



**ZAMBIA
DECIDES
2026**



ELECTIONS ASK



#PeoplePower
Social Justice | Gender Equality | Poverty Free Zambia

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Zambia

Introduction

As the country heads to the polls in 2026, ActionAid Zambia presents a set of priority asks aimed at strengthening social justice, advancing gender equality, safeguarding public resources, and ensuring that economic governance delivers for all. ActionAid Zambia's Election Asks are grounded in evidence from communities, policy analysis, and our long-standing commitment to social justice and human rights. We call on all political actors to move beyond rhetoric and provide clear, measurable, and accountable commitments that address the structural inequalities limiting Zambia's development.

Democratic Governance, Civic Space and Electoral Integrity

Issue:

Since 2021, the civic space has experienced a shift characterised by advancing and shrinking space heading towards the 2026 general election. During this period, the country has undertaken several legal reforms, notably the Constitution Amendment Act No.13 of 2025 [Cyber Security Act No. 3 of 2025](#), [Including the NGO Bill No. 6 of 2025](#), which received major pushback. Zambia has also recorded several human rights violations such as arbitrary arrests and denial of fundamental freedoms, with overall civic participation being hindered by high self-censorship due to fear of the government, especially among dissenting and opposing voices to the ruling party.

Our ask:

As the country heads towards the General Elections, we acknowledge the progress made through the introduction of new electoral laws and the replacement of the Public Order Act with the Public Gatherings Act. However, concerns remain regarding several contentious provisions within these laws, as well as the need for

further reforms to strengthen democratic governance and protect citizens' rights. We therefore call on all political parties and candidates to make democratic and governance reforms a key part of their campaigns by clearly outlining how they will address these outstanding issues, safeguard fundamental freedoms, strengthen civic participation, and advance a more inclusive, accountable, and democratic Zambia. Further, enhance enforcement of existing laws around electoral processes, ensure impartiality in application to all political actors especially opposing voices, and create a fair environment for all actors to participate. Candidates and political parties should show commitment towards rule of law, human rights, inclusivity and electoral integrity through their manifestos, messaging and actions.

Fighting Corruption and Strengthening Public Accountability

Issue:

Despite Zambia's increased Corruption Perception Score (CPI) from 33 in 2021 to 39 in 2024 largely owed to the increased capacity of financial intelligence, this has not been matched with the desired rate of prosecution by the relevant Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA). Illicit Financial Flows (IFF) in 2024 were reported at a staggering K80 billion (or \$3.5 billion), consisting of suspected revenue losses, illegal trade in key economic sectors such as mining.

Reports have also revealed consistent abuses in the public procurement and distribution of medical supplies, recruitment and placement of personnel in education, fraud and money laundering activities in the agricultural sector affecting quality service delivery to the many Zambian citizens who rely on critical government services for survival.

¹[Report_CPI2024.pdf](#)

Weak legal frameworks for political party and campaign financing increased electoral related risks and practices such as vote buying and abuse of public resources.

The Auditor General's reports consistently reveal these serious weaknesses in public financial management affecting key sectors like education, health, agriculture, local government, and social protection.

Sectors critical and responsible for delivering social justice outcomes. **Our ask:** Candidates, Political Parties and other political players must demonstrate actionable commitment to integrity through voluntary declaration of assets and lifestyle audits. Political parties must commit to transparent and accountable use of resources preventing electoral malpractices such as vote buying which prey on the economic vulnerability of women and youth. Manifestos must clearly explain strategic actions to counter corruption, especially the abuse of resources in both public and private sectors before, during and after elections. Candidates must also highlight key legal and regulatory gaps that hinder detection, investigation and successful prosecution of suspected public officials and respective reforms. Further, commit to full implementation of the Auditor General's recommendations and strengthen whistle-blower protection mechanisms.

Debt Justice, Tax Justice and Economic Accountability

Issue:

Despite progress in debt restructuring, Zambia continues to face significant fiscal pressures arising from public debt obligations, tax expenditures, illicit financial flows, and limited domestic resource mobilization. With a burgeoning domestic debt portfolio, gains -thanks to the government's restructuring efforts to free up fiscal space- could be reversed if left unchecked. Tax expenditure, for

instance, reported at K13 billion in 2024, denies the treasury of substantial revenue that should be channelled to key sectors such as education and health, contributing to enhancing free education quality and a healthy and productive Zambian population. Illicit financial flows further exacerbate the problem of inadequacy and stifle inclusive and sustainable growth.

The burden of debt and revenue leakages continues to undermine budget credibility due to inadequate investments in critical sectors of education, healthcare, agriculture, social protection, and climate resilience.

Our ask:

We demand to hear the plans to operationalise the provisions of the Debt Management Act of 2022 which includes adhering to debt ceilings and actualising the sinking fund. Further, we demand publishing all major public borrowing agreements and strengthening measures to combat illicit financial flows and aggressive tax avoidance. More importantly, we ask for a comprehensive, robust and sustainable domestic resource mobilisation strategy outlining how government can leverage on mining and tax policy to navigate the debt crisis and augment revenue for gender responsive public spending.

Climate Justice, Food Security and a Just Energy Transition

Issue:

Zambia is facing an energy crisis, high costs of agricultural inputs and low productivity, water scarcity, and increased levels in the scale, severity and impacts of the climate crisis in terms of droughts, floods, pests, temperatures, unsustainable mining, violation of human rights through land grabs, and pollution of natural resources such as water, air, and land, among others.

