

# MAKANDAY weekly

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✳ 20TH - 26TH FEBRUARY 2026 ✳

ISSUE. NO 0026

## Chinese Mining Company's Profits Rise as Zambia's Farmers Wait for Justice



**On the first anniversary of the Sino Metals pollution disaster, MakaanDay looks back at some of the stories we have covered**



- **How Enforcement Failed Before the Sino-Metals Tailings Disaster**
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# Chinese Mining Company's Profits Rise as Zambia's Farmers Wait for Justice

One year after the Chambishi tailings dam collapse, this investigation examines unresolved contamination, stalled relocation plans, and the growing contrast between corporate profits and community recovery.

By Linda Soko Tembo | *MakanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism*

A year after toxic waste from Sino Metals Leach Zambia's collapsed tailings dam destroyed farmland around Chambishi, the fields remain silent.

Where maize once grew, farmers say nothing can be planted. The Mwambashi Stream, once a source of water and livelihood, still carries the memory of contamination. And for more than 200 affected farmers, the future remains suspended in uncertainty.

In December, a government-commissioned assessment confirmed that while water conditions have improved, soil in affected areas still contains elevated heavy metals, threatening cultivation. It recommended the urgent relocation of residents living within the mine's pollution control zone. Months later, no relocation plan has been publicly communicated.

Victims are still waiting for relocation and describe the compensation received so far as woefully inadequate. Meanwhile, the parent company ultimately responsible for the dam has moved on, profitably.

According to its latest six-month financial report, the parent company of Sino Metals Leach Zambia Limited (SML), the state-controlled China Nonferrous Mining Corporation (CNMC), made after-tax profits of US\$371 million in the first half of 2025.

The same report also revealed that CNMC, which is listed on Hong Kong's stock exchange, had gone ahead with a decision to reward shareholders for its 2024 profits. Its US\$167 million dividend payout was the highest made by the company in at least six years.

CNMC's historic financial success contrasts starkly with unresolved environmental harm faced by affected communities.

## A spill that changed everything

When a tailings dam in Chambishi failed, it released acidic mining waste into the Mwambashi Stream and surrounding areas.

The stream feeds into the Kafue River, one of Zambia's most important water systems and a lifeline to thousands of residents downstream.

Tailings dams are meant to safely store mining waste, which can contain highly toxic chemical residues and heavy metals.

Sino Metals initially reported that 50,000 cubic meters of waste had been spilled. But last August, an independent assessment by pollution control company, Drizit Environmental (Pty) Ltd, estimated that up to 1.5 million tonnes of tailings were released—far exceeding the company's initial figure.

In the immediate aftermath, Drizit reported what it described as “dangerous levels” of cyanide, arsenic, copper, zinc, lead, chromium, cadmium, and other pollutants, which posed “significant long-term, health risks, including organ damage, birth defects and cancer.”

A government-commissioned Environmental and Social Incident Impact Assessment released in December found water quality had returned to normal, but identified a core contamination zone of approximately 5.35 square kilometres where soil remains impacted by elevated heavy metals.

The assessment recommended the urgent relocation of the residents living within the mine's pollution control zone, identifying 158 as “directly affected and vulnerable to displacement.”

While the report documented the damage, how much it will cost to clean up and relocate residents is still unclear.

What the company has paid—and what remains unclear

Earlier this month, the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment said the spill had moved into the clean-up phase, with ZEMA ordering Sino Metals to begin remediation and complete the work by June 2026.



*Land affected by the spillage linked to Sino Metals on 18 February last year shows limited vegetation growth during the current rainy season, with dry soil visible in the area.*

Under Zambia's environmental framework and polluter-pays principle, the company is responsible for funding environmental restoration and compensating victims affected by the spill—with government oversight.

In the months following the disaster, affected residents reportedly received individual payouts ranging from US\$17 to US\$2000—far below what they say is needed—and often only after signing agreements waiving future legal claims.

By last September, Sino Metals had paid nearly US\$600,000 to address environmental and livelihood damages, according to a report by Zambia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

The latest financial statement of CNMC, which owns Sino Metals, runs to the six months to 30 June last year—a time which covers the collapsed dam and the four months after it.

This 70-page report contains a small number of references to the disaster. A note on the penultimate page of the accounts describes the collapse as “an incident” and that SML “promptly initiated rescue

and containment efforts to manage the situation”.

“The Directors believe that this incident has been adequately provided for the six months ended 30 June 2025 and further provision is not made as an amount cannot be reliably estimated at this stage,” the contingent liability note stated.

Victims take issue with the amount that has thus far been paid, some taking the battle for compensation into their own hands: Over the past year, two class-actions suits have been filed against the company—collectively asking for \$420 million in damages, and tens of billions for a government-managed reparations and remediation fund.

