

COUNTRY PROFILE Republic of Malawi

The most densely populated country in mainland southern Africa, Malawi is also among the least developed. A heavy reliance on agriculture, both for subsistence and export, leaves Malawi vulnerable to climatic conditions and fluctuations in global prices. The government is dependent on foreign aid for one third of its revenue, the biggest donors being the World Bank, IMF and Britain (DFID). Malawi suffered greatly during the 30 year autocratic rule of Dr Hastings Banda but since he lost power in 1994 the country has generally seen an improved situation concerning political and social rights, although practising homosexuality is, as in many African countries, still classed as a criminal offence. One challenge for Malawi is that its neighbours are generally viewed as having greater potential. Malawi markets itself as the “warm heart of Africa” and one of Africa’s largest lakes stretches almost the length of the country,

SUMMARY FACTS

Sources: UN Statistics, UNICEF (2009)

Population: 14.8 Million (UN, 2008), UK: 61.2 million
Capital: Lilongwe
Area: 118,484 sq km (45,747 sq miles), UK: 243,610 sq km (94,060 sq miles)
Major languages: English and Chichewa
Major religions: Christianity
Life expectancy at birth: 53 years (UN, 2008), UK: 79 years
Under-five mortality rate: 100 per 1,000 live births (UN, 2008), UK: 6 per 1,000 live births
HIV prevalence: 11.9% aged 15-49 (UN, 2007), UK: 0.2% aged 15-49
Adult Literacy Rate: 72% ages 15 and older (UN, 2008), UK: >99%
GDP per capita: US\$256.6 (2007), UK: US\$35,200
Monetary unit: 1 Kwacha = 100 tambala
Main exports: Tobacco, Tea, Sugar, Cotton, Coffee
CO2 emissions share of world total: less than 0.1%, UK: >2%
Population without access to an improved water source: 24% (UN, 2006), UK: 0%
Population using improved sanitation: 60% (UN, 2006), UK: 100%
Government: Democratic Progressive Party

President: Bingu wa Mutharika

Year Women received right to vote: 1961, **UK: 1918, 1928 (equal rights)**



History

From the first millennium, Bantu-speaking people migrated from central Africa into the Lake Nyasa region, an area now known as Malawi. The earliest known kingdom in the region is that of the Maravi Confederacy. Established by the Bantu migrants circa **1480**, and continuing into the **18th century**, the confederacy controlled territory west from the great lake to the Luangwa River, south to the Zambezi and east to the coast.

The **mid-19th century** saw British involvement in the area, with explorer and missionary Dr David Livingstone reaching Lake Nyasa in **1858**. Shortly after, in **1876**, Scottish missionaries established a centre, from which they could fight slavery, named Blantyre (named after Livingstone's birthplace and now the largest city in Malawi). These missionaries were soon followed by the traders, the largest being the African Lakes Company.

Frequent conflict between the missionaries and slave-traders prompted the appointment of a British consul to the area in **1883**. Initially the new British domain was known as the British Central African Protectorate, but in **1907** it was renamed the Colony of Nyasaland. Over the next half century, the British failed to make significant profit from Nyasaland, and in **1953** the colony was joined with Northern and Southern Rhodesia to form the Central African Federation. It was hoped that this connection with two bigger, more productive colonies would in turn make Nyasaland more profitable.

As with elsewhere in Anglophone Africa opposition to British colonial rule grew rapidly throughout the 1950s and the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC), formed in **1944**, came to prominence under the leadership of Dr Hastings Banda. After a series of both violent and political conflicts, elections were held in **1961** to form a new legislative assembly. Banda's NAC, renamed the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), polled 94 per cent of the vote. In **1963** the British granted Nyasaland self-government, with Banda as prime minister, but in **1964** Nyasaland declared its independence, and renamed itself the Republic of Malawi. After elections in **1966** Banda became president and the new constitution established a one-party state, with all opposition groups facing suppression.

From the start of his rule, Banda's foreign policies were at odds with those of other African leaders of nations that had gained independence. He maintained cordial relations with South Africa's National Party and the Portuguese administration in Mozambique: both repressive white-supremacist regimes condemned by other independent African countries.

In **1971** Banda was proclaimed as 'President for Life' of Malawi and he cemented his dominance in the elections of **1978**, candidates for which had to fulfil two criteria: firstly, they had to belong to the MCP and secondly, Banda himself had to personally approve of them. Many of those he did not approve of were excluded via an English test. Over the course of the next decade Banda regularly reshuffled his Cabinet in order to prevent the ascendancy of a political rival.

