

# MAKANDAY

## weekly

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16TH - 22ND JANUARY 2026



ISSUE. NO 0021

## How Enforcement Failed Before the Sino-Metals Tailings Disaster

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### A K10 Drink, a K1,000 Fine, and a System That Looks Away

- Kachasu is illegal under Zambian law, unlicensed, untaxed, and widely recognised as dangerous. Yet in Kitwe's central business district, within sight of shops, markets and council offices, the illicit brew is being sold openly, disguised as energy drinks and soft beverages, and consumed by some of the city's most vulnerable residents.

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### Rains Lay Bare Years of Neglect on Chama's Strategic Roads



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# Rains Lay Bare Years of Neglect on Chama’s Strategic Roads

By Paul Ng’ambi | Kwenje FM | Chama district

The Chama–Lundazi and Chama–Matumbo roads in Chama district, eastern Zambia, have deteriorated to a critical state, with conditions worsening following the start of the rains.

Heavy rains have caused flooding in several sections, rendering parts of the roads impassable and leaving motorists, traders, patients and farmers stranded. What should be a vital transport corridor has instead become a daily struggle for the people who depend on it.

Roads are widely recognised as the backbone of economic and social development. They connect farmers to markets, children to schools, patients to hospitals and communities to economic opportunities. In Chama, however, poor road conditions have disrupted these connections, affecting livelihoods and undermining service delivery.

According to transport experts and government policy documents, inadequate road networks increase the cost of doing business, limit access to social services and slow down rural development.

The importance of the Chama–Lundazi and Chama–Matumbo corridor was formally acknowledged as far back as 2010 under the Link Zambia 8000 programme, when it was identified as a strategic national road.

In 2011, the government signed a US\$90 million contract with Shanghai Construction Group to rehabilitate the Lundazi–Chama section. The project was reaffirmed as a national priority in 2014. However, by 2021, parliamentary reports revealed that construction works had stalled due to financing challenges.

Subsequent expectations that international financing, including a US\$458 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) grant, would revive the corridor have not materialised, leaving the road largely unfinished to date.

Despite its strategic importance, the Chama–Lundazi and Chama–Matumbo roads have not seen full rehabilitation for decades.

The corridor links Chama, one of the most remote districts in Eastern Province, to Lundazi, Chipata and Chinsali in MUnchinga Province, and provides potential cross-border access to Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania.

Currently, only about 30 kilometres from Chama town have been upgraded to bituminous standard, while more than 120 kilometres remain in extremely poor condition. During the rainy season, vehicles frequently get stuck, travel times double, and essential services are disrupted.

Residents say the situation has reached crisis levels. Those from areas such as Dunda to the Muyombe turn-off report that the road becomes almost impassable during the rains. Some travellers say they fall sick after enduring long journeys over deep potholes and muddy sections. Beyond inconvenience, the road poses serious safety risks to motorists and other road users.

Transport operators and motorists are among the hardest hit. Noah Banda, a motorist who frequently uses the Chama–Lundazi road, says vehicle damage has become routine.

“The road is very bad, full of potholes. Almost every trip the vehicle gets damaged, and we end up, at the garage each time,” he said. “A journey that should take three hours now takes about five. Because of these costs, we are forced to increase charges.”

The poor state of the road has also affected the movement of goods and people, driving up the cost of living. Zacks Goma, a long-time Chama resident and businessman, says transport delays and high charges have stifled business growth. He explains that suppliers charge exorbitant fees due to the bad road, forcing traders to pass on the costs to consumers.

“Since independence, we do not even have a fuel station here because the road is bad,” he said. “Development starts with roads. During the rainy season, we are completely cut off. I hire trucks every month from Chipata to Chama at about K20,000.”

To recover that cost and still make a profit, commodity prices become very high

Goma notes that Chama has strong agricultural potential, producing crops such as rice and maize, and could benefit significantly from improved road connectivity. He adds that with better roads, the corridor could link to the Great North Road and the Nakonde border, increasing traffic and potential government revenue through tolling.

