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HH Pledges Unity as UPND Figure Tells Opposition to ‘Keep Quiet’

By John Mukela

- President Hakainde Hichilema has begun his second term promising to govern Zambians regardless of how they voted, but an inauguration-day call by a senior UPND official for the opposition to “keep quiet” until 2031 has raised a wider question about the place of political dissent during the President’s new mandate.

Hichilema was sworn in for a second term at Heroes Stadium on September 1, bringing months of election campaigning and political confrontation to a formal close.

In his post-inauguration message, Hichilema sought to shift the country from electoral competition towards national unity, promising equal treatment for those who supported him and those who did not.

“To those who voted for us, we thank you for your trust and confidence. To those who did not vote for us, we respect your democratic choice,” Hichilema said.

“We will serve you on an equal basis, without discrimination, because you are our fellow citizens and an equal part of this great Republic.”

The message places reconciliation and equal citizenship among the early tests of Hichilema's second term following a fiercely contested August 13 election.

But even as the President appealed for unity, comments from within his own party pointed to a different view of the role the opposition should play over the next five years.

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HH Pledges Unity as UPND Figure Tells Opposition to 'Keep Quiet'

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During a television interview around the inauguration, UPND Lusaka Province Chairman and incoming Kafue West MP Obvious Mwaliteta was reported as saying that Hichilema should now be allowed to govern and that the opposition should "just be quiet until 2031."

The comment presents an immediate contrast with the democratic principle that an election gives the winner the authority to govern, but does not suspend the opposition's responsibility to scrutinise government.

Zambia's opposition parties now face their own test after losing the election: whether they can move beyond personality-driven attacks and provide credible alternatives on the economy, mining, taxation, jobs and public services.
That distinction matters.

Criticising government economic policy requires explaining what is wrong with it and presenting an alternative. Personal attacks on political leaders may attract attention, but rarely tell citizens how another government would address the problems confronting them.

Socialist Party leader Fred M'membe has recently attempted a more policy-oriented approach, publishing proposals covering structural reforms in government, mining and taxation.

Such interventions point towards the kind of contest Zambia could see more of during Hichilema's second term: an opposition challenging government through competing ideas rather than simply competing insults.

The government, however, must equally accept that criticism does not end when an election does.

Holding the presidency does not place Hichilema or his administration beyond scrutiny. A functioning democracy requires opposition parties, civil society, journalists and ordinary citizens to question government decisions and the conduct of those exercising public power.

Kenyan President William Ruto, who attended Hichilema's inauguration, also used the occasion to emphasise the responsibility that follows electoral victory.

"I am confident that in this new mandate you shall govern for Zambians. Those who voted for you and those who did not," Ruto said.

"They all belong equally to Zambia and they must all have a place in the future. Political competition may divide choices. It must never divide our destiny."
That message closely mirrors Hichilema's own pledge.

With the inauguration over, however, the test will no longer be what was said at Heroes Stadium but what happens during the next five years.

For Hichilema, that means demonstrating that government services, opportunities and the protection of the state do not depend on political affiliation.

For the opposition, it means providing meaningful checks and balances — and credible alternatives to government policy.

OPINION: HH's Second Term: Planting Is Not Enough

When Hakainde Hichilema first took office in 2021, MakanDay described the aftermath of that election as a political whirlwind that had left behind "a cloud of political dust" for the new president to settle. There would be no honeymoon, we argued.

Zambia faced a high cost of living, youth unemployment, unsustainable debt, governance problems and the difficult task of rebuilding institutions.

Five years later, Hichilema has taken the oath again. The political circumstances are different, but the question is remarkably similar: what happens after the celebration?

In his message following his inauguration, Hichilema offered an answer. His first term, he said, was about "restoring stability and laying the foundation." His second would focus on growing the economy, creating jobs, strengthening communities and ensuring progress reaches every home.

It is an important distinction. But it also creates the standard against which his second term should be judged.

Perhaps St Paul offers an unexpectedly useful way of looking at it.

Writing to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3), Paul confronts a community divided into camps: some declaring allegiance to Paul, others to Apollos. He reminds them that leaders are ultimately servants performing different tasks.

His famous agricultural metaphor follows: one plants, another waters, but growth comes from God. More importantly for politics, Paul says those doing the planting and watering share one purpose and each will be judged according to their labour.

Zambia could borrow something from that wisdom.

The danger after elections is that politics remains trapped in the language of who belongs to whom: UPND or opposition NRPUP, winner or loser, our stronghold or theirs. Paul regarded that sort of factionalism as a sign of immaturity. Zambia should too.

Hichilema's declaration that those who did not vote for him will receive equal treatment is therefore more than conciliatory inauguration language. It should become a measurable principle of government.

- **OPINION: HH's Second Term: Planting Is Not Enough**

A road should not know which party a constituency voted for. Neither should a hospital, a school, a government contract, a police officer or the Constituency Development Fund.

