

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection

JCTR

Promoting Faith and Justice

BULLETIN



QUOTE

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing ."

— Edmund Burke

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LETTER

From the Editor

Dear Readers,

It is with great privilege that I welcome you to this edition of the JCTR Bulletin, which centres on the intersecting themes of governance, justice, and inclusive development in Zambia. At a time when the nation continues to navigate complex political and socio-economic transitions, this issue brings together a collection of articles that interrogate the structures, policies, and choices shaping our common future.

This edition opens with a critical analysis of the 2025 Constitutional Amendment Process, which raises urgent concerns about inclusivity, legitimacy, and public participation. The article challenges the current approach and proposes pathways towards a more credible, people-driven constitutional reform process. Complementing this is an in-depth reflection on Zambia's political, economic, and governance transformation, offering a data-driven assessment of where the country stands and the gaps that remain, particularly in economic development and institutional effectiveness.

The bulletin further explores the role of government in advancing economic development, emphasising the need for a capable state that fosters investment, strengthens governance, and balances growth with environmental sustainability. This is followed by a thought-provoking critique of the proposed reintroduction of Members of Parliament into local councils, which warns of the risks to decentralisation, accountability, and constitutional integrity.

Issues of equity and justice are brought to the fore in an article examining land rights and access to natural resources, highlighting how existing systems continue to

marginalise vulnerable communities despite progressive legal frameworks. Similarly, the reflection on the national budget calls for a people-centred approach that prioritises those with low incomes, upholds human dignity, and promotes integral human development.

The edition also considers Zambia's post-debt restructuring context, offering reflections on debt, justice, and the moral obligations of economic policy. Together with these contributions, the Photo Focus section provides a visual narrative that captures lived realities and complements the themes explored throughout the bulletin.

Collectively, these articles underscore a central message: that justice, accountability, and participation must remain at the heart of Zambia's development agenda. They challenge us to reflect critically, engage meaningfully, and act responsibly in shaping a society that upholds dignity and equity for all.

As you engage with this edition, I invite you to reflect not only on the issues presented, but also on your role in advancing the common good.

Yours sincerely,

Rev Dr. Boyd Kapyunga Nyirenda, S.J.
Deputy Executive Director & Editor of the Bulletin



A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE 2025 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT PROCESS



Introduction

Zambia's ongoing constitutional review process has entered a critical phase following the appointment of the Technical Committee (TC) on Constitutional Review and the close of national-level submissions on 13 November 2025, only three weeks after the exercise began. Although the government has presented this process as part of a broader effort to refine the country's governance framework and respond to past reform debates, its structure and execution have raised questions about inclusivity, legitimacy, credibility, and adherence to constitutional principles. The shadow of the Constitution Amendment Bill No. 7 of 2025, introduced earlier in the year and still a central reference point, looms large over the current exercise. That bill's selective embrace of recommendations from the Electoral Reform Technical Committee (ERTC), coupled with the Constitutional Court's finding that its genesis did not meet constitutional standards of independence and public participation, has sharpened public scrutiny of the new committee's composition, mandate, and methods.

This article examines the core challenges emerging from the current constitutional reform process. It contends that the process, as currently constituted, is flawed and risks undermining the credibility and inclusiveness required for a truly people-driven Constitution. It focuses on four key areas: the composition of the Technical Committee, the consultation process, risks to democratic consensus, and the timing of the constitu-

tional amendment process. It begins by providing the broader context linking Bill 7 to the formation of the new Technical Committee. It then assesses the composition and mandate of the committee, evaluates the consultation approach and its implications for participatory constitutionalism, and analyses the risks posed to democratic consensus by the current model of engagement. The article further considers the political timing of the process and how it aligns with electoral cycles. The final section proposes a set of reforms aimed at ensuring the process is credible, inclusive, and nationally owned. These include recomposing the Technical Committee, clarifying and expanding its mandate, guaranteeing an inclusive consultation process, safeguarding democratic consensus, aligning the timeline of the process with credibility, and promoting meaningful grassroots participation. These may help create a Constitutional amendment process that is inclusive, credible, and people-driven.

1. Context: The Return of Constitutional Amendment Politics

In March 2025, the Minister of Justice presented thirteen thematic areas proposed for constitutional amendment, framing them as "non-contentious." This framing sits uncomfortably with the nature of constitutional reform: every provision of a constitution is intertwined with others, and its amendment inevitably raises political, institutional, and normative stakes. Zambia's own preamble of the *Constitution of Zambia (Amendment)*, 2016 Act No. 2, emphasises that constitutional

change must be inclusive and reflective of the people's will. A people-driven process is therefore not a procedural preference, but a constitutional demand.

The publication of the draft bill on 23 May 2025, ahead of its first reading, complied with the letter of *Article 79*. Yet the manner of its release drew criticism. The absence of public briefings, limited dissemination, and the delay between the Gazette date and publication in the Daily Mail created the impression of a subdued rollout rather than nationwide consensus-building. Critics have argued that this “Nicodemus” approach contradicted the government's assurances of participatory constitutionalism.

Substantively, Bill 7 proposed amendments to 22 articles affecting ministers, Members of Parliament, the Secretary to the Cabinet, the Attorney General, the Solicitor General, and local government leadership. In effect, the amendments touch nearly every tier of the political-executive order. Although the Ministry of Justice has linked the bill to recommendations from the ERTC, several key proposals from that consultative process were omitted.

The omissions are notable. The ERTC recommended, among other things, revising *Articles 116 and 117* to allow the appointment of ministers from outside Parliament, subject to ratification. This shift would have strengthened the separation of powers by freeing MPs from executive obligations and enhancing legislative scrutiny. It also recommended amending *Article 110(2)* to require gender-balanced presidential tickets, a structural commitment to advancing gender inclusion. Bill 7 abandoned both proposals, signaling reluctance to recalibrate executive power or redistribute opportunities within political leadership.

The government's position has persisted despite sustained advocacy from civil society and the Church Mother Bodies - Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ), and the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB). Although the President ordered a deferral of the bill and the Constitutional Court later ruled that the process violated constitutional principles by not being people-driven, lacking independence and broad consultation, the executive has maintained that constitutional amendment is a “requirement.” The tension between judicial interpretation, legislative authority, public sentiment, and executive priority continues to shape this debate.

2. Composition and Mandate of the Technical Committee

The appointment of the Technical Committee is constitutionally grounded under *Articles 92(1), 92(2)(f), and 92(2)(j)* of the Constitution, but the configuration of the committee raises important concerns. Representation is narrow, with limited reflection of Zambia's demographic and institutional diversity. The absence of nominations by institutions or constituencies means members are not formally accountable to organized bodies such as churches, unions, civil society groups, or professional associations.

Questions regarding the competence and suitability of some members further cast doubt on the committee's capacity to manage a reform process of this magnitude. This is compounded by restrictive Terms of Reference, which mirror Bill 7's thematic areas, that stand in tension with the expansive scope implied by a constitutional review. While the committee is expected to gather submissions nationwide, the exercise has been confined to a three-week window, an unrealistic period for meaningful participation across a country with significant rural populations and logistical constraints.

Moreover, there is heavy emphasis in the ToRs on political rather than developmental or human rights issues, following earlier critiques of Bill 7. This orientation risks narrowing the reform agenda to political elites' priorities while eclipsing deeper structural issues, including socioeconomic rights or institutional design reforms that had gained traction in public debates. Expanding the Technical Committee and its mandate may help assuage the challenges above.

3. The Consultation Process: Selective and Exclusionary

The consultation method adopted for the current process relies primarily on Provincial Headquarters as submission centres. This approach is inherently selective. It favours those with resources and mobility, and it excludes communities whose lived experience is shaped by distance, poverty, or limited access to public institutions. A process that aspires to reflect the “aspirations, diversity, and evolving governance needs” of citizens cannot rely on a model that filters out the majority.

The absence of a preliminary question, whether Zambians even want a constitutional amendment at this time, is particularly striking. The process presumes consent where none has been expressly sought. It asks citizens to comment on pre-selected areas rather than inviting them to define the agenda.

This approach departs from principles of participatory constitutionalism, which require that the people collectively determine both the need for reform and the scope of the exercise.

A more inclusive model would involve town hall discussions in districts, deliberate outreach to rural constituencies, and systematic use of radio and local-language platforms. Civic education has been minimal, leaving many Zambians unable to meaningfully assess or contribute to constitutional discussions. In a country with high poverty and low literacy levels, broad-based participation is not only a democratic ideal but a practical necessity.

4. Risks to Democratic Consensus

Constitution-making relies on dialogue, compromise, and broad legitimacy. The current process risks entrenching elitism, where debates are dominated by those already familiar with the Constitution. Without platforms that allow citizens, political parties, traditional authorities, and civil society actors to deliberate collectively, the process may deepen polarisation rather than build consensus.

Stakeholders have also been discouraged from raising issues outside the prescribed focus areas. This is a significant constraint. Issues such as expanding the Bill of Rights have longstanding support among many actors. Restricting the agenda narrows the space for innovation and reinforces the perception that constitutional amendment is being driven by political interests rather than public priorities.

The absence of independent oversight further leaves the process vulnerable to perceptions of partisanship. A credible constitutional review process must be monitored by an independent body capable of evaluating transparency, inclusivity, and fairness.

