

# MAKANDAY weekly

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# THE UNEXPLAINED DEATHS

## – What happened in that room?

### Conflicting Accounts and Forensic Questions

By Gibson Zulu

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# THE UNEXPLAINED DEATHS – What happened in that room?

From page 1

Two Lusaka brothers died hours apart after being found critically ill in their Kasama accommodation. A MakanDay investigation has uncovered gaps in recruitment records, conflicting accounts of the scene and troubling handling of critical forensic evidence. The family is demanding answers.

January 3, 2026 is a day Rommie Soko says she will never forget, the day she lost both her sons within hours of each other. The family still has no answers. While the police change their stories about what happened to the forensic evidence, there are no post-mortem results, and the police aren't able to explain why, and the first officer on the scene that day was been transferred to another district.

Harrington (27) and his younger brother, Joshua Mbeleko (21), had travelled from Lusaka to Kasama in northern Zambia after Harrington was recruited by a businessman to work at a vehicle fitment company. Months later, both were found critically ill in the accommodation where they were staying. One died on the scene, and the other passed away shortly after being taken to hospital.

For nearly two months, MakanDay has tracked the case, reviewed records and spoken with family members, police sources and others who are familiar with the case.

While the deaths raise serious questions about how the brothers were recruited and whether these complied with the country's employment laws.

MakanDay's investigation also raises troubling questions about how cases of this nature are handled, and whether crucial evidence was properly secured.

Rommie Soko, a resident of Mtendere, a sprawling township east of Lusaka, says she had been in regular contact with her sons. When communication abruptly stopped, she got worried.

"After several attempts (to contact them), I finally received a call from an anonymous number," she said. "I was told,

'Your children have been found critically ill in a room, and we are taking them to the police'. I remember wondering in shock why they were not being taken to hospital instead."

A man who reported discovering the brothers told MakanDay he found them lying helpless inside their accommodation and alerted police.

## The Discovery

A Kasama Central Police officer, who is not authorised to speak publicly, said the responding officer described a room containing scattered clothing, food remnants and work tools, including a pick and shovel.

Accounts of what the scene looked like when the pair were found vary. The police officer described a room with scattered clothing, food remnants, and tools including a pick and shovel. He noted a strong and unusual odour. The man who discovered the brothers said the smell was consistent with human waste, while family members who later visited reported blood-stained bedding and a chemical-like odour.

## Recruitment and Responsibility

The brothers' uncle, Moses Soko, said the accommodation was linked to individuals associated with the businesses where the deceased were believed to have worked. The family says they have not been given clear information about who had formal responsibility for the house or for the brothers' welfare.

Efforts by MakanDay, including a visit to the property in Kasama, to establish ownership of the house have yielded no conclusive results. In an interview, a businessman who owns a bakery where one of the late brothers, Joshua, had reportedly found work declined to provide details regarding the ownership or management of the property.

The Kasama businessman identified as Emran Munshi, who had earlier hired Harrington, confirmed to MakanDay that Harrington travelled

to Kasama to install equipment. However, the businessman said the job was completed and that he had been paid for it. He denied employing Harrington beyond that task, adding that the business was not yet operational at the time

The family does not believe the work contract had ended. They say Harrington remained in Kasama and later arranged for his younger brother to join him for work.

No written employment contracts, payment records or formal engagement documents have been presented to the family, raising questions about compliance with Zambia's labour laws.

## Forensic Handling Under Scrutiny

Establishing what happened inside the room and what the boys died of will depend on forensic findings and samples taken at the post-mortems conducted at Kasama General Hospital. But, police seem confused about where the forensic samples from the scene and post-mortems actually are.

Family members say postmortem samples were collected before burial but were not immediately transported for specialised forensic analysis.

Police in Kasama told MakanDay that the samples were delivered to the country's highest referral facility, the University Teaching Hospital (UTH) in Lusaka, on January 24, nearly three weeks after the deaths. Police said this was necessary as there are no forensic facilities in Kasama. When pressed, they declined to clarify where the samples had been stored during the intervening period or how their integrity had been preserved.

When MakanDay checked with UTH it was confirmed that the samples were never received.

When asked about this again, the police said the samples were "with police in Lusaka," but did not provide further explanation.

More than two months after the deaths, it is still unclear where the samples are being held, whether a documented chain of custody exists, and when forensic analysis will be completed.

