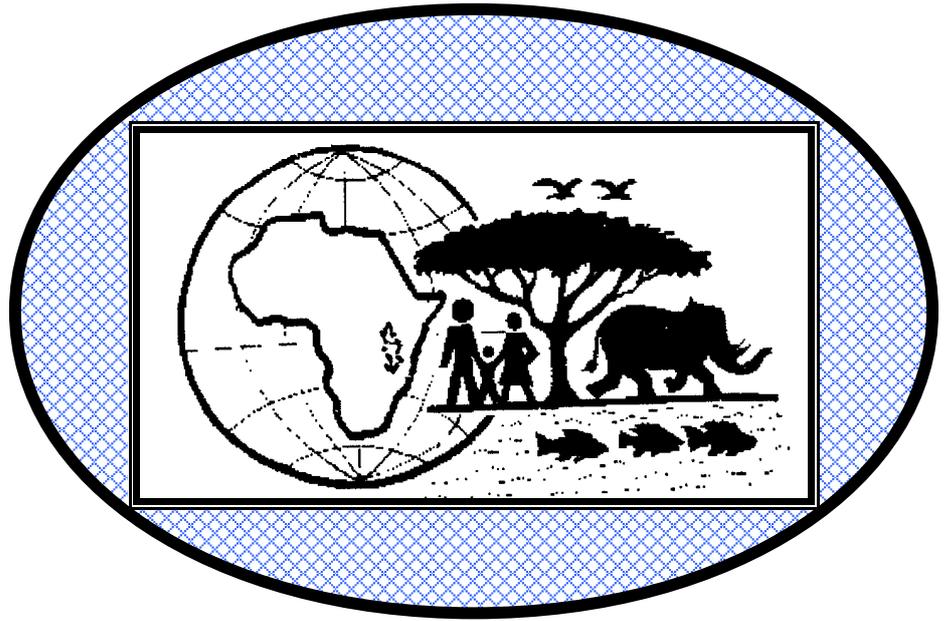


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***DECEMBER
2009***

***REVIEW OF
THE YEAR***

**News clippings
with analysis
from the major
newspapers in
Malawi**



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LIST OF NEWSPAPERS REVIEWED

DAILY TIMES MALAWI NEWS THE NATION
THE WEEKEND NATION THE SUNDAY TIMES
THE GUARDIAN NATION ON SUNDAY

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ACRONYMS

ACB	Anti-Corruption Bureau
ADMARC	Agriculture Development and Marketing Corporation
ATC	Agricultural Trading Company
CAMA	Consumer Association of Malawi
CAN	Calcium Ammonium Nitrate
CCAP	Church of Central African Presbyterian
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
CHRR	Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation
CILIC	Civil Liberties Committee
CONGOMA	Council for Non-Governmental Organisation of Malawi
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
EPAs	Economic Partnership Agreement
ESA	Eastern Southern Africa
ESCOM	Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi
EU	European Union
FPSM	Family Panning Association of Malawi
FUM	Farmers Union of Malawi
HRCC	Human Rights Consultative Committee
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MACRA	Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority
MADAC	Malawi Development Advisory Council
MANEB	Malawi Examinations Board
MBC	Malawi Broadcasting Corporation
MCC	Malawi Council of Churches
MCCI	Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEC	Malawi Electoral Commission
MEJN	Malawi Economic Justice Network
MESN	Malawi Elections Support Network
MHRCC	Malawi Human Rights Consultative Committee
NICE	National Initiative for Civic Education
NSO	National Statistical Office
PAC	Public Affairs Committee
SADC	Southern Africa Development Corporation
TVM	Television Malawi
UDF	United Democratic Front
WHO	World Health Organisation

PREVIEW

The year 2009 will go down in people's minds as a year of many changes and strange occurrences. Being a year of general elections Malawians saw a change in the voting pattern. For the first time the electorate did not vote based on regional lines, a thing that observers felt was maturity in Malawi's democracy. President Bingu wa Mutharika won with a landslide victory.

After five years of a government in opposition in the National Assembly the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* is now the majority in parliament. This arrangement has seen the opposition being defeated even when they have valid points. Parliament cruised through bills during the budget sitting when it only took a few days to pass the whole budget.

Months after Mutharika was given another mandate to rule Malawi a number of decisions that he has made have left people with more questions than answers. The issue of the quota system is still a hot debate among Malawians. It is not clear whether in the end it will assist to achieve its intended goal to the satisfaction of every Malawian citizen. Another issue is that of the many powers that parliament is piling on the president. Like in The One Party Era it all started with people that were close to the then president Dr Kamuzu Banda, giving him too much power. Some overzealous politicians are slowly bestowing the same on Mutharika.

Some people are also at pains to understand why Mutharika all of sudden has developed a carefree attitude towards Malawians. In some of his statements Mutharika showed that he does not care on some occasion when he was either addressing members of the press or the nation. Still fresh in people's minds is the way he told this nation about his trip to Portugal. Like some political analysts have noted Mutharika needs to slow down on his utterances some of which have been questionable.

Malawi continued to face a lot of challenges in the just ended year. Reports of Malawi's economy being among the fastest growing economies in the world would make a layperson raise eyebrows when there are shortages of Forex and fuel among other things. In the same vain reports of a minimal imports cover also make people wonder what these sentiments mean. Something somewhere does not add up.

WISHING YOU ALL A HAPPY AND BLESSED 2010

POLITICS

The Year of the Watershed

Reflecting back over the year one cannot escape the importance of the *before* and *after*. This refers of course to the 19th of May national presidential and parliamentary elections. Bingu wa Mutharika won the presidency with more than 64% of the vote. His runner up JZU Tembo had about 30% of the presidential vote. In the parliamentary election the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* had 37.7% of the valid votes, while independents had over 29%. The 37.7% meant under the first past the post system, that 112 out of 191 verified seats went to the DPP. 31 went to Independents, many of whom decided to join the DPP. 27 to the once mighty *Malawi Congress Party MCP* and 17 to the *United Democratic Front UDF*. The number of female MPs rose from 27 to 40. The victory of Mutharika was devastating. Most commentators and observers as well as the general public were caught by surprise. Many predicted a win for Mutharika but not such a landslide victory.

The Before

Choosing Candidates

It has become commonplace to blame the third and multiple term bids of Bakili Muluzi (prior to the 2004 elections) for the imposition of Mutharika as candidate for the presidency on the UDF. Instead of being a puppet president Mutharika proved to be his own man and after leaving the party that put him in power, starts his own political party. This led to a very weak minority government, which had to cope with a very angry opposition. Looking at the parliamentary proceedings, the attempts to impeach the president, the battles around the budget and section 65 (about crossing the floor), the unparliamentary language used, the poor record of bills passed into law (refer the parliamentary audit by CCJP and HRCC), one sees the consequences of these developments. Political governance was taken with a grain of salt. The economy however performed well. Bumper harvests, food security, debt cancellation, confidence of the donor community, food on the table for most Malawians were all signs of a sturdy, growing economy. The combination of an opposition (which was seen by the general public to be out to topple the president and his government and which tired the people with the continuous and often open conflict between the president and his opponents) and a well performing economy, must have been the secret that landed the DPP its majority and the president his landslide victory.

January saw the DPP holding a convention and 'choosing' (without any other candidate) Bingu as presidential candidate. The running mate is not yet chosen by any of the parties. We will have to await February when candidates declare their candidacy before the electoral commission. Primaries in all camps create the usual discontent and conflict. Many who do not make it stand as independents. The question of the candidacy of Muluzi is not yet settled. Brown Mpinganjira, political migrant that he is, joins the MCP camp. Is this because they are foreseeing the alliance between UDF and MCP?

In February with the time of declaring their candidacy for the presidency, the nation learns that Bingu has chosen Joyce Banda as running mate. Having a woman as

running mate is a fact that much has been said about. One of the presidential candidates is Loveness Gondwe the only woman to run for the presidency. The primaries are still running into problems. Cabinet ministers who are not chosen in the primaries are sacked from cabinet. The number who stand as independents grows.

Recriminations between the main presidential candidates continue. The political climate in the country is seen as bad enough to warrant the visit of Joachim Chisanu and John Kufuor. They try to bring the conflicting parties together. They are somewhat successful but Tembo will later scoff at the visit when he calls it wasted time.

Campaigning and Alignments

The 17th March is set by the electoral commission as the official start of the campaign. But of course all have started to campaign already. Bingu cleverly claims the mantle of Kamuzu and makes it look as if he is continuing the development agenda of Kamuzu Banda. He unveils with much pomp the statue of Banda. Tembo does not attend this event. At the same time Muluzi is being prosecuted by the Anti Corruption Bureau.

The Electoral Commission finally rejects the candidacy of Bakili Muluzi. He vows to fight this in the courts. The EC does give extra time to submit other candidates, but the UDF cannot do without their Bakili. And while the parliament is dissolved, the ACB continues prosecuting Muluzi.

Civil Society has some problems in monitoring the election process. Late disbursement of funds is generally claimed as the reason. But those responsible for funding, say that it is late reporting by civil society etc. which causes this delay. The Catholic Church uses the Sundays of Lent to help people to reflect about the elections, about participation and about leadership. It is done in most churches throughout the country and makes a real contribution to civic education. Doing so in atmosphere of prayer helps to put at ease those who fear violent elections. The bishops letter of May 2008 is also used to civic educate the population. Several other faith communities add their voices.

It is only in April after court appearances that Muluzi decides to go in alliance with Tembo's MCP. This is obviously too close to the May 2009 elections. It is too short a time to inform the electorate. Many prove that they do not understand what is happening by querying why Muluzi does not appear on the ballot paper. Many a commentator and expert utters the opinion that MCP and UDF form a formidable alliance and that they will give Bingu a run for his money. It is obvious with hindsight that the short time they had to properly inform and convince the electorate will cost them dearly. The Tembo-Mpinganjira ticket will only amass about 30% of the national vote and most of the null and void votes are counted in their traditional support areas.

Resources and Bias

The governing DPP uses all means possible, government resources (e.g. MACRA funds for DPP shirts, cap, cloth etc.; MACRA is the only parastatals with money). It uses the public media for about 95% of its total air time. A report by NICE and the Electoral Commission of December 2008 states that the main source of information for the rural population is the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation! The strategy used by Bingu is to continuously attack his opponents even in their own heartland. This

keeps them on the defensive and makes it less possible for the Tembo camp to outlay all their strategies for the future of Malawi. The DPP impresses with blue busses, new Hummer vehicles and mobilizing massive amounts of people. The language used on both sides is so bad that it does not bode well for peaceful elections! Churches continue to pray for peaceful elections.

The 19th of May elections, which are in spite of much fear very peaceful and produce a massive turn out are separating the before and after. The results of these have already been spelt out and can only be referred to as a landslide victory. The other side of the watershed.