5. Timing and Credibility

The pace of the amendment process suggests an alignment with the electoral cycle. Constitutional reform should not be subordinated to political timelines. A constitution is a foundational document that requires deliberation, adequate civic education, and time for public absorption. Rushing the process risks producing a document that lacks legitimacy and long-term durability.

A phased approach would allow consultations to be conducted methodically, the draft to be reviewed rigorously, and public understanding to be built through sustained civic engagement.

Without this, the reform risks being perceived as an elite-driven project with limited ownership among the majority.

6. Pathways Toward a Credible Constitutional Reform Process

Restoring legitimacy and public confidence in the constitutional reform process will require a set of deliberate institutional and procedural adjustments. These measures may include reconstituting the Technical Committee to ensure balanced representation and expertise, clarifying and broadening its mandate so that responsibilities are transparent and comprehensive, guaranteeing inclusive consultations that engage diverse voices across society, safeguarding democratic consensus by fostering dialogue and compromise among stakeholders, aligning the reform timeline with credibility to avoid rushed or politically driven processes, and promoting meaningful grassroots participation to anchor reforms in the lived realities of citizens. Together, these measures may help create a reform process that is not only procedurally sound but also widely trusted and genuinely representative of Zambia's democratic aspirations.

6.1. Reconstitution of the Technical Committee

First, there is a need to broaden representation within the Technical Committee. Members should reflect Zambia's ethnic, regional, gender, disability, and civil society diversity. Such inclusivity will help build legitimacy and strengthen accountability in the reform process.

Second, institutional accountability must be prioritised. Instead of individuals being appointed directly, members should be nominated by their respective organisations—such as churches, unions, NGOs, and academia. This approach ensures that committee members remain answerable to their constituencies and act in line with collective interests rather than personal agendas.

Finally, guiding legislation should be adopted to provide a clear framework for the committee's operations. Provisions similar to those in the *National Constitutional Conference Act No. 19 of 2007* could be used. These would outline the committee's duration, security of tenure, bill drafting powers, and competence criteria. Such measures would promote transparency, safeguard legitimacy, and strengthen the credibility of the constitutional reform process.

6.2. Clarifying and Expanding the Mandate

The mandate for constitutional reform must be clarified and broadened to ensure it reflects the full scope of the task at

hand. This begins with revising the Terms of Reference (ToRs) so that they align with the overarching constitutional reform agenda. Central to this process is the principle of legitimacy: reform efforts should commence by seeking the consent of the Zambian people to amend the Constitution. Such consent anchors the process in democratic participation and ensures that any changes are rooted in the will of the citizens. In revising the mandate, it is essential to avoid the limitations experienced under Bill 7, which restricted consideration to only pre-selected sections of the Constitution. A comprehensive reform process must allow for the review of all constitutional provisions. This inclusive approach prevents piecemeal amendments and instead encourages a holistic examination of the Constitution, ensuring that reforms are coherent, balanced, and responsive to the nation's evolving needs.

Equally important is the need for flexibility within the mandate. Stakeholders should be empowered to raise issues beyond the initial ToRs, thereby creating space for innovative proposals and broader dialogue. For example, expanding the Bill of Rights could strengthen protections for citizens and enhance the Constitution's role as a guarantor of fundamental freedoms. By permitting such flexibility, the reform process becomes more dynamic, participatory, and capable

6.3. Inclusive Consultation Process

An inclusive consultation process can be strengthened through the establishment of a Town Hall system. Instead of relying solely on submissions to Provincial Headquarters, open Town Hall meetings across districts would provide a platform to capture grassroots voices. This approach ensures that ordinary citizens have the opportunity to directly contribute to decision-making and policy discussions.

Community outreach is another vital component. By using radio broadcasts, local languages, and civic education campaigns, rural populations can be effectively engaged. These methods help overcome barriers of distance, literacy, and access, ensuring that even those in remote areas are included in the consultation process.

Finally, civil society facilitation plays a key role in mobilising participation and guaranteeing inclusivity. Collaborating with NGOs and faith-based organisations allows for broader representation and helps build trust within communities. These partnerships ensure that diverse groups are heard and that the consultation process reflects the needs and aspirations of all citizens.

6.4. Safeguarding Democratic Consensus

Safeguarding democratic consensus requires deliberate mechanisms that go beyond temporary committees or ad hoc consultations. One essential approach is the creation of consensus-building forums that bring together diverse stakeholders such as civil society organizations, political parties, and traditional leaders. These platforms should serve as permanent spaces for dialogue, ensuring that conversations about governance, representation, and national priorities continue even after the formal work of committees has concluded. By institutionalizing inclusive dialogue, societies can reduce polarization, foster mutual trust, and build a culture of collaboration that strengthens democratic resilience.

In addition to dialogue, independent oversight is critical to maintaining credibility and fairness throughout the process. Establishing an impartial monitoring body ensures that inclusivity, transparency, and accountability are consistently upheld. This body would track the participation of different groups, evaluate whether procedures are being followed equitably, and provide regular reports to the public. By acting as a safeguard against bias or exclusion, independent oversight reinforces public confidence in democratic processes and protects the integrity of consensus-building efforts. Together, these measures create a durable foundation for democratic governance rooted in fairness, inclusivity, and shared responsibility.

6.5. Timing and Credibility

Constitutional reform must be approached with deliberate care and credibility. It is essential that the process be decoupled from electoral timelines, ensuring that reform is not rushed to meet political deadlines. Reform undertaken under such constraints risks undermining both its legitimacy and long-term sustainability.

A phased approach is therefore recommended. Adequate time should be allocated for consultation, drafting, and review prior to submission to Parliament. This sequencing allows for broad participation, careful refinement, and the strengthening of institutional trust.

Equally important is the role of public education. Sustained civic education campaigns must be conducted to equip citizens with the knowledge necessary to understand the reform process and contribute meaningfully. Informed participation enhances legitimacy, fosters accountability, and ensures that constitutional change reflects the collective will of the people.

6.7. Substantive Grassroots Participation

Promoting substantive participation means encouraging conscious contributions from citizens that reflect their lived experiences and aspirations. Such engagement ensures that individuals are not passive observers but active participants in shaping the common good.

As the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace affirms, “Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 189). This highlights the moral responsibility of every person to take part in building a just society.

However, genuine participation is only possible when the principle of subsidiarity is upheld. This principle requires that all stakeholders be allowed to contribute fully within their capacities, without being overshadowed or absorbed by higher authorities. The Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno* reminds us that higher organs of society must not take over the roles of subordinate ones. Respecting this balance ensures that participation remains authentic and effective. Only through an approach that includes such measures can Zambia move toward a constitutional reform process marked by credi-

bility, inclusivity, and national ownership.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 2025 constitutional amendment process presents Zambia with both a challenge and an opportunity. As currently structured, the process risks repeating the shortcomings of previous attempts at constitutional reform. Weak representation, restrictive mandates, narrow consultations, and rushed timelines threaten the credibility and inclusiveness required for constitutional durability. A legitimate, credible and inclusive constitutional amendment process that may lead to solid constitutions that stand the test of time should guarantee a diverse Technical Committee, strengthen institutional accountability, and provide legislative clarity. It requires an expanded mandate that enables genuine reform, the adoption of inclusive town hall consultations, and the safeguarding of democratic consensus through transparency and dialogue. Crucially, sufficient time must be allocated to free the process from the pressures of electoral expediency.

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**PARTICIPATION IS A DUTY TO BE
FULFILLED CONSCIOUSLY BY ALL,
WITH RESPONSIBILITY AND WITH
A VIEW TO THE COMMON GOOD**

WHERE ARE WE AS A NATION IN TERMS OF POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND GOVERNANCE TRANSFORMATION?



Introduction

In Zambia, as in many other places, we often share opinions and beliefs without thorough research or evidence. We may genuinely think our views are accurate, but they might not reflect the entire truth. When we share these perspectives with others, they may not have the opportunity to verify the information, and they might either accept or reject our claims without scrutiny. This can be misleading, and yet people deserve to know the facts. Evidence-based information in understanding complex issues like national transformation is of paramount importance.

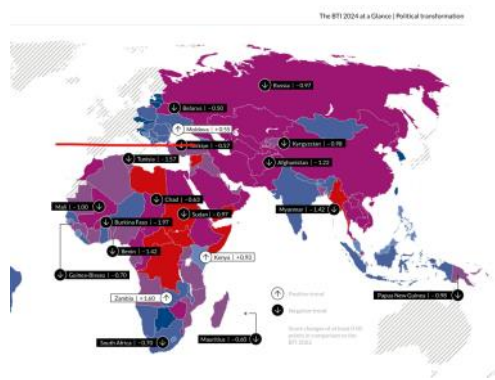
For instance, certain online surveys are going around, posing the following questions: “Do you feel that things in Zambia have improved, deteriorated, or haven’t changed in the last years? Do you feel the political environment has improved? Do you feel that the economic situation has improved, deteriorated, or hasn’t changed since the coming in of the current government?” Answers to these questions are not easy; they will depend on individual preferences and political affiliation and may not portray the real picture. One who supports or belongs to the ruling party will likely say that Zambia has improved, while one who belongs to the opposition party will say that things have deteriorated.

When discussing national issues like political, economic, and governance transformation, opinions can be influenced by personal biases, affiliations, or preferences. However, organisations that conduct research and assessments can provide a more objective understanding of the situation.