Additional questions have emerged regarding the brothers' mobile phones. Family members say the devices were not returned and they have not been informed whether police recovered them from the accommodation.



Meanwhile, at least one of the deceased's Facebook and TikTok accounts remains accessible and has shown visible activity in the weeks following his death. It is unclear who has access to the accounts or whether investigators have secured the devices and associated digital data as part of the investigation.

Electronic devices can constitute critical evidence in sudden or unexplained deaths, particularly where questions arise about recruitment, movement, or communication prior to the incident.

Police are legally mandated to collect, secure and manage physical and digital evidence in cases of unexplained death.

## Institutional Silence

There have been no arrests and, as far as MakanDay has been able to establish, police have not brought anyone in for questioning.

Fearing that investigations at district level may be compromised, the family have reported the matter to police headquarters in Lusaka and are calling for an independent inquiry.

The Inspector General of Police, Graphel Musamba, had not responded to MakanDay's questions by the time of publication, including queries about the delay in transferring forensic samples and the current whereabouts of those samples.

Police have not responded or issued a public update on the findings of the postmortem examinations or the current status of investigations.

## Legal Dimensions

The family has raised concerns about possible exploitation or trafficking. At this stage, available information points to risk indicators rather than proof.

Under Zambia's Anti-Human Trafficking Act of 2008, trafficking involves three elements: an act such as recruitment or harbouring; a means including coercion, deception or abuse of vulnerability; and a purpose, namely exploitation.

Other legal frameworks may also apply. The Employment Code Act of 2019 requires lawful employment contracts, safe working conditions and employer accountability. The Penal Code (Cap 87) provides for offences relating to unlawful confinement, negligence causing death and homicide-related acts.

Whether any of these provisions are engaged will depend on the outcome of investigations.

But nearly two months later, no cause of death has been publicly disclosed.

No individual has been formally charged. And the physical and digital evidence that could determine what happened to the two brothers appears to remain under police control without clear public accounting.

MakanDay has further established that the officer who first responded to the case has since been transferred to a neighbouring district – whether by routine administrative process or other circumstances remains unclear.

For their family, one question persists: What exactly happened inside that room in Kasama.

**Additional Reporting by Angela Mtambo | Radio Mano in Kasama**

**Gibson is an intern at MakanDay under the Free Press Initiative's Journalism Graduate Internship Programme, which aims to promote excellence in journalism.**

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## OPINION

# Beyond Police Day: Why Zambia Must Reform Its Police Service

4 March marked Zambia Police Day, an occasion set aside to recognise the work and sacrifices of officers tasked with maintaining law and order across the country. The day celebrates the role of the police in protecting lives, safeguarding property, and upholding the rule of law.

But beyond the parades, speeches and public recognition, Police Day should also serve as a moment of reflection. It offers an opportunity for a broader national conversation about whether the police are adequately equipped, supported, and structured to carry out their mandate effectively.

The Zambia Police Service defines its mission as “to enforce the law for a secure and peaceful environment”. Yet fulfilling that mission requires more than dedication alone.

Effective policing depends on adequate personnel, modern investigative tools, reliable operational resources, and strong institutional accountability.

In reality, Zambia's police operate under significant structural strain.

The service currently has about 22,000 officers serving a population of roughly 20 million people, resulting in a policing ratio of one officer for every 894 citizens.

This falls far below the United Nations recommended standard of one officer per 450 citizens, highlighting the growing pressure on the country's law enforcement system.

In a ministerial statement to parliament in November 2023, Home Affairs and Internal Security Minister Jack Mwiimbu confirmed that the country's police-to-citizen ratio had worsened to this level.

Behind that statistic lies a deeper problem: a police service stretched beyond its capacity.

With fewer officers available, the police struggle to patrol communities effectively, respond quickly to emergencies, and investigate crimes thoroughly.

Limited transport and operational resources further slow responses and restrict patrols, particularly in rural or hard-to-reach areas.

Housing shortages and inadequate housing and office space also affect morale and operational readiness.

At the same time, gaps in equipment, forensic capacity, and training weaken investigators' ability to handle complex cases.

Together, these constraints slow investigations, weaken crime prevention, and risk eroding public confidence in the police's ability to enforce the law effectively.

Our recent reporting illustrates how these structural pressures can surface in real cases.

In the investigation “the Unexplained Deaths – What Happened in That Room?”, police handling of the case raised serious questions about professionalism and transparency.