The After

In his acceptance speech the president spells out that while rule is by the majority, this does not mean that the views, concerns and rights of the minority will be neglected. This rule by an absolute majority, even such that it can change the constitution being more than two thirds, worries the experts, the commentators, and civil society. One can hear from the word go that the reduction of the opposition to less than a third of parliament will mean that there is need for a strong civil society. They will have to be the check and balance. So one can say that from the start there is fear that the more than two thirds majority in the august house will bring a de facto one party state. That this is not just speculation can be seen by some of the tell tale signs: the speaker of parliament and both deputies are DPP, the parliamentary committees are chaired by the DPP; even the deputy chairs are DPP; not one opposition member. The position of leader of the opposition should go by custom and by standing orders to the leader of the biggest opposition party, Mr. Tembo. But the standing orders are changed so that the whole of parliament will determine who will lead the opposition in the house.

The Cabinet and Priorities

The new Cabinet in spite of promises to the contrary with 44 members is bloated. It holds some surprises. The former Minister of Finance credited with turning around the economy in Malawi, returns as Minister of Local Government and a relatively unknown figure fills the post of Minister of Finance. Only 11 of those who held Cabinet posts prior to the elections return. One cannot but wonder in how far a leaner Cabinet would translate into less costs and more development. Because development remains the 'mantra' of the president and his DPP. One further wonders if the way our ministers are treated is in line with Malawi still belonging to the ten poorest nations on earth. The number of cars put at each minister's disposition is completely out of synch with the poverty levels in Malawi. One also wonders if some of the expenses incurred bringing Mercedes Benz vehicles into the country are not part of the Forex crisis which was already being complained about as early as May, June? We often hear that the president dreams in colour. But one wonders if dreaming in colour should not mean: no more Mercedes vehicles for ministers (refer to the example of Kenya with a much more robust economy than Malawi), repairs of railways as a way to the sea, both Beira and Nacala instead of a world port and waterway, awakening the potential in the people at the grassroots instead of the discourse that speaks about bringing development.

Quota and Division

One commentator has called the year 2009 an “annus horribilis” for the president. The launch of the quota system of selection of entrants to the university or equitable selection of students for the university as others would like to call it, estranges the people from the North who voted so unanimously for Bingu. One of the campaigners Harry Mkandawire who was rewarded with the post of deputy director of political affairs in the DPP, writes an open letter to the president and is sacked. Even while he has made it utterly clear that he will return to his Ndatha Farm in 2014, the president told his cabinet in no uncertain terms that they should not start campaigning for his position. Almost at the same time he told everyone that his brother Peter could stand for any function in the land since he is a Malawian, even the presidency. This has led many to think that a dynasty is being created.

Forex and Fuel

Towards the end of the year both Forex and fuel run out. The people cuing up for fuel at the pumps have ample time to discuss the reasons for all this. The economy suffers as is evident in the newspaper-reports about laying off workers and even closing businesses and firms. The IMF has not yet given its nod for a new programme for Malawi which was followed by some donor partners who have suspended their budget support till the IMF gives its OK. Civil society was initially shocked by the initiative of the president to appoint a number of its most critical and vocal members to a special advisory council, Malawi Development Advisory Council MADAC. It is not known who was asked and has refused, but some of those who accepted have now come out in the open. Others wonder if this is a ploy to silence the ‘alternative opposition’ since the opposition in parliament is already very weak and thus it will mean a full go ahead for the executive with little or no checks and balances to speak of. This seems to be implied in the president’s legal council Allan Ntata’s comments, who said it is against the constitution for civil society to want to have input in legislation. He believes that this is the exclusive role of Parliament. The rest has to wait till 2014 the time of new elections.

Natural Problems

At the same time there are worrisome signs that some parts of the country have poor rains. This will reduce the effect of the efforts to subsidise inputs, a policy that in the last three years led to bumper harvests and a huge surplus of maize. All this while we hear much less complaints about the coupon system, a sign that government might be getting it right. The earthquakes in Karonga on the 9th December have led to an outpouring of help from the general public, but remain a worry especially since there were several quakes well throughout the month of December.

Majority Rule

Malawi is now setting a new step towards democracy: how to cope with a large majority in Parliament. How to keep the separation of powers in this new configuration. How to draw on the talent of the legislative, with so many young MPs but also with so many MPs who are holders of degrees and together represent a considerable amount of talent. Parliament which since 2004 was blocked most of the time by the opposition, which may well have contributed to the watershed victory of Bingu and his DPP, is now working neck break speed. Bills are passed without sufficient scrutiny and therefore the legislating function of Parliament, positively critiquing the bills presented by the executive seems almost suspended. One of the

results is the debacle around the age at which girls are allowed to get married. The President is called upon not to assent to the bill passed in Parliament and to his credit returns to bill for further scrutiny. Towards the end of the year there are some issues which have worried commentators: the police bill which has been rushed through Parliament contains many necessary and beneficial changes but also allows the police searches without warrant and makes it hard for people to express their opinion through public meetings and marches. Furthermore the Constitution has been changed again and allows the sitting President to determine the date for the local elections. For many this is tantamount to having no local elections at all. Is our parliament only a rubberstamping 'August House': a 'nyumba ya matamando' singing the praise of the executive? It is now left up to the president who has been asked not to assent to these bills.

Father of the Nation and the Flag

One commentator gives some hints as to what should happen so that Malawi can forge ahead on the road it has embarked and for the president to succeed. "Bingu has still four years to prove that is as much a President for the people in Ngerenge in Karonga as well as Goliati in Thyolo. He can show that by avoiding statements that make him sound like a vengeful jilted lover. Let him act, speak and behave like he is a father for all of us from the hills of Chitipa to the valleys of Nsanje" (R. Tenthani in the Sunday Times, 03-01-10) And we at the CFSC add: "a father figure, with a vision, who can inspire all to draw on their own resources and bring about lasting development."

Is the way forward to change the flag? Those in favour say Malawi has developed enormously and therefore our flag which reflected aspirations of newly independent people should change. But it seems there is a consensus building up, which says: we have made progress and thank God for that. But there remains so much to be done. Poverty is still rampant, roads need maintenance, hospitals need medicine and devoted staff, schools need infrastructure, dedicated, motivated teachers and books. The gap between rich and poor should be reduced. This reflects probably the aspirations of some 80% of the population. They find these expressed in the old flag. The money saved by holding on to the old flag could well be used for some of these aspirations. To say it again with the words of R. Tenthani in the same newspaper: "It is only then that our national flag and national anthem will begin to make sense ... again."

ECONOMY

2009 Budget

With a new parliament and cabinet in place the Mutharika administration seemed to have started the year 2009 on a positive note. To begin with President Bingu wa Mutharika an economic engineer as his followers fondly called him during the 2004 campaign period, appointed economist Ken Kandodo Banda as the new finance Minister. Kandodo took over the reigns from Goodall Gondwe who gained the public's trust as the man who assisted Mutharika in putting the country's economy right on track.

One of Kandodo's first duties was to present the National Budget in the National Assembly. Fresh from the general election hustles, Kandodo presented a K25.8 billion budget to members of the National Assembly. Among other things the government adjusted upwards the salaries of civil servants and removed duty on imported infant formulas. The tax-free threshold was raised from MK9,000 to MK10,000, meaning that those whose monthly income levels are below MK10,000 are not required to pay income tax. However, much as this is a positive move as far as increasing disposable income is concerned, the adjustment was too minimal. An ideal cut-off would be the minimum monthly cost of food for an average Malawian family living in towns. In 2008/09, this ranged between MK20,000 and MK25,000. An income that is only enough to cover basic food costs should not be taxed. However, the 2009/2010 Budget was commended and applauded by many, including the civil society, the *International Monetary Fund IMF* and the *World Bank*.

Unlike the previous Budget sessions, the 2009/2010 Budget session was held in the most peaceful manner. The Budget votes and Bills were passed without adequate debate because the government MPs were in the majority. Although this is an advantage in that there wasn't too much wasting of time and public resources in form of sitting allowances, it also posed a danger of passing votes and Bills which might have required some useful amendments. This did not please opposition Members of Parliament and a cross section of civil society. The big question remains: Will the 2009/2010 Budget implement all the activities contained in the Budget as efficient as the session itself?

World Financial Crisis

The world financial crisis is one of the issues that featured highly in the Malawi press in the year 2009. Being a 'least developed' country, Malawi benefits a lot from the West in terms of donor funding. Malawi was not an exception in being affected by the recession. While many countries were negatively affected, Malawi actually benefited from it through the falling World prices of fuel and fertilizer. The commercial price of fertilizer dropped almost by 50%, increasing its affordability to many Malawian smallholder farmers. Against this background Malawi equally shared some of the problems from World financial crisis.

Most of Malawi's civil society organizations get their funding from international organizations in the North that were severely affected by the global financial crisis. This resulted into major cuts in the levels of funding meant for civil society organizations. Some organizations had to lay off some of their personnel while others

were simply not able to implement some of their planned activities. 2009 press reports disclosed that other organizations were engaged more in videoconferences as a cheaper alternative to physical travelling to convenient venues of such conferences. There were also reports that some organizations implemented expense-cutting measures such as, minimizing the usage of company vehicles. Meanwhile, there are reports that recession is easing in some parts of the West.

Forex

The year 2009 has not been an easy year as far as Forex reserves are concerned in Malawi. A forex shortage was announced as early as January but the Reserve Bank of Malawi wore a brave face and assured the nation that all was well. As the year progressed, the country witnessed the Reserve Bank telling the nation that the situation is under control. Despite the fact that even local cross boarder traders were failing to access Forex in bureaux and in commercial banks, the central bank let the nation down by maintaining that there was enough foreign exchange in the economy.

It all came clear early this year that indeed there was shortage of Forex when the same Reserve Bank announced that the imports cover had gone down to 1.3 months. Malawi being a net-importing country, 1.3 months of imports cover is simply too low. Malawi's growing manufacturing sector relies heavily on Forex for importation of raw materials for its survival. The current foreign exchange crisis could kill this important sector which is supposed to support the agricultural sector for development to continue.

Like all politicians who always put the blame on others President Bingu wa Mutharika accused foreigners who are doing business in Malawi for the Forex shortage. President Mutharika did not mince words when he spoke of the Forex shortage as being man-made. He pointed an accusing finger at the Asians who he said siphon off the much-needed Forex to their respective countries. This was supported by press reports that also featured a few articles that revealed a number of foreigners were caught with some illegal Forex at Kamuzu International Airport. Later during the year the President restricted the number of annual external trips for all civil servants as one way of preserving the country's hard earned Forex. To this effect, President Mutharika had to cancel his own official external trip as a way of living by example.

Meanwhile some experts feel the many foreign trips for the president and his entourage also contributed a lot to the Forex shortage. They are also of the same opinion that government officials who travel too often on foreign trips are also part of the cause. Some analysts blamed the recent purchase of numerous Mercedes cars for ministers and a new presidential jet as the major cause of the country's Forex shortage.

EPAs

Malawi's stand on the *Economic Partnership Agreement EPAs* still remained the same in the year 2009. The country will not sign the *EPAs* in their current form. 2009 reports on *EPAs* disclosed that in a group of 16 countries, most countries had already signed the interim agreement but Malawi has not signed even the interim agreement. This development has been commended by civil society organization who are also advocating for a no to the *EPAs*.

