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INSIDE THE FEAR | JERABOS AND ZAMBIA'S URBAN INSECURITY

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Inside the Fear | Jerabos and Zambia's Urban Insecurity

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By Makanday

Are Jerabos criminals, or a symptom of something deeper? In Chingola, tensions have boiled over. Unrest. Fear. Survival battles over copper.

Inside the Fear, our latest documentary, moves beyond the label to examine the forces driving one of Zambia's most contested urban realities.

Because in Chingola, this is no longer just a debate. It is a story shaped by death, protest, and unanswered questions, and it leads to one place -Sensele Mine.

On December 1, 2023, more than 30 illegal miners were reportedly trapped and died underground at Sensele Mine in Zambia's Copperbelt. In response, government suspended operations, citing safety concerns and the need to review small-scale mining practices.

For nearly two years, the mine remained closed to stone dealers known as Jerabos, anger grew.

On April 3 and again on July 30, 2025, small-scale miners clashed with police during protests demanding access to the site. Miners say government had promised the mine would reopen after the rainy season.

That reopening never came.

By late 2025, mediation efforts led to negotiations. On October 26, 2025, representatives of small-scale miners and Chingola Resources Limited signed an agreement, witnessed by government officials.

The deal: a US\$4 million empowerment fund.

Officials said the money would support 4,000 small-scale miners transitioning away from Sensele Mine.

In early January this year, government

confirmed the funds had been released. There were celebrations.

But weeks later, an investigation by Radio Kokoliko in Chingola, found a different story unfolding on the ground.

On January 5, 2026, groups of miners gathered at the District Commissioner's office in Chingola.

They had one question: Where is our money?

Several miners told this investigation they had submitted their names — some more than once. They were later directed to Rugby Stadium in Chingola to verify registration lists.

At the stadium, confusion.

Some claimed certain individuals had already bought vehicles. Others said they had not received a single ngwee.

These claims could not be independently verified.

Small-scale miners' chairperson Gabriel Chipimo disputes claims of widespread exclusion. Vice chairperson Mike Mushota adds that some claiming exclusion may not have been legitimate Sensele workers.

But despite these assurances, key details remain missing. No verified public list of beneficiaries. No breakdown of payments, no disclosure of how the money was allocated.

The US\$4 million deal raises critical questions: Where exactly was the fund deposited? Was the amount distributed equally among 4,000 miners? How were beneficiaries verified? Did government audit the list, and is there any oversight mechanism?

Neither the steering committee nor the company has published documentation explaining how the funds were distributed.

In a recent interview with Kokoliko FM, Bishop Joseph Kazhila, a member of the committee overseeing the programme, acknowledged the limitations.

"It solved very little," he said. "We knew it was not going to solve the problem..."



KCM can give one of their dumps so that these guys can be diverted there."

A review of company records shows that Chingola Resources Limited, the company that is said to have provided the money, has a mixed ownership structure, combining individual shareholders and corporate entities, suggesting a layered and potentially complex control arrangement.

The majority stake is held by Laric Management-FZCO, which controls 85,000 shares. Other corporate shareholders include Beverley Building Limited, Sensele Enterprises Limited, and Supremacy Investments Limited. The remaining shares are distributed among individual shareholders, including both Zambian and foreign nationals from countries such as the United Kingdom and China. The company was incorporated on June 10, 2022.

For many in Chingola, the empowerment fund was meant to end a cycle of conflict at Sensele Mine.

But without transparency, confusion risks replacing conflict. If 4,000 miners were meant to benefit, how many actually did? And if funds have been fully disbursed, why do some registered miners say they are still waiting?

Although presented as an empowerment programme, the funds served one purpose, removal of illegal miners from the site to pave the way for formal mining operations by the new owners.

Rather than empowerment, the programme appears to function as a transition mechanism — clearing access for mining to resume. In that shift lies the deeper question at the heart of this investigation: When the mines change hands, when deals are signed, when millions are announced, who truly benefits — and who is pushed aside?

You can watch the documentary here | https://youtu.be/Q_cgEXIBgGU?si=yeyPHVqeAij52WMI

Additional Reporting by Kokoliko FM in Chingola



Living with Sewage – Inside Roan’s Sanitation Crisis

By *Pride Nyirenda | Luanshya*

At six in the morning, Harriet Mwila begins her day the same way she has for years: sweeping sewage out of her yard. The smell arrives before the sunlight. Behind her small house in Roan Constituency in Luanshya on the Copperbelt, a collapsed sewer line leaks through the soil, spilling human waste into the very space where her three children play.

