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## Zambia's "Peaceful" By-Election:

### • Fear, Violence and the Meaning of Silence in Kasama

By MakaanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism and Field Reporters in Kasama

**A** mayoral by-election in northern Zambia was officially recorded as peaceful.

But an on-the-ground investigation by MakaanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism suggests a more complex reality, one shaped by fear, political pressure and weak enforcement of electoral standards.

The election, held on January 29 in Kasama, the provincial capital of Northern Province, was won by Bywell Simposya of the ruling United Party for National Development (UPND), the party of President Hakainde Hichilema. It followed the death of Mayor Theresa Kolala in December 2025.

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## Three Agriculture Bills Promise Reform — But Can Zambia Finally Deliver?

By Linda Soko Tembo

Three major agriculture-related Bills currently before Parliament, the Food Reserve Bill, 2025, the Agricultural Marketing Bill, 2025, and the Agriculture Credit and Warehouse Receipts Bill, 2025, are being presented by policymakers and sector experts as the most ambitious overhaul of Zambia's agricultural legal framework in more than a decade.

Together, the proposed laws aim to restructure how food is stored, marketed, and financed in Zambia.

But while stakeholders say the reforms are long overdue, questions remain about whether new legislation alone can fix structural weaknesses that have persisted across successive administrations.

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## Mining Zambia's Carbon Forests

A newly approved mine by a Chinese-owned company has moved machinery into a forest area linked to a major REDD+ carbon project — raising alarm over land rights, livelihoods, wildlife, and Zambia's climate commitments.

By Womba Kasela

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# Zambia's "Peaceful" By-Election: Fear, Violence and the Meaning of Silence in Kasama

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While Zambia has in recent years positioned itself as a stabilising democratic force in Southern Africa, governance experts say the events surrounding this local vote raise broader questions about how "peaceful" elections are defined, and who decides.

## Silence as self-protection

Within days of arriving in Kasama, journalists encountered an unexpected obstacle: silence.

A senior church leader, widely regarded as a moral voice in the region, declined to comment on the by-election.

"I wasn't around when it was taking place, so I wouldn't know what transpired," he said.

Similar responses came from Senior Chief Mwamba and several residents across the town.

During our interview with Luka Kangwa Mandosa, the Senior Chief Mwamba, he chose to commend voters for what he described as the "peaceful manner" in which they conducted themselves during the election.

"I'm grateful that the election process went well, because what was important was to elect someone who should develop our area," he said. "There were allegations from some voters, but we cannot focus on those negative claims."

Further conversations with both residents and political figures often began openly, but quickly stalled.

## A violent undercurrent

The silence was finally broken when the journalists met Abel Lombe, a local resident known as Bashi Lombe.

He still bore stitches on his forehead, injuries he said he sustained during the campaign period.

Lombe alleged he was attacked by an organised group travelling in a convoy of new, unregistered vehicles, including Toyota Hilux pick-up vehicles, a detail he cited as evidence that the violence was coordinated rather than spontaneous.

He further explained that after the assault, the group forcibly took the vehicle and drove off with it as part of their extensively assembled convoy. The vehicle, he said, was later abandoned on the outskirts of Kasama before being recovered. It is currently parked at Kasama Police Station.

But authorities described the election as calm and orderly. Yet testimonies from residents and opposition actors suggest that episodes of intimidation punctuated the campaign.

While no widespread violence was officially recorded, gunshots were reportedly fired during the vote-counting process at the district's tally centre. That same night, at the same venue, two opposition vehicles allegedly had their windcreens smashed. No comprehensive public account of these incidents has been released.

## An unusual show of political force

What drew equal attention was not only alleged violence, but the scale of political presence.

During the campaign period, nearly ten cabinet ministers, alongside senior officials from State House and multiple district commissioners, travelled to Kasama.

In a country where municipal by-elections are typically low-profile affairs, the concentration of executive power in a single local race was striking.

Opposition candidates and local observers argued that this show of force created an uneven playing field, blurring the line between state resources and party campaigning. The ruling UPND has rejected accusations of misconduct and defended the presence of its officials as legitimate political mobilisation.

## Allegations of inducements

The investigation also uncovered allegations that local councillors from the opposition Patriotic Front were approached with financial incentives to switch allegiance or offer political support.