Although Malawi has not signed the interim agreement of the EPAs the *European Union EU* still insists that the *EPAs* are a good arrangement for a developing country like Malawi. 2009 reports show that Malawi is still negotiating with other countries the same *EPAs*. However, it is reported that it has not been an easy task because some of the countries in the *Eastern Southern Africa ESA* region have already signed part of the agreement. This is what those in favour of signing feel will put Malawi in an awkward situation.

The press in the year also showed that the government was commissioning a study/consultancy that would draw recommendations on whether or not Malawi should sign *EPAs*. Results of the consultancy, if indeed commissioned, are yet to be known.

Tobacco

2009 tobacco season was not as smooth as one would have expected. Coming from a year of good sales in 2008 many farmers increased the volume of their tobacco hoping to get good prices from the sale. This was not to be because the sales of the gold leaf failed to impress many farmers resulting into a number of interruptions. Among other things the farmers expressed dissatisfaction on the prices their leaf was fetching on the market. Despite Mutharika setting the buying prices of tobacco in the year 2008, the buyers still bought the crop at much lower prices.

The tobacco industry faced more hiccups in 2009 than in the previous year. Among other things the tobacco industry witnessed the deportation of some foreign tobacco bosses. They were accused of duping farmers by buying tobacco at very low prices despite the good quality of the leaf. Although Mutharika's government deported the bosses some observers feel there is a lot that should be done if the problems in the tobacco industry are to be solved. At the same time some farmers were against the deportation. Tobacco is at present the main foreign exchange earner of Malawi. It contributes to more than 60% of Forex in Malawi. However the opening of the Kayelekera Mine in Karonga is expected to also help in boosting the economy.

Fuel

The beginning of the year saw the decrease in price of fuel globally. This situation forced the then Minister of Finance Goodall Gondwe to bow down to pressure from civil society and other groups to cut the price of fuel in Malawi. After weeks of talks about the possibilities of cutting the prices, an announcement was made to that effect. With the reduction in fuel prices people expected a change in some of the services. The reduction in the prices of transportation costs should also have meant prices of goods going down. But to the contrary only a few services cut down their prices like the bus fares.

However as the year progressed Malawi faced the first ever fuel shortage in decades. This resulted in congestions at gas stations and increased problems of transport. To make matters worse some illegal fuel sellers took advantage of the shortage to make quick easy money by charging exorbitant prices to motorists. A number of organizations and observers took government to task for failing to take care of the problem that took almost three weeks.

Inflation Rate

Malawi's inflation rate continued its downward trend in the year 2009. Among other things the *National Statistical Office NSO* attributed the availability of food in the country. The inflation rate reached 7.4 % in some months in the just ended year. Experts however noted that as the inflation rate is going down prices of food crops should also go down so that it matches with the rate.

FOOD SECURITY

Food Situation

In January, stories on food shortage continued to dominate press coverage in Malawi. There were still some disagreements between the government and other stakeholders who felt there were massive food shortages in Malawi. Photos of starving people had appeared in the press they all agreed that they had no food. The government still stood by its statement that there was plenty food in the country.

Newsreaders were shocked with news about the food shortages. It was reported that people in Machinga were buying madeya (maize husks) for food. At the same time people in Dedza were now exchanging their bicycles for maize in Mozambique due to an acute shortage of maize in the district. Surprisingly officials kept saying there was plenty of food in the country.

The press in January also disclosed that prices of maize might go up during year. *Centre for Social Concern CfSC*, a faith-based organization, felt that the fact that the world is currently facing food shortages this would also befall poor Malawians. This would result in high costs that the poor might find very hard to cope up with. A survey conducted by *CfSC* had shown that every year the price of maize continues to go up. Therefore, the same was expected to happen. Although government introduced a fixed price for maize in the country some traders still sold it at whatever price they wished.

New Price for Subsidized Fertilizer

President Bingu wa Mutharika announced that Malawians should expect the price of fertilizer to be reduced during this coming growing season and he indeed reduced it to MK500 per 50kg bag. Government was commended for cutting the price of subsidized fertilizer, so that the needy can access the farm input.

President Bingu wa Mutharika, has successfully run the subsidized fertilizer programme and the results are what people are seeing in their fields to date though with some hiccups here and there during the distribution of fertilizer coupons to the needy.

Maize's Set Price

The Malawi government in the month of April announced the prices of crops. After reports of exploitation, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security announced new prices of selling and buying crops mainly maize, which is Malawi's staple food. According to the ministry this move is to help stop unscrupulous traders from exploiting the poor farmers. The ministry has set the prices at MK55 per kilogramme of maize. This is the price that farmers had to sell their grain.

Although government announced this buying price of maize recent reports had shown *Agriculture Development and Marketing Corporation ADMARC* was not yet ready to

buy maize. According to ADMARC, some farmers do harvest their maize when it is not fully dry. Authorities at the grain market feel buying the maize when it is not dry would end up destroying the maize because it is kept for a long time.

Although government had set the price of maize at MK55/kg some months ago, observers noted that some traders were selling the grain at any price they wished contrary to government's announcement. As it is always the case in the lean months of January, February and March, a number of households ran out of the grain thereby increasing the demand of maize locally. The situation forces traders to raise the price of grain unnecessarily. A monthly survey by the *Centre for Social Concern* revealed that some traders were selling the grain at K5,000 per 50kg bag, which is twice as much as the government's set price.

Reduction of Fertilizer Prices

In April the *Agricultural Trading Company ATC* came up with sweet music to people's ears when it announced reduced prices of the farm input. The company slashed the prices of fertilizer by almost half. For instance *Calcium Ammonium Nitrate CAN* is going at K4,330 down from K7,200. Observers had commended ATC and asked other companies who sell fertilizer to emulate this example.

Rice Situation

With the harvesting season of rice in Malawi observers noted that the prices had fallen. Rice, which is also regarded as one of the main foods in many people's homes, is usually harvested in the months of May to July. Reports had shown that the grain was now selling at very low prices.

During the month of June, reports on food security had shown that the government would not impose a maize ban during the year. This had happened because of the bumper harvest that Malawi had experienced. Last year government imposed a ban stopping farmers from selling their produce, mainly maize, to private traders. This was one way of making sure that households have enough maize to sustain them till the next harvest. Experience had shown that the same private traders who buy the crop from the farmers at a very low price came back in lean months of December to March to sell the grain at exaggerated prices.

Parliamentarians Views on Food Security

Despite reports of a bumper harvest, Members of Parliament from several areas in Malawi expressed concern the over shortages of food in their areas. Speaking in the National Assembly legislators took turns in commending President Bingu wa Mutharika for making food security his priority but observed that people in some areas were still starving. Reports had shown that some Malawian citizens were suffering amid plenty of food that the country is boasting about. It should be noted that Malawi has 1.2 million tones of maize surplus.

Livestock Production

Malawi with so much maize that had been harvested, other sectors had also experienced tremendous growth. Media reports disclosed that there was also an increase in the fish production, the number of cattle had also increased from 600,000 to 950,000 and a fall in goat production. Other reports had also shown an increase in

the poultry industry. With a good harvest, the number of poultry in the country was expected to continue increasing due to expected availability of animal feed.

Universal Fertilizer Subsidy

Debates on whether government should introduce universal subsidy or not made headlines in July. There had been different views being heard from the August House. According to some members of the government were still of the view that it was good for government to continue with the current targeted farm inputs. Some experts had noted that it is almost impossible for Malawi, whose economy is still staggering, to introduce Universal Fertilizer Subsidy Programme. Examples are known of some developed countries that have excelled in food security and have never implemented a universal subsidy.

Maize Marketing

Now, months after farmers had harvested their crops they had nowhere to sell their produce. According to reports the situation left people with no option but to sell their produce to unscrupulous traders. These private traders were reaping where they did not sow as they were buying maize at as low as K25 per kilogram. Because the farmers were so desperate to get some money, they were forced to sell the grain at this low price. By this month, ADMARC, which is the main grain marketer, had not yet opened its markets.

Following cries from farmers who were wondering when the ADMARC depots were going to open, the grain marketer finally opened its markets in August. One reason mentioned was lack of space in the depots and warehouses leading to buying only maize and no other farm produce. This means farmers had nowhere to sell their other crops like groundnuts, beans, soya, cotton and many more farm produce. Farmers had to resort to selling the crops to private traders who most of the times exploited them.

Coupon Distribution

With the farming season approaching the Ministry of Agriculture announced that it would make sure that the distribution of coupons would be done in good time. Reports had shown that there had been a number of shortfalls that the targeted farm input programme has faced in the past. Ranging from shortage of coupons and bad distribution the ministry was going to raise the awareness of farmers so that they know the features of the coupons.

The press in the month of September disclosed that beneficiaries of this year's farm input subsidy programme would be using their Voter Identification Cards. This time around the government wanted to fight reports of ghost villages and beneficiaries. The use of the Voter IDs would surely assist in eliminating cheating of any kind but it has sidelined those who are entitled to receive the coupons but did not participate in the general election because of their religious beliefs and for other reasons.

The *Farmers Union of Malawi FUM* in the month under review applauded the government for the targeted farm input programme but noted that there was still room for improvement. The Union feels the Ministry of Agriculture could do better in the area of distribution of farm inputs.

Agricultural Fair for 2009

President Bingu wa Mutharika in the month of August opened the National Agricultural Fair in Blantyre. Mutharika whose government strives at making Malawi a hunger free nation opened the fair where different farmers showcased their crops and other agricultural products. He is also reported to have encouraged farmers to use modern farming technologies like irrigation. With irrigation farmers can be assured of bumper yields. Food security is a requirement for people to be able to participate fully in developmental activities.

Storage of Maize Surplus

As Malawians are enjoying another year of bumper harvest the *Malawi Economic Justice Network MEJN* had noted that there was a lot of surplus maize that needed attention. In a survey that the organisation conducted it found that this maize if left unattended would eventually rot and that there would be a loss. People had so much maize and to make matters worse ADMARC announced it would not be able to buy a lot of it because of a lack of funds. MEJN asked members of parliament to look into the problem and come up with solutions.

Despite another year of bumper yields some citizens are still facing storage problems. Food security reports in July had shown that some of the harvest is lost during storage because of lack of suitable facilities. Perhaps this is the reason why people in Mzimba district have engaged in building maize storage banks in their villages. The villagers in Mzimba want to make sure that there is food security in their area. They feel the village storage banks will help them when there is food shortage in the area.

Food Security Awards

There were exiting news from various corners of the world about Malawi's food security status. In recent months a number of awards had been given to Malawi for the food situation. As the world commemorated the World Food Day an international organization called *Actionaid* had released a list of countries that were really fighting hunger and Malawi was on position 5.

2009 Fertilizer Delivery Hiccups

This year's fertilizer delivery has been with more problems than previous ones. This year the distribution had been affected by a shortage of fuel, and other problems that seem to be slowing down the delivery of the farm input.

Rainfall Situation

Another problem which has affected agricultural sector is the erratic rainfall. The rains had generally been late this season country wide although Met experts had predicted good rains this season. A wide range of areas are experiencing drought with some areas having maize crop withered or dried up.

