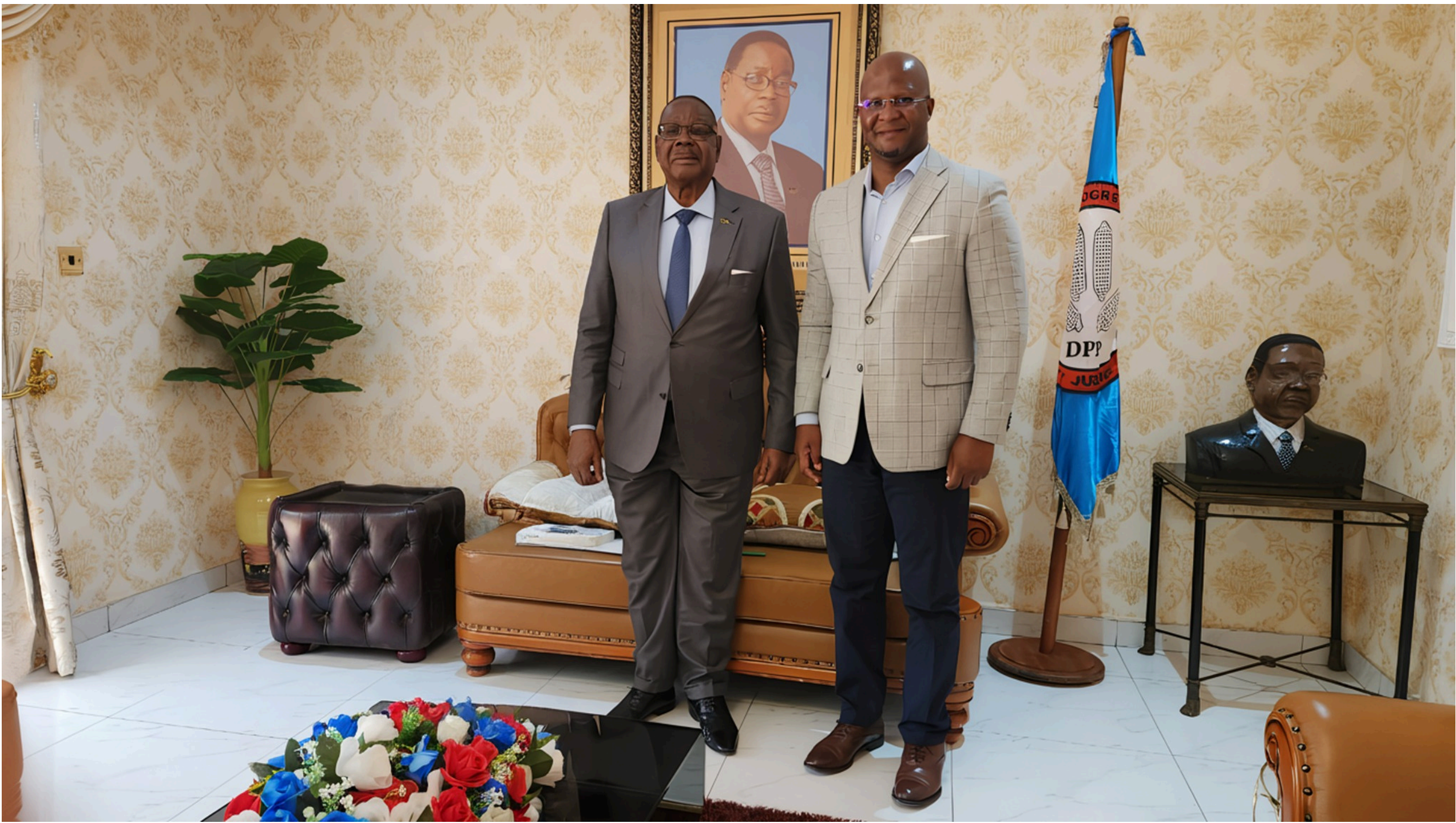
Age and Health Concernseductions

At 84, Mutharika privately acknowledged that his advancing age and health concerns would pose significant challenges to effective governance. Unlike his public persona of strength and determination, sources reveal that behind closed doors, Mutharika expressed doubts about his ability to serve another full presidential term.

"APM was very candid about his limitations," revealed a senior DPP official who requested anonymity. "He felt that the country needed younger, more energetic leadership, and he saw that in Atupele."

