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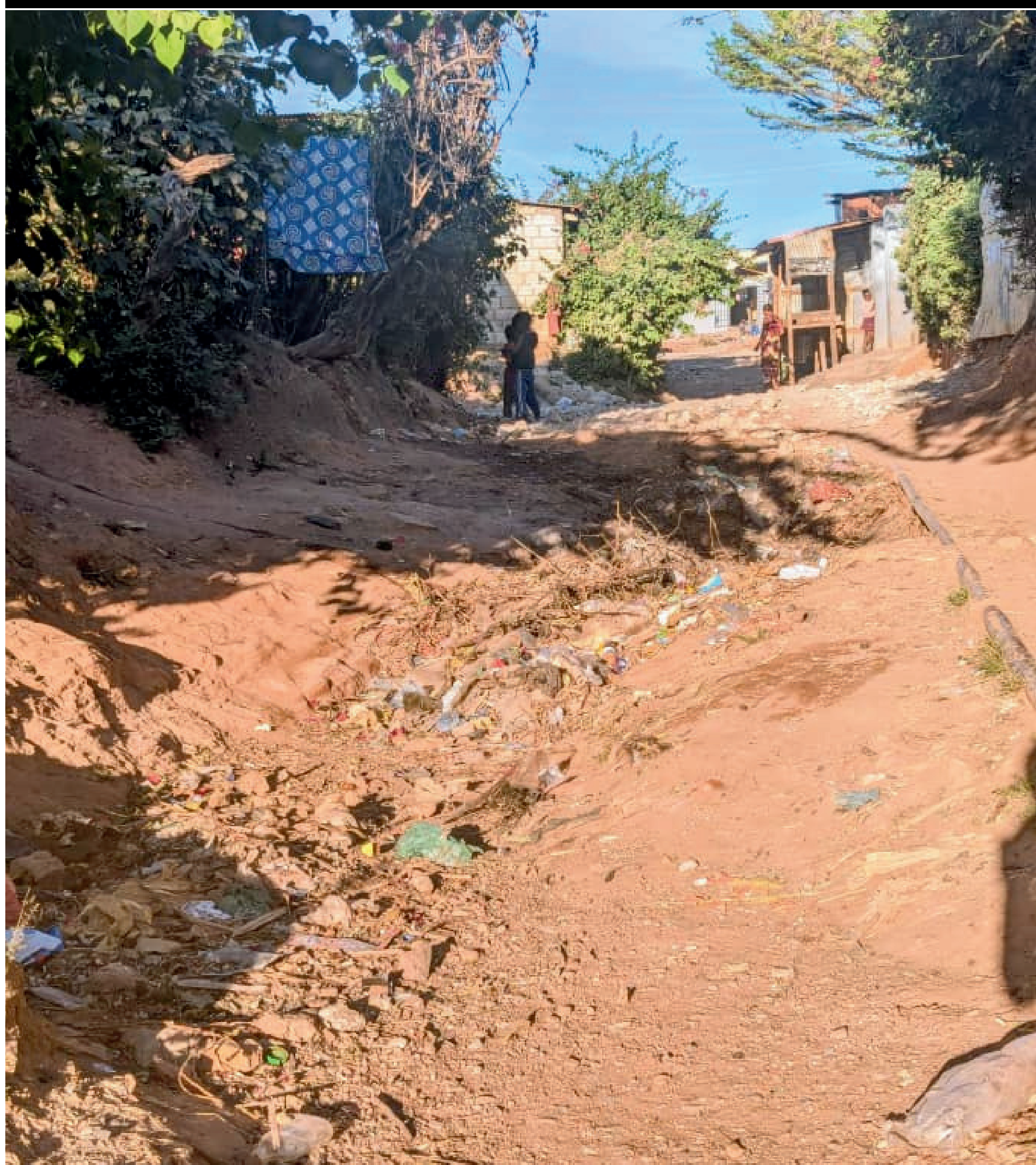
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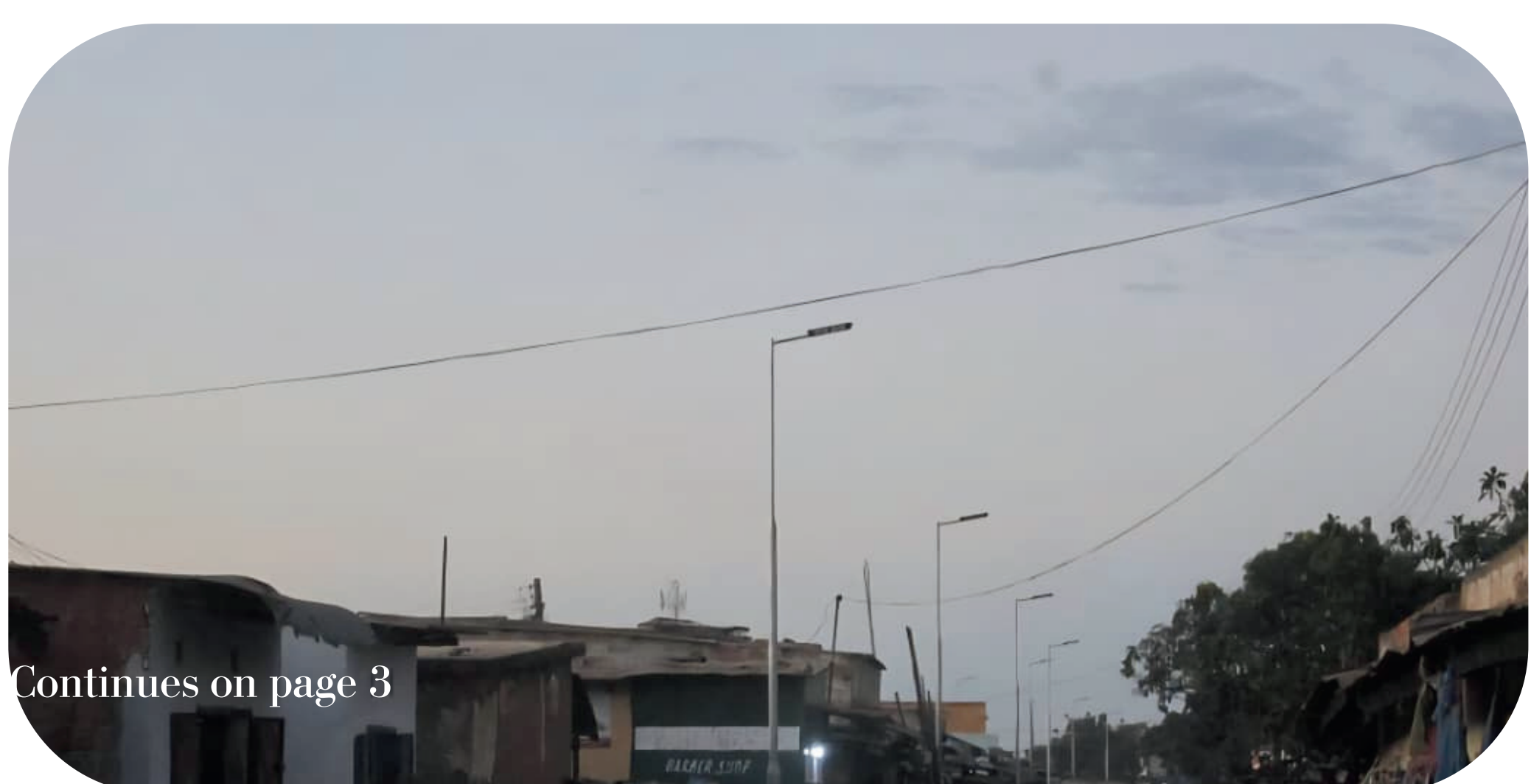
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Can New Leaders Rescue Kalikiliki From Years of Neglect?

