



## Circular Letter No. 3 – June 2026

By Rainer Kašik - Infrastructure for Learning & Resilience

An assignment from Comundo

## When the Zambezi Rose – Schools, Floods, and the Fragility of Learning



The Zambezi River overflowed its banks and filled the so-called flood plains, March 2026

### Dear Friends and Family, Acquaintances and Supporters

Kindest greetings once again from Katima Mulilo, in the far north-eastern corner of Namibia. When I wrote my last circular letter at the end of 2025, the rainy season was just beginning to announce itself. After several dry years, the first good rains were welcomed with great relief across Namibia. People spoke with hope about grazing, harvests, fuller rivers, and the return of green landscapes. Here in the Zambezi Region, too, the transformation was visible: dry sand turned into soft ground, trees became lush again, and the river systems slowly began to fill.

But as so often, blessing and burden can lie very close together. What began as a long-awaited rainy season soon became one of the most serious flood situations the region has experienced in decades.

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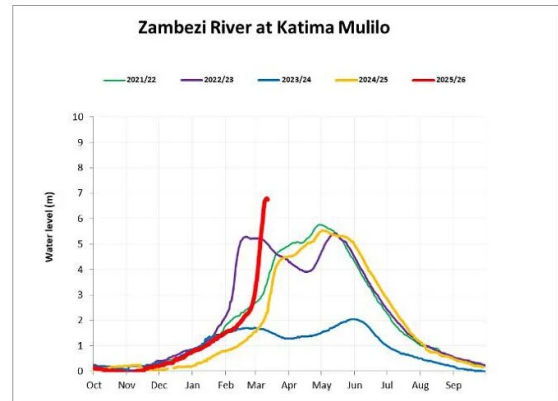
The Zambezi River rose to a historic level, described locally as the highest in around fifty years. By March and April, the river had overflowed into the eastern floodplains. Roads disappeared under water. Villages became islands. Schools, clinics, police posts, and homesteads were cut off. In some areas, daily movement was possible only by boat.

For those who know Namibia mainly as a dry country of deserts, savannah and long distances, it may be difficult to imagine this other face of the country: a vast water landscape, beautiful and threatening at the same time. From a distance, the floodplains can look almost peaceful. Close up, however, the reality is very different. For families living there, rising water means uncertainty, danger, separation, and the constant risk of losing access to school, health care, food, and shelter.

For us at the DEIYSAC (Directorate of Education, Innovation, Youth, Sports, Arts & Culture) in the Zambezi Region, the floods became an immediate educational emergency. Schools in the floodplains could no longer function safely. Some were surrounded by water; others were gradually cut off from dry land. Learners and teachers could no longer move safely between villages and classrooms. For some children, the journey to school would have meant crossing floodwater in areas where crocodiles, hippos, snakes, and fast currents are part of the reality. At that point, the question was no longer whether teaching should continue as usual. The question was how teaching could continue at all.

«Don't wait for the government' Zambezi regional council chairperson Bernard Sisamu has urged residents affected by floods to relocate with immediate effect.»

The Namibian, 14 March 2026



The Zambezi River level is significantly higher in 2026

Graphic: Daily Flood Bulletin of the Hydrological Service Namibia from 11 March 2026

## When schools had to move

In early April, DEIYSAC began the urgent evacuation and relocation of schools from the flood-affected areas, particularly in the *Bukalo* and *Ngoma School Circuits*. The names of the schools soon became part of our daily vocabulary: *Mpukano*, *Nankuntwe*, *Namiyundu*, *Imukusi*, *Isize*, *Lisikili*, *Malindi*, *Muzii*, *Sifuha*, *Nfoma* and others. Some were directly relocated; others were assessed as the water continued to rise. In total, more than ten schools were affected in different ways.

The logistics were enormous. It was not simply a matter of moving pupils from one classroom to another. Entire school communities had to be shifted: learners, teachers, headteachers, school furniture, desks, chairs, black-boards, books, mattresses, personal belongings, cooking utensils, and sometimes even parts of household life. Boats from the Regional Council, the police and other public services were used. The *Kabajani Ferry* became an important part of the operation. Large boats arrived loaded with learners in life jackets, mattresses piled high, school chairs stacked in impossible-looking towers, and people trying to hold together the fragile order of daily life while everything familiar was being moved.