There is another lesson in Paul's metaphor.

If Hichilema's first term planted the seed, the second must show us the crop.

"Foundations" cannot become a permanent explanation for hardship.

Economic stability matters, investment matters and restructuring debt matters, but citizens ultimately encounter an economy at the kitchen table. They measure progress through food prices, transport, rent, jobs, wages and whether a small business can survive.

In 2021, MakanDay wrote that the new president faced the immediate challenge of the cost of living, unemployment, debt, governance and reform. Five years later, some circumstances have changed, but the fundamental test of government remains delivery.

There is also humility embedded in Paul's message that political leaders might find useful. The planter is not the harvest. Neither is the person who waters.

Presidents inherit institutions, investments, failures and achievements from those before them. They add something and eventually hand the country to somebody else.

That makes Hichilema's description of leadership as "not a prize, but a sacred duty to serve" particularly appropriate.

The election is finished. The speeches have been made. The inauguration is over.'

Now comes the watering.

And by 2031, Zambians will not simply ask what was planted. They will want to see what grew.

The measure of that growth should not only be found in economic statistics, new investments or government programmes, but in how many Zambians are better able to stand on their own feet. Fewer families should need Social Cash Transfer simply to survive. More farmers should be productive enough to graduate from dependence on FISP. More young people should be earning livelihoods from decent jobs and viable businesses rather than waiting for the next government empowerment programme.

Social protection will always have a place for those who genuinely need it. But Hichilema himself has called for "a culture of productivity and self-reliance." By the end of his second term, the fairest test of that promise may therefore be simple: has government merely supported more Zambians, or has it helped more Zambians reach the point where they no longer need supporting?

St Paul wrote: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow."

Hichilema says the planting has been done. The next five years must show the harvest.

Two HIV Prevention Injections Could Now Protect Zambians for a Year

For Zambians at risk of contracting HIV, prevention may no longer mean remembering to take a pill every day or returning to a clinic every two months. A new injection being rolled out across the country can provide protection for six months at a time — and will be available free of charge at participating health facilities.

The United States has committed US$4.25 million through 2027 to support Zambia's rollout of lenacapavir, the twice-yearly HIV prevention injection.

By Gibson Zulu

The new option, known as lenacapavir, is an HIV prevention injection administered twice a year. It is already available at more than 100 health facilities across nine provinces, with Luapula Province expected to be added as the programme expands.

The target is to make the injection available at 541 health facilities by 2027. That could make HIV prevention considerably easier for people who struggle with daily medication or frequent visits to health facilities.

Oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), for example, is generally taken daily. The vaginal ring is used monthly, while another injectable prevention drug, cabotegravir, is administered every two months.

Lenacapavir stretches that interval to six months.

"So this one is special in that you only give it every six months. So a person doesn't need to be coming frequently to get the shot," Professor Lloyd Mulenga, Director of Infectious Diseases at the University Teaching Hospital (UTH), told MakanDay.

The injection does not replace the other prevention methods. Instead, it gives people another choice depending on what works best for them.

"It's another choice. So it's adding to the choice," Mulenga said.

Who can get it?

The starting point is an HIV test.

Lenacapavir for prevention is intended for people who are HIV-negative but consider themselves at risk of acquiring the virus. Someone who is already HIV-positive should not receive it as a stand-alone prevention injection.

This means people seeking the injection must first have their HIV status confirmed.

Among those who could benefit are people in relationships where one partner is HIV-positive and the other HIV-negative, as well as other men and women who consider themselves at risk of infection.

Pregnant women at risk of acquiring HIV are another group health officials say could benefit from the longer-lasting protection.

"Anyone who comes to UTH or Chawama or Ndola Teaching, and as long as they feel that they are at risk, they are eligible for lenacapavir," Musonda Musonda, Senior Public Health Adviser at the U.S. Embassy in Zambia, told MakanDay.

The injection will be provided free of charge at participating health facilities. For people who have previously faced the inconvenience of taking prevention medicine every day, the attraction is straightforward: two scheduled visits for injections could provide protection across an entire year.

Zambia has surpassed global HIV treatment targets, yet recorded about 30,000 new infections in 2024. Now a twice-yearly injection being rolled out free across the country could give people at risk another way to protect themselves — without taking a pill every day.

But six months does not mean forget about it

The convenience comes with an important condition: people must return for their next injection on time.

Mulenga said clients have a window of about two weeks before or after their scheduled six-month date to receive the next dose.

After that, the amount of medicine in the bloodstream continues to fall. If someone is exposed to HIV during this period, their protection may be reduced.
There is another concern.

If a person contracts HIV while low levels of lenacapavir remain in the body, the virus could potentially develop resistance to the medicine.

"If you miss, you're exposed to HIV, and you get HIV, it's likely that you may have resistance because the drug is still in reduced quantities in blood," Mulenga said.