Green Belt Initiative

Parliament during its sitting in the month of November passed the Green Belt Bill. Unlike some bills that take a long time to be debated both sides of the National Assembly were for the Green Belt. Among other things the Green Belt will help Malawi to be a food secure nation for life if properly managed. Against this

background the MPs passed the bill that will see government borrowing money from the International Development Association to fund the project.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Social Issues

Social issues beside the heavy political agenda of 2009 were as usual part of civil society and religious groups concern. The CCAP Church celebrated this year the 150 anniversary of Dr David Livingstone's arrival in Malawi. It is remembered that he contributed to the fall of slavery in that part of the world. Nevertheless child labour and exploitation of tenants are still rampant in many estates of Malawi. To fight these evils CFSC has been working with other partners since a long time for the passing of tenancy labour bill. Some MP's are estate landlords and are reluctant to pass it. According to the *National Office of Statistics* the economic level of the people is improving in the Northern region but in the Southern Region more than 50% of the population is under the poverty threshold. In January the *Public Affairs Committee PAC* asked government to come up with statements on the food situation amid rumours that some people are starving. The government denied any sign of hunger in the country.

Electricity and Water

Following the persistent blackouts and water shortages that Malawi faces the *Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce MCCI*, asked the responsible ministers to resign but they refused. After a long and tough court case the *Consumer Association of Malawi CAMA* managed to get *Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi ESCOM* to change its slogan from "Power all day, every day" to "Towards Power all day, every day". *Malawi Economic Justice Network MEJN* asked for a probe on reports that ESCOM blew over K80 million for a party and gifts last Christmas. The body also spent K12 million to buy a car for their board Chairman.

The *Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace CCJP* in September announced findings of a survey they conducted on Kayerekera mine in Karonga district. It shows that the water that people drink at the mine is contaminated. There might be a possibility of uranium spilling into Lake Malawi.

Cut Backs

Due to the global financial crisis The *Council for Non Governmental Organisation of Malawi CONGOMA*, noted that there has been a decrease in the funding from international donors to the local organisations. The principal of the College Polytechnic declared that NGOs should be accountable and need to declare their assets. Nobody denied it. An NGO in Salima was asking K20,000 against a promise of job. It has been closed since then.

Unity and Division

Religious Groups had ups and downs in 2009: The *Public Affairs Committee PAC* condemned the violence that happened in the Zambezi Evangelical Church in Manja, Blantyre. According to the Principal Secretary of Nutrition and HIV/AIDS, religious

groups deny homosexuality in Malawi and this hinders the fight against AIDS. The birthday of Prophet Muhamed, peace be upon him, was an occasion for inter-faith rejoicing. The Easter way of the cross was once again celebrated not only by the Catholics but also by the Anglicans and the Pentecostals.

The Pre Elections

Political issues facing civil society were plenty and heavy. During the pre elections: At different occasions and coming from different religions the clergy prayed for peace during the elections. The Catholic Bishops published a booklet of homilies notes for Lent, the Nkhoma Synod published a statement, both calling to choose just and honest candidates for the elections. Saint Egidio also called for free and fair elections whereas *Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation CHRR* emphasized the need to have a campaign free of violent words and acts.

The *Malawi Elections Support Network MESN* and the opposition proposed that the electoral body *Malawi Electoral Commission MEC* should have a separate tally centre but the government refused.

The *Civil Liberties Committee CILIC* denounced the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* primary elections as not fairly conducted in some areas. *Non-Governmental Organizations NGOs* advised major parties to consider taking female candidates as running mates. As if responding to that call the DPP chose Joyce Banda as first ever presidential running mate.

Dr Bingu wa Mutharika promised that he would not imitate his predecessors during electoral campaign. Despite that the government fired *Inspector General IG* of Police because he dared to oppose the use of the police music band at a political rally instead of being used at official state functions. The *Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation CHRR* criticized the government for the use of its vehicles to ferry people to and from almost each of the ruling DPP functions. Even at state functions party slogans are chanted. 98% of *Malawi Broadcastion Corporation MBC* and *Television Malawi TVM* airtime are used to cover the government or DPP activities, the remaining 2% are used to criticize the opposition.

The *Malawi Law Commission* announced that the presidential aspirants are not eligible to stand if they continue being Members of Parliament. Others said that the aspirants will be free to do so because by then there will be no parliament.

The *Malawi Electoral Commission* announced the results of the presidential aspirants mid March: Dr Bakili Muluzi was disqualified on the ground that he already served two terms as president. This weakened considerably the UDF party.

The Elections Results

Civil Society and foreign observers commended the Malawi Electoral Commission for having conducted the elections in a free and fair manner. *Malawi Human Rights Consultative Committee MHRCC* congratulated Bingu wa Mutharika for being re-elected as President. The *Malawi Council of Churches MCC* asked opposition leader John Tembo who is also President of the *Malawi Congress Party MCP* to concede defeat and congratulate President Bingu wa Mutharika as the winner of the 2009 Presidential Election. On the contrary John Tembo challenged the results in court despite slim chances of winning anything. Some weeks before the results the *Public Affairs Committee PAC* had announced its stand against rushing into the swearing in

of the President. In fact Bingu wa Mutharika swore in the day after the official results.

The *Civil Liberties Committee* in the month of May noted that although civic education was done before the general election, civic education should be an ongoing exercise. Even with minimal resources civil society managed to carry out voter and civic education, encouraging voters to register and turn out for voting more than in 2004 by a wide margin.

The Post Elections Parliamentary Affairs

The *Commission for Justice and Peace CCJP* commended the appointment of Honourable Henry Chimunthu Banda as the Speaker of the National Assembly because he stood firm during the heated debates that were a daily occurrence in the last Parliament.

The *Council for Non-Governmental Organisations of Malawi CONGOMA* urged the current Parliament to deal with the controversial Sections 65 (MP's crossing the floor) and 83 (Presidential tenure) of the Malawi Constitution so far without result.

CCJP found that Parliament failed to do its duties to its full potential during the last presidential mandate. On the conduct of new Parliament on the first 100 days, it faults the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* who abuses its majority position by bulldozing issues like the budget no matter how important without much debate. *Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR)* is asking the Opposition to play their role of providing checks and balances to the government instead of rubber-stamping whatever comes.

During the campaign period the *Malawi Congress Party MCP* leader John Tembo announced that he would be more democratic. Surprisingly he endorsed the sacking of the party's spokesperson Ishmael Chafukira for saying things in the media that did not please the party and John Tembo. The *Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation* reminded that such evidence shows that he has not changed.

The new MCP spokesperson Nancy Tembo complained about Civil Society's silence concerning the absence of an opposition leader, accusing the DPP of wanting to divide the party by all means.

Other Points of Concern had to be Addressed

The *Malawi Electoral Support Network MESN* said that despite the fact that there is an allocation for the 2010 local government polls, there have not been any meetings by Cabinet to discuss them, there is no calendar for the elections and the Electoral Commission has not accredited any organisation to carry out civic education. Furthermore the government wants a bill that will give the president powers to choose when he wants local government elections to be held. This would give the president too much power. There are currently no councillors in Malawi.

Contrary to his words Mutharika on many occasions commented on issues that are still in courts. Also he announced that his brother Peter is free to contest for any position even that of president in this country. The Nkhoma Synod of the *Church of Central African Presbyterian CCAP* has asked to leave that issue to a DPP convention.

The death penalty remains in the Malawi Constitution but ever since Malawi became a multiparty state no one has ever been hanged despite some people being on death row. The *Malawi Human Rights Consultative Committee HRCC* feels we should avoid chances that another president could decide to sign it in the near future. So the death penalty should be removed from the Constitution.

Civil Society is a right holder, especially journalists and the academia to access information from public officers who are the duty bearers to be accountable about their service. All concerned parties await the passing of the information bill so that Malawians can enjoy a free flow of information.

Besides traditional leaders, the police are also among some of the people involved in corruption. According to the *Anti Corruption Bureau ACB*, the Police's involvement in corruption cases has damaged the image and the trust that people have in the organisation.

At the African Synod, the bishops asked corrupt top government officials to either repent or quit, when cases of corruption in public offices are being reported in the press almost every day in Malawi. But some say that it does not apply to Malawi.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

As the year winds up, media reports have so far covered a number of events that took place on social and cultural life. A lot of debate has been focused on the reasons why such events happened. One major concern was the unclear boundaries between politics and cultural traditions which has become part of life today – every one sees it as normal. During the year media reports analyzed this situation and other important issues that made headlines.

Should Politics be Involved in or Guide Our Traditional Practices Today?

During the year media reports have raised concerns on how politics have interfered with traditional customs. From what has happened one would say that Malawi's traditional leadership is at the mercy of political regimes. It has become normal practice that politicians or the Head of State appoint or promote the authority of chiefs in different parts of the country. These promotions have often gone along with salary review and at different levels the perks for chiefs have been increased handsomely. Unfortunately, in most of these appointments or promotions succession lines have not been observed. What matters more is their loyalty and affiliation to the ruling parties. Those chiefs who did not tow the line of the government of the day have often been neglected in the development agenda; let alone some favours from government. Today politicians have control over traditional leaders – they have threatened to demote those seemingly not loyal. On the other hand, those who take the dictates of the ruling government have benefited enormously materially. They received more such gifts in the run-up to the last general elections in May where they were heavily used in campaigning for different political parties. This situation calls for a lot of questions one of which is the role of traditional authorities in safeguarding traditional customs. Is this the desired situation? If not, is it reversible? It depends on all of us especially our political leaders.

The Marriage Age of the Girl Child -16

The nation and the public were alarmed when the new crop of our legislators passed a bill that put the girl child at the risk of getting married at sixteen years of age. Experts including the *Family Panning Association of Malawi FPSM* have reacted angrily to this move that puts the girl child at ransom. The danger of starting family life at this early age is that the bodies of these girls are not mature enough to endure pregnancy and childbirth. The situation will lead to more maternal deaths thereby defeating the progress that has already been made on the *Millennium Development Goals MDGs* on safe motherhood and maternal deaths. The passing of this bill contradicts all commendable efforts by the Ministry of Education who campaign to promote equal attainment of education between boys and girls. This is the period when most girls are supposed to be at secondary school. The bill if assented to by the Head of State will have negative effects on poverty-stricken families whose sole alternative will be for their girls to get married. There will be more school dropouts at different stages of learning.

More than just passing the bill hurriedly, one looks at the level of debate in the house which did not take into account the views of the constituents. Our parliamentarians need to be more focused. How would they feel if other people were deciding the married age of their daughters? It is important to think and reflect before making

serious amendments to our constitution because it is the law of the land that guides all of us.

At the level of society, the press reports have carried stories of certain traditional customs that still perpetuate the rapid spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS. There is a lot of campaigning against the trend has been done, but certain sections of society still feel it is one way of keeping their traditions. The media reports sampled *Kupimbira* of Karonga (forcing young girls to get married to older men in payment of debt) of the northern region and *kuchotsa fumbi* (after initiation of especially girls, one old man, called *fisi* which means a hyena is supposed to sleep with the young girls). These practices are refusing to disappear or die and they have facilitated the spread of HIV/AIDS. Our people still do not seem to learn any lessons from this unwarranted practice.

