

MAKANDAY weekly

TRUSTED. BOLD. INDEPENDENT



17TH - 23RD APRIL 2026

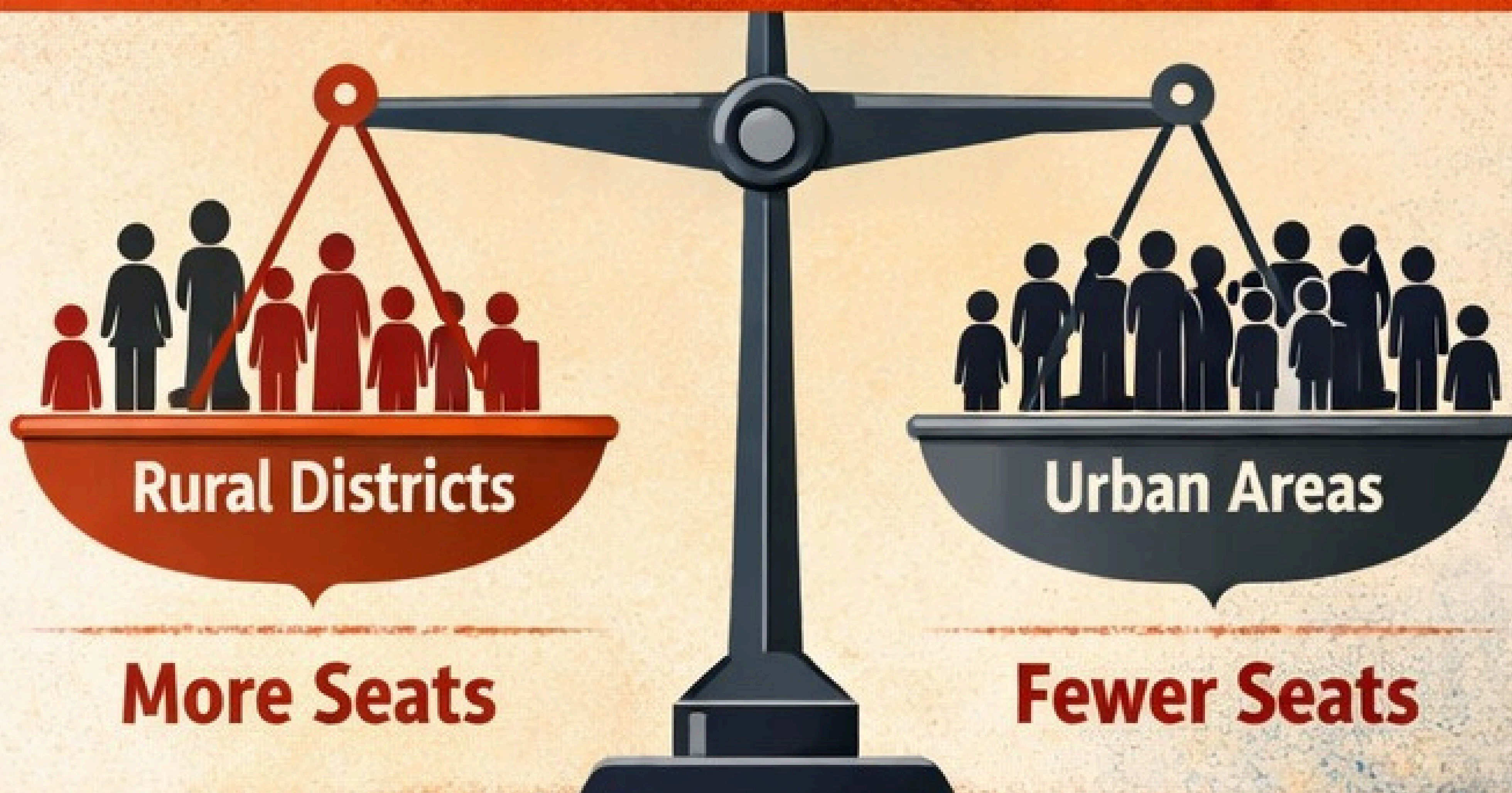


ISSUE. NO 0034

How Zambia's New Electoral Map Could Deliver 133 Seats to UPND



Majority Before the Vote?



How Zambia's New Electoral Map Could Deliver 133 Seats to UPND

From page 1

By Charles Mafa

A preliminary analysis of Zambia's 2026 constituency delimitation by policy commentator Rueben Lifuka suggests that the ruling United Party for National Development (UPND) could secure 133 out of 226 constituency-based parliamentary seats—equivalent to 58.8 percent of the national assembly—if past voting patterns hold.

“Of course, the emphasis is that this analysis is based on the assumption of past voting patterns, which could definitely change given new dynamics at play,” Lifuka said.

Lifuka is one of Zambia's most prominent voices on governance, transparency, and anti-corruption, with decades of involvement in both national and international reform efforts.

The projection, based on a “back-of-the-envelope” model using the 2021 election results and applying them to the newly expanded constituencies, points to a structural advantage emerging from the delimitation exercise—raising fresh questions about the balance between representation and electoral equity.

Crucially, this projection by Lifuka, a former president of Transparency International Zambia,

accounts only for constituency seats. It does not factor in the additional 40 proportional representation seats and a further eight nominated MPs, which will ultimately shape the final composition of the national assembly. While these additional seats could either reinforce or modestly rebalance the outcome, the core advantage arising from constituency distribution remains significant.

More seats, uneven weight

Zambia's constituencies will increase from 156 to 226, a 70-seat expansion. But the distribution of those new seats reveals sharp disparities.

Provinces such as Central, North-Western, Southern, and Western, which together account for about 37 percent of the population, will collectively hold 100 seats—44.25 percent of the national assembly. These regions have historically leaned heavily toward UPND.

By contrast, more densely populated areas—particularly Lusaka and Copperbelt—show a different pattern. Despite large populations and voter bases, these provinces receive comparatively fewer seats relative to their population size.

tripling the voting weight of individuals in less populated areas.

Lusaka, for instance, has the highest population-to-seat ratio, with one seat representing about 171,109 people. In contrast, Western Province has the lowest ratio, where one seat represents just 52,443 people—effectively

When equality becomes imbalance

On paper, each constituency elects one MP, giving equal voting power within the national assembly. But the path to that equality is uneven.

In practical terms, a voter in a sparsely populated constituency carries more influence in determining parliamentary composition than a voter in an urban centre. This is because fewer votes are required to elect an MP in smaller constituencies.

The implication is significant. Political parties with strong support in less populated regions can convert votes into seats more efficiently. That efficiency appears to favour UPND.

The geography of advantage

The analysis shows that provinces with smaller populations but higher seat allocations align closely with UPND's 2021 electoral strongholds.

