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Mines Are National Assets That Must Benefit Zambians — Banda

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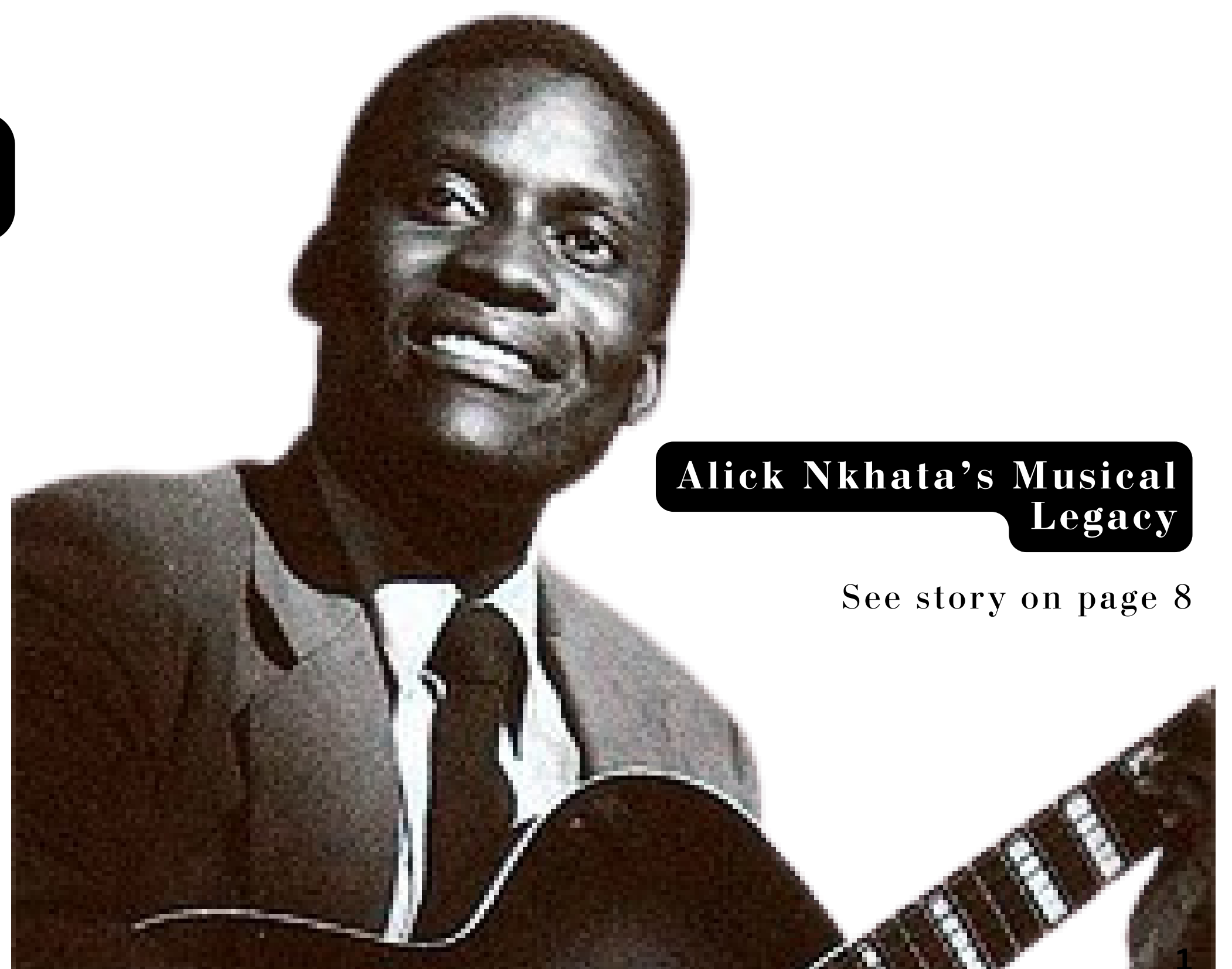
Chama Diary: Chama Runs on Black-Market Fuel as District Lacks Filling Station

Chama, the largest district in Eastern Province, is hard to access due to poor roads. It has only one bank, no mobile network operators, and critically, no official fueling station. According to Chama district council's website, it covers about 17,630 km² — more land than any other district in the province.

The absence of a licenced fueling station in Chama District, Eastern Province, has forced residents to rely entirely on informal, black-market fuel vendors for both transport and business needs.

Fuel is sold in 20-liter containers by street vendors who source it mainly from neighboring Malawi, where it is cheaper, or from Lundazi town. Prices fluctuate sharply — ranging from K60 to K90 for 2.5 liters, and soaring to as much as K150 during shortages.

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Alick Nkhata's Musical Legacy

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The Team who did the Alabuga project

The transnational investigation into the recruitment of African young women for Russia's Alabuga drone site (see link to main story) was conducted by investigative journalists from seven African countries. They are featured below.

Charles Mafa began the investigation in response to the mixed messaging received by the public in his home country, Zambia, caught between an intensive propaganda campaign and recruitment drive for Alabuga on one side, and troubling international reports on the other. He reached out to the Network of African Investigative Reporters and Editors (NAIRE), of which he is a member, leading to a seven-country collaborative project. In his day-to-day work, Mafa is a veteran investigative journalist and the co-founder and managing partner of the MakanDay Zambia Centre for Investigative Journalism. He has worked with both Zambian and international media, served as a mentor for BBC Media Action, and received multiple awards.

ZAM collaborated with Makanday on the Alabuga project.

