



Power, Politics, & Procurement at ZAMMSA



- This two-part investigation by MakanDay exposes how Zambia's central medical supply agency, ZAMMSA, descended into chaos, from political capture and procurement manipulation to a multimillion-kwacha drug scandal that has left the country's healthcare system vulnerable.
- The Zambia Medicines and Medical Supplies Agency (ZAMMSA) has become a hub of kickbacks and political patronage, with procurement authority increasingly diverted from the agency to the Ministry of Health, and in some cases, even to State House.
- Insiders suggest that ZAMMSA's apparent "failures" may be strategic. By portraying the agency as ineffective, procurement functions could be deliberately shifted back to the Ministry, creating yet another layer of political opportunity and control.

See story on page 1

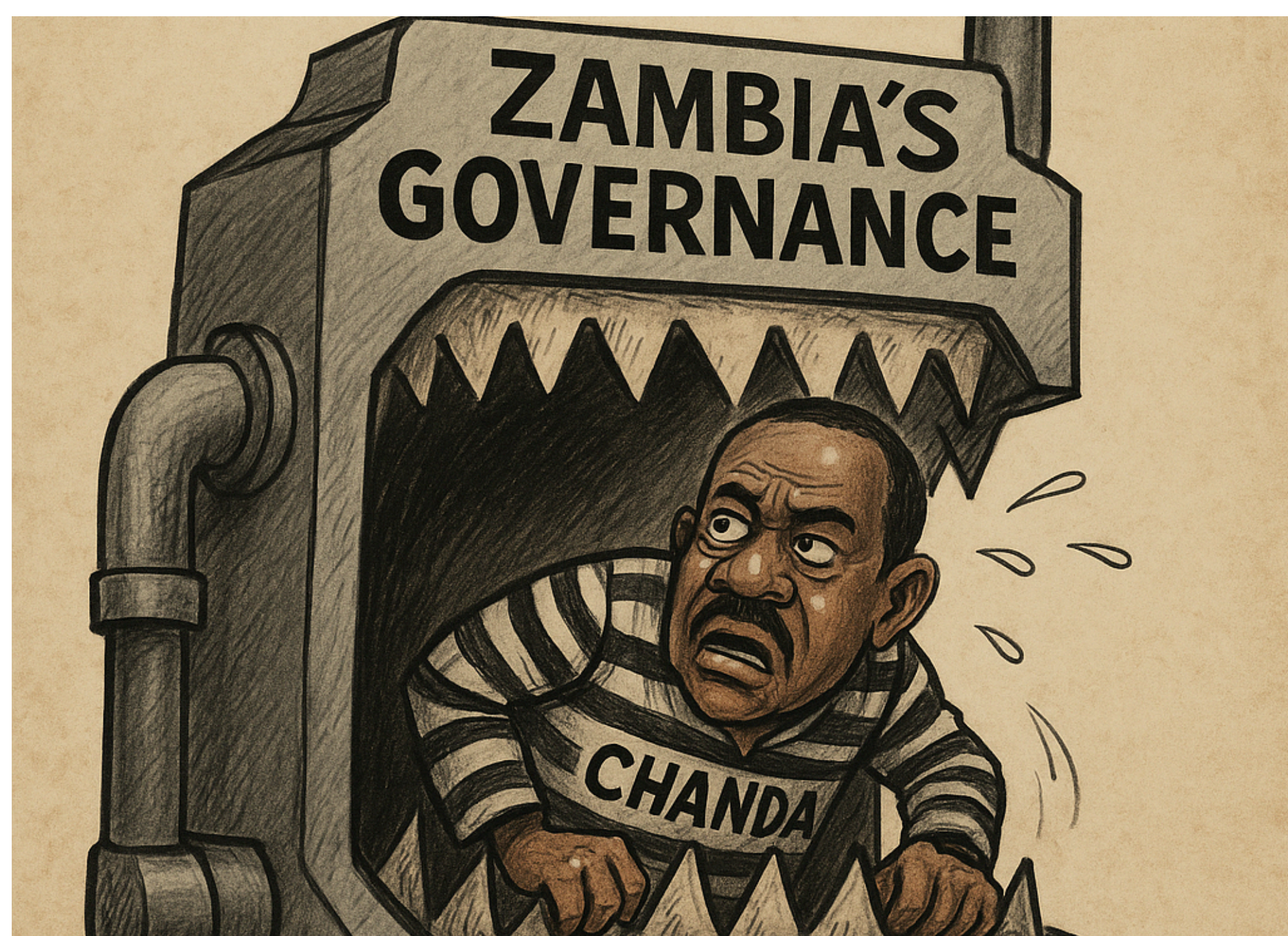
Women who Defied Colonial Odds

It may be apparent from the real life experiences of Ann Chilombo and Maliya Chisanga that neither marriage nor adverse colonial legislation prevented diligent and ambitious African women from pursuing successful careers during pre-independence days in Zambia. Admittedly, such women were few and far apart given that colonial rule denied economic opportunities to women, comparatively favouring men. In spite of the lack of an enabling environment, some women were, however, able to create wealth through sheer hard work and devotion to entrepreneurship.