Despite the autocratic nature of Banda's rule, there were some positive achievements during his Presidency. In the period directly following independence Malawi achieved high levels of economic growth due to Banda's agricultural development strategy, although this growth was short lived and did little to improve the standard of living for most. The expansion of secondary education and the modernisation of 'Native Courts' are two other notable achievements from Banda's period of office.

However, the aforementioned achievements were overshadowed by his repressive rule. The foreign press were banned, dress codes were imposed on the population and any group regarded by the MCP as a threat faced suppression. Although the constitution theoretically guaranteed civil rights and liberties, with so much power concentrated in the

hands of Banda and the MCP this meant little in practice. Banda encouraged people to report those who criticised him and mail was frequently opened and telephones tapped. Banda fell seriously ill in **1993**, and in June of the same year a referendum resulted in a multi-party system being introduced. The first election under the new system came in May **1994**: The United Democratic Front (UDF), led by Bakili Muluzi, gained a majority of seats. After becoming President, Muluzi closed political prisons and permitted freedom of speech and expression. Economic reforms quickly followed, but arguably with less positive outcomes. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) gave assistance to Malawi, but required the withdrawal of state subsidies and the liberalisation of foreign exchange laws. By **1996** these 'short-term adjustment costs' had hit the average Malawian hard. Food prices and unemployment soared and as a result crime increased, particularly in urban areas. Nevertheless, Muluzi was re-elected in May **1999**.

In July **2002** Muluzi attempted to secure a third term in office by proposing the Third Term Bill. When this failed he appointed Bingu wa Mutharika as his successor and, amid claims of electoral irregularities by observers and opposition, the UDF were re-elected in **2004**. Mutharika resigned from the UDF in **2005** following what he claimed was hostility to his anti-corruption measures. He formed the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and remained in power. A famine had occurred earlier, in **2002**, and by **2005** food shortages were affecting nearly half the population. Mutharika's government introduced a fertiliser and seed subsidy programme, and for the subsequent four years Malawi produced a surplus of maize, which has been exported to surrounding countries including Zimbabwe and Kenya.

Despite scandals and political infighting, Mutharika and the DPP were resoundingly re-elected in **2009**. Although opposition leader John Tembo questioned the legitimacy of the result, Freedom House have pointed to the greater participation of women and greater competition between parties as positive steps forward for democratic governance in Malawi. Freedom House do, however, recognise that there is some way to go in establishing full political rights in the country, and as of **2010** Malawi is considered to be 'partly free'.

Population

Malawi has a population of almost 14 million, and is the most densely populated country in mainland Southern Africa. 86 per cent of people live in rural areas and the vast majority are subsistence farmers, reliant on the short annual rainy season. Over half the population is under 15 years old and the population growth rate is currently 2.39 per cent. Malawi's population is made up of a number of ethnic identities with the Chewas constituting 90 per cent of the population of the central region; the Nyanja predominating in the south and the Tumbuka in the north. The population density is greatest in the south leading to smaller land holdings in that region.

Politics

Malawi's political system is based on democratic, multi-party elections. The current constitution was put into place in 1995. The branches of the government consist of the executive, legislature and judiciary. The executive includes a President who is head of both state and government, first and second Vice Presidents and a cabinet. The President is elected every five years. There are currently nine political parties, with the Democratic Progressive Party acting as the ruling party and the Malawi Congress Party and the United Democratic Front acting as the main opposition parties in the National Assembly. However, these parliamentary parties are weakly organised and have tended to form around one or two particular personalities.

Malawi maintained close relations with South Africa throughout the apartheid era, which strained Malawi's relationships with other African countries, but following the collapse of apartheid in 1994, strong diplomatic relationships were made with other African countries. Historically Malawi has had a limited voice within the region but with the

development of trade links in the region, the country's voice has grown more voluble over the last decade.

Malawi is a founding member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) which was formed to coordinate development programmes in order to reduce economic dependence on South Africa.

Economy

Malawi is among the least developed countries in the world. The economy is heavily based on agriculture, from which more than one-third of Gross Domestic Product and 90 per cent of export revenues come. The country's heavy economic reliance on tobacco (accounting for 70 per cent of export revenues) places a heavy burden on the economy as world prices decline and the international community increases pressure to limit tobacco production.