From front page

By Mazombwe Banda

KALIKILIKI, Lusaka — When darkness falls in parts of Kalikiliki Ward 35, many residents say they avoid walking alone. Some claim even taxi drivers increasingly refuse to enter certain sections of the densely populated settlement because of fears of attacks linked to rising criminal activity and poor road conditions.

For 31-year-old Moses Phiri of Mtendere East, the danger becomes even worse when someone falls sick at night.

“Our health post only operates from 08:00 hours to 17:00 hours,” he said. “If someone gets sick at night, transport becomes another problem because of insecurity and the roads. Even Yango drivers fear coming here.”

Yet Kalikiliki Ward, located about 11 kilometres east of Lusaka’s central business district, is home to an estimated population of more than 91,160 people and 22,580 registered voters, according to Zambia Census of Population figures and the Electoral Commission of Zambia’s 2025 Final Register of Voters, respectively.

Created from Mtendere Ward 30 before the 2021 general election, Kalikiliki Ward 35 has become one of the most densely populated wards in Munali Constituency. The ward includes Kalikiliki main community, Kalale, Weber area, Mtendere East and the Natural Resources Development College (NRDC) area, with 29 polling stations spread across the constituency.

But despite rapid population growth and increasing political importance, residents say development has failed to keep pace with the community’s expanding needs.

Many point to poor roads, limited health services, blocked sewer systems, rising insecurity, inadequate sanitation and the absence of a government school within the ward as signs of long-standing neglect.

Now, as campaigns ahead of the 2026 general election begin to intensify, residents say they are looking for leaders capable of delivering

visible development rather than promises.

Health Services Under Pressure

Residents say access to healthcare remains one of the biggest challenges facing Kalikiliki Ward.

Despite the area’s large and growing population, the ward has only two health posts — one located in the main Kalikiliki community and another in Mtendere East near Salama Park.

The first health post was constructed during the Patriotic Front administration, while the second was built using the Constituency Development Fund (CDF).

According to Munali Constituency Constituency Development Fund Committee Chairperson, Auditor Mazuba, the Mtendere East Health Post consumed K1,516,420 from CDF allocations to the ward between 2019 and part of 2025. The facility was officially handed over to the community last year.

“The breakdown of the amount is as follows: K697,224 was spent on the actual structure of the health post, K385,418 on the wall fence, and K433,778 on medical equipment, furniture, and other clinic requirements,” he said.

Both facilities operate only during daytime hours, forcing residents requiring emergency medical attention at night to seek help from clinics outside the ward, including Chainda, Mtendere and Kalingalinga clinics.

Residents say the limited healthcare infrastructure has become more noticeable as the ward continues to expand.

Poor Roads and Growing Insecurity

Residents also expressed concern over rising criminal activity and deteriorating roads, which they say are affecting daily life and public safety.

Some residents claim transport operators increasingly avoid parts of the ward because of fears of attacks, especially at night. The ward currently depends mainly on the Kalikiliki police post, while some residents also rely on the nearby NRDC police post to report crimes.

Few weeks ago, Zambia Police Service spokesperson Godfrey Chilabi confirmed that police had shot dead five suspected criminals in Chibolya Compound who were believed to have regrouped there after operating from Kalikiliki.

“These suspects from Kalikiliki had regrouped in the Chibolya compound,” Chilabi said at the time.

The development heightened concerns among residents, many of whom are now calling for increased police patrols and improved security infrastructure.

Residents say poor road infrastructure has further worsened accessibility in parts of the ward, particularly during the rainy season.

Sanitation and sewer problems

In parts of Kalikiliki, blocked sewer lines and uncollected garbage have become part of daily life.

Residents say some overflowing drains remain unattended for weeks, raising fears of possible outbreaks of water-borne diseases during the rainy season.