A similar pattern emerged in the story “Zambia's ‘Peaceful’ By-Election: Fear, Violence and the Meaning of Silence in Kasama”. During the election period, reports included an assault on a resident, gunshots near the tally centre, and damaged vehicles.

These cases do not necessarily prove wrongdoing by the police. However, they point to a broader institutional concern, a tendency toward limited public communication and slow clarification of serious incidents.

When investigations take too long, when evidence trails remain unclear, or when official explanations are incomplete, public confidence in law enforcement inevitably suffers.

Trust is one of the most important assets a police service can possess. Without it, even well-intentioned policing efforts struggle to gain legitimacy.

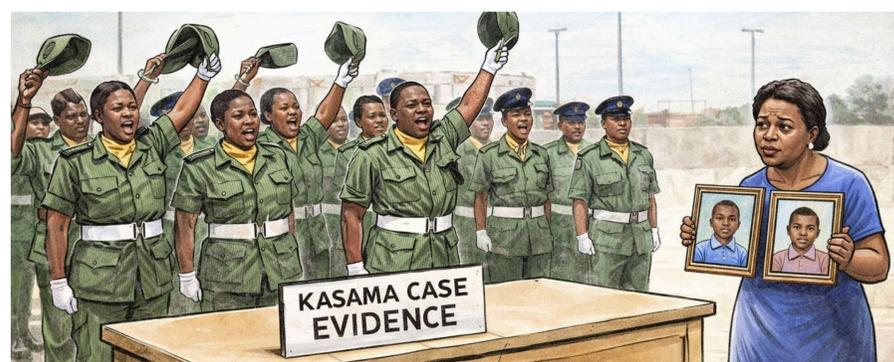
Addressing these challenges requires more than simply acknowledging resource constraints. It calls for deliberate reforms that strengthen both capacity and accountability within the police service.

Zambia must gradually increase recruitment to move closer to internationally recommended policing ratios while investing in critical operational logistics such as transport, forensic infrastructure, and modern investigative technologies.

Finally, independent oversight systems must be strengthened to ensure accountability when investigations stall or procedures are not followed. These include parliamentary scrutiny, internal disciplinary mechanisms, and external civilian oversight bodies such as the Police Public Complaints Commission.

Policing is one of the most visible functions of the state. When it works well, citizens feel protected. When it fails, the consequences cut across society.

Strengthening the Zambia Police Service is therefore not simply a budgetary issue. It is a matter of safeguarding justice, maintaining public trust, and ensuring that the institutions responsible for enforcing the law remain worthy of the authority they carry.



# “Justice for Sale” : How Rural Zambians Pay Police to Arrest Criminals

From page 1

By Angela Mutambo | MakanDay Investigates

“The police are supposed to protect us, not charge us,” complained one farmer. “Now criminals are braver than ever.”

John Chibwe, a local farmer from Kopeka Village in Mpulungu District, Northern Zambia, recounted how he caught a thief stealing maize from his field—only for the suspect to walk free because police couldn’t respond.

“We called the village headman, who in turn contacted the police, but they said they had no transport,” Chibwe said. “We ended up letting the thief go with just a warning. What choice did we have? If this continues, people will stop reporting crimes altogether.”

In another village in the Northern Province, a man accused of rape also walked free—not because he was proven innocent, but because the victim’s family could not afford to cover the police’s transport costs.

“My daughter was defiled by someone we know in the village. We reported, but the police said we must find transport first. We don’t have money or a vehicle. The man is still here, walking around freely like nothing happened. How can we feel safe?”

Her identity has been withheld to protect her and the child.

Across rural Zambia, this is becoming the norm. Community members and traditional leaders say police officers working through the Community Crime Prevention Unit (CCPU) demand transport money every time they’re called to respond to crimes. When the money isn’t available, suspects are released or simply ignored.

“We’re now solving even serious crimes at home,” said one headman. “People are tired of begging the police.”

The CCPU was created to bring law enforcement closer to the people, especially in rural areas.

However, officers say they’re poorly equipped — no vehicles, no fuel, and no operational funds. This has opened the door to informal charges and outright extortion.

Three CCPU officers interviewed for this investigation confirmed that demanding transport fees has become common practice. One officer admitted, “Sometimes we have no choice. Without transport, we can’t arrest anyone”.

The consequences are severe. Petty theft, farm invasions, and violent crimes are increasing, especially during the harvest season. Villagers say maize is being stolen directly from their fields, but reports to police are ignored unless transport fees are paid.

