

## COUNTRY PROFILE Swaziland

The landlocked Kingdom of Swaziland is the only absolute monarchy in Africa. The country is ruled by King Mswati III who rules by decree over his people. Swaziland has the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence in the world and an estimated 70% of people live below the poverty line. Freedom of speech is restricted, all political parties are banned and any opposition to the monarchy is heavily punished. It is a beautiful country ravaged by poor governance and HIV/AIDS.

### SUMMARY FACTS

<b>Population:</b> 1.2 million (UN, 2008), UK: 61.2 million.	<b>GDP per capita:</b> US\$ 2,369 (PPP) UK: \$35,200
<b>Capital:</b> Mbabane	<b>Monetary unit:</b> 1 Lilangeni = 100 cents
<b>Area:</b> 17, 364 sq km (6, 704 sq miles), UK: 243,610 sq km (94,060 sq miles)	<b>Main exports:</b> Sugar, wood pulp, minerals
<b>Major languages:</b> SiSwati, English	<b>CO<sub>2</sub> emissions share of world total:</b> <0.1%, UK: > 2%
<b>Major religion:</b> Christianity	<b>Population without access to an improved water source:</b> 40%, UK: 100%
<b>Life expectancy at birth:</b> 46 years, UK: 79 years	<b>Population using improved sanitation:</b> 50%, UK: 100%
<b>Under-five mortality rate:</b> 83 per 1,000 live births , UK: 6 per 1,000 live births	<b>Government:</b> Monarchy (King rules by decree)
<b>HIV prevalence:</b> 26.1% aged 15-49, (UK: 0.2 % aged 15-49)	<b>King:</b> King Mswati III, Prime Minister: Dr. Barnabus Dlamini
<b>Adult Literacy Rate:</b> 80% ages 15 and older, UK: >99%	<b>Year Women received right to vote:</b> 1968 (limited rights), UK: 1918, 1928 (equal rights)

Sources: UNICEF 2007, 2008, UN 2008



## History

Ancient Swaziland was inhabited by the San and evidence suggests the area now known as Swaziland was populated as early as **40,000** years ago. The birth of modern Swaziland can be seen as the period during the **15<sup>th</sup> century** when Bantu migration brought people south from central Africa to what is now Mozambique. After moving into Zululand in neighbouring South Africa at around **1750**, the Swazi community finally moved north to settle in the area now known as Swaziland during the early **1800s**. The most notable early leader of Swaziland was Mswati II, who during the **1840s** solidified the territory of the nation and encountered the first European immigrants in the area.

After the death of Mswati II, agreements were made between Swaziland, South Africa and Britain on issues such as authority and independence; promises that the white settlers would later renege on. South Africa administered Swaziland from **1894** until in **1902**, when the British began ruling the country as a protectorate in order to preserve an element of control in the region. This administration lasted for around sixty years and during this time, the British - who ruled Swaziland by decree via the High Commissioner for South Africa – issued a Native Authorities Proclamation which recognized the status of the Ngwenyama, or paramount chief, (a position held by King Sobhuza II from **1921** until his death in **1982**) of the Swazi and granted the chief a degree of power to rule his Kingdom.

Fearing that the apartheid regime in South Africa would incorporate Swaziland into its rule, the British prepared the country for independence and introduced a constitution which granted Swaziland limited self-governance as of **1963**. In anticipation of independence, numerous political parties formed during the early **1960s**, with Sobhuza's Imbokodvo National Movement (INM) proving to be the most successful given its close identification with the majority rural population. After enhanced constitutional talks for a number of years which saw the INM elected to share power with the British through multi-party elections, Swaziland was granted full independence in **1968** and adopted a new constitution.

The first elections of newly-independent Swaziland were held in **1972** which the INM won, defeating the growing Ngwane National Liberatory Congress (NNLC) to solidify their position as the ruling party. In response to this growing political threat, Sobhuza II declared in **1973** that he would repeal the constitution of **1968** and ban all political parties on the grounds that the modern constitution did not bare any resemblance to the traditional form of Swazi governance; a move which transferred all supreme executive, legislative and judicial powers to the King. This state of emergency decree, which sent all political parties 'underground' was supported by the apartheid regime, who believed any opposition to the King would also jeopardise national security in South Africa.

