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Unlawful Detention Now Zambia’s Leading Human Rights Violation — HRC

Ennety Munshya

Unlawful detention has emerged as the most common human rights violation in Zambia, the Human Rights Commission (HRC) has revealed.

This week, the Commission held its inaugural case review meeting, during which 193 cases were examined. Of these, 150 cases — representing 77.7% — involved unlawful detention of suspects by law enforcement officers, a trend the Commission has described as “deeply worrying”.

Speaking during a press briefing on Friday, 5 December 2025 at the Grand Palace Hotel in Lusaka, Commission Chairperson Dr. Pamela Towela Sambo said the right to personal liberty, protected under Article 13 of the Constitution and various international human rights instruments, continues to be violated with impunity.

She said the law clearly outlines the circumstances under which a person may be deprived of their liberty, yet the Commission found widespread non-compliance, with many suspects detained for prolonged periods before being taken to court.

Dr. Sambo noted that in many cases, suspects were detained not because investigations were complete, but because officers arrested first and investigated later—an approach she described as illegal and contrary to basic principles of justice.

The Commission also expressed concern over the persistent denial of police bond, citing stringent and often unrealistic bond conditions imposed on suspects.

“Suspects should only be arrested once law enforcement officers have sufficient evidence to charge the person with an offence, within the legally prescribed period of 24 hours,” she said.

She added that prolonged detentions were being fuelled by systemic weaknesses, including slow docket processing between the Police and the National Prosecutions Authority, delays in transporting suspects to court, and shortages of court interpreters.

In more serious cases, such as murder and drug-related offences, suspects remained in custody for weeks because post-mortem, medical, and laboratory reports could only be processed in Lusaka.

“These bottlenecks undermine the right to liberty and must be urgently addressed,” Dr. Sambo said.

The Commission also revealed disturbing violations involving children. Out of the 193 cases reviewed, 27 concerned minors, including reports of detention and violence in schools.

Dr. Sambo said the Commission will intensify engagement with key institutions, including the Zambia Police Service, the Judiciary, the Social Welfare Department, and other partners.

She added that the HRC will also consider pursuing impact-driven public interest litigation to challenge entrenched unlawful practices where necessary.

“We Were Paid K20’’- The Human Cost of Zambia’s Illegal Logging Boom

By Lucy Nambela

Illegal tree cutting in the Chiawa Game Management Area (GMA) is robbing the community of its natural future. The destruction is driven by poverty, alleged involvement of traditional leaders, and a thriving timber route through Chirundu border.

A disappearing forest

Chiawa GMA, about 150 kilometres southeast of the capital - Lusaka, is a key conservation buffer zone bordering the Lower Zambezi National Park. Its mopani and leadwood forests, vital wildlife corridors, are now marked by dusty tracks and fields of tree stumps. Between 2023 and 2024, illegal logging surged, with reports of powerful individuals exploiting vulnerable residents.

Eyewitnesses describe a coordinated, round-the-clock operation using heavy machinery. Investigations by Capital FM found that even some Community Resources Board (CRB) members tasked with protecting the forests were complicit.

CRB Executive Officer Chiwala Matesamwa said poverty and greed were fuelling the destruction.

“Community members were involved because they saw an opportunity to make money from the illegal activity,” he said.

“The loggers used heavy equipment and would even camp in the area for days.”

He also accused some headmen and CRB members of participating, calling it a betrayal of their conservation mandate.

The human cost

At the bottom of the chain are the cutters—men and women working in dangerous conditions for minimal pay.

A 28-year-old logger described spending two weeks in the bush: “I saw at least 10 trucks loaded during that period.”

Another said he earned only K250 a day and quit after cutting 20 trees. Women earned even less.

Martha Kamalata, a mother of three, said: “For removing the bark from the trees, we were paid only K20, sometimes K30 per log.”

A 32-year-old man broke down explaining how his relative was arrested escorting a timber truck.

“I don’t want to speak to you. My relative was arrested,” he said sharply, later adding through tears that the family was still struggling to pay the fine.

The Department of Forestry has not responded to a 27 October 2025 press query on the outcomes of logging-related cases.

Allegations against the royal establishment

Multiple residents alleged involvement of the Chiawa royal establishment.

A 24-year-old man claimed palace officials were recruiting young people to cut mopani and leadwood.

51-year-old long-time resident, recalled hearing “machine-like cutting” late at night in 2024. He said villagers were told the palace was aware of the logging, though he later believed the chieftainess’ name was being used for private gain.

A senior headman confirmed palace representatives had asked him for permission to cut “a few trees,” only for the operation to expand massively.

“The only benefit I got was a bottle of cooking oil,” he said. “Those who came are the only ones who benefitted.”

He warned of the long-term impact.