In the main Kalikiliki community, some households depend on informal waste collectors who often delay garbage collection for days or even weeks after waste has piled up.

In Mtendere East and surrounding areas, some residents pay private garbage collectors about K75 monthly for weekly collection services.

Rosemary Mwanza, who has lived in Kalikiliki since 1994, said sanitation problems have persisted for years despite repeated complaints.

“We’ve been forsaken by our public leaders,” she said. There’s nothing to show in this ward in terms of infrastructure development in all areas, it is (one of) the least developed in this constituency.”

She said blocked sewer systems had become another major concern for residents.

No government school within the ward

Despite its large population, residents say Kalikiliki Ward still does not have a government school serving the community directly.

As a result, many families rely on community and private schools, while some children walk long distances or spend money on transport to access public schools in neighbouring areas.

Some learners reportedly travel as far as Chibelo in Lusaka Central Constituency to attend school.

“Niyokosa chabe (It’s just hard), as much as we appreciate the free education law by the government,” said resident Ruth Banda. “but it would help if we also had a government school within this ward.”

She said many parents still struggled with transport costs despite tuition-free education.

“Land is not even the problem,” she said. “The government can still find a way to build at least one school here.”

Questions over CDF awareness and access

Some residents also questioned whether ordinary community members were adequately benefiting from the CDF, particularly the bursary and skills development components.

Mwanza said many youths in the area could benefit from CDF opportunities if there was greater transparency and awareness.

“We just hear about CDF and bursaries, but I don’t personally know anyone who has benefited,” she said. “If leaders can sensitise people properly and ensure transparency, many youths here can improve their lives.”

Her concerns reflect growing public interest in how development funds are being distributed and implemented at ward level.

Delayed recreation facility

Residents also questioned delays in completing rehabilitation works at the ward’s only major playground.

The facility, which serves as the main recreational space for young people in the area, has reportedly remained inaccessible for more than a year while upgrade works continue.

Workers were recently found constructing a perimeter wall around the grounds in preparation for additional fencing works,

Can New Leaders Rescue Kalikiliki From Years of Neglect? cont...

although goalposts removed during the rehabilitation process had not yet been reinstalled.

Some residents said they had received little information about when the project would be completed.

“Yes, we want development,” Phiri said. “But this project has taken too long. It has been over a year now and people are not being told what is happening.”

Efforts to obtain a response from outgoing councillor Shadreck Chimwang’a were unsuccessful by press time as his mobile phone remained switched off.

Voters looking for new leadership

As political campaigns begin to intensify ahead of the 2026 elections, many residents say they are now looking for leaders capable of addressing the ward’s long-standing problems.

Residents interviewed said they wanted leaders who would prioritise sanitation, roads, health services, schools and youth empowerment.

For John Mpundu, 29, the next councillor must understand the realities facing the community.

“We need leaders who will work with the community and lobby for real development,” he said. “People are tired of promises.”

Several individuals are reportedly seeking adoption as ward candidates ahead of the August 13 elections, including Joseph Kumbukani Phiri, Gabriel Chanda, Aaron Kaleya and Modester Zulu.

While some aspirants declined interviews citing busy schedules, Phiri said his focus would be on sanitation, youth empowerment and community development. Having previously worked

as a water project officer, he said his experience had exposed him to many of the ward’s long-standing challenges.

“I’ve grown up in this ward,” he said. “I know the problems people are facing because I’ve seen them over the years.”

For many residents, however, the coming election is less about campaign rhetoric and more about whether leaders can finally address decades-old problems that continue to shape daily life in Kalikiliki.

“We have heard promises for many years,” said Mwanza. “What people want now is development we can actually see.”

Mazombwe is a talented journalist based in Lusaka at Zambia Daily Mail. He is currently on a three-month paid internship at MakaanDay after he emerged second in the prestigious 2025 MakaanDay Media Awards.



NDOLA’S SILENT CRISIS

Front page



A generation under siege by drugs and gangs

By James Mwape | Ndola

Children, crime and a city losing control

In several townships across Ndola on the Copperbelt, a growing generation of young people is being pulled into a dangerous cycle of drugs, gang activity, violence, and fear — exposing what residents, social workers, and community leaders describe as a deepening urban social crisis.

What was once dismissed as isolated cases of substance abuse among a few youths has, according to residents, evolved into a wider breakdown affecting families, schools, markets, and community safety across parts of the Copperbelt city.

From Chifubu to Chipulukusu, Twapia to Siniya, and Masala to Kawama,

residents describe communities where drug use among teenagers is becoming increasingly visible, youth gangs commonly referred to as “junkies” are instilling fear, and some children are allegedly being drawn into the sale and distribution of drugs

Many residents say the crisis is no longer hidden. It is unfolding openly within communities already struggling with unemployment, poverty, overcrowding, and limited opportunities for young people.

At the centre of these concerns is the growing belief that children are not only using drugs but are also being drawn into selling them, often within the same communities where they live.

A Radio Icengelo report found that while authorities acknowledge rising cases of drug abuse and youth-related criminal activity, residents believe enforcement has not kept pace with the scale of the problem.

In some areas, residents describe parts of their communities as increasingly unsafe after dark, with reports of attacks and intimidation linked to groups of youths allegedly operating in gangs.

One resident from Riverside in Siniya Compound described

a growing sense of fear in the area, saying some routes have become inaccessible at night due to fear of attacks.

“Some roads in Riverside have become inaccessible at night. You just cannot pass freely especially when you are carrying a parcel, they grab and if you resist, they beat,” the resident said.

Icengelo also uncovered allegations suggesting possible involvement of some individuals within community security structures in enabling drug-related activities.

A former member of a neighbourhood watch group alleged that some operatives may tip off suspected dealers before operations are conducted, while others allegedly benefit financially from allowing the trade to continue. These allegations could not be independently verified.