Farmers and traders echo similar concerns, saying poor roads lead to delays, spoilage of goods and missed markets. In some areas, such as Mwataluzi, trucks reportedly get stuck for days due to damaged bridges, forcing traders to hire manual labour at high cost and pushing prices further up for consumers.

The health sector has not been spared. At Chama District Hospital, Senior Resident Medical Officer said the poor road conditions delay drug deliveries and patient referrals. He explained that ambulances often take too long to transfer patients to Chipata for specialist health services, which hosts the provincial referral hospital.

“These delays worsen patients’ conditions, increase pain and discomfort, and in some cases lead to life-threatening complications,” he said, adding that delayed care can result in organ failure or even death.

Responsibility for national road infrastructure lies with the Ministry of Infrastructure, Housing and Urban Development, working through the Road Development Agency (RDA) and the National Road Fund Agency (NRFA).

In response to concerns over prolonged delays, Minister of Infrastructure, Charles Milupi said funding constraints have been the main challenge. He explained that the US\$458 million MCC grant was earmarked to rehabilitate roads linking agricultural production areas to markets, including the Chipata–Lundazi–Chasefu route, which had been prioritised. However, changes in United States government policy led to the cancellation of MCC and USAID programmes, forcing Zambia to reassess its financing strategy.

“At the moment, government resources are limited due to debt and economic pressures,” the minister said. “Public-private partnerships work where there is heavy traffic, but roads like Chama–Matumbo do not yet attract private investors. With the cancellation of the MCC funding, we have to look for alternative ways to finance these roads.”

At district level, officials say efforts are being made to manage the situation. A district works supervisor observed that Chama was placed under a programme intended to improve feeder roads, but implementation has been slow due to coordination challenges with RDA.



The main image was generated using artificial intelligence for illustrative purposes. It does not depict real individuals, locations, or events and is intended solely to visually represent the issues discussed in the story.

Rains Lay Bare Years of Neglect on Chama’s Strategic Roads Cont...

Meanwhile, Chama District Commissioner Yobe Goma said government has been carrying out periodic grading and gravelling from Lundazi to the Muyombe turn-off and plans to continue these temporary measures while searching for funds to upgrade the road to bituminous standard.	Members of Parliament for Chama North and Chama South have also	raised the matter in parliament, pushing for budget allocations and clear timelines. However, the roads were not included in the 2026 national budget, raising further concerns about when permanent works will begin.	Efforts to obtain clarification from project financiers and contractors have yielded mixed results.	Representatives of Shanghai Construction Group confirmed that their contract covered the Chipata–Lundazi and Lundazi–Chama sections under a concessional loan arrangement with the China Exim Bank. However, the company says the project did not commence because the financing agreement between the Zambian government and the lender did not take effect.	As the rains continue and communities remain cut off, residents of Chama are left asking the same questions: when will the Chama–Lundazi and Chama–Matumbo roads finally be rehabilitated, how will they be funded, and who will be held accountable for years of delays on a road that is central to the district’s development and survival?
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From page 1

A K10 Drink, a K1,000 Fine, and a System That Looks Away

By Mercy Mulenga | Kitwe

Despite clear laws banning its sale, deadly kachasu is traded in plain sight in Kitwe, protected by weak penalties, missing prosecution data and alleged tip-offs.