Her broom scrapes against wet ground as she pushes the filth away from her doorstep. It is a routine she never chose, but one she has come to expect. “Sometimes the sewage even comes inside the house,” she says. “When it rains, it floods the floor. We clean it, but the smell never leaves.”

Mwila lives here with her husband and their three children, the youngest just six years old. Their home is modest, two rooms and a small kitchen area. But the yard, once a place for play and chores, has become something else entirely - an open channel for raw sewage.

For the Mwila family, the crisis is not only about discomfort. It is about health. When sewage collects near the house, flies gather in thick clusters. During the rainy season, contaminated water spreads across the yard, seeping closer to their living space.

“My children get sick often,” Mwila says. “Sometimes it’s stomach problems, sometimes fever. We don’t know if it is from the sewage, but we worry.”

Her concern reflects a broader public health risk. Medical experts warn that exposure to untreated waste significantly increases the likelihood of diseases such as cholera, dysentery, and other diarrhoeal infections. In communities like Roan, where sanitation systems have broken down, that risk is no longer theoretical. It is part of daily life.

M’s story is not isolated. Across several neighbourhoods in Roan Constituency, residents describe a similar reality: overflowing sewer lines, blocked drains, and waste flowing through spaces meant for homes, markets, and footpaths. In some areas, sewage runs openly along the streets, forcing residents to navigate contamination as part of their everyday routines.

Many say they have repeatedly reported the problem to local authorities, but little has changed.

The roots of the crisis lie in infrastructure that has long outlived its lifespan. Luanshya’s sewer system was built decades ago. Over time, pipelines have collapsed, silted up, or become blocked. Without consistent maintenance or replacement, the system can no longer cope. Instead, it pushes waste back into the very communities it was designed to serve.

This breakdown comes despite national commitments to improve water and sanitation. Under Zambia’s Eighth National Development Plan, the sector is identified as a priority for public health and improved living conditions. Government has also allocated significant resources toward water infrastructure. Yet on the ground in Roan, those commitments feel distant. Residents say the gap between policy and reality is growing more visible, measured not in reports or budgets, but in the daily presence of sewage in their homes.

Officials from Kafubu Water and Sewerage Company acknowledge the challenges, pointing to aging infrastructure and resource constraints as key obstacles to repairs. Local leadership has also indicated that plans are in place to address the situation, though timelines remain unclear.



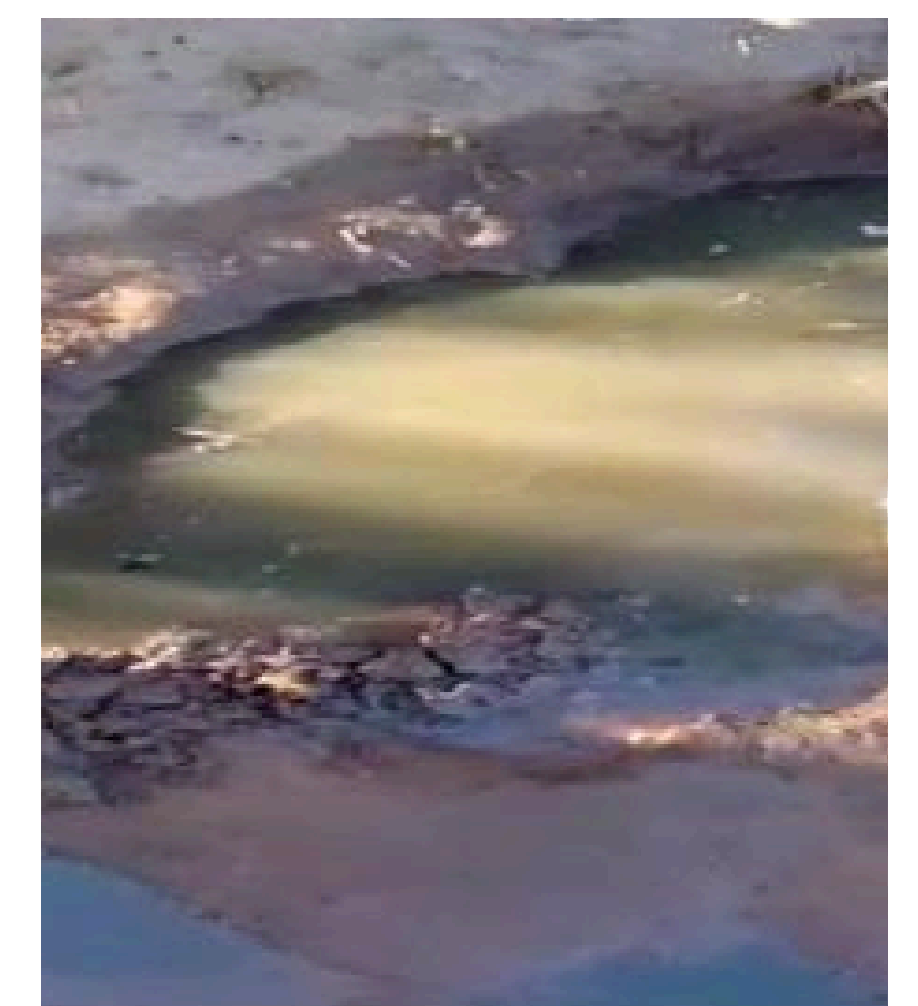
For families like the Mwilas, those explanations offer little immediate relief. As evening falls, Mary washes her floor once again. Outside, her children play carefully, stepping around pools of contaminated water that have become part of their environment.