At Siniya Market, traders say the impact of drug abuse among youths is now part of daily life.

A trader said: “These boys take drugs right behind here. When they are high, they become aggressive. One of them even nearly injured me one time,” the trader said.

A reformed youth, who has experienced drug abuse and is now trying to rebuild his life, also shared his experience.

NDOLA'S SILENT CRISIS Cont....

“I started because of peer pressure. My friends were doing it and I thought it was normal. Later it became a habit that was hard to stop,” he said.

At Luig Drop-in Centre, under the Chicetekelo Youth Project rehabilitation programme, workers say the crisis is deepening. Staff members report that the age of children affected by substance abuse continues to grow rapidly.

“The problem is getting worse. The youngest we have seen is just eight years old,” said staff member Inness Phiri.

Another official, Jackson Nyirongo, said the centre currently has 153 boys and girls undergoing treatment for drug-related problems.

The situation raises broader questions about what is driving young people into substance abuse and crime at such an early age. Residents and social workers point to a combination of poverty, unemployment, family breakdown, and peer pressure as key contributing factors.

Community leaders say the situation has developed gradually but has now reached worrying levels.

One local leader described the trend as a “ticking time bomb,” warning that children as young as 15 are already involved in substance abuse, particularly cannabis and other drugs.

The leader further stated that the rise in drug use has contributed to the formation of youth groups that now engage in violent behaviour and instil fear in surrounding communities.

“These groups are now attacking members of the community and instilling fear among residents,” the leader said.

Zambia’s child protection framework emphasises rehabilitation rather than punishment for juveniles involved in drug-related offences. However, concerns have emerged that this protection may be exploited by older individuals who allegedly use minors to distribute drugs, knowing they are less likely to face severe penalties.

At Nkwazi Police Post, cases linked to assault and suspected gang activity are reportedly being recorded. During a visit by this reporter, a young man arrived

seeking assistance after an alleged attack, carrying a medical report for documentation.

When asked about allegations of collusion between security personnel and drug dealers, a senior officer at Nkwazi Police Post declined to comment on record, stating she was not aware of such conduct. However, she acknowledged that cases involving drug abuse and youth-related violence were on the rise.

In another interaction, a police officer who spoke on condition of anonymity confirmed that two juveniles aged 15 and 16 had recently been picked on suspicion of selling cannabis. The officer said the children were later released after counselling, in line with provisions under the Children’s Code Act No. 12 of 2022.

Efforts to obtain a response from the Drug Enforcement Commission in Ndola were unsuccessful. The institution did not provide comment despite a physical visit and follow-up calls.

Ndola Teaching Hospital also did not respond to requests for comment, although a medical officer confirmed that the facility continues to handle cases of young people presenting with symptoms linked to substance abuse.

For many families, the crisis is no longer seen only as a security issue, but as a gradual erosion of childhood, safety, and opportunity.

This article was produced by MakanDay’s Local Reporting Network. Subscribe through our website and follow our Facebook page to receive stories like this one as soon as they are published.



A Killing in Plain Sight | Inside the Collapse of Order at Kisasa Market

Police outnumbered, systems overwhelmed, and a community left to decide justice for itself.

By Linda Soko Tembo, Brenda Zulu & Stanley Fwataki

When MakanDay journalists arrived in Kisasa, along the Mutanda–Mwinilunga Road, about 120 kilometres south-west of Solwezi, the provincial capital of North-Western Province, Kisasa Market had fallen silent.



Where traders once shouted prices over loudspeakers and customers bargained across crowded stalls, there was only wind. Torn plastic sheets flapped against empty frames. Stones and sticks lay scattered across the ground, remnants of a mob attack that turned a place of trade into a crime scene.

Residents moved cautiously through the market, speaking in low voices. Many had fled. Others were afraid to stay.

At the centre of that silence is the killing of a woman.

What we have gathered about the woman who never returned home

What MakanDay has established is that the victim, Eneless Hellen Kamutumbe, 46, was a businesswoman, gold trader, and mother of six.

Originally from Ingwe Village under Chief Ingwe in Kasempa district, she lived in Chingola on the Copperbelt, where she supported her family through small-scale trading. According to her relatives,

she travelled to Kisasa to follow up on a failed gold transaction.

She had given money to a man to buy gold on her behalf. When she contacted him, he said he was in Kisasa. But when she arrived, his phone was switched off.

Stranded without money to return to Chingola, Kamutumbe made a decision that would place her at the centre of a deadly chain of events. She tried to sell her phone.

The accusation

At a mobile services booth, she encountered 25-year-old Prince Ntambo, a SIM card replacement agent. Moments later, he accused her of making his genitals disappear. The claim, rooted in longstanding myths that have periodically surfaced in parts of Zambia, spread rapidly through the market.

“This is where everything started,” said a security guard stationed at a nearby communication tower.

Within minutes, he said, a crowd formed.

A Killing in Plain Sight | Inside the Collapse of Order at Kisasa Market cont....

What began as suspicion turned into confrontation, and quickly escalated into violence.

A breakdown of protection

Kamutumbe was taken to a nearby community police unit (CPU), a neighbourhood watch structure meant to provide immediate security. But the system did not hold.

Witnesses say officers tried to hide both Kamutumbe and Ntambo inside the small, chain-secured building as a crowd gathered outside. The mob quickly overwhelmed it and broke in. As violence escalated, the officers fled, leaving Kamutumbe behind.

An eyewitness then attempted to move her to the palace of Senior Chief Museli Musokantanda, about 100 metres away. But the Chief was not present.

By then, she was already severely injured. Witnesses said cultural beliefs also delayed intervention, with some insisting it was a bad omen to take a bleeding person to the Chief.

In a final attempt to escape, Kamutumbe asked to be taken to a house near Kisasa Secondary School, about 400 metres away. However, the mob followed. They broke in, dragged her outside, and continued beating and stoning her.