Elizabeth BanyiTabi was reporting on the growing desertion of Cameroonian soldiers to Russia when the ZAM and NAIRE Alabuga project came along, focusing on Russian recruitment of girls for the arms industry. As a NAIRE member herself, she expanded her investigation to examine the deeper motives driving not only soldiers but also young people across Cameroon to seek escape, even if it means going to war in a foreign country. Working under conditions of oppression and censorship, BanyiTabi has published her reporting in outlets including the Cameroonian Guardian Post, ZAM Magazine, and the Guardian (UK), among others.

Samuel Baker Byansi is an investigative journalist, human rights advocate, and NAIRE member who previously worked in Rwanda. He was forced to leave the country under the increasingly oppressive rule of Paul Kagame and later authored *From Watchdogs to Traitors: The Less You Know, The More You Believe*, an account of the decline of Rwanda's media landscape amid the co-option, intimidation, and betrayal of journalistic principles that accompanied Kagame's state capture. Now in exile, Byansi continues to investigate the region from abroad. He is also a laureate of the 2025 Difference Day Honorary Title for Freedom of Expression, awarded by Brussels' Free University.

Design by Sky Walker



Emmanuel Mutaizibwa's experience spans both journalism and legal research. A NAIRE member, he is a journalist and lawyer by profession, and has served as political editor and investigations editor at Uganda's Nation Media Group. In 2019, he co-founded the East African Centre for Investigative Reporting, where he is now Managing Partner. His articles and films have appeared in South Africa's Sunday Times, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Al Jazeera, Vice Media Group, TRT World, The Guardian, and ZAM.

Josephine Chinele is a multi-award-winning investigative journalist with the Platform for Investigative Journalism in Malawi and a member of NAIRE. She is a two-time Pulitzer reporting grantee and a former fellow at the Los Angeles Times. Her work focuses on the exploitation of African citizens, as well as issues of oppression, corruption, and poor governance.

Beloved John covers foreign and diaspora issues for Nigeria's leading news platform, Premium Times. Despite her young age, she has already reported for prominent Nigerian media outlets, including Order Paper, the country's foremost independent parliamentary monitoring organisation and policy think tank, as well as the International Centre for Investigative Reporting.

William Moige is a journalist at East Africa's renowned media house, Africa Uncensored. Driven by a "deep commitment to uncovering truth and amplifying unheard voices," as he describes it, Moige specialises in stories that not only expose corruption and defend human rights but also investigate and challenge broken systems. His investigative work earned him the Outstanding Media Security and Safety Award in Kenya in 2024. Like his media house, Moige believes journalism should not only inform but also ignite change and improve lives.

ZAM and Africa Uncensored partnered on the Alabuga project.

The project was coordinated and edited by Evelyn Groenink, Investigations Editor at ZAM.

Mines Are National Assets That Must Benefit Zambians — Banda

By: Ennety Munshya

Presidential hopeful and former ZCCM-IH Board Chairperson, Dolika Banda, says Zambia must begin to treat its mines as national assets that belong to the Zambian people.

Speaking on the Friday edition of Radio Phoenix’s “Let the People Talk” programme, Banda observed that the biggest challenge facing the country’s mining sector is the lack of capacity and financial resources to fully exploit its mineral wealth.

“It is a national asset, it is in Zambian soil. It belongs to the Zambian people. We do not have the financial wherewithal to be able to take those assets out of the ground and make them marketable,” she said.

Banda lamented Zambia’s limited participation and control in the sector, stressing the need for citizens to play a leading role in the ownership and management of mines. She further underscored the importance of negotiating firmly with mining companies to ensure that Zambians are the true beneficiaries of the country’s resources.

“Zambia is so attractive now. Everybody wants to come and invest here. But why should we waive certain taxes? It is like a bride who is so attractive. More men want to marry her, so you raise the bar in terms of how much you are going to pay, and who will pay?” she explained.

Banda argued that there are multiple ways of extracting value from mining investors beyond taxation. She recalled the Kaunda era, when taxes were relatively low but mining companies were still compelled to build schools, clinics, and roads.

She also emphasised the importance of adhering to development agreements, which she said are currently being poorly implemented.

However, Banda’s political journey has not been without setbacks. Recently, her anticipated unveiling as president of the People’s Alliance for Change (PAC) fell through after last-minute disagreements with party leader Andyford Banda. The announcement was expected at PAC’s second convention, but Dolika was absent from the panel, and Andyford Banda was instead re-elected unopposed across all ten provinces.

Explaining the fallout, Andyford Banda said the disagreements were not financial but arose from irreconcilable differences in political approach and party-building strategies. While acknowledging Dolika’s extensive banking background, he pointed to his own decade-long political experience as a source of contrasting perspectives.



2026 National Budget Prioritises CDF, Jobs, and Economic Resilience

By Linda Soko Tembo

The Finance and National Planning Minister, Dr. Situmbeko Musokotwane, unveiled the 2026 national budget amounting to over K253 billion, with a pledge to accelerate job creation, infrastructure development, and economic resilience

To support grassroots development, Dr. Musokotwane announced an increase in the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) to K6.2 billion. This translates to K40 million per constituency, up from K36.1 million in 2025—an increment of K3.9 million per constituency.

Presenting the budget on Friday, 26 September, under the theme “Consolidating Economic and Social Gains Towards a Prosperous, Resilient and Equitable Zambia”, Dr. Musokotwane said the fiscal plan aims to build on recent progress while steering the country towards inclusive and sustained growth. He emphasised government’s commitment to grow the economy to levels not seen before, despite shocks such as COVID-19 and the 2024 drought.