While the company earlier responded to WhatsApp queries by referring relocation matters to the Office of the Vice President, it did not provide answers to the specific written questions submitted prior to publication.

Meanwhile farmers in Kalusale say they have not seen any clean-up begin and still do not know if or when relocation will happen.

**Dividends paid, displacement delayed**

While affected families wait for adequate compensation and relocation, shareholders have been reaping rewards.

Over the past five-and-a-half years, Sino Metals' parent company, CMNC, has earned more than US\$2.4 billion in after-tax profit. The company's most recent financial disclosure shows more than US\$1.48 billion in retained profits—underscoring the strength of its financial reserves.

Dividends paid out to shareholders have been similarly robust: Since 2019, the total amount of dividends have topped US\$600 million.

CNMC derives all its revenues from Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, though its accounts do not specify how much comes from each country.

The past two years annual accounts of Sino Metals, the mining company and CNMC subsidiary that owned the tailing dam, have not been disclosed.

But the company's 2023 financial statements show revenues totalling nearly US\$295 million in 2023 and 2022, and profits after tax totalling US\$37 million for the two years.

This represents a small percentage of its parent company's revenues and profits. Furthermore, Sino Metals' production of copper cathodes and blister copper fell dramatically “mainly due to the temporary suspension of production to focus on the appropriate rehabilitation measures,” CNMC's six month financials stated.

But there are other Zambian entities belonging to CNMC such as NFC Africa which contribute huge sums to its multi billion dollar revenues.

#### Farmers still waiting

For farmers still waiting to be relocated, the contrast is stark.

Kalusale area chairperson Bernard Njovu describes the compensation paid to farmers affected by the disasters as wholly inadequate.

“Looking at the figures which the company is making, personally as a farmer I think that compensation was just a scam because it was not real compensation,” he said. “It was like they were just giving money to help people cope with the situation while waiting for proper compensation.”

Njovu added that more must be done, particularly as Sino Metals—with government support—plans to relocate residents from the area. He said compensation should be properly handled during the relocation process and urged authorities to involve the community in planning compensation before people are moved.

Other farmers interviewed by MakanDay, who requested anonymity for fear of jeopardising potential compensation, say communication from both the company and government has been inadequate.

Several said they learned of plans to relocate them only through newspapers and social media.

“We are ready to move,” one farmer said. “We can no longer farm here. But no one has told us where we are going.”

Another said relocation appears stalled because alternative land has not yet been identified.

“I don't think government has found land to relocate more than 200 farmers,” he said.

The last major engagement, farmers recall, was a public meeting at Mukuba Secondary School, where the Environmental and Social Incident Impact Assessment report was presented. Since then, they say, there has been little follow-up.

Some farmers further allege that the company has continued operations in affected areas and is attempting to reduce the list of people eligible for compensation.

“If you live outside the area but have a caretaker on the farm, they would rather list the caretaker than you, the owner,” one farmer claimed.

#### A trail of deflected responsibility

When contacted, Sino Metals' Deputy Chief Executive Officer Sydney Chileya declined to provide a timeline for relocation.

“The issue of Kalusale is currently under the Resettlement Department under the Office of the Vice President,” Chileya said. “They are better placed to provide an update.”

Questions sent to the Office of the Vice President of Zambia produced confirmation, but no timeline.

Press aide Njenje Chizu said SML is working with the Permanent Secretary in charge of resettlement and that the government agrees relocation is necessary because residents are not safe in their current location.