“They looted everything,” said the homeowner, Peter Ndumba, deputy headteacher at Kisasa Primary School.

He reported losing K10,000 in cash, two smartphones valued at K6,500, clothes, food, and a Samsung smart TV. The money had been set aside for his daughter’s school fees.

“My family has been left in a very difficult situation,” he said.

Kamutumbe was later killed near Pentecost Holiness Church.

Police outnumbered

Police response came, but it was not enough. Five officers from Kisasa Police Post and Kalumbila Police Station attempted to intervene at Kisasa Secondary School but were confronted by a large crowd. Stones were thrown, their vehicle was damaged, and the officers were forced to withdraw.

A community primed for violence

MakanDay has established that the killing did not happen in isolation. A pattern is emerging.

Residents told MakanDay that a 17-year-old boy was found dead at the same market on January 1, 2026, followed by another killing on January 17. Kamutumbe’s death on March 20 marks at least the third major incident in under three months in this informal roadside settlement, largely populated by unemployed residents.

“This one was the most brutal,” said Phillison Ackson Mukanzu, a relative of Chief Museli. “It has shaken the entire chiefdom.”

Two days before Kamutumbe’s killing, rumours had circulated widely on social media about alleged cases of genital disappearance in Chingola. By the time she arrived in Kisasa, fear had already taken hold.

“When the accusation was made, people were ready to believe it,” said one trader.

A market shut down

Following the killing, Chief Museli ordered the closure of Kisasa Market for two months. According to market officials, the market previously generated between K300,000 and K500,000 daily, supporting thousands of traders and informal workers. That activity has now stopped.

Many residents have fled, fearing arrest following President Hakainde Hichilema’s directive targeting those involved in the violence.

“People are not running because they are guilty,” said one resident. “They are afraid.”

Schools emptying out

The impact has extended to the area’s two schools, Kisasa Primary and Kisasa Secondary. During a check on March 25, 2026, only seven pupils were present out of more than 2,000 at the primary school, while attendance at the secondary school dropped to 193 out of 1,456.

According to school authorities, 13 pupils are among those arrested during police operations that followed the killing.

“These learners are mentally affected,” said Kenneth Lingunja, headteacher at the secondary school.

Police say investigations are ongoing. Police Public Relations Officer Godfrey Chilabi confirmed that as of March 31, 2026, 12 suspects had been charged with murder, while 22 others face charges of riotous conduct. A total of 257 people, including Ntambo, a SIM card replacement agent, are currently in custody in connection with the violence that led to Kamutumbe’s killing.

“The number of arrests may increase as investigations continue,” Chilabi said.

School authorities have appealed for the screening process to be expedited so that affected learners can return in time for their end-of-term examinations.

Weak systems, predictable outcomes

Kisasa Police Post, established three years ago, serves a population of nearly 40,000 people. Residents say this has led to heavy reliance on informal security structures such as neighbourhood watch groups and traditional authority systems.

In this case, both systems failed. The community police unit could not contain the crowd. Traditional authority was inaccessible at a critical moment. Police were outnumbered. The result was fatal.

Unanswered questions

The circumstances that brought Kamutumbe to Kisasa remain unresolved. Her family believes the mystery man involved in the gold transaction may hold key information. His identity, and whether he played any role beyond the failed transaction, has not been established.

“If he had met her earlier, she would not have come here,” a relative said.

The deadly accusations of “genital theft” are not new. They first surfaced in Kasumbalesa on the Zambia–DRC border, before spreading to Chingola and later to Kisasa in Kalumbila, where Kamutumbe was killed by a mob. Similar incidents have also been reported in other parts of Zambia and across the border in Tunduma.



COMMENT

UNIP fifth edition

By John Mukela

One day in conversation with my friend and elder brother, the late Gilbert Mudenda, he remarked that the then governing Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD), and the subsequent political parties that were to come after it, were all “new editions of UNIP”.

His argument was that even though UNIP was no longer in power, this did not detract from its embodiment in what came afterwards – which is to say, MMD, PF and currently UPND.

In other words, like it or not, UNIP’s DNA is well entrenched, and will continue to be thus entrenched till Kingdom come. Or will it?

In my view, well, yes and no.

But unfortunately, a systematic analysis of this argument, given the confined limits of this very short piece, is obviously impossible.

What I can say however, without appearing to contradict myself, is that the general thrust of Gilbert Mudenda’s thesis might call for us to seriously re-examine our entire governance in a mature manner, devoid of emotion or drama.

I am driven to reminisce on this as a result of my remote observations, from the side-lines, of our current political season in the run-up to the August elections.

And what am I seeing?

Well, I think I see an old script of a classic theatrical play, with its unchanging set of familiar props, lighting and scenery with a never-ending cast of both new and recycled actors.

I also see a contemporary crisis rooted in our old colonial structures whose roots are still well-entrenched.

First, there is the argument, which still holds true, that when colonialists transferred Western models of state organisation to Africa, the result was an alien weak state with a weak or non-existent foundation.

Our multi-ethnic composition as a state, further exacerbates this reality

and unfortunately always becomes a problem sharpened at the edges during election time.

In many respects, most academic research and analyses still frame this multi-ethnicity through what I will call “anthropological lenses” – where much emphasis is championed and placed on linguistic and ethnic divisions.

I think this is wrong because in one sense, what is usually labelled ethnicity or tribalism is really the same thing as nationalism, which is a more palatable description.

For arguments’ sake, the rivalries of for example, ethnic group A and ethnic group B in Zambia are essentially part of the same story as the divisions between say, the Flemings and the Walloons in Belgium or the French and English in Canada.

But in Belgium and Canada, these differences are not reduced to tribal simplicity, chaos or primitiveness, as is done to our differences here in Zambia.

In Belgium it is nationalism, and here it is tribalism.