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I still remember seeing images and videos from those first days: school furniture being loaded onto boats; mattresses tied down on deck; children arriving after long journeys; teachers, parents, officers and community members offloading belongings under the hot sun. It looked impressive, but also deeply unsettling.

A school is usually something fixed: a place, a building, a yard, a routine. Suddenly, school had become something movable, improvised and vulnerable.

The official plan foresaw relocation centres at *Lusese*, *Kabbe*, and *Schuckmannsburg* schools. These places were meant to provide safer, dry ground where teaching could resume. In practice, however, these schools and hostels were never designed or equipped to absorb entire school communities under emergency conditions. They were mainly school compounds with old or incomplete hostel structures, community-built mud buildings, temporary tents, limited water and sanitation, and very little infrastructure for cooking, storage, hygiene or accommodation.

«What followed was a race against time...»



*The fully loaded Kapelwa Kabajani Ferry*



*Late arrival in Schuckmannsburg*

## The reality of the relocation centres

The first days at the relocation centres made the scale of the problem visible. On paper, the learners had been moved to safety. On the ground, however, many basic requirements were missing.

At Lusese, there were reports of no toilets and no bathrooms shortly before learners were expected to arrive. There was no firewood for cooking and no proper cooking equipment – only cooks waiting to prepare meals. At other centres, temporary lights had to be borrowed from private homes, similar to those sometimes used at funerals. Doors, zinc sheets, poles, chalkboards, locks, mattresses and tents were needed. Toilets had to be unblocked. Septic tanks had to be emptied. Make-shift bathrooms had to be constructed. Mosquito spray and mosquito nets became urgent as children slept in crowded rooms and tents during the wet season, when malaria risk is always present.

Food was another major challenge. Learners had to be fed daily, and menus had to be planned quickly around whatever supplies were available: rice, maize meal, fish, oil, bread, sugar, soya mince, beans and later some donations.



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*Improvised cooking over an open fire ...*

There were questions about who would cook, who would receive stock, how food would be accounted for, how long supplies would last, and whether teachers would also receive meals or have to provide for themselves. Even eggs became a logistical and financial issue. A donation from Korean visitors, for example, was carefully recorded and directed toward eggs for meals at the three main centres.

These may sound like small administrative details, but they are exactly what make an emergency either manageable or unmanageable.

A relocation centre is not only a place where people sleep. It must provide light, food, toilets, safe drinking water, cooking facilities, storage, security, classroom space, mattresses, mosquito protection, and a system for accountability. Without these basics, a centre quickly becomes a place of exhaustion rather than safety.

The dedication of many colleagues was remarkable. Inspectors, planning officers, hostel staff, general services staff, principals, teachers, parents, and local community members worked under extreme pressure. They transported goods, counted mattresses, prepared meals, cleaned rooms, offloaded furniture, searched for quotations, drafted needs lists, requested boats,



*... at the relocation centres, April 2026*

arranged firewood, and kept the communication going through long WhatsApp threads at all hours. There was frustration, yes, but also a strong sense of commitment. Again and again, one message returned:

«Teaching and learning must continue...»

## Between emergency and planning

My own role developed quickly during this period. Initially, I was asked to support the planning of expanded relocation centres.

After high-level visits by the President, the Minister of Education, and other officials, we received the message that the situation was politically urgent and that funding would be available. At one point, the planning assumption was almost:

«Money is not the issue; plan what is needed!»

For an architect and planner, this was a clear task. The idea was to develop practical, durable, rapidly constructible school buildings for the three relocation





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had no adequate sanitary facilities. Some lacked storage, lighting, water connections or safe accommodation. Teachers, learners, and sometimes parents had to adapt to conditions far below what should be considered acceptable for education.