One councillor told MukanDay he received an initial cash payment of K5,000 (equivalent to

roughly USD 280), with additional promises contingent on the election outcome. Another said he declined a similar offer.

Allegations of inducements are difficult to independently verify, particularly as the alleged payments were made in cash and are strongly denied by ruling party officials. However, they have contributed to a broader perception among opposition actors that the political playing field during the by-election was neither neutral nor evenly administered.

Peter Chikweti Yuda is the Forum Democracy and Development losing candidate

An Anti-Voter Apathy (AVAP) representative, one of the few organisations that monitored the polls from the campaign period through to voting day, also raised a few concerns about the campaign environment.

AVAP Northern Province regional coordinator, Amos Muselema said the election was fairly good and that campaigns were largely peaceful, despite isolated incidents of alleged electoral malpractices that had been reported. He added that, overall, the election was peaceful because all political parties had been allowed to campaign.

"All in all, the election was peaceful ..., except for a few incidents that we observed were some political parties were seen taking hold of voters' cards of some voters, but generally speaking in almost all the polling stations, there was nothing like that," said Muselema.

Some residents also confirmed instances in which voter and national registration cards were allegedly collected in exchange for cash ahead of polling day. According to those accounts, individuals were paid K50 upon surrendering their voter and national registration cards, with an additional payment reportedly made when the documents were returned.

One voter from Chisanga area, a domestic worker in New Town, said she was among those who surrendered her documents under this arrangement.

She added that some individuals later collected their documents after polling day, meaning they had not cast their ballots.

But the ruling UPND rejected allegations of inducement and intimidation. The party's Northern Province chairperson, Nathan Ilunga, defended both the heavy presence of government officials including ministers and the conduct of its campaign.

In an interview with Radio Mano, he said party officials were merely collecting information from voters' cards in selected wards and comparing it with the details contained in the voter register.

## Weak enforcement, lingering questions

Police maintained a visible presence throughout the campaign period. However, several complaints raised by residents, including from Lombe, as well as opposition representatives, did not appear to result in any publicly documented investigations. The police presence seemed focused more on maintaining surface order than enforcing the law, and even that order was not consistently upheld.

The Northern Province Police Command referred all questions regarding its conduct, including allegations of professional misconduct and lack of impartiality, to its headquarters in Lusaka.

Police spokesperson Godfrey Chilabi said the Service would respond "once I have the full report from Kasama," but no response had been received by the time of publication.

The Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ), which administered the vote, announced the final results without publicly detailing how reported irregularities were assessed or addressed.

In a response to MukanDay, the Commission said the query was shared with its legal team, which handles conflict management, and that a response would be issued once they reverted. No response had been received by the time of publication.

## The broader stakes

Zambia has often been cited as one of Southern Africa's more resilient democracies, particularly after the 2021 general election marked a peaceful transfer of power.

However, experts say that by-elections, though localised, can serve as important stress tests for institutional neutrality. They offer insight into how security forces operate under pressure, how the advantages of incumbency are exercised, and how secure citizens feel in expressing their political preferences.

## Three Agriculture Bills Promise Reform — But Can Zambia Finally Deliver?

From page 1

### A sector long defined by production — not profit

For decades, Zambia's agricultural debate has revolved around a single seasonal headline: how much maize was produced.

Yet bumper harvests have not translated into stable incomes for farmers. Small-scale producers continue to grapple with volatile prices, delayed payments from state agencies, limited access to affordable credit, high post-harvest losses, and persistent policy unpredictability, structural challenges that undermine productivity, planning, and long-term sustainability.

Agriculture employs a majority of Zambia's rural population. However, formal lending to the sector has declined in recent years, and market systems remain fragmented.

The three Bills now before parliament seek to intervene at each of those weak points.

### Refocusing the FRA: Food security or market distortion?

At the centre of the reforms is the Food Reserve Bill, 2025, which seeks to redefine the role of the Food Reserve Agency (FRA).

Historically, the FRA has played a dual role, maintaining strategic food reserves while also acting as a dominant maize buyer. Critics argue this has distorted markets, strained public finances, and delayed payments to farmers.