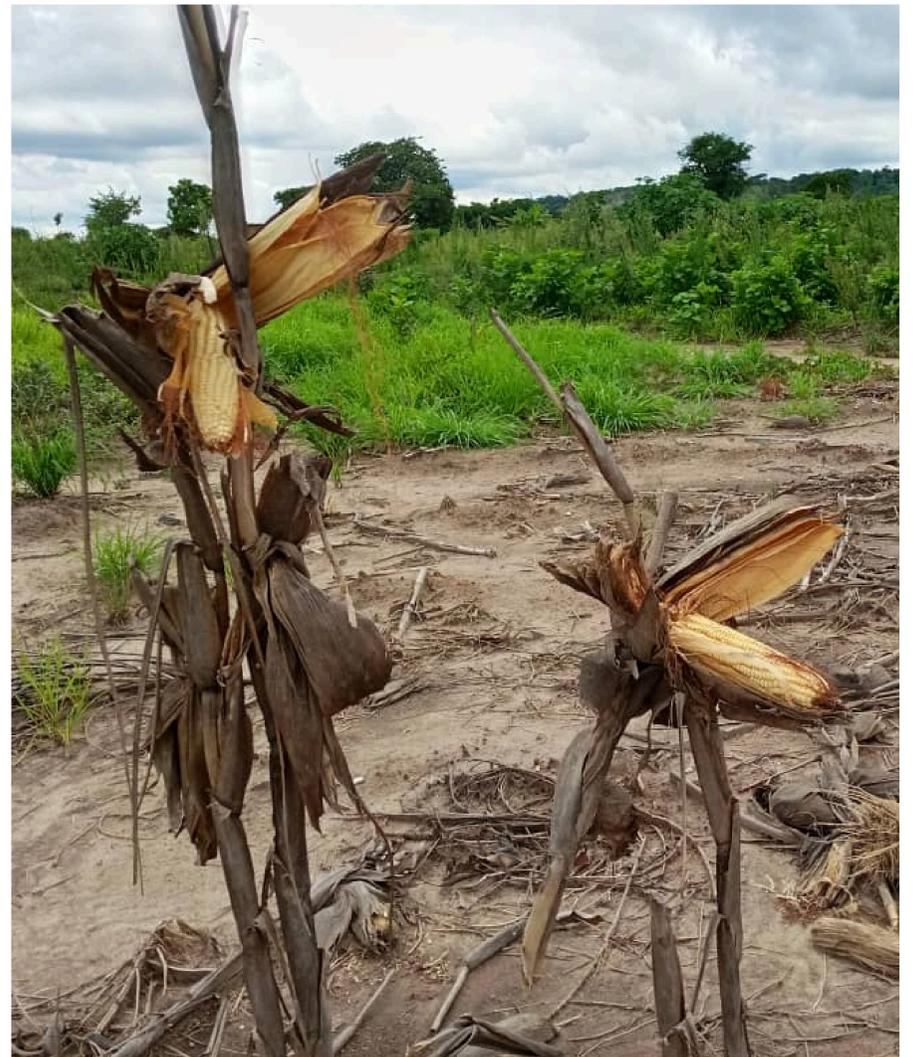
“The President and the Vice President have agreed that the people should be resettled by Sino-Metals and should be given land where they can continue with their activities,” Chizu said.

However, he also deferred details of progress to the Permanent Secretary responsible for resettlement.

Legal representatives for affected farmers say they are still waiting.

Mehluli Malisa, a lawyer at Malisa and Partners Legal Practitioners, said the matter remains before the courts and that they have not received further communication from the company.

*Finance Uncovered, a UK journalism organisation, contributed to this story.*



# \$250 Million Infinity Hills Project Launched in Zanzibar

ZANZIBAR, Tanzania — Infinity Developments has launched a \$250 million residential and mixed-use project in Zanzibar, marking one of the largest private real estate investments announced on the semi-autonomous Indian Ocean archipelago in recent years.

The project, known as Infinity Hills, will be located in Kikwajuni, near Stone Town, the historic heart of Zanzibar and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It will comprise 1,112 apartments, including studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom units — alongside retail and office space.

Zanzibar, part of the United Republic of Tanzania, has in recent years positioned itself as a fast-growing tourism and investment destination in East Africa. The property sector has expanded alongside rising visitor numbers and foreign buyer interest, particularly from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

## A Strategic Location in the Indian Ocean

Infinity Hills will be situated close to the coastline and within minutes of Stone Town's historic district, which is globally recognised for its Swahili architecture and cultural heritage. The development will also be near key social infrastructure, including GEMS Zanzibar International School, healthcare facilities, and public green spaces.

Company Chairman Samuel Saba described the project as a high-end residential community blending modern urban living with the island's coastal environment.

“With state-of-the-art finishes, premium amenities, and a strategic location, this project redefines luxury living in Zanzibar,” Saba said. “It brings me great pleasure to introduce Infinity Hills, a visionary residential community designed to offer a seamless blend of comfort, convenience, and modern elegance.”

Infinity Hills is located in Kikwajuni, close to Stone Town, part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and near one of the island's largest public parks and coastal areas.

The project also sits adjacent to major social infrastructure, including GEMS Zanzibar International School and nearby healthcare facilities.

“From inviting cafés and swimming pools to carefully designed spaces for relaxation and social interaction, every element reflects our commitment to quality, innovation, and long-term value,” the company said.

The development will feature a community swimming pool, landscaped gardens, kiosks, a café, and a children's play area. Residents will also benefit from proximity to the upcoming Infinity Hills Mall, which will include retail outlets, food and beverage establishments, and modern office spaces housed within a dedicated commercial block.

The company says the development offers foreign ownership eligibility and professionally managed rental services, positioning Infinity Hills as a high-yield investment opportunity driven by rising demand for quality housing in Zanzibar.

Infinity Hills also presents a strong investment opportunity, driven by rising demand for quality residential properties in Zanzibar. Key investment highlights include its prime location in Stone Town, access to one of the island's largest public parks, proximity to the beach, foreign ownership eligibility, and professionally managed rental services post-sale.