The economy of Malawi is dependent on substantial economic aid from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and individual nations. A third of Malawi's revenue comes through foreign aid. Britain is Malawi's biggest aid donor, through its Department for International Development (DFID). Funding is put towards programmes to assist good governance, improve the health system (especially in response to HIV/AIDS), support for agricultural initiatives and increasing school enrolment.

In 2006 Malawi completed the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, resulting in US\$3.1 billion in debt cancellation. In 2005 the country had spent 9.6 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on debt servicing. Debt cancellation has freed up considerable resources and civil society involvement in the HIPC process has ensured that public services have been expanded, with HIV/AIDS services, more health workers and more children staying in school being some of the effects of this. However, critics of the HIPC initiative question its sustainability in the long term.

Despite these recent gains, Malawi is still classified as one of the poorest countries in the world; 53 per cent of Malawians live below the poverty line. The Malawian government continues to face challenges in improving environmental protection, dealing with HIV/AIDS, improving the education system and satisfying its foreign donors that it is working to become financially independent.

Civil Society & Trade Unions

Given that much of the population is involved in subsistence agriculture, the trade union movement is small relative to other southern African countries. However, the Malawi Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU) was registered in 1995 as a membership labour movement organisation with the aim of uniting and strengthening human rights standards and social welfare in the work place. MCTU has 45,000 members and seventeen affiliates. The organisation works with industries, plantations and the Employers Consultative Association of Malawi. 22 national unions are in operation in Malawi. Recently the MCTU clashed with Chinese investors over working conditions of local employees.

Workers' rights are protected by the national constitution and the International Labour Organisation core conventions, all of which have been ratified by the government.

Achievements

1. Progress in some of the Millennium Development Goals: Malawi is doing well in promoting gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education. The ratio of girls to boys in secondary schools has increased from 0.6:1 in 2000 to 0.8:1 in 2006. Child mortality has also been reduced by two thirds among children under five. Under-five mortality has fallen from 189 per 1,000 live births in 2000, to 100 per 1,000 live births in 2008. At this rate the under-five mortality rate may be reduced to 41 per 1,000 live births by 2015.

2. Reduction in Food Insecurity: In 2007 Malawi was selling more corn to the World Food Program of the United Nations than any other southern Africa country, and was exporting hundreds of thousands of tonnes of corn to Zimbabwe. The level of child hunger has fallen sharply. Farmers attribute this success to new government subsidies for fertiliser. This marks a major departure from World Bank recommendations to eliminate subsidies. This success is causing re-examination of the role of agriculture in helping reduce poverty in Africa, and of government investment in basic components of farming, such as fertiliser, improved seed, farmer education, credit and agricultural research.

3. HIV/AIDS: Under president Banda's regime little was done to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, but intensive efforts made over the last decade have done a great deal to raise awareness of the issue. Since 2004 the National AIDS Policy has been improving the quality of treatment and support services in the country.

Development Challenges

1. Economic Growth: Without equitable economic growth Malawi is unlikely to achieve the first Millennium Development Goal on poverty reduction.

2. Climate Change: Climate change is responsible for worsening poverty levels among women because they make up the larger share of the agricultural workforce. Climate change in Malawi is connected to environmental degradation thereby leading to a lack of drinkable water, a shortage of land for farming and deforestation.

3. HIV/AIDS: Although the HIV infection rate in Malawi has stabilised in urban areas, the rate in some rural areas continues to increase. This problem can be attributed to a lack of human resources in the healthcare sector, where attempts to increase access to HIV testing and treatment have been hindered by a severe shortage of staff. Malawi has just one doctor per 50,000 people, one of the lowest levels in the world. The National Association of Nurses in Malawi (NONM) revealed in 2008 that four nurses are lost to HIV/AIDS related illness every month. HIV prevention and treatment for health care workers is particularly necessary in Malawi if targets to scale up treatment to 245,000 people on ARVs by 2010 are to be met.

For more information on Malawi, visit the following websites:

- Government website of Malawi www.malawi.gov.mw/
- Malawi Human Rights Commission www.malawihumanrightscommission.org/
- National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi www.nasfam.org/
- United Nations Development Programme for Malawi www.undp.org.mw/
- Malawi Tourism Board www.malawitourism.com/