For example, Western, Southern, and North-Western provinces, where UPND previously secured overwhelming support, are projected to deliver a substantial share of the

newly created seats. When these gains are combined with existing strongholds, the model suggests a pathway to a parliamentary majority well above the simple threshold of 114 constituency seats.

Even before proportional representation and nominated seats are added, the party appears positioned to cross the majority line comfortably.

Beyond numbers: A structural question

The Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) has framed delimitation as a necessary step to improve representation, particularly in underserved rural areas. There is a strong argument that geographic size, accessibility, and service delivery challenges justify smaller constituencies in remote regions.

But the emerging data highlights a deeper tension.

Is delimitation correcting historical underrepresentation—or creating a new imbalance where the weight of a vote varies significantly depending on where it is cast?

The answer may lie in how Zambia reconciles two competing principles: equal representation by geography, and equal value of each vote.

An election before the election?

If the projections hold, the implications are profound. A projected 133 constituency seats would already place UPND in a dominant legislative position. Once the 40 proportional seats and eight presidential nominations are incorporated, the final parliamentary balance could shift further—but the foundation of power would have already been laid through constituency outcomes.

In effect, the numbers suggest that a significant portion of the parliamentary outcome may be shaped not only by voter choice in August, but by the structure of representation itself.

What is being established is that as Zambia heads toward the elections, the question is no longer just who will win—but how the design of the electoral map may already be influencing the result.

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE DELIMITATION ANNOUNCEMENT-2026

Province	Current No. of Constituencies	No. of New Constituencies	Total No. of Constituencies	Percentage Increase in Seats	Population Size (2022 Census)	Total Number of Registered Voters (2025)	Ratio of seats per population size (1 seat per population)	Ratio of seats per population size (1 seat per registered voters)	Percentage of the 226 seats	Percentage of seats obtained by UPND in 2021	Back of envelope projection of seats for UPND-2026
1 Central	15	8	23	53.3	2,252,483	825,269	97,934	35,881	10	69	16
2 Copperbelt	22	7	29	31.8	2,757,539	1,294,354	95,088	44,633	13	55	16
3 Eastern	20	9	29	45.0	2,454,788	1,136,885	84,648	39,203	13	17	5
4 Luapula	15	5	20	33.3	1,514,011	703,291	75,701	35,165	9	13	3
5 Lusaka	12	6	18	50.0	3,079,964	1,455,808	171,109	80,878	8	69	12
6 Muchinga	8	6	14	75.0	918,296	439,502	65,593	31,393	6	10	1
7 Northern	13	6	19	46.2	1,618,412	730,230	85,180	38,433	8	31	6
8 North Western	12	7	19	58.3	1,270,028	524,972	66,844	27,630	8	100	19
9 Southern	20	9	29	45.0	2,381,728	1,119,174	82,129	38,592	13	100	29
10 Western	19	7	26	36.8	1,363,520	632,433	52,443	24,324	12	100	26
	156	70	226		19,610,769	8,861,918					133

Notes

- Percentage increase in the number of seats= Copperbelt (31.8%), Luapula (33.3%)
- The Ratio of seats per population size= based on the 2022 population figures, Lusaka has the highest ratio of 1 seat for 171,109, followed by Copperbelt at 1:95,088 while Western province has the lowest ratio at 1 seat for a population of 52,443
- Western, Southern, North Western and Central with a population of 7,267,759 (representing 37 % of the population)) has a 100 seats out of 226 representing 44.25%
- Back of the envelope projection for seats allocation for UPND in 2026- working on the results of 2021 for UPND and assuming nothing changes, the party will get 133 which will be 58.8 percent of the 226 seats

One Vote, Unequal Weight | Inside Zambia's New Constituency Map

A landmark expansion promises to bring leaders closer to the people. But census data reveals a deeper imbalance: where you live may now determine how much your vote counts.

By Charles Mafa

On a morning framed as a milestone for Zambia's democracy, the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) unveiled 70 new constituencies, expanding parliament from 156 to 226 seats ahead of the 2026 general election. The announcement was presented as a necessary evolution, one that would bring leadership closer to citizens and respond to population growth across the country.

“In determining the 70 constituencies, the Commission was guided by the factors as outlined in the Constitution which place a duty on the Commission to consider the history, diversity and cohesiveness of communities; population density, trends and projections; geographical features; means of communication; the need to keep constituencies within districts; and the need to pursue approximate equality of population while still protecting adequate representation for urban and sparsely populated areas,” the ECZ chairperson, Mwangala Zaloumis said.

But beneath that promise lies a more complex reality. An analysis by the MakanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism, drawing on [the 2022 Census of Population and Housing](#), shows that the new electoral map does not distribute representation evenly. Instead, it introduces a measurable imbalance between urban and rural Zambia, one that could shape political influence in the years ahead.

Zambia's population now stands at 19.6 million, according to the 2022 census. With 226 constituencies, this would suggest an average of roughly 86,800 people per constituency, a useful benchmark for what equal representation might look like. Yet the reality deviates sharply from this standard.

In Lusaka Province, each constituency represents approximately 171,000 people,

while in Western Province, a constituency represents just over 52,000. The disparity is not marginal. It means that a vote cast in Western Province carries more than three times the representational weight of one cast in Lusaka.



Appendix 1.5: Population Size by Constituency and Sex, Lusaka Province 2010-2022

Constituency	2010 Population			2022 Population		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Lusaka Province	53,843	53,188	107,031	111,095	114,181	225,276
Chongwe	70,900	70,401	141,301	152,923	140,444	313,367
Kalumbila	40,607	40,368	80,975	104,952	113,022	217,974
Fera	11,979	12,325	24,304	19,514	18,419	37,933
Chawama	73,470	74,275	147,745	101,548	104,851	206,399
Kalumbila	81,109	81,229	162,338	180,372	172,450	352,822
Kanyama	81,742	82,913	164,655	254,862	249,040	503,902
Lusaka Central	14,616	14,881	29,497	44,844	43,297	88,141
Mandevu	178,422	180,186	358,608	224,424	241,120	465,544
Mtoto	140,242	142,492	282,734	354,426	345,954	700,380
Mtoto	127,223	124,752	251,975	349,384	345,705	695,089
Rufuna	25,785	25,217	51,002	41,478	40,255	81,733
Total	1,082,998	1,108,227	2,191,225	1,489,042	1,590,922	3,079,964

Source: Zamstats

The ECZ has consistently argued that delimitation is not a mathematical exercise. In her address, Chairperson Mwangala Zaloumis emphasised that the process was guided not only by population, but also by geography, accessibility, community cohesion, and population trends. These criteria acknowledge the realities of governing a country where some constituencies span vast and difficult terrain, while others are densely packed into urban centres.