“Infinity Hills offers investors an opportunity to benefit from strong rental yields, long-term capital appreciation, and hassle-free rental management,” Saba said. “With state-of-the-art finishes, premium amenities, and a strategic location, this project redefines luxury living in Zanzibar.”

With regulatory approvals finalised, Infinity Developments said construction activities will commence in line with the project's phased development plan.

“Our team has worked with passion and dedication to bring this vision to life,” Saba. “I am confident that Infinity Hills will exceed expectations and set a new benchmark for residential living in Zanzibar.”

## About Infinity Developments

Infinity Developments is Zanzibar's leading real estate development company, dedicated to transforming iconic destinations into timeless experiences. Through a blend of architectural excellence, cultural preservation, and sustainable innovation, the company delivers projects that inspire, empower, and endure.



# 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 (ESIA) 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.

**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



## “I Could Have Been the First to Die,” Says Chambishi Resident

By Womba Kasela and Justina Matandiko

Jennifer Banduwell, a 63-year-old farmer, is among the victims of the recent tailings dam burst at Sino Metals Leach Zambia Limited, a Chinese-owned mining company in Chambishi, Kalulushi District. The disaster severely flooded her house with acidic effluent, rising to waist level, and destroyed her maize field.

Recalling the desperate moments, she described how she and her neighbour used blankets in a futile attempt to stop the water from completely flooding their homes. She said she could have been the first to die, unaware that the water engulfing her home was contaminated with acidic effluent.

On the day of the disaster, she was inspecting her maize field when she heard a roaring noise and rushed home, only to be engulfed by a wave of water. Despite struggling to stay on her feet, she barely made it inside as her children tried to save household items.

The next day, local officials warned affected families not to drink well water or eat food from their fields due to contamination. Banduwell and her family endured hunger and thirst until Sunday,

when mine representatives and local authorities provided limited relief — one 25kg bag of mealie meal, 2.5 litres of cooking oil, a pack of sachet water, and K500 cash. However, they were informed that this would be their only support until compensation arrangements were finalized.

Although a water bowser was allocated, Banduwell and her family are unable to access it due to road damage caused by the acidic effluent. They have been relying on sachet water for drinking and cooking and can only bathe using collected rainwater. Despite receiving another supply of sachet water on Tuesday, Banduwell remains frustrated as their food supply is destroyed, and they continue to face severe shortages.

“I could have been the first to die,” Banduwell recalls.

She isn’t alone. Over 200 farmers have been affected, leaving communities desperate for assistance.

Bernard Njobvu, another affected farmer, is struggling as compensation from Sino Metals has been delayed.

With no food and the K500 cash assistance already exhausted, he and his family are finding it difficult to survive.

“The compensation is taking too long, and we are suffering in the meantime,” Njobvu said. As a subsistence farmer, he relied on his harvest to support both his household and extended family. Now, his crops are destroyed, and his land is severely damaged by the acidic effluent.

“I farm to provide for my family and relatives, but now everything is gone. I don’t even know if I can farm again,” he added. Bernard hopes that the compensation will cover not just the loss of food, but also the damage to his land.

### Mine Pollution Disaster Linked to Delayed Government Action

A MakanDay investigation has established that the government ignored multiple warning signs before the environmental disaster at Sino Metals. The incident occurred on February 18 at around 14:00 when a tailings dam collapsed, releasing over 50 million litres of highly acidic effluent into the Mwambashi Stream, a tributary of the Kafue River.

While the full extent of the damage remains unclear, reports suggest that the pollution may have spread up to 200 kilometres, killing fish and other aquatic life.

Centre for Environmental Justice (CEJ) Executive Director Maggie Mwape stated that what was once a lifeline for thousands of people has now become a ticking time bomb, threatening public health, food security, and biodiversity.

In a statement, she noted that dead fish are floating on the riverbanks, livestock are falling ill, and communities are left without access to safe drinking water.

Nkana Water and Sanitation Company was forced to shut down water supply to Kitwe, Zambia’s second-largest city, for four days due to high levels of acidic contamination.

### Early Warning Signs Ignored by Authorities

The disaster could have been prevented. In 2016, Sino Metals was one of seven mining companies investigated by the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (Zema) for polluting the Kafue River. Subsequent government reports and ministerial inspections

highlighted the instability of the tailings dam, yet corrective action was delayed.

The other companies under investigation were Konkola Copper Mines (KCM), Mopani Copper Mines (MCM), Bolloré Mining, NFC Africa Mining PLC, Chambishi Copper Smelter, and Chambishi Metals.

Between 2022 and 2023, Sino Metals is alleged to have discharged acidic waste into the Lulamba stream in Chambishi, affecting farmers who depended on the water for irrigation.