A sense of cultural uniqueness and a determination to guard mutual interests is the essence of both nationalism and ethnicity.

But this uniqueness etc only becomes politically salient, loud and disruptive when aggravated by uneven development, political competition and the self-serving tactics and corruption of ambitious politicians.

Then there is the perennial drama of political party-switching.

In that sense, going by the party-switching and hopping that we have seen in the past and continue to see today, UNIP second edition (MMD) could be argued to be the same as UNIP third edition (PF) which was the same as UNIP fourth edition (UPND).

That is why at every turn and at every successive political transition in Zambia, the new incoming political party has faced two dilemmas.

The first is the need and necessity to carry along with it, old and heavy political baggage.

Second is the burden of having to always start governing from an empty reservoir of governance experience.

So, at every political change, the country has endured with learner driver political leadership, because limited political continuity at the organisational level has occurred in all of our transitions.

Some have learned the national leadership ropes fast, while others have faltered.

Hakainde Hichilema can be counted as belonging to the former, given his government’s navigation of the debt and drought crises, and other developmental achievements of his administration, such as free education, increases in CDF, revitalisation of mining and industry, etc.

But, the demise of former ruling parties robs us of much-needed continuity and in turn reduces our political institutions to seasonal clubs that wither away at the slightest gust of turbulent political wind.

What Zambia needs are robust political parties that can endure, come rain or shine, if the country is to gather true momentum and political maturity.

Zambia does not need circus political jokers and chancers.

But how if it were to occur, would a prolonged and robust political competition between say, two dominant political parties, change the picture?

My guess is that not much will change if political elites will still benefit more than the rank and file voting majority who will continue to get crumbs off the governance table.

What we need more of from politics are tangible solutions for poverty alleviation and the provision of basic human needs for the people, not predatory self-seeking party-hopping politicians with their eyes firmly glued on the closing balance of their bank accounts.

Breaking the cycle of more UNIP political party editions will be difficult because it requires the emergence of robust political parties with firm institutional foundations.

Unfortunately, I think all of our political parties lack this robust institutional cohesion.

For this to materialise, in Zambia’s fragile and nascent political set-up, parties need to be grassroots oriented, and this grassroots orientation must be bottom up, from the people, by the people and of the people.

What has often been the case is that because I think I am popular and I have a bit of money, I decide, often with pomp and ceremony at the Holiday Inn or Radisson Blu, media cameras galore and journalists beaming with gratitude for the transport allowances, that I will form the next government!

And so together with a few friends, we connive to register the party, and because we are so clever, we name and market this new party “The People’s Party,” even though none were in attendance at its Holiday Inn launch.

We ignore that enduring political parties cannot survive through empty sloganeering and clever marketing because they need to be people-driven bottom up entities with a unifying national message and national appeal.

To my mind, only two parties came close to that – the African National Congress and the United National Independence Party, by virtue of their all-inclusive assignment for political liberation.

In similar fashion, the MMD’s campaign for democratic emancipation was short-lived and soon faltered under the weight of the party’s diverse and competing forces.

Party formation may demand to be people-driven, but its success equally requires and depends on strong legitimate leadership.

The bogeyman of that equation is that strong leadership all too often morphs into hero-worshipping sycophancy and personalisation which compromises the leader’s vision.

At its most basic, we continuously see it played out every time we tune into ZNBC’s 19hrs news.

At the commissioning of a maternity clinic in rural Serenje, the women announce while gyrating rhythmically to the steady beat of the drums, before the media cameras, “Twatotela sana kubakateka!”

UNIP fifth edition cont...

In Kaoma, “Lwaitumela ku bo President kakuluhupula niluna kwa Kaoma...” etc.

Zambians revel in dispensing high-minded praise even when they don't really mean it.

And therein lies the catch. Because as soon as leadership climbs to its peak, it soon begins its descent.

For UPND to succeed where its predecessors have failed, it must transition at all levels, depersonalise its leadership and anchor its party structures into everyday society, moving away from personality cults to a systems-based bottom-up organic network.

For its competitors, the same holds true but even more so, since there can only be one option – which is to dig deep, swim often against the tide and remain afloat.

It's a tough ask, but a necessary one if we are to avoid UNIP fifth edition ad infinitum.



Looking Back

HH, the former cattle herder – “where we are born is a circumstance of history”

The disarray in the MMD, and the pressures facing PF in government, appear to have boosted the standing of UPND and consequently the stature of its leader, Hakainde Hichilema, as the major opposition leader. John Mukela went to visit him in his new Lusaka headquarters.

The nondescript dusty road with no name has recently been tarred into respectability, sandwiched between Makishi Road westwards and Bwinjimfumu to the east.

Newly christened Provident Street, its transformation from peri-urban backwardness to chic city glitz now lends it an unmistakable cosmopolitan aura and on this particular day, a string of smart cars and four-wheel drives line most of its length.

The cars have momentarily been abandoned, and their owners nowhere in sight but somewhere within the vicinity of number 83A, Provident Street – the new address of the opposition United Party for National Development (UPND).

A carnival atmosphere pervades the occasion, and after a short wait, the man everyone has been waiting for emerges to address the sizable crowd of supporters and the small corps of journalists. We're here ostensibly to witness the defections to the UPND of several members of the governing Patriotic Front (PF) and the former ruling Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD).

Shouts of “HH – Aleisa!” erupt, followed by the rejoinder, “Bashikulu Baley! Obufi Bwachilamo!” (“HH – is coming!...the old man is leaving! Too many lies!”)

At the back of my mind, I suspect that my interview with Hakainde Hichilema, the UPND leader, will most likely be thwarted by the throng of activity and while waiting in the main office lobby for the interview afterwards, I learn that I am not alone seeking an audience with HH.