Kachasu is illegal under Zambian law, unlicensed, untaxed, and widely recognised as dangerous. Yet in Kitwe’s central business district, within sight of shops, markets and council offices, the illicit brew is being sold openly, disguised as energy drinks and soft beverages, and consumed by some of the city’s most vulnerable residents.	A MakanDay investigation has found that kachasu, often made from fermented maize husks and sugar, is thriving in plain sight despite existing laws that prohibit its production, sale, and consumption. Produced without quality control, the brew carries serious health risks, including methanol poisoning, rapid intoxication, permanent blindness, and death.	On-the-ground checks revealed a well-organised informal trade operating behind supermarkets, inside busy markets, and beneath braai stands. Traders conceal bottles in buckets and boxes, often masking the alcohol in familiar energy drink containers to evade detection. Buyers are warned to remain discreet, while sellers appear confident, some claiming advance knowledge of council inspections.	Despite repeated assurances from Kitwe City Council that enforcement operations are ongoing, the illicit trade continues largely unchecked.	Data on arrests and prosecutions requested by MakanDay remain unavailable weeks after a formal press query was submitted. The only publicly documented enforcement case this year resulted in a K1,000 fine imposed on a single trader, an amount traders say can be earned in one day.	As deaths linked to illicit alcohol continue to be reported elsewhere in the country, the situation unfolding in Kitwe raises urgent questions: Why does the trade persist so openly? Who is failing to enforce the law? And why do penalties appear too weak to deter a business that thrives on risk, secrecy and official inaction?	Acting on directions provided by multiple sources, a walk along a quiet road behind Pick n Pay in Kitwe town led to a man in his early forties, visibly intoxicated and holding a soft drink bottle filled with kachasu. Without hesitation, he pointed out one of the traders operating nearby, offering a glimpse into an illicit trade that continues largely unchecked in the heart of the city.	The trader, seated while selling fried sausages, locally known as “ilenda ilepya”, kept a bucket beside him containing bottles of kachasu disguised as energy drinks. The concealment allowed the illegal alcohol to be sold in plain sight, blending seamlessly into everyday informal trading activity.	Chisokone Market, Kitwe’s largest trading hub, has also emerged as a major hotspot for kachasu sales. Findings indicate that several vendors selling meat chops hide boxes beneath their braai stands, filled with bottles of varying sizes containing the illicit brew. The methods of concealment suggest an organised and adaptive trade, designed to evade routine inspections.	The practice of disguising kachasu in energy drink bottles is not new. According to Kitwe City Council, the local authority is aware of the tactic and maintains that operations to curb the vice are ongoing, according to Public Relations Officer Emmanuel Lupikisha. However, observations on the ground raise a critical question: why are traders operating so openly without consequence?	One cigarette vendor alleged that the kachasu trade is widespread and that sellers are well known in the markets, but arrests rarely occur. The vendor further claimed that some council workers are among the customers, an allegation that, if true, would point to serious conflict-of-interest concerns.	Another trader disclosed that kachasu sellers now operate with confidence, claiming they often receive tip-offs ahead of inspections. These advance warnings, the trader said,	allow sellers to temporarily hide their stock and resume business afterward, reinforcing a sense of protection and impunity.	Despite repeated assurances from the council about routine inspections, the illicit trade continues to thrive. A small bottle of kachasu sells for as little as K10, making it easily accessible to vulnerable consumers, particularly youths, while exposing deep cracks in enforcement and accountability.	Efforts to quantify enforcement outcomes have so far yielded little transparency.	Statistics on arrests and prosecutions linked to kachasu trading have not been made available to MakanDay, despite several weeks having passed since a press query was submitted to the council. The only response received is that the department responsible has not yet provided feedback.	The only publicly documented enforcement action last year occurred six months ago, when the council confiscated 175 bottles of suspected kachasu during a public health operation at Chisokone Market. The alcohol was seized from a single trader identified only as Mr. Chitako, who was issued an administrative fine of K1,000.
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## A K10 Drink, a K1,000 Fine, and a System That Looks Away Cont...

The penalty has raised concern, particularly when weighed against both the health risks posed by kachasu and the reported profits generated from the trade.

Several vendors told MukanDay that daily earnings from kachasu sales can reach at least K1,000, sometimes more, meaning the fine imposed could be recouped in a single day.

According to sources, the penalty was calculated solely based on the quantity of alcohol confiscated. Traders found with smaller quantities are often briefly detained and released upon payment of fines, but such cases are rarely publicised.