He projected economic growth at 6.4 percent in 2026, compared to an average of 5.2 percent over the past four years. Inflation has dropped from 16.7 percent in 2024 to 12.3 percent, with expectations of falling further into the Bank of Zambia’s 6–8 percent target range. He also noted that the Kwacha appreciated by 14.7 percent this year, driven by increased mining foreign exchange inflows and a tight monetary policy stance.

“Inflation has declined to 12.3 percent this month. This largely reflects lower food prices due to the bumper maize harvest of 3.7 million metric tonnes, appreciation of the Kwacha, reduced fuel prices, and the impact of the tight monetary policy stance,” he said.

Dr. Musokotwane highlighted growth in key sectors such as mining, agriculture, energy, education, and health. Copper output rose to 820,676 metric tonnes in 2024, with the country targeting one million tonnes in 2025 and a long-term goal of three million tonnes annually by 2031.

In agriculture, a bumper maize harvest of 3.7 million tonnes was recorded in the 2024/2025 farming season. Government now plans to raise maize production to 10 million tonnes, focusing on export-oriented surplus.

In the energy sector, investment in solar and thermal power is being accelerated to address drought-induced electricity shortages. An additional 1,800 megawatts is expected by 2026, with non-hydro sources projected to account for 33 percent of generation capacity.

Since 2022, government has recruited 42,000 teachers and 18,000 health workers. In 2026, an additional 3,500 teachers and 2,500 health workers will be employed. Drug availability in public facilities has improved to 90 percent, while more than 280 health facilities have been completed.

The health sector has been allocated K26.2 billion (10.3% of the budget), including K6.4 billion for drug procurement—a 30 percent increase from 2025 to cover gaps left by withdrawn donor support.

On social protection, the Social Cash Transfer programme will reach 1.5 million households in 2026, while more than 2.4 million people have already benefited from the drought-response Cash-for-Work programme.

The K253.1 billion budget represents 27.4 percent of GDP, with K206.5 billion expected from domestic revenue and K12.1 billion from grants. The remainder—K34.5 billion—will be financed through domestic and external borrowing. A significant share will go to debt servicing: K52 billion for domestic debt and K21.7 billion for external repayments.

Dr. Musokotwane cited Zambia’s successful restructuring of 94 percent of eligible external debt under the G20 Common Framework. He also stressed new priorities, including investment in green energy, carbon markets, and sustainable agriculture, alongside measures to combat plastic pollution and curb the illegal use of mercury in mining.

While noting progress, he cautioned that unemployment, poverty, and productivity gaps remain pressing.

“Development has no finishing line. Now is the time to push the country to the next level,” he said.



The Minister of Finance and National Planning Dr. Situmbeko Musokotwane

Harassment, Cover-Ups, and Bribery in Multi-Billion Kwacha Finance Ministry Scandal

By Charles Mafa

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) continues to delay prosecution in what appears to be a cover-up involving officials who escaped arrest in the theft of over a billion kwacha in public funds at the Ministry of Finance. In the meantime, the whistleblower, Grandy Ntumbo, remains a target of ongoing victimisation.

A 2019 special audit into the Ministry of General Education, led by Ntumbo, a Principal Internal Auditor in the Ministry of Finance, uncovered a five-year payroll fraud scheme worth over K2 million within the Zambia Educational Projects Implementation Unit (ZEPIU), along with other major financial irregularities.

The audit also revealed the misuse of K500,000 from the World Bank-funded Zambia Education Enhancement Project (ZEEP) and overwhelming evidence from the Treasury Single Account (TSA) and the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMIS), pointing to widespread financial misconduct in both ZEEP and the Keeping Girls in School (KGS) initiative. Numerous staff members received irregular allowances.

Further investigations revealed unauthorised withdrawals from government accounts and breaches of a presidential directive prohibiting travel by directors, ministers, and permanent secretaries without Cabinet approval.

As Ntumbo pursued the case and engaged with the ACC, deeper inquiries exposed a far-reaching corruption and money laundering network rooted in the Ministry of Finance. The scheme extended to the Auditor General’s Office and key institutions, including the Drug Enforcement Commission (DEC).

For example, over a span of 30 years, more than 200 government officials participated in systematic embezzlement, siphoning funds daily and weekly through treasury accounts and government loan and investment accounts.

The financial misconduct within the finance ministry involved the embezzlement of over K1 billion from the state treasury through fictitious allowances and a five-year payroll fraud.

Despite multiple requests by MakanDay, the ACC has yet to provide an update on the arrests of 18 officials, including the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Finance, the Accountant General, and the Controller of Internal Audit.

However, in a rare statement during its third-quarter media briefing on October 25, 2023, the ACC said that “investigations into allegations of corruption against Ministry of Finance officials are almost concluded, and the Commission will advise on the next course of action.”

MakanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism takes a closer look at this large-scale theft and the ongoing victimisation of whistleblower, Ntumbo. His efforts to expose corruption have led to severe reprisals, including suspension and removal from the payroll. Since 2021, he has faced persistent persecution from ministry officials who have evaded arrest.

Timeline of Key Events

December 2019

- Joyce Sundano Phiri, the Controller of Internal Audit, forms a team of Forensic Internal Auditors to investigate allegations of large-scale money laundering and corruption at the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) following intelligence reports about significant theft of public funds, corruption, and money laundering activities.
- The probe focuses on the Treasury Single Account (TSA) and donor funds from the World Bank, particularly within the Zambia Education Enhancement Project, Keeping Girls in School, and the Zambia Educational Projects Implementation Unit.
- Audit verification begins in Central Province Provincial Education Office.