Lulamba ward councillor Hastings Banda, who also serves as Kalulushi deputy mayor, confirmed that the pollution incident did occur. However, he was uncertain about the exact number of affected farmers, although he noted that the impact was significant.

Banda said that all affected farmers received compensation from the mine, based on the amount of crops they had planted. This compensation scheme was designed to ensure that farmers were fairly reimbursed for the damages caused by the pollution.

‘Everyone affected by the pollution was compensated based on their crop planting. Currently, the water in the Lulamba stream is safe,’ he said.

In 2023, the then-Minister of Green Economy and Environment, Collins Nzovu—currently Minister of Water Development and Sanitation—conducted an inspection of several mining operations in Kalulushi district, with Sino Metals being one of the mines visited during the tour.

According to a statement issued by the Ministry’s communications unit, concerns were raised about the stability of Sino Metals’ tailings dam during the minister’s inspection. The statement revealed that in July 2023, the company had reported a tailings dam wall failure to Zambia Environmental Management Agency (Zema). When the minister visited in October, it was found that the tailings dam had not been fully rehabilitated.

“During the site visit with the Honourable Minister, the tailings dam walls had not been rehabilitated fully and was prone to collapse,” the statement read in part.

“The water in the Lulamba stream was affected resulting in the colour change to blue. The pH was low (acidic at the time of inspection).

Some small-scale farmers growing vegetables on the banks of the Lulamba stream were affected,” the statement added.

MakanDay has also established that at the time of the incident, Sino Metals was still under a Compliance Order from Zema, issued on October 11, 2022. The order directed the company “to stop discharging acidic effluent into the aquatic environment and to fully comply with the conditions outlined in the Decision Letter”.

The Sino Metals pollution also led to the closure of Copperbelt University, the country’s second-largest higher learning institution, due to a lack of water supply. Other affected areas include Kalusale, a nearby community where the wells—the only source of water for some residents—have also been contaminated by acidic effluent.

MakanDay journalists, who were taken on a walk through some of the maize fields, observed thick waste on the ground, and in some areas, the water had turned black—a clear sign of chemical damage. At first glance, the maize cobs appeared healthy, but closer inspection of the roots and leaves revealed signs of acid exposure, including dried and withered foliage.

Further, they came across the remnants of a bridge that once connected key routes. Now, it was barely recognisable, as though it had never existed. The surrounding ground had taken on an unnatural greenish and bluish colour, a stark reminder of the toxic aftermath left behind by the mine’s pollution disaster

### **Government Response and Calls for Accountability**

Despite the widespread devastation, Copperbelt Minister Elisha Matambo praised the mine for its swift response but emphasized the urgent need for compensation.

During a media briefing on February 23, 2025, Matambo revealed that over 200 farmers across five districts—Mpongwe, Masaiti, Luanshya, Kalulushi, and Chambishi—were affected by the contamination. He expressed relief that no lives were lost and commended the mine for its quick action, but reiterated the necessity of compensating those impacted.

During the same briefing, Mines Minister Paul Kabuswe called for a review of the 2023 independent inspection

and stressed the need for stricter monitoring of the mine’s operations. He stated that the mine would not resume operations until all dams were inspected and corrective measures implemented to ensure public safety.

Kabuswe also questioned the reliability of the 2023 independent inspection, urging for enhanced security and ongoing monitoring of the dams.

Zema declined to comment, directing all inquiries to Nzovu, the Minister of Water Development and Sanitation, who announced the suspension of the mine’s operations.

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### **Comment**

## **One Year After the Sino Metals Disaster — Still Waiting for Justice**

One year on from the collapse of the Sino Metals Leach Zambia tailings dam near Chambishi, one of Zambia’s most serious environmental disasters in recent memory, the fields where families once planted maize remain eerily silent. What was once fertile farmland now lies fallow, the soil contaminated with heavy metals. For more than 200 farmers affected by the spill, the promise of recovery is still out of reach.

On 18 February 2025, toxic mining waste spilled from the failed containment dam into the Mwambashi Stream, a tributary of the Kafue River, a critical waterway on which tens of thousands of Zambians depend for irrigation, fishing, and daily water needs. In its immediate aftermath, the river appeared to “die overnight” as fish perished and water quality deteriorated.

Since then, government-commissioned assessments have acknowledged lingering contamination in soil and recommended relocation for those living within the core pollution zone, yet months later, relocation plans are stalled and communication with affected communities remains limited. Compensation payouts so far have been described by residents as woefully inadequate, and many have had to sign away rights to further claims simply to receive modest sums.

At the same time, the parent company ultimately responsible for the dam’s failure, China Nonferrous Metal Mining Corporation, recorded healthy profits and continued distributing dividends to shareholders. This contrast between corporate gain and

### **Sino Metals Apology and Continued Challenges**

Sino Metals issued a formal apology for the disaster, but the company’s actions have been criticised by environmental advocates, who point to poor management and negligence as the primary causes of the crisis.