Growing faster, represented less

This balancing act is visible in how the new constituencies have been distributed. In urban Zambia, particularly Lusaka, the challenge is population pressure. Lusaka is the country's largest province, with over three million residents, yet it received only six additional constituencies, bringing its total to 18. The result is a persistently high population per constituency.

In places like Kanyama and Mandevu, populations already exceed several hundred thousand people (525, 902). Even after subdivision, many urban constituencies remain far above the national average, suggesting that representation has not kept pace with rapid urban growth.

Fewer people, greater weight

Appendix 1.10: Population Size by Constituency and Sex, Western Province 2010-2022

Constituency	2010 Population			2022 Population		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Western Province	24,742	30,221	54,963	34,408	41,328	75,736
Lisiba	12,420	13,859	26,279	16,299	17,734	34,033
Kaoma Central	17,894	18,219	36,113	38,709	40,979	79,688
Mangochi	32,159	38,008	70,167	33,560	34,442	68,002
Lume	24,219	24,527	48,746	29,408	31,894	61,302
Luanshya	20,788	23,022	43,810	29,700	31,293	60,993
Lukulu East	28,290	30,244	58,534	44,193	50,097	94,290
Mtoto	13,100	14,368	27,468	19,232	20,209	39,441
Mungu Central	42,414	44,211	86,625	70,209	78,763	148,972
Nalikwanda	19,129	20,889	40,017	23,231	25,513	48,744
Mtoto	14,851	15,631	30,482	22,537	22,789	45,326
Mwandi	12,343	12,711	25,054	20,143	20,273	40,416
Nalolo	24,558	29,011	53,569	30,502	38,143	72,645
Nayunia	21,031	21,139	42,170	32,964	33,090	66,054
Senanga	33,870	37,047	70,917	53,642	58,578	112,220
Seheke	21,719	22,129	43,848	35,484	37,171	72,655
Sowetola	24,710	24,509	49,219	34,263	39,559	73,822
Sikongo	20,752	24,710	45,462	27,581	32,089	59,670
Suma	20,514	21,970	42,484	31,404	34,025	65,429
Total	433,505	449,449	882,954	655,421	707,899	1,363,320

Source: Zamstats

In rural Zambia, the logic shifts. Provinces such as Western, North-Western, and Muchinga have smaller populations but significantly lower population-per-constituency ratios. These areas are characterised by large landmass, sparse settlement patterns, and limited infrastructure.

Here, the Commission appears to have prioritised accessibility, ensuring that communities spread across long distances are not left without effective representation. The consequence, however, is that fewer people are represented by each MP, increasing the relative weight of each vote.

Growth corridors

At the same time, the delimitation reflects an awareness of emerging growth corridors. New constituencies have been created in areas such as Chongwe, Kalumbila, and Chibombo, districts that have recorded some of the highest population growth rates in the country.

In these regions, the Commission seems to be anticipating future demographic shifts rather than simply responding to current figures. This forward-looking approach suggests that delimitation is not only about present realities, but also about positioning the electoral map for the Zambia of tomorrow.

- Chongwe (Lusaka Province) – expanding peri-urban settlements
- Kalumbila (North-Western Province) – mining-driven population surge
- Chibombo (Central Province) – strategic corridor along the Great North Road

According to the 2022 census, these areas have recorded some of the highest growth rates in the country, in some cases exceeding 6–8 percent annually.

A historical shift - with new questions

Historically, the scale of this expansion is unprecedented. Zambia has gradually increased the number of

constituencies since independence, but never at this magnitude. The addition of 70 constituencies marks a structural shift in the country's democratic architecture, one that will influence governance, resource allocation, and political competition for years to come.

Yet it also raises difficult questions about the nature of representation. Should all votes carry equal weight regardless of geography? Or should representation account for the realities of distance, remoteness, and access to services? The current delimitation suggests that Zambia has opted for a hybrid model, one that blends population equality with practical considerations. But in doing so, it has created a system where equality is uneven.

The political stakes

Electoral boundaries are not just administrative tools. They are instruments of power. They determine how communities are grouped, how voices are amplified or diluted, and ultimately how political authority is distributed. In this new configuration, urban voters, despite their growing numbers, find themselves stretched across fewer constituencies, while rural voters gain comparatively greater representation.

The bottom line

The ECZ has delivered on its promise to bring representation closer to the people. But it has not done so equally. As Zambia moves toward the 2026 elections, the new constituencies will not only define political competition, they will quietly shape the value of each vote.

Central Province (8 New Constituencies)

No.	District	New Constituency
1.	Chibombo	Keembe West
2.	Chisamba	Mwamboshi
3.	Kabwa	Bwacha South
4.	Kapiri Mposhi	Kapiri Mposhi West
5.	Mkushi	Mkushi South
6.	Mumbwa	Mumbwa West
7.	Serenje	Nkundalla
8.	Shibuyunji	Mwembezi West

One Vote, Unequal Weight | Inside Zambia's New Constituency Map cont...

Copperbelt (7 New Constituencies)

2. Copperbelt Province

No.	District	New Constituency
1.	Chililabombwe	Konkola
2.	Chingola	Chingola West
3.	Kalulushi	Chambishi
4.	Lufwanyama	Lufwanyama East
5.	Masaiti	Kalalangabo
6.	Mpongwe	Mpongwe East
7.	Ndola	Dag Hammerskjoeld

Eastern Province (9 New Constituencies)

No.	District	New Constituency
1.	Chadiza	Chadiza East
2.	Chama	Chama Central
3.	Chasefu	Chasefu North
4.	Chipangali	Chipangali West
5.	Chipata	Chipata North
6.	Lumezi	Lumezi South
7.	Lusangazi	Lusangazi Central
8.	Mambwe	Malambo West
9.	Nyimba	Nyimba North

Luapula Province (5 New Constituencies)

No.	District	New Constituency
1.	Chienge	Kalungwishi
2.	Chifunabuli	Chifunabuli North
3.	Kawambwa	Luongo
4.	Mansa	Mansa East
5.	Nchelenge	Mweru

Lusaka Province (6 New Constituencies)

No.	District	New Constituency
1.	Chilanga	Chilanga North
2.	Chongwe	Chongwe West
3.	Kafue	Kafue East
4.	Lusaka	Makeni
5.	Lusaka	Roma
6.	Lusaka	Lima

Muchinga Province (6 New Constituencies)

No.	District	New Constituency
1.	Chinsali	Chilinda
2.	Isoka	Nkombwa
3.	Kanchibiya	Lwitikila
4.	Mafinga	Mafinga South
5.	Mpika	Mpika South
6.	Nakonde	Mwenzu

Northern Province (6 New Constituencies)