February/March 2020

- Ms Phiri, appoints Ntumbo as the team leader of the forensic internal auditors.

May 2020

- Controller of Internal Audit, Phiri, is replaced by Chibwe Mulonda.

June 20, 2020

- Ntumbo is offered a bribe.
- State security agencies gather crucial evidence of the bribe related to falsifying the audit report, secure the evidence, and obtain a statement regarding the bribe and the audit findings.
- Ntumbo reports the bribery attempt to his superiors—Assistant Director of the Specialised Audit Department David Kajokoto, Assistant Director Ndalama Chilumba, Director of the Specialised Audit Department Nora Mwila Sichilongo, and Controller of Internal Audit Chibwe Mulonda—as well as to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

September 2020: Attempts to Recover Seized Evidence

- The ACC seizes the K5,000 bribe in Ntumbo’s account.
- A Ministry of General Education official from the Provincial Education Office in Kabwe, who had deposited the bribe into Ntumbo’s account, calls him, attempting to retrieve the documents that were seized by the ACC along with the bribe money.
- The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance writes to the Controller of Internal Audit, requesting access to the documents Ntumbo had signed for as forensic evidence.

December 2020: ACC contacts Ntumbo and instructs him to surrender documents to ACC.

- Ntumbo responds in writing, stating that accepting the bribe would have been a criminal offence and that the documents were seized by the ACC as evidence in an ongoing investigation.
- Victimisation of Ntumbo by superiors at the Ministry of Finance begins. This included various actions, such as withholding work assignments, transferring him from the Forensic Audit Unit to the Revenue Audit Unit, and assigning him junior officers to supervise.
- The ACC begins collaborating with the Ministry to safeguard Ntumbo.

February 2021: ACC Attempts to Retrieve Key Documents

- An ACC Officer approaches Controller of Internal Audit, with a search warrant to seize documents obtained by Ntumbo from the MOGE Provincial Education Office and the Forensic Audit Report for the 2019 investigation.
- The attempt to seize the documents fails.
- ACC arranges for Ntumbo to voluntarily surrender the documents he obtained from MOGE PEO in Kabwe.
- Ntumbo complies, and the ACC issues an acknowledgment.
- Despite the ACC issuing a caveat to protect Ntumbo, the Ministry of Finance refuses to allow him to operate from its offices.

May/June 2021: ACC Investigates Ntumbo’s Victimisation

- Overwhelmed by Controller of Internal Audit’s persistent attempts to retrieve the seized documents, the ACC summons Ntumbo for an interview to establish the extent of the victimisation.
- During the interview, Ntumbo discloses to the ACC the presence of a cartel within the Ministry of Finance involved in a 30-year-old money laundering scheme, which he said is even more widespread than the one at the Ministry of General Education.
- He further discloses that K110,000 was deposited into his account as an attempt to recruit him into the cartel. To substantiate his claims, Ntumbo prints out records from the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMIS).
- Despite this evidence, the state fails to seize the illicit funds deposited into his account.

July 2021: ACC Issues Protection Order for Ntumbo as Victimisation Heightens.

- The ACC formally writes to Assistant Director of Specialised Audit, instructing that Ntumbo should not be transferred until criminal investigations are concluded.
- However, while the ACC was still building its case on victimisation, Assistant Director of the Specialised Audit Department transfers Ntumbo from the Forensic Audit Section to the Revenue Audit Section.
- July 21, 2021:Ntumbo is transferred to Mongu, Western Province, which he appeals on grounds of victimisation.
- ACC warns Ministry of Finance officials for harassing Ntumbo and obstructing the ongoing investigations.
- The Controller of Internal Audit arranges for Ntumbo to be placed on the Western Province payroll without following government procedures, which require an arrival advice form before such placement.

August 2021: ACC Warns Against Interference in Investigations

- Assistant Director instructs Ntumbo to re-audit MOGE.
- The ACC cautions Assistant Director against this directive, stating that MOGE was under investigation.
- Ntumbo resumes reporting to the Ministry of Finance.
- August 3, 2021:Ntumbo formally writes to key authorities—including the Secretary of the Civil Service Commission, the Secretary to the Cabinet, the Permanent Secretary (Financial Management and Administration) at the Ministry of Finance, the Director General of the ACC, and the Director of Human Resources —appealing his transfer on the grounds of victimisation.

September 2021: Escalation of Victimisation

- The Director of Human Resources at the Ministry of Finance writes to Ntumbo, giving him 48 hours to explain why he had not reported to Mongu.
- September 7, 2021: Ntumbo is asked to collect an exculpatory letter from the Ministry of Finance.
- September 23, 2021: Ntumbo responds to the Ministry, explaining that he had appealed to the Secretary to the Director of Human Resources and the Civil Service Commission, citing documented evidence of victimisation.

October 2021: ACC Intervenes

- The ACC phones the Controller of Internal Audit and the Director of Human Resources at the Ministry of Finance to caution them over their continued victimisation of Ntumbo.
- ACC officer summons Ntumbo to his office, urging him to reconcile with his superiors and drop the corruption cases against Ministry of Finance officials.
- Later that month, Ntumbo personally reports life-threatening attacks to Deputy Inspector General of Police, and submits a written complaint to Inspector General of Police.
- However, after the initial interview and submission of evidence, Deputy Inspector General of Police stops taking Ntumbo’s calls.