CEJ’s Mwape condemned the lack of accountability among multinational mining companies, accusing them of prioritising profits over the welfare of local communities and the environment.

community loss underscores a broader challenge in Zambia’s extractive sector: who bears the cost of environmental harm?

The lack of meaningful progress on relocation, remediation, and equitable compensation raises troubling questions about accountability and enforcement. Civil society groups and affected farmers have pursued legal action seeking substantial damages and a formal restoration mechanism, but the journey toward justice remains long and uncertain.

This first anniversary should be a moment not just for remembrance, but for reflection and action. Zambia needs stronger regulatory oversight and a transparent process that centers the voices of those harmed, not buried technical reports or lukewarm corporate statements. Environmental laws on the books must translate into real protections on the ground.

Communities should not be left to rebuild alone, nor should the price of environmental ruin be treated as a cost of doing business. One year later, the land still waits for its children to return; Zambia’s leaders must act to ensure they can.



# How the English language was used to redefine local culture and voice the desire for change in the run up to Independence

By Walima T. Kalusa

In 1942, an amusing verbal exchange unfolded between Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia's future president, and the European district commissioner (DC) in Broken Hill, now Kabwe, in the Central Province.

Upon entering the DC's office to apply for a new travel document, Dr Kaunda, then a student at Munalu secondary school, said, "Good morning" to the colonial official. Irritated that his visitor did not refer to him as "sir" in his greeting, the DC instructed an African head clerk to tell Kaunda in Bemba that he should say, "Good morning, sir".

Throughout the conversation, the DC insisted on the clerk translating whatever he said to the school boy into Bemba. Interestingly, although Dr Kaunda himself spoke Bemba as his first language, he opted to speak in English throughout the conversation. In addressing the colonial agent in English, Kaunda hoped to demonstrate to him that the future nationalist was not "just an ordinary native."

Comical as this anecdote may be, it encapsulates the conflicting ways in which European rulers and their African subjects used English and literacy in colonial Zambia and beyond.

From the 1920s on, British rulers established schools in the colony to create a small class of Western educated Africans who would be imbued with European values and employed as teachers, nurses, office orderlies and clerks in the lower echelons of the colonial administration.

Efforts to educate a few Africans intensified after the outbreak of the Second World War, when colonisers and mine-owners sought to forge a small but contented African middle class to replace skilled Europeans miners mobilised for the war effort, or to fill vacancies in the expanding colonial administration. These privileged Africans were to be the bulwark against the rapidly gathering storm of African nationalism.

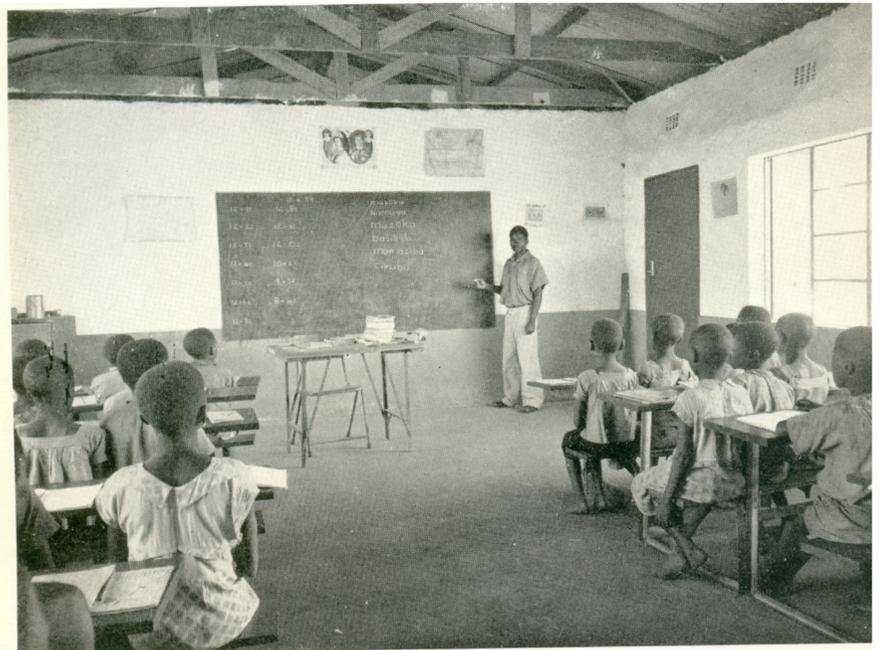
If the colonial authorities provided education to create educated African manpower and to checkmate African nationalist ambitions, European missionaries established schools for religious purposes. The first to

build schools in the colony, they were keen to spread the arts of reading and writing to enable Africans to read the Bible on their own. They also wanted to train literate catechists, teachers and medical personnel who would assist in manning mission bush schools, as well as health centres.