The practical message for people choosing lenacapavir is therefore simple. Two injections a year may be easier than taking a pill every day, but keeping the six-month appointment matters.

Reported side effects have largely involved reactions around the injection site, including pain, redness and, in some cases, small nodules. Mulenga said cold compresses and painkillers could help manage discomfort where necessary.

• **Two HIV Prevention Injections Could Now Protect Zambians for a Year cont..**

Why a twice-yearly injection matters

One of the challenges with HIV prevention medicine is not simply whether it works, but whether people continue using it as prescribed. A daily medicine only provides its intended benefit if people consistently take it.

Mulenga said early programme data showed about 80 percent of people returning for reinitiation, compared with a reported 25 percent return rate for oral PrEP.

He cautioned that the figures were preliminary.

"It's initial data which is really promising, but we hope that even the long-term data will be as good," he said.

If that pattern holds as the programme expands, the longer interval between doses could become one of lenacapavir's most important advantages: reducing the number of times people need to think about, collect or take their HIV prevention medicine.

19,200 people covered by first shipments

The rollout is being supported by the United States, which has committed US$4.25 million through 2027 specifically towards Zambia's lenacapavir programme.

The first U.S.-funded shipment arrived in August with enough doses for 9,600 people. A second shipment covering another 9,600 people has since arrived, potentially providing the new prevention option to 19,200 people.

The two shipments are worth more than US$1 million, according to U.S. officials.
U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Frank Garcia visited UTH during a trip to Zambia in which he also attended President Hakainde Hichilema's September 1 inauguration for a second term.

"Administered just twice a year, lenacapavir offers women, mothers, and at-risk populations across Zambia a new and powerful tool to stay ahead of this virus," Garcia said.

He particularly highlighted pregnant and breastfeeding women, arguing that preventing HIV infection among mothers also has implications for the health of their children.

The U.S. has supported Zambia's HIV response for more than two decades, including through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

Ministry of Health Permanent Secretary for Donor Coordination Dr George Sinyangwe described the United States as Zambia's largest external supporter of HIV prevention and treatment and said the partnership had contributed to reductions in HIV-related deaths.

But for people deciding how to protect themselves from HIV, the significance of the latest programme is much more immediate.

There is now another choice alongside daily oral PrEP, the monthly vaginal ring and two-monthly cabotegravir: an HIV prevention injection taken only twice a year.

For those who choose it, the trade-off is equally clear — test HIV-negative before starting, receive the injection every six months and return on time for the next dose.

"Pela Akakupela": The Price of Fish

On Zambia's Lake Tanganyika, women traders say having money is not always enough to secure fish. Some say sexual relationships have become another price of doing business.

By Annie Zulu

This investigation was supported by the Pulitzer Center.

At 5 a.m., Martha Bwalya arrived at Ngwenya landing site on Lake Tanganyika with money in her hand and an empty bucket.

Boats were returning from a night of fishing. Fishermen hauled their catch ashore as traders crowded around them. Fish changed hands and women who had secured stock began another day of business.

Bwalya waited. By midday, the 45-year-old trader still had an empty bucket.

"I came to buy fish at 5 a.m. I haven't managed to buy any because I don't have anyone to buy from," she said.

Nearby, Jane Chela, 38, had also been waiting since early morning.

"When the fishermen come, they will get the fish and give it to someone they have an

Bwalya, 45, looks out across Lake Tanganyika after failing to secure fish for sale at Ngwenya Landing Site in Mpulungu District, despite having money to buy | Photograph by Annie Zulu

- agreement with. I will just remain standing and watch," she said.
Chela, a mother of six, depends on fish trading for income.

"Going back home empty-handed without buying any fish is devastating because it means I won't be able to do business. How, then, will I survive? I have children to feed."

A fish trader waits for boats returning from a night of fishing at Ngwenya Landing Site in Mpulungu District, hoping to secure fish for sale | Photograph by Annie Zulu

Across two fishing communities on Zambia's Lake Tanganyika shoreline, women told this investigation that money alone does not always guarantee access to fish.

Some fishermen say preferential access can result from legitimate commercial relationships, including arrangements in which women lend them money.

But women traders, community leaders, one fisherman and a government fisheries official also described sexual relationships linked to access to fish.

Beyond those who spoke on the record, this investigation interviewed 32 women anonymously. Twenty-six said they were aware of sex-for-fish arrangements, including nine who said they had personally experienced sexual demands.

"Pela Akakupela": The Price of Fish cont...

The interviews were not a representative survey and cannot establish how widespread the practice is.

But across interviews in Mpulungu and Nsumbu, one phrase repeatedly emerged: Pela Akakupela — loosely translated as "Give to the one who gives to you".

Women and community leaders said the phrase can describe arrangements in which traders receive fish from fishermen with whom they have established relationships.

The women still pay for the fish.But some said money is not always the only thing expected.