Unlike licenced liquor traders, kachasu sellers do not pay taxes or rent approved trading premises. Instead, they operate in undesignated locations and at unrestricted hours, in violation of Statutory Instrument No. 86 of 2021, issued under the Liquor Licensing Act No. 20 of 2011.

Yet, with no publicly available prosecution data, Chitako remains the only trader documented as having been arrested and fined since last year, highlighting significant gaps in enforcement.

As the persistence of the illicit trade points to regulatory weaknesses, a memo dated 18 December 2025, issued by Town Clerk Patrick Kambita, convened a meeting with bar and nightclub owners. The meeting focused on laws governing alcohol sales and concerns over unregulated activities during the rainy and festive season, which the council warned could increase the risk of disease transmission.

During the meeting, participants raised concerns about the early-morning operation of illegal drinking places, commonly referred to as shebeens or illegal drinking places, particularly in market areas.

**Responding, the Director of Public Health, Rodney Banda, said the local authority would work closely with other stakeholders, including the Zambia Police, to strengthen enforcement.**

However, traders in Kitwe told MukanDay that inspections are typically intensified only during festive periods. Contrary to council claims, they alleged that routine inspections often occur only after complaints are lodged.

Others attributed weak enforcement to limited manpower, saying the council struggles to monitor all markets effectively. The number of enforcement officers at Kitwe City Council has not been disclosed.

The situation in Kitwe reflects a broader national crisis. In early 2024, during the launch of the Coalition Against Alcohol in Lusaka, Vice President Mutale Nalumango said nearly 70 percent of alcohol produced in Zambia is illicit, citing a study by the Centre of Primary Care Research. Some of the alcohol, the study found, is made using toxic substances such as methylated spirits and industrial chemicals.

The deadly consequences are already evident. In September last year, seven people died and one was left permanently blind after consuming a lethal mixture of methylated spirit, sweetener, and water in areas bordering Chisamba and Kapiri Mposhi in Central Province. Central Province police commanding officer Charity Munganga described the incident as alarming and avoidable.

### **Public health experts warn the risks are severe**

Dr Quincy Mwabu, Executive Director of Medical for Quality Healthcare in Zambia, said illicit alcohol such as kachasu often contains methanol, which can cause sudden illness, blindness, organ failure, and death.

“No tradition or economic pressure can justify consuming substances that can kill within hours,” he said.

Meanwhile, the Zambia Compulsory Standards Agency says it does not regulate kachasu because it is illicit and unbranded. Its Communications and Public Relations Manager Brian Hatyoka warned the public that the safety of such brews cannot be guaranteed.

As deaths linked to illicit alcohol continue to surface, experts warn that without urgent, coordinated enforcement, particularly in high-risk informal and peri-urban markets, the toll on human life will persist.



*Photo Credit: The Demographic - Facebook Post*

# How Enforcement Failed Before the Sino-Metals Tailings Disaster

By Ennety Munshya

An independent assessment has confirmed long-held fears that the collapse of a copper waste dam at the Chinese-owned mine, Sino-Metals Leach Zambia Limited, caused significant environmental damage across parts of the Copperbelt, flooding fields and chemically burning crops.

On 18 February 2025, a section of tailings dam at Sino-Metals in Kalulushi collapsed, releasing acidic waste into the surrounding environment. The waste flowed into the Chambishi Stream, merged with the Mwambashi River, and continued downstream toward the Kafue River, one of Zambia’s most important water systems.

For communities along the river, the impact was immediate. Water supplies were disrupted. Fields were flooded and crops destroyed. Livelihoods built around farming, fishing, and livestock were thrown into uncertainty.

What followed was officially described as an environmental incident.

Months later, in September, the government commissioned Applied Science and Technology Associates to assess the environmental and socio-economic impact of the Sino Metals tailings dam failure.