Above the din of animated chatter, I overhear a woman explain to another woman – a UPND official, that waiting outside the main gate is a party of more defectors and they all wish to meet “the president.”

My suspicions that my interview is unlikely to occur are confirmed and so a new appointment is hastily re-scheduled for the next day.

As abruptly as the rain comes, so too does it depart and the following day, the last of the April rain descends and most of that day, it pours. When HH bursts into the UPND office foyer where I am waiting, he carries a folded umbrella, and is casually clad – slacks, woolen jacket, and we exchange greetings. Today the office is quiet, the crowd that had the day before swarmed long since departed.

The interview, I am informed, will be in his office. He leads the way and when I enter a small no-frills room, at one end, a small desk and beside it, two visitors' chairs, greets me. Opposite, its back against the wall, slightly bigger and more comfortable is another chair. I make to sit on one of the two visitors' chairs but Mr. Hichilema raises his arm and waves me to the bigger chair on the other side. I watch him take his place in the smaller chair. It's a disarming gesture.

We briskly settle down and Ruth,

Mr. Hichilema's assistant is under strict orders to ensure we are undisturbed for our meeting, beginning shortly before noon and lasting just over a couple of hours, during which his rich baritone rises occasionally, and sometimes descends into a hushed whisper, but all the time animated.

It's a frank, no-holds-barred exchange in which I quiz, solicit explanations and motivations and in which we spar toe to toe, counter-punching now and then, parrying, weaving and I am in no doubt that he has mastered the hurly burly world of tactical political attack, necessary for any serious politician worth his salt.

But firstly, just who is this man, Hakainde Hichilema? What really drives him? And why does he think he has the answers to provide an alternative to the governing Patriotic Front?

“I come from an extended family structure,” he tells me. “Born in a village. Most Africans born in a village are born in an extended family, which means growing up in a large family, lots of kids, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces, half-brothers, common chores. Where we are born is a circumstance of history. Nobody chooses where they will be born and what will be their fate. You have no power to determine that.

“In our area, 42 kilometers west of Monze, cattle is the business. Cattle and cropping. Cattle is the business we knew from birth, and just to amplify that heritage, some people say we were born in a cattle kraal. So people shouldn't get surprised

that I am a rancher because that was my first activity.”

Despite that rural background, Hakainde was clearly bright, attending the village school, going on to secondary school in Kalomo, doing the mandatory national service stint, before finally landing a government bursary to read economics at the University of Zambia. The village boy had come far, but he wasn't done yet. Later, he would pursue post-graduate studies, earning an MBA in finance and business strategy from the University of Birmingham.

The training would stand him in good stead, and before he had even graduated from UNZA, Coopers & Lybrand had already offered him a position as a young executive at their Lusaka office. The entrepreneurial spirit and enterprising skills garnered from his cattle herding days came to the fore.

“With my second salary in that first job, I bought a plot in Kalingalinga. My friends laughed. How can you buy a plot in Kalingalinga? But I had no shame. Today people are ashamed to build a house in a komboni (compound). What are you ashamed of? What else do you have? Nothing! So for me there was nothing to lose. I could only gain. So I bought a plot there. I could not afford a full time bricklayer, so I got a part-time bricklayer and we would build during the weekends. Bricklayer and myself. I would take off my tie as a young professional at Coopers & Lybrand and we built it up

HH, the former cattle herder – “where we are born is a circumstance of history” Cont...

“But it was taking long and I didn’t want to take out a loan. I knew I couldn’t finish it so I took an entrepreneurial decision to sell the house, and bought a plot in Libala. Started building there. It got tough. I went to a local company and said to them, I have a structure. If you have an employee who can rent it you can complete the house and your employee can stay there rent-free for a year. I was just a young guy. They agreed. That’s how I got started. We have continued constructing since then. Commercial property. Rental property here and there. Some people say we have done very well but I really think we could do even better if we had an enabling environment, lower bank interest rates that could promote growth, then we could expand our portfolio.”

But what about the famous list of properties and businesses that was announced by President Michael Sata, and lingering questions of impropriety about the origins of Mr. Hichilema’s wealth? Was the list accurate? I ask.

“That was done to spite me,” Mr. Hichilema charges. “I will not get into that because I have taken the view that my rights as a citizen were infringed by the Head of State hiding behind Presidential immunity. It was against my freedoms, done to make me look bad in the eyes of Zambians. To look like a glutton. A greedy guy.”

He maintains that he comes from a culture that says you should privately give rather than privately receive, and that it is for that reason that he was initially uninterested in joining politics. But, I ask, how could he have no political interests or aspirations? Did he feel that politics was beneath his capacity?

He says to the contrary, because there is “a right time for everything. From early on I decided that my first responsibility was to my immediate family, my children and extended family and those who were associated with me in different ways.

“My view is first you secure your immediate family and then you look to the broader community beyond Monze and then the larger Zambian community. My perception is that public service is a service. Not to go into public service to earn a living.

For me it means you must give rather than take from the community. So I did what I could to secure the family and at the same time continued to do charity work to assist the community. I am a community worker. I have channeled this community work through the area member of Parliament, irrespective of whatever political party they might represent, and we have had many able members of Parliament. We are currently constructing a health centre under the current area MP. But you have seen how we have MPs, Ministers, Presidents, in the forefront trying to secure government resources, trying to secure things for themselves, denying the communities they are meant to be serving.”

But if public service was not high on his agenda, how was he convinced to lead the UPND? What changed?

“When late Anderson Mazoka passed on I never applied for this. I was headhunted and for a while I resisted. I was only 42 years old and still had a lot of things to do, and had planned to retire at 47 and then go into charity work, digging boreholes, building dip tanks for the community, and developing our scholarship scheme. On average we have 23 to 25 children we keep in school from primary to university. We have done this for over 20 years, so I wanted to formalise this work into philanthropic work in an organized manner, setting up a foundation.