The Bertelsmann Foundation's 2024 report on Zambia offers valuable insights into the country's progress in these areas. By assigning a score out of 10 and ranking Zambia among 137 countries, the report provides a data-driven perspective on the nation's transformation. This analysis can help us better understand the current state of affairs and identify areas for improvement. Where are we as a nation in terms of political, economic and governance transformation? We look at the assessment that has been done. This paper uses the BTI 2024 data to address a simple question: where are we as a nation in political, economic, and governance transformation? The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, it presents Zambia's current rating and ranking in all three transformation domains. Second, it reviews long-term trends dating back to 2006 to show how Zambia's scores have shifted over time. Third, it distils the key findings and draws conclusions about the country's trajectory.

II. Rating and Ranking of Zambia in Terms of Political, Economic and Governance Transformation

The BTI 2024 data positions Zambia as a country with moderate political and governance transformation, but significant deficiencies in economic transformation. Politically, Zambia scores 6.20 out of 10 and ranks 48th out of 137 countries. The strongest elements relate to stateness, political participation, and institutional stability. Stateness stands at 7.8 and has been stable for nearly two decades, while political participation and institutional stability both sit at 6.5. Political and social integration follows closely at 6.0. Rule of law, however, lags at 4.3 and continues to undermine the integrity of the overall political transformation score.



Economic transformation is far weaker. Zambia's score of 4.54 places it 91st out of 137 countries. Four of the seven sub-indicators — socioeconomic development, welfare regime, economic performance, and sustainability — fall below 5. The most striking figure is the 2.0 score for socioeconomic development, which reflects entrenched poverty, widening inequality, and chronic underinvestment in human capital. Despite relatively stronger performance in market organisation (6.3) and monetary and fiscal stability (5.5), these have not translated into broad-based economic gains.

Governance transformation stands at 5.16, again ranking 48th out of 137. International cooperation (6.7), steering capacity (6.0), and consensus-building (6.0) perform comparatively well, but resource efficiency sits at 4.3. This low score signals persistent weaknesses in public sector management, budget discipline, and administrative capability.

Long-term trends sharpen the picture. Many indicators were significantly stronger in 2006 than they are today. Between 2016 and 2021, Zambia experienced a marked decline across political, economic, and governance metrics, reaching the

lowest point in the dataset. Since 2021, ratings have improved, but not sufficiently to return to earlier highs. Democratic institutions and some governance measures have rebounded, but the rule of law, property rights, socioeconomic development, and public sector efficiency remain below mid-2000s levels.

III. Findings and Conclusions

A. Political and Governance Transformation: Moderate Progress, Weak Enforcement Capacity

The overall political transformation scores above 5 reflect a system that retains the essential features of competitive politics and institutional continuity. Multi-party elections continue to function, the legislature remains active, and civic participation remains meaningful. These attributes underpin the relatively strong scores in political participation, institutional stability, and stateness. They also point to a political environment that, while contentious, has avoided systemic breakdown.

Yet the strength of democratic structures contrasts sharply with the weakness of their enforcement. The sub-indicator for rule of law falls below 5, signalling an institutional bottleneck that cuts across accountability, rights protection, and judicial integrity. Three problem areas stand out. First, doubts about judicial independence and prosecutorial impartiality are persistent, often linked to political influence or uneven enforcement. Second, inconsistencies in legal application undermine predictability and investor confidence. Third, protection of civil rights remains uneven, with recurring concerns about arbitrary arrests, restrictions on expression, and variable adherence to due process. These gaps suggest that democratic institutions exist but are not consistently anchored in an impartial legal order.

Governance performance reveals a similar pattern. Steering capacity and consensus-building are stable, but resource efficiency is low at 4.3. This reflects weak coordination across ministries, limitations in bureaucratic capacity, and recurring issues in financial management. The state often articulates priorities but struggles to implement them effectively, reinforcing the gap between formal democratic structures and their practical delivery.

B. Economic Transformation: Systemic Underperformance

The economic transformation profile is the weakest of the three domains. A score below 5 indicates a system struggling to convert policy intent into developmental outcomes. Four

sub-indicators, socioeconomic development, welfare regime, economic performance, and sustainability, are below average. The most significant concern is the 2.0 score for socioeconomic development. This reflects deep poverty, widening inequality, and limited human development, suggesting that economic growth has not translated into improvements in living standards. Human capital remains underdeveloped, constraining long-term productivity and competitiveness.

The welfare regime score below 5 highlights gaps in social protection. Safety nets are limited, coverage is uneven, and the state lacks the capacity to shield vulnerable groups from economic shocks. Economic performance has also been inconsistent, marked by low productivity, weak job creation, and recurring macroeconomic pressures. Sustainability challenges, including environmental degradation, overreliance on mining, and debt-related constraints, indicate that the current growth model is fragile.

Overall, the economic sphere shows that the country's structural weaknesses run deeper than short-term policy choices. The combination of poor socioeconomic outcomes, limited social protection, and weak environmental and fiscal sustaina-

bility has constrained Zambia's ability to achieve transformative economic change.

C. Trajectory Over Time: Recovery Without Restoration

The broader trend since 2006 shows a clear pattern. Zambia began from a relatively high baseline across political, economic, and governance indicators. From 2016 to 2021, scores declined sharply. Some indicators fell to their lowest point in two decades. Since 2021, the data show improvement across most dimensions, indicating that recent policy and governance shifts have had a positive effect. However, the recovery remains incomplete. Current ratings remain below 2006 levels in all three transformation domains.

This suggests three overarching conclusions. First, Zambia's political system is resilient but hampered by weak enforcement institutions. Second, economic transformation remains the country's most urgent and underperforming area. Third, while recent reforms have reversed some deterioration, the country has not yet restored the stronger institutional and developmental position it once held. Unless these economic challenges are handled a return to the 2006 levels will not occur retarding overall development across all metrics.



THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN ADVANCING ZAMBIA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Economic development has long sparked debates about how much government should shape a country's trajectory. Global experience shows that neither heavy-handed state control nor unchecked markets deliver inclusive prosperity on their own (Adelman, 1999). What matters is a capable state, one that sets clear rules, invests in people, and works with citizens and the private sector to expand opportunity. This lesson is especially relevant for Zambia. Despite its resource wealth and human potential, the country continues to grapple with weak diversification, high joblessness, and structural vulnerabilities that limit broad-based progress.

This article examines how the government can steer Zambia toward a more resilient and equitable economic future. It begins by exploring how the state can foster an enabling environment for high-return investments, with a focus on infrastructure, agriculture, green industries, and mineral beneficiation. It then considers how governance reforms, particularly constitutional review and stronger citizen participation, shape economic outcomes by building trust and accountability. Finally, it looks at the need to balance growth with environmental justice, recognising that sustainable development demands protection of ecosystems and communities already facing climate-related risks.

Creating an Enabling Environment for High-Return Investments

One of the most critical roles of government today is to foster an enabling environment for investment. This does not mean the state should do everything, but rather that it should reduce barriers and enhance opportunities for productive, high-return investments. For Zambia, this includes:

- **Infrastructure development:** Expanding energy generation, transport, and digital infrastructure to lower the costs of doing business.
- **Agricultural value chains:** Moving beyond subsistence and raw exports by supporting agro-processing and modern farming techniques.
- **Green and renewable sectors:** Positioning Zambia as a leader in sustainable energy and climate-smart investments, ensuring development does not compromise environmental justice.
- **Mining beneficiation:** Encouraging value-addition in copper and cobalt, critical minerals for the global green transition.

When governments invest in infrastructure and human capital, they unlock private sector activity. Evidence from East Asia shows that such interventions enabled dynamic growth and

export competitiveness (Adelman, 1999). Zambia can draw from these lessons by using policy to signal stability, consistency, and long-term commitment to development goals.

Linking Governance and Citizen Engagement

Governance reforms are not only about laws and institutions—they are about building trust. The ongoing constitutional amendment process is a critical opportunity for Zambians to shape how power and resources are managed. A credible constitution that reflects citizens' aspirations can enhance accountability, reduce policy uncertainty, and boost investor confidence.

Citizen participation is therefore central to Zambia's economic future. Inclusive governance ensures that growth is not concentrated among elites but shared across households and communities. This resonates with the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection's call for policies rooted in human dignity and social justice.

Balancing Growth and Environmental Justice

Economic development must also be sustainable. Zambia is experiencing increasing pressure from climate change, droughts and shifts in rainfall patterns that threaten food security. Government's role is to ensure that investment strategies align with environmental stewardship, balancing the need for growth with the protection of ecosystems and vulnerable populations. This is not only a moral imperative but

also an economic one: long-term investors increasingly prioritize countries with strong environmental governance.

Conclusion

As Zambia reflects on its governance framework and economic direction, the role of government in development is once again at the center of national debate. History and global experience teach us that capable states matter—not to replace the market, but to guide it toward outcomes that benefit all citizens. For Zambia, this means creating an enabling environment for high-return investments, strengthening governance and citizen engagement, and pursuing a path of sustainable development.

Economic policy is not just about numbers; it is about dignity, justice, and the well-being of every household. The choices made today will determine whether Zambia breaks free from structural traps and moves toward a future where prosperity and justice go hand in hand.