Public Endorsement and Respect

Mutharika's respect for Muluzi was not merely private sentiment. In a 2019 article published by Nyasa Times, Mutharika publicly justified his consideration of Muluzi, stating that "he understands running government comes with responsibility." This public endorsement reflected Mutharika's genuine belief in Muluzi's capabilities and character.



Meetings at Page House

Multiple DPP sources confirm that Mutharika and Muluzi met at least twice at Page House, Mutharika's residence in Mangochi, to discuss the former president's intention to strategically place Muluzi as his successor.

These high-level discussions, conducted away from the prying eyes of party officials, centered on Mutharika's belief that Muluzi represented the future of Malawian politics and possessed the experience and integrity necessary to lead the country

Proven Partnership and Trust

The foundation of Mutharika's confidence in Muluzi stems from their successful working relationship during the DPP's previous tenure in government. Muluzi served as a Minister in Mutharika's administration, demonstrating both competence and loyalty during challenging political times.

The former President's assessment of Muluzi was based on concrete observations of his ministerial performance and his approach to political responsibility, traits that Mutharika felt were essential for presidential leadership.

A Debt of Political Honor

Perhaps most significantly, Mutharika felt he "owed it" to Muluzi after the 2019 election controversy. Sources reveal that Mutharika harbored regret over his decision not to select Muluzi as his running mate in 2019, instead choosing the less popular Everton Chimulirenji.

This decision, which many political analysts viewed as a strategic error, weighed heavily on Mutharika's conscience. The former President saw supporting Muluzi's presidential bid as both political wisdom and personal redemption.

DPP wrangles and the failed Zisinthe Alliance

The original plan involved the formation of the "Zisinthe Alliance," a powerful opposition coalition comprising the DPP, UDF, and the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD). This alliance was designed to present a united front against the ruling Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and provide Malawi with a credible alternative government.

While Mutharika himself favoured Muluzi as the alliance's running mate, senior DPP officials harbored different ambitions. They were not prepared to accept Muluzi as a running mate and fundamentally opposed the idea of him eventually succeeding Mutharika as alliance leader.

Internal Sabotage and Power Preservation

A calculated strategy by DPP party hardliners to maintain control while exploiting Muluzi's political energy and youth appeal saw Muluzi's campaigning abilities and public appeal as a useful tool, while ensuring that real power remained within the DPP establishment.

"They wanted to use Atupele's youthful energy and clean reputation to win elections, but they had no intention of allowing him to truly lead," explained a source familiar with the internal party dynamics. "It was about maintaining control while appearing to embrace change."

The Leak That Killed the Alliance

In a move that sources describe as deliberately destructive, DPP officials leaked the alliance agreement to the media and rival political parties. This calculated sabotage was designed to create mistrust and confusion among alliance partners.

Mutharika, who had delegated much of the alliance negotiations to his party officials due to his inability to participate in all deliberations, was reportedly blindsided by this internal betrayal. The leaks effectively poisoned the well of inter-party cooperation and made meaningful collaboration impossible.

Fabricated Propaganda Against Muluzi

To further discredit Muluzi and justify the alliance's collapse, DPP officials spread false information claiming that Muluzi had secretly formed an alliance with the incumbent MCP. This propaganda campaign was designed to portray Muluzi as untrustworthy and politically opportunistic. The fabricated narrative served one main purpose: to consolidate DPP's hierarchy's power.

Jane Ansah – The Architect of Electoral Controversy

The selection of Jane Ansah as Mutharika's running mate represents perhaps the most controversial aspect of the DPP's 2025 campaign strategy. Ansah was the Chairperson of the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) during the 2019 general election, which was subsequently annulled by the Constitutional Court due to widespread irregularities.

The Constitutional Court's ruling specifically ordered an audit of the electoral process and questioned the suitability of MEC commissioners to remain in office. Ansah's tenure was marked by nationwide protests calling for her resignation over her handling of the disputed election.

The Succession Concern

Given Mutharika's advanced age, the choice of running mate takes on added significance as it effectively identifies his potential successor. The selection of Ansah, given her controversial background and the circumstances surrounding the 2019 election annulment, raises serious questions about judgment and political wisdom.

Critics argue that Ansah's association with the "Tippex Election" - a reference to the widespread use of correction fluid on ballot papers that contributed to the election's annulment - makes her a liability rather than an asset to the DPP ticket.

A Questionable Political Legacy

The 2019 election controversy that Ansah oversaw was characterized by what the Constitutional Court termed "widespread incompetence" and "gross negligence." The court ultimately annulled the presidential vote and ordered a re-run after opposition parties successfully challenged the results citing irregularities.