See story on page 5

OPINION: In Zambia's Governance Machine, Kingsley Chanda Is Just the Latest Meal



See story on page 3

Power, Politics, and Procurement: How ZAMMSA Lost Its Independence

• *This two-part investigation by MakaanDay exposes how Zambia’s central medical supply agency, ZAMMSA, descended into chaos, from political capture and procurement manipulation to a multimillion-kwacha drug scandal that has left the country’s healthcare system vulnerable.*

Part I

By Charles Mafa | MakaanDay Investigates

- The Zambia Medicines and Medical Supplies Agency (ZAMMSA) has become a hub of kickbacks and political patronage, with procurement authority increasingly diverted from the agency to the Ministry of Health, and in some cases, even to State House.
- Insiders suggest that ZAMMSA’s apparent “failures” may be strategic. By portraying the agency as ineffective, procurement functions could be deliberately shifted back to the Ministry, creating yet another layer of political opportunity and control.

ZAMMSA, the country’s central agency for procuring, storing and distributing essential drugs and medical supplies, has seen eight Director Generals (DGs) in just four years, including several in acting capacities. This revolving door at the top reflects deep institutional instability and the absence of continuity in leadership.

The list of former Director Generals includes Billy Mweetwa, who served for one year from August 2022 to August 2023, and Victor Nyasulu, who held the position from November 2023 until July 2024, when he was suspended following a scandal involving 61 trucks marooned at Chirundu border. Others who have since acted in the role include Chipopa Kazuma (who acted after Chikuta Mbewe was fired in 2021), Dr Peter Mwaba, Luke Alutuli, Nalishebo Siyandi, Dr. John Kachimba, and the current acting Director General, Jane Banda Chisanga.

By law, the Ministry of Health’s role ends with the appointment of the ZAMMSA board, which is then responsible for hiring the DG. The failure to appoint a functional board creates a governance vacuum that effectively hands power to the Ministry of Health.

Without a board, the Ministry acts as both regulator and implementer, bypassing normal checks and balances. This arrangement ensures that key decisions, including DG appointments and dismissals, remain politically driven.

According to a key insider, the Ministry of Health, working closely with powerful officials at State House, continues to maintain direct control over senior appointments and procurement processes, undermining the agency’s independence.

“When there is no board in place, the Minister (of Health) effectively becomes the board,” said one of the sources, a former Director General.

The Ministry of Health has not yet responded to MakaanDay’s request for comment, including questions on when the ZAMMSA board will be appointed.