The late **1970s** saw Sobhuza II introduce a Tinkhundla based system of governance; a format which has proven to be undemocratic since its inception. The newly formed parliament, the first since independence to be organised through the Tinkhundla system, opened following elections in **1979**. King Sobhuza II died in August **1982** and a year later in **1983** the People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO) was formed with the overall aim of attaining multi-party democracy in Swaziland. Sobhuza II's son, Prince Makhosetive was crowned King Mswati III in **1986** and became the world's youngest reigning monarch. Like his father before him, Mswati III continued to rule Swaziland by decree and upheld the ban on political parties, amassing great wealth as the majority of the population remained below the poverty line.

In **1990**, 11 PUDEMO members, including its President Mario Masuku, were charged with high treason in the first such case of its kind in Swaziland after organising a campaign in support of democracy and workers rights. The early **1990s** saw tokenistic reviews of the Tinkhundla system by King Mswati III in response to pressure from civil society; however these commissions were rejected by opposition movements and were not seen as concerted efforts by the government to reform politically. Strikes organised by the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU) in **1996** brought the country to a standstill which led to the detention of numerous leaders of civil society groups. Strike action and opposition to King and Government intensified into the new millennium with Mario Masuku, leader of PUDEMO, arrested on account of subversion and sedition in **2000** after protests. He was held in custody for 2 years until his release in **2002**.

A new constitution, replacing that of **1973**, came into effect in **2006** which further solidified the King's ability to rule by decree. The parliamentary elections of **2008** under the Tinkhundla system were widely criticised internationally and also by Swazi civil society for lacking democratic credentials and failing to comply with SADC's principles and guidelines on free and fair elections. Numerous opposition movements decided to boycott the event in protest. In August of the same year, the Suppression of Terrorism Act (STA) was signed into law which stated that any criticism of the King or government should be treated as an act of terrorism and punished accordingly. This legislation gave free reign for the security forces to intimidate and interfere with the activities of civil society groups, make arbitrary arrests at protests and use excessive force against activists with impunity.

### Population

Swaziland is virtually homogenous with most of the estimated 1.17 million inhabitants being of the same tribe, whilst there is also a small Zulu and white population. Most of the population are rural based. Christianity is the dominant religion in the Kingdom and is followed by around 82 per cent of the population with some remaining indigenous religions. SiSwati - also spoken in South Africa – is the most common language, with Zulu, Tsonga and Afrikaans also used.

### Politics

Under the Tinkhundla system, parliamentarians are elected outside of the political party system. The Kingdom is divided into 55 constituencies and then into further chiefdoms which establishes the devolution of state power from central government to Tinkhundla areas as a basis for election or appointment to public office. The current process has been rejected by many groups for lacking democratic credentials. One of the most serious limitations given the variation in size of the constituencies is that usually the candidate from the largest constituency wins the secondary elections. Moreover it lacks accountability and is neither participatory nor representative. The National Assembly comprises these 55 members elected through the Tinkhundla system in addition to 10 King's appointees, whilst the Senate is made up of 30 members with 10 appointed by the King and 20 by the National Assembly. Although the King's appointments to the Senate are meant to be representative of Swazi society, many believe these individuals are more influential than those appointed by the National Assembly. The King appoints the Prime Minister and then approves the cabinet and has the power to dissolve parliament at any time.

### Economy

The economy of Swaziland has in recent years experienced low levels of growth which have seen the country's population suffer inequality, high poverty rates and increasing unemployment. Swaziland is classified as a low middle income country, with a per capita income of over twice the sub-Saharan average. However, this masks the great inequality in the country and approximately 69 per cent of people still

live below the poverty line of 1 US dollar per day. Swaziland signed an interim Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the EU in 2008 in order to gain access to the European Development Fund however this was met with opposition from civil society and trade analysts. Swaziland is a member of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and a high proportion of Swaziland's net annual revenue is derived from its membership of SACU, although this funding is in decline as the global economic downturn has caused a reduction of imports to the region. Swaziland's currency Lilangeni is pegged at parity with the South African Rand and fiscal and monetary policies are determined by the Reserve Bank of South Africa. This strengthens the currency, however, also increases Swaziland's vulnerability to external economic shocks. The unemployment rate increased from 22 per cent in 1997 to 31 per cent in 2004 and among young people has often been twice as high.