"I had to sleep with men"

Jennifer — a pseudonym used to protect her identity — said she experienced such an arrangement.

She entered the fish trade after leaving school at 17, hoping to earn a living.

"I realized that I had to sleep with men that work on the lake or own boats for me to buy fish," she said.

Jennifer said such relationships could begin with exchanging telephone numbers. A woman and fisherman would meet away from the landing site and, she said, the fisherman would subsequently make fish available to her. She eventually left the trade and returned to school.

Fish traders wait at Ngwenya Landing Site in Mpulungu District for boats returning from Lake Tanganyika, hoping to secure fish for sale | Photograph by Annie Zulu

Her account was among nine gathered anonymously from women who said they had personally experienced sexual demands connected to accessing fish.
Mary Chizu, secretary of the Mpulungu District Women's Association, said the practice is familiar within the fish trade.

"What happens is that if I am a woman and I don't have a sexual relationship with fishermen, then I will never do business," she said.

According to Chizu, fishermen can return from the lake already knowing which traders will receive their catch.

"When the fishermen come from catching fish, they will shout Pela Akakupela. They will select who is going to buy."

Chizu said the women still pay for the fish, but some maintain sexual relationships with fishermen to secure access.

"The men have that capacity of going on the lake, catch fish. They are taking advantage of that," she said.

"Give to the one who gives to you"

Musonda at her home in Nsumbu, Nsama District, after returning from the landing site without securing any fish for sale | Photograph by Annie Zulu

Hours away by boat in Nsumbu, women described similar experiences.
Beauty Musonda, 59, has traded fish for more than 20 years.

Musonda described standing at the landing site holding up her money as fishermen sold to other traders.

"I can even raise my hand with money. They will get someone behind me and sell it to them and I will remain."

She also used the phrase Pela Akakupela.

"When they sleep with the woman, that's when they will give her the fish. If you refuse, they will never sell you," she said.

Songwe, outside his home in Nsama District | Photograph by Annie Zulu

Albert Songwe, a village headman in Nsumbu and former fisherman, said the phrase means, "give to the one who gives to you".

In the fish trade, he said, it can refer to a fisherman giving a woman access to fish in exchange for sex.

"There are a lot of women fish traders but only few will buy the fish," he said.

Fishermen dispute the allegations

Fishermen sort freshly caught kapenta (Limnothrissa miodon) after a night of fishing on Lake Tanganyika at Nsumbu Landing Site in Nsama District | Photograph by Annie Zulu

Fishermen interviewed in Nsumbu offered differing accounts. Chrispin Kabwe, 27, rejected the suggestion that preferential access necessarily involved sex.

Some women, he said, lend fishermen money. When the fishermen return from the lake, those traders receive priority because of their financial arrangements.

Ketson Musonda, 33, denied that sex-for-fish occurred in the community.

George Sindazi, 34, gave a different account. He acknowledged that sexual exchanges can occur, but described them as consensual.

"It's normal for this to happen, it happens even in other sectors like mining. I have what she wants and she has what I want. When she allows me to have sex with her, that's it," he said.

His description differs sharply from those of women who said refusing sexual relationships could jeopardize their ability to obtain fish and earn an income.

What money could — and could not — buy

During reporting trips in May and July 2026, this reporter also approached the fish trade as an ordinary prospective buyer without initially identifying herself as a journalist.

Carrying K2,000, she made four attempts to buy fish — two at Ngwenya in Mpulungu district and two in Nsumbu.

On each occasion, fishermen said the fish she sought had already been secured or reserved for other buyers.

The reporter observed other women receiving fish while she and other prospective buyers remained without stock.

No fisherman asked this reporter for sex. The exercise therefore did not establish why particular women received priority or whether any of the arrangements observed involved sexual relationships.

It did, however, support one narrower observation: having cash available did not necessarily mean a buyer could obtain fish.

A trade dominated by men

Lake Tanganyika stretches across Zambia, Tanzania, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo and supports fishing communities along its shores.

A FISH4ACP and WorldFish value-chain analysis estimated Zambia's annual production of Lake Tanganyika small pelagic fish at about 28,000 tonnes and found the sector provides a significant share of employment in Zambia's fishing industry.

Women and men, however, occupy different positions in the trade. Women work mainly in fish processing and trading, while fishing itself is overwhelmingly dominated by men.

The 2024 Frame Survey of Fisheries in Lake Tanganyika recorded 85,923 fishers across the four countries sharing the lake, of whom 598 were women.

That leaves many women traders dependent on fishermen for access to the commodity they need to earn a living.

FISH4ACP research has also documented women's vulnerability to sex-for-fish transactions in fishing communities on Zambia's Lake Tanganyika shoreline, particularly where women struggle to obtain fish for processing and trade.
For women such as Bupe Namwanza, 70, that access has immediate consequences.

Namwanza, a widow who has traded fish for more than 30 years, supports grandchildren and cares for her elderly mother.