“After quite a lot of consultations, persuasion and discussions I agreed to contest. It was an election, not an appointment. I was not appointed, as some people believe. Other candidates who were being talked about were Sakwiba Sikota, Patrick Chisanga, Mrs. Mazoka, Mr Sichinga and several others. I was not even in the picture at that time. I came much later. But when I was being talked to, among the people who persuaded me was Mrs Mazoka.”

I put it to him that having taken up the leadership, he has been defeated thrice – scoring approximately 25% in 2006, 19.7% in 2008 and finally in 2011, 18.17% of the republican presidential vote. Not a good record and not a hopeful start. Does he ever consider throwing in the towel? What lessons has he learned?

He feels that he’s “unfortunate because my first election should really have been the 2011 election. Normally you would take five years as a build up to an election. I took over as UPND leader in July 2006 and in September we had elections. I had 45 days to contest. I was still settling down, organising the party, looking at the selection of candidates and at the same time organising campaign funds, the campaign programme – it was a baptism of fire.

He dismisses those accusations and insists the pact failed because of lack of unity and a common economic and social programme.

“We were poles apart. We said before we look at candidates we should first look at our individual party manifestos so that we marry the two. How do we run our common monetary and fiscal policies, agriculture, education, mines, health – all these. But the PF’s view was No!...lets first agree the candidates,



“And then in 2008, just two years later, it was the first time we lost a sitting President in this country when President Mwanawasa died. In many respects Mr. Banda’s election was also to a large degree a sympathy vote, based on his campaign that he was an old man and he wanted to finish off what the late Levy had started. Losing a president was an experience never known in Zambia. So you see, in five years, I have contested three elections, when I should ordinarily really have only done one.”

Talking about the 2011 election, why did the UPND pact with the PF fail? Was it as we have been told, because of Mr. Hichilema’s hunger for power? That he had insisted on being offered the presidency should the pact succeed in unseating the then governing MMD?

which party will take which ministerial positions, who will be the president. How can you decide on positions before you have agreed on the size of the cabinet?

“The size of the cabinet must go in line with the common manifesto and the economic policies, because UPND believes in a small cabinet, not a bloated cabinet. MMD was criticized for having a bloated cabinet. Are you surprised that today there are about 70 ministers and deputy ministers? How different are the PF from the MMD?

“We wanted to agree these things first but our friends refused to sit down. Once you have agreed on the policies then you can look at the administration to support your economic and social programme. I come from a school that believes that your business strategy

HH, the former cattle herder – “where we are born is a circumstance of history” Cont...

must come first and then you find a structure that will help you implement your business and economic programme. Our friends believed first you must share the posts, allocate responsibilities, then that’s when you come to your business. I think that’s a recipe for disaster, for losses if you’re in business. Because how do you decide how many managers you will have before you see if you can generate enough revenue to support those managers? That was a fundamental crisis that happened in that pact.”

He says that before UPND can consider going into any future pact, it is non-negotiable that it must first satisfy the need for a shared vision to help the people that it wants to serve and not a shared vision “of how you gain as members of the party.

“A shared vision of how the vulnerable, how a double orphan with no parents but with grey matter in his or her head from Sikongo, Kalabo, Chama, Kabompo, Chipili, Mporokoso, can go to school and reach university. I don’t want to be in government for the taxpayer to build me a retirement home.”

What about the talk that Mr. Hakainde is a tribalist and his party, the UPND is essentially a tribal party anchored on tribal Tonga hegemony?

Mr. Hichilema laughs and dismisses that as propaganda and wishful thinking spearheaded by a hostile government media and points to the defections to his party from other political parties by members of those parties in all Zambia’s districts and provinces.

“I think you have heard that from the description in the state-controlled media. How they describe Hakainde and how they describe the UPND. A distortion of fact by a hostile media. I sometimes ask myself – is there another Hakainde out there? Is there another UPND out there? That description is far from the truth. I like to debate. But when people cannot debate with you they find other frivolous things to say about you. As a leader and as a party you must be prepared to get ridiculed.”

And does he take offence at being ridiculed?

“Initially you do. But I went in at the deep end and I have learnt that if they can’t ridicule you, ridicule the leader, who will they take out their frustrations against? Even in a family people say unpleasant things. What about in a political party? The first thing is that we must have common ground and interests to serve the people better. To bring out the value that the country has through its resources so that we can generate value for the weak, the sick. That’s a consolation.”

But what reach does the UPND have and on what does it base its hope that it is capable of unseating the governing PF?

He reveals that he is “extremely happy that Mr. Sata came into government and became President in 2011. Very happy. It’s God’s way because it has exposed the PF and we have been vindicated. People were hungry for change. Look at the PF’s economic and monetary policies – SI33, SI35, poor policies, destroying the kwacha, destroying the economy. You cannot close out foreign exchange in an import-led economy because you need the dollar.

“These are the consequences of not being serious about your economic and social programme because you are seeking public office to eat not to serve. You fire nurses when they ask for salary increases after you promised them more money. You re-instate them under pressure and ask them to re-apply and makethem lose all their benefits. How will you win elections?

You transfer a married teacher to Kalabo and the husbands remains in Lusaka. Can a husband or wife manage to commute between Kalabo and here? Where is the humanity in that?

When you start fighting chiefs, you start saying you, Litunga, you are wearing that admiral’s uniform because you claim your land was bigger and you gave the white man land and in return they gave you that admiral’s uniform and you call yourself a chief, you are not fighting Bo Lubosi, you are fighting the BRE, you are fighting the Lozi people and any other people who respect that chief.

“When you tell the chief in Eastern Province that I know what you do in your bedroom – there’s anger everywhere. There’s dissatisfaction. When you see people coming to join the UPND , why should they retain the PF in 2016?

This story was first published in the May 2014 edition of the Bulletin & Record Magazine.