No.	District	New Constituency
1.	Kaputa	Kundabwika
2.	Kasama	Kasama North
3.	Luwingu	Luwingu Central
4.	Mbala	Saise
5.	Mpulungu	Mpulungu South
6.	Mungwi	Mpanda

North-Western Province (7 New Constituencies)

No.	District	New Constituency
1.	Kabompo	Kabompo West
2.	Kalumbila	Lumwana
3.	Kasempa	Mufwashi
4.	Mufumbwe	Dongwe
5.	Mwinilunga	Mwinilunga East
6.	Solwezi	Solwezi North
7.	Zambezi	Zambezi Central

Southern Province (9 New Constituencies)

No.	District	New Constituency
1.	Choma	Choma South
2.	Itezhi-Tezhi	Itezhi-Tezhi West
3.	Kalomo	Kalomo South
4.	Kazungula	Kazungula North
5.	Livingstone	Maramba
6.	Mazabuka	Magoye West
7.	Monze	Monze East
8.	Namwala	Namwala East
9.	Sinazongwe	Kariba

Western Province (7 New Constituencies)

No.	District	New Constituency
1.	Kalabo	Kalabo South
2.	Luampa	Luampa West
3.	Lukulu	Lukulu South
4.	Mongu	Mongu East
5.	Senanga	Senanga North
6.	Sesheke	Sesheke West
7.	Shangombo	Shangombo North

Province	Current No. of Constituencies	No. of New Constituencies	Total No. of Constituencies
Central	15	8	23
Copperbelt	22	7	29
Eastern	20	9	29
Luapula	15	5	20
Lusaka	12	6	18
Muchinga	8	6	14
Northern	13	6	19
North Western	12	7	19
Southern	20	9	29
Western	19	7	26
Total	156	70	226

AU Petition Over Kabwe Lead Crisis Piles Pressure on Zambia Ahead of Elections

By Charles Mafa

Zambia is facing renewed international pressure over the decades-long lead poisoning crisis in Kabwe, as human rights groups and affected families push for urgent intervention from the African Union.

In a complaint filed before the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA), alongside Zambian civil society organisations and affected families, is seeking accountability for what they describe as ongoing violations of children's rights linked to historical mining activities in the central Zambian town.

The case, backed by Human Rights Watch, calls for urgent action to address what has become one of the most severe environmental health crises in the country.

“The consequences of the Zambian government’s inadequate enforcement of mining and environmental regulations have been borne by children, the most vulnerable population,” said Allan Ngari, Africa advocacy director at Human Rights Watch.

“The case being filed by IHRDA, its partners and affected families is a necessary and urgent effort to end this cycle of neglect and demand accountability and immediate action from the Zambian government.”

The petition comes as President Hakainde Hichilema is scheduled to visit Kabwe to reopen the Zambia-China Mulungushi Textiles joint venture, following a reported US\$140 million rehabilitation after more than two decades of closure. Political analysts say the timing of the visit, in a town long defined by one of the country’s worst environmental disasters, places renewed scrutiny on the government’s response to the lead crisis ahead of the August 13 elections.

While investment returns to Kabwe through industrial revival, affected families say the legacy of past mining remains largely unaddressed.

According to the complaint by IHRDA, children in Kabwe have been exposed to toxic lead waste from historic mining operations and contaminated mine tailings in a mine that was

AU Petition Over Kabwe Lead Crisis Piles Pressure on Zambia Ahead of Elections cont...

opened in the British colonial period. Lead is a highly toxic metal that is particularly harmful for children and can result in cognitive impairment, multiple irreversible health effects, and even premature death.

Estimates suggest that up to 200,000 people may have been exposed to toxic dust from the mine, with medical researchers indicating that more than 95 percent of children living near the former site have elevated lead levels in their blood.

Despite the scale of the crisis, rights groups argue that government action has fallen short.

“The consequences of inadequate enforcement of mining and environmental regulations have been borne by children, the most vulnerable population,” said Allan Ngari.

The complaint accuses the Zambian government of failing to adequately contain contamination and of allowing continued exposure through licensing of mining and mineral processing activities on toxic waste sites.

While authorities have taken some steps to address the crisis, including establishing a presidential technical committee, critics say these efforts have yet to translate into meaningful, long-term solutions.

The petitioners are now asking the African committee to find Zambia in violation of its obligations under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

They are also seeking a series of urgent measures, including the immediate containment of contamination sources, suspension of hazardous activities, large-scale testing and treatment of children, and long-term environmental clean-up of affected areas, including schools and homes.

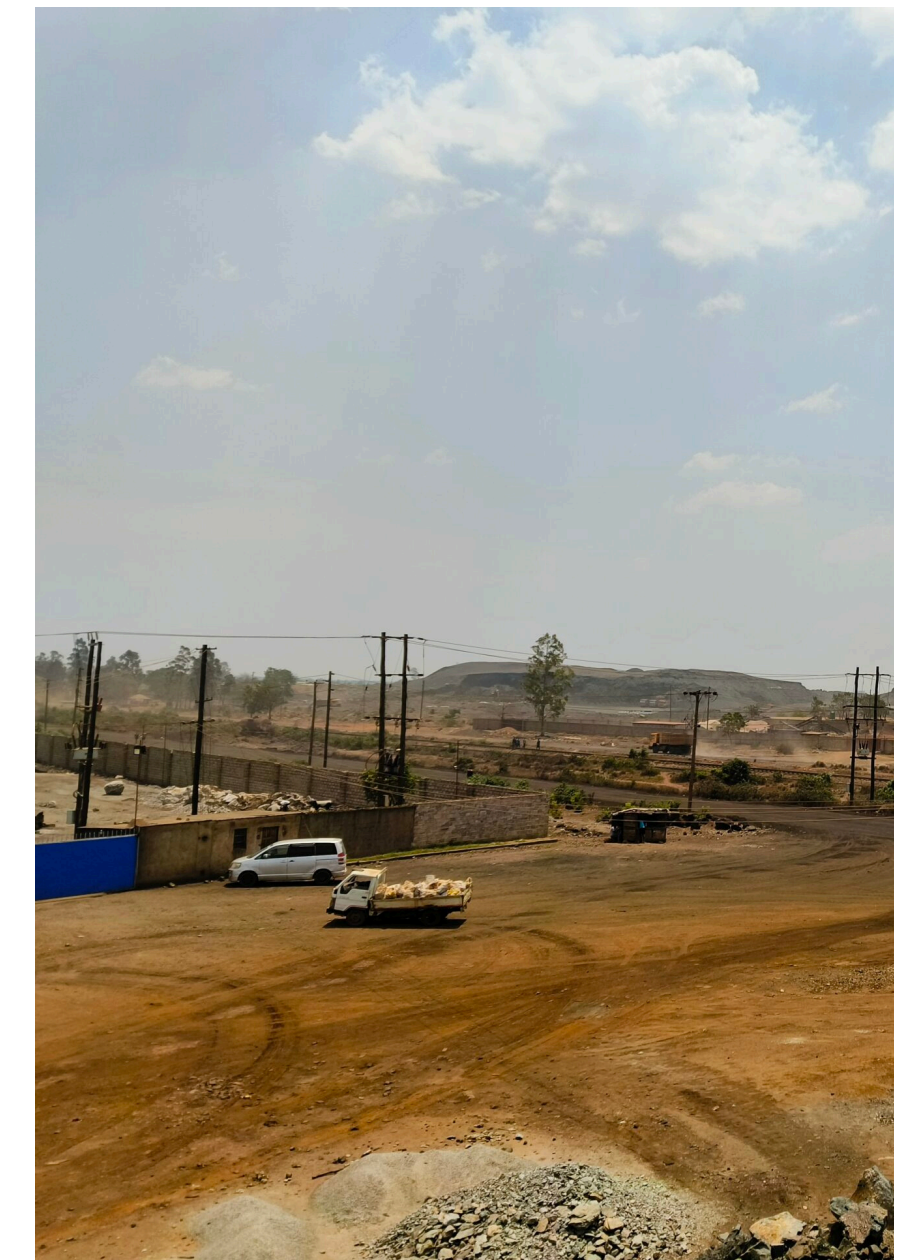
The case comes at a time of growing legal and public scrutiny over the Kabwe disaster. Parallel class action proceedings are ongoing in South Africa against companies linked to the historical mining operations, highlighting the potential for both state and corporate accountability.