For a party seeking to rebuild trust with the Malawian electorate, the selection of a figure so closely associated with electoral malfeasance appears counterproductive and potentially damaging to the DPP's credibility.

Muluzi – The Clean Politician Malawi Needs?

Despite the internal DPP sabotage and propaganda campaigns, Muluzi is seen as a significant figure in Malawian politics. He has marketed himself as part of a new generation of political leadership with a clean record and genuine commitment to public service.

This, observers say, is the very reason DPP hardliners campaigned to exclude Muluzi from real power - his clean political record and appeal to younger voters. He is seen as representing a break from the old patterns of political behaviour that have characterized much of Malawi's post-independence experience. Mutharika has himself publicly acknowledged Muluzi's potential.

The Road Not Taken

As Malawi approaches the 2025 elections next week, the revelations about Mutharika's original intentions and the internal DPP power struggles that derailed them provide insight into what might have been. The Zisinthe Alliance, had it materialised, could have presented a formidable challenge to the incumbent MCP government.

Instead, Malawian voters are left with a fragmented opposition, a controversial running mate selection, and questions about what the future holds for the country's democratic development.

This month in the Bulletin and Record

The myth of Bishop “Moto Moto” King of the brigands

Bishop Dupont, a member of the White Fathers, gained entry into Bembaland in the 1890s. He soon became a legendary figure, not least because of the popular belief that for a short period he had held the Mwamba chieftaincy. Dupont left Zambia in 1911 and died in 1930 in Tunisia. The legend of Bwana Moto Moto lived on in Zambia and resulted for instance in the naming of Mbala’s museum. His story was revitalised in 2000, when Dupont’s bones were returned to Zambia and reburied at Chilubula mission in Kasama.

The bones, collected in Tunisia by Fr. Felix Phiri, arrived in a casket at Lusaka airport on 9 December 2000. As is the tradition for visiting dignitaries, delegations from the church and government were standing on the tarmac of the airport to receive the bishop. Catholic women had come out in their hundreds, ululating and dancing as the casket was carried out of the plane.

From the airport the bones embarked on a trip that took them right through Zambia’s Northern Province, touching on places where Dupont had made a lasting impact: Serenje, Chilonga, Mpika, Mansa, Lubwe, Kasama and Chilubula, his final resting place. Everywhere the relics were welcomed by big crowds of people. In Kasama, the remains were lifted upon a carrier made out of tree bark. The stretcher was covered by a red cloth, symbolising power and strength.

Some 2km before reaching Chilubula, the procession was welcomed by the bamucilingwa (royal undertakers) of Chief Mwamba, dressed in red, who carried him the last distance. At Chilubula cathedral, the royal undertakers handed him over to the Catholic Church.

He was then buried under the floor, next to the altar. The burial mass was attended by the Bemba chiefs, Makasa and Munkonga. Three Bemba bishops of Dupont’s former field of evangelisation were there, as well as the provincial superior of the White Fathers, White Sisters, Zambian priests, African sisters of the Child Jesus Congregation and the Catholic population of Chilubula mission.

Joseph Dupont was born in 1850 in Geste, a small village in the Vendée region of France. In 1870, he enlisted in the army and fought in the Franco-Prussian war. Despite his outstanding military skills, Dupont became a missionary and was ordained a priest in 1879. He entered the Missionaries of Africa, founded by Cardinal Lavigerie, and was sent to the Buluba area.

After a short spell in the Congo, he returned to France, which he left again in 1891, having been deputed to lead the White Fathers’ caravan to the interior of Tanganyika. In 1895, he took over Mambwe mission in the Tanganyika-Malawi corridor, whence he tried to gain a foothold into the adjoining kingdom of the Bemba. He closely followed the instructions of Lavigerie, whose strategy of conversion was based on the so-called “Clovis model”: persuade the King and the population will follow suit.

His first contact with Bemba royalty in the summer of 1895 was with the then chief, Makasa, who invited him to open a mission station at Kayambi. Dupont realised soon that Mubanga Chipoya, holder of the Mwamba title, was strategically the most important chief among the Bemba.

The legendary Bishop “Moto Moto” Dupont (1850-1930)



The myth of Bishop “Moto Moto” King of the brigands Cont....