November 2021 – May 2022: Internal Audit and Further Retaliation

- Ntumbo is assigned to lead the internal audit verification of pharmaceutical drugs in Southern Province.
- November 3, 2021: Ministry of Finance Targets Ntumbo
- The Permanent Secretary of Economic Management and Finance informs the ACC that Ntumbo was charged in June 2021 for the loss of a government laptop, as flagged in an audit query by the Office of the Auditor General.

- The Ministry claims that Ntumbo’s transfer to Western Province was routine, but acknowledges that he never reported to the new station, citing victimisation.

December 2021: Threats and Expulsion from Office

- December 5, 2021: Ntumbo reports for work at the Ministry of Finance but is forcibly removed from the premises by Director of Internal Audit Operations, Human Resource Officer, and Director of the Specialised Audit Department
- In response, Ntumbo files an email complaint with Controller of Internal Audit, Director of Audit Operations, and Director of the Specialised Audit Department.
- December 6, 2021: Secretary to the Treasury summons Ntumbo and threatens him, accusing him of pretending to be an ACC whistleblower.
- Secretary to the Treasury also claims that Ntumbo exposed an irregular K950,000 loan he obtained from the Ministry of Finance and National Planning.
- He warns that if Ntumbo fails to report to Mongu within 10 days, he will be retired in the “national interest.”
- December 20, 2021: ACC Issues Legal Protection for Ntumbo
- The ACC writes a caveat letter to the Secretary to the Treasury, copying the Secretary to the Cabinet.
- The letter officially legally protects Ntumbo from further retaliation.
- It confirms that Ntumbo has suffered workplace victimisation at the hands of Assistant Director of Treasury and other senior Ministry of Finance officials

February 2022

- Ntumbo writes to President Hichilema requesting intervention but receives no response.
- He meets then DEC Director General, submitting a parallel complaint and requesting an assessment of his security situation,
- He provides her with evidence of economic plunder involving four aircraft (two ATRs and two Boeings) by the previous government.
- Documents reveal a \$3 million transfer by the government, but the aircraft were never delivered.
- Reports indicate that money was collected using the Presidential Challenger aircraft.
- DEC provides Ntumbo with state security and a safe house within seven days.
- Ntumbo informs the ACC Director General that his office space has been overcrowded, making work difficult.
- The ACC DG does not act, citing instructions not to arrest Ministry of Finance officials due to ongoing IMF negotiations.

- The restriction on the K5,000 bribe in Ntumbo’s bank account expires, and he informs the ACC. No action is taken until Ntumbo requests a progress report in October 2022.

March 2022

- The Civil Service Commission acknowledges Ntumbo’s appeal against his transfer to Mongu, stating discussions with the Ministry of Finance are ongoing.\
- The Civil Service Commission transfers several directors from the Ministry of Finance to the Cabinet Office.

June 2022

- Ntumbo contacts new ACC DG Gilbert Phiri regarding the Ministry of Finance’s failure to comply with protective measures.
- Ntumbo seeks a meeting with DEC DG Chirwa regarding the promised arrests of Ministry of Finance officials.
- Chirwa declines, referring him to Assistant Director of Money Laundering, Mukelabai Kwaleyela.
- Ntumbo insists on the DG’s attention.
- Three hours later, a DEC official calls, questioning why Ntumbo is still in the safe house, suggesting his stay was only meant to be temporary.

MOGE bribe case, as the K5,000 remains in his account since February 2022. ACC fails to respond but reimposes the restriction on the K5,000 without informing him.

December 22, 2022

- Ntumbo reports to the Ministry of Finance as usual. A Senior Internal Auditor calls, questioning his presence.

January 2023

- Ministry of Finance removes Ntumbo from payroll.
- Ntumbo believes ACC insiders shielding corruption are behind attacks on his life and salary suspension.
- Former Internal Audit Controller (among those arrested) removes Ntumbo from the payroll.
- January 27, 2023: Ntumbo’s lawyers (LCK Chambers) write to the ACC DG citing reprisals against him and requesting a progress report within seven days.
- They also write to the Attorney General demanding his reinstatement and protection from further reprisals.
- January 31, 2023: Ntumbo receives a charge sheet from the Ministry for absenteeism since September 2021.
- He responds the same day but receives no reply.

- March 23: Ntumbo writes to ACC summarising his victimisation and transfer.
- March 30: Ntumbo’s lawyers requests a meeting with the ACC DG regarding legal action.

April 20, 2023

- Ministry of Justice responds to LCK Chambers’ February 24 letter, stating that Ntumbo was transferred in July 2021 but failed to report to his new post.
- Citing Section 60(b) of Public Service Terms, the Ministry states his salary is withheld due to absence, though he was not officially removed from payroll.

May 11, 2023

- Ntumbo writes to ACC DG, copying LCK Chambers, expressing concerns over his reinstatement and safety.
- He alleges that Secretary to the Treasury Felix Nkulukusa is blocking his return to payroll.
- He requests state protection.
- ACC issues a restriction order on properties belonging to Assistant Director and Assistant Director of the Specialised Audit Department. Assistant Director had issued clean Internal Audit Reports for MOGE until December 2019, particularly regarding the Zambia Education Project Implementation Unit.
- May 24, 2023: Transparency International Zambia releases a statement on ACC’s suspect refund negotiations.