"If I don't sell fish, my family won't eat," she said.

“Pela Akakupela”: The Price of Fish cont..

Known, but rarely reported

Senior Chief Tafuna, a traditional ruler of the Lungu people in Mpulungu district, said he had never formally received a complaint from a woman about sex-for-fish.

But he said he knew of the practice.

Women can fear exposure, ridicule and damage to their reputations, he said.

“They would rather not talk about it.”

He also acknowledged the economic consequences women can face if they refuse.

“I can assure you, the women who don’t give in struggle to buy fish,” he said.

Mpundu Ngandwe, the District Fisheries and Livestock Coordinator in Mpulungu, also said his office had received no formal complaints. But he acknowledged the practice.

“Sex for fish is something that is silently being practised along the line of trade in fish and people don’t come out to say that this is what is happening,” Ngandwe said.

He said it had existed for years.

Ngandwe also described arrangements in which fishermen reserve catches for particular traders.

“If they have made an agreement, that fisherman will not sell fish to anyone. Even if some women have money, even more money, they will not sell to you,” he said.

A request for comment outlining the findings of this investigation was sent to the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock through its Public Relations Office. Despite follow-ups, no response had been received by the time of publication.

Attempts to reduce dependence

FISH4ACP is working with fishing communities around Lake Tanganyika to strengthen women's economic position in the fish trade.

According to its National Coordinator, Masiliso Phiri, more than 20 women’s groups have been established, with some receiving equipment including solar-powered cold rooms and dryers.

The programme also supports savings groups and alternative livelihoods, while more than 30 peer educators have been trained to conduct community sensitisation.

Joel Katailo, one of the peer educators, said poverty contributes to women’s vulnerability, but having money does not necessarily protect them from sexual demands.

This investigation could not establish how many complaints about sex-for-fish have been investigated, how many women have received protection after reporting sexual demands, or whether the practice has declined.

That leaves a gap between what is known in the communities and what appears in official records.

Traditional leaders say they know of the practice. A government fisheries official acknowledges it and says it has existed for years. Women describe what refusing can cost them economically.

Before sunrise, traders will again gather at landing sites along Lake Tanganyika. Boats will return from the night’s fishing and women will arrive with money to buy their catch.

For Bwalya and others who depend on that trade, having the money is only the first hurdle.

Freshly caught buka buka (Lates stappersii) and English fish (Boulengerochromis microlepis) lie on the shore at Ngwenya Landing Site in Mpulungu District after a night of fishing on Lake Tanganyika | Photograph by Annie Zulu

The growing power and risks of Zambia's digital democracy

In the run-up to Zambia's 13 August general elections, democracy was exercised not only at rallies, campaign meetings and polling stations, but also on the screens of ordinary citizens' phones and computers.

In this two-part series, Blessing Vava reports.

A young voter in Lusaka could move from a WhatsApp conversation about the election to a Facebook campaign video, then to TikTok commentary, before checking a candidate's position on an issue.

A Yango driver could follow campaign developments between trips, while a small-business owner in Kitwe could receive political messages while processing mobile-money payments on Airtel.

His critics and the prosecution case now place that claim under considerable scrutiny.

On election day, citizens followed results, rumours and competing claims through their phones long before the official count had concluded.

Fourteen presidential candidates alongside hundreds of parliamentary and local-government candidates, fought not only through rallies, posters, television and radio, but across increasingly important digital spaces.

This was not accidental. It reflected a broader transformation in democracy itself.

Elections, constitutions, parliaments, political parties and courts remain essential. But democratic life is now also mediated through smartphones, social platforms, algorithms, digital identities and artificial intelligence.

The question is no longer simply whether technology can strengthen democracy. It is who controls and governs the technologies through which democratic participation increasingly takes place — a question at the heart of "geosociotechnopolitics."

From the Ballot Box to the Digital Public Sphere: Zambia's New Electoral Architecture

For much of Africa's post-independence history, political communication was relatively centralized, with governments, newspapers, radio, and television being the principal gatekeepers of information.

My time in Zambia made these fundamental changes visible.

Campaign messages moved constantly between physical and digital spaces: a rally generated content for Facebook; a television interview became a TikTok clip; a speech circulated through WhatsApp groups within minutes.

Citizens were not simply consuming political messages; they were recording, remixing, and redistributing them.

Traditional broadcast media played a vital role in bridging this physical-digital divide. Established houses — the public broadcaster ZNBC alongside private networks such as Diamond TV, Muvi TV, Prime TV, and QTV — extended their reach well beyond television sets by live-streaming debates, breaking news, and interview clips on YouTube, Facebook, and X.

Citizens inside and outside Zambia followed events as they unfolded. In this sense, the gatekeepers of the broadcast era were not displaced by digital platforms so much as absorbed into them.