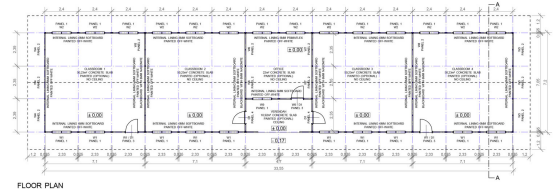
By the beginning of June, after the half-term break, a new concern emerged: some learners and parents did not want to return to the relocation centres because conditions there were too difficult. This puts the new term at risk. If children cannot safely return to their original schools because the floodplain remains affected, and do not want to return to the relocation centres because the conditions are inadequate, then education is suspended between two impossible options.

This is why I am convinced that DEIYSAC Zambezi needs fully functional relocation centres. Not temporary camps that are improvised each year anew. Not half-completed hostel structures used in desperation. But properly planned, phased, equipped centres that can serve schools during floods and perhaps also support other educational needs during normal times.

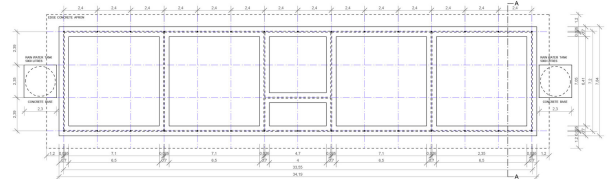
Such centres should include basic classrooms, sleeping facilities, kitchens, storerooms, toilets, showers, water supply, wastewater disposal, lighting, firewood or alternative cooking arrangements, and safe spaces for staff and learners. They do not need to be luxurious. But they must be functional, hygienic and dignified.

## Beauty, danger and responsibility

What made these months particularly difficult to process is the contrast between the beauty of the landscape and the hardship it created. The Zambezi in flood is breathtaking. The water reflects the sky, trees stand in shimmering wetlands, and the whole region seems transformed into a vast green-blue world. But for those who live in the floodplain, this beauty comes with a heavy price.



FLOOR PLAN

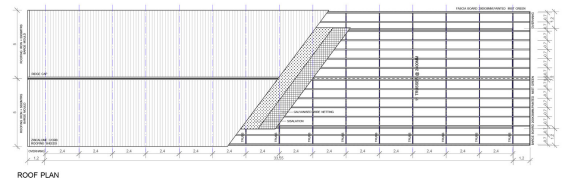


FOUNDATION PLAN



MAIN ELEVATION

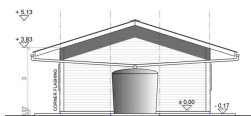
### Relocation Centres / Construction Plans 2026



ROOF PLAN

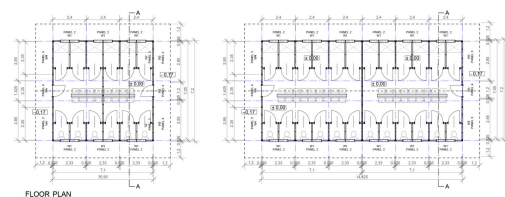


ELEVATION BACK



ELEVATION SIDES 1:100

### Relocation Centres / Four Classrooms Block 2026



FLOOR PLAN

### Relocation Centres / Ablution Blocks 2026



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*The mighty Zambezi at its peak, May 2026*

As an outsider working here, I try to be careful with my words. Floods are part of the ecological rhythm of this region. They replenish wetlands, sustain livelihoods, and shape cultural and environmental life.

But this year's flood also showed how fragile essential services become when infrastructure is insufficient. A child's right to education should not depend on whether a boat is available, whether a temporary toilet can be built in time, or whether there is enough firewood to cook lunch.

These weeks have taught me again that infrastructure is never just about buildings. It is about continuity, dignity and protection. A classroom is not only walls and a roof; it is the possibility of learning despite uncertainty. A toilet block is not only a technical detail; it is health, safety and dignity. A kitchen is not only a place to cook; it is what makes it possible for children to stay at school. A relocation centre is not only an emergency camp; it can be the difference between interruption and continuation.

For me personally, this flood response has been one of the most intense experiences of my assignment so far. It brought together everything I have been working on since I arrived in Katima Mulilo: school infrastructure,

planning, sanitation, vocational and technical thinking, coordination with government structures, and the daily realities of limited resources. It was also a reminder that development work often happens not in ideal project cycles, but in moments of pressure, contradiction and improvisation.

I was impressed by many colleagues who worked far beyond normal duties. I also saw how quickly people can be overwhelmed when systems are not prepared for the scale of a crisis. Both things are true.