September 06, 2023

- DEC orders Ntumbo to vacate safe house.
- Ntumbo writes to the DEC Director General, seeking an update on his disclosures regarding the US\$3 million and K5 billion Ministry scandal, reminding them of their promise to dismantle the cartel within two weeks.
- September 2023 – Ntumbo files for judicial review in the High Court.
- December 13, 2023 – Court of Appeal ruling.
- January 2024 – Attempts made to settle the matter out of court.
- May 15, 2024 – Case returns to court after failed out-of-court settlement. The Ministry of Finance insisted they would only pay Ntumbo upon written confirmation from the ACC that he had been staying in a safe house.
- Under new DG Tom Shamakamba, ACC arrests 18 senior Ministry of Finance officials for theft and fictitious payments.
- February 22, 2025 – Ringo Zulu, Controller of Internal Audit, is fired.

The story was first published on March 26, 2025.



August 9, 2022

- Civil Service Commission advises the Ministry of Finance that Ntumbo was absent without valid authorisation and recommends disciplinary action. The Commission never communicates this to Ntumbo.

October 2022

- Additional intelligence reveals the Ministry of Finance theft amounts to K533 million, far exceeding initial estimates.
- Ntumbo informs DEC DG. She offers a meeting, but Ntumbo declines, opting for private prosecution.
- Ntumbo writes to ACC DG requesting progress reports on the MOGE and Ministry of Finance cases. He also inquires if the ACC has abandoned the -

- Charges include absenteeism and the loss of a government laptop, which he previously reported stolen.

February 2023

- Senior officials at the Ministry of Finance and Auditor General’s Office are transferred as investigations continue.

March 2023

- Under new DG Tom Shamakamba, ACC arrests 18 senior Ministry of Finance officials for theft and fictitious payments.
- An unnamed person claims to relay a message from the President, requesting evidence of the looting at the Ministry of Finance.

Chama Diary: Chama Runs on Black-Market Fuel as District Lacks Filling Station

By Ennety Munshya

Chama, the largest district in Eastern Province, is hard to access due to poor roads. It has only one bank, no mobile network operators, and critically, no official fueling station. According to Chama district council’s website, it covers about 17,630 km² — more land than any other district in the province.

The absence of a licenced fueling station in Chama District, Eastern Province, has forced residents to rely entirely on informal, black-market fuel vendors for both transport and business needs.

Fuel is sold in 20-liter containers by street vendors who source it mainly from neighboring Malawi, where it is cheaper, or from Lundazi town. Prices fluctuate sharply—ranging from K60 to K90 for 2.5 liters, and soaring to as much as K150 during shortages.

Despite being home to more than 140,000 people, according to the 2022 census, Chama remains one of the most isolated districts in the province. Poor infrastructure continues to hinder access, with most roads unpaved and often impassable in the rainy season. The district is linked to the rest of the country by just two main routes, the Chipata–Lundazi–Chama Road and the Chama–Matumbo Road.

A recent visit by a MakanDay team found that, while a few streets in the central business district are tarred, basic facilities remain scarce. Residents say many businesses shun the area, citing its lack of economic viability.

On the streets, yellow 20-liter containers have become a familiar sight, symbols of the thriving black-market fuel trade. For many families, vending has proved profitable, with some vendors saying it has enabled them to pay school fees and meet other household needs.

But for taxi and motorbike operators, survival is more difficult. They contend with unstable prices, high costs, and unreliable fuel quality. Some vendors reportedly sell changanya, fuel adulterated with water or paraffin, that damages engines and further squeezes already thin livelihoods.

One fuel vendor, Zebron Botha, who has been in the trade since 2001, explained that supplies are sourced both locally and across the border in Malawi, though mostly from Malawi where fuel is significantly cheaper than in Zambia.

According to Botha, a 2.5-liter container of diesel sells for between K60 and K75, depending on the vendor. Petrol costs slightly more, ranging from K75 to K90. But when supply runs low, prices spike, with the same 2.5 liters selling for as much as K150.

“We buy the fuel in drums and start reselling. It is cheaper to order from Malawi than locally. Locally, fuel is expensive, so if we order at an expensive price we also have to hike the price for us to make something out of it,” he explained.

Botha adds that vendors face their own challenges, particularly in the rainy season when poor roads drive up transport costs.

Another vendor, who requested anonymity, said he has been in the trade for nearly 24 years. He described fuel vending in Chama as highly lucrative, largely because the district has no licensed fueling station.

From the business, he has managed to educate his children and support other family needs.

He explained that vendors source fuel from licensed service stations in Lundazi and, at times, from Malawi.

“It depends on where it is cheap. Sometimes we buy from Malawi and sometimes locally in Lundazi. Availability of the fuel also matters and determines the price at which we resell it,” he says.

Elijah Ng’uni, a taxi driver in Chama, described the fuel situation as a major challenge, saying vendors always add a profit margin.

“It’s not easy to balance operations and cash in because fuel prices are unstable and keep fluctuating,” he said, adding that quality is also a concern due to poor storage.

“We need a licensed fueling station here. Even when government reduces prices, we don’t benefit because vendors still want to make profits. Running a taxi business has become too expensive—the costs are just too high.”

Peter Banda, a motorbike rider, echoed the concern, noting that unstable fuel prices disrupt their businesses.

“When vendors hike prices, we are forced to raise fares just to survive, but clients don’t understand when we increase fares. We really need a fueling station,” he said.

Banda added that adulterated fuel, known locally as changanya, is another threat.

“Sometimes they mix fuel with water or paraffin and sell it to us. Our bikes and vehicles are getting damaged,” he complained.