The firm replaced Drizit, a South African company previously contracted by Sino-Metals before its engagement was terminated. At the signing ceremony, Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) Acting Director-General Karen Banda-Etondo stressed the urgency of the assessment, while consultant Chilekwa Kampeshi said the work would be guided by science.

According to the firm’s Environmental and Social Incident Impact Assessment (ESIIA) report, the disaster was not sudden, unavoidable, or purely technical. Instead, it was the product of long-standing failures in oversight and enforcement.

**Laws existed. Enforcement did not**

Zambia has no shortage of environmental and mining regulations. The Environmental Management Act, the Water Resources Management Act,

and mining regulations clearly place responsibility on state institutions to prevent pollution, monitor high-risk infrastructure, and protect public water sources.

According to the report, the Sino-Metals tailings dam failure occurred “within a context of adequate law on paper but weak implementation”.

Tailings storage facilities are among the most hazardous structures in mining. International best practice requires continuous monitoring, independent safety audits, emergency preparedness plans, and strong regulator oversight.

The report’s findings suggest these safeguards were either insufficient, poorly enforced, or inconsistently applied at Sino-Metals.

The result was predictable. Regulatory intervention came after the dam failed, not before warning signs were addressed.

**A spill that shocked the system — briefly**

The toxic waste released from the dam were highly acidic, with extreme chemical characteristics. In the short term, the spill caused sharp deterioration in water quality, leading to disruptions in municipal water supply and damage to ecosystems.

Emergency measures, including liming and operational suspension, helped stabilise water chemistry months later. The report acknowledges that by the time of later monitoring, some water quality indicators had returned closer to pre-incident levels.

But this recovery masks a deeper problem. Stabilisation was reactive, undertaken only after contamination had already occurred. The report makes clear that earlier enforcement, monitoring, and preparedness could have reduced or prevented the scale of damage altogether.

**Pollution that does not disappear with headlines**

While water quality showed signs of recovery, the report identifies persistent contamination in soils and river sediments, particularly in and around the Chambishi Stream.

According to the report, copper and cobalt levels in soils exceed international guideline limits. River sediments continue to act as reservoirs of pollution, capable of re-contaminating water during floods or high-flow events.

The report identifies a core contaminated area of approximately five square kilometres, marked by elevated heavy metals in soil and associated ecological and agricultural risks.

“A core area of approximately 5.35 km<sup>2</sup> exhibits elevated heavy metals in soil, with associated ecological impairment and agronomic risks.” — Environmental and Social Incident Impact Assessment.

This distinction matters. Water may look clean today, but contaminated soils and sediments ensure the legacy of pollution continues, silently and long after public attention fades.

**Communities left inside a danger zone**

The report identifies at least 158 people living within the mine’s pollution control zone, an area considered unsafe for permanent human settlement. Shallow wells in surrounding communities are deemed unsuitable for drinking. Farmers in high-impact areas face restrictions on land use unless remediation is carried out.

Yet enforcement has been inconsistent. Compensation for damaged crops was paid even to residents without legal tenure, according to the report. While intended as relief, the payments created an unintended incentive. Some farmers returned to contaminated land, increasing long-term exposure risks.

The report calls for urgent resettlement in line with national policy and international safeguards. The continued presence of families in polluted zones underscores how weak enforcement transfers environmental risk from companies and regulators to ordinary citizens.

**A problem bigger than one mine**

Perhaps the most damning finding is that the Sino-Metals spill is not an isolated case. The report shows that the Kafue River system is affected by cumulative pollution from multiple mining operations, past and present.

Numerous tailings dams, waste rock dumps, and industrial discharges contribute to declining water and soil quality. This means regulatory failure cannot be reduced to one company or one incident. It is systemic.

Sino-Metals did not expose a single weak link, it exposed a governance system that has struggled to regulate an entire mining corridor effectively.