The proposed law attempts to separate strategic food security functions from routine trading activities. It introduces clearer pricing mechanisms tied to market rates and

establishes guidelines for stock rotation and emergency releases.

According to the Bill's memorandum, the objective is to maintain sufficient reserves to respond to emergencies and market shocks while improving cost efficiency and transparency.

However, analysts note that previous reforms to FRA operations have struggled due to political pressure during election cycles, fiscal constraints, and administrative inefficiencies.

The key question is not whether FRA needs reform, it is whether parliament and the treasury will enforce the new rules when political pressures intensify.

### Fixing fragmented markets — or adding regulation?

The Agricultural Marketing Bill, 2025 proposes the creation of a Zambia Agricultural Marketing Council and a Market Observatory Unit to collect and disseminate market data.

In many rural districts, farmers negotiate prices without reliable access to market information. Informal middlemen often dominate the system.

Professor Frank Kayula, President of the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Zambia, says mandatory registration of grain traders could protect farmers.

"If you don't register, you don't participate in the market," he said, describing the move as a way to eliminate "briefcase traders" who dictate prices without accountability.

The Bill promises advance publication and consultation before market interventions — an attempt to improve predictability.

But some private-sector actors are quietly asking whether new licensing requirements could increase compliance costs or introduce bureaucratic bottlenecks.

Whether the council becomes a facilitative body or a regulatory burden will depend heavily on its design and enforcement.

### The Financing Gap: Can Warehouse Receipts Unlock Credit?

Access to finance remains one of the sector's most persistent barriers.

The Agriculture Credit and Warehouse Receipts Bill, 2025 introduces a legal framework allowing certified warehouse receipts to serve as collateral for loans.

Under the proposed electronic warehouse receipt system, stored commodities would be digitally recorded, improving transparency and lender confidence.

Lance Simwanza, Managing Director of Kudu Consultancy, cites financing data that illustrates the urgency of reform.

"In 2019, 16.4 percent of the agricultural loan book went to agriculture. By 2023, this had dropped to 9.3 percent," he said, referencing a study conducted for the World Bank. "In 2021, 97.3 percent of agricultural financing went to large-scale farmers, with only 2.7 percent reaching small and medium-scale farmers."

If implemented effectively, the warehouse system would allow farmers to avoid distress sales at harvest and instead access working capital while waiting for better market prices.

However, Zambia has attempted commodity exchange and structured trading reforms before, with mixed success.

Infrastructure gaps, storage capacity limitations, and enforcement weaknesses remain serious constraints. Experts say legislation can create a framework. It cannot build warehouses or guarantee discipline in settlement systems.

### Reform is not implementation

At a recent knowledge and information sharing session hosted by the Indaba Agricultural Policy Research Institute (IAPRI), Executive Director Brian Mulenga described the three Bills as a coordinated "full-system reform".

The ambition is clear: create a more predictable, transparent agricultural system capable of improving food security, stabilising markets, and expanding financing.

However, experts caution that Zambia's reform history is replete with well-crafted policies that ultimately faltered at the implementation stage. They warn that similar efforts could be undermined by inadequate funding, political interference, overlapping institutional mandates, weak enforcement mechanisms, and the fiscal pressures that often accompany election cycles.

Institutions such as the Zambia Agricultural Commodity Exchange (ZAMACE) have emphasised that certified storage infrastructure, strong oversight, and disciplined settlements will be crucial.

Without adequate financing and administrative capacity, the reforms risk remaining legislative intent rather than economic transformation.

### Parliament's test

As parliament debates the three Bills, the reforms represent more than technical legal adjustments.

They challenge long-standing practices around food reserves, maize marketing, and credit allocation.

If enacted and implemented with fiscal discipline and transparency, they could stabilise farmer incomes, reduce distortions, and expand smallholder access to finance.

But if enforcement falters, or if institutional mandates again blur under political pressure, the agricultural system may continue to struggle despite new laws.

Zambia's agricultural question is no longer simply about production volumes.

It is about whether the country can move from policy ambition to accountable execution. The Bills promise reform, but implementation will determine whether that promise holds.