Even though European rulers and missionaries deployed education to pursue different goals, they were joined by their mutual belief in the value of the "civilising mission" to Africa. They all saw modern education as a transformative force by which they would bring light to the "Dark Continent," a euphemism for undermining African culture and supplanting it with Western culture with its values, norms and beliefs.

It is no surprise, then, that in spite of the conflicting agendas missionaries and successive colonial regimes attached to their education projects in imperial Zambia, they found it expedient to cooperate in the sphere of education. To this end, in 1924 the newly-formed colonial state in the protectorate initiated a system of grants-in-aid to missionary agencies engaged in the provision of African education.

Nowhere was this cooperation more evident than on the Zambian Copperbelt. As thousands of Africans - the vast majority of whom were children - converged in mine compounds and locations in the 1930s, they posed an administrative headache. Worried that African boys and girls would turn into delinquents, the colonial state urged Protestant missionaries to establish the United Missions to the Copperbelt (UMCB) in 1936. Through the UMCB, the state increasingly channelled grants toward missionary societies that established and ran schools on the Copperbelt for African children, and evening classes in English, knitting and cooking for adults. Besides receiving funds from the state, the UMCB also got fiscal support from the Rhodesia Selection Trust, the Anglo-American Corporation and the British South Africa Company, which continued to receive royalties from the mines even after it had relinquished political reins over the territory in 1923. Together, the mining giants contributed no less than £323,000 towards African education in 1960 alone.



Village school in the Gwembe Valley

The co-operation between these entities resulted in unprecedented expansion of education in colonial Zambia in the 1950s. Much of this expansion occurred mostly on the Copperbelt, where the level of education was also much higher than elsewhere in the colony. Territory-wide, the number of African secondary schools rose from only two in 1948 to 17 in 1958, the corresponding figures of students enrolled in the schools jumping from 198 to 1,890. By the latter date, there were ten teacher-training colleges with a total of 1,249 students, 220 of whom were females. These figures exclude students enrolled in the colony's trade schools and technical college. Nor do they reflect the growing numbers of African boys and girls at primary school level.

By all accounts, Africans responded to the provision of modern education enthusiastically. Missionaries proselytising on the Copperbelt after the 1930s, for example, reported that there was great keenness among both young and older Africans to learn English and to acquire literacy skills. Workers off-duty eagerly attended night classes, some of them reportedly insisting on continuing studying after half past nine and on Sundays, too. Similar enthusiasm was observed among younger learners. A missionary noted that there was a huge demand for books among them throughout the Copperbelt. Wherever he went in the mining area, he encountered boys who asked him to sell them books on subjects ranging from correspondence and arithmetic to hygiene and scriptures.

The evangelist noted that, in the absence of books, Africans resorted to reading catalogues, English adverts, or any scraps of paper with printed words on them.

By the 1950s, educated Africans were demanding higher colleges of learning, where they could study courses in technology, medicine and engineering. As tertiary education opportunities within the colony were very limited, some Africans were by that date seeking higher education in neighbouring colonies or overseas.