For affected families, however, the issue remains immediate and deeply personal.

Human rights groups say the AU case presents a critical opportunity for Zambia to address longstanding failures.

“This request for AU action is an opportunity for the Zambian government to place children’s rights to health and safety above its economic interest,” Ngari said. “The request along with the class action suit highlights the importance of both state responsibility and corporate accountability in addressing decades-long environmental harm and ensuring effective reparations for affected children and communities.”

Whether the intervention will lead to concrete action remains to be seen. But for many in Kabwe, the filing marks another step in a long struggle for recognition, accountability, and a safe environment.



\$4 Million Promise | Who Benefited from the Sensele Empowerment Fund?

As Zambia heads toward 2026, questions over transparency, accountability, and who benefits from “empowerment” are only growing louder.

By *Beverly Busanga* | *Chingola*

Chingola is a town built on copper. But for hundreds of small-scale miners, locally known as jerabos, Sensele Mine was more than a source of mineral wealth. It was survival.

That survival was abruptly disrupted in December 2023. On December 1, more than 30 illegal miners were reportedly trapped underground at Sensele Mine. 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 jerabos.

Frustration quickly grew. On April 3 and again on July 30, 2025, small-scale miners clashed with police during protests demanding access to the site. Many said they had been promised that the mine would reopen after the rainy season. That reopening never came.

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

At the centre of the deal was 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 2026, government confirmed that the funds had been released. Celebrations followed.

But weeks later, a different story began to emerge.

On January 5, 2026, groups of miners gathered at the District Commissioner’s office in Chingola with a simple question: where is our money?

Several miners told the investigation that they had registered for the fund, some more than once, but had not received anything. They were later directed to Rugby Stadium to verify registration lists, where confusion and frustration deepened.

Some claimed that certain individuals had already purchased vehicles using the funds, while others said they had not received even a single ngwee. These claims, however, could not be independently verified.

Leaders of the small-scale miners offered a different perspective. Chairperson Gabriel Chipimo disputed claims of widespread exclusion, while vice chairperson Mike Mushota suggested that some of those complaining may not have been legitimate Sensele workers or may have failed verification processes.

Yet critical questions remain unanswered. No verified public list of beneficiaries has been released. There is no breakdown of payments and no disclosure of how the funds were distributed.

The US\$4 million deal raises several key questions. Where exactly was the fund deposited? Was the amount shared equally among the 4,000 miners? How were beneficiaries verified? Was there any government audit? And what oversight mechanisms are in place?

Neither the steering committee nor the company has made public any documentation detailing how the money was allocated.

\$4 Million Promise | Who Benefited from the Sensele Empowerment Fund? cont..

In a recent interview, Bishop Joseph Kazhila, founder of Life Gospel Fellowship Ministries Church International and a member of the committee overseeing the programme, acknowledged challenges in the disbursement.

A review of company records shows that Chingola Resources Limited has a complex ownership structure.

The majority of shares are held by corporate entities, with Laric Management-FZCO controlling the largest stake at 85,000 shares. Other corporate shareholders include Beverley Building Limited, Sensele Enterprises Limited, and Supremacy Investments Limited. Additional shares are held by individual investors, both Zambian and foreign, including from the United Kingdom and China. The company was incorporated on June 10, 2022.



For many in Chingola, the empowerment fund was meant to bring closure to a cycle of conflict at Sensele Mine. Instead, a lack of transparency risks replacing conflict with uncertainty.

If 4,000 miners were meant to benefit, how many actually did? And if the funds have been fully disbursed, why do some registered miners say they are still waiting?

While the programme has been presented as an empowerment initiative, findings suggest it may have served another purpose.

Evidence from the investigation indicates that the funds provided by Chingola Resources were intended, at least in part, to facilitate the removal of illegal miners from the pit and pave the way for formal mining operations by the new owners.

Rather than direct empowerment, the programme appears to function as a transition mechanism clearing access for commercial mining activities. For many former jerabos, the promise of empowerment remains uncertain.

That mix is telling. While Zambia has seen growth in media platforms and a modest improvement in perceptions of freedom, the day-to-day environment for journalists tells a more complicated story

Freedom without access

One of the clearest signals of that contradiction lies in access to information. According to the report, 65 percent of journalists struggle to access information, and 79 percent struggle to access government officials. These are not small barriers. They strike at the core of journalism. Because without access, there is no accountability.

Chisanga warned that this limitation weakens the media's watchdog role and reduces citizens' ability to participate meaningfully in governance. In practical terms, it means stories are delayed, diluted, or never told at all.

A legal framework that restricts

Beyond access, the report highlights deeper structural concerns within Zambia's legal framework.

Seventy-five percent of respondents say existing laws restrict media operations, with cyber-related legislation and regulatory frameworks cited as key pressure points.

Government acknowledged these concerns. Representing the Ministry of Information and Media, Permanent Secretary Thabo Kawana, through a statement delivered by Director for Press and Media Morden Mayembe, reaffirmed the state's commitment to improving the media environment.