Human Trafficking for Labour and Sexual Exploitation

The Day of the African Child, “L’enfant Noir”, was celebrated amid gross abuse of children in different forms. This day should be a reminder that children have the right to basic amenities in life and their continued abuse is a crime against humanity. A number research papers have revealed gross abuses in the tobacco estates, a situation that poses a major challenge. One imagines that instead of going to school, children are kept busy in the farms working on behalf of their parents without pay. Further to this violation is that they are subjected to dangers as they work on the estates. They are exposed to the green leaf and nicotine effects in the process of growing, selecting, grading and bailing the crop. In addition to this cheap labour mothers also work on behalf of the husband and they are also exposed to the same dangers. It has been reported in one meeting convened by the Centre for Social Concern that one woman gave birth while working on the farm, a situation that explains how poor the working and living conditions are in these areas. From this development one concludes that women are not entitled to maternity leave and/or any decent medial attention. Visit to many of these farms showed that schools and clinics are too far, not easily accessible.

The practice of human trafficking which is present, though hidden, in Malawi has seen the suffering of young women and men who have been betrayed by their own relatives and friends to travel from their villages in search for better life in towns/cities. The majority have ended up in serious sexual exploitation. There have been reports of trafficking taking place both within Malawi and across the borders to the disadvantage of poor people who are deceived because of poverty. Children are often trafficked to tobacco estates within Malawi and they are recruited on their own.

Besides the Tumbuka, Ngoni and Chewa as recognized tribal groupings in Malawi, during the year the media reports covered the coming together of yet another tribe – Lomwe. While it is important to promote tribal affiliations, the *Muhlako wa Ahlomwe* came with mixed reactions. Firstly, it was the only tribe that was heavily sold in the media and on the radio then, a situation that attracted jealous from the already existing tribal groups. The media went further to question its patronage, the Head of State was not normally supposed to be leader of the newly found tribal grouping because the public saw this position as being biased towards one tribe while the expectation is that he is the patron of all the tribes in the country. Again, being of that tribal affiliation, it became obvious that people would think he aligned himself more with the *Muhlako wa Ahlomwe* than other tribes. One would therefore suggest that while supporting his tribe in whatever way, a prominent chief should have been chosen patron because it is not a political grouping. The coming in of the head of

state as patron removed the flavour, because as long as the president is present at its gatherings, some political officials are also expected to accompany him. This is a normal procedure for the president to be accompanied, and when these officials travel, they use government vehicles which are part of the public resources that should be exclusively used for government intended purposes.

On the same development, commentators have further analyzed and cited examples where the national cake is not shared equally – Quota System in public appointments has not been adhered to. There has been a growing concern that the Lhomwe belt has grabbed most of the senior and public positions at the disadvantage of people of other regions. Does this situation look at merit as a criterion for job distribution across the board? This development will further widen the gap between tribal groups.

What Has Been Happening in Blantyre is Strange

The mysterious attacks on people by both known and unknown individuals at Ndirande and other townships in Blantyre have always been a major concern to many Malawians. It is seemingly difficult to understand why gruesome things are done during the day and at night to innocent people who are supposed to live peacefully. This animalistic behaviour or tendency has chiefly targeted female or child-head families that are normally unprotected. Most of these have lost their lives. One of the famous people nicknamed Nachipanti has apparently revealed names of people who mastermind all these worrisome activities that target women and children in the townships – these individuals hold senior positions in public and private sectors. Nachipanti may just be an agent who gets his bread from torturing and killing people on behalf of his masters, and it is doubtful whether this practice will finally come an end looking at the calibre of people involved.

Madonna's Adoption and Contribution to Malawi

It is clear from the reports that the second adoption of poor Mercy by Madonna attracted less attention though some critics continued to give their views. Should they have made all that noise if a Malawian adopted the two children? Would there have been so much publicity including international media houses? What makes this issue so unique? We are all called to think and reflect about it. What about the Girls Academy Secondary School that Madonna is building in the outskirts of Lilongwe, is it in good faith or is it intended to answer some questions raised by concerned Malawians? However one interprets these facts, it is apparent that when one interacts or criticizes a famous figure they make a name – they become popular either as an individual or as an organization.

EDUCATION

Back to School

In 2009 the media reported a number of issues touching education. A positive development was of teenage mothers being encouraged to go back to school. In South West Division 72 teenage mothers went back to school. The Ministry of Education is to include school feeding programme in its budget. All this geared towards curbing school dropouts and to increase enrolment in the schools. The *Malawi Examinations Board MANEB* put up measures to curb cheating during examinations, some of the measures introduced were introducing stiff penalties to those who do not comply with the examinations rules. MANEB also confirmed that 118,000 candidates will sit for 2009 MSCE examination and noted that there has been an increase of 3,000 candidates. These indeed are positive indicators in education.

Poor Education

While positive issues emerged in the education sector it is also worthwhile to note that there have been issues that will have a negative impact on the education standards in Malawi. The World Conference on Higher Education which took place in from 5-8th July 2009, Paris, France observed that Malawi's secondary and higher education is the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. Malawi's Education Minister Dr George Chabonda attended the conference.

A joint study conducted by Malawi Human Rights Commission and Action Aid on Laws, Policies, and Regulations in Education observed that Malawi's laws on education are weak. In the Malawi Constitution section 25 stipulates the right of education for all however the government fails to make education compulsory.

It was also reported that sexual harassment of the girl child still on the increase. An observation was made that Malawi does not have a written policy on sexual harassment.

New School Year

There has been a debate to go back to the old school calendar. The issue of reverting to the old school calendar re-surfaced in 2008. The school calendar was changed in 1990's due to persistent water shortages in Zomba. The water problem was solved but it is interesting to note that the school calendar was not changed after solving the problem. In 2009 the Ministry of Education was not ready to go back to the old school calendar but the issue re-surfaced during the 2009 presidential and parliamentary elections campaigns.

During the official closing of the Community Impact Exposition Week organised by the University of Malawi Students Union, which took place in October 2009, Dr Gorge Chabonda announced that the government has changed the school calendar. The change was to harmonise the Malawi Academic calendar. The school calendar will start from September and end in June the following year. The 2009/2010 will be

a transitory year. The transitory academic year started on 7 December 2009 and will end September 2010.

While appreciating the control of private schools' uncountable terms in a year, the change of the school calendar has affected people negatively, both in terms of finances and also the syllabus. For instance, this year's Form 4s will write their exams in June 2010, in five months time, there is still a lot to be covered, this group will be the most affected and they will certainly contribute to dwindling down of education standards.

Quota Selection or Division?

Another sensitive issue that has generated a lot of debate in education sector and countrywide is the quota system also known as equitable distribution of resources. This development has widened the ethno-religious/regional gap especially between the north against the centre and the south.

Historically, the quota system was once technically introduced under the one party regime where every district was supposed to produce 10 quality candidates to university and this was based on merit. In 1989 all teachers were called to teach in their region of origin, a development that was a catalyst to divide people on regional lines. Noticing that the system was not practical because there were so many teachers from the north who could not be accommodated in the region, the unpalatable decision was rescinded discretely and teachers were re-deployed back to where there was need without necessarily looking at the region where one came from. Obviously during the referendum this was one of the issues that Malawians voted against – ethno-regional discrimination.

Today the Quota system has re-surfaced after 15 years into a democracy. It is seemingly a hot issue and has raised a lot of debate. Instead of providing space for quality debate on equal access vs. merit, the proposal was carried to be implemented even when it was still under judicial review. While the public were meant to believe that the quota system was meant to promote equal access to tertiary learning, there is strong evidence that the system has even affected this year's form one selection. The outcry by some quarters is based on 2009/2010 selection which has seen more deserving candidates not finding their way to either national or district secondary schools. The media reports have continued to comment on the Ministry of Education's argument against the views expressed by the Livingstonia Synod, which still holds that this year's selection has been biased. One wonders whether we should dwell much on equal access or concentrate on infrastructure development to accommodate more candidates.

Meanwhile Mzuzu Catholic Diocese has commissioned an inquiry to look into 2009 form one selection. It is also important to note that the 2009 university selection list has not been released yet. There are no first year students at Bunda College and they are going into the second semester.

Private Schools

Another issue that took centre stage in the education sector in the year 2009 is the inspection of private secondary schools. The Ministry of Education engaged in private secondary school inspection exercise. Among other things the Ministry was looking for the quality of teachers and their qualification. Authorities also wanted to know if the teachers teaching in secondary schools had the right qualification and also checked on infrastructure and availability of teaching and learning materials. This exercise resulted in more than 600 schools being closed. It also left some students with no hope of finding places in the government certified private secondary schools.

HEALTH

Killer Diseases

During the year 2009 the Malawi Government and civil society groups have shown great seriousness in tackling top killer diseases such as malaria, cholera, Tuberculosis and HIV and AIDS which afflict the nation relentlessly. It has been proven that lack of sanitation, poor road infrastructure, illiteracy, cultural beliefs and poverty are some of the reasons that slow progress for Malawians to attain good health. In recent years Malawi has experienced acute water shortages in its large towns due to constant power failure and the people walk long distances to fetch water which is found in dirty ponds. This is unbelievable when one comes to know that two thirds of Malawi is covered by potable water. The result has been cholera throughout the year. And Malawians are still waiting to know the name of the strange disease which attacked residents of Neno district and claimed 17 lives. American scientists were called to collect samples and carry out tests and give us a feedback.

Malaria Hopes

Media reports reveal there have been several drugs such as quinine, chloroquine, SPs and LA have been used in the continuing fight against malaria but the disease has prevailed. Now a multi-million Kwacha malaria trial centre has been built at Area 18 health centre in Lilongwe. This will become the largest malaria vaccine trial in Africa. It is called the George Joaki Centre, under the University of North Carolina. According to the project study coordinator Tisungane Mvalo, 1,600 babies aged from 6 to 17 weeks are targeted for the first trial and the second will target babies aged between 5 to 17 months. Developing the malaria vaccine is critical to defeating a disease that kills 300,000 children in sub-Saharan Africa. According to World Health Organisation statistics, malaria kills 10,000 under-five children in Malawi every year.

Medical Staff

It is heartbreaking to learn from media reports that Malawi has the worst doctor-population ratio in the world with more than 50,000 Malawians depending on a single doctor. This sad scenario arises from the fact that the country has only one College of Medicine and the intake has been low. According to the Executive Director of the *Malawi Health Equity Network* Martha Kwataine, the most crucial element in improving the number of doctors in the country is to make sure that the doctors who are trained remain in government. At the moment Turkmenistan leads the world with at least 150 citizens sharing a single doctor with Cuba coming second best.

In a related situation media reports say Malawi lags behind in the number of registered nurses who play an important role in supervising junior nurses. It is said Malawi produces less than 200 registered nurses every year, but according to the Director of National Organisation of Nurses, Dorothy Ngoma, Malawi needs to increase the number to at least 1,000 a year.