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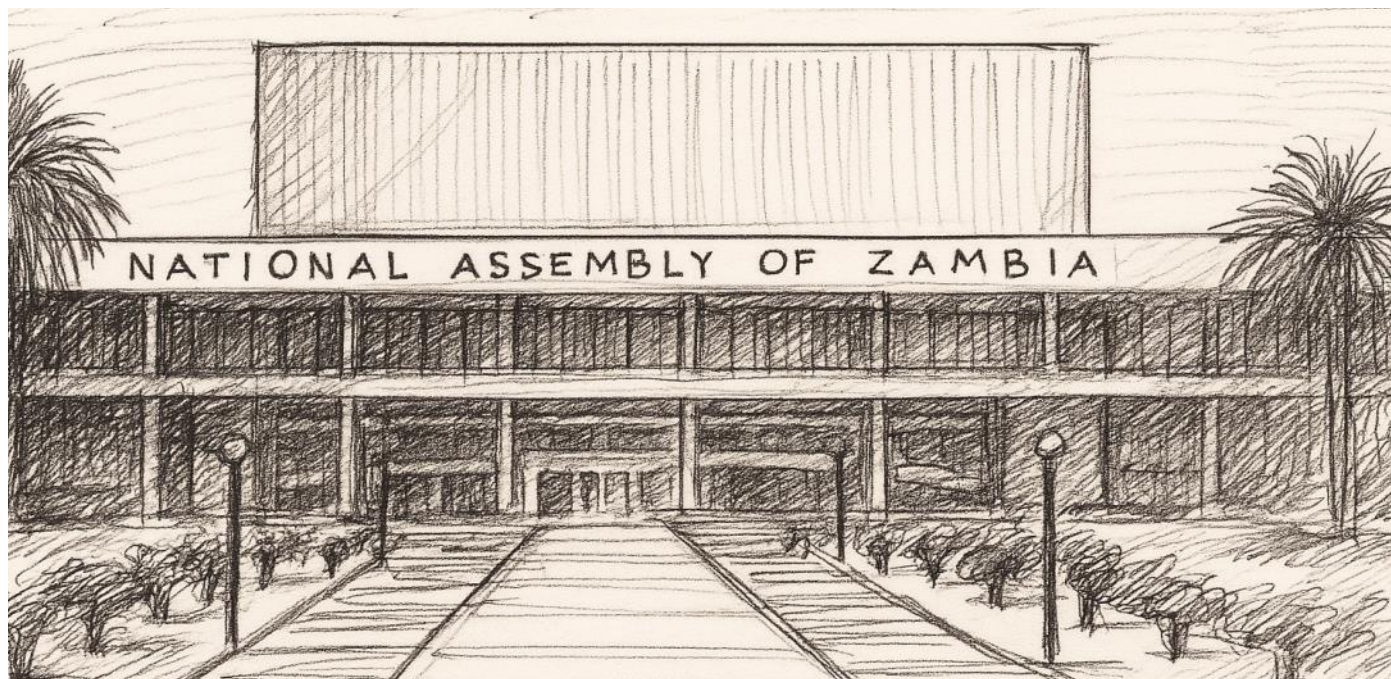
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GOVERNANCE REFORMS ARE NOT ONLY ABOUT LAWS AND INSTITUTIONS — THEY ARE ABOUT BUILDING TRUST.



THE CONSTITUTIONAL EROSION OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE: WHY REINTRODUCING MPs INTO COUNCILS IS A DEMOCRATIC THREAT AND A LACK OF ASPIRATION FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS



Introduction

The passage of Constitutional Amendment Act 13 of 2025 has settled the legislative question. But a parliamentary majority does not resolve a constitutional contradiction, and the concerns that animated debate on Bill No. 7 are now more urgent precisely because they have been written into the supreme law of the land. What remains is to understand what that costs and to identify what must come next.

Act 13 reintroduces MPs into the composition of local authorities, reversing their removal in 2016. It also introduces a proportional representation system in which the PR ballot is tied directly to the presidential vote. These two provisions are not unrelated. Taken together, they ensure that some councillors sitting in local authorities will owe their seats not to ward-level or constituency mandates but to presidential coattails. The accountability chain does not merely lengthen under Act 13. It runs in the wrong direction: upward toward the executive, not downward toward citizens. The centralisation is structural, not incidental, and it is now constitutional.

Regarding the aspirations of parliamentarians, it may not be correct to say they have none. They are simply aspiring downwards to local government to increase their powers

rather than upwards to the executive, which would provide them with a far more substantial source of authority. This article examines the government's case for integration, interrogates the constitutional and democratic risks now that those risks have been enacted into law, and outlines a principled alternative rooted in decentralisation.

The Government's Thesis and Its Limits

The government's rationale rests on two points: that MPs' national mandate equips them with a bird's-eye view of constituency development priorities, and that because MPs oversee the CDF, they should be present in the bodies that execute local projects. In his address at the opening of Parliament on 12th September, the President framed opposition to the Bill not as constitutional disagreement but as a failure of personal reflection, an appeal designed to secure parliamentary support rather than engage its merits. That framing succeeded. But framing is not argument, and a law built on a weak premise remains weak regardless of the votes it attracts.

Historical Regression and a Deeper Centralisation

Zambia has been here before. The 1992 amendment to the Local Government Act made MPs ex officio councillors, producing councillors who hesitated to challenge MPs

holding Cabinet positions. This mirrored the one-party state era from 1972 to 1991, when local offices were reduced to instruments of central consolidation. Testimonies from that period are unfavourable: MPs were seen as overriding the proper authority of Mayors and Council Chairpersons. Act 13 does not merely repeat this pattern. It entrenches it constitutionally rather than statutorily, meaning correction now requires a further constitutional amendment rather than a simple parliamentary majority. The cost of the original error has multiplied.

The PR-presidential ballot linkage deepens this concern considerably. During the one-party era, the consolidation of central power over local governance worked through party structures. Act 13 achieves a structurally similar outcome through constitutional design: MPs with no independent local mandate, selected through a mechanism tied to presidential electoral performance, are now embedded in bodies responsible for ward-level development. The mechanism differs. The directional pull of power is the same.

Separation of Functions and the Accountability Collapse

The Constitution assigns MPs to legislative and oversight duties under Article 63, while councils exist as decentralised structures to plan and implement local development. Allowing MPs to act as both overseers and implementers creates a dual-role conflict that makes accountability structurally impossible. You cannot hold accountable an institution in which you are yourself a decision-maker. This is not a technicality. It is the institutional logic that gives oversight meaning.

The CDF illustrates this dysfunction. Although Article 162 enshrines the CDF, the involvement of MPs in its implementation is not constitutionally required. That was introduced through subsidiary legislation, the CDF Acts of 2018 and 2024, granting MPs a voting majority on the Constituency Development Fund Committee. Act 13 codifies and deepens this distortion rather than correcting it. The President described the current separation of MPs from direct supervisory power at councils as a distortion. In reality it is deliberate: the Assembly legislates and allocates; councils execute; oversight bodies monitor. Collapsing this structure does not eliminate distortion. It simply relocates it to a level where it becomes harder to challenge.

The comparative record is clear. Kenya's courts have found MP participation in local executive functions unconstitutional. India's 2013 parliamentary committee recommended abolishing its CDF model specifically because it blurred legislative and executive roles and undermined the constitutional standing of local government. South Africa's constitutional framework mirrors Zambia's Article 152 almost precisely in protecting local authority autonomy. Crucially, none of these jurisdictions responded to developmental coordination challenges by embedding legislators in councils. Kenya, India, and South Africa all use inter-institutional development committees: structured forums through which MPs engage with local priorities without displacing elected councillors or council staff. This is the settled comparative direction. Act 13 moves against it.

What Comes Next?

The constitutional petition route is now the primary legal avenue. The internal tension between Act 13 and Article 152 is not academic. It is a live question for the courts, and relevant parties should be weighing it seriously. In the meantime, implementation matters. Subsidiary legislation, CDF regulations, and council procedural rules remain in play. Civil society should push for mandatory conflict-of-interest declarations where MPs participate in council decisions touching CDF projects, clear limits on MPs' voting roles in council proceedings, and mandatory recusal where a direct patronage interest exists.

Documentation is now urgent. Civil society, the media, and oversight institutions need to begin systematically tracking how MPs exercise their council presence: attendance, voting patterns, whether councillors are being overridden, and what relationship MP council behaviour bears to CDF patronage. This evidence base is essential both for present accountability and for building the political case for future reversal.

The principled long-term alternative is clear. Councils and their technical staff should plan and implement development. MPs should confine themselves to oversight, lawmaking, and holding the executive accountable for CDF use. The Local Government Equalisation Fund under Article 163 could be restructured to allocate resources transparently through formula-based criteria, replacing patronage with accountability. MPs' perspectives can be incorporated through formal inter-institutional committees without requiring

council membership. If the underlying concern is MPs' limited career trajectory, the answer is to aspire upwards: a third tier of government or a bicameral legislature drawing power away from the executive would give parliamentarians a legitimate upward path and end the institutional cannibalism that results from MPs and local government officials competing over the residue of power.

Conclusion

Act 13 of 2025 has enacted into constitutional law a set of governance risks that were historically documented, judicially recognised in comparable jurisdictions, and explicitly warned against during the Bill's passage. It has done so through a process in which opposition was framed as moral failure rather than constitutional argument. That framing should be part of

the public record of how this law came to be.