“If we cut down the trees, where will we get shade? Protecting the trees is everyone’s responsibility,” he said.



Chirundu Forestry Officer Olland Singogo 2

“We Were Paid K20”- The Human Cost of Zambia’s Illegal Logging Boom cont..

Response from the royal establishment

Royal establishment Secretary Oliphans Madzwanya declined to comment, saying he required authorisation from Chairperson Boniface Chiawa.

Chiawa denied any involvement by himself or Madzwanya. He said the logging in places like Kambale was driven by “immigrant loggers” who negotiated with village headmen.

He said the establishment later imposed a logging and charcoal ban and dismissed two headmen who had allowed the activity. He dismissed the accusations as false, suggesting they came from “frustration” among those affected by the ban.

Chieftainess Chiawa was unavailable for comment as she was out of the country for medical treatment.

A betrayal of climate responsibility

Illegal logging has left Chiawa vulnerable to erosion, floods and declining agricultural productivity. Trees that once stored carbon and supported rainfall patterns are vanishing. Rivers and streams are drying up.

A senior resident who was interviewed fears the long-term consequences. “Back then, you couldn’t walk two metres without finding a mopani tree. Now, it’s hard to spot even one... That’s why rains are delaying because there are no trees,” he said.

“It’s unfortunate that this is happening at a time when we should be advocating for reforestation,” environmental activist Elliot Goledema added.

Headman Joseph Kajiwa said the community was already feeling climate change impacts.

“Illegal logging takes away from the community,” he said, adding that youths had been “used as cheap labour.”

He criticised weak enforcement. “The law clearly states that no logging should take place in a GMA, but there is no effective enforcement,” he said.

What authorities say

In May 2025, the author witnessed extensive timber destruction during an Environmental Crimes Journalism Fellowship tour led by Forestry Officer Olland Singogo. Six months later, Singogo was suspended and investigated for wrongful disposal of logs. He did not respond to calls.

A senior official at the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment said all logging in Chiawa appeared to be illegal. This was confirmed by Chief Forestry Officer Dr. Freddie Siangulube, who said no concession licence had been issued for the area as it is restricted.

Under Section 15(23)(a) of the Forests Act No. 4 of 2015, cutting or removing any forest product without a permit is illegal.

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) said the Forestry Department is the authority responsible for enforcing forest laws. Tourism Ministry Permanent Secretary Evans Muhanga

added that forest-impact assessments fall under Forestry, although DNPW, which sits under his ministry, continues to monitor wildlife populations and land-use trends.

Enforcement actions and wider corruption

On 26 June 2025, the Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA) and Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) intercepted four timber trucks at Chirundu without proper export permits.

According to a statement on the ZRA website, the timber and vehicles were forfeited, avoiding a K188,000 loss in export duty. The trucks were valued at K3.6 million.

Illegal timber trade is part of a broader national problem. According to Transparency International Zambia, illegal logging of rosewood alone leads to staggering losses of about US\$3.2 million in revenue and estimated bribes paid to state officials of about US\$1.7 million.

Is there a solution?

Despite the devastation, small steps toward recovery are emerging. CRB Executive Officer Matesamwa said six trucks carrying illegal logs had been impounded.

Chitende Ward Councillor Paul Kagiye is pushing for alternative livelihoods to reduce reliance on environmental destruction.

Lucy is a fellow under the Wildlife Crime Prevention (WCP) environmental fellowship for journalists.

The MakanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism, in partnership with WCP, supported the reporting of this story.



Abandoned logs in Chiawa GMA

Buses, Briefings and ‘Support’ -What Chipata Reveals About Zambia’s Constitutional Reform

As Zambians debate Bill Seven, questions grow over whether the “public input” behind it reflected genuine citizen voices, or carefully arranged support. Chipata’s public hearings reveal a troubling gap between the government’s promise of inclusive reform and the reality of a tightly managed process.

By MakanDay and the team of five journalists in Eastern Province

Zambia’s contentious constitutional reform initiative, widely referred to as Bill Seven, has returned to Parliament after a court-ordered halt — but the journey it has taken reveals a much more complex picture.

Its reintroduction has reignited public debate, with some civil society organisations, church groups, and opposition parties warning that the process is being pushed through too quickly and without genuine citizen engagement.

The proposed changes to the Constitution include increasing constituency-based seats from 156 to over 200 seats, introduce reserved seats for women, youth, and persons with disabilities, introducing a hybrid voting system, and raising the number of presidentially appointed MPs from the current eight.

In Chipata, Eastern Province, where ordinary citizens were invited to help shape the country’s supreme law, MakanDay and a team of five local journalists documented a consultation process that looked inclusive on paper but unfolded very differently on the ground. The team gathered videos, photos and interviews with some of those who were ferried to the venue.