# Mining Zambia's Carbon Forests

From page 1

## A quiet invasion at dawn

At sunrise, the hills of the Muchinga Escarpment echo with the groaning of heavy machinery — drowning out the birdsong and elephant calls that once defined the Chiawa Game Management Area (GMA). Behind a newly erected wire fence, trees lie uprooted, heaps of earth rise like new hills, and a processing plant takes shape where wildlife once roamed freely.

This is the emerging footprint of Deco Luck Investments Limited, a little-known mining company that has quietly set up operations in one of Zambia's most ecologically sensitive landscapes. Its presence has triggered outrage among residents, conservationists, and tourism operators, who fear the mine could permanently scar the ecosystem and undermine local incomes.

## A project shrouded in secrecy

### How a new mine appeared — almost unnoticed

The mine is located in Kafue district, and is expected to begin full operations before the end of the year. It follows the controversial footsteps of Mwembeshi Resources, whose plan to mine inside the Lower Zambezi National Park was halted after massive public outcry. But where Mwembeshi failed, Deco Luck appears to have slipped through the cracks of oversight and community scrutiny.

Documents reviewed by MakaanDay reveal that the exploration licence was originally issued to Sino Mine Resource Geological Engineering Company Limited.

The licence was later transferred in 2022 to Deco Luck Investments, a company whose PACRA records show directors Cao Chujun and Sun Lei, with Sun Deli listed as shareholder, all Chinese nationals.

However, a critical timeline discrepancy raises questions about legality and procedure. A press query was sent to the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Mines and Mineral Development, Dr Hapenga Kabeta, but several follow-up attempts went unanswered. When he eventually responded a week later,

he indicated that the ministry's principal public relations officer, Shamwinda Tembo, would handle the query. To date, no response has been provided.

Deco Luck was incorporated on 13 September 2022.

Yet a mining licence transfer agreement between Sino Mine and Deco Luck—obtained from the ZEMA website, shows the transfer was approved months earlier, on 08 June 2022, valued at K2 million.

This means the licence was transferred to a company that did not yet legally exist, a red flag under the Mines and Minerals Development Act.

## ZEMA approval and a royal signature — but no community voice

In September 2024, ZEMA approved Deco Luck's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), on condition that the company obtain consent from the local royal establishment before commencing operations.

By late 2024, the Chiyaba Royal Establishment issued a letter confirming its approval.

“With the authority bestowed upon me as head of the chiefdom, I hereby certify and confirm that Deco Luck Investments Limited has been granted the rights for the exploration of minerals in Chiyaba Chiefdom,” read the signed document,” reads the letter.

But behind this official green light lies a story of silence, confusion, and deep community division.

A source within the royal establishment contradicted the public position, saying the decision was made without community consultation.

“The community was never consulted,” said a source from the royal establishment. “The same land allocated for mining had earlier been designated for community forest management under the REDD+ carbon reduction project by BioCarbon Partners (BCP) in 2022.”

REDD+, which stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, plus conservation, sustainable forest management and enhancement of forest carbon stocks, is a UN-



backed framework that allows forests to be protected and managed to reduce carbon emissions, often generating carbon credits while restricting destructive land uses such as mining.

## The REDD+ contradiction: forest protection vs mining expansion

The contested land overlaps with areas designated under the Luangwa Community Forests Project, one of Africa's largest REDD+ programmes, covering 2.1 million hectares, with Chiawa contributing over 68,200 hectares.

REDD+ zones are meant to protect forests from degradation and extractive threats such as commercial mining.

These initiatives form part of Zambia's climate commitments under the UNFCCC, meaning the country has pledged internationally to protect forests and reduce emissions as part of its response to climate change.

UNFCCC stands for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

It is an international treaty adopted in 1992 that provides the global framework through which countries commit to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, protect ecosystems, and adapt to climate change.

Because Zambia's forest protection and emission-reduction commitments fall under the UNFCCC, decisions that permit mining or deforestation in designated areas raise questions about compliance with both national law and international climate obligations.

BCP Project Coordinator, Solomon Kazadi, declined to comment on land allocations, directing questions to the Community Forest Management Group and the royal establishment.

However, he emphasised: “REDD+ zones are legally protected through Community Forest Management Partnership Agreements and Form four submissions, which record community consent, forest boundaries, and prohibited activities such as commercial mining. These safeguards enable communities to challenge any incompatible land use that threatens their forests or carbon rights.”