A legislative majority is not constitutional legitimacy. The internal contradiction Act 13 has created is justiciable, its implementation harms are measurable, and the case for reversal must now be built on evidence. Zambia's democratic future depends on strengthening independent institutions and protecting local autonomy. Act 13 does neither. What remains is the work of ensuring that this remains not merely an argument on paper, but the foundation of a sustained and disciplined accountability effort.

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IT IS AN INJUSTICE, A GRAVE EVIL AND A DISTURBANCE OF RIGHT ORDER, FOR A LARGER AND HIGHER ASSOCIATION TO ARROGATE TO ITSELF FUNCTIONS WHICH CAN BE PERFORMED EFFICIENTLY BY SMALLER AND LOWER SOCIETIES

**MATER ET MAGISTRA: ENCYCLICAL ON CHRISTIANITY & SOCIAL PROGRESS
POPE JOHN XXIII - MAY 15, 1961**



A MUTED PROMISE: LAND RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO NATURAL RESOURCES IN ZAMBIA



Land and natural resources are supposed to be governed not by greed and broken promises but by justice, equity, and the voice of the people.

Zambia is richly endowed with land and natural resources, blessings that have the potential to support broad-based development and improve the well-being of all citizens. Yet access to these resources remains deeply unequal. Although our land laws are framed as neutral and protective of all Zambians, they are enforced unevenly in practice. Those with political power or wealth can secure prime land with relative ease, while poor and rural communities face insecurity, dispossession, and limited avenues for redress. This pattern not only entrenches inequality but also undermines the pursuit of social justice and the protection of human dignity. My argument is that Zambia can move towards a more just and equitable society only if it strengthens and enforces its land governance system in ways that prioritise the rights and needs of the least advantaged.

To develop this argument, I will proceed in two steps. First, I draw on John Rawls's theory of justice to show how the prin-

ciples of fairness can illuminate the failures and possibilities within Zambia's land governance system. Second, I turn to Catholic social teaching to demonstrate that the ethical demand for equitable access to land is rooted not only in political philosophy but also in the theological conviction that every human being possesses inherent dignity. This will be followed by a review of the legal framework underpinning the issues on land and natural resources, and concluding remarks.

Rawls's theory of justice offers two insights that are especially relevant to Zambia's land question. The first is the "difference principle", which allows inequalities only when they work to the benefit of those who are least advantaged (Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 1999). Under this lens, Zambia's land governance system is unjust to the extent that it improves the position of the powerful while leaving rural and marginalised communities, such as those in Shang'ombo, Nalolo, Chikanda in Mumbwa, and Sinazongwe, without meaningful protection or opportunity. If land allocation and regulation do not expand the capabilities and security of those at the bottom, then the system fails the basic test of justice. Rawls's second contribution, the "veil of ignorance", challenges policymakers to design laws as if they did not know their own social position or advantage. I often relate this principle with

a golden rule that states: “*so whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets.*” (Mathew 7:12). In addition, Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative also could be equated to a golden rule: “Focus on reciprocity” (Kant 1900). This categorical imperative is not only considered as a golden rule, but it also asks us to consider that our own actions would be applied as a universal law for everyone. This also means that we should be so considerate not only to our own biological families and friends but to humanity as well. In the Zambian context, this principle exposes how far our laws fall short, as many rules are shaped and applied by individuals who assume they will remain on the benefiting side of inequality. A just land regime would require legislators and administrators to imagine themselves as rural farmers, displaced households, persons with disability or young people with no access to family land, precisely the people whom the current system marginalises.

Catholic social teaching reinforces this demand for justice by grounding it in the theological dignity of the human person. Genesis 1:27-28 affirms that every person is created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) and endowed with intelligence and free will. Thus, they possess inherent, inviolable worth (dignity), which bequeaths them human rights, including the property right. The church further affirms that human rights are from reason and the redemption of humans by Jesus Christ according to *the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 153. Because human dignity is the foundation of all rights, access to land, on which livelihoods, security, and participation in community life depend, cannot be treated as a privilege reserved for the powerful. A governance system that allows dispossession or entrenches exclusion violates both human dignity and the moral purpose for which land is entrusted to humanity. Scripture reminds us that land is a gift intended for the flourishing of all, not the enrichment of a few (Deuteronomy 1:8). When the legal and administrative frameworks fail to safeguard equitable access, they contradict the ethical vision that underpins both Christian teaching and the broader human rights tradition.

Zambia’s legal framework recognises both statutory and customary land rights, though in practice the protection of these rights is uneven. Under the Constitution and the Lands Act of 1995, all land is vested in the President in trust for the people of Zambia. The Act distinguishes between State land and customary land and, crucially, affirms the continuity of custom-

ary tenure. Section 7 provides that any land held under customary tenure before the Act came into force “*shall continue to be so held and recognised,*” and that customary holdings may not be construed as violating statutory law. In principle, therefore, rural communities enjoy legally protected tenure, and customary land can only be taken, converted, or alienated through procedures that comply with statutory requirements, common law, judicial precedents, principles of equity, and customary norms. This framework, at least on paper, places customary land on equal footing with State land and protects local communities from arbitrary dispossession.



Yet the implementation of these protections remains fraught. Land-based investments, often framed as engines of economic development, frequently proceed without free, prior, and informed consent, leaving communities vulnerable to displacement and inadequate compensation. Weak enforcement, limited oversight, and power imbalances mean that compulsory acquisition procedures and safeguards in the Lands Act are not consistently applied. Women, in particular, bear the brunt of these inequalities, as the current policy and administrative systems fail to acknowledge their specific vulnerabilities.

Stakeholders have long called for a comprehensive review of the Lands Act and national land policy to clarify the rights of poor rural households, strengthen transparency, and compel institutions such as the Ministry of Lands and the Lands Tribunal to collect and publish gender-disaggregated data. Simplifying land administration and reducing the cost of titling, potentially through free or subsidised titles for the poorest, would further align the legal framework with its aim of protecting those most at risk. Without such reforms, constitutional guarantees and statutory provisions remain largely theoretical, offering little defence against unequal power and the growing pressures on customary land.

In summation, the difference between legal provisions and the lived realities of the Zambians regarding land and natural

resources just shows the deficit in human rights. The legal frameworks and theories provide a more acceptable foundation for equal access; therefore, their implementation will help us live in a more equal-based society, where every human being will be or feel entitled. If we are willing to address this problem, then we should all-together advocate for a prolonged approach that will include these measures: strengthening the legal systems or frameworks, improving our governance structures, promoting transparency and accountability, and, most importantly, advocating for more substantive participation of the local communities in making decisions, espe-

cially that concern our universal gifts from God—*Land and other natural resources*. Only then will Zambia move towards a more just and equitable society that upholds the dignity of everyone and respects their rights.

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IF WE ARE WILLING TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES REGARDING LAND AND OTHER NATURAL RESOURCES, ZAMBIA WILL MOVE TOWARDS A MORE JUST AND EQUITABLE SOCIETY THAT UPHOLDS THE DIGNITY OF EVERYONE AND RESPECTS THEIR RIGHTS.



THE NATIONAL BUDGET MUST CHAMPION PEOPLE WITH LOW INCOMES, UPHOLD HUMAN DIGNITY, & DRIVE INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT



What does a nation hold most dear? The answer lies in its budget. A country's budget not only outlines the allocation of funds but also signifies what the government prioritises. It draws lines not only among governmental ministries but also between the valued and the marginalised. More than just an economic document, a national budget reflects a nation's moral and developmental priorities and serves as a public statement of who and what the government values most. In countries where many citizens endure the heavy burdens of poverty, inequality, and climate challenges, a just and forward-thinking budget must be anchored in three interconnected principles: a preferential option for the poor, the protection of human dignity, and the promotion of integral human development. The preferential option for the poor is not an abstract principle; it is a lived necessity. The budget must prioritise investments in social protection, rural infrastructure, and agricultural support. Expanding the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), strengthening social cash transfer programs, and subsidising smallholder farmers are not acts of charity; they are acts of justice. They ensure that

the poor are not left behind in the pursuit of national growth.

The Invisible Majority

For far too long, poverty has been perceived as merely a problem to be solved, a flaw in national statistics, or a burden on government resources. This perspective not only undermines the dignity of those living in poverty but also obscures the invaluable contributions that marginalised communities make to the nation. As Pope Francis reminds us, "The poor are not a problem to be solved, but brothers and sisters to be welcomed with respect" (Francis 197). Sometimes, they may feel their insights and wisdom are worthless, leading them to give more weight to others' opinions, even when their own are superior to what is being proposed for them. Paulo Freire once observed, "The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption" (Freire 54). To genuinely progress in development, we must transform our view, from seeing people with low incomes as passive beneficiaries to recognising them as active partners in creating more just, resilient societies.

In doing so, we can listen and benefit from their ideas and insights. Amartya Sen captures this truth when he argues that “Development has to be more than the expansion of incomes; it has to be an enhancement of freedoms” (Sen 36). Their lived wisdom, born of resilience and necessity, is not anecdotal but experiential data; knowledge that can guide smarter, more humane policies.