Buses arrived carrying mostly youths and women, many unsure why they had been called. Submissions sounded rehearsed, and long afternoon queues formed as participants collected unexplained K100 allowances.

What should have been genuine civic participation instead exposed a process vulnerable to political mobilisation, poor communication and subtle manipulation, casting doubt on the legitimacy of a reform effort the government insists is citizen-led.

It remains unclear why Chipata became the focal point for this level of engineered support. No similar reports emerged from other districts. In Kasama, northern Zambia, for instance, a journalist who covered the hearings there described the process as smooth and largely free of interference.

A consultation already under strain

Early sessions in Chipata drew low turnout, with many residents, especially youths, unaware the consultations were happening. Attendance surged midweek when alleged ruling United Party for National Development (UPND) officials began ferrying groups to the venue for what appeared to be arranged submissions.

On 31 October, President Hakainde Hichilema encouraged citizens to support the review, arguing that more constituencies would enhance representation. His remarks coincided with a sudden wave of pro-delimitation submissions in Chipata. Inside Uncle Chipeta Lodge in Chipata, the venue of the submissions, some participants struggled even to pronounce “delimitation,” yet their support for it was strikingly uniform.

“The submissions for Wednesday and Thursday were almost identical,” said one of the participants. “People kept saying delimitation was good, but when asked to explain, they couldn’t. The second, third and fourth, all repeated the same points. It sounded rehearsed.”

She added that she observed participants queuing for K100 payments near a parked white Toyota Hilux.

By Thursday, mobilisation had grown more open and noticeable. Additional buses arrived, including one from Chipata Teachers Training College, carrying mostly civil servants – teachers, nurses, and support staff. Several passengers told MakanDay they only learned the purpose of the trip upon arrival.

These accounts now sit at the centre of growing concern that the hearings were rushed, poorly communicated, and vulnerable to manipulation.

Officials push back, observers disagree

In an interview with MakanDay, UPND deputy provincial chairperson Alex Phiri, named among those allegedly involved in mobilisation, denied any role in transporting participants.

“I was there almost all the days, but I never saw anyone being transported there,” he said.

But Alliance for Community Action (ACA) Executive Director Laura Miti, who observed the public sittings in Chipata, offered a sharply contrasting view. She said communities on the outskirts had little access to the process, some participants were reportedly instructed on what to submit, and others were mobilised simply to boost numbers.

“So overall, the sense is that its technical committee really was window-dressing, practically, was really difficult to get a good view of what Zambians really want,” she said. “In our view, as the ACA, it was designed to ensure that Bill 7 as it was, would pass. So, it was more of a clean-up exercise.”

Inside the mobilisation machine

MakanDay established that mobilisation began well before the public sittings. Well-placed sources said local party structures coordinated with officials from Lusaka to arrange transport, meals and allowances for participants.

Eastern Province Deputy Permanent Secretary Lewis Mwape, who was seen at the meeting held at the provincial health office on Sunday 26 October, denied convening any gathering to canvass support. He confirmed meeting some civil society leaders, including Ms Miti, but insisted he did not attempt to influence anyone’s position.