### **Civil society and trade unions**

Swaziland has a strong and active trade union and civil society movement which operates in extremely difficult circumstances. United around a common cause of promoting democracy, human rights and freedom of expression, organisations endure constant harassment, detention and persecution from the state. The two trade union federations currently operating in the country are the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU) and the Swaziland Federation of Labour (SFL) whom both promote the interests of workers in relation to employers and also provide numerous welfare services for their members. It is estimated that around 60-65 per cent of the private workforce is unionised. A new Public Services Bill, which will infringe on public servants' rights to be members of political organisations and publicly voice political opinions, has been proposed. Individuals found guilty of voicing their opinions on political matters risk losing their jobs and face criminal prosecution. The Bill is widely seen as an extension to the Suppression of Terrorism Act, as it is most likely to be used to further silence opposition and interfere with trade union activity.

PUDEMO, which has had to operate as an illegal organisation since its formation in 1983, has been the most prominent opposition movement and along with its youth league, the Swaziland Youth Congress (SWAYOCO), has led calls for a democratically elected parliament and an end to restrictions on forms of political and social expression. The Swaziland United Democratic Front (SUDF) was formed in 2008 as a coalition of pro democracy groups pushing for a democratic election system and the removal of the Tinkhundla based system of governance.

### **Development Challenges:**

1. **Politics:** Swaziland is an authoritarian, absolute monarchy where the King rules by decree over his people. Political parties are banned and civil society groups harassed and intimidated. There is international pressure for Swaziland to reform its constitution, install a multi-party system, remove the Tinkhundla based system and hold democratic elections.
2. **Human rights:** Although Swaziland has signed up to the African Union Charter on Human Rights and ratified numerous International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions - including the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise convention (No.87), serious violations continue to occur such as arbitrary arrests of civil society individuals, torture, beatings and killings by security forces. In 2010, PUDEMO activist Siphon Jele was arrested under the Suppression of Terrorism Act (STA) of 2008 for wearing a t-shirt of the banned political party and later died whilst in police custody.

3. HIV/AIDS: Swaziland has the highest HIV prevalence rate in the world, yet only 20 per cent of the population know their HIV status. In addition to a high number of children orphaned as a result of the pandemic, increased AIDS prevalence has weakened governance capacities for service delivery, with serious impact on food security, economic growth and human development.
4. Poverty: The proportion of the population living at or below the poverty line of US \$1 per day is 69 per cent. Swaziland also has one of the world's highest levels of inequality of income distribution. It ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> in the 2010 UN ranking on economic inequality. The high prevalence of HIV/AIDS means many households face increased expenditure with a reduced income/agricultural production.
5. Women: HIV/AIDS and poverty have a woman's face in Swaziland. 31 per cent of adult women have HIV compared with 20 per cent of men and girls are more likely to be taken out of school at a young age to care for relatives, meaning they miss out on vital education. The status of women in Swaziland society is also a concern. Gender disparity is evident in many areas of daily life and many laws and practices remain gender biased.
6. Education: With adult literacy rates of 80 per cent, Swaziland ranks mid-table relative to other countries in the SADC. However, the government has been slow to implement a 2005 promise to provide free primary education to all. One year grade is added each year to the Free Primary Education (FPE) programme, but the government is struggling to cope with the administrative challenge this brings, and cites lack of funds as a reason for this difficulty. Many schools do not have enough classroom space or teaching staff to cope with the growing influx of new pupils, so the improvement of school infrastructure, and recruitment of new teachers, is key to the success of Swaziland's FPE programme.

**For more information on Swaziland, visit the following websites:**

- SWAPOL was founded by five HIV positive women in 2001 to provide support and improve the quality of life for those living with HIV/AIDS  
<http://www.swapol.net>
- PUDEMO is the main opposition party in Swaziland but is now branded a 'terrorist' organisation by the government [www.pudemo.org](http://www.pudemo.org)
- The Swaziland Democracy Campaign (SDC) is a product of joint activities between Swazi and South African organisations [www.swazidemocracy.org](http://www.swazidemocracy.org)
- The Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) is a leading Johannesburg-based foundation established in 1997 and works for democracy in Swaziland [www.osisa.org](http://www.osisa.org)