“We used to live peacefully, and most problems ended at the headman’s place,” said one villager. “Now crime is growing, and people no longer trust the police to intervene.”

Traditional leaders in at least three chiefdoms have raised the alarm, saying the police are failing their communities.

“We understand that the government is struggling with resources, but this has become corruption,” one headman said.

The provincial chairperson of the CCPU, Alfred Mwamba, acknowledged the issue, stating that while officers are dedicated, they’re working under extremely difficult conditions. He called on the Ministry of Home Affairs to urgently intervene with transport and logistical support.

Lucky Munkondya, Northern Division Commanding Officer, clarified that CCPU members are volunteers, recommended by community leaders, and work with passion to ensure peace in their areas.

She acknowledged that staffing shortages further limit police responsiveness, especially in newly created districts.

Munkondya noted that the current fuel supply does not match the growing number of police stations in the region. She added that the creation of new districts and additional police posts, without a corresponding increase in logistical and financial support, has placed further strain on police operations.

A police source familiar with fuel logistics

revealed that Northern Province receives an allocation of 8,000 litres of fuel per month—6,000 litres of diesel and 2,000 litres of petrol. This amount, the source said, is not sufficient to sustain operations throughout the month.

The 2023 Parliamentary Committee on National Security and

Foreign Affairs report found rural stations are chronically under-resourced and underequipped.

The Police Public Complaints Authority records show many cases of police inaction linked to lack of transport and investigative resources.

## ECZ Says It Received Complaint in Kasama, Calls Voter Card Collection “Illegal”

By Ennety Munshya,

The Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) has confirmed that it received a formal complaint during the Kasama mayoral by-election alleging that a political party was collecting voters’ cards in exchange for money, a practice the Commission says is illegal under Zambian law.

In a written response dated 25 February 2026, the Commission said the Kasama District Conflict Management Committee received a complaint from the Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD) on 26 January 2026, alleging that the ruling United Party for National Development (UPND) was giving money to voters and collecting their voter cards in return.

According to ECZ, the matter was heard on 27 January 2026. However, the Commission said the complainant did not provide evidence to support the allegations, and the matter was referred to law enforcement agencies, specifically the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and Zambia Police, because the allegations were criminal in nature.

“It was resolved that since FDD did not avail any evidence to support the complaint the matter should be reported to the Law Enforcement Agencies (Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and Zambia Police (ZP)) for further investigation and action and in view of the fact that the allegations were criminal in nature,” he Commission said in a statement signed by Brown Kasaro, Chief Electoral Officer.

Collection of Voter Cards Is an Offence – ECZ  
In its response, ECZ made it clear that collecting or asking for another person’s voter’s card details is illegal.

“It is illegal to collect a voters Card during campaigns or any other time even when elections are not eminent,” the Commission stated, adding that being in possession of another person’s voter card or asking someone to disclose details from the card constitutes an offence under Regulations 38 and 39 of the Voter Registration Regulations.

This clarification directly relates to findings in the MakanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism’s earlier report, which documented testimonies from residents in Kasama who alleged that voter and National Registration Cards (NRCs) were collected in exchange for K50 payments ahead of polling day.

In that investigation, some residents claimed the documents were later returned after polling day, meaning they did not cast their ballots.



Disclaimer: The photo used is an illustrative image based on an official ECZ statement and is not the original document.

### ECZ: Commission Not an Investigative Body

The Commission further clarified that while it can reprimand political parties, revoke accreditations, or refer matters to law enforcement agencies, it is not an investigative body when it comes to criminal offences.

Where allegations involve criminal conduct, ECZ says it refers matters to relevant enforcement agencies for investigation and further action.

### “Functus Officio” After Declaration of Results

ECZ also stated that once election results have been declared, the Commission becomes *functus officio*, meaning it no longer has the authority to handle alleged malpractice. Any aggrieved party must instead petition the courts under Section 97 of the Electoral Process Act.

“Thus once results are declared, the aggrieved party may petition the relevant Court or Tribunal to deal with the electoral malpractice,” the Commission said.

### Linking Back to the Kasama Investigation

In its original investigation titled “Zambia’s ‘Peaceful’ By-Election: Fear, Violence and the Meaning of Silence in Kasama,” MakanDay documented numerous allegations, including inducements, claims of voter card collection, testimonies suggesting intimidation during the campaign period and concerns about weak enforcement of electoral standards.