The sewage has not stopped leaking.

In Roan, the sanitation crisis is not an abstract policy failure or a distant development concern. It is immediate and unavoidable. It is the air residents breathe, the ground beneath their feet, and a daily reminder of a system that has quietly broken down.

You can also watch the report here | <https://web.facebook.com/share/v/INUtl3ap3G/>

The story has been edited and fact-checked by MakanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism.



OPINION

UNZA’s Sanitation Crisis: A Decade of Warnings Ignored

More than a decade ago, a student at the University of Zambia, in an interview with the *Bulletin and Record*, described the institution as “appalling.” Lecture rooms leaked when it rained. Hostels were overcrowded. Sewer systems were broken. Students lived, studied, and slept in conditions that raised a fundamental question: how had Zambia’s premier university been allowed to fall so far?

That question was asked in 2012. It remains unanswered in 2026.

Today, the images emerging from UNZA are disturbingly familiar. Flooded corridors.

More than a decade ago, a student at the University of Zambia, in an interview with the *Bulletin and Record*, described the institution as “appalling.” Lecture rooms leaked when it rained. Hostels were overcrowded. Sewer systems were broken. Students lived, studied, and slept in conditions that raised a fundamental question: how had Zambia’s premier university been allowed to fall so far?

The warning signs were always there.

As far back as 2012, students were sharing rooms meant for two people with as many as eight occupants.

UNZA's Sanitation Crisis: A Decade of Warnings Ignored Cont...

More than 30 students shared a single toilet and shower in some hostels. Broken sanitary systems were already part of daily life. What is happening today is not a sudden collapse. It is the result of sustained neglect.

But in 2026, the consequences of that neglect have become impossible to ignore.

A University of Zambia student, Emmanuel Bwalya, died after reportedly falling into a water-filled pit linked to poor drainage and sanitation conditions on campus. The incident came amid ongoing student complaints and protests over sanitation failures.

This was not simply an accident.

It was a warning that the crisis has crossed a dangerous line — from discomfort and indignity to real risk, and now, loss of life.

At its core, the sanitation crisis is not about toilets. It is about governance. UNZA's problems have long been tied to chronic underfunding, erratic financing systems, and a lack of long-term infrastructure investment.

Successive governments have acknowledged these challenges, yet meaningful reform has remained elusive. Reports have been written. Commissions have been formed. Promises have been made. But on the ground, little has changed. Instead, the system has expanded without the infrastructure to support it.

Student numbers have grown. Facilities have not kept pace. Maintenance has been deferred. The result is predictable: a university operating beyond its capacity, where basic sanitation systems fail under pressure.

This raises uncomfortable but necessary questions.

How does a national institution continue to function when its students are exposed to unsafe living conditions? Where has the funding for maintenance and infrastructure gone? And at what point does neglect become institutional failure?

The sanitation crisis also exposes a deeper contradiction.

UNZA was established to produce the human capital needed to drive Zambia's development. Yet the environment in which that human capital is being shaped is itself deteriorating. A university cannot claim academic excellence while failing to provide basic dignity — and basic safety.

The sanitation crisis also exposes a deeper contradiction. UNZA was established to produce the human capital needed to drive Zambia's development. Yet the environment in which that human capital is being shaped is itself deteriorating. A university cannot claim academic excellence while failing to provide basic dignity — and basic safety.