In the course of the next few years, he put all his energy into liaising with him. Mwamba Mubanga, on his part, sensed the threat of the encroaching British South Africa Company (BSAC) and needed a mediator between the prospective European rulers and himself. By the time he was dying, Chief Mwamba had overcome his earlier misgivings regarding Dupont and summoned him to his presence. There are several accounts of Dupont’s last encounter with Mwamba Mubanga. The consensus in recent academic literature is that the chief, who was aware of the likely consequences of his death, namely bloodshed and chaos, asked Dupont to become the protector of his land and people, until such time as a successor had been appointed.

When Mwamba died on the night of October 23 1898, thousands of people fled to Dupont’s tented camp. Under the missionary’s leadership, the late chief’s headmen and subordinates submitted to English rule. During the next few months, however, Dupont sought to exploit his performance at Mwamba’s to the mission’s advantage. His repeated claims to be the rightful incumbent of Mwamba’s land and title led him to clash with local BSAC’s officials, but did in the end result in the concession of a grant of four square miles to establish his mission.

Within the borders of Chilubula (“the place of redemption”), Dupont as missionary-in-charge was given the by then restricted authority of a native chief. Nine months after the death of Mubanga, Nkolemfumu Kanyata was installed as the new Mwamba. The creation of the myth of Bishop “Moto-Moto”, the “king of the brigands”, was initiated by none other than Dupont himself. From the time of his arrival in northern Zambia, Dupont presented himself as a temporal ruler, insisting on being carried in a hammock followed by a large amount of carriers. He always made a point of making a show of his military skills, which were highly admired.

He also exploited the Messianic belief in the return from Luba country of Lucele Nganga, the white culture hero of Bemba traditions of origins. Faced with the defeat of their coastal allies, internal rivalries and the threat of invasion by the BSAC, chiefs Makasa,

Makumba and Mwamba welcomed Dupont as a possible source of income, protector and go-between. These chiefly expectations allowed Dupont to strengthen his reputation and get a foothold among the Bemba. For the White Fathers, the alliance with the Bemba chiefs was an important strategic move and, despite the fact that the Bemba chiefs did not convert to Catholicism, they allowed their subjects to do so.

Dupont’s memory lived on long after his demise, most notably in the shape of praise songs. Doing fieldwork in the 1960s, the historian Andrew Roberts reports the following praise song, which was composed while Dupont was still residing at Kayambi mission.

*This man is our chief
What parent loved his children as he does
Motomoto who helps poor people
If you have seen another like him, tell us!*

Another remarkable song was recorded in the late 1960s by Fr. T. Diessen. The song is called Lwimbo lwa Bwana Moto Moto. Mulubishi Wesu, A Song for Monsignor Moto Moto. Our Redeemer.

*He gives our life to our children
and nurtures them with food
He hurls down the lions
and heals our ailments
He is so strong yet so kind
And the mother of Moto-moto
How great a queen she is
A queen so sweet and gracious
She received the downtrodden
and is hospitable to stranger
Her husband without doubt
must regard her with gratitude
Oh how we would wish to go and meet her!
what road can we take, please, to reach her
We would ask her this and that
We would tell her many things
This royal mother of Our Chief here
Is really our Queen
Refrain
Let those who have seen her equal tell us of her!*

Dupont is here praised as the ideal man, whose goodness the matrilineal Bemba see as deriving from his mother.

The first Bemba Bishop of Kasama Diocese, Clement Chabukasansha, received Dupont's Episcopal ring and crosier as he was regarded as the descendant of the legendary Bwana Moto Moto. In 1973, when his successor Elias Mutale was consecrated, the royal drummers of Chief Makasa were summoned, while the White Fathers handed him Dupont's relics.

Not surprisingly, it was Bishop Mutale who initiated the return of the bones of Bishop Dupont. The reasons given were threefold. First, it was emphasised that Dupont had expressed the wish to be buried among “his” people, the Bemba. Secondly, it was meant to confirm Dupont’s role in founding the Catholic Church in Zambia; his reburial was in fact intended to coincide with the 100-year jubilee of the church. Dupont had been the first Bishop to be consecrated on Zambian soil. Thirdly, in the genealogy of the church Dupont is the predecessor of Bishop Mutale; the grandfather should be buried amongst his children.

With the visit of Pope John Paul in 1989, a special representation by Chief Mwamba was sent. As part of the lobbying for having the bones returned, they handed him an axe, which according to legend had been given to Dupont by the dying Mwamba Chipoya. Another group who regard themselves as the descendants of Dupont is the African sisters of the Child Jesus congregation, founded in 1926 in Chilubula by the successor of Dupont, Bishop Larue. Bishop Larue is considered as their founder, their father, but Dupont is their grandfather and he gets special mention in their charter.