The 2026 electoral field — spanning from the governing UPND to the NRPUP, Socialist Party, Citizens First, and smaller parties — depended heavily on this expanded digital architecture. Political leaders actively shaped, and were sometimes trapped by it.

President Hakainde Hichilema's camp and the UPND used digital platforms to communicate policy, project continuity, and mobilise younger voters while bypassing traditional media.

Opposition figures such as Brian Mundubile of the NRPUP adopted similar strategies to communicate directly with voters.

Yet the same platforms that expanded political communication also amplified volatility. This was starkly demonstrated when Mundubile claimed victory through online channels before the Electoral Commission of Zambia completed its official tally, accelerating competing claims of legitimacy and placing immense pressure on electoral institutions.

This volatility was compounded by the rapid circulation of unverified claims and synthetic disinformation. Fake GEN-20 forms purporting to show official election results spread across social media and messaging groups, giving misleading narratives a veneer of institutional authority.

In an environment where citizens anxiously awaited outcomes, fabricated documents often travelled faster than institutional corrections.

Similarly, a false communication circulated online alleging that State House had instructed the Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA) to shut down internet access and target critics.

Although State House and fact-checkers quickly exposed it as a fabrication, the rumour generated deep anxiety. It succeeded not because it was true, but because it threatened the very digital infrastructure through which citizens were experiencing the election.

- **The growing power and risks of Zambia's digital democracy cont...**

The episode revealed a new reality of democratic politics: political leaders and institutions are no longer required only to communicate policies or official decisions; they are increasingly forced to expend political capital responding to entirely fabricated mandates and false narratives attributed to them.

The combination of premature victory declarations, fake GEN-20 forms, and false shutdown claims illustrates a fundamental tension of democracy in the digital age.

Institutional procedures have deliberate timelines for establishing facts, but the digital public sphere refuses to wait for them.

Political narratives can be declared, fabricated, shared, and believed long before the institutions responsible for establishing the truth have completed their work.

When Information Becomes a Political Weapon

The events surrounding the counting process demonstrated one of the clearest lessons of the campaign: misinformation and premature political claims can shape public perceptions before verified facts catch up.

iVerify Zambia documented a number of false and misleading claims circulating during the election period, including manipulated political content, allegations concerning electoral officials and fabricated documents.

False claims about the outcome circulated before the Electoral Commission had formally completed the declaration process. The United Nations was itself forced to clarify its position after misleading social-media posts claimed that UN observers had congratulated a candidate.

The problem was not confined to one political camp, and that is precisely the point. Misinformation does not need to convince everyone to become politically significant.

If one voter believes the election has already been stolen, another believes a candidate has already won, a third fears that the internet is about to be shut down, and a fourth believes an international institution has endorsed a candidate, the common informational foundation on which democratic disagreement depends begins to disappear.

That may be digital misinformation's most dangerous effect: not simply introducing false information, but weakening citizens' ability to agree on what counts as evidence at all.

This is compounded by the emotional pull of political content. A claim that an election has been stolen or that the internet is about to be shut down generates far more urgency than a routine official announcement.

Algorithms do not necessarily reward what is true; they often reward what captures attention. In an election, what captures attention can quickly become what is believed.

Zambia had anticipated some of these dangers. In February 2026, UNDP and the Panos Institute Southern Africa relaunched iVerify Zambia 2.0 as a strengthened national mechanism to combat misinformation, disinformation and hate speech ahead of the general elections.

The initiative specifically recognised emerging threats associated with artificial intelligence, deepfakes, synthetic media, algorithmic amplification and coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

Connectivity alone cannot sustain a healthy democratic public sphere. Citizens need reliable information, not simply more information.

Electoral commissions need credible and timely communication. Journalists and fact-checkers need the capacity to respond at the speed of social media.

Political parties have a responsibility not to exploit uncertainty for partisan advantage, while technology companies must recognise that their platforms have become part of democracy's infrastructure.

Citizens have a responsibility too. Forwarding a message is no longer an entirely private act. The first line of defence against digital manipulation is often not the state, but the citizen who pauses before pressing "forward."

Dr. Blessing Vava is a "geosociotechnopolitics" scholar, governance practitioner and researcher. He spent a month conducting field research on elections and digital public spheres in Zambia.

The Mines Pay. But Where Does the Money Go?

"The community must be able to say ... how is this money used?" says Zambia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (ZEITI) National Coordinator Ian Mwiinga. Across six Zambian councils, more than K238.5 million in property rates has been reported in 2026. In Solwezi alone, Kansanshi reported K95.3 million — even as residents grapple with inadequate market facilities, water and other essential public services, By Linda Soko Tembo reports.

When mining companies pay millions of kwachas directly to local councils, Mwiinga says people living in those communities should be asking where the money goes.

"The community must be able to say, wait a minute, company X paid two million. How is this money used?" said Mwiinga.