There is also a risk that the crisis becomes normalised. That broken sewer lines, overcrowded hostels, and water shortages are accepted as part of the "UNZA experience". That is perhaps the most dangerous outcome of all. Because once dysfunction becomes routine, accountability disappears.

What is needed now is not another statement of concern. It is a clear, transparent intervention. A full audit of infrastructure. A public breakdown of funding. A timeline for rehabilitation. And above all, political will to treat the crisis with the urgency it demands.

The tragedy is not that UNZA is failing. The tragedy is that it has been failing for years — and everyone knew.

The final question is one UNZA's leadership cannot avoid. This is an institution that trains engineers, planners, and problem-solvers. Yet within its own campus, a basic system like sanitation has been allowed to collapse. If a university entrusted with building Zambia's technical capacity cannot fix its own infrastructure, what does that say about accountability at the highest level?



This week in the Bulletin & Record

UNZA fails the grade

Mired in debt estimated to be at least K1 trillion, Zambia's bastion of higher education, UNZA, appears to be crumbling under the burden of poor funding, low staff numbers, inadequate facilities and an out-of-date curriculum. Charles Mafa investigates.

Picture the scene. A poor boy from the rural area works hard at his local school, passes his exams with flying colours, then comes to Lusaka for the first time to get a degree, only to find a crumbling university education system and nowhere to sleep.

It may sound dramatic, but sadly this is the reality facing many Zambian students seeking to further their education.

Take 24-year-old Arnold Mudenda*. Mr Mudenda, who recently finished a degree in demography at the University of Zambia (UNZA), describes his four-year stay at the campus as "disturbing". He says the living and teaching conditions at the nation's highest learning institution were "appalling".

"In many instances, the lecturer teaches over 200 students in one class without the PA (public address) system and the lecture rooms are too small for such a number," he said.

University education is the engine for providing young people with the skills needed to get a decent job. UNZA was created by the Zambian government in 1966 shortly after independence to be a leader in the provision of higher education in the region and to produce professionally trained human resources for the new country's growing economy.

However, the institution's original goals are now under threat from inadequate funding, overcrowding, low staff levels and a lack of investment in infrastructure. Many of the students interviewed for this piece said most lecture rooms at the Great East Road campus were in a dilapidated state, many with leaking roofs, creating severe difficulties for students to learn during the rainy season.

"There are leakages in almost every lecture theatre. In the rainy season you will find that a student has to move, relocate in the process of learning, and that is an inconvenience," said Ali Tunkara, the students' union representative.

Libraries within universities have long been regarded as gateways to information. They not only provide books and space for students to study but also provide resources for research activities. This is not the case for the UNZA library, however.

Sources at the institution reveal that books and other literature are in short supply and there is no funding for periodical subscriptions. In fact, one student described the library as a "living museum" for the university. Mr Tunkara said most of the books that line the library shelves are obsolete and date back as far as 1924.

While old books are obviously not necessarily a bad thing, the problem appears to be that UNZA's library is not updated with modern books at the same time. This perhaps reflects the institution's old-fashioned curriculum and criticisms that it is out of step with modern student requirements. Indeed, there is growing concern that the university's curriculum should be reviewed urgently.

At the 2012 graduation ceremony, the university vice-chancellor, Professor Stephen Simukanga, said most of the current curricula had served the purpose for which they were developed. This is also noted in the Ministry of Education National Implementation Framework of 2008 to 2010. The document states: "Other challenges facing the universities include lack of curriculum responsiveness and relevance to individual, community and national needs."

UNZA fails the grade cont...

Students argue that what is taught at the university does not respond to the changing economic and social environment. Mr Tunkara claims that the current curriculum does not fully prepare students for the workplace.

“It is because of such an approach that we find our curriculum and the quality of the students that are produced from this institution half-baked,” he said.

This difficult situation at UNZA is preparing undergraduates for a job in the real world as no figures detailing how many students find employment upon graduation are available. However, Manucana Musiwa, managing consultant at Career Prospects, an employment agency based in Lusaka, speaks of the need to “develop more home-grown theories and principles that students can relate to and which they can easily apply”, backing up complaints that the university curriculum is overdue a revamp.

But these are not the only problems the university is facing. Students say staying at the university hostels is like living in exile in your own country. Mr Tunkara describes the accommodation situation as “pathetic”.

