

Malawi



KEY FACTS

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| Joined Commonwealth: | 1964 |
| Population: | 15,263,000 (2009) |
| GDP p.c. growth: | 0.5% p.a. 1990–2009 |
| UN HDI 2010: | world ranking 153 |
| Official language: | English |
| Time: | GMT plus 2hr |
| Currency: | Malawi kwacha (MK) |

Geography

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|------------|---------------|
| Area: | 118,484 sq km |
| Coastline: | none |
| Capital: | Lilongwe |

Malawi is a long, narrow south-east African country shaped by the dramatic Rift Valley, with Lake Malawi a dominant feature. It is bordered by Mozambique to the east, south and south-west, by Zambia to the north and north-west, and by the United Republic of Tanzania to the north and north-east. There are three regions: the northern (capital Mzuzu), the central (capital Lilongwe) and the southern (capital Blantyre).

Main towns: Lilongwe (capital, pop. 922,900 in 2009), Blantyre (commercial centre, 760,100), Mzuzu (187,200), Zomba (seat of parliament, 105,300), Kasungu (64,400), Mangochi (54,500), Karonga (44,100), Salima (42,700), Nkhotakota (34,700), Liwonde (31,200), Rumphu (29,800), Nsanje (28,200), Mzimba (27,800), Mchinji (27,100), Balaka (25,200) and Dedza.

Topography: Malawi's deep Rift Valley trench is on average 80km wide. Lake Malawi occupies two-thirds of the Rift Valley floor. It feeds the Shire river, which flows south to join the Zambezi. Plateaux rise west of the trench. The northern region is mountainous, with the open Nyika Plateau, escarpments, valleys and the forested slopes of Viphya Plateau. The central region, the main agricultural area, is a plateau over 1,000m high. The southern region is low-lying apart from the 2,100m high Zomba Plateau and the 3,002m Mulanje Massif, the highest mountain in south-central Africa.

Climate: The tropical climate is tempered by altitude and cooler on the high plateaux. There are three seasons: a cool, dry season from mid-April to August; a warm, dry season from September to November; and a rainy season (receiving 90% of precipitation) from December to April. Most of the country is well watered, receiving 800–2,500mm of rain, with some areas in the high plateaux receiving 3,500mm p.a.

Environment: The most significant environmental issues are deforestation; soil degradation; and water pollution by agricultural run-off, sewage and industrial wastes.

did you know?

Malawi is one of seven landlocked Commonwealth countries, all of which are in Africa, though it does have a border with Lake Malawi of more than 750km.

Malawi has the lowest per capita income in the Commonwealth, but its economy has grown at more than 7% a year over 2005–09.

Vegetation: The varied climate encourages a range of vegetation. Zomba Plateau, the country's oldest forest reserve, has Mulanje cedar, cypress and Mexican pine. There is dense tropical rainforest on the lower ranges of the Mulanje Massif; higher up grow ericas, helichrysum, giant blue lobelias, species of iris, staghorn lily and (unique to Malawi) Whyte's sunflower. Forest covers 36% of the land area, having declined at 1.0% p.a. 2000–07. Arable land comprises 32% and permanent cropland 1% of the total land area.

Wildlife: Animals include leopard, hyena, jackal, hyrax, porcupine, red duiker, bushbuck, reedbuck, klipspringer, baboon, mongoose, vervet monkey, serval, civet, genet, tree frog. More than 219 bird species have been recorded, including the white-tailed crested flycatcher, fiscal shrike and wailing cisticola, and 11 species are thought to be endangered (2002). Birds of prey include the augur buzzard, the eagle owl and the long-crested eagle.

Transport: There are 15,450km of roads (45% paved) and 797km of railway. Rehabilitation of the war-damaged railway line to the Mozambican port of Nacala was completed in 1997. Plans were announced in 1999 for private-sector management of Malawi Railways, leading to eventual privatisation.

Lilongwe International Airport handles the bulk of domestic and international traffic; the second international airport is Blantyre Chileka.