Alick Nkhata's Musical Legacy

The multilingual musician who wrote songs that transcended social and cultural divides and helped build national unity

By Walima T. Kalusa

Many people in Zambia today may not have heard of Alick Nkhata, let alone know about his enormous contribution to the growth of the country's music industry. However, Mr Nkhata, whose illustrious musical career spanned the pre- and post-independence era, not only pioneered popular music in the early 1950s, but, up to his demise in the mid-1970s, was the undisputed champion of that genre of music in Zambia, if not in the entire central Africa.

A household name throughout the region in the 1950s and 1960s, he animated the lives of thousands of people who attended his concerts or listened to his songs on radio. Indeed, many people of his generation - including the author's parents - still have fond memories of the guitarist-singer and continue to sing his songs in times of merry-making. In this sense, his music still lives on today.

Who was Alick Nkhata and what made his music so popular?

Mr Nkhata was born in 1922 in Kasama in the Northern Province of what was then Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). He was an offspring of a cross-ethnic marriage between a Tonga father and a Bemba mother, whose beliefs and culture would later be reflected in her son's music. Little is known about his early life, save for the fact that the future artist had an abiding passion for music from childhood. After leaving school, he trained as a teacher but, after the outbreak of the Second World War, enlisted in the Kings African Rifles under the East African Division. Like many Zambian men of his generation, he saw action in the Far East, notably in Burma. Unfortunately, there is no documented account of his experiences there.

Mr Nkhata seems to have begun singing and playing an acoustic guitar as a teenager, a hobby that his mother appeared to have keenly nurtured. His singing career, however, really took off after the end of the war when, following demobilisation in 1946, the upcoming artist worked as a field music recording assistant under Hugh Tracy, the famous British ethnomusicologist. Credited with "inventing" the Kalimba, a version of the Imbari, a Shona hand-held musical instrument, Mr Tracy travelled the length and breadth of central and southern Africa with Mr Nkhata recording traditional African music from 1946 to 1949. Mr Tracy, who founded the International Library of African Music in 1954 to record traditional music in central and southern Africa, fervently believed that unless such music was recorded and thus preserved, it could wither away under the pressures of colonialism with its offshoots of westernisation, labour migration, urbanisation and Christianity.

By all accounts, Mr Nkhata came to share Mr Tracy's belief in the value of preserving authentic African music for the sake of posterity. Together, they toured many parts of colonial Zambia, Malawi and

Zimbabwe making high quality field recordings of indigenous songs and documenting local musical instruments. Mr Nkhata's devotion to preserving African traditional music outlived his work with Mr Tracy. Long after the departure of his British mentor from Northern Rhodesia in 1949, Mr Nkhata continued to record traditional songs for the Central African Broadcasting Service (CABS), which he joined as an announcer-translator in 1950. In 1963, CABS, the forerunner of the present-day Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation, sponsored him to study broadcasting with the Voice of America (VOA) in Washington, US. While there, he became one of the earliest hosts of the African Panorama programme on the VOA English to Africa service. Three years later, Mr Nkhata rose to the rank of director of broadcasting and cultural services at CABS, a position he held up to his retirement in 1974.

Our protagonist did not only record other musicians' music. He himself was also an accomplished solo guitarist who composed, sang and recorded his own songs. To promote his singing career, he joined hands in the 1950s with Shadrack Soko and Dick Sapseid, an accomplished musician and British broadcaster at CABS, and together they formed the Lusaka Radio Band, which they later rechristened as the Big Gold Six Band. The band's songs were played regularly on radio. Mr Nkhata continued to churn out music even after CABS's offices were relocated to colonial Harare in modern Zimbabwe during the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. After moving to Harare, he teamed up with leading local musicians there such as Elias Banda, regularly touring and performing music across the country during his free time.

At the height of his singing career in the 1950s and 1960s, Mr Nkhata composed and recorded numerous songs. His most popular hits included Shalapo (Goodbye), Ifilamba (Tears), Tax driver, Icupo (Marriage), Nalikwebele Sonka (I Warned You, Sonka), Balelila Pendeka (Crying for Pendeka), Abalumendo bamo (Some Gentlemen) and Uluse lwalil eNkwale (Kindness Killed the Partridge), all of which he sang in ChiBemba. He also sang songs in Nyanja, Lunda, Chewa, Kaonde, Tumbuka and Nsengaand in Swaka. Mr Nkhata's ability to sing in so many different languages aptly attested to the versatility of the born-musician and to his conviction that music transcended linguist barriers.

As the titles of his hits suggest, his songs, a number of which he composed and sang on the spur of the moment, were avivid commentary on a wide variety of social issues in 1950s and 1960s Northern Rhodesia. As an American anthropologist who met him in the 1950s observed, Mr Nkhata sang of rural and urban life, of sex, of love and of loneliness, and so on. In Abalumendo bamo, for example, the "Dreamer of Songs," as Nkhata called himself, warned young men against wasting money on Bakapenta - that is prostitutes who painted their lips. In another popular hit, he sang of awkward, ignorant wives from rural areas who brought shame upon their urban husbands by cooking tea leaves as if they were vegetables.



A popular feature on programmes and sound is the Lusaka Radio Band led by Alick Nkhata, himself a well know and popular radio personality

But Mr Nkhata often also sang of more serious issues. In 1966, for instance, he composed a song in praise of Zambia’s First National Development Plan that sought to improve state management of the economy, education and cultural development. Similarly, before his death in the 1970s, he composed a song in which he challenged the international community to remove from power the illegal white minority regime of Ian Smith in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Whether satirical, sentimental or melancholic, Mr Nkhata’s songs no less entertained than educated his fans. Eyewitnesses recall that people who attended his concerts would be laughing one moment and crying the next, depending on the nature of the songs the talented musician played.