Speaking during an interview for the Ministry of Mines and Minerals Development podcast on August 26, Mwiinga said citizens should increasingly be asking not only how much copper and other minerals Zambia produces, but how much mining companies pay, how much government receives, where the money goes and whether communities where extraction takes place see tangible benefits.

"These amounts are not small," he said.

New ZEITI data obtained by MakanDay shows just how large they can be. Across six councils in three provinces, more than K238.5 million in property rates was reported for the 2025 reporting period.

Solwezi Municipal Council accounted for the largest amount, with K95.3 million reported by Kansanshi Mining Plc. Kalulushi District Council reported K90.6 million, China Nonferrous Metal Mining (Group) Company Limited (CNMC) reported K35.3 million for Luanshya District Council, while Lubambe Mine reported K15.8 million for Chililabombwe Council.

Siavonga Town Council reported K1.4 million and Kafue Town Council K160,739.

Solwezi and Kalulushi alone accounted for K185.8 million, or about 78%, of all the property rates reported across the six councils.

The data combines figures self-reported by councils with company-side disclosures. Kalulushi, Siavonga and Kafue reported their own figures, while the amounts for Solwezi, Luanshya and Chililabombwe were reported by Kansanshi, CNMC and Lubambe respectively.

For communities, however, knowing that a mine paid is only the beginning. The harder question is what happens after the money reaches the local authority.

The K95 million question in Solwezi

That question is particularly striking in Solwezi, the centre of one of Zambia's most important copper-producing regions. Kansanshi reported K95.3 million in property rates to Solwezi Council in 2025 — about 40 percent of the entire amount reported across the six councils covered by the ZEITI data.

Yet MakanDay's reporting in Solwezi has repeatedly documented pressure on some of the most essential public services used by residents.

At Kyawama Market, more than 2,000 traders were operating without running water or drainage and with only four toilets and two bathing rooms when MakanDay investigated conditions there late last year. For traders such as Bridget Chinzahu, who had worked at Kyawama for about two decades, the shortcomings were part of everyday life.

The Mines Pay. But Where Does the Money Go? cont...

"We have over 2,000 traders depending on this place every day," Chinzahu told MakanDay. "We need urgent government action."

The council had promised something better. A groundbreaking ceremony for a modern Kyawama Market was held in January 2024, but almost two years later construction of the main market had still not begun.

The planned development, including a temporary trading site, was estimated to cost about K53.5 million and was expected to provide more than 2,000 trading shelters, 60 permanent shops, mobile-money booths, running water and proper sanitation.

The council said the project would be financed from locally generated revenue. Now put the cost of that project alongside the latest ZEITI figure.

MakanDay sent Solwezi Council a right-of-reply request on August 31, asking it to confirm the K95.3 million reported by Kansanshi, explain how the money was accounted for and spent, and provide an update on the Kyawama Market project. The council acknowledged the query but said it would respond when the Town Clerk returns from an assignment in about a week.

The K95.3 million Kansanshi reported in property rates to Solwezi Council in 2026 is almost 1.8 times the estimated K53.5 million cost of the Kyawama development.

That does not mean Kansanshi's property rates were earmarked for Kyawama Market. Nor does the comparison establish that the council has misused the money. But it illustrates the scale of mining-related revenue flowing directly to a local authority against the infrastructure needs visible in the same city.

And the problem extends beyond the market. In an earlier investigation, MakanDay documented residents in parts of Solwezi struggling for access to clean water. In Kimakolwe, some families depended on boreholes for drinking water and shallow wells for washing — a snapshot of a longstanding contradiction in North-Western Province: mining investment accelerated population and economic growth while infrastructure and essential services struggled to keep pace.

'These amounts are not small'

During his interview, Mwiinga illustrated the significance of local mining revenue with the example of an unnamed council that received about K70 million in business fees and property rates in a single year — roughly twice the Constituency Development Fund allocation at the time.

He did not identify the council, but a MakanDay review of ZEITI reports found that Kansanshi was reported to have paid K72.79 million in annual business fees and property rates to Solwezi Municipal Council in 2023. The figure is not directly comparable with the K95.3 million reported for 2026, which relates specifically to property rates, but both demonstrate the scale of mining-related revenues flowing directly to local authorities.

ZEITI collects and compares information on what mining companies say they have paid and what government institutions say they have received. For Mwiinga, disclosure is only the starting point. The figures must also withstand scrutiny.

Do the figures add up?

ZEITI compares what mining companies report paying with what government institutions report receiving.

"ZEITI is a global standard aimed at promoting transparency and accountability in the extractive sector. We go to the companies and say, how much money did you pay to Zambia Revenue Authority (ZRA), for example, in a particular year?" Mwiinga said.

ZEITI then approaches ZRA to establish how much it received from the same company. The figures do not always match.

"When you find the numbers are actually different, that's when we now bring this information to the attention of various authorities in the ecosystem," Mwiinga said.

He said discrepancies can arise from issues including mineral grades, tax filing, record keeping and transfer pricing.