Society

KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 129
 Life expectancy: 54 years
 Net primary enrolment: 91%

Population: 15,263,000 (2009); Malawi is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa but with only 19% living in towns, one of the least urbanised; 50% lives in the southern region, only 11% in the north; growth 3.2% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 40 per 1,000 people (56 in 1970); life expectancy 54 years (41 in 1970).

The largest ethnic group is the Chewa, whose ancestors came from the Congo; the other main groups are Nyanja, Lomwe, Yao and Tumbuka.

Language: Chichewa is the national language and widely spoken. English is the official language. Chinyanja, Chiyao and Chitumbuka (in the north) are major languages.

Religion: Mainly Christians (Protestants 55%, Roman Catholics 20%); Muslims 20%.

Media: *The Daily Times* and *The Nation/Weekend Nation* are dailies; *Malawi News* is weekly, and *Boma Lathu* monthly in Chichewa.

Radio is the principal source of information for most Malawians; state-owned Malawi Broadcasting Corporation provides national radio stations and there are several private radio stations. The government launched Television Malawi in 1999, initially reaching the main population centres.

Some 5% of households have TV sets (2006). There are 2 personal computers (2005) and 47 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

Education: There are eight years of compulsory education starting at age six. Primary school comprises eight years and secondary four, with two cycles each of two years. Some 36% of pupils complete primary school (2006). The school year starts in January.

Tertiary education is provided at the University of Malawi (including the College of Medicine, Bunda College of Agriculture and Malawi Polytechnic), Mzuzu University (since 1999) and University of Livingstonia (2003). The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 51:100 (2007). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 86% (2008).

Health: 80% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 56% have adequate sanitation facilities (2009).

Malaria, dysentery, bilharzia, measles, tuberculosis and hepatitis are common. There has been a successful campaign against leprosy. Infant mortality was 69 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (205 in 1960).

Since the 1990s, the incidence of HIV/AIDS has been among the highest in the world and AIDS treatment continues to make very heavy demands on health resources. In 2009, 11.0% of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

Communications: Country code 265; internet domain '.mw'. Mobile phone coverage is good in urban areas. Internet connection is available in main towns and there are some internet cafes.

There are 11 main telephone lines and 157 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, John Chilembwe Day (15 January), Martyrs' Day (3 March), Labour Day (1 May), Kamuzu Day (14 June), Republic Day (6 July), Mothers' Day (October), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Religious festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday, Easter Monday and Eid al-Fitr/end of Ramadan.

Economy

KEY FACTS 2009

GNI: US\$4.2bn
 GNI p.c.: US\$280
 GDP growth: 7.3% p.a. 2005–09
 Inflation: 11.5% p.a. 2005–09

Overview: At independence in 1964, Malawi was one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. It was further disadvantaged when civil war in Mozambique strangled its export trade for over a decade, and when afflicted with long periods of drought, for example between 1991 and 1994, and in 2002. Yet it achieved substantial growth from the 1960s, based on agricultural exports, and especially tobacco.