# How Enforcement Failed Before the Sino-Metals Tailings Disaster

By Ennety Munshya

## Accountability after the emergency

The report invokes the polluter-pays principle, clearly stating that Sino-Metals must finance remediation, restoration, and long-term monitoring. It recommends stronger enforcement, inter-agency coordination, independent audits of tailings facilities, and early-warning systems for downstream communities and water utilities.

“Use the polluter pays principle and existing instruments (e.g. Environmental Protection Fund, Mines and Minerals (Environmental Protection Fund) Regulations) to ensure that Sino-Metals and other responsible parties finance agreed remediation and restoration measures.” — Environmental and Social Incident Impact Assessment.

What the report does not document are clear consequences proportionate to the damage already done. There is no public accounting, within the report, of penalties imposed, regulatory failures addressed, or officials held responsible for lapses in oversight.

Responsibility appears dispersed across agencies, a familiar pattern in environmental disasters, where diffusion of authority results in diffusion of accountability.

## Company response

In a statement issued following a public disclosure meeting convened by ZEMA on 6 January 2026, Sino-Metals said it takes the ESIIA findings and recommendations seriously and committed to continuing remedial and environmental management measures under regulatory guidance.

The company said it has maintained a proactive remediation programme since the incident and pledged to provide further updates as implementation progresses.

## From paper reform to real protection

The report reads less like a conclusion and more like a warning. It demonstrates that Zambia’s environmental crisis is not rooted in a lack of knowledge, science, or law. It is rooted in enforcement inertia.

Until regulators move from reaction to prevention, from post-disaster assessments to real-time oversight, similar incidents remain inevitable. The cost will continue to be borne by communities living near mines, farmers cultivating marginal land, and citizens who depend on shared water systems.

What remains unanswered is whether enforcement will finally follow — and who will answer for the years when it did not.

*Photo Credit | ZEMA Facebook page & Environmental and Social Incident Impact Assessment (ESIIA) report.*



## Comment

# Criticise the Facts—If You Can

One of our most-read stories this week came from Chama, written by one of our partners with guidance and editorial support from MakanDay. The story also attracted wide attention from political interest groups, who shared it across their social media pages and WhatsApp platforms.

Curiously, the loudest criticism had little to do with the substance of the reporting. Instead, some commentators took issue with our use of an AI-generated illustration, despite a clear disclaimer at the bottom of the story stating that the image was artificially generated and was for illustration purposes.

One critic accused us of laziness, arguing that we should have gone into the field to obtain a “proper” image. While we agree that original images are always prioritised, we are also transparent with our audiences.

When images are used strictly for illustration, we say so clearly.

The same critic then rushed to produce a short video purporting to show progress on the ground. That is her prerogative. The distinction between her approach and ours lies in process. At MakanDay, we do not simply line up voices and publish what they say. Every claim is checked, corroborated, and tested against evidence. That process can take days, weeks, and sometimes months.

Our journalism is not driven by speed, sentiment, or optics, but by facts. It is those facts, and only those facts, that determine whether a story is published.

We would have been far more concerned had our critics challenged the accuracy of what we reported. They did not.

Our investigation focused on the dire condition of two critical roads—the Chama—Lundazi and Chama—Matumbo corridors, not on Constituency Development Fund (CDF) allocations. We explained why these roads matter and what their neglect means for ordinary people.

When the rains fall in Chama, the roads disappear. Vehicles sink into mud. Trucks stall for days. Journeys meant to take three hours stretch to five or more, if they happen at all. Travel during the rainy season becomes a gamble, with the real risk of being stranded for days.

Transport costs are passed directly to consumers. Food, fuel, and basic commodities cost more, not because of scarcity, but because of impassable roads. Poverty is deepened by infrastructure failure.

Farmers miss markets. Produce spoils. Transporters avoid the area. Traders pay exorbitant fees just to survive. Potential investors stay away. Development is deferred, again and again.

For people in Chama, this is what being “connected” to the rest of the country looks like on paper, and what isolation looks like in practice.