"Access to information remains a cornerstone of democracy," the statement read, noting ongoing efforts to strengthen the implementation of the Access to Information Act and institutional frameworks.

However, the government stressed that journalists in Zambia operate under the same legal framework as ordinary citizens, as there is currently no specific law granting them special protections or status.

Mayembe said that while international frameworks recognise certain rights and protections for journalists,

these have not yet been fully incorporated into national law.

He noted that Zambia has no legislation clearly defining who qualifies as a journalist or media practitioner, nor any law that grants them a distinct legal status.

"Consequently, journalists operating in public spaces are subject to the same legal framework as all other citizens. They are not granted automatic exemptions or special treatment simply by virtue of their profession," he said.

He explained that journalists are required to comply with the law like any other citizen. This includes respecting privacy rights, observing restrictions on public gatherings and access to restricted areas, and avoiding offences such as defamation, hate speech, misinformation, or the publication of information exempted under the Access to Information Act.

He added that although international and regional human rights instruments recognise that journalists may, in certain circumstances, be entitled to specific protections in the public interest, these remain largely aspirational in Zambia until they are formally domesticated.

"As such, law enforcement agencies and the courts are bound to apply existing laws as enacted," he said.

In this context, the government said assessments of press freedom should take into account the country's legal framework, adding that progress will depend on continued dialogue among government, the media, and civil society.

Digital shifts and new risks

The report also examines emerging trends in the digital space, including the growing influence of bloggers and artificial intelligence.

While digital platforms have expanded access to information, they have also introduced new risks, including misinformation and ethical concerns.

The gaps are significant. According to the report, 80 percent of media houses lack policies on artificial intelligence, while 94 percent have no code of conduct governing its use.

Freedom on Paper, Pressure in Practice: Inside Zambia's Media Reality

By Linda Soko Tembo

Zambia's media landscape is expanding, but not necessarily becoming freer.

A new national report shows that while platforms are growing, journalists are still struggling to access information, operate without fear, and navigate restrictive laws.

The result is a system where freedom exists in principle—but is limited in practice.

A new report by the Media Institute of Southern Africa Zambia suggests that while progress has been made¹, the conditions under which journalists operate remain constrained, uneven, and, in some cases, increasingly fragile.

A mixed picture

The Freedom of Expression (FOX) Report by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA Zambia)

examines how journalists and other stakeholders perceive the media environment in the country over a six-month period. The newly-released report, titled "a perception of the freedom of expression, media freedom and digital rights in Zambia," covers the period from July to December 2025.

Its findings are based not on theory, but on lived experience—drawing from journalists, civil society, government, and academia. At its launch, MISA Zambia Chairperson Lorraine Mwanza Chisanga described the outcome as "a mixed but important picture".

"The report reveals that 62 percent of journalists believe that the media does not operate freely," she said, adding that this reflects ongoing challenges despite existing democratic frameworks.

Freedom on Paper, Pressure in Practice: Inside Zambia's Media Reality cont...

Closing the event, Austin Kayanda said the report should serve as a catalyst for action, not just a reflection of challenges.

“The findings remind us that while progress has been made, significant work still lies ahead, particularly in improving access to information, addressing restrictive legal frameworks, and ensuring the safety and independence of journalists,” he said.

As Zambia approaches the 2026 general elections, stakeholders are being urged to strengthen collaboration and create an environment where the media can operate freely and citizens can access information without fear.

Now in its sixth edition since its introduction in 2022, the FOX Report remains a key accountability and advocacy tool, tracking the state of media freedom, freedom of expression, and digital rights in Zambia.

1. Zambia has more than 260 broadcasting stations, comprising 192 radio stations, 62 television stations, and six subscription management services, according to the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

How a Newly Formed Company Secured a School Lab Tender — & Failed to Deliver

In Kalomo's Choonga Ward, a K300,000 school laboratory contract was handed to a company barely months old and registered for retail, not construction. Months later, the project has stalled, payments have been made, and no one is saying exactly where the money went.

By **Kebby Sianjame | Kalomo**

At Choonga Secondary School, the bell still rings to mark the start of lessons. But inside the classrooms, science is taught without experiments, and practical learning exists only on the chalkboard. A laboratory project meant to change that reality now stands incomplete.

A science laboratory project meant to change that reality now stands incomplete.

Funded under the 2024 Constituency Development Fund (CDF), the project received over K300,000 in February 2025. The funds were intended for plumbing works, installation of laboratory sinks, tables, and other essential fittings to support practical science education.

But months after work was expected to be completed, the structure tells a different story. Inside the building are unfinished tables, poorly installed pipes, and no equipment. Teachers are left explaining experiments in theory, while pupils wait for a facility that has yet to materialise.

“We learn science in the classroom, but experiments are just written on the board. We don't practice,” one pupil said.

Another added: “We were told the lab would help us, especially us in examination classes, for physics and chemistry. But it has taken too long.”

A contract for the project was awarded by Kalomo Council to Bombafye Investment Limited. According to procurement expectations, such contracts are supposed to be transparent, competitive, and awarded to capable entities.

However, a search of records at the Patents and Companies Registration Agency (PACRA) reveals that Bombafye Investment Limited was only incorporated on 2 November 2024, just a few months before the laboratory project was funded.

The company is owned by two shareholders, Harry Mwasika and Jackson Hara, with a nominal share capital of K20,000. Its registered business activity is listed as retail trade, not construction.

These details raise questions about how the company was selected for a public infrastructure project worth over K300,000.

What due diligence was conducted before awarding the contract? And how did a newly registered company, with no clear construction profile, secure the tender?

For the school, the consequences are immediate and visible.

“As a fully-fledged secondary school, we need this laboratory. The new curriculum requires that learners use it regularly. Without it, our pupils risk leaving school half-prepared,” said head teacher Belden Hamuyobe, who is appealing for the project to be completed as soon as possible.

At community level, frustration is growing. Parents say the delay is affecting the quality of education their children receive.

Two parents, Dorcus Mudenda and Gatrade Walenda, said the stalled project has denied pupils the opportunity to fully benefit from science education, particularly those preparing for examinations.

According to Kalomo Town Council Director of Works, Buya Siyagwelele, the contract was eventually terminated after concerns were raised about the project.

However, key questions remain unanswered.

Council officials confirmed that part of the K300,000 allocation had already been released to the contractor before the contract was terminated. But they did not disclose how much money was paid, how much work was completed, or whether any funds have been recovered.

Requests for detailed figures were not answered by the time of publication. Without this information, it is difficult for the public to determine whether taxpayer funds were adequately safeguarded.

A representative of Bombafye Investment Limited, Davies Bwembya, said he was not aware of the contract's termination. He confirmed that the company had received payment but did not disclose the amount.