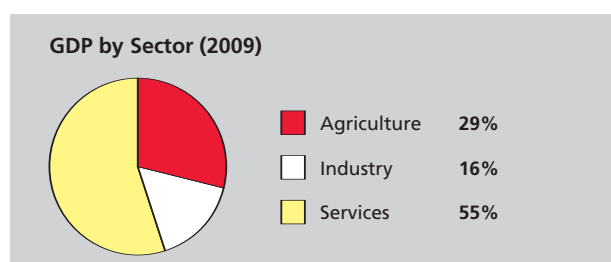
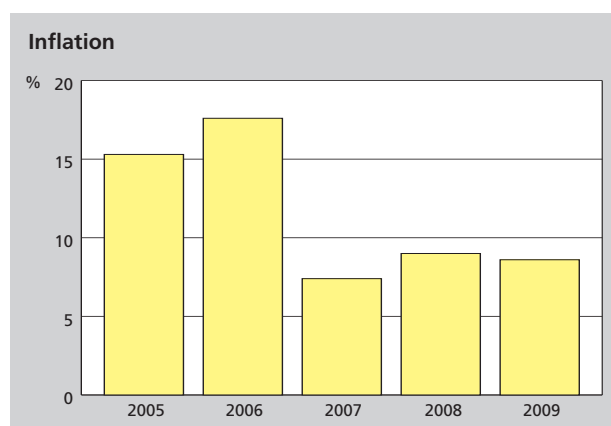
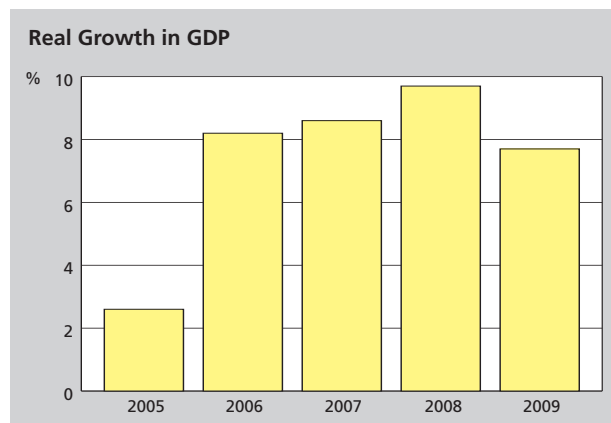
However, the country's dependence on agricultural commodities has meant that there have been periods of slow or negative growth, when commodity prices have been depressed or international demand subdued, or in periods of drought. At these times foreign debt grew far quicker than GDP and exports, and debt servicing became a heavy burden.

After one such period in the early 1990s, the government embarked on economic reforms, including stronger fiscal discipline, public spending cuts, greater accountability and a programme of

privatisation, and was supported by a series of World Bank structural adjustment loans and IMF stabilisation programmes. In the 2000s, there was investment in some light manufacturing and especially in the production of clothing and textiles for export to the USA.

These reforms led to a gradual recovery, with better agricultural performance, higher commodity prices (notably for tea) and increased export earnings. However, during 2000, with a poor maize harvest, weaker tobacco prices and the growing burden on the economy of the loss of skilled workers and health care costs of HIV/AIDS, growth slowed and then in 2001 the economy shrank by more than 4%. It recovered in 2002 in a climate of persisting drought and generally maintained good rates of growth, becoming strong during 2006–11, and largely unaffected by the world economic downturn of 2008–09. In 2006, the country qualified for debt relief under the IMF/World Bank Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.

Trade: Exports of goods and services account for 23% of GDP (2008). Principal exports are tobacco (the largest by far), sugar, tea, coffee and cotton.



Constitution

Status: Republic with executive president
Legislature: National Assembly
Independence: 6 July 1964

The present constitution was approved by the National Assembly in May 1994 and promulgated in May 1995. It provides for a multiparty democracy on the US model. It curtails the former sweeping and absolute powers of the president, contains a bill of human rights (although it retains the death penalty) and protects the independence of the judiciary.

The head of state is an executive president, who is elected every five years for a maximum of two terms by direct universal suffrage. The president is also head of the cabinet, whose maximum size is 24 members. Legislative authority is vested in the unicameral National Assembly, whose 193 members are directly elected for a five-year term by universal adult suffrage.

The Senate was scheduled to follow the local elections that were eventually held in November 2000, but in January 2001 the National Assembly approved a constitutional amendment that removed the provision for a senate.

Politics

Last elections: May 2009 (presidential and parliamentary)
Next elections: 2014 (presidential and parliamentary)
Head of state: President Dr Bingu wa Mutharika
Head of government: the president
Ruling party: Democratic Progressive Party

Presidential and parliamentary elections were held in May 1994. Bakili Muluzi won the presidential election, obtaining about one-third more votes than his nearest rival, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda. His party, the United Democratic Front (UDF), obtained the largest number of seats in the parliamentary elections, but not an overall majority.

In September 1994, Muluzi reshuffled his cabinet and broadened its political composition, appointing ministers from the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) and other smaller parties; this gave the new government the majority needed to push its legislative programme through parliament. Chakufwa Chihana was nominated to the new office of second vice state president. The Malawi Congress Party (MCP) remained the strongest opposition party.

There was a further cabinet reshuffle in May 1996, following Chihana's resignation in protest at alleged corruption in government. Chihana remained leader of AFORD, but the party was divided over his resignation, some members with ministerial posts resigning and others opting to remain in office.