In many cases, people with low incomes remain the silent majority, bearing the burden of policy failures and budget shortfalls while being excluded from the very discussions that shape their lives. Yet, it is precisely their lived experiences, resilience, and grounded understanding of community needs that make their voices indispensable. Placing the poor at the centre of decision-making is not a charitable act; it is a democratic imperative. It’s time to move beyond token consultations and embrace genuine, inclusive governance. As Amartya Sen reminds us, “No one can be free if they are deprived of basic capabilities” (Sen 87). Placing the poor at the centre of decision-making is not a charitable act; it is a democratic imperative. Paulo Freire argued that “Dialogue cannot exist without humility” (Freire 90), and humility in governance means listening to those whose voices have long been silenced. It’s time to move beyond token consultations and embrace genuine, inclusive governance. Pope Francis echoes this call when he insists, “Authentic democracy is possible only when it is based on the recognition of the dignity of every person” (Francis 112).

The misconception

One of the most persistent misconceptions in budget planning is the assumption that expertise is the exclusive domain of academics, economists, or political elites. While these professionals play crucial roles, most lack the day-to-day understanding of survival in poverty. As Paulo Freire cautioned, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world” (Freire 72). For those who live this reality, navi-

gating systemic gaps and shortcomings isn’t theoretical; it’s a lived, daily practice. Their insights are not just anecdotal; they are experiential data, grounded in reality and often far more relevant than abstract statistics.

When a mother figures out how to feed her children on a subsistence income, or when a community creates informal support networks in the absence of government services, that is innovation born out of necessity, and we should learn from that. These individuals may not draft a budget, but they possess knowledge that can guide a smarter, more humane national budget and policies that benefit the whole population. Listening to them doesn’t mean charity; it means tapping into a deep well of practical wisdom. As Amartya Sen reminds us, “The real challenge is to see poverty as capability deprivation rather than merely low income” (Sen 109).

Therefore, anything that is shaped without the preferences of those it’s intended to serve often fails because it misses critical nuance. For instance, one might say that the government is allocating more money to infrastructure to drive economic growth. While this statement is true and is often framed as rational and objective, planners and consultants often shape budgets and such programs based on macroeconomic indicators rather than lived realities. Therefore, the intervention may fall flat. Including the voices of people experiencing poverty at the planning table helps policymakers avoid costly blind spots and design more effective and efficient interventions.

The impoverished are not simply enduring hardships; they are innovating within them. They develop survival strategies, create informal economies, and form networks of mutual aid that exemplify efficiency and solidarity. Their resourcefulness is not merely a response to scarcity; it is a powerful testament to human adaptability and resilience. Policymaking and budget planning that overlook this reality reduce a dynamic population to mere statistics, thereby missing the chance to have better solutions informed by real-world experiences.

Shona proverb goes, “*muzivi wenzira yeparuware ndiye mufambi wayo*” (the one who knows the way across a rocky surface is the one who walks it). Therefore, to effectively plan for the future and foster development, individuals, especially the marginalised, need to be fully engaged in every step of the process. Budget planning is no exception; it is, in fact, fundamental to include them.

Socio-economic and political prudence

Involving the poor in real decision-making, such as national budget planning, isn't just an act of inclusion; it's an act of socio-economic and political courage and prudence. It challenges entrenched hierarchies and demands humility from those in power. But the reward is immense: when governance becomes a dialogue rather than a monologue, democracy is not only preserved but deepened, and development is manifested. As Pope Francis has said, “Authentic democracy is possible only when it is based on the recognition of the dignity of every person” (Francis 112). Elevating these voices isn't just inclusive, it's strategic. When the lived experience of poverty is treated as a form of knowledge, budget formulation becomes more responsive, more just, and ultimately, more successful because it reflects what people need, not what elites assume they want.



**AUTHENTIC DEMOCRACY
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Reframing poverty also means challenging the assumptions that hold back inclusive development. It means rejecting the idea that wisdom always flows from the top, and acknowledging that those at the grassroots often have clearer sightlines to what works and what doesn't. Paulo Freire reminds us that “Dialogue cannot exist without humility” (Freire 90). When we see the

poor as partners, we unlock a relationship based on mutual respect, rather than paternalism. This shift in mindset has practical consequences. Governments that empower low-income communities to lead (rather than merely consult) build stronger social contracts. They craft budgets that align with developments protected by the community and programs that inspire ownership rather than dependency. In essence, the people become co-architects of their future, not just spectators to decisions made in distant halls of power.

Not all voices carry equal weight in the halls of power. Often, marginalised groups, minority communities, or less organised populations find their perspectives underrepresented or even misinterpreted. Including the poor in budget planning discussions is a critical start, but inclusion cannot end at symbolic representation. True empowerment demands that we reimagine governance as a shared responsibility, where ordinary citizens, especially those most affected, have direct influence over decisions, budgets, and accountability structures. Tokenistic gestures aren't enough. If budgets and policies are to be rooted in justice and grounded in reality, the poor must be given real power and not just a seat, but a say.

The preferential option for the poor compels budget makers to view national priorities through the eyes of the marginalised. In practice, this means allocating a larger share of resources to programs that support vulnerable communities. From expanding social cash transfer programs to subsidising smallholder farmers and improving rural infrastructure, a pro-poor budget is not only just; it is smart economics.

As Amartya Sen argues, “Development has to be more than the expansion of incomes; it has to be an enhancement of freedoms” (Sen 36). When more citizens have access to basic services and income-generating opportunities, the entire economy becomes more resilient and inclusive.

Dignity is non-negotiable, and every citizen is entitled to a life that provides access to clean water, healthcare, education, and meaningful employment. A national budget should prioritize these rights by ensuring universal access to essential services and safeguarding citizens from exploitative systems. Investing in equitable education, especially for rural learners, along with initiatives for decent work and affordable housing, is vital for restoring dignity to those whose humanity is frequently overlooked.

We must recognise that true integral development extends beyond mere Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth; it must consider how we are fostering the full potential of every citizen, environmentally, socially, economically, and spiritually. GDP growth should ultimately reflect the living standards of the populace. It is unacceptable for GDP to increase while a significant portion of the population lives in extreme poverty. Such a situation indicates a failure on the part of the government, suggesting that numerical success takes precedence over the well-being of its citizens. Relying solely on GDP growth can mislead policymakers and budget planners into believing that their policies and financial allocations are effectively benefiting the nation. Instead, policies and budget planning should instil hope in every citizen, particularly among the marginalised.

How can we be inclusive?

How can we ensure that the voices of the poor are fully included in policy formulation and budget planning, especially when not everyone can participate in discussions simultaneously? How can we hear from people living in remote areas? One effective approach is to educate marginalised communities, empowering them to believe in their abilities. When citizens are educated, they are more likely to engage with public issues, providing valuable input and oversight. This enables governments to create budgets that better reflect the population's actual needs. When poor communities participate in national conversations, budgets can be better aligned with important goals, such as poverty reduction

and economic growth, leading to fairer, more equitable economic development. Education builds confidence in individuals, allowing them to share their insights without fear of being dismissed.

A promising model is participatory budgeting, where communities, often through open public forums, help determine how public resources are allocated. This approach not only democratises financial decision-making but also builds trust and transparency between governments and citizens. Leaders, consultants, budget planners, and policymakers should be accountable not only to Parliament or donors but also to the people whose lives their policies affect. This means creating platforms (both formal and informal) where the poor can question, critique, and contribute. Town hall meetings, community radio discussions, and digital tools can amplify the voices that are too often drowned out by bureaucracy or privilege.



LEADERS, CONSULTANTS, BUDGET PLANNERS, AND POLICYMAKERS SHOULD BE ACCOUNTABLE NOT ONLY TO PARLIAMENT OR DONORS BUT ALSO TO THE PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES THEIR POLICIES AFFECT.

One of the most impactful tools available is the implementation of social accountability mechanisms, including community scorecards and citizen report cards. These instruments empower individuals to evaluate the quality of public services, giving them a platform to voice their concerns and advocate for necessary improvements. By actively participating in these localised initiatives, communities can significantly influence policy-making and budget planning. These mechanisms illustrate that when communities are trusted with oversight of public services, governance can be enhanced not only in structure but also in practical effectiveness, fostering a more responsive and accountable system.

Conclusion

The national budget reflects our collective values. It should be a courageous, compassionate, and inclusive document that ensures no one is left behind. It must go beyond mere ink and paper, embodying hope in action. When we listen to the voices of marginalised individuals, we must translate their insights into meaningful practices. Often, the perspectives of these individuals are only partially acknowledged, and their valuable wisdom is frequently overlooked. We need to be both attentive listeners and proactive doers. This is not an act of charity, pity, or favour towards the underprivileged; it is a matter of justice. Thus, the national budget is not

simply a ledger of income and expenditure; it is a mirror of the nation's conscience. It must embody courage, compassion, and inclusivity, ensuring that no citizen is left behind. When the poor are placed at the centre, when dignity is safeguarded, and when development is integral, the budget ceases to be a technical exercise and becomes a covenant of hope, a living testimony of what the nation holds most dear.

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WHEN A MOTHER FIGURES OUT HOW TO FEED HER CHILDREN ON A SUBSISTENCE INCOME, OR WHEN A COMMUNITY CREATES INFORMAL SUPPORT NETWORKS IN THE ABSENCE OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES, THAT IS INNOVATION BORN OUT OF NECESSITY, AND WE SHOULD LEARN FROM THAT.