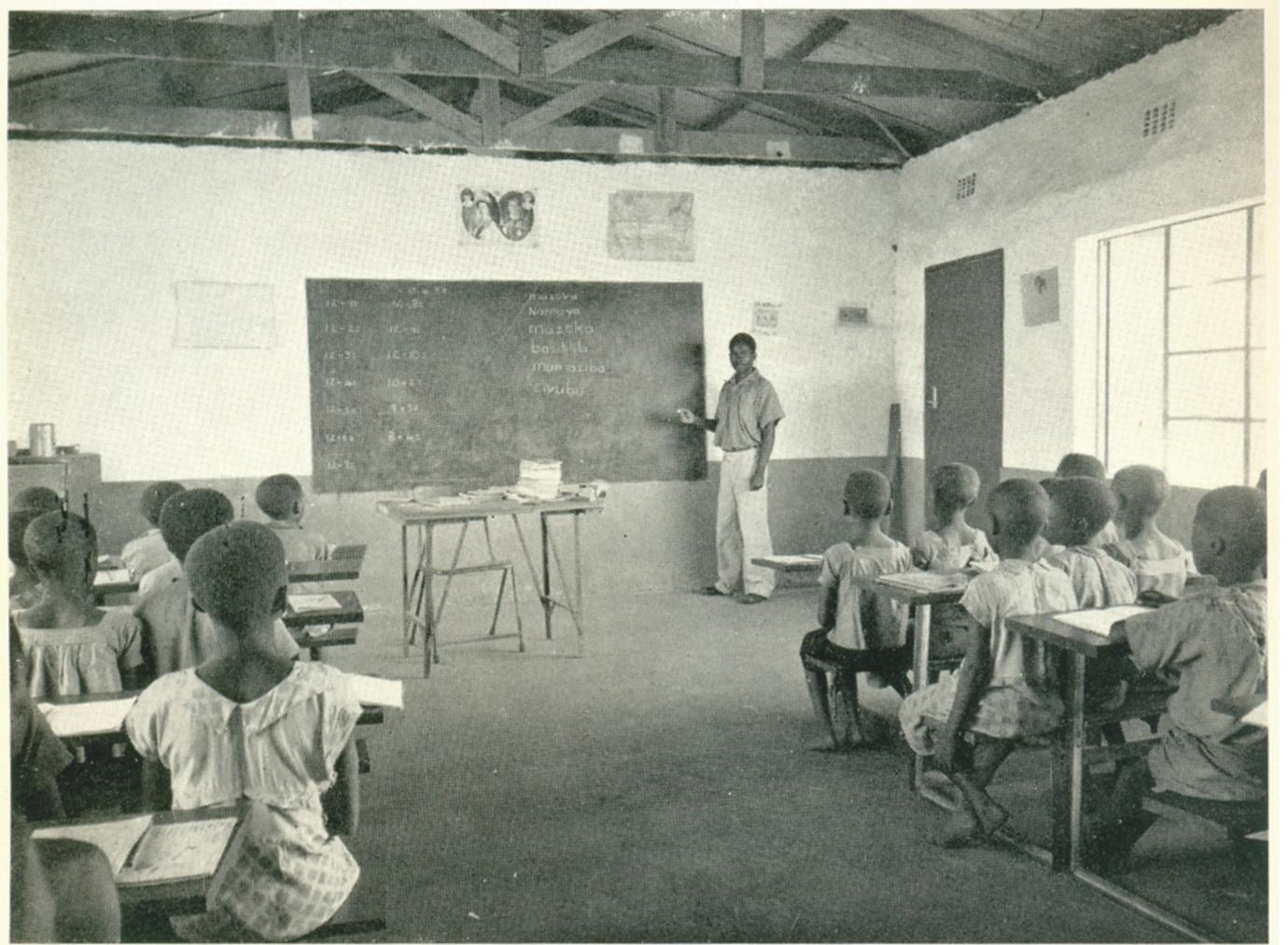
This demand for modern education by Africans is indicative of the value and uses they perceived in education. To them, Western education was more than a means for propagating the Gospel or training a subservient African middle class, as missionaries and colonial authorities envisaged, respectively. Africans saw the literacy skills and the English language they derived from modern education as entitlements by which they could not just secure white collar jobs in a European-dominated society but also make demands upon their colonial masters. By the outbreak of the Second World War, Africans were using their command of English to demand full citizenship within the British Empire. When such demands were rebuffed, they began to agitate for political independence.

This view was perhaps best expressed in 1957 by a young, articulate African teacher at a meeting attended by white missionaries at Mindolo, Kitwe. The teacher reminded the missionaries that educated Africans had waited for too long to be

admitted into the socio-economic mainstream of the colonial society. He lamented that although Africans had painstakingly acquired school certificates or even received university education in Britain or America, Europeans still refused to accept them as equals. The teacher warned that the patience of educated blacks had now run out; they would thus no longer beg for racial equality but demand freedom from alien rule. To colonial and mission school graduates, then, education entitled them to govern themselves.

But the graduates also deployed literacy skills and English in numerous other ways. Able to communicate in the language empire, they not only overcame linguistic barriers, they also provided leadership in such colonially-inspired institutions as the African Advisory Councils, and Regional and Provisional Councils, where English was the only medium of communication. From the 1950s onward, they also deployed their command of English to represent the African voice in the white-dominated Legislative Council and Federal Assembly. Everywhere in colonial Zambia, they formed and led such organisations as social clubs, welfare associations, trade unions, and nationalist parties whose membership transcended ethnic cleavages. And, in these ways, they provided alternative leadership to that of traditional rulers through whom colonial rulers governed their subjects in keeping with the tenets of indirect rule.

Beyond using skills and language acquired from Western education, the elites were not slow to deploy them to shape their own culture and identity. Anthropologists and colonial administrators working on the Copperbelt after the war observed that educated Africans interacted in socially exclusive circles in which their non-English speaking subalterns were not included. In the 1950s and 1960s, the elites further marked their social distance from illiterates by speaking impeccable English, wearing suits, driving cars, drinking imported beer and marrying spouses from different ethnicities. In sum, the educated turned English and literacy into a means for remaking their culture - often in ways that their colonisers and missionaries neither fathomed nor controlled.



31. Girls at drill at a mission school. Besides literacy and domestic science, girls also received some physical education.

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**This story was first published in the February 2013 edition of the Bulletin & Record Magazine.**