This suggests that if mining overlaps with REDD+ zones, there may be grounds for a legal challenge.

## Tourism or tailings? A region torn between two futures

Chiawa lies at the heart of the Lower Zambezi ecosystem — home to elephants, lions, leopards, and hundreds of bird species. Tourism brings in steady revenue and supports community projects.

But mining brings short-term jobs and long-term scars.

A conservation source warned.

“Mining may create short-term jobs, but tourism has no lifespan. Once the minerals are gone, the company will leave, and the damage cannot be undone.”

Experts also warn that noise and blasting could drive wildlife into villages, worsening already tense human-wildlife conflict.

## Promises broken: local people feel betrayed

## “We Protect the Forest, Others Sell the Carbon” Cont...

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

In Kanyangala village, farmer Musifu Kakumbo recalls joining mine setup work in search of better income. Instead, he earned K50 per day, received no meals, and was frequently replaced.

“They keep removing people,” he said. “You work for a few weeks, and then they replace you. I have eight children, K50 a day was not enough and I have since gone back to farming.”

Other residents echo similar frustrations, outsiders are being prioritised for work, despite promises that locals would be first in line.

Chitende Ward Councillor Paul Kajiye confirmed receiving several complaints.

“They were told the mine would bring jobs, but that hasn’t happened,” Kajiye said. “People are angry and feel used.”

A senior headman, however, defended the approval, saying the community felt neglected by wildlife authorities and hoped the mine would bring long-overdue benefits.

“When animals attack us, ZAWA (wildlife authority) says there’s no fuel. We thought the mine would help us, they even promised to buy vehicles for our headmen. We’re still waiting.”

When asked whether the land allocated to the mine was part of the BCP project, he denied stating that the land for the REDD+ project remains intact and is not the land where the mine is set to begin operations.

### Company defends itself; environmental risks remain

Deco Luck’s Human Resource Manager, Kennedy Mubanga, dismissed allegations of exploitation or any wrongdoing.

“Those claims are false,” he said. “We have employed locals and are fully compliant with government regulations. The people spreading lies are former subcontractors who no longer work with us.”

Environmental activist Richard Kakuwa argues otherwise, warning that mining “robs animals of their very existence”

and that pollutants can linger for decades, contaminating water systems and affecting human health.

He further notes, “despite EIAs, the damage continues because many companies do not follow the guidelines along the way”.

### The unanswered question: who protects Chiawa’s forests?

As bulldozers keep carving into the escarpment, Chiawa sits at a crossroads, between economic desperation and ecological collapse.

“We believe we will benefit from the mines and not tourism,” said the senior headman.

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

with payments reportedly made before and after polling day.

The ECZ confirmed that it had received reports of these allegations from the opposition Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD) in a statement responding to Radio Mano in Kasama.

However, while acknowledging receipt of complaints, the Commission announced final results without publicly detailing how the allegations were assessed or resolved.

Opposition councillors also claimed inducements were offered to influence political alignment.

Many of these allegations are disputed, and some are difficult to independently verify.

The ruling party has rejected claims of wrongdoing, and monitoring groups described the election as largely peaceful despite isolated incidents.

Still, the central concern extends beyond the claims themselves. It lies in the absence of transparent follow-up.

The police maintained a visible presence but referred substantive questions to higher headquarters. No comprehensive public account of reported incidents was released. When complaints are acknowledged but not clearly addressed, public confidence can erode.

The scale of political mobilisation also drew attention. Nearly ten cabinet ministers and multiple senior officials reportedly campaigned in what is usually a low-profile municipal race.

While such activity may be legal, it carries symbolic implications. In young democracies, the line between party and state must not only exist in law but be seen in practice. Even perceptions of imbalance can weaken trust.



By-elections serve as useful stress tests. With less national and international scrutiny, they reveal how institutions function under limited oversight. They show how law enforcement responds to local complaints, how electoral bodies handle disputes, and how secure citizens feel in expressing political choices.

Zambia’s democratic progress remains meaningful. The country is not in crisis.

But democratic erosion rarely begins dramatically. It often starts with normalisation, of unanswered allegations, muted civic voices, and accountability gaps.