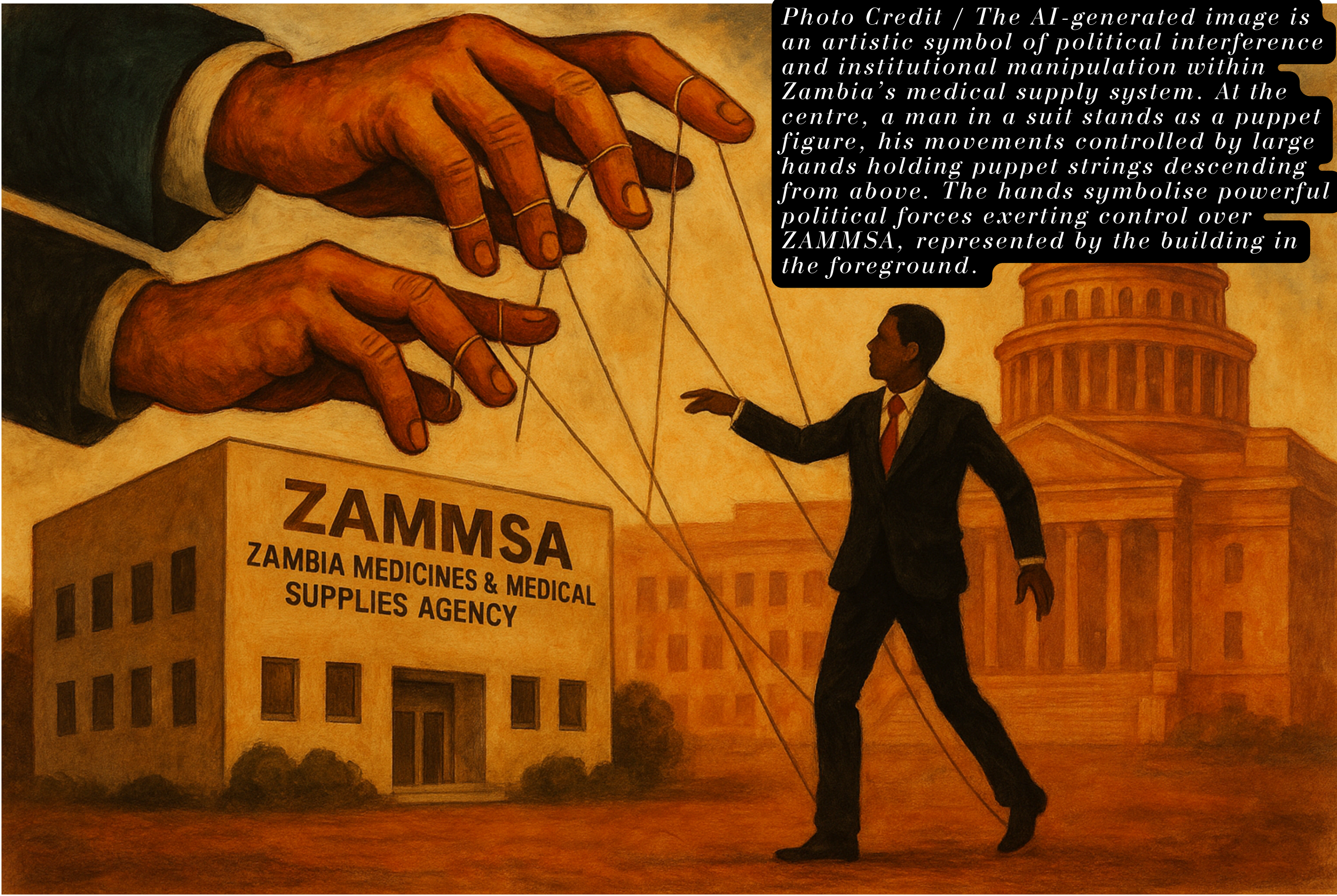


Photo Credit / The AI-generated image is an artistic symbol of political interference and institutional manipulation within Zambia’s medical supply system. At the centre, a man in a suit stands as a puppet figure, his movements controlled by large hands holding puppet strings descending from above. The hands symbolise powerful political forces exerting control over ZAMMSA, represented by the building in the foreground.

“ZAMMSA is where the money is and where there’s money, there’s opportunity for kickbacks,” a source close to the agency disclosed under condition of anonymity.

So, at the moment, a lot of issues are pending due to the governance gaps, he added.

MakaanDay’s investigation, based on insider interviews and access to documents, has found that part of the crises leading to recent sackings and arrests can be traced back to 11 December 2023. On that date, the agency launched a “mop-up” procurement exercise to address drug shortages by purchasing ex-stock medicines.

“Mop-up procurement exercise” means that the agency conducted a rapid, unscheduled purchase of medicines (ex-stock), likely to cover shortages or spend leftover funds, which may have opened opportunities for irregularities or corruption.

Officially, the exercise aimed to stabilise supply chains disrupted by the Patriotic Front (PF)’s era of drug debt and scandals such as Honeybee’s expired and substandard medical supplies. However, concerns soon emerged such as altered documents, inconsistencies in the number of bidders, doubts about suppliers’ actual stock availability and shelf life, as well as signs of collusion among suppliers.

According to ZAMMSA’s records seen by MakaanDay, contracts worth K700 million were awarded to 24 companies. But insiders claim the real figure was K685 million, while other documents show inflated totals of up to K1.4 billion.

The record show that the Zambia Public Procurement Authority (ZPPA) reportedly advised ZAMMSA to issue a brief national call advertised for only seven days targeting suppliers and manufacturers holding ex-stock.

Respondents were required to submit basic information, including product description, total quantities available and expiry dates.

Priority was to be given to products with high public health impact and a remaining shelf life of at least 80%.

Notably, the procurement was executed under the Limited Bidding method, using a prequalified shortlist of bidders, in accordance with the Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2020.

While the initiative was intended to fast-track the availability of medicines, concerns remain about the transparency, fairness, and integrity of the process.

On Wednesday, 20 December 2023, ZAMMSA issued enquiries to prequalified bidders for the supply and delivery of essential medicines, medical supplies, anti-cancer medicines, adjuvants, and reproductive health commodities. From the initial call for bids, 31 companies were shortlisted.

According to the original mop-up exercise document seen by MakaanDay, Maz Pharmaceuticals Limited, Lab Galore Limited, Inter Med Pharmaceuticals Limited, and Lumumba Pharmaceuticals did not submit their bids. Consequently, only 27 bidders participated in the final stage of the process.

The document further indicates that the Management Procurement Committee recommended that Director of Supply Planning, be granted authority to award and negotiate contracts for products whose prices exceeded the 10% threshold.

The director was also directed to retender contracts for essential and overpriced medical commodities, including anti-cancer medicines and reproductive health products. The recommendation was subsequently forwarded to ZAMMSA management for action.

The total value of the procurement was estimated at over K1.1 billion (K1,121,025,619.09), with a stipulated delivery period ranging from ex-stock to a maximum of six weeks, following completion of the mop up exercise.