Meanwhile, the building remains incomplete.

Council officials say the project will be completed, but for the Choonga community, such assurances come after months of waiting.

The stalled laboratory highlights a broader challenge affecting some CDF-funded projects. While the programme is designed to support local development, weak contract enforcement, delayed corrective action, and limited transparency can undermine its impact.

In Choonga, the cost is already clear.

Learners have lost valuable time. Teachers continue to work without essential tools. And a project meant to improve education now stands as a reminder of unanswered questions.

The story was produced by Voice of Kalomo Radio and fact-checked by MakaanDay Centre for Investigative Journalism.



This week in the Bulletin & Record

King or country?

Whether or not the Barotseland Agreement of 1964 should be reinstated has been a political hot potato since its abrogation in the late 1960s. Restoration of the agreement was a campaign issue for the Patriot Front in the 2011 elections – one that helped President Sata win Western Province. More recently, however, government's stance has been less clear and this has heightened tension in the province. At the time of going to print, Zambia was awaiting the findings of the Rodger Chongwe Commission of Inquiry into last year's deaths during riots in Mongu. The Barotse National Council was also due to meet imminently. Jack Zimba went to Mongu to find out how the people of that province feel about the situation

Wamundila is sitting under a tree in Mulambwa Harbour in Mongu selling fresh fish despite a national fish ban announced by government.

For Wamundila and other fishermen and fish traders in Western Province, the fish ban announced by government does not apply here. The decree of the Litunga, or king, does. And the king has not issued any decree to ban fishing yet.

But the waters do not yield much at this time of the year. One man comes to the river bank with a handful of small fish and puts them on a sack spread on the ground. A hoard of women gathers around and haggles over the price.

Nearby, a boat full of weary-looking, sun-beaten souls prepares for the arduous journey across the flooded Barotse plains to Kalabo. This is the only means of transport during the flood season in a region that has seen little development since Independence.

Mongu is by and large a backwater town devoid of any industry or major agriculture development, and the whole province has extremely poor infrastructure – second only to the newly-created Muchinga Province. Apart from shabby lodges, guest houses and nondescript buildings that dot the sandy landscape of Mongu without design, form or pattern, there is precious little else in the provincial capital of Western Province.

On paper, the picture of the province looks even bleaker and it usually falls at the base of any statistical ladder. For example, a survey done by the Central Statistical Office on poverty levels across the country revealed that Western Province, between 1991 and 2006, had poverty levels as high as 84% - far higher than the national average. The province is also grappling with a growing problem of underage drinking and prostitution. Many blame lack of development for the province's high unemployment and poverty levels.

All this has caused despondency among residents of Mongu and Western Province in general. Many believe it is the region's tangled political history that has led to this underdevelopment.

Indeed, the problem besetting Western Province is multifaceted and its genesis almost gets lost in history and politics – century-old agreements that were signed between rulers of the once flourishing Lozi Kingdom and the British colonial rulers in search of Africa's wealth. And of course there is the highly contentious Barotseland Agreement of 1964, which gave the Lozi king the power to administer all the resources of Barotseland such as its fish, water and land, as well as power in relation to local government and taxation, and the native treasury.

As a result, there are two governance systems operating in Western Province, even though the Barotseland Agreement of 1964 was abrogated by the president at the time, Kenneth Kaunda, through the passing of the Local Government Act no.69 of 1965, and the Land and Miscellaneous Provisions Act no.47 of 1969, which effectively abolished Barotseland as a separate political entity and incorporated it into the national local government system. The Constitution (Amendment) Act no.47 of 1969 cancelled the Barotseland Agreement of 1964.

However, the Barotse Royal Establishment (BRE), the traditional authority in Barotseland, and Lozi traditionalists have contested the legality of decisions made by the United National Independence Party government to cancel the Barotseland Agreement of 1964, accusing it of having unilaterally abrogated the agreement without consulting the Litunga and the people of Barotseland.

Since 1969, there has been agitation from the Lozis for the restoration of the Barotseland Agreement, with demands ranging from reinstating the autonomy provided

under the 1964 agreement to secession based on the principle of self-determination.

Successive Zambian presidents have equally refused to honour the agreement, saying it threatens national unity. But many Lozis think the restoration of the agreement could foster development in the province, claiming neglect by central government under the current system.

I met with four youths who call themselves Barotse activists to discuss the emotive subject of the Barotseland Agreement. Last year, all but one of the youths were sent to prison convicted of treason for advocating the restoration of the agreement and for their involvement in the riots of January 14, 2011, in which two youths were shot dead by state police and several others wounded. Nawa Nawa, Lyamba Mutumba and Mulanda Mayumbelo all served part of their jail terms at Mumbwa State Prison before they were pardoned by the newly-elected President Michael Sata. The fourth youth, Brian Kahalu, claims he had been on the police's wanted list following the January 14 riots. In total, 28 people were convicted of treason and sent to prison, heightening tensions in a province that only a few months earlier had seen similar protests over the Barotseland Agreement issue.

The pardoning of the convicted youths by President Sata was hailed by many as a way of healing the old wounds and opening a new page in as far as the Barotseland issue was concerned. President Sata had made the release of the Barotse detainees his campaign message before last year's September 20 elections, calling the detainees "our children" in a bid clearly meant to win the hearts and minds of the people of Western Province. It seems he won their hearts, but not their minds.

"I know my relatives voted for Sata because they wanted me out of prison," Mr Mutumba, one of the four youths, told me. "But I don't think he can bring development to Barotseland."

There is already growing discontentment among the young people in Mongu, most of whom voted for the Patriotic Front. The four activists feel marginalised and often talk of "us" and "them".

"We are suffering. You are not suffering, that is why you cannot support us," Mr Kahalu said, with an emphasis on "we" and "you". For a moment, I feel as though I am in a different country.

They do not hide their indignation at the new administration.

"Why is the central government controlling



How a Newly Formed Company Secured a School Lab Tender — & Failed to Deliver cont....

everything here in Barotseland when the government that side knows that there is a government which should control those things here?

“It is another government that is controlling us, but they have neglected us. Those people are stingy,” Mr Mutumba said.

Mr Kahalu added: “I don’t think you would be happy to be fed by another household.”

Their verdict on President Sata could not be more damning. “Rupiah Banda and Michael Sata are just the same,” Mr Mutumba said, his conclusion attracting nods from his three colleagues.

But while they unanimously discredit central government, they differ over the ability of their own traditional leaders to develop the area.

Mr Mutumba says he doubts the ability of local leadership. “The local leadership has that selfishness, but that will be corrected,” he said, shaking his head.

When I ask them who is higher, the president or the Litunga, their answer is immediate. “The Litunga is higher than the president of course,” they said.