Mwiinga stressed that ZEITI does not conduct audits, describing its work instead as a "diagnostic tool" that can flag areas requiring further scrutiny. Its findings can be used by institutions including the Ministry of Mines, ZRA, Financial Intelligence Centre, Patents and Companies Registration Agency, Bank of Zambia, Ministry of Finance and Office of the Auditor General.

In some cases, he said, the Office of the Auditor General has used ZEITI information to conduct risk-based audits.

Beyond the Treasury

Once minerals are sold, mining revenue moves through several channels.

Mwiinga explained that mineral royalties are among the first payments made to government because they are charged on gross revenue.

Mining companies also have financial obligations that include servicing loans used to finance their operations and making payments to shareholders.

Corporate income tax is paid when a company makes a profit. Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines Investments Holdings Plc (ZCCM-IH) also receives dividends, price participation fees and royalties under specific agreements with mining companies. But following mining money only as far as the national treasury provides an incomplete picture.

Mining happens in communities where people live, farm, trade and depend on roads, water, sanitation and public infrastructure. Mwiinga said communities therefore need to see tangible benefits from mining activities taking place in their areas.

Failure to demonstrate those benefits could ultimately threaten a mining company's "social licence to operate".

For a trader at Kyawama, mining's contribution is not measured only in tonnes of copper produced or millions of kwacha paid to government. It can also be measured in whether there is running water at the market, adequate toilets, drainage and a safe place to trade.

For families in communities such as Kimakolwe, it can be as basic as whether clean water is available close to home.

Across just six councils, more than K238.5 million in property rates was reported in 2026. In Solwezi alone, Kansanshi reported K95.3 million.

This week in the Bulletin & Record

The importance of the Marikana massacre

Last year's killing of 34 mine workers by South African security forces at the Lonmin-owned Marikana platinum mine may have provided the catalyst needed to diversify the nation's politics

By Terry Bell in South Africa

Marikana was a watershed, a turning point that is likely to have a profound and long- term impact on the social and political environment. But, unlike other watersheds over the past 53 years, it may provide the basis for political diversification rather than uniting disparate opponents of a single authority.

The Sharpeville massacre of 1960, the student revolt of 1976, the unbanning of liberation movements and the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 were all culminations of political pressures coupled with often desperate, ill-considered or opportunistic reactions by those in power. But they all signalled the beginning of the end of a particular era or aspects of a way of life.

The adoption of progressive labour laws, a Bill of Rights and a constitution at the same time as the liberal Growth Employment and Redistribution programme in 1996, also qualifies as a watershed, although one riddled with contradictions. And it is many of these that laid the ground for the bloody watershed of Marikana on August 16, last year.

But when 34 miners lay dead on the rocky outcrop known as Wonderkopand and on the fields below, the horror and the tragedy opened up opportunities for political opponents of both government and the economic system itself. It also triggered the biggest upheaval the modern labour movement has faced as thousands of miners deserted the once dominant National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).

It is the veritable collapse, certainly on the platinum belt, of the NUM that has been the most obvious, immediate, change wrought. But it is the involvement of political groups and parties that may have as big, if not bigger, an impact in the longer term.

The major beneficiary of the desertions from the NUM has been the Association of Mining and Construction Union (Amcu) which, so far, remains determinedly non- aligned politically. However, Amcu is affiliated to the politically non-aligned National Council of Trade Unions (Nactu) which is headed by general secretary Narious Moloto, who currently doubles as the general secretary of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC).

Mr Moloto says he has no political ambitions and has "stepped in on a temporary basis" to help PAC get back on its feet. But just as the large-scale influx of members to Amcu boosted the flagging fortunes of Nactu, there are obvious hopes within PAC that it will have a similar impact on their party.

In publicity terms, however, it is Julius Malema who has had more impact, not only by quickly intervening after August 16 and organising legal representation for mineworkers, but also by being barred from the area by police.

Mr Malema and his newly launched Economic Freedom Fighters clearly hope to win electoral support on the platinum belt. So too does the also recently formed Workers and Socialist Party (Wasp) that has — in the form of the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) — had a presence for some time in the Rustenburg area.

ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe provided a considerable boost to the DSM and Wasp with his allegation that Wasp member Liv Shange was solely responsible for the "anarchy" in the mining sector. But the DSM is only one of several groups that have seized the opportunity to try to win support and members among the disillusioned miners. Elements of the Democratic Left Front, an umbrella group that contains a number of small Left groups, has also been active.

However, a political party that has had little public exposure but which may have the greatest impact is the United Democratic Movement (UDM), headed by former Transkei leader, Bantubonke Holomisa. His main electoral base is the Eastern Cape, home to most of the migrant miners of Marikana and to their extended families. These families, in turn, have familial links to the Western Cape.

Some indication of who might be the beneficiaries and who the losers — and the level of impact the Marikana watershed has had — may become clearer after next year's elections.

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