After the exercise was concluded, the report was submitted to ZAMMSA. At the request of the then Director General, Victor Nyasulu, the agency’s Internal Audit Department conducted a further due diligence review of the K1.2 billion mop-up procurement.

Findings from ZAMMSA’s due diligence report

MakanDay has established that the due diligence report analysed by ZAMMSA’s Internal Audit Department, which aimed to verify the 27 companies shortlisted for contract awards through checks on stock availability, shelf life, and other compliance factors, also included Lumumba Pharmaceuticals, bringing the total number of companies assessed to 28.

However, Lumumba Pharmaceuticals was not among the officially shortlisted companies, as it did not submit a bid during the mop-up exercise.

According to the report, out of about K730 million (K729,508,077.67) worth of stock assessed, only K384 million (K384,091,808.42) worth of medicines and medical supplies had a shelf life above 80%.

The exercise further revealed indications of possible supplier collusion and coercive practices, as several suppliers reported that portions of their stock were being kept at other premises or by sister companies. This pattern was particularly common among smaller suppliers. However, the report noted that no evidence was provided to confirm ownership of the stock allegedly stored at these alternative locations.

In some cases, suppliers claimed their stock was held at premises belonging to companies that had also participated in the same tender process.

Publicly available information on ZAMMSA’s official website shows that the agency awarded contracts worth approximately K700 million to 24 local suppliers under the mop-up initiative, which was aimed at urgently addressing shortages of essential medicines and medical supplies at secondary and tertiary health facilities across the country.

Yet, behind the official numbers lie questions about altered documents, inflated figures, and opaque decision-making. The audit findings, internal memos, and accounts from insiders all point to a procurement system vulnerable to political interference and manipulation.

In Part II, MakanDay digs deeper into the politics behind the procurement chaos — how ministerial interference, favoured suppliers, and a mysterious truck scandal combined to topple ZAMMSA’s leadership and expose systemic rot at the heart of Zambia’s drug supply chain.

Story from page 1
Comment

In Zambia’s Governance Machine, Kingsley Chanda Is Just the Latest Meal

Today, MakanDay turns its attention to a matter that cuts to the heart of our governance crisis, a story that asks why the case of former Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) Commissioner General Kingsley Chanda exposes a broken system that no one seems willing to fix.

Just like that, Chanda is behind bars, eaten by the very system that he tried to protect. He was sentenced to six years with hard labour for breaching procedure in the disposal of 22 government vehicles. Alongside him, Callistus Kaoma, the former ZRA Director for Administration, received a nine-year sentence with hard labour.

Delivering judgment on Monday, Lusaka Acting Chief Resident Magistrate Sylia Munyinya-Okoh convicted the two in some of the 22 counts and acquitted them in others, citing insufficient evidence.

In mitigation, Chanda’s lawyer pleaded for leniency, reminding the court that his client had served the country with diligence and has a sick mother.

But here’s the uncomfortable truth: those who hold public office often forget that their decisions carry life-and-death consequences.

Some of their choices have sent millions to early graves, denied thousands access to medical care, and robbed countless children of education.

These are not just bureaucratic errors, they are acts that kill silently, leaving people alive but without dignity, hope, or opportunity.

The headlines in Chanda’s case may say justice has been served. But we say, beneath the courtroom drama lies a deeper story about how power really works in Zambia, and how our governance system punishes the obedient while shielding the powerful.

During the trial we learned that some of those vehicles ended up in the hands of archbishops and ruling-party figures. Yet when the verdict came, only Chanda faced the consequences.

He did not act alone. Like many senior public servants, he operated under a system where orders from above override procedure and where refusing such orders can end a career overnight. In the end, Chanda was punished not for greed, but for obedience.

Where are the people who issued those directives? Where are the beneficiaries who drove away in government vehicles?

They never appeared in court, not even to accompany Chanda to court during trial.

This is the heart of Zambia’s governance crisis: a system that protects political patrons and sacrifices technocrats. Every administration pledges to fight corruption, yet enforcement agencies, Anti-Corruption Commission, Drug Enforcement Commission, Auditor General, and others, rarely touch those closest to power.



Public service today runs on fear. Civil servants know that if they follow procedure, they risk being branded “uncooperative.” If they follow political orders, they risk prison. It is a lose-lose cycle that corrodes professional integrity and institutional independence.

When leaders like Chanda fall, it is not only their reputations that collapse, it is the credibility of the institutions they once led.

This is how scandals at Zambia Medicines and Medical Supplies Agency fester. It is how mining licences slip quietly into protected forest areas. It is how national budgets get manipulated through hidden hands.

Each episode tells the same story: political capture of public institutions. The result is paralysis, cynicism, and a widening gap between government rhetoric and reality.

If Zambia truly wants to end this culture of selective justice, reform must begin at the top, not at the ballot box. Real change will not come with another election in 2026. We have seen this cycle before, where promises of reform fade the moment power changes hands.