Maternal Morbidity

During the year 2009 media reports revealed Malawi competes with countries which have been at war in terms of maternal death across the world. This was disclosed by Special Advisor to the *Norwegian Nurses Organisation* Michael Vitols. He said

Malawi's figures compare with countries like Sierra Leone, Somalia and Afghanistan, all of which have a history of years and years of civil war. According to the Malawi Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey this country has a neo-natal rate of 31 deaths per 1,000 live births and a maternal rate of 807 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Despite the desperate situation that Malawi is facing regarding maternal deaths, Malawi's Vice-President Joyce Banda has said her goal as African Union Goodwill Ambassador for Safe Motherhood is to reduce maternal deaths by half from the current 807 per 100,000 live births. It has been observed that most maternal deaths occur when pregnant women are treated by traditional birth attendants.

Mysterious Disease

During the year under review a strange disease broke out in border villages of Malawi and Mozambique in Neno District. Initially after killing seventeen people which included eight from Malawi and nine from Mozambique, samples were taken and sent to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States for analysis. For a while the mysterious disease was only known as the Neno disease from the place of origin. We now know that actually the infection is in fact Typhoid fever. This was revealed by Secretary of Health, Chris Kang'ombe. According to Kang'ombe, the infection had taken a long time to diagnose because it kept changing characteristics making it difficult for health experts to identify. Experts are still working to find out factors that are causing persistence of the infection. According to Kang'ombe, government is looking at issues of water and sanitation and is making sure the people from the affected area follow correct hygiene practices to combat the spread of the disease which in four months has infected over 300 people and killed about 36 others so far. Symptoms of the disease include a stiff neck, dehydration, fever, headache, joints pain, abdominal discomfort and loss of voice.

Helping Our Neighbours

Malawi cannot afford to treat foreigners from neighbouring Tanzania, Zambia, and Mozambique in its already congested hospitals and health centres. Media reports have revealed hospitals and health centres along the borders with Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia are being flooded with foreign patients because of the free health care services. The Deputy Minister of Health and Population Gloria Mwale, observed that patients from across the border are not budgeted for. One other person Martha Kwataine, who is Director of Malawi Health Equity Network, has said if the health services are provided to our neighbours as a way of promoting our bilateral relationship, then it is done in a wrong way because it is one sided. At the end of the day it is Malawians who are going to bear the brunt when drugs are in short supply. The system of treating foreigners in Malawi hospitals and health centres is only benefiting the people who are running away from paying for the health services in their countries.

Children's Health

One area where Malawi seems to improve is under-five mortality rate, the death of children aged five, which has continued to decline since 2008. United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF estimates indicate that under-five mortality in the country has decreased from 225 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990, to 100 per thousand in 2008. UNICEF report says progress has been seen in every part of the world, and

even in some of the least developed countries like Malawi, which is one of ten high under-five mortality countries that is now on track to meet the Millennium Development Goal of a two-thirds reduction in under-five mortality between 1990 and 2015. And in a related situation, unsafe abortion cases have contributed to the country's high maternal mortality. Media reports indicate that 807 women who die for every 100,000 live births as maternal mortality, 24% of them are due to cases of unsafe abortion. To compliment this a chief in a village outside Zomba reported that in five and half months, eight young girls in his 40,000 people administrative area had died of abortion complications. So to in Mulanje where a chief reported that in 11 months, five young girls had died from unsafe abortions. The list goes on as in a small village north of Mangochi Boma 56 girls were expelled within one year due to pregnancy. According to media reports severely restrictive abortion laws, a clash between traditional cultural norms and religious ideologies, poverty, the desire for young women to remain in school and extra-marital pregnancy, are among the causes of unsafe abortions in Malawi.

Tuberculosis Control

Media reports in 2009 reveal that Malawi has about 29,000 TB cases every year and 8,000 die of the disease. According to the National TB Control Programme technical advisor Dr Daniel Nyangulu, TB remains one of the top killer diseases in the country together with malaria and HIV and AIDS. To combat this disease the National TB Control Programme has said it has embarked on a campaign to provide universal access to TB testing and treatment in the country.

According to the *World Health Organisation WHO*, Malawi only screens half of those infected with TB and the country fell short of the WHO recommended treatment success rate of 85% by at least 13%. Mr Nyangulu explains that the TB Control Programme now offers active screening at its TB testing centres and that means HIV testing is offered in combination with TB tests.

HIV and AIDS

Media reports of the year under review say HIV and AIDS in workplaces has registered a big reduction in deaths caused by the epidemic. This was disclosed by the Principal Secretary in the Office of the President Dr Mary Shawa. She said according to 2004 statistics, about 240 people were dying because of HIV and AIDS-related infections and now it's only 24 people dying each day. Shawa explained that government, realising the threat that HIV and AIDS posed to the Civil Service, it allocated two percent of Other Recurrent Transaction to HIV and AIDS workplace programme.

It has been observed that HIV and AIDS is prevalent among the youth because of several reasons such as poverty, watching pornographic materials, peer pressure, defilement and rape. All in all the Sub-Sahara region had an estimated 22 million adults and children living with HIV by the end of 2007. In Malawi about a million people are living with the virus, that's according to the *National Aids Commission*. When the epidemic was discovered more than twenty years ago, the sufferers shunned to reveal it to the public for fear of being stigmatised. It is encouraging today to see numerous people living with HIV and AIDS coming in public places and confessing they have the virus. Malawi has so far managed to reduce the national prevalence rate from 14 percent to 12.

Cholera Outbreaks Continue

It is pleasing to note that the Ministry of Health has assured the people of this country that the cholera outbreak which badly affected people early in 2009 is now under control. While cholera is easily preventable if people are hygienic in their families and communities, it can also be fatal. Dirty drinking water from unsafe sources and lack of toilet facilities are some of the commonest causes of cholera. It has also been reported in the media that diarrhoea and pneumonia vaccines will soon be introduced in Malawi. It is hoped pneumonia vaccine will first be available in 2010 and by 2012 diarrhoea vaccine will follow. Over the years the Lower Shire districts of Nsanje and Chikwawa have been focal places for cholera and diarrhoea attacks because of floods, but in 2009 Lilongwe experienced cholera attacks that claimed several lives. Consistent water shortages due to power failures both in Blantyre and Lilongwe forced people to fetch whatever water they could lay their hands on just to survive.

Beyond Belief – or not?

We cannot cap 2009 media reports without mentioning the Mulanje ‘birth stone’ and the Ntcheu lady who saw light after 22 years on a sick bed. Agnes Msolo from Mulanje District is said to have delivered a 300-gramme stone with a piece of cloth attached to it after six months of pregnancy. Experts who included doctors, geologists and cloth manufacturers said both the stone and the piece of cloth were real. There is a general consensus that Agnes might have inserted a stone in her birth canal out of desperation of having no child after eight years of married life.

And a 71-year-old woman Esther Chiwindo from Ntcheu who had been sick for 29 years and bedridden for 22 years was rescued from her ordeal by a Salima based NGO known as *Kuthandiza Osayenda Disability Outreach Kodo*. Esther has been paralysed by unknown disease since 1986 and was lying on her ramshackle bed without a mattress. After 22 years she was able to come out of her house on a wheel chair, thanks to Kodo. Esther comes from Ben Tchauya village in Traditional Authority Kwataine.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Degradation

In 2009, environmentalist and other concerned citizens continued to cry foul over the environmental degradation that is rampant in the country. The main culprit being deforestation which is fuelled by overdependence on use of firewood and charcoal. It was reported in January that firewood and charcoal selling is more than a lucrative business because there is a ready market and at the same time it does not attract any tax from the government. Chief Machinjiri of Blantyre advised government to boost rural electrification programme as the main alternative to the use of firewood and charcoal so as to curb deforestation in the country. The President's launch of the National Tree Planting Season saw a number of communities planting trees. Some observers noted that communities should not abandon but continue to take care of the trees until they mature. It is common practice that a number of organizations and communities plant trees with pomp but fail to care for them. Against this background, some organizations and individuals feel that extra care of trees from the nursery till they mature is necessary if the tree planting exercise is going to bear fruit.

The persistent electricity blackouts in the country prompted environmentalist to complain in March. It was reported that a number of households, especially in urban areas, resorted to using charcoal and firewood as a source of energy thereby increasing the demand for the items.

Kayerekera

The other controversial issue that attracted the attention of the media is the uranium mining project by Paladin at Kayerekera in Karonga. Government went ahead to justify the project contrary to the views of environmentalists, civil society and other interested parties. Much as Malawi needs a lot of Forex, environmentalists felt government should have considered the damage that uranium mining might cause to human beings and the environment in the first place.

Chia Lagoon

Press reports also disclosed the effects of climate change in Malawi. For example, it was reported that the Chia Lagoon in Nkhotakota has been affected by climate change. For a long time the lagoon has benefited people as a source of fish. Recent reports have shown that the temperatures at times go beyond the normal daily temperatures. This affects life in the Chia waters making it difficult for fish to live. Some environmentalists are looking into ways of helping the Chia revert to its former state.

Environment and the Elections

As 2009 was a year of general elections, environmentalists bemoaned the tendency of candidates to neglect environmental issues in their manifestos. One could safely say that political parties neglected environmental issues in their priorities of the 2009 campaign, a development that is worrisome especially because of the looming climate change effects.

Climatic Ignorance

Press reports have disclosed that the news about climate change in Malawi has left many people more confused than before. It is common knowledge that a number of people in Malawi are illiterate. Now the mention of climate change is not an easy concept for such people to understand. The illiterate are not the only group that does not understand climate change but some learned people have a similar problem. Environmental issues are rarely discussed therefore not too many people have the necessary knowledge to understand its consequences.

Media reports have disclosed that the change in climate has also left people in some areas of the country to wonder what is happening to seasonal patterns. For instance, people used to know or guess the rain patterns but reports indicate that this is not the case any more. Similarly people would know when to expect floods and in which areas. But recent experience has shown that even in safe upland areas floods also do occur. This has resulted in a lot of damage to people's homes and crops.

Combating Climate Change

The month of June saw Malawi commemorating the World Environmental Day. Just like other countries around the world Malawi celebrated the day bearing in mind the fact that issues of the environment are not given priority most of the time. Among other things climate change was one of the issues environmentalists took time to discuss. The Government also promised to put in place policies that will help in combating climate change. This announcement follows the call from environmentalists on the effects of climate change that are currently affecting people. Officials from government noted that combating climate change requires combined efforts from both civil society and other organisations. Among other things government wants to allocate funding to projects that would assist in the prevention of climate change. Government has also plans to put in place laws that would promote adaptation on climate change.

Njuli Quarry

Environmental reports have disclosed that people around Njuli Quarry in Chiradzulu are finding it difficult to live a normal life because of the activities at the quarry. A sad story is told of a river that dried up because of the quarry and now people cannot access clean water from this river. Similarly the residents have to live with the noise that comes out from explosions at the quarry. Activities at the quarry are also blamed for polluting the air as crops in the gardens are covered with dust. Meanwhile residents in the area are demanding that the quarry be closed because people are now at risk as some are suffering from tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases.