At the time of publication, ruling party officials had rejected allegations of misconduct, stating that party agents were merely collecting information for comparison with the voter register.

The ECZ’s written clarification now establishes two important facts, a formal complaint was indeed received and heard and collecting voter cards or asking for their details is illegal under electoral regulations.

What remains unclear is whether law enforcement agencies have since opened investigations, and whether any evidence has been substantiated.

The organisation stated that this framework has been applied consistently across participating chiefdoms.

### Community Training and Documentation

Responding to concerns about transparency, COMACO said it conducted structured financial literacy training prior to disbursing funds.

According to the statement, Community Forest Management Groups, cooperative leaders and traditional leaders were trained on how carbon credits are generated and verified, how revenue calculations are conducted, how exchange rates are applied, and how the benefit-sharing formula works.

Each chiefdom, COMACO added, was provided with documentation outlining allocations and the basis for calculation.

### Role of Traditional Leadership

On questions relating to how funds are shared internally within chiefdoms, COMACO said it does not determine allocations to individual traditional leaders.

“Decisions regarding how the community share is allocated within each chiefdom are made through local governance structures,” the organisation stated, noting that chiefs play a central role in conservation oversight and community mobilisation.

### Call for Continued Dialogue

COMACO acknowledged that carbon markets are complex and said it remains committed to transparency and accountability.

“We remain committed to transparency, accountability, and ensuring that conservation delivers meaningful and measurable benefits to rural households who protect Zambia’s forests,” the statement said, adding that the organisation welcomes continued constructive engagement with the media.

The clarification introduces key financial and governance details into an ongoing public conversation about conservation finance, community benefits, and accountability in Zambia’s emerging carbon market sector.

As debate continues, the central question raised in MakanDay’s investigation remains: How can rural forest communities be assured that the environmental assets they protect translate into fair and transparent economic returns?

## COMACO’S FULL STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

COMACO Clarifies Carbon Revenue Distribution in Eastern Province  
Community Markets for Conservation (COMACO) wishes to clarify factual information regarding recent public reporting on carbon credit revenue distribution in Eastern Province.

For more than a decade, COMACO has worked in partnership with traditional leaders and Community Forest Management Groups (CFMGs) to protect forests while strengthening rural livelihoods. Carbon credit revenue is generated through verified reductions in deforestation and is shared according to an established benefit-sharing structure agreed upon with participating stakeholders.

Recent reporting referenced a payment of US\$309,468 to Chikuwe Chiefdom and suggested that the community should have received more than K6 million based on exchange rates between K20 and K23 per US dollar. However, at the time funds were disbursed, the prevailing exchange rate was K15.1 per US dollar. Using the applicable rate at the time of transaction, US\$309,468 converts to K4,672,966.80.

## COMACO Responds to Carbon Revenue Questions Following MakanDay Story

The company says the discrepancy cited in the story arises from applying a later exchange rate to an earlier payment

### By MakanDay

Community Markets for Conservation (COMACO) has issued a formal clarification following MakanDay’s recent investigation, “We Protect the Forest, Others Sell the Carbon,” which raised concerns about how carbon credit revenues are calculated and distributed within chiefdoms in Eastern Province.

In a press statement released this week, COMACO said recent reporting had misapplied exchange rates when calculating the value of funds disbursed to Chikuwe Chiefdom.

### Exchange Rate Discrepancy

The investigation referenced a payment of US\$309,468 and suggested that, at exchange rates between K20 and K23 per US dollar, the amount would translate to more than K6 million.

However, according to COMACO, the funds were disbursed at a time when the prevailing exchange rate stood at K15.1 per US dollar. Using that rate, the organisation states that the payment converts to K4,672,966.80, which it says aligns with the amount received by the community.

“The discrepancy cited arises from applying a later exchange rate to an earlier payment,” the statement said.

### How the Carbon Revenue Is Shared

COMACO further clarified that carbon revenue is distributed according to a set formula agreed upon with stakeholders:

- 55 percent allocated to communities through Community Forest Management Groups (CFMGs) and chiefdom structures
- 35 percent retained for project implementation and operational costs
- 10 percent allocated to the Forestry Department

The amount received by the community aligns with this calculation. The discrepancy cited arises from applying a later exchange rate to an earlier payment.