There is a clear difference between an election without widespread violence and an election without fear. The former may satisfy technical definitions of peace; the latter reflects the deeper strength of democracy.

If “peaceful” is to retain its meaning, it must signify more than calm streets. It must include transparency, accountability, and citizen confidence

Kasama may not signal collapse, but it offers a reminder that democratic resilience requires constant renewal, even in elections that seem small.

## Opinion | When “Peaceful” Is Not Enough

From page 1

Zambia takes pride in the word peaceful when describing its elections. Since the 2021 transfer of power that brought President Hakainde Hichilema to office, the country has been widely praised as one of Southern Africa’s more stable democracies.

But the January 29 mayoral by-election in Kasama prompts a more searching question: what do we actually mean when we call an election peaceful?

On paper, the process appeared orderly. The United Party for National Development (UPND) won the seat. The Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) announced the results. Authorities recorded no major violent outbreaks. Officially, calm prevailed.

Yet reporting on the ground revealed a more complicated reality.

What stood out in Kasama was not chaos, but silence. Community leaders and residents were hesitant to speak openly about the campaign period.

Interviews often began candidly but quickly shifted into caution. Civic and church leaders stressed harmony and development, while avoiding direct engagement with allegations of intimidation or misconduct.

In politically sensitive environments, silence can function as self-preservation.

When citizens are uncertain about the consequences of speaking freely, democratic space can narrow, not through overt repression, but through atmosphere and perception.

Several concerning claims surfaced during the investigation. A local resident alleged he was assaulted during the campaign.

There were reports of gunshots near the tally centre on counting night and of opposition vehicles being damaged.

Some voters alleged that they surrendered their voter and national registration cards in exchange for cash,

# Exorcising Sanguni

How management at Roan Antelope Mine used local customs and beliefs to try to help workers overcome their fear of a many-headed mystical snake

By Walima T. Kalusa

As people who perceived themselves as harbingers of civilisation to the “Dark Continent,” Europeans in imperial Africa routinely denigrated local institutions and beliefs as primitive. It is now well known, however, that, despite such rhetoric, they were not slow to appropriate some African institutions, ideologies and practices in order to govern their colonial subjects.

In keeping with the tenets of indirect rule, colonisers in British Africa, for example, pressed chiefly institutions into their service and came to rely on them to collect taxes, to maintain law and order, and/or to mobilise African labour for constructing such public projects as roads, bridges, clinics or schools. To this end, colonisers unsurprisingly did little to undermine local institutions and the authority of African traditional authorities through whom they ruled. In so doing, they reinforced rather than weakened chiefly institutions, power, prestige and status, at least in the eyes of their black subjects.

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.

If European rulers in Africa were keen to govern through indigenous institutions and beliefs, so were colonial capitalist companies, who deployed African belief systems and practices to mobilise and to retain African labour. This observation is all the more true for the Rhodesia Selection Trust (RST), which opened the Roan Antelope Mine in Luanshya on the Zambian Copperbelt in the 1920s.

From its onset, the company faced persistent labour shortages that threatened to cripple the mine. At the centre of the early labour doldrums of the mine was the reluctance of African miners to work there due to its extremely high mortality and morbidity rates among both Africans and European workers alike. Mine archives suggest in the first decade of the mine, tropical diseases notably malaria, blackwater fever,

typhoid and dysentery exacted a heavy toll on the lives of the workers, malaria alone reportedly afflicting one in every five workers daily.

What exacerbated the shortage of labour at the Roan Antelope in the early days was the widespread belief in the black mining community that deaths at Roan Antelope Mine were caused by Sanguni, a mystical snake held to dwell in the Luanshya River. According to this legend, Sanguni, believed to be a many-headed reptile, mysteriously afflicted its victims as they forded the river. The snake, whose colour, capriciousness and ways of attacking or killing its victims seem to have been told and retold according to each narrator’s imagination, soon earned for the mine an evil reputation that spread rapidly across the entire colony and beyond. By the end of the 1920s, this reputation had reached even the remotest village in the territory.