The reforms Zambia needs are clear and urgent.

First, the law must be able to hold political leaders criminally accountable for issuing unlawful directives to civil servants.

Second, institutions must be empowered to act independently, so that technocrats can say “no” to political pressure without fear of dismissal.

Third, investigations must reach every level of power, not just the convenient scapegoats.

Finally, Parliament must reclaim its oversight role, ensuring that ministers and the executive are answerable to the people, not the other way around.

The Chanda case is not about one man’s guilt. It is about a nation’s moral compass. Until those who give illegal orders face the same scrutiny as those who carry them out, justice in Zambia will remain partial, politicised, and performative.

Chanda may have broken the law, but he did not break it alone. The question we should all be asking is simple:

Who gave the order?

Until that question is answered, Zambia’s governance will continue to devour its own, and the promise of reform will remain just another headline.

Zambia’s 2026 Budget Faces Reality Test — Economist Flags Risk of Instability

By Linda Soko Tembo

An economist has described this year’s K223 billion national budget as a “feel-good” and politically motivated budget, saying it prioritises popularity over prudence and raises serious concerns about economic realism, sustainability, and the government’s ability to deliver on its promises without triggering instability.

In an interview with MakoDay, Yusuf Dodia observed that the government is projecting a 25% increase in income tax, along with significant rises in Paye As You Earn (PAYE) and Value Added Tax (VAT) collections, targets he described as unrealistic, given Zambia’s slow job creation and limited private-sector growth.

Pre-election populism

Dodia noted that, despite increased allocations to social protection, job creation, and infrastructure, the mining sector, Zambia’s main revenue source, remains largely under-addressed, with only a marginal increase in mineral royalty revenues.

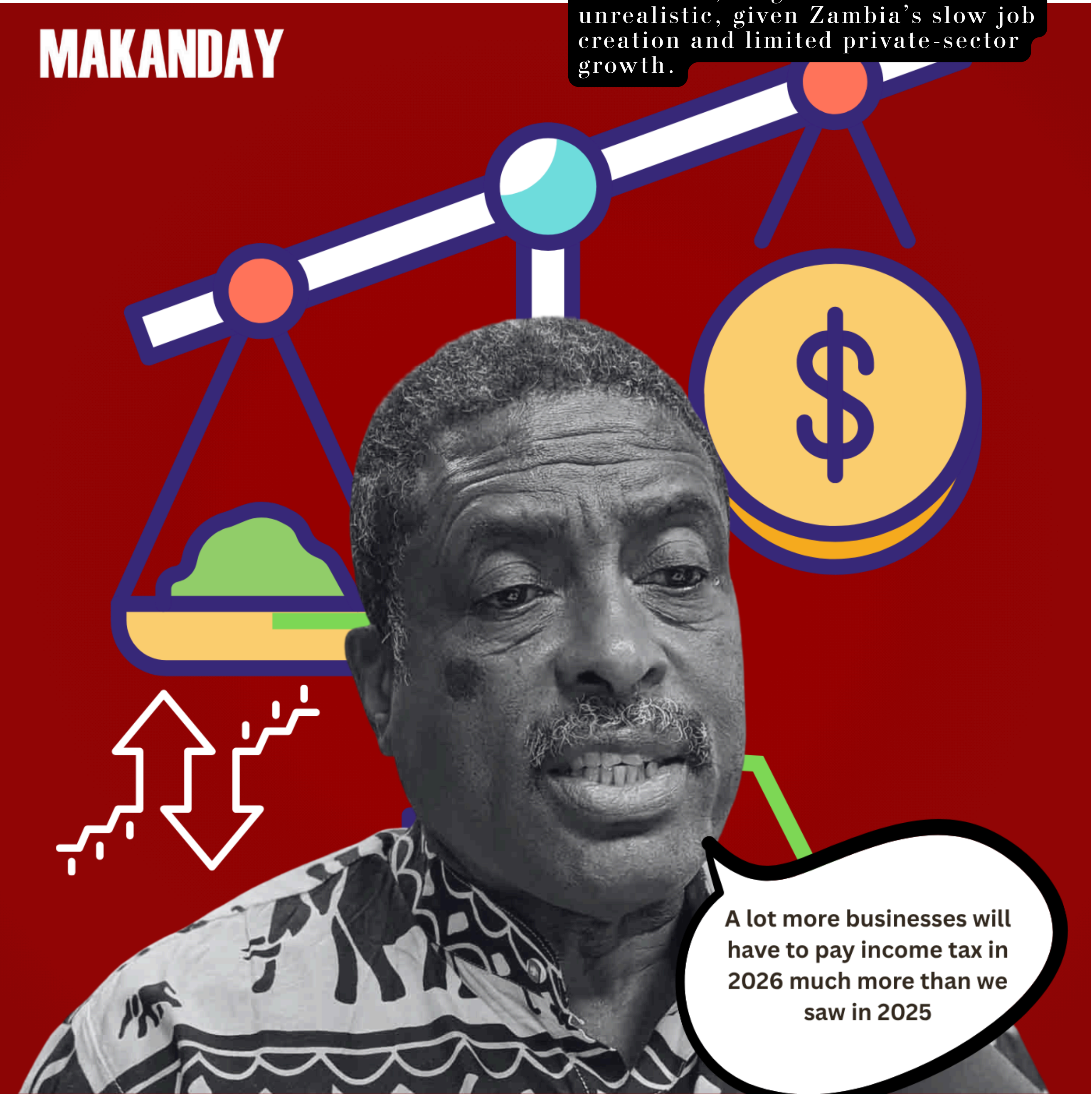
He explained that the overall structure and tone of the 2026 budget reflect President Hakainde Hichilema’s address to Parliament on 12 September 2025, which emphasised improving citizens’ livelihoods.