² FIC Trends Report 2024

³ State House Presser, July 2025

⁴ Group Reports Malpractice in Kawambwa



High rates of deforestation due to demand for energy, land use change, etc. Limited enforcement of policies and regulations to safeguard humans and the environment. Limited climate financing for environmental sustainability, as seen in the national budget (less than 1%), among others.

Our ask:

We demand that, as we head for the 2026 general elections in August, every political party and independent candidate must demonstrate commitment through manifestos, speeches, statements, and interviews to addressing the current climate crisis Zambia is facing.

Their campaigns, as aspiring presidents, MPs, councils, mayors, and councillors, must demonstrate clear solutions to climate policy addresses or interventions in their key messages, which must be reflected in their media statements, interviews, public rallies, and assemblies on how they intend to confront climate change in Zambia while promoting agro-ecological and organic fertilisers, addressing the energy crisis, and protecting the rights of women, children, PWDs, and smallholder farmers. Further, they must demonstrate how they will strengthen environmental regulation and accountability for polluters, including how they will ensure that revenues generated from Zambia's natural resources benefit citizens and communities.

Responsible Mining, Natural Resource Governance and Business Accountability

Issue:



While Mining remains central to Zambia's economic growth by contributing over 70 percent to foreign exchange earnings, it also poses serious human rights violations. Mining communities continue to bear the brunt of pollution, negative health

impacts, displacement and relocation, loss of livelihoods, labour rights violations and inadequate or no compensation, all thanks to irresponsible mining activity. Communities also often carry the environmental and social costs of extraction without receiving a fair share of benefits. As Zambia moved towards implementing the Lobbito Corridor plan and 3 million metric tonnes of annual copper productions, these matters will compound when left unchecked.

Our ask:

Government must pass the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Government must increase funding to watchdog institutions such as Zambian Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) and the Human Rights Commission- which both receive less than 0.1% of the national budget. This limits their capacity to carry out their mandate leaving mining communities exposed to public health risks and limited justice.

Further, guarantee fair compensation and resettlement for affected communities, promote community benefit-sharing mechanisms. Lastly, we ask Government to Increase the Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) fund to increase formalisation which must include training, access to mining equipment and unlocking markets for ASM players.

Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Ending Gender Based Violence

Issue:

Gender inequality remains a significant barrier to social justice and development in Zambia, with women and girls disproportionately affected by systemic discrimination, poverty,

and violence.

Women face challenges such as limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, compounded by cultural norms and patriarchal structures that perpetuate their subordinate position in society. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women and children is a pervasive issue, with many survivors facing barriers to justice due to institutional sexism, stigma, and inadequate public services. Further, political participation remains unequal, and women continue to face violence, harassment, and financial barriers when seeking public office.

Ask: ActionAid Zambia calls on candidates and political parties to clearly outline how they will address gender inequality and eliminate sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Specifically, we expect candidates to commit to fully operationalising the Gender Equity and Equality Act of 2015 and increasing funding to the Gender Division, which has repeatedly identified inadequate resources as a major obstacle to its effectiveness. Candidates must also present actionable plans to strengthen gender-responsive public services by increasing budget allocations for education, healthcare, water, sanitation, and transport, ensuring these services are accessible, inclusive, and safe for women, girls, and marginalised groups.

Furthermore, we call on candidates to detail their strategies for combating SGBV through comprehensive policies, survivor support systems, and training for law enforcement and judicial officials. Finally, we expect candidates to prioritise women's leadership and representation by enforcing affirmative action policies and ensuring women's active participation in governance and decision-making processes. Prioritisation of establishing well-resourced GBV fast track courts in every province to deliver timely and reliable justice for survivors.

Youth Empowerment and Participation Issue:

Zambia's youth present a great demographic opportunity, to drive social, economic and political development, yet continue to face high unemployment and exclusion from decision-making processes. Zambia's population of youth is estimated to be at 28.2% while youth unemployment remains persistently high, estimated at 14.5% with informal and vulnerable employment being the norm. Meaningful youth participation in civic processes remains constrained coupled with the limited implementation of the National Youth Policy and Action Plan, weak youth inclusion in pol.

Policy reviews have highlighted challenges including limited youth representation in political leadership and decision-making spaces, barriers to meaningful civic engagement, unequal access to technology, and gaps in the implementation of youth focused policies.

While Zambia's National Youth Policy provides a framework for youth empowerment and participation, stakeholders continue to call for stronger mechanisms to ensure that young people are not only consulted but are able to meaningfully influence decisions that affect their lives, as such, youth engagement often remains symbolic rather than meaningful.

Our ask:

Institutionalise meaningful youth participation across governance structures by ensuring that at least 20 –30% of appointments in public committees, advisory boards, and local councils are reserved for youth, in line with Zambia's demographic reality and the principles of the African Union Youth Charter and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Youth Framework



Reduce barriers to youth civic participation by upholding fundamental freedoms of expression and assembly and promoting safe online spaces for youth activism and social accountability. Expand youth access to financing, entrepreneurship support, and decent employment opportunities, not just internships in the Civil Service. Increase investment in education, innovation, digital inclusion, and skills development. does create a much stronger obligation on Government to finance education. The Free Education Act has created a legal duty on Government to provide free education, which in practice requires sustained and adequate investment to make that right meaningful.

Conclusion

The 2026 General Elections must be more than a contest for political office. They must be a national opportunity to advance democracy, accountability, climate justice, gender equality, economic justice, and human rights. ActionAid Zambia calls upon all candidates, political parties, and elected leaders to commit themselves to a vision of Zambia that is inclusive, equitable, accountable, climate-resilient, and centered on the rights and dignity of all citizens.