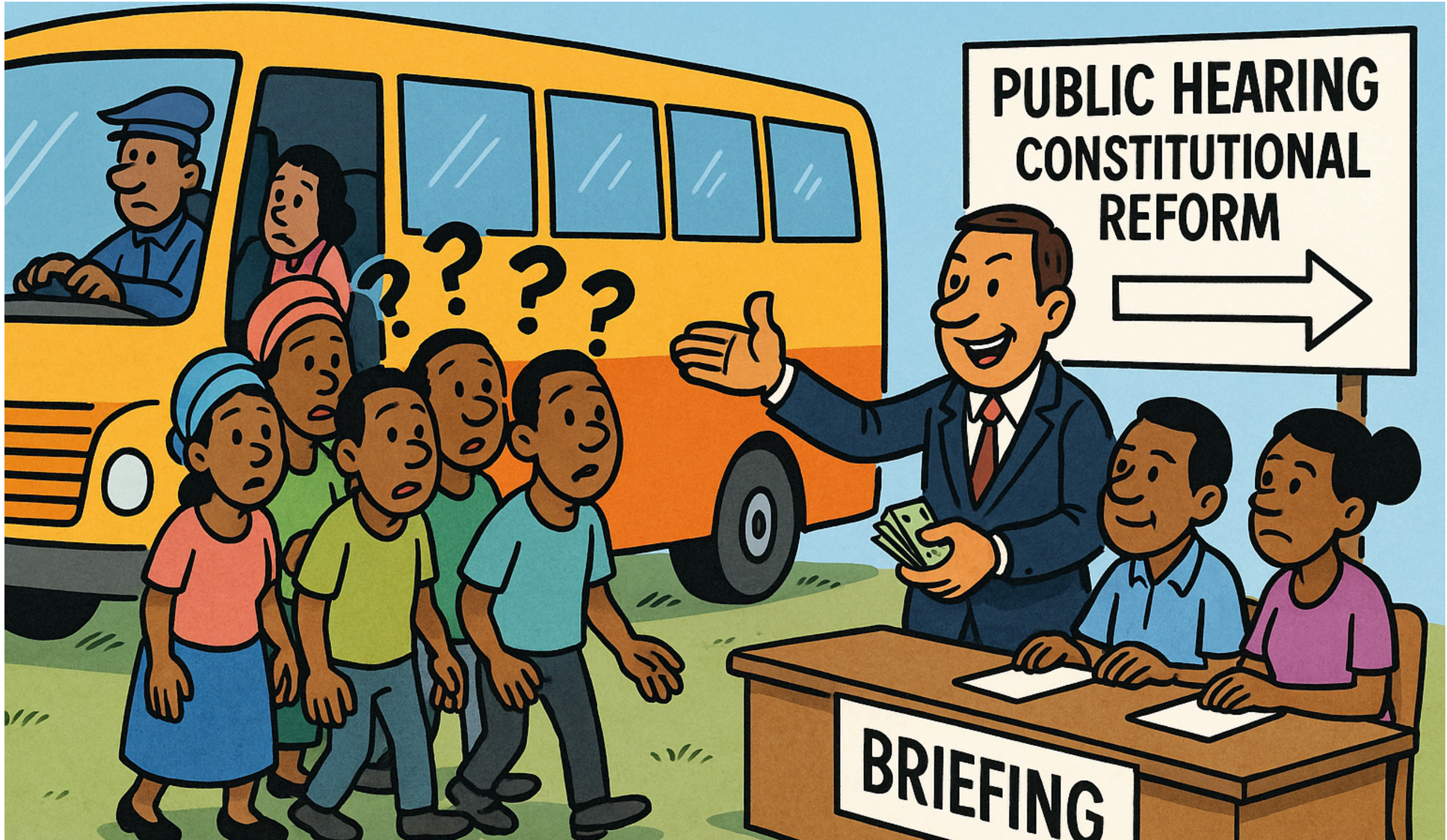
“The meeting called by Dr. Lewis Mwape did not work out because NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) were being pressured to adopt a single position, to support the constitutional amendments, particularly on delimitation and representation,” said one source who attended the meeting.

Two days later, on October 28, a second meeting reportedly involving UPND-aligned CSOs was held at Jemita Lodge, allegedly attended by a State House official and a former UPND MP. The official referred all queries to State House when approached for comment.

The constitutional framework

The Constitution mandates the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) to delimit electoral boundaries at least every ten years, considering population, geography and social cohesion. The amendment process currently underway falls within this mandate.

Public sittings began on 27 October, with teams deployed nationwide in two phases, concluding in Lusaka from 10 to 13 November. President Hichilema had earlier sworn in a 25-member committee chaired by retired Supreme Court Judge Christopher Mushabati, tasked to propose amendments through what he called “an inclusive, consultative, cost-effective process that reflects the voices of all Zambians.”



The main image used in this story is AI-generated. It is included for illustration only and does not depict any actual scenes from Chipata.

This pledge followed public backlash against the 2025 version of Bill Seven, criticised for being rushed and opaque. Civil society pressure forced the creation of the new technical committee—welcomed as progress, but overshadowed by suspicion.

Civil society’s cautious support

Civil society and faith-based groups cautiously endorsed the review but insisted its legitimacy depended on transparency, open access to draft documents, and meaningful participation of women, youths and marginalised communities. They also warned that dissenting voices must be protected.

Governance experts say a transparent review could strengthen public trust and reshape Zambia’s governance culture. Yet the scenes in Chipata highlight how easily consultation can slide toward manipulation.

For the majority who were transported to make submissions, constitutional promises only matter when they translate into better lives. They spoke of wanting their children to have access to education, healthcare, clean water, and decent housing, not as policy ambitions, but as guaranteed rights in the constitution.

Zambia’s repeated struggles to produce a constitution that genuinely reflects citizens’ aspirations stem largely from a lack of national consensus, with recurring concerns over inclusivity, transparency and political will, according to experts.

In a 2012 interview, Professor Muna Ndulo, one of Zambia’s most respected legal scholars, warned that many African constitutions fail not because of poor wording, but because they are built on flawed, exclusionary processes.

Ndulo, who helped to draft the constitutions of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Afghanistan, said the most successful constitutions were those in which there was a complete separation of powers between the three arms of government – legislative, executive and judicial.