In the run-up to the 1999 elections, an opposition alliance of the MCP and AFORD put forward Gwanda Chakuamba as presidential candidate with Chihana as his running-mate. When the elections were finally held in June, Muluzi won the presidency with 52% of votes cast while Chakuamba secured 45%. In the National Assembly, the UDF won 93 seats, the MCP 66 and AFORD 29, a result that gave the opposition alliance a parliamentary majority. However, by August 1999, with the support of four independents,

Muluzi gained control of parliament and his position was subsequently strengthened by a succession of by-election victories.

Following a poor harvest in 2000/01, a combination of severe floods and drought devastated food crops in 2001 and by 2002 the country faced food shortages. Meanwhile, its strategic grain reserve of some 167,000 tonnes had been sold off, and by mid-2002 more than 500,000 people were estimated by the World Food Programme to be in need of food aid, increasing to a peak of 3.6 million people in February 2003, after which the new harvest brought recovery to most parts of the country.

Speculation that Muluzi would decide to stand for a third term at the 2004 election, requiring an amendment to the constitution, ended in July 2002, after a narrow majority of parliamentarians had voted against such an amendment. Then in April 2003 Dr Bingu wa Mutharika was confirmed as the UDF's presidential candidate; Muluzi appointed four AFORD members as cabinet ministers and AFORD agreed to support the UDF candidate at the next election.

In a close contest in May 2004, Mutharika (UDF) won the presidential election with 35.9%, John Tembo (MCP) coming

second with 27.1% and Chakuamba (Mgwirizano Coalition) third with 25.7%. In the simultaneous parliamentary elections MCP took 60 seats, UDF 49, Mgwirizano Coalition 16 and UDF's ally AFORD six. Though both the ruling UDF coalition and the MCP claimed to have won presidential and parliamentary elections, Mutharika was sworn in as president and formed a government while the opposition mounted violent protests. In the succeeding weeks the president secured the support of first Chakuamba and then the National Democratic Alliance. However, in February 2005, with the support of majority of his cabinet, Chakuamba and a number of MPs, he left the UDF to form a new party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

In the presidential election in May 2009, Mutharika received 66% of votes, a substantially higher share than in 2004. His main challenger, MCP leader Tembo, took 31%. In the parliamentary elections, the ruling DPP won 114 seats, the MCP 26, the UDF 17 and independents 32. Before the elections former president Muluzi made a further attempt to run for the presidency. The electoral commission ruled that he was not eligible because he had already served two terms, the maximum allowed by the constitution. Muluzi appealed this decision in the High Court, which upheld the



History

Malawi was once called *Maravi*, or 'reflected light' – perhaps a reference to sunlight glittering on Lake Malawi. Archaeological excavations have revealed evidence of early settlements around Lake Malawi, dating back to the late Stone and Iron Ages.

The area is mentioned in early Arab writings and in Portuguese writings of the 17th and 18th centuries. The pre-colonial Maravi Empire was a loosely organised society covering an expanse of territory well beyond present-day Malawi and encompassed first the Chewa and later the Tumbuka ethnic groups. The Yao from the north and the Ngoni made successful invasions during the 19th century. The Yao became involved in the commercial slave trade, acting as agents for the coastal Arabs. David Livingstone visited Lake Malawi (then called Lake Nyasa) in 1859 and was followed in succeeding decades by British missionaries, traders and planters. This was an unsettled period, with widespread slave raiding.

In 1891, Britain declared the country the British Protectorate of Nyasaland. In 1953 the UK federated Nyasaland with Northern and Southern Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe). The Federation was vigorously opposed and, in 1958, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda returned home from Ghana, at the invitation of the Nyasaland African Congress, to lead the fight against it. The government declared a state of emergency in 1959 and arrested Banda and other members of Congress. Following his release in 1960, a series of constitutional conferences was held, as were elections. Internal self-government was achieved in 1963, the Federation was dissolved and Malawi attained independence and joined the Commonwealth on 6 July 1964, with Banda as prime minister.