Our stories speak for themselves. We owe no defence for doing our work carefully, transparently, and in the public interest. But for clarity’s sake, we have chosen to explain it this once.



# How you can forget yourself by looking at the man in the mirror

**Gospel singer Cleo talks to Hope Mkunte about dreams, forgetting words to his songs and how a sermon inspired his hit single Kalilole**

Cleo’s hit song Kalilole is accidental, it was not meant to be on a CD. When he recorded it, he was just experimenting to see what direction he should take with his music.

The song was inspired by a sermon. Cleo, a born-again Christian, was so touched by a pastor’s message that he turned it into a song. Its thumping beat and clever word play has made it a hit, almost a national anthem. Some people have named their pubs and barbershops after it.

**But who is Cleo and what is he talking about in Kalilole?**

Picture this. There is a young boy. His father is a farmer and his mother a businesswoman. He grows up singing in the choir, has dreams of becoming a police officer but instead becomes a singer -- he is shy boy torn between music and law enforcement.

That is Frank Cleovaster Shikwasha, aka Cleo, born in Kabwe, raised in Katuba, and now in Lusaka. He started singing in the Great Chronicles Choir at John Laing Baptist church in 1999 when the choir was formed, and has been involved in all the choir’s seven albums, including their latest offering, Amakwebo.

“When I started out, my brother told me that I was still young to join the choir, but I insisted till he gave me the chance and I won him over with my singing. I come from a musical family. Even my sisters all sing in the choir. Now that I am a solo artist, I miss the choir and they miss me too. But whenever I can I join them.”

In 2005 Cleo recorded his first professional song, Lekení Bane Ndande, at Big Beats studios where the once-famous Uncle Jah recorded his ground-breaking Gongga album.

Cleo put his career on hold because of school, but started recording again in 2008 at GOEME records. He had almost finished his debut album when the computer with all his music crashed, forcing him to go on a sabbatical until 2012, when his brother opened Jerminady studios where Kalilole was recorded. The studio has become a stable of gospel music, recording trendsetting artists like Kings Mumbi of the Malembe Malembe fame and song bird Karen.

Cleo says he is still shocked that his sermon-inspired Kalilole has become a hit

when he had other songs in mind he thought would catapult him into the limelight.

“Our Pastor was preaching in church about how a person can forget themselves if they don’t look in the mirror. When he was preaching he read from a Chewa Bible and the word Kalilole caught my attention. I started composing the chorus in my head as I was walking from church. The tune kept playing in my head and when I went to the studio I found my producer making a beat...I just sang on the beat he had already made and the song fitted perfectly,” he explains.

Like most Zambian hits Kalilole is a typical love song.

“In the song I am telling my woman that I will buy her a mirror so that she can see how beautiful she is. I had trouble coming up with the second verse because

I always feel like I have already spoken everything in verse one, but my producer helped me and told me to explain to the fans what a Kalilole is, and that’s how I was able to finish.”

Kalilole is also the name of his debut 17-track album, whose stand-out songs are Woman No Cry, Mapepe, Lobola and of course Kalilole, although Cleo says his favourite songs are Selina and Kalubango.

Despite Kalilole’s success, Cleo was not getting show bookings for shows. Then one day a DJ called him for an impromptu phone interview and asked him to sing Kalilole live on air. Cleo forgot the lyrics.

“Imagine! I didn’t know the lyrics to my own song... I only sang the chorus and a few lines. I usually don’t listen to my own songs and I listened to Kalilole just one time after it was recorded. I had forgotten about it.”

Asked about the state of Zambian music, especially the competition between gospel and secular music, Cleo lights up. “Gospel music sales are doing really well but secular music gets more shows,” he explains. “Secular music does not sell that much because people say, ‘Nikagula CD ya moba izashota’ (If I buy a CD, I won’t have enough to buy beer) so secular music fans prefer to go to a club and listen to the music there than buy an album.”

*The story was first published in the December/January 2014 edition of the Bulletin and Record Magazine.*