“You can’t say the substance is going to be right when the process is wrong. It just doesn’t happen,” he said at the time. “You could get miracles, no doubt, but I think ordinarily those things don’t happen that way.”

Two Years After Groundbreaking, Solwezi’s Kyawama ‘Modern Market’ Still Not Built

By Stanley Fwataki

Construction of the long-awaited Kyawama Modern Market in Solwezi has still not begun almost two years after the groundbreaking ceremony, leaving more than 2,000 traders operating in overcrowded and unsafe conditions. The market, which is the largest and busiest trading centre in Solwezi, continues to struggle with poor sanitation, inadequate shelter, and rising congestion despite a government commitment to upgrade it.

Solwezi, the provincial capital of North-Western Province, sits at the heart of Zambia’s mining belt and is home to Kansanshi Mine, Lumwana Barrick, and Kalumbila Mines which has grown rapidly, now accommodating over 332,700 residents, according to the 2022 Census.

With a provincial population exceeding 1.2 million people, markets such as Kyawama play an important role in linking agriculture, mining-related trade, and household commerce. The vibrant market offers fresh produce, spices, household goods, and crafts, but its old infrastructure has failed to match the town’s explosive growth.

In December 2024, the Solwezi Municipal Council announced through its official Facebook page that it had approved a K213.6 million budget for 2025, representing a 28 percent increase from the previous year. Within this budget, K47.7 million was allocated for capital projects, including the construction of a fire station, paving of open spaces, installation of streetlights, and, importantly, the long-promised Kyawama Modern Market. However, despite these allocations, the site remains untouched nearly two years after the 2 January 2024 groundbreaking ceremony.

Traders say the delay has made a bad situation worse. Bridget Chinzahu, the Kyawama Market chairperson who has traded there for 20 years, describes daily operations as exhausting and unsafe.

She says the market has only four toilets and two bathing rooms, no drainage system, no running water, and shelter that floods or collapses during the rainy season.

“We have over 2,000 traders depending on this place every day,” she said. “We need urgent government action. We can not keep working in these conditions.”

The lack of progress has increased pressure on the Solwezi Municipal Council, which began preliminary steps in October 2025 by identifying a temporary trading site where traders will operate while work begins on the main market site.

According to Engineer Maxwell Chibesa, the Council’s representative, the contractor engaged is Horizon Properties, which is currently clearing land and constructing facilities at the temporary site.

The new holding area will include an ablution block with four toilets, a car park, running water, and adequate shelter to allow traders to operate safely while construction on the main market gets underway.

Chibesa explained that the delay resulted from lengthy procurement processes under the electronic government procurement system, which slowed planning and approvals.

He said that once traders are moved to the temporary location scheduled for December 2025, the Council will clear the old Kyawama site and begin full construction. The modern market is expected to be completed within 12 months, beginning in September 2025 and ending in October 2026, if all goes according to plan.

The total cost for both the temporary site and the modern market is about K53.5 million (K53,465,545.10), funded entirely through locally generated revenue by the Solwezi Municipal Council. When completed, the new Kyawama Modern Market will feature over 2,000 trading shelters, 60 permanent shops, office space, 32 mobile-money booth spaces, and full water and sanitation services.

A check conducted on site confirmed that work at the new temporary site is progressing, with the contractor on the ground. Engineer Chibesa assured Solwezi residents that the Council will strictly supervise the project to ensure quality work is delivered within the stipulated timeframe.

As traders wait to be relocated and construction to finally begin, Kyawama Market remains overcrowded, vibrant, and essential but desperately in need of the modernisation it has long been promised.



Old Market

Produced by Radio Kabangabanga in Solwezi for MakanDay. The article has been edited and fact-checked by MakanDay.

Bangweulu is Running out of Fish — & Destructive Fishing is to Blame

By Ennety Munshya

On the shoreline of Lake Bangweulu in Samfya, Luapula Province in northern Zambia, the afternoon harbour is alive with activity. Boats glide toward land, traders gather with plastic dishes and baskets, and fishers unload the day’s catch in a rhythm as old as the lake itself. Yet beneath this busy scene, a quiet crisis is unfolding.

Many of the fish brought ashore are barely the length of a hand—immature and far from breeding age. Scattered along the sandy bank are mosquito nets, long ropes tied to empty bottles, and improvised sticks and poles. These are not remnants of ordinary fishing tools but evidence of a growing shift toward destructive and illegal methods that threaten one of Zambia’s most important wetlands.

For generations, Lake Bangweulu has fed thousands of families across Luapula, Muchinga and Northern provinces. Today, it sits at the edge of ecological collapse.

Along the shore, all sorts of fishing gear lie scattered, but the sight of mosquito nets, long ropes tied to empty bottles, and long sticks leaves the reporter wondering what they are used for, and what they mean for the future of fishing here.