According to Dodia, the budget’s spending plan appears strategically aligned to boost public support ahead of the general elections. However, he cautioned that while the spending intentions may be popular, the means of financing them remain unclear.

Dodia explained that the revenue targets for 2026 appear highly ambitious, with income tax collections projected to rise from K65 billion in 2025 to K82 billion in 2026, an increase of 25%. Similarly, PAYE is expected to grow from K26 billion to K31 billion, while VAT collections are forecast to rise from K48 billion to K54 billion over the same period.

“If that’s the case, it means a lot more businesses will have to pay income tax in 2026 much more than we saw in 2025,” he said. “That would suggest a healthier and more productive economy, but I am not sure how achievable that is, it might be a bit ambitious.”

“For example, PAYE brought in K26 billion in 2025, and the target for 2026 is K31 billion an increase of K4 billion or about 6 percent. To raise that K4 billion, it would require creating roughly 1.6 million new low-income jobs, which is a difficult number to turn into reality,” he added.



Dodia said another area of concern is the shift in financing sources. While the government plans to reduce foreign financing from K19 billion to K12 billion, a 34% drop, domestic borrowing is expected to rise sharply from K15 billion to K21 billion, representing a 41% increase.

“This raises the risk of crowding out the private sector this is going to be a tough year I think in terms of general economic stability and growth,” he said.

Dodia explained that despite its ambitious spending, the 2026 budget fails to address key structural issues necessary for long-term economic growth. He noted with concern that there was no mention of the Export Proceeds Tracking Framework (EPTF), a system that has been instrumental in stabilising foreign currency inflows.

The EPTF, an initiative of the Bank of Zambia, requires all exporters to channel their earnings through Zambian bank accounts within 90 days of shipment. The framework enhances transparency, strengthens the bank’s oversight of foreign exchange flows, and improves financial management by allowing for the tracking and reconciliation of export proceeds against declarations made to the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA).

“There was silence from both the President and the Minister of Finance on the EPTF, and that’s worrying,” Dodia said. “If this mechanism is revoked or weakened, the country could face serious foreign exchange shortages.”

He added that signs of pressure on the foreign exchange market are already visible. The BoZ’s recent proposal to enforce the use of the Kwacha in local transactions has been interpreted by some as a reflection of growing concern over dollarisation and limited forex availability.

“If foreign exchange was abundant, there would be no need to enforce such rules,” he said. “The fact that this is happening suggests we’re bracing for a shortage. If the EPTF isn’t maintained, the kwacha could easily slide to between K28 and K30 per US dollar.”

Dodia concluded that while the 2026 budget promises broad-based benefits for citizens, the ability to deliver them without triggering fiscal or macroeconomic instability remains a serious challenge.

He described it as a typical pre-election budget, noting that allocations to certain sectors such as the Constituency Development Fund have increased despite persistent concerns over misuse and -

mismanagement. Social protection programmes such as the Social Cash Transfer and the Farmer Input Support Programme under the e-voucher system have also received notable increases.

“The government has expanded initiatives like the Cash for Work programme and school feeding schemes, alongside a boost in public-sector employment, with more teachers and health workers recruited this year and plans for additional hiring next year,” he said. “Substantial funding has also been directed toward the construction of new health centres and the expansion of schools.”

However, Dodia emphasised that the mining sector, the so-called ‘elephant in the room,’ remains largely untouched. Despite its importance to the economy, the only movement is a marginal rise in mineral royalty revenues from K17 billion in 2025 to K18 billion in 2026, raising questions about whether the sector is being adequately leveraged for national development.

Story from page 1

This Week in the Bulletin & Record

Women who Defied Colonial Odds

By Walima T. Kalusa

African men in colonial urban centres have long been imagined as having been passive victims of colonialism. Women in similar locations have not fared better. Indeed, the bulk of the existing literature on imperial rule in Africa either completely ignores urban-based women or simply casts them as prostitutes or disobedient daughters who fled to colonial towns in defiance of the patriarchal authority of their chiefs, their fathers and their husbands.