- There was commitment!
- There was improvisation!
- There was courage!

«But there was also a clear lack of adequate infrastructure!»

That is why I hope this newsletter can also raise awareness among those who may be able to support this work. The plans for the three relocation centres are now sufficiently developed to be implemented step by step as funding becomes available. What is needed is not only emergency relief, but investment in preparedness: functional, durable, practical infrastructure that allows education to continue when the Zambezi rises again.

«Because the mighty Zambezi River will rise again...»



*Learners are paddled to school in a 'Mokoro'*



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### Personal Highlight: The Kuomboka Festival in Mongu, Zambia

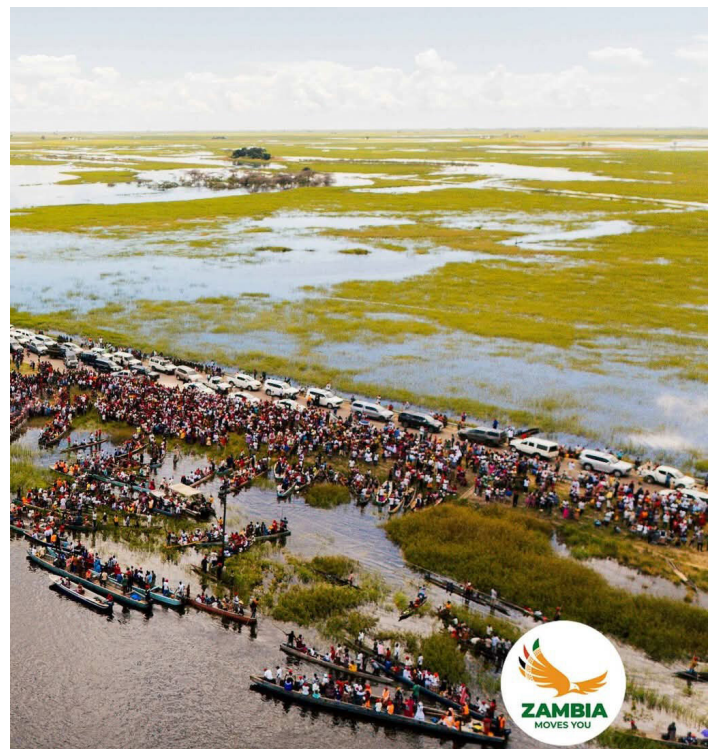
After weeks of following the Zambezi flood from the perspective of emergency response, school evacuation, and relocation centres in Namibia, I experienced the same river in a completely different way across the border in Zambia. In late March, I travelled to Mongu in *Western Province* to attend the *Kuomboka Festival* of the *Lozi* people. It became one of the most beautiful and memorable cultural experiences of my time in Southern Africa so far.

The contrast could hardly have been stronger. On the Namibian side, the mighty Zambezi led to flooded schools, logistical challenges, boats carrying desks and mattresses, and an urgent need for toilets, food, firewood, and shelter. In Zambia, the same floodwaters formed the stage for one of the region's most important traditional ceremonies. The word "*Kuomboka*" means "to get out of the water" or "to move from water to dry land."

Each year, when the *Barotse Floodplain* is inundated, the *Litunga*, the King of the *Lozi* people, leaves his palace at *Lealui*, his dry-season residence on the Barotse Floodplain, about 14 kilometres west of Mongu, and travels by royal barge to *Limulunga*, his residence on higher ground.

This year, the ceremony took place on 28 March 2026, earlier than usual, reflecting the exceptionally high water levels of the Zambezi. After everything I had seen in the Zambezi Region of Namibia, it was deeply moving to witness how floodwaters that bring disruption and hardship in one place can also carry cultural memory, royal authority and communal pride in another. The festival reminded me that the Zambezi is not only a physical river. It is also a cultural landscape, a historical connector, and a living reference point for communities on both sides of the border.

The *Lozi* world reaches beyond present-day national boundaries. Many people in Namibia's Zambezi Region speak *Silozi* or have cultural ties to the Lozi Kingdom.