In this investigation, Makanday, examines how traditional fishing methods have persisted in Bangweulu and how some of them now threaten the lake’s fragile fish stocks.

A lake under pressure

Some fishermen openly speak about what is happening on the water. Others avoid interviews altogether, the silence itself suggesting awareness that the methods they use are illegal or harmful.

Scotcha Nkandu, a fisherman of three years, says he has witnessed a steady decline in fish stocks.

“We buy the recommended nets,” he says. “They’re designed so they don’t catch everything because the mesh is big. Our friends who use mosquito nets... those are the best people to talk to about that.”

Mosquito nets, which have an extremely fine mesh, scoop up everything in their path, immature fish, breeding females, and eggs.

Another fisherman, who requested anonymity, says new techniques have emerged that actively destroy breeding grounds.

“Some of these methods disturb the eggs or bury them,” he explains. “They stop fish from multiplying. There are many such methods now—and they are very bad.”

Attempts to speak to fishermen whose boats carried mosquito nets were unsuccessful. All declined interviews, saying they were “not comfortable being recorded”.

Inside the “umukwau” method

Further along the lake, MakaanDay encounters a group of young men using the traditional but increasingly destructive method known locally as umukwau. Initially reluctant, they agree to answer a few questions while sternly warning - “don’t capture us.”

A long rope tied with plastic bottles stretches deep into the water. Three men pull it steadily for nearly two hours. The bottles create a loud rattling beneath the surface, frightening fish into a waiting net.

As the men shift positions, a second team paddles along the line to inspect the catch. What unfolds is an intense and coordinated operation, one that sweeps through breeding grounds with little discrimination.

Techniques like umukwau, alongside the use of mosquito nets and small-mesh gear, are among the practices conservationists warn could accelerate the collapse of the Bangweulu fishery.

Warnings from conservation records

The scenes on Lake Bangweulu echo long-standing warnings raised in official reports. The 2021 Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture, Lands and Natural Resources reported that Zambia’s capture fisheries have remained under severe strain due to overfishing and destructive methods. Despite rising demand, production has stagnated for years.

The Committee also noted weak enforcement of regulations, especially during the fishing ban, as a major factor in the depletion of indigenous fish species. Lake Bangweulu, it observed, has been gradually drying over the decades, compounding the pressure on its fisheries.

The report attributed the weak enforcement to insufficient staffing and limited equipment, and recommended strengthening regulation by deploying more personnel and providing the necessary resources to support effective monitoring.



State what the report says on staff, are they adequate or not. Why is there weak enforcement?

African Parks, which manages the Bangweulu Wetlands with the Zambian government and local communities, has repeatedly raised alarm about the scale of illegal and harmful fishing practices. In its annual report, the organisation observed that non-compliance during breeding periods and the continued use of banned gear remain among the gravest threats to the ecosystem.

According to African Parks, areas where fishing bans have been effectively enforced show rapid improvement in fish availability, evidence that the decline is reversible if rules are followed.

Government response still pending

MakaanDay sought comment from the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock on what measures are being taken to regulate both traditional and illegal fishing practices. The Ministry has not yet responded.

A ninety-day fishing ban, which came into effect on 1 December, is currently in force. During this period, fishing in major water bodies—including Lake Bangweulu—is prohibited to allow fish species to breed and replenish.

But fishers and conservation groups warn that the ban’s success depends on two critical factors, including strict enforcement across the lake, and support for alternative livelihoods for communities who rely almost entirely on fishing for survival.

Without these measures, they say, destructive practices may continue unchecked.

Additional reporting by Frank Mwansa and Robby Mofya from Radio Yangeni in Mansa.



FRA Payment Delays Push Farmers Into Crisis as Planting Season Opens

With the rains already falling, unpaid farmers in Fimpulu say they cannot buy fertiliser, seed or labour — putting their livelihoods and the next harvest at risk.

By Ennety Munshya, Frank Mwansa, and Robby Mofya

As the rains begin to fall across Zambia, fields in most rural communities are coming alive with activity. But in Fimpulu, a farming area in Mansa District of Luapula Province, the planting season has opened with unusual silence. Scores of small-scale farmers who supplied maize to the Food Reserve Agency (FRA) say they are stuck at home, unable to buy fertiliser, seed, or labour, because the agency has not paid them for crops delivered months ago.

“We are stranded. We don’t know what to do next,” one farmer said. “FRA is still holding on to our money.”

When government announced that FRA would purchase 543,000 metric tonnes of maize this year, farmers in Mansa were hopeful that timely payments would allow them to re-invest in their fields.

But for farmers in Fimpulu, that hope has turned into anxiety.