BUILDING TRUST & JUSTICE: ENHANCING TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY IN ZAMBIA'S PUBLIC INSTITUTION



Introduction

In Zambia, transparency and accountability in public institutions remain a pressing issue, not merely a moral or ethical concern, but a foundation for economic stability. Corruption, inefficiency and political influence continue to erode public trust and reduce the returns on public investment by misdirecting resources and slowing service delivery. To address this, public sector management needs clearer rules, stronger reporting, and active citizen and stakeholder engagement so resources are used effectively and equitably.

The Role of Accounting Standards

Weak and inconsistent financial reporting makes it difficult to track public funds, detect inefficiencies, and hold officials to account. Recent Auditor-General reports document repeated procurement irregularities and incomplete projects that point to weak controls and poor re-

porting. International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) offer a practical framework to close these gaps. IPSAS promotes standardised disclosures, consistent recognition of assets and liabilities, and fuller notes that explain assumptions, contingencies and project status. New IFAC (International Federation of Accountants) and IPSASB (International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board) implementation tools make the transition from cash toward accrual reporting more feasible and provide practical templates, training materials, and guidance for countries implementing IPSAS.

Adopting IPSAS helps by: (1) making financial statements comparable across ministries and agencies, (2) forcing fuller disclosure (including notes) that explain deviations and delays, and (3) reducing the scope for off-book transactions via consolidated, auditable statements. Those changes make it harder to misdirect resources and

easier for oversight bodies and citizens to follow the money.

Reporting Measures and Transparency

Transparent reporting is more than numbers: it is also context, timing and explanation. Zambia's Auditor-General reports show the real consequences of weak reporting, stalled roadworks, incomplete health facilities, and contracts with irregularities, which lock up capital and reduce public investment returns. For example, during an inspection, the Auditor-General found that *"the contractor was not on site. The overall stage of completion stood at 40%."*

What prevents such outcomes is (a) more frequent, standardised reporting, (b) robust notes explaining delays, reallocations and scope changes, and (c) machine-readable digital publication so civil society, auditors and parliamentary committees can analyse the data quickly. Detailed notes that explain variances turn audit figures into actionable intelligence: they let oversight actors detect early slippage, demand corrective action, and protect public funds from becoming sunk costs.

Civil society and watchdogs already play a vital role. Simplified versions of audit reports and civil-society summaries highlight where project monitoring failed and where procurement norms were not followed. This scrutiny matters: when procurement and project reporting are opaque, the risk of waste and graft rises, and ordinary citizens face the economic cost.

Transparency and Accountability: A Shared Commitment

Accountability is shared, but it must be precise: each actor has clear roles that, together, close the accountability loop. Who are these actors? The actors may include citizens, other stakeholders, civil servants and public institutions, policy makers and oversight, and policymakers and oversight bodies.

Citizens: stay informed (read the Auditor-General's reports and local Output-Based Budget reports), partici-

pate in town halls, and report visible irregularities to oversight bodies. Active citizens raise the political cost of poor performance and make corruption riskier.

Stakeholders (NGOs, civil society, professional bodies, media): review audit notes, publish accessible analyses, and prioritise oversight around high-risk projects flagged in audit reports. Support civic tech and indexing efforts that turn audit documents and reports into searchable datasets and digitised public records for journalists and parliamentarians.

Civil servants and public institutions: adopt standard notes templates for all capital projects, publish quarterly reconciliations, and maintain an up-to-date asset register. Internal compliance, supported by whistleblower protections, makes reporting meaningful rather than ceremonial.

Policymakers and oversight bodies: require machine-readable audited financial statements, mandate project note disclosures (cost-to-date, milestones, reason for variances), and fund the Auditor-General and Anti-Corruption Commission adequately so they can follow up quickly. Embedding these recommendations into normal reporting practice rather than leaving them as a final *'checklist'* in the conclusion makes them operational: promoted as rules for everyday administration rather than optional reforms

Decentralisation and Political Neutrality

Public procurement units, local councils and parastatals must operate with institutional independence. When priorities shift every political cycle or procurement decisions are steered for political advantage, projects lose continuity and costs rise. A practical approach is decentralised, transparent reporting that ties disbursements to verifiable, published milestones. When local councils and procurement bodies must publish milestone evidence, progress photos, and variance notes alongside payment requests, the space for politically motivated reallocation narrows.

Combating Corruption for Economic Justice

Recent indicators show modest improvements in perception, but practical governance gaps remain. For instance, Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2024 gave Zambia a score of 39/100, up slightly from 37 in 2023, reflecting a modest improvement in how corruption is viewed by experts and business leaders. Yet on the ground, the Zambia Bribe Payers Index (ZBPI) 2024 revealed that 15.3% of citizens encountered bribe requests when accessing public services, rising from 10.1% in 2022. These civil-society indices, alongside simplified audit briefs from the Auditor General’s office, consistently point to recurring procurement and project-management risks: delays, cost overruns, and misallocations that directly affect ordinary citizens and deepen inequality.

Corruption increases transaction costs, raises barriers to entry for honest businesses, and diverts funds from essential services, all of which slow growth and widen inequality. Tight financial reporting, transparent procurement logs, and comprehensive notes reduce these opportunities: when bidder lists, contract variations, and cost-to-date figures are public and machine-readable, irregularities are easier to spot and harder to hide.

The Anti-Corruption Commission, parliamentary oversight, and civil society have shown that strengthened oversight reduces certain irregularities when combined with public reporting. But to lock in gains, we need full-system measures: IPSAS adoption, routine notes disclosures, digital portals, and resourced enforcement agencies.

How IPSAS and Better Reporting Prevent Recent Cases

IPSAS can help address several recurring governance and accountability problems. Its requirements on disclosure of commitments and project progress compel ministries and local authorities to explain funding shortfalls or contractor absences early, reducing the likelihood of projects becoming stalled or abandoned. The publication of procurement timelines, bidder lists, and contract amendments, whether in financial statement notes or through linked dashboards, limits opacity and allows auditors and civil society to scrutinise irregularities in real time. IPSAS consolidation rules also bring parastatals and agencies onto the public balance sheet, reducing hidden liabilities and improving overall fiscal transparency.

Conclusion

Ensuring transparency should not be about fighting corruption, but also about unlocking Zambia’s economic potential. The evidence from recent Auditor-General reports and civil-society reviews shows where reporting failed and where money was locked into incomplete or irregularly awarded projects. Standardised accounting rules (IPSAS), timely reporting with robust notes, decentralised publication of project milestones, and active civic oversight will make public spending more efficient, reduce waste, and contribute to fairer economic outcomes. These reforms may be technical, but their payoff will result in: better services, lower costs, and a fairer economy.

David Kalumbu
Summer Intern — JCTR

ACCOUNTABILITY IS SHARED, BUT IT MUST BE PRECISE: EACH ACTOR HAS CLEAR ROLES THAT, TOGETHER, CLOSE THE ACCOUNTABILITY LOOP.

ZAMBIA AFTER DEBT RESTRUCTURING: REFLECTIONS ON DEBT AND A JUST SOCIETY



In 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of Zambia declared that it was unable to continue paying its debts of about \$24 billion. When a person or company is unable to pay its debts, it declares bankruptcy. Courts oversee the process of accounting for assets, determining what is owed, and dividing assets between creditors appropriately. When Zambia became insolvent, however, there was no bankruptcy process. Zambia could not sell all its assets and close shop. Instead, since 2020 the government has negotiated with foreign banks, firms, other governments, and international financial institutions to restructure its debts.

As of July 2025, the country successfully restructured about 90% of its debt. This restructuring has given Zambia more time to pay its debts, reduces interest rates on loans, and in some cases reduces the amount owed.

The restructuring period has not been easy for the nation. While negotiations continued, Zambia's gross debt increased to \$28.69 billion, or 117.7 percent of GDP. As

JCTR has reported, this period has been marked by inflation and rising cost of living, made worse by drought in 2024. In its March 2025 Debt Sustainability Analysis Report, however, the Ministry of Finance expresses optimism that restructured debt returns Zambia to solid financial footing. This is echoed by the World Bank's July 2025 Economic Update which argues that debt restructuring will allow Zambia to invest in industry and development while avoiding future debt distress.

Despite the challenges, it seems there is reason to hope. Nevertheless, questions remain because Zambia has been here before. In 2006 Zambia's debt was reduced from \$7.1 billion to \$500 million in an initiative led by the World Bank and IMF. This significant reduction did not protect Zambia default in 2020, however. The future, therefore, is not guaranteed. Two recent papers – one from the IMF and the other from the Vatican – suggest different principles that should guide heavily indebted poor countries like Zambia. A close reading of both papers suggests lessons and possible futures for Zambia as it emerges from this episode of debt restructuring.

Restricting Spending to Increase Growth

In a paper published April 2025, researchers from the IMF studied every instance in Sub-Saharan Africa where a country's public debt was reduced for two or more years without debt restructuring, sixty instances in total since 2020. The goal of this study was to identify factors of meaningful and stable debt reductions, apart from formal negotiated restructuring. The study finds that debt reduction in Africa has two ingredients: reduced spending and real growth; that is, growth in GDP that outpaces inflation. In low-income countries, real growth was the most important ingredient. Decreasing spending is difficult, especially in developing countries with limited infrastructure. The authors propose that countries should attempt to borrow more at low interest rates, presumably from the IMF or the World Bank, which will ease the political consequences of spending cuts. Countries should also increase revenue by broadening their tax base and reducing tax exemptions and pursue growth by reducing government regulations and subsidies.