This story was first published in the September 2011 edition of the Bulletin and Record magazine.

Chama Diary: The Cost of Coexistence (Part II)

- After losing 1,500 tomato plants to elephant raids, farmer Robert Mvula now sleeps outside in the cold to protect his last remaining crops.
- Rural farmers living near protected wildlife zones face daily struggles as human–elephant conflict deepens hunger and poverty. The situation is compounded by the absence of effective long-term solutions and compensation systems, with government efforts limited so far to small-scale measures such as installing solar-powered fences.

By Ennety Munshya in Chama

In the first part, we reported on Julius Ngulube, a 49-year-old farmer from Kaozi Scheme in Chama district, Eastern Province,

who is struggling to repay a K40,000 loan from the government-supported Sustainable Agriculture Financing Facility (SAFF) after losing his entire maize crop—wiped out by drought and ravaged by elephants.

In this second part, we focus on Robert Mvula of Mundalanga, another small-scale farmer whose 1,500 tomato plants were destroyed by elephants while he was away at a funeral. He now spends his nights sleeping outside in the cold, guarding what little remains of his vegetable garden from the wild animals that threaten his family’s survival.

“We camp near our gardens to guard our crops from the animals. We depend on these gardens for our daily food, and we sell some to make ends meet.

At night we light fires near where we sleep. When the elephants see fire, they are scared,” he told MakanDay.

He says farmers try different tactics to keep the animals at bay—tying small pieces of iron sheet to ropes so they clang in the night, hoping the noise will scare off the wildlife. But even these desperate measures often fail.

Around his garden, deep elephant tracks carve through the soil, a stark reminder of their destructive passage. Where nearly 1,500 tomato plants once thrived, only flattened stalks remain. For Mvula, the only hope is that government will one day provide lasting solutions to keep wild animals from invading people’s homes.

Another farmer, Chindongo Mphande, lost his cassava and groundnut fields to elephants in June and says that living alongside wild animals is a constant struggle.

When MakanDay visited his field, the destruction was clear: cassava and groundnuts lay uprooted across the land, with elephant tracks and droppings marking their destructive visit.

As a small-scale farmer, Mphande depends on his crops to feed his family and cover his children’s school needs.

“Whatever we try to plant vegetables, fruits, any crops we can eat, the animals attack and destroy everything,” he laments.

Human–animal conflicts in Chama are worsening an already difficult situation in the area – hunger crisis.

Chama district lies within a Game Management Area (GMA), surrounding part of the Musalangu Game Management Area (GMA), which serves as a buffer zone for the North Luangwa National Park and surrounding communities.

A study published in the International Journal of Research in Geography “Causes and Effects of Human–Wildlife Conflict in Zambia: A Case of South Luangwa Game Management Area” notes that crop damage, destruction of property, and human injuries or fatalities are the primary forms of conflict.

According to the study, 28% of respondents reported crop damage, 48% experienced property destruction, and 22% suffered human injuries or fatalities due to wildlife encounters.

The study further says that destruction of crops leads to significant economic losses for farmers, undermining livelihoods and contributing to food insecurity. The report also highlights the absence of a formal compensation mechanism, which worsens the challenges faced by affected communities.

In response, the government has proposed installing solar-powered fences in human–animal conflict hotspots in Chama District. However, questions remain about the feasibility of this approach, given the scattered settlement patterns in the area.

According to a ZNBC report of September 10, 2025, Eastern Province Minister Peter Phiri said Constituency Development Fund resources could be used to support fencing initiatives in vulnerable areas. He acknowledged the serious difficulties communities face due to frequent wildlife encroachment.

» Awards Ceremony

Entries Open for MakanDay Investigative Reporting Award

The Eminent Prize for Investigative Journalism is now in its fourth year. This award recognises journalists who demonstrate exceptional commitment to uncovering hidden facts and holding leaders accountable.

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Submission Guidelines

- Entries must uncover abuse of power, corruption, or expose injustice.
- Journalists may submit their own work or nominate another’s work (with their permission).
- Eligible entries must have been published or broadcast between 1st January and October 31st 2025.
- Non-English entries must include a translation.
- For print entries: include a scanned copy (and, if unclear, a transcript in Word or PDF).
- For broadcast entries (TV, radio, or online video): include a link or attach the file.
- All entries must include a biography and photo of the entrant(s).
- The awards are open to all Zambian journalists and MakanDay contributors. However, MakanDay journalists are not eligible to participate.

Submit entries to: editor@makanday.org

Visit: website <https://makanday.org>

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