Aaron Kasompe, 50, a small-scale farmer who has grown maize for nearly a decade, says the delay has plunged his family and farm operations into crisis. He sold 400 by 50kg bags of maize to the FRA in July. He had also acquired a Sustainable Agriculture Financing Facility (SAFF) loan of K60,000, expecting to repay it immediately once FRA credited his account.

Instead, the delay has triggered a financial chain reaction.

“I can’t pay people to begin working at the farm because I do not have money. I am depending on the money that FRA is supposed to pay me for the maize I supplied to them. I saved some money in my bank account to enable me to kick-start farming this season, but that money has been withheld by the bank because my SAFF loan has not yet been settled,” Kasompe said.

The bank has now frozen his savings pending loan repayment, putting the planting season at risk.

Grace Nkandu, 65, who supplied 50 bags of maize, also fears for her family’s survival.

“We depend on farming to feed and provide for our family, but if we are not paid by FRA, how do we survive? We don’t know what to do. We are not working. The government needs to help us,” she said.

Nkandu had planned to diversify her field this year by planting cassava and groundnuts. Without her FRA payment, those plans are now impossible.

The Food Reserve Agency officially opened the 2025 crop marketing season in June, setting the buying price at K340 per 50kg bag. The initial target was to purchase 543,000 metric tonnes, at an estimated cost of K3.69 billion, through over 1,400 satellite depots.

But just months later, the agency's expenditure had ballooned far beyond what had been planned.

According to a ministerial statement delivered by Agriculture Minister Reuben Mtolo on 4 November 2025, government’s increased share of maize purchases, driven by limited private sector participation and a national bumper harvest, had overwhelmed the agency’s budget.

“Due to the bumper harvest experienced in the 2024/2025 season and the limited participation of the private sector in maize marketing, government decided to increase its share of maize purchases,” Mtolo said.

As of 31 October 2025, FRA had purchased about 1.7 million metric tonnes, valued at K11.3 billion, above the original target.

This left an unexpected financing gap of K7.62 billion. To bridge the shortfall, FRA and government engaged commercial banks and secured a K5 billion loan facility intended to clear outstanding payments to farmers. However, the minister did not indicate when the agency would actually pay the arrears.

While Fimpulu farmers represent only a fraction of those waiting for FRA payments countrywide, their situation raises broader questions:

- How many farmers nationwide are affected by the delays?
- Why did FRA purchase over three times the planned volume without secured financing?
- What emergency measures exist to prevent delayed payments during peak farming seasons?
- What is the impact on national food security if farmers cannot plant on time?

For small-scale farmers, who produce the majority of Zambia’s staple maize, any delay in planting threatens the 2025/2026 harvest and could fuel future increases in mealie meal prices.

Several farmers interviewed said they now risk losing an entire season because they cannot buy inputs, hire labour, or meet loan obligations.

The ripple effects are already visible, seed and agro-dealer shops report reduced customer traffic, casual labourers are going unpaid, and families are being forced to cut their food consumption as they wait for FRA funds.

The Agriculture Minister has assured parliament that government is “doing its best to ensure the debt owed to farmers is paid within a reasonable timeframe.” But without a clear timeline, uncertainty continues to spread across farming communities like Fimpulu.

For Kasompe, Nkandu, and hundreds of others in Luapula, every passing day brings the fear that their fields will remain unplanted, and their families unsupported, long after the rains have settled.

National Association for Smallholder Farmers Executive Director Frank Kayula says the delayed payments show how volatility the agriculture sector is, making it difficult for the private sector to participate.

Kayula warns that the non-payment will slow productivity and ultimately reduce yields, driving up the price of the staple food and affecting the entire country.

He adds that it is unfair for government to collect maize from farmers without paying them, noting that many farmers depend on this income for their livelihoods.”

Produced by Radio Yangeni in Mansa for MakanDay. The article has been edited and fact-checked by MakanDay.



Photo Credit | Victor Musonda

LOOKING BACK

The story was first published in the April 2013 edition of the Bulletin & Record magazine.

Uncle Rex: the father of jazz

The multi-award winning jazz musician and guitarist bears his soul to Hope Mkunte

“How does it feel to be the father of jazz music in Zambia?” I ask Uncle Rex, excited to meet him for the first time.

Uncle Rex ponders the question but does not answer right away. Instead he stares ahead with no emotion on his face. I am beginning to think I have started this interview on the wrong foot. You must understand that I am in the presence of a musical giant who mentored the crop of late 1990s and early 2000s contemporary Zambian singers such as JK, Joe Chibangu, Loue X and Maureen Lilanda. This man has played alongside international stars like Mirriam Makeba and Oliver Mtukudzi. He has shared the stage with late local music peers like Paul Ngozi and Jagari Chanda of the famed 1970s band The W.I.T.C.H. He has played hundreds of local shows and has toured countries like South Africa, Germany, England and Scotland.