River Pollution

The issue of river pollution also received some coverage. Most rivers in Malawi are now exposed to a lot of waste dumping from residents in townships a thing that has left people with no option but to live with the smells from the filth in the rivers. Among other things some rivers are now dumping places for the waste from factories. Is it because residents have nowhere to take their waste? Perhaps it is high time city assemblies came up with refuse collecting points so that people avoid dumping waste in the rivers.

Karonga Earthquakes

On the waste note, Karonga in the month of December experienced very strong earthquakes which have left some people dead while leaving others homeless and helpless. Media reports faults the meteorological department of failing to detect the disaster in time. Meanwhile media reports commend government of Malawi and President Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika for declaring Karonga as a disaster area. Many well wishers including the President have visited the area and donated various items to the victims,

What to do?

In conclusion therefore, 2009 has posed serious challenges to Malawi as far as environmental issues are concerned as evidenced by the media reports. Malawi has to do something now and not tomorrow to save the environment and humanity at large. So let us all be concerned about the environment and climate change!

GENDER

The 2009 General Elections

For the first time in the history of Malawi we have a female Vice President. Mrs Joyce Banda's position as running mate for the *Democratic Progressive Party DPP's* candidate Dr Bingu wa Mutharika, did not come as a surprise because it was already speculated in the press. Mrs Banda who was formerly Minister of Foreign Affairs got all the support she needed from the voters who made sure Banda, alongside Mutharika, won with a landslide victory. Banda is the second woman to become Vice President in the Southern Africa after South Africa's Mlambo Ncuka.

Women failed to make it even during party primary elections because among other things parties were favouring male candidates. It is alleged that some female aspirants faced hostility within their parties because their leadership preferred male candidates. This also contributed the decrease in the number of women who finally contested. It should be noted that there are still other reasons like the hiking of nomination fees from K10,000 to K100,000 was also hindrance to some women. The fact that some female aspirants were not financially stable also decreased the number of women who finally contested in the general elections.

50-50 Campaign

2009 was a year of general elections and the participation of women was followed by the press. In the previous elections women were fighting for 30% of female representation in the national assembly. There are 193 seats in the Malawi Parliament. Although there was a lot of awareness women failed to reach the required 30%. It should be noted that Malawi is not the only country in the *Southern Africa Development Corporation SADC* region that failed to make it.

The SADC target changed from 30% to 50% of female representation in any decision-making positions. Member states in the SADC region agreed that countries should now be striving to reach 50% of women and 50% of men in any decision making position. That is why there was the 50-50 campaign during the 2009 May general elections.

The Malawi government and the gender organisations received some donor support for the 50-50 campaigns. Like any awareness raising activities, the 50-50 campaign got a lot of advocacy and press coverage before and after the elections. It is not a surprise that with all the support the women got the again failed to reach their goal 50%. Out of the 193 seats in the National assembly, women make only 28%.

Experience has shown that there is still a lot of work that needs to be done to change people's mindset. A number of female contestants failed to make it because they did not get support from fellow women. This clearly shows that some people out there do not feel comfortable have female leader. Similarly there is still a tendency of pulling each other down among women. If only activists manage to help in changing people's mindset on female leaders this scenario would perhaps change for the better.

Results from a National Population Census that was conducted in 2008 but released in 2009 survey have shown that women still make up more than 50% of the population. Malawi has over 13 million people. Perhaps with these figures one would expect women to use this to their advantage by voting each other into power.

Malawi failed to reach the 30 % target, but it is not the only country that failed to do so. So far only five countries in the whole SADC region made it. These are Mauritius, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia. Now to the other countries that failed to reach the target when it was at 30% one tends to wonder if they will reach the new target of 50%. This whole issue of aspiring to reach the set goal of 50% raised a number of debates among some civil society organisations. While some observers felt there should be some seats that should automatically be reserved for women so that we reach the 50%. But some however have been against the idea because they felt women should be in decision-making position on merit. So far many have not favoured this proposal as a result it was not followed during the May 2009 general elections.

Women in Parliament

Although a number of female Members of Parliament MPs are new in the August House, their participation has been greatly appreciated by some observers. In the year 2009 women contributed to the proceedings in the National Assembly though there were new in the system.

Gender activists and some observers expressed shock over the composition of the committees of the national assembly. Firstly looking at the membership of the parliamentary committees, their chairs are all from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party. As if this is not enough there is only one woman chairing a committee. This development shocked the nation because people expected equal sharing of responsibilities between male and female members of the national assembly.

16 Days of Activism

Just like the years before the Malawi nation observed the 16 Days of Activism amid reports of massive gender based violence against women. In most homes in Malawi it seems like normal for women to be abused. Men get away with all kinds of abuses in Malawi because there is a tendency of silence and respect for marriage among many Malawian women. Since the beginning of the year 2009 there have been plenty of ugly incidents in the press. Left right and centre women have suffered physical, emotional and financial abuses but have always remained silent.

Although there is an increase in cases of gender based violence in Malawi, the country still continues to get good attributes from leaders who keep saying, Malawi is a peaceful and god-fearing nation. One tends to wonder what exactly people mean when they god-fearing. In all fairness a god-fearing nation would have less acts of abuse. Similarly individuals would always question themselves before they harm others.

A number of cases of gender based violence found their way in the press in 2009 meaning acts of violence against women are still the common in society. Despite the fact that there is legislation against gender based violence, women and children continue to face various forms of abuse. Now the 16 Days of Activism also give Malawians a chance to reflect on the need to avoid violence against loved ones at all times.

Gender and Development Protocol

After months of waiting President Bingu wa Mutharika signed the SADC Gender and Development Protocol. Mutharika signed the protocol at a function that many gender activists were not allowed to attend. There had been cries from some sectors of society over Malawi's delay in signing the gender and development protocol. Mutharika has so far been praised for his signing the protocol because it shows that the country is committed to gender and development. Previously Mutharika has received awards for his work on gender and development. Mutharika also received praise from other international observers who commended Malawi for signing the protocol.

Women as Heroes

President Bingu wa Mutharika honoured Rose Chibambo, Malawi's first female Cabinet Minister by naming a road after her in Mzuzu City. Chibambo against all odds was appointed into Cabinet in the Kamuzu era. Mutharika named the road after Chibambo in recognition of her work in the one party era. But observers have noted that there are still some more women missing who should be recognised for their contributions to Malawi. 2009 reports disclosed that there are times when as a nation we remember brave men who fought for this country's freedom but women are never mentioned. Besides the fact that some of the men we call our martyrs fought alongside women, the brave women go unnoticed.

Marriage Age Bill

Much to the dismay of the gender activists Parliament in 2009 passed the marriage age bill which stated that people can be married at the age of 16 without their parents' consent. The issue raised a lot of debate among gender activists who through the media expressed shock over the members of parliament's conduct in passing this bill. Gender activists have always advocated for more education for the girl child so that they are not dependent on other people especially men. Now at 16 many girls are still in school. This is what shocked many people including the girl children who felt they were not consulted. Similarly other observers felt parliament passed the bill in haste. Against this background President Bingu wa Mutharika did not assent the bill to give room for more consultations.

CFSC Pres Statement
2010

4th January

2009 COST OF LIVING MUCH BETTER THAN 2008 AND 2007- BASED ON THE CFSC BASIC NEEDS BASKET ANALYSIS FOR THE YEAR

As far as cost of living is concerned, the just ended year was a good year, not only in terms of food availability, but in terms of the pace at which the general prices of basic commodities in the urban areas were increasing/decreasing (inflation). Although cost of living generally increased in December 2009 in all the four cities, the trend for the whole year is more favourable than in the past three years.

December 2009 Cost of Living Trend

Cost of living has increased in the month of December in all the four cities. In Blantyre, it slightly went up by 1.2% from MK51,092 in November to MK51,730 in December. Cost of basic food items rose to MK25,269. Blantyre has the highest cost of living. In Lilongwe, the average cost of basic needs went up by 3.3% from MK49,805 in November to MK51,445 in December. Cost of food was at MK25,269, which is slightly lower than Blantyre. In Zomba city, cost of living went up by 2.8% from MK45,001 to MK46,243 in December. Basic food items now cost MK23,289 on average. Mzuzu has the lowest cost of living at MK44,554, and it has gone up in December by 9.9% from MK40,542 in November. However, during the month of December, food was very expensive in Mzuzu. It was the highest among all the four cities. An average family living in Mzuzu had to have at least MK26,258 in order to meet the minimum food requirements. This high cost in food is not influenced by the price of maize because in Mzuzu, the price of maize is declining while prices of other food items are increasing. There was a shortage of sugar and cooking oil in Mzuzu during the month as a result of the just ended fuel crisis, which affected distribution of these food items to all parts of Malawi.

Urban Inflation in 2009

Despite the major events that took place in 2009 in Malawi, such as the general elections, the foreign exchange problems and the fuel crisis, this was a better year than 2008. Although, many people are struggling to find employment and others are struggling to make profits from their small businesses, and many others are still far from getting an income that would enable them to at least afford food requirements, prices of basic commodities in 2009 were rising at a more acceptable rate than last year. Analysis of a cost of living trend for Lilongwe shows that the average year-on-year urban inflation (in real terms) has declined from 39.1% in 2008 to **10.96%** in 2009. This is also lower than the 15.3% average urban rate of inflation for Lilongwe in 2007. The rate was highest at the beginning of the year in January and February (at 33.9%) and lowest in the second half of the year, especially in November at -4.23%. More details in Table 1 and Figure 1 below:

Table 1: Urban Inflation Rate for Lilongwe

Year on Year Inflation for Lilongwe (real) (%)

Month	2007	2008	2009
Jan	4	22	32.5

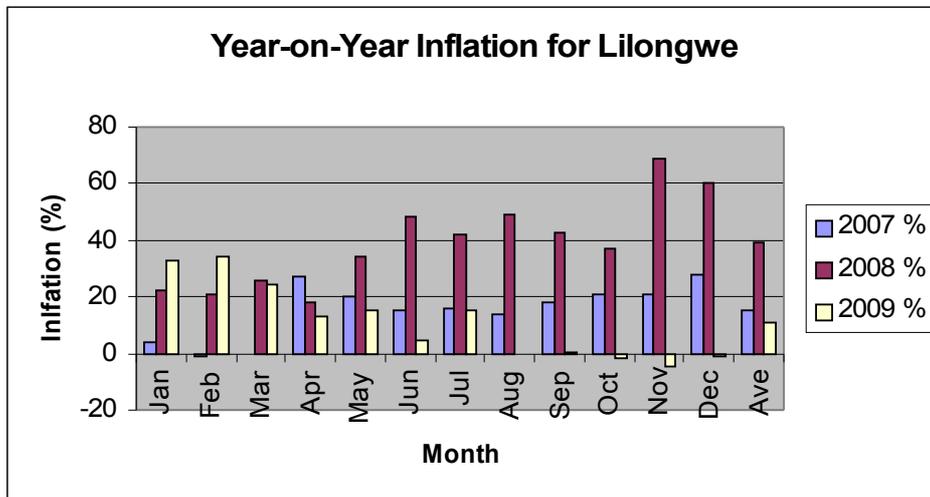
Month-to-Month Urban Inflation for Lilongwe (%)

Month	2007	2008	2009
Jan	14.3	9.3	1.5

Feb	-1	21	33.9
Mar	0	26	24.3
Apr	27	18	12.9
May	20	34	15.1
Jun	15	48	4.3
Jul	16	42	14.9
Aug	14	49	-0.1
Sep	18	43	0.2
Oct	21	37	-1.7
Nov	21	69	-4.2
Dec	28	60	-0.7
Ave	15.25	39.08	10.95

Feb	4.3	3.2	3.7
Mar	-0.2	4.4	-3.2
Apr	7.6	1.1	-8.3
May	-7	5.2	6.7
Jun	-2.3	6.7	-3.7
Jul	1.9	1.6	1.6
Aug	-1.6	3.3	-1.7
Sep	4.5	1.1	1.2
Oct	3.9	-0.7	-2.9
Nov	0.9	13.6	7.5
Dec	5.5	-0.1	3.3
Average	2.65	4.06	0.48

Figure 1: Year-on-Year Urban Inflation Rate for Lilongwe



The same trend is observed on month-to-month inflation rates for 2007, 2008 and 2009. The average month-to month urban inflation rate for the capital city in 2009 was at 0.47%, compared to 4.07% in 2008, 2.8% in 2007 and 0.2% in 2006 (See Table 1 above). Things were even much better in terms of average food inflation for the city of Lilongwe. As can be observed in [Table 2](#) and [Table 3](#) below, the Lilongwe year-on-year average food inflation for 2009 was as low as **7.24%**, compared to 61.3% in 2008 and 9.15% in 2007.