This observation is reinforced by the fact that while colonial policies encouraged men to work as migrants in European-controlled towns, such policies were conversely designed to restrict women to rural areas. There, women were expected to shoulder the burden of the cost of reproducing labour needed in mines, farms and other capitalist enterprises owned and controlled by Europeans. At the same time, most traditional authorities under Indirect Rule worked closely with imperial rulers to prevent women from seeking waged employment in towns in order to bolster chiefly power.

But there were a few women who no less defied colonial constraints and chiefly power than rose to social and economic prominence in towns and cities. Among these unsung heroines in British Zambia were Ann

Chilombo and Maliya Chisanga. Born in the early 1930s in Luapula, which was then part of the colony’s Northern Province, Ann attended the famous Mbereshi Mission School in Kawambwa, from which she graduated with a Post-Standard VI in the aftermath of the Second World War.

After teaching for a few years in mission schools, Ann Chilombo joined the colonial civil service as a teacher. She subsequently taught for 10 years at various government schools in Luapula. However, her burning ambition, as she recalled in the late 1950s, was to become a business-woman and thus penetrate what was then an almost exclusively male domain.

Like most other business pioneers in colonial Zambia, Miss Chilombo faced daunting challenges. She possessed neither starting capital nor experience indispensable to undertaking a successful business. In a world where business was largely monopolised by men, both black and white, her dream to pursue a business career also invited more ridicule than support from elders, relatives, friends and workmates. Undeterred, Ann Chilombo resigned from the civil service and joined a private company specialised in importing and selling agricultural equipment.

By so doing, the ambitious former teacher hoped to gain business experience and to raise capital to set herself up in business.



Women who Defied Colonial Odds Cont.....

After saving enough money from her last job, Miss Ann Chilombo not only purchased a second-hand van, she also surprised her relatives by resigning from the private company to try her luck in the fish trade. Like Luka Mumba (see B&R, Sept., 2013), whose wealth partly derived from trading in fish, she began to buy fish from Bangweulu swamps and Lake Mweru. Using the van, she regularly transported fish to the Copperbelt, where there was an insatiable demand for fish in the copper industry, and mining companies and the colonial government were her major customers.

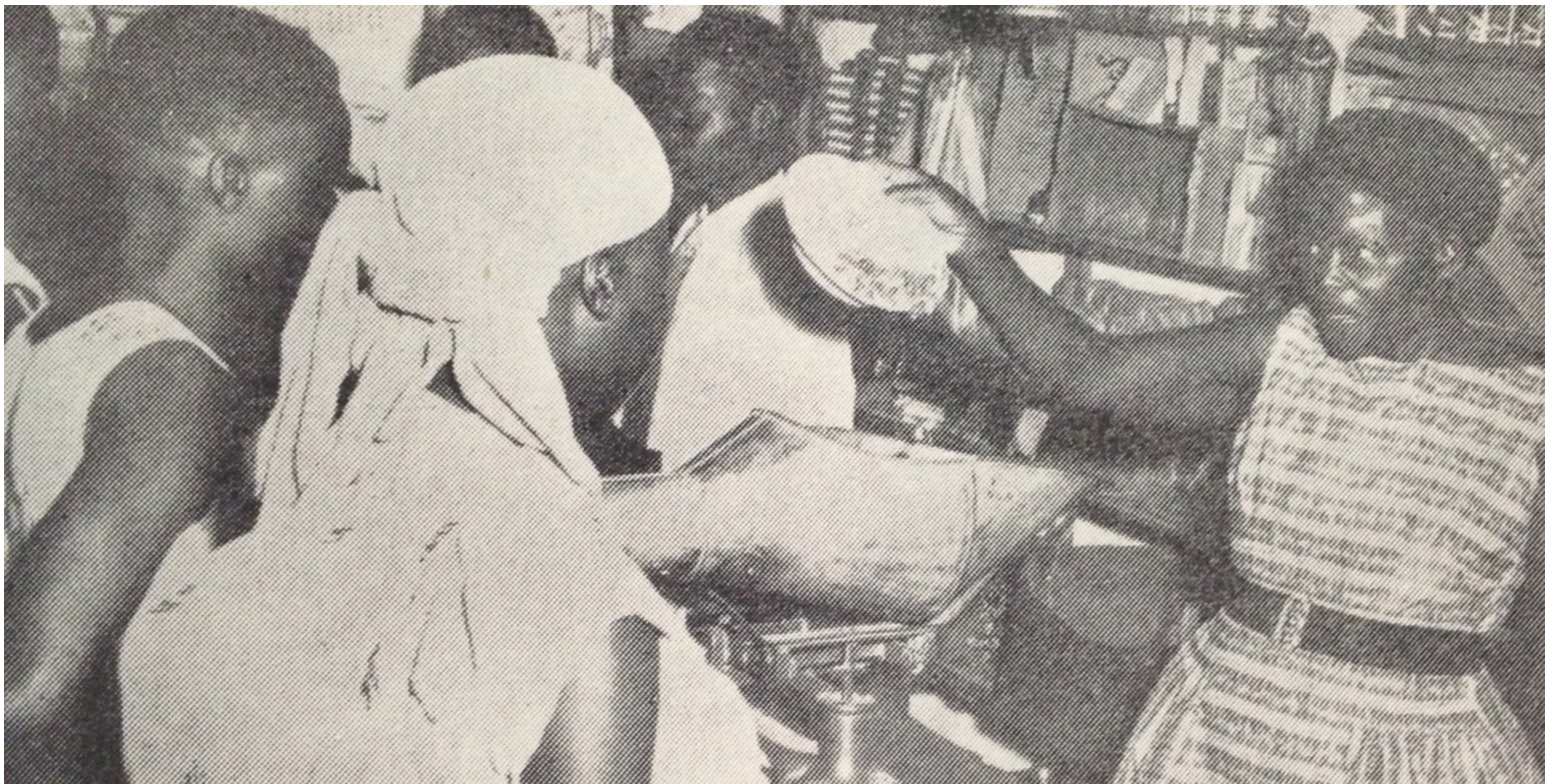
The fish trade was by no means easy, not least because the ex-teacher entered the fish trade with minimal capital. As the protagonist would remember in 1958, trading in fish was also highly competitive as there were numerous fishmongers, mostly men with more business resources and experience. Moreover, purchasing fish in the swamps was a very rigorous undertaking.