In popular imagination, the Roan Antelope Mine came to be perceived as haunted by the deadly spirit of the snake. In fear of Sanguni, most Africans shunned or avoided the mine, evidently preferring to work at other wage employment centres elsewhere in southern Africa, with better health records. Thus, for the most part of the 1920s, the efforts of the officials of the Northern Rhodesia Native Labour Association who locally recruited African labour for the RST proved largely in vain. The officials tried to overcome this obstacle by not disclosing the name of the mine to their recruits. But when the recruits found out what their final destination was, they deserted in huge numbers

This problem was compounded by the fact that African labourers working on the mine equally deserted in big numbers on account of the numerous deaths attributed to Sanguni. This caused such critical labour shortages that mining operations at the Roan Antelope Mine sometimes came to a complete standstill.

As Frank Spearpoint, the mine’s first Compound Manager observed, the belief that the mine in Luanshya was haunted by Sanguni posed the most serious obstacle the mine management had to deal with in the early days.

The Compound Manager was candid enough to admit that the management believed that this challenge could not be overcome through any “ordinary means”. Confronted with the labour crisis attributed to Sanguni, the management came to believe that only an African solution could dispel the myth.

To this end, in the early 1930s, D.D. Irwin, Roan Antelope Mine’s first general manager, turned for help to John E. Stephenson, an old British colonial hand well versed in local religious beliefs and associated rituals. Chirupula, as Stephenson was known on the Copperbelt, where he had earlier established the first Boma (district administrative headquarter) in the area under the British South Africa Company and had married several Lamba princesses, recommended the exorcising of Sanguni from the Luanshya River.

With the fiscal backing of the mine management, Chirupula Stephenson invited a team of Lamba diviners to perform appropriate rituals to drive Sanguni from the river. In return for blankets and money paid by the management, the diviners built a sacred hut close to the Luanshya River. There, they carried out elaborate rituals witnessed by representatives of all African ethnic groups working on the mine. Apart from sacrificing to their ancestors a white cock and an ox, the Lamba diviners also ate a ritual meal and drank large quantities of beer - all paid for by RST. Throughout these ordeals, the ritual specialists implored their ancestors to remove the mysterious snake from the river.

But the exorcism failed to allay the fears of Sanguni among African miners at Roan Antelope Mine. A few days after the rituals, tribal elders who had represented Bemba-speaking miners at the ceremonies told the Compound Manager at Roan Mine that ancestors of the Lamba could not intercede for Bemba miners, for the two ethnic groups may have fought each other in the past! And, for many years, the myth of Sanguni was also reinforced by successive generations of European miners who ridiculed African workers for believing in Sanguni and unwittingly embellished the legend with their own trimmings.