[Table 2.1: 2007 Food Inflation Rates](#)

[Table 2.2: 2008 Food Inflation](#)

[Table 2.3:](#)

[2009 Food Inflation](#)

Mnth	Food Basket (MK)	Yr-on-Yr Urban Inflation %	Month To Month Inflation	Mnth	Food Basket (MK)	Yr-on-Yr Urban Inflation	Mnth To Mnth Inflation	Month To Month Inflation	Food Basket (MK)	Yr-on-Yr Urban Inflation %	Month To Month Inflation
Jan	14,579	-5.84	4.64	Jan	20,384	39.82	Jan09		28,566	40.14	-5.46
Feb	15,645	-12.95	7.31	Feb	21,411	36.86	Feb10		30,366	48.97	6.30
Mar	15,474	-12.12	-1.09	Mar	23,033	48.85	Mar08		28,759	34.32	-5.29
Apr	17,002	27.18	9.87	Apr	21,981	29.28	Apr07		24,183	4.99	-15.91
May	14,968	9.57	-11.96	May	23,546	57.31	May02		26,050	18.51	7.72
Jun	14,933	13.15	-0.23	Jun	25,943	73.73	Jun08		24,062	2.19	-7.63
Jul	15,364	13.95	2.89	Jul	26,121	70.01	Jul09		25,003	-3.62	3.91
Aug	14,876	8.02	-3.18	Aug	26,990	81.43	Aug03		24,112	-7.69	-3.56
Sep	15,925	12.88	7.05	Sep	26,991	69.49	Sep00		24,696	-8.50	2.42
Oct	15,899	14.10	-0.16	Oct	27,755	74.57	Oct83		23,479	-13.01	-4.93
Nov	16,178	14.61	1.75	Nov	30,216	86.77	Nov87		24,135	-13.04	2.79
Dec	17,726	27.23	9.57	Dec	29,689	67.49	Dec04		25,269	-16.37	4.70
Avg Food Inflation rate for 2007		9.15	2.21	Avg Food Inflation rate for 2008		61.30	Avg Food Inflation Rate for 2009		7.24	-1.25	

Cost of Living Trend in Different Cities

During the year, Blantyre's cost of living was the highest, with an average cost of MK48, 729 per month, while Mzuzu was the least expensive city, with an average cost of living of MK39, 168 per month. Average cost of living in 2009 for Lilongwe and Zomba were MK48, 729 and MK48, 137 per month, respectively. You will see more details in [Table 3 below](#). However, in terms of inflation, Zomba had the highest average month-to-month inflation rate of 0.84% while Mzuzu had the lowest at -0.9%. The average inflation rates for Lilongwe and Blantyre were 0.47% and 0.43%, respectively.

Table 3: Cost of Living Trend by City

Cost of living trend for 2009 by City

Month	Lilongwe	Inflation Rate	Blantyre	Inflation Rate	Mzuzu	Inflation Rate	Zomba	Inflation Rate
Dec. 08	49,225		49,342		46,258		42,152	
January	49,982	1.54	50,270	1.88	50,484	9.14	43,091	2.23
February	51,812	3.66	49,743	-1.05	43,767	-13.31	43,691	1.39
March	50,159	-3.19	49,327	-0.84	45,476	3.90	95,635	-0.48
April	45,987	-8.32	47,038	-4.64	42,783	-5.92	41,672	-4.16
May	49,052	6.66	49,686	5.63	41,532	-2.92	44,715	7.30
June	47,237	-3.70	49,937	0.51	40,671	-2.07	41,353	-7.52
July	48,009	1.63	48,163	-3.55	41,271	1.48	42,918	3.78
August	47,172	-1.74	48,622	0.95	39,263	-4.87	43,730	1.89

September	47,730	1.18	49,560	1.93	42,263	7.64	45,169	3.29
October	46,353	-2.88	49,259	-0.61	41,966	-0.70	44,423	-1.65
November	49,805	7.45	51,092	3.72	40,542	-3.39	45,001	1.30
December	51,445	3.29	51,730	1.25	44,554	9.90	46,243	2.76
Average	48,729	0.47	49,536	0.43	39,168	-0.09	48,137	0.84

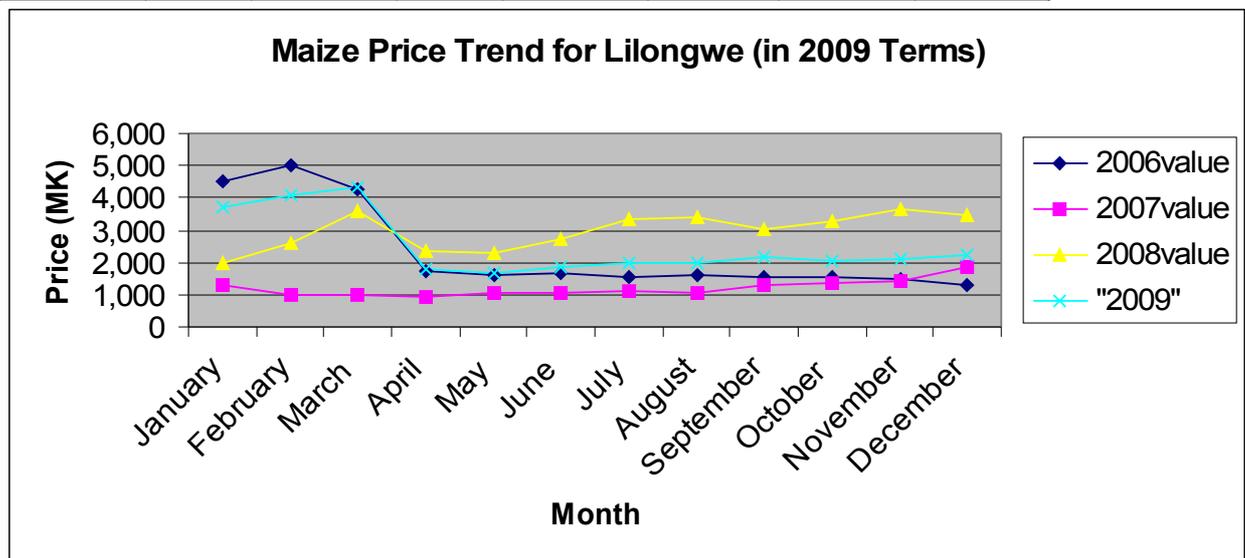
Maize Price Trend for Lilongwe

The average price of a 50 kg bag of maize was lower in 2009 than in 2008, in real terms. In Lilongwe, the average price for the bag of maize in 2009 was MK2, 491 while in 2008 it was at MK2, 978. The price of maize was highest in the months of January to March and significantly decreased immediately after harvest in April. For more details, please see [Table 4](#) and [Figure 2](#) below.

Table 4: Maize Price Trend for Lilongwe

Price of maize Trend for Lilongwe (inflated to 2009 values)

Month	"2006"	2006value	"2007"	2007value	"2008"	2008value	"2009"
January	3,015	4,510	1,000	1,270	1,780	2,001	3,725
February	3,368	5,021	775	988	2,270	2,572	4,056
March	2,840	4,242	775	1,009	3,142	3,575	4,350
April	1,179	1,734	750	951	2,063	2,340	1,785
May	1,114	1,606	850	1,063	2,020	2,271	1,663
June	1,171	1,667	850	1,062	2,450	2,736	1,844
July	1,100	1,565	890	1,103	2,860	3,350	2,000
August	1,100	1,580	825	1,026	3,072	3,409	1,950
September	1,100	1,571	1,025	1,273	2,760	3,046	2,150
October	1,100	1,558	1,092	1,357	2,980	3,292	2,050
November	1,100	1,498	1,200	1,429	3,450	3,663	2,088
December	1,000	1,285	1,600	1,872	3,350	3,487	2,225
Average		2,320		1,200		2,978	2,491



Maize Price Trend by City

The average price of a bag of 50 kg for maize was the lowest in Zomba at MK2, 145 and highest in Blantyre at MK2, 699. The average price for Mzuzu was MK2, 381 while for Lilongwe was MK2, 491. Please see details in [Table 5](#) below.

Table 5: Maize Price Trend for the Four Cities

2009 Price of maize by city

Month	Blantyre	Lilongwe	Mzuzu	Zomba
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January	4,000	3,725	3,600	2,933
February	4,000	4,056	3,900	2,907
March	4,000	4,350	3,250	2,979
April	2,292	1,785	2,140	1,333
May	1,850	1,663	1,970	2,429
June	2,000	1,844	1,930	1,736
July	2,125	2,000	1,930	1,573
August	2,125	1,950	1,830	1,675
September	2,500	2,150	2,100	2,000
October	2,500	2,050	2,070	2,200
November	2,500	2,088	1,913	2,000
December	2,500	2,225	1,939	1,978
Average	2,699	2,491	2,381	2,145

Conclusion of the 2009 yearly review

At the start of this year, the Director and all staff members of the Centre For Social Concern would like to sincerely thank you for your feedback and words of encouragement throughout the year. It has been a year of surprises and of promise. But in its early days there are also quite a number of worries, as the reading of the above will have shown. We cannot but remind all of us that we are called to work together for the common good of all Malawians, but even more especially the poorest among us. May the year 2010 deliver on the early promise of the second mandate of the present government. It is our wish that together we will find the best way forward. We at the CFSC think that it should be under the present flag, which is a symbol of hope. It is hope that is needed to make dreams a reality.

May God Bless Us All Throughout 2010.