In 1966 Malawi became a republic, with Banda as president. A new constitution gave the president, who was also commander-in-chief of the armed forces, widespread powers. He held a

number of ministerial portfolios, including External Affairs, Agriculture, Justice and Works. Malawi became a one-party state, with Malawi Congress Party (MCP) as the sole party.

The following decade saw widespread political unrest, much of it arising from splits and rivalries. Pressure for democratic reform intensified at the end of the 1980s. The one-party government held out for a period: thousands of arrests were made in the first half of 1992, among those arrested was trade union leader and multiparty democracy campaigner Chakufwa Chihana. Strikes, student demonstrations and political riots were suppressed by police, in the course of which at least 38 people died.

Western donors supported the campaign for multiparty democracy by suspending non-humanitarian aid to Malawi in May 1992. The reformers joined forces in a Public Affairs Committee (PAC) – an umbrella body of religious and political groups calling for change. The Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), chaired by Chihana, and the United Democratic Front (UDF), chaired by Bakili Muluzi, were formed in September 1992 and joined the PAC. The government then established the president's Committee for Dialogue and agreed to hold an internationally supervised national referendum on the one-party system.

Over 78% of the adult population voted in the referendum on 14 June 1993, and 63% supported a multiparty system. The constitution was accordingly amended. Banda also announced an amnesty for all Malawians imprisoned or exiled for political activities. Laws passed by the National Assembly in November 1993 committed Malawi to human rights including freedom of expression. The Constitution (Amendment) Act introduced a bill of rights, the title of life president (which had been assumed by Banda in 1971) was dropped from the constitution and a number of restrictive laws were repealed.

electoral commission's ruling. He later made an appeal to the Constitutional Court, which also upheld the ruling.

International relations

Malawi is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, African Union, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, Non-Aligned Movement, Southern African Development Community, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Traveller information

Local laws and conventions: Drug taking and smuggling (including the purchase of cannabis) are illegal and penalties can be severe. Buying uncut precious stones is also illegal.

Handshaking is the usual form of greeting. Modest dress should be worn, especially by women who must ensure that their legs and shoulders are covered.

Business meeting appointments should always be made and the use of business cards is customary. Business is conducted in English. Kwacha International Conference Centre in Blantyre is Malawi's only dedicated conference centre, with seating for up to 500 people. The best months for business are May to July and September to November. Business hours are Mon–Fri 0730–1700.

Immigration and customs: Visas are not required for British, Australian, Canadian and US citizens. Passports must be valid for six months from the date of entry. Visitors will need to ensure they have a return air ticket.

Single parents travelling with children should have documentary evidence of parental responsibility.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate will be required by visitors arriving from infected areas.

It is recommended that visitors copy the photopage of their passport and keep their passports and documents in the hotel safe.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left. Car hire is increasing and chauffeur-driven cars are available. Visitors may

drive in Malawi on an international driving permit for up to one year. The wearing of seatbelts is compulsory. Drink-driving is illegal.

Air Malawi provides regular links between Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu, Makokola and Liwonde.

There is a national rail service run by Central East African Railways which runs between the main towns.

Malawi has a good bus network between the major towns and luxury coaches connect Blantyre to Lilongwe and Mzuzu. Taxis are in short supply and need to be booked.

Travel health: Visitors must ensure they have comprehensive medical insurance, as facilities outside urban areas are limited and for serious medical treatment medical evacuation may be necessary. Visitors will need protection against malaria, together with insect repellent and suitable clothing to discourage bites; bilharzia and rabies are also present.

All prescription medicine should be packaged in their original containers, clearly marked to avoid confusion. It is advisable to bring a sealed, personal emergency medical pack, including syringes.

All water used for drinking, brushing teeth and making ice should be boiled. Bottled water is available. Powdered or tinned milk is advised.

Money: Credit cards are not widely accepted in Malawi. Travellers cheques are recommended. Money can be changed at airports, banks or bureaux de change. US dollars, pounds sterling, euros and South African rand are the easiest to change. There are very few ATM machines even in tourist areas. Banking hours are Mon–Fri 0800–1400.

There were 742,000 tourist arrivals in 2008.

Further information

Government of Malawi: www.malawi.gov.mw

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

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