By the time he retired to his farm in Mkushi in 1974, Mr Nkhata had recorded thousands of songs that included his and other musicians’ music. Through his own art, he championed peaceful coexistence, for his music transcended barriers of ethnicity, racism and other related “isms” that sow seeds of social discord in society. Indeed, some of his songs in the 1950s ridiculed the exploitation of Africans, colour bar and racial discrimination, but they were never recorded due to the political temperature of the day. Even in retirement, Mr Nkhata continued composing and singing at his farm. He eventually became a member of the Performing Rights Society, an umbrella body of artists based in the UK from which his family continues to derive royalties for his music.

Mr Nkhata was killed at his farm by Ian Smith’s forces from Southern Rhodesia in 1978 during a raid against a nearby camp of nationalist fighters under the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU). His demise, however, failed to extinguish his music, which continues to be played on radio programmes at ZNBC, where his recordings are localised. His music also lives on through the efforts of his son, David, who inherited his father’s love for composing, singing and recording songs. David Nkhata, who continues to live on his late father’s farm in Mkushi and who vehemently opposes computerised music, is poised to release a new album before the end of 2012, thus carrying on the family tradition of singing and entertaining people.

Although no serious study has been carried out on Mr Nkhata, he is certainly a towering figure in the history of Zambian music and that of the country as a whole. Through his unequalled efforts to record his own and other musicians’ art, he preserved and bequeathed thousands of songs to the nation and to posterity. His songs, transcending social and cultural divides, further cultivated a sense of national unity, social cohesion and identity.

In this sense, Mr Nkhata’s art became a potent symbol of nation-building both before and after his tragic end. His music possessed teachings that are as relevant to contemporary Zambian society as they were to previous generations. It is no wonder that it still attracts the attention of many Zambians today irrespective of their linguistic, ethnic and historical backgrounds. Through music, the composer, teacher, entertainer and social critic educated multitudes of people, drawing their attention to social issues, and, after independence, pressing political problems. His art also broke ethnic and other barriers and was an important element in nation-building after independence. For all these reasons, his name deserves to be etched in Zambia’s hall of fame.

This story was first published in the October 2012 edition of the Bulletin and Record magazine.



Comment

What is with the voters?

In Malawi, voters reversed their decision of five years ago, when they removed Prof. Peter Mutharika from office, by returning him to the presidency in the September 2025 election. He won with about 56.8% of the vote, defeating incumbent Lazarus Chakwera. Malawi thus becomes the fourth African country to re-elect a former president.

Just last year, in December 2024, Ghana brought back former President John Dramani Mahama, who defeated his main rival, Vice President and ruling-party candidate Mahamudu Bawumia.

In Benin, Mathieu Kérékou lost power in 1991 but returned to win the presidency again in 1996, and was re-elected in 2001.

A similar development occurred in Somalia, though under a different system. In May 2022, the Somali parliament re-elected former President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to a new term.

What is surprising in all this is the trust that voters have shown in Malawi and Ghana—the belief that a politician who once held office can suddenly return as a national saviour.

Voters often express frustration that leaders who promise transformation quickly fall short once in office.

In Zambia, as elsewhere, citizens are growing impatient with leaders who fail to deliver on jobs, the cost of living, corruption, and basic services.

This impatience fuels nostalgia for former presidents or earlier governments, with some believing that returning a familiar figure might bring stability, experience, or simply a change from the disappointments of the present.

There is a similarity here with the Gospel passage in Luke 7:31–35, where Jesus compares the people of his generation to children in the marketplace—never satisfied,

rejecting both John the Baptist and the Son of Man despite the different ways in which each came.

In the same way, voters today often find excuses for the failures of politicians while refusing to take responsibility for their own role.

In a democracy, change does not come from politicians alone. Politicians respond to pressure, accountability, and the demands of the people.

Voters must move beyond nostalgia or frustration and recognise their own responsibility: to organise, to hold leaders accountable, and to demand results. Without that pressure, even the most well-meaning leaders will fail to deliver.

Democracy works best when voters stop waiting for a political “messiah” and instead act as the driving force that compels politicians to serve the public good.

Guns, Gangs and Gold: The dark side of Zambia's gold discovery

Would you agree with Chief Kizela's spokesperson, Labson Samola Kayombo, on the government's decision to allocate the Kikonge gold mine in Mufumbwe, North Western Province, to cooperatives?

"I advocated for cooperatives myself. Having one investor is selfish business. With cooperatives, money stays with our people and can improve the local economy. If there was an investor, the money could be going to South Africa or going to England. For me, the idea of cooperatives is the best. I hope government can extend it to copper and other minerals."

MakanDay's Charles Mafa, together with James Beluchi (Kasempa FM) and Caleb Likomeno (Mufumbwe FM), travelled to Mufumbwe to trace how a discovery that was meant to bring prosperity has instead unleashed gangs, guns, and chaos.

Full story coming soon...

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.

Deadline: 31st October 2025

A panel of independent judges will review submissions and select up to two winners.

- Overall Winner: A brand-new laptop
- Runner-up(s): A three-month, fully paid internship at MakanDay
- Honourable Mentions: Up to two may be named and invited to the awards ceremony hosted by MakanDay

Winning and finalist entries will be featured on the website <https://makanday.org> and across our social media platforms.

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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AWARDS CEREMONY



31st October 2025