The IMF document does not address Zambia specifically, but it is complemented by the World Bank's most recent economic update on Zambia. The World Bank argues that in Zambia's case, the best path to growth is to expand production of valuable copper exports, rather than relying on exports of raw copper. This would create skilled jobs in a variety of copper-related industries, promoting inclusive growth that benefits an expanding middle class. Taken together, the World Bank and IMF recommendations are that countries should reduce spending, remove regulations, borrow more, and bet that markets will respond and real growth in the mining industry will follow. All investment is a sort of bet, but a

good bet is based on careful risk assessment. In the case of Zambia, the risks are significant.

It is not easy to tighten budgets during election years. It is even more difficult to do this when inflation continues to lower real wages and costs of living remain high. Though the kwacha has rallied recently, it is too early to tell whether this is a sign of the strength of the kwacha or simply the relative weakness of the dollar. If Zambia cannot secure sufficient low-interest loans, will it start to borrow again at high interest rates? If so, the country could lapse into debt distress again, as it did in 2020 after having its debt reduced in 2007 under the HIPC initiative.

Another risk is that reduced spending and deregulation will lead to some growth, but deeper issues of inequality will go unaddressed. This is especially significant in resource-rich countries like Zambia, where a large portion of GDP is produced by a very small percentage of the population. This structural imbalance leads to very high inequality, with some very rich and many very poor. The World Bank and IMF believe the mining sector can be developed to create high-paying middle-class jobs that will reduce inequality. It is not difficult to imagine a future, however, where growth is just sufficient to satisfy debt obligations for some time; however, the promise of high-paying middle-class jobs in a developed mining sector does not materialize. In this case, the majority of Zambians will continue to struggle under inflation to meet the rising cost of living, and the government will remain under pressure to borrow more money.

Creating a People-Centred Global Economy

Published just two months after the IMF paper, *The Jubilee Report* from the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Social Science attempts to shift the tone. It is a wide-ranging report that offers a raft of recommendations – some are more specific and technical, while others are more ambitious and overarching. Many recommendations explicitly name the World Bank, the IMF, and other mainstays of the global financial infrastructure. The

report ambitiously aims to provide “a blueprint for tackling the debt and development crises and creating the financial foundations for a sustainable people-centred global economy.” The report offers recommendations to all the players in international finance, included in these are some for countries in different stages of debt. Consistent across the recommendations, however, is the conviction that the global system which finances development should serve the needs and interests of people in developing countries.

Central to The Jubilee Report is the argument that the purpose of development financing is ensuring integral human development; that is, ensuring that every person is able to live a life consistent with their human dignity. Put differently, the report argues that when hard decisions about debt must be made, the interests of impoverished people in heavily indebted countries should have priority over the interests of banks and Wall Street firms. Lenders and borrowing governments share responsibility. Borrowing governments must prioritize the long-term needs of the country, refusing to fund spending in the short-term by borrowing at high interest. Similarly, private creditors and foreign governments should not seek profit and influence through bad loans that are unlikely to be paid.

Beneath the shift in tone is the argument that sustainable development, not debt stabilization, should be prioritized by governments and international lenders. This means changing the way debt is discussed and risk is assessed. Currently, debt sustainability models are primarily concerned with determining whether a country can still make its payments. This is reasonable, given the negative effects of default. However, this preoccupation with debt stabilization focuses attention perpetually on the short and medium-term, treating all growth as good growth but without accounting for issues of inequality. Lending for sustainable development, on the other hand, finances long term investment in health, education, and infrastructure. It acknowledges the unpredictable threat of climate change, especially in a country like Zambia

that is susceptible to drought and reliant on hydropower and rainfed agriculture.

Looking Ahead

Taken together the IMF and Vatican reports offer compelling visions for the future, though with different emphases. Based on over 60 cases of debt reduction in Africa over the past 25 years, the IMF report should inspire hope that after a long and painful process of debt restructuring, Zambia is in a good financial position to capitalize on its abundant natural resources and young population. Stable, sustained debt reduction is possible. However, the IMF’s preoccupation with debt stabilization through deregulation and cost-cutting fails to sufficiently focus on the primary issue of human development or the need to respond to inequality and climate change.

The Jubilee Report offers a corrective to the IMF’s recipe for debt reduction. Reflecting the principle of human dignity at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching, it argues that debt in a just society must serve the common good. Solidarity, not self-interest, should inform investments aimed at reducing inequality and shifting the structural imbalance that currently characterizes Zambia’s economy. International organizations like the IMF and World Bank have an important role to play in future development financing; however, the most effective development is subsidiary. It is not a top-down formula, even if imposed with the best intentions. Rather, it is the product of investment in people and communities that yield a just and more equal economy, even if these investments take time to mature.

Luke Olsen, S.J

Winter Intern — JCTR

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SOLIDARITY, NOT SELF-INTEREST, SHOULD INFORM INVESTMENTS AIMED AT REDUCING INEQUALITY AND SHIFTING THE STRUCTURAL IMBALANCE THAT CURRENTLY CHARACTERIZES ZAMBIA'S ECONOMY.



GIVE US FEEDBACK!

Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback on **JCTR Bulletin No. 135**. Your insights are important in helping us strengthen our research, analysis, and engagement on issues of governance, justice, and inclusive development in Zambia.

This short form will take only a minute or two to complete. Your responses will inform future publications and ensure that our work remains relevant, accessible, and impactful.

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PHOTO FOCUS

 Oct '25

JCTR & CSPR make a joint submission to the National Assembly of Zambia's Parliamentary Planning and Budgeting Committee on the 2026 Macroeconomic and Fiscal Framework.



JCTR's staff pose for a group photo on a boat cruise post the 2026 Review and Planning Workshop.

JCTR receives global recognition for Think Tanks to Watch in 2025 — a moment of great joy for the Ministry of the Society of Jesus and its constituents.



PHOTO FOCUS

 Nov '25



JCTR participates in the UN Tax Convention Talks in Nairobi with Focus on Fair Allocation of Taxing Rights, High Net-Worth Individuals

Dismas Kelly Chisanga, SJ — JCTR Faith & Justice Programme Officer, presents ICE materials to community members at a validation meeting on a CDF project



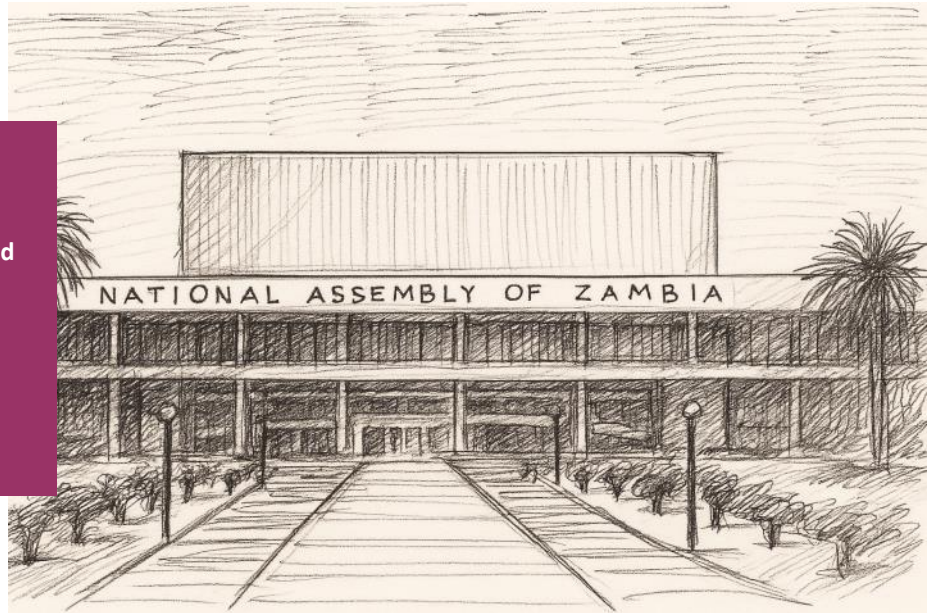
With support from SCIAF, JCTR established demonstration farms (demo-plots) to showcase the benefits of Agroecology. Community members pose for a photo with indigenous seeds in hand

PHOTO FOCUS



Dec '25

JCTR reiterates a detailed critique of the then proposed constitutional amendments under Bill 7— at a critical political juncture in Zambia. [See here](#)



JCTR & the People in Need (PIN) conclude provincial stakeholder engagements across Luapula, Southern, Western, North-Western and Lusaka Provinces under the CSO-LEADs Project, with support from the EU

JCTR closes shop for an industrial break as the year 2025 concludes



WE ARE CLOSED

FOR AN INDUSTRIAL BREAK

We reopen on Monday, January 5, 2026



ARTICLES AND LETTERS

We would like to encourage you to contribute articles to the JCTR bulletin. These articles can be on any social, economic, political or educational, cultural, pastoral, theological and spiritual theme. **A good issue of the bulletin depends on your lively and analytical exchange of views.** Should you choose to write to us, **the length of your article should be between 1,000 and 1,500 words.**

We also encourage comments on the articles in this or any previous bulletin issues and views for the improvement of the bulletin are also welcome.

To contribute, please write articles or letters to the Editor-JCTR Bulletin, by email, to:
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Theological Reflection

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