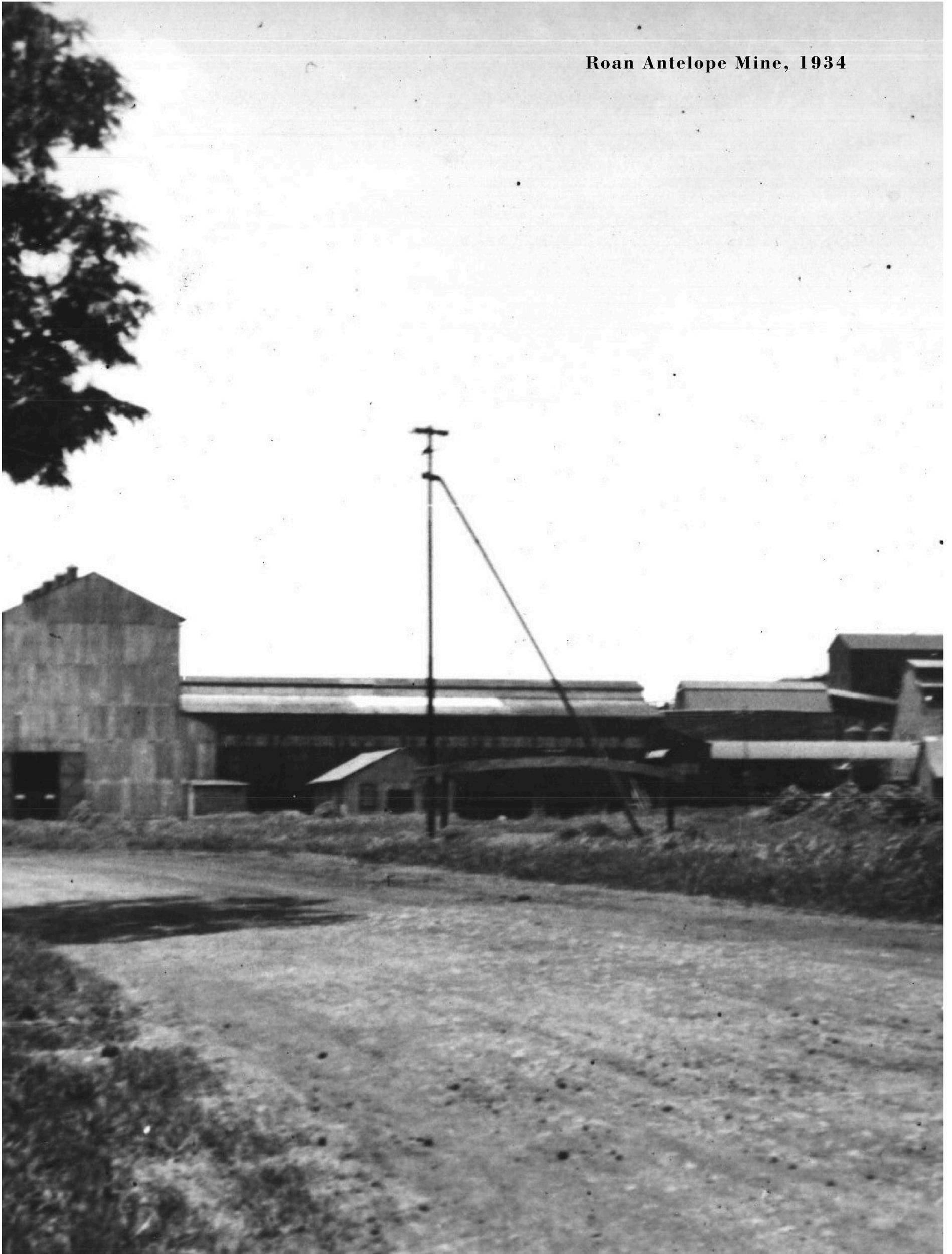
The fear of Sanguni with the labour problems it provoked was inadvertently done away with in the 1930s when RST undertook a vigorous anti-malaria programme at Roan Antelope Mine. A costly programme designed by the world-famous sanitarian, Sir Ronald Watson, of the British Institute of Tropical Hygiene, the anti-malarial undertaking involved draining and/or oiling mosquito-breeding swamps close to the mine and the canalisation of Luanshya River. This programme eradicated malaria-carrying mosquitoes, drastically reducing mortality and morbidity rates on the mine and, ultimately, killing the myth of Sanguni.

How the mine management tried to overcome labour problems associated with Sanguni in the early days at Roan Antelope Mine clearly demonstrates that colonial companies in Africa were not slow to appropriate local beliefs and practices that they otherwise vilified. Their actions paralleled those of white rulers in British South Africa, who reportedly appropriated witchcraft beliefs in order to collect taxes from Africans, to rule and to legitimate their power in ways that were meaningful to Africans. Similarly, elsewhere in British Africa, colonisers often participated in local institutions and ceremonies that they saw as central to upholding chiefly power and authority. By deferring to or supporting such institutions, colonial rulers were able to govern their imperial subjects through pre-existing systems of power.

In this, colonial rulers were not alone. Evidence now shows that, faced with African resistance to the Gospel and missionary medicine in the early days of Christian evangelisation, European missionaries, too, sometimes appropriated existing idioms to popularise the faith and mission medicine among Africans. In colonial Mwinilunga, for example, medical missionaries of the Christian Missions to Many Lands studied and channelled their medical practice through local ways of healing that they initially simply dismissed as heathen. The missionaries participated in anti-witchcraft rituals, often collecting and publicly burning anti-witchcraft paraphernalia,

## Exorcising Sanguni Cont...

much like local diviners and healers. What is remarkable is that in most of their writings, Europeans seldom admitted the extent to which they relied upon indigenous ways of seeing or being in an effort to rule African societies, or to appropriate their labour.



Roan Antelope Mine, 1934