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*His Majesty Lubosi Imwiko II*

For many, the *Litunga* in Mongu is not a distant foreign king but part of a shared cultural and historical identity. This made the experience especially meaningful for me. Having worked for more than a year in the Zambezi Region, I came to understand more clearly how deeply connected Namibia and Zambia are through language, history, water, and kinship.

The festival already began on Friday with the traditional regatta, a lively and impressive warm-up for the main event on Saturday. Men and women competed in different categories, from single-person dugout canoes, so called *mokoros*, to five-person canoes. The paddlers stood upright as they moved across the water, balancing with remarkable confidence and rhythm. The journey from *Lealui* across the Barotse Floodplain towards Mongu and *Mulamba Harbour* is described as taking



*The Nalikwanda, the large black-and-white royal barge*

around six to eight hours. Watching the paddlers make their way across the flooded plain made me understand the physical endurance behind the ceremonial beauty of *Kuomboka*. It was sport, tradition, discipline and celebration all at once.

Mongu itself was full of life during these days. Thousands upon thousands of people had gathered, with Zambia Tourism reporting as many as 250,000 spectators and subjects. Around the festival grounds, makeshift stalls lined the roads: food, drinks, clothes, music, souvenirs, loudspeakers, dust, laughter, children, police, traffic, and people moving in all directions. In a way, it reminded me of a large “*Kirtag*” or local fair in Central Europe, only on a much larger scale, with royal ceremony, floodwater, drums and canoes at its centre. The atmosphere was festive, dignified and full of anticipation.



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On the main day, the royal procession across the water became the emotional centre of everything!

The *Nalikwanda*, the large black-and-white royal barge, carried the *Litunga* across the flooded plain, accompanied by paddlers, musicians, smaller boats and cheering crowds. The symbolism was everywhere: the elephant on the royal barge as a sign of authority, the movement from floodplain to higher ground, the songs, colours, royal gestures, and the sense that everyone present was part of something much older than themselves. In Namibia, we had been struggling to move schools out of the water; in Mongu, I watched a kingdom ritually move with the water.

The journey was also personally special because I met two good friends from Zambia in Mongu: Charity Soka and Tom Lubasi. Tom, from Lusaka, and I stayed with Charity and her family in Mongu, which made the whole experience even more wonderful. After long, intense festival days, we returned home tired but happy, and there was always food, conversation, warmth and laughter waiting for us. Breakfast in the morning, dinner in the evening, and the feeling of being received not as a visitor but as part of the household, this hospitality touched me deeply. I can honestly say that I have rarely experienced such generosity since arriving in Africa.



A swarm of boats following the *Nalikwanda*

Looking back, the *Kuomboka* Festival gave the whole flood season a different emotional frame. It did not erase the hardship I had witnessed in Namibia, nor the urgent need for better school relocation infrastructure. But it reminded me that water is never only a problem. It can also be memory, identity, movement, ceremony and belonging. The Zambezi had shown me its destructive power in the floodplains of Namibia. In Mongu, it revealed its cultural soul.

«For that, I am very grateful...»

## Closing Thoughts

Looking back on these months, I feel both humbled and challenged. The flood has shown me the power of nature, the vulnerability of rural education, and the importance of practical, grounded planning. At the same time, the *Kuomboka* Festival revealed another meaning of the same river: not only danger and disruption, but also memory, identity, ceremony and belonging.

Experiencing both sides so closely, the emergency relocation of schools in Namibia and the joyful royal procession across the Barotse Floodplain in Zambia, has strengthened my conviction that school infrastructure must be planned for crisis, continuity and dignity. When the Zambezi rises again, children should not have to choose between unsafe floodplains and inadequate relocation centres. They deserve learning environments that protect them, support their teachers, and allow education to continue.

Thank you for continuing to accompany me on this journey. Your interest, messages and encouragement mean a great deal.

Kindest regards from Katima Mulilo,  
take care and stay in touch!

**Rainer Kašik**



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At Comundo, we believe that each of us has a responsibility to act against injustice and inequality. Choosing to engage with us is a concrete way to contribute. Together, we can foster long-term change toward a fairer world. We are convinced that change is possible through an exchange between North and South based on mutual respect and trust.

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## Contact Details

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Kindest regards from northern Namibia,  
**Rainer Kašik**