Apart from the new Levy Mwanawasa hostels, the old students’ hostels are congested and in a state of disrepair. More than 60% of the students are not accommodated and, in some cases, eight students share a room that is supposed to accommodate only two people.

In Soweto Hostel, tiny rooms of around four metres by two metres are stacked with four beds shared by eight female students. It is worse in other hostels, such as Africa Hostel, which is for male students. Walking down the dark corridors, you have to watch out for discharge from broken sewer systems. Students have to slum it in small rooms and over 30 of them share one toilet and shower, while other sanitary facilities are broken.

The university international liaison and public relations manager Mulenga Musepa assured that the problem of accommodation will soon be a thing of the past. Plans to put up more hostels which will

accommodate all the students are underway. “Therefore, the problem of accommodation will be overcome,” Mr Musepa said.

He attributed the great demand for campus accommodation to the “conducive studying environment” within the university, adding that UNZA currently has 3,736 bed spaces for a student population of about 10,500.

The university’s inadequate accommodation, understaffing, poor learning materials and courses that do not necessarily help modern graduates to get a job raises the question: how has UNZA been allowed to fall into such a state of disrepair?

It seems the nation’s higher learning institution has faced serious political and financial neglect for a long time, with successive Zambian governments deserting the institution.

In 2010, Professor Simukanga revealed at a conference in Changsha that the “poor lecturer student ratio stood at 1:27”. He also added that though the problem of brain drain was not as serious as it was in the 1980s and 1990s, the main problem is in-country brain drain to private universities as well as moonlighting.

Academic and administrative departments are operating below 50% of their required staff numbers, according to UNZA’s strategic plan for 2008 to 2012. Lecturers claim they are the most poorly paid in the southern region and that they are not given decent accommodation. Dr Eusdan Chiputa, president of researchers and lecturers union, UNZALARU, would not disclose how much UNZA is receiving in terms of public funding but did comment that the Patriotic Front government for the recent salary upward adjustments.

The researchers’ and lecturers’ representatives said well over 500 lecturers or more than 600 academic staff are needed.

Experts say in the 1990s, the university suffered under the brunt of government austerity measures designed to tame inflation and cut spending.

Dr Chiputa says the arrival of the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) into government in 1991 saw them do away with the quarterly funding system and introduce a monthly cash budget. The quarterly funding system allowed the university to have cash to use in the next three months thereby making it easier to plan expenditure. The current monthly budget system often leads to erratic funding, meaning that teachers are sometimes not paid on time.

In 1997, the then president Frederick Chiluba appointed a commission of inquiry into the operations of Zambia’s public universities, citing “incessant disturbances that quite often compelled the university authorities to close the institutions”. None of the commission’s recommendations was implemented.

The university is a public institution and government continues to play a crucial role through policy direction and provision of financial support in the form of grants and bursary remittances for government-sponsored students. However, the release of both grants and bursaries by government has not been without challenges, including delays and budget cuts.

In addition, the university has huge debts that need to be settled. According to official documents, as at December 2007 it owed various institutions a total of over K261 billion. Dr Chiputa said this figure is now well over K1 trillion.

Most of this debt can be explained. This is the debt that is owed mostly to ZRA (Zambia Revenue Authority). Some of it is owed to superannuation; some of it is owed to NAPSA (National Pension Scheme Authority),” Dr Chiputa said.

He added: “What the university did to find money to pay these creditors, gratuities and retirement benefits, was not the bother of government. That is why a lot of us had a very big bone to chew with the MMD government because of their neglect of university education.”

The current government has said it is aware of the challenges facing the nation’s higher institution of learning. President Sata said during the official opening of parliament that “our universities and colleges... are faced with a shortage of staff and appropriate teaching and learning materials.”

Ministry of Education spokesperson Terence Mushamba said plans are underway to expand existing universities and build new ones. The question that remains, however, is how will all this be funded?

For example, the graduation rate has continued to increase. The number of graduates rose from 906 in 2003 to more than 1,700 in 2007.

Veteran politician Simon Zukas, who was involved in the construction of the university and served on its council from 1966 until 1990, believes the university can restore its reputation as the country’s bastion of higher education if it is left to run its own affairs.

“I think they [government] must just keep out. Yes, they must provide funding but they should leave the universities to be self-governing.”

Some of the individuals featured in this article have since passed away. May their souls rest in peace.

This story was originally published in the December 2012–January 2013 edition of the Bulletin & Record magazine.