Carbon revenue is distributed under a consistent formula in which 55 percent is allocated to communities through their CFMGs and chiefdom structures, 35 percent supports project implementation and operational costs, and 10 percent is allocated to the Forestry Department. This framework has been applied across participating chiefdoms.

Prior to the issuance of funds, all CFMGs, cooperative leaders, and traditional leaders underwent structured financial literacy training. These sessions covered how carbon credits are generated and verified, how revenues are calculated, how exchange rates are applied,

and how the benefit-sharing formula functions. Each chiefdom was provided with documentation outlining its allocation and the basis for calculation.

Decisions regarding how the community share is allocated within each chiefdom are made through local governance structures. COMACO does not determine internal allocations to traditional leaders. Chiefs play a central role in conservation oversight and community mobilisation, and any allocations within the community share are determined at chiefdom level.

Carbon markets are complex, and COMACO recognises the importance of continued dialogue and clarity. We remain committed to transparency, accountability, and ensuring that conservation delivers meaningful and forests

measurable benefits to rural households who protect Zambia's

COMACO values the role of the media in strengthening public understanding and welcomes continued constructive engagement grounded in verified information.

**Issued by:  
Rebecca Snyder  
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The story goes that when he was a baby, Phiri would cry whenever he had clothes on. When he got older, he would simply remove his clothes. Since then he has remained naked, come rain or shine, winter or summer. For Phiri, being naked is normal.

His daughter-in-law and granddaughter, however, believe that he does not wear clothes because he was bewitched by his aunt. "We had asked his sister before she died and she told us that he had been bewitched," Phiri says.

Phiri's nudity has over the years been an attraction for passing motorists. Recently, a bus load of church members on route to Malawi stopped by to greet old Phiri, offering their prayers and financial assistance. Many others have offered their assistance to Phiri, fascinated by his story. "All the motorists that use this road know me," he says, pride in his voice.

Others have tried to help Phiri out of his clothes-free life, but have failed.

Once, a Catholic priest tried to make Phiri wear clothes, but he was chased out of the village by an axe-wielding Phiri, Daka narrates, with bursts of laughter. "Even soldiers once tried to force clothes on him but he refused to wear them," she says.

As we prepare to leave, a bunch of teenage girls in school uniform walk by, shouting their greetings to Phiri. The girls are Phiri's grandchildren who live in the nearby houses.

Everyone, it seems, has come to accept the old man's nakedness.

**This story was first published in the 2011 edition of the Bulletin & Record magazine. Some of the people mentioned in this story may have since passed on. May their souls rest in peace.**

This week in the Bulletin & Record

## The naked truth

From page 1

By Dennis Ng'andu Jr

I had first caught sight of him from a distance back in the 1990s while travelling to Chipata as a small boy - a tall naked figure working in a garden along the Great East Road.

Everyone on the bus got talking about what they had seen. Some women expressed disbelief at the sight of the man who did not wear clothes. Others questioned how the naked man related with the people in his village - how he managed to work in the fields or walk along the Great East Road with nothing on but a baseball cap, a metal wristlet and a necklace.

Almost 20 years later, I am travelling to a roadside village in Chief Nyalungwe's area in Kacholola to meet this man, Nkhanga Phiri.

After a short walk through a forest of trees in blossom, I stumble upon a cluster of thatched houses. Phiri's house is the one at the beginning of the homestead, I am told. On hearing our voices, Phiri walks slowly out of his derelict hut, bent over with age, and crouches down by the entrance.

Age has taken a heavy toll on Phiri. His vision is now blurred, and he often wanders in his conversations.

Ask anyone how old Phiri is, and they just shake their heads. Even the old man himself does not know when he was born. "I wouldn't know. I was very young," he quips.

Phiri then refers to an incident during his childhood in a bid to explain his age. It was the time when his village was swarmed by an army of red locusts, he says, although nobody knows when this was.

Most of Phiri's relatives have died, and he is now in the care of his 23-year-old granddaughter, Evelyn Phiri. His daughter-in-law, Ludia Daka, also helps to care for him.

When I ask her about her father-in-law's nudity Daka says: "What can I do, I found him like this. At first it was very strange, but now I'm used," she says.

Although nudism, or naturism, is accepted in many parts of the world, including South Africa where nudist beaches exist, it remains a sensitive and taboo subject in Zambia. So how did Phiri come to live a life free of clothes?



*Nkhanga Phiri has chosen not to wear clothes since he was a young boy*