If Ann Chilombo took advantage of colonial education and employment to become a successful entrepreneur, Maliya Chisanga's rise to economic prominence was a consequence of determination and foresight. Older than Ann Chilombo, the future business-woman was born in Zambia's modern North-western Province.

She settled on the Copperbelt in the 1940s. There, Maliya Chisanga seems to have quickly realised that although mining companies supplied African miners with such rations as mealie meal and meat, they did not provide them with "traditional delicacies," including caterpillars (ifishimu), wild fruits, and mushrooms. Aware that there was an elastic demand for such foodstuffs in the African mining community on the Copperbelt, but devoid of initial capital, Miss Maliya Chisanga began to wander in the bush to collect caterpillars, which she sold to miners in Kitwe and Chingola.

Encouraged by her spouse who, too, was an ambitious entrepreneur, Maliya Chisanga moved to Kanyama, an African township in Lusaka, the colony's capital city. With a rapidly expanding African population after the Second World War, Lusaka offered a large scope for business and Maliya was keen to take advantage of this situation. Before long, she became the first woman to open and run a thriving shop in Kanyama and by 1958 she owned an equally successful shop in the Democratic Republic of Congo. So successful was her retail business that by that date, she had raised enough money to buy a vehicle and she had become a household name among the African community in Lusaka.

It may be apparent from the real life experiences of Ann Chilombo and Maliya Chisanga that neither marriage nor adverse colonial legislation prevented diligent and ambitious African women from pursuing successful careers during pre-independence days in Zambia.



It involved travelling long distances and often sleeping in the open amidst swarms of malaria-carrying mosquitoes.

Ann Chilombo apparently overcame these difficulties through sheer diligence and determination. For by the time she got married to a school headmaster in the town of Mansa in the mid-1950s, she had become wealthy enough to open a large store in the town. The first African woman to accomplish this feat in the area, the newly married woman soon turned her store into a thriving business, earning what was then a substantial amount of £10 daily. But the storekeeper was also a housewife who juggled her business activity with household chores, besides taking care of her five children. Each day after closing her shop, Chilombo worked out accounts, wrote letters, and cooked for the family. She also regularly travelled to Lusaka by air, a clear demonstration of her success as a business-woman.

In the late 1950s, she would recall that she sometimes got lost for days in the bush. However, Miss Chisanga persevered and continued to trade in caterpillars for two years to raise sufficient capital to pursue a less difficult business.

Her perseverance paid off. By 1950, she had saved a little money to embark on a more lucrative, two-pronged business in which she traded in chickens and brewed and sold munkonyo, a locally popular drink, to African miners. The business-minded entrepreneur purchased chickens from Zambia's Southern Province, some which she exported to Sinoi in neighbouring modern Zimbabwe and sold the rest in Lusaka. It was indeed while on one of the business trips to Lusaka in 1952 that Maliya met and married a man from the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo.

Admittedly, such women were few and far apart given that colonial rule denied economic opportunities to women, comparatively favouring men. In spite of the lack of an enabling environment, some women were, however, able to create wealth through sheer hard work and devotion to entrepreneurship.

Ironically, most women in Zambia today still face the same huddles that hindered the economic progress of their colonised counterparts. They are denied access to education, loans and land. But that is another story for a later chapter.

The story was originally published in the Bulletin and Record's October 2023 edition.

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

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