Dressed in faded denim jeans and rocking his signature hat, the softly-spoken guitar maestro downplays his celebrated jazz career and admits that it has not been all smooth sailing for the genre, especially bearing in mind that he started playing jazz in the 1970s and 1980s, when disco reigned supreme.

“It was really difficult for me to start playing jazz because everyone was crazy about disco at that time. There was no money coming in because no one was coming to watch my shows. For about a period of 10 years jazz music was stagnant,” Uncle Rex says, gestures with his elegant hands emphasise points.

A trip down memory lane reveals that music has played a big part in his life since his childhood. Uncle Rex’s father, who was a Zambia Railways mechanic, was an avid guitar player but it was his brother, Jairos, whom he affectionately called JJ, who taught him most of the guitar skills he still uses today. You would think that Uncle Rex knew from the start that he would end up a musician but he offers a different view.

“Even though there was always music in the house when I was growing up I didn’t know I would make a career out of music,” he says.



Uncle Rex, who went to the same school as Kalusha Bwalya, smiles upon the mention of the football legend. “We were young guys growing up and playing soccer. We used to play in the under-10 soccer league but nobody knew Kalusha Bwalya would end up a soccer star or that I would end up a musician. We were just playing, you know what I mean?”

With three trendsetting solo albums to his credit, it is hard to put into words the musical genius that is Uncle Rex. His career stretches over a generation, from his first appearance in the band Hotline in the 1970s, to releasing his award winning third album This is Me last year. “I started in a band called Hotline and our biggest gig was at Falcon hotel in Ndola, and then later joined another band called Master Q1 before I joined another band called Lifasi,” he says. “I was jamming all over the place before I moved to Lusaka.”

Uncle Rex's body of work transcends that of even the most accomplished Zambian musicians outside the jazz genre. He has also been in several secular and gospel music bands, most of which he formed. Upon in arriving in Lusaka in 1986, Uncle Rex gave his life to the Lord. I ask him how the transformation came about and Uncle Rex gets solemn as he answers the question.

“You know my brother, JJ, the guitarist, had a friend who was a pastor and he is the one who started ministering to me and what he ministered to me really touched my heart. He led me to the Lord.”

He quickly embraced his new found faith and formed his first gospel group called Glory Singers, which gained popularity in gospel music circles but shortly afterwards disbanded. He then joined a band called Shine On. He would later form a band called Reality, from the Go-Center worship grounds. “Reality was a big, big hit in the gospel circles”, he says. “We recorded two successful albums and did several music videos that were showing on ZNBC.”

Uncle Rex’s three solo albums Finger Speech, Coming Home and This is Me have won Uncle Rex a total of seven awards: four Ngoma Awards, two AZAMI and one ZMA Award. I ask him how much money each of these awards came with and he laughs shyly.

“These awards come with very little money. I feel embarrassed to even tell you the amount. The Zambian music industry shows little appreciation for our work because even album sales are very minimal. The money we get from shows is very little because people don’t attend shows so the money we get is just hand-to-mouth, and the only way I really make money is when I am hired to play for clients like NGOs and banks. I am a full time musician and despite that there isn’t a lot of money. [But] I still love what I do.”

One of the highlights of his jazz career is being nominated for a Kora Award in 2004 in the best new comer category. He recalls the experience. “Me and Jane Osburne were the only musicians nominated from Zambia. I didn’t win the award, but I got to meet a lot of international artists and I played with them. I was actually seated on the same table with [Zimbabwean musician] Oliver Mtukudzi.”

Our interview has come to an end, and I bid Uncle Rex farewell and thank him for his time. But as I walk out he stops me.



“I want you to hear some of the new stuff I am working on” he says excitedly. “I am working on a gospel jazz album”.

We sit in his car and jazz a rendition of As the Deer by Martin J. Nystrom oozes out of the vehicle’s speakers. It is easy to see why he says this album will be his best to date: the sound quality is crystal clear, the melodies are refreshingly uplifting and the album will be mastered in the US. This album in the making is titled Fellowship and will be available this month.

“On this album, I think I have finally matured as an artist,” he says.

Dazed by the beauty of the music I am hearing, I repeat my first question to him. “How does it feel to be the father of jazz music in Zambia?”

After a moment’s hesitation, Uncle Rex finally responds, a smile breaking from the corners of his mouth, but the look in his eyes as tranquil as ever. “It feels good. It feels great that I somehow have done something for music and for Zambia because I have groomed a lot of young people in music even though it hasn’t been easy. A lot of my peers from the 1970s and 1980s lost their lives to HIV and AIDS. It’s just by the grace of God that I am still alive and able to bless people with my music.”