Mr Nawa says it is the ngambela who is on a par with the president. The ngambela is the prime minister in the Lozi governance structure. He adds: “The Litunga cannot be compared with the president because he is a king.”

I raise hesitantly the issue of secession, expecting the youths to shy away from the subject considering their conviction and imprisonment last year, but their response is definitive.

“What we want is just the whole of our beautiful land to be cut off from the rest of the country because we have suffered enough,” Mr Mutumba said.

“Secession is the best,” Mr Kahalu added.

The youths dream of a Barotseland with its own banks, universities and manufacturing industries, but they say that can only happen when Barotseland secedes from the rest of Zambia, even though they all agree that the agreement of 1964 was not about secession.

Only Mr Nawa, a softly-spoken father-of-six, is hesitant to call for secession, perhaps still haunted by what he suffered in prison last year.

“It is up to the royal establishment to decide,” he said, apparently preferring not to discuss the issue further.

Last year the BRE clearly stated that the Barotseland Agreement of 1964 was not about secession but about giving Western Province the power to administer its own affairs. It is unclear whether this stance will change following this year’s Barotse National Council (BNC).

The king, who is largely perceived to be a Movement for Multi-Party Democracy sympathiser, has already had a brushing with President Sata, with the former speaking disparagingly about the latter. Although various stakeholders have called for dialogue over the Barotseland issue, the path President Sata has taken seems parallel to that of the royal establishment. For example, by not recognizing the ngambela of Barotseland – both as a person and office – the president has shut the main channel of communication with the Lozi people.

President Sata could not hide his indignation towards the new Lozi prime minister at a function at State House, where he called him a “fake”, arguing that no such title existed in Zambia’s Constitution. But his comments did not go down well with the Lozis, who had waited for 15 years to have a new prime minister, who is appointed by the Litunga and speaks on behalf of the king. Many Lozis had hoped that the appointment of the new ngambela would quickly settle the Barotseland Agreement impasse.

“There can be no dialogue without the ngambela because he is the principle stakeholder in this issue and he speaks on behalf of the king,” one induna (the equivalent of a chief in Western Province) told me. “And we may not have the title or position of prime minister in our Constitution, but for us he is still prime minister and the people are united behind him.”

Asked what the BRE wanted out of the

Barotseland Agreement, the induna instead talked of the peoples’ wishes.

“Whatever the people will come up with at the BNC [Barotse National Council], that is what BRE will go with, whether recognition or breakaway. At the moment, the BRE has nothing on the table,” he told me.

The BNC, which at the time of going to print had not taken place but was expected to do so imminently, is a stakeholders’ meeting that discusses important issues affecting the people of Western Province.

there are certain demands that are too difficult for government to meet. But if BRE was flexible and accommodative, I think we would see development and the tension and conflict will be reduced,” he said.

Mr Ntoya said many young people wanted to see some of these traditional norms done away with. He points to the land issue.

“There is too much bureaucracy in the way the BRE and the kuta [traditional court] handle issues of land here, especially if you don’t come from here,” Mr Ntoya added.



Others, however, see the traditional authority in Western Province as a hindrance to development and are calling for reform.

Enoch Ntoya is vice-chairman of the Youth Dialogue Forum. He says the traditional leadership is too rigid in the way it deals with issues and is thereby stifling development.

“The issue of the BRE not compromising is a very big issue. Even the issue of the Barotseland Agreement has reached this far because maybe

Mr Ntoya says he wishes to meet the king one day and express his views about development in the province. “There is that tradition that you can’t say anything, like it was during the days of Kaunda where Kaunda was like a god and you couldn’t say anything against him. But you see, be it political or traditional, it is leadership in the end that the kuta and the Litunga are providing, so why don’t people that are being led participate?” he said.

But his wish to meet the king may never be granted

How a Newly Formed Company Secured a School Lab Tender — & Failed to Deliver cont....

because the king hardly ever appears in public and the kuta has its own restrictions about access to the king. Last year, after repeated rumours that he had died, the king presented himself to his subjects in a bid quell those rumours.

“Why should there be a rumour that the king has died for him to meet the people? And so we are saying, in the same way that he appeared when there was a crisis he should appear even when it comes to development,” Mr Ntoya said.

What does seem clear is that the awkward relationship between government and the traditional power structures in Western Province is impeding development.

Although the provincial minister Nathaniel Mubukwanu (who has since been transferred from the province) talked of a harmonious working relationship with the royal establishment, one government official gives a different story, complaining bitterly about the challenges he faces trying to appease the traditional leadership. The government official showed *The Bulletin & Record* a letter written to his office from the kuta over a government project.

“Sometimes you just have to follow what they tell you to do before they summon you. And when you try to argue, they tell you we are also a government,” he told me.

There have also been absurd stories about the allocation of land by the BRE. The most famous one is where an induna allocated land to someone within somebody’s yard — between the main house and the servant’s quarters.

Wanga Mutungulu, who leads a group called the Movement for the Restoration of the Barotse Agreement, said in *The Times of Zambia* last year: “Government as an instrument of development in Barotseland is currently a lame duck due to the existence of parallel structures of governance.

“For as long as the Barotseland Agreement 1964 is not enforced, these structures will continue to operate independently without explicit provisions for cooperation.

Under these conditions, the quest for accelerated and sustained grassroots development of the province will remain but a flirting illusion that will be pursued but not attained.”

However, some jump to the defence of the traditional leadership, pointing out projects that have been allowed in the province such the rice project in the plains under the Japanese development agency, JICA. It is a big misperception they say.

Despite the misgivings that young people like Mr Ntoya might have about the traditional leadership, there is still a deep reverence for the king among most Lozis, and for many it is considered taboo to criticise or question his authority. Those that have dissenting views about the king speak in muffled tones, usually comparing him to his predecessor, Ilute Yeta IV, who they say was a more likeable king.

“This king has little regard for tradition. No wonder he spends most of his time at Limulunga [where the king has his winter palace],” one man told me.

Last year, after the January 14 riots, there seemed to be an imminent threat to the Litunga and his throne, and government deployed hundreds of police officers to protect him during the Kuomboka ceremony, which was witnessed by far fewer people than normal following tensions in the province. The joke then was that there were more police officers during the ceremony than civilians.

For some, the number of local people who attended the ceremony was an indication of the Litunga’s ebbing popularity, and many wait to see if this year’s ceremony will present a different picture.

Back at the harbor, with its filthy surroundings and murky waters, gentle waves rock the small canoes moored along the edge of the water. There seem to be undercurrents everywhere in Mongu nowadays, creating a murky atmosphere and causing anxiety among its residents.

The story was first published in the April 2012 edition of the Bulletin and Record Magazine.

