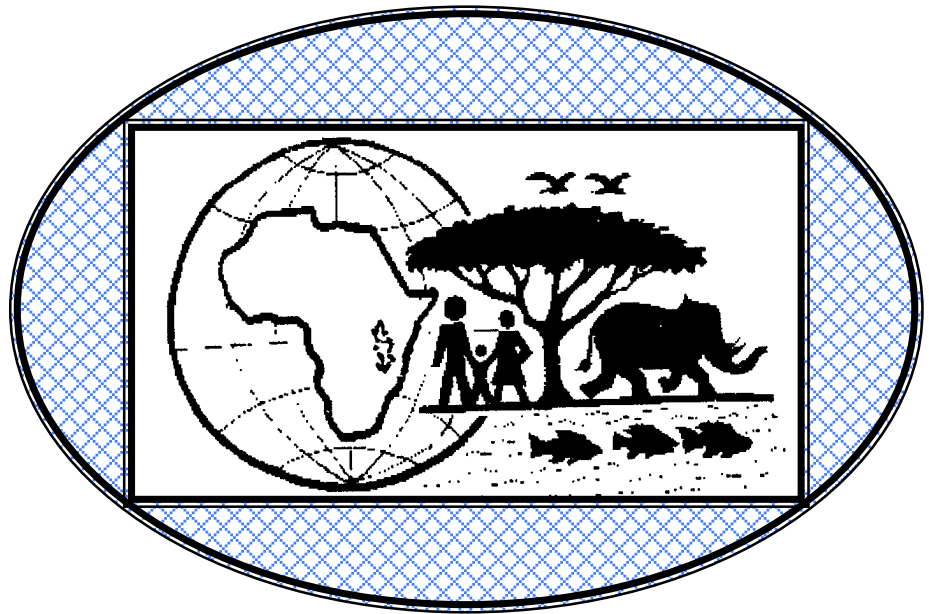


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**AUGUST
2011**

**News clippings
with analysis
From the
Major newspapers
in Malawi**

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LIST OF NEWSPAPERS REVIEWED

Daily Times

The Weekend Nation

The Sunday Times

Malawi News

The Guardian

Nation on Sunday

The Nation

PREVIEW

The devaluation of the Kwacha by 10% means that the country's monetary officials have made a deliberate downward adjustment to the country's official exchange rate relative to other currencies. In other words, devaluation is a reduction in the value of the Kwacha with respect to those goods, services or other monetary units with which the Kwacha can be exchanged.

There are two implications for a currency devaluation. On the one hand, devaluation makes a country's exports relatively less expensive for foreigners. There are some positive results from this perspective as devaluation can help to achieve a better balance of trade. For instance a country like Malawi constantly experiences a trade deficit (when imports exceed exports). The devaluation of the Kwacha in this case will reduce the price of Malawian products abroad and increase the price of foreign products on the domestic markets. The anticipated positive outcome of this is an increased demand for Malawian products in other countries due to lower prices which, in turn, can mean increased production and more jobs at home. As a result, this may help to reduce the country's trade deficit (discouraging imports).

On the other hand, however, currency devaluation also has negative consequences in the sense that we Malawians holding the recently devalued Kwacha have lost international buying power. Our ability to purchase goods or services from other countries has diminished i.e. the devaluation of the Kwacha makes foreign products relatively more expensive for domestic consumers. Additionally, in extreme cases, if our government has artificially devalued the Kwacha, at a later stage, it may be forced to purchase the Kwacha (our own currency) with foreign reserves, depleting its own assets and ability to pay public debt. The Russian 1998 currency crisis is a good example of this.

POLITICS

Finally the ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* filled some of the vacancies in its *National Executive Committee NEC* in the month of August. After the party had fired its vice president Joyce Banda, it appointed Goodall Gondwe to fill the position. In what could be termed a new development, the party has rocketed in Ken Zikhale Ng'oma as its Campaign Director. Zikhale was the *DPP's* first General Secretary who ditched the party to join Gwanda Chakuamba and only came back some months ago. Perhaps the most painful casualty is that of Bintony Kumtsaira who got the chop from the *NEC*. Kumtsaira was the Secretary General of the ruling *DPP*. His firing was unexpected. Like they always say, one day in political circles is too much and anything can happen. Well it did, Kumtsaira has just been fired from the *NEC*, to imagine that some months ago he was one of the most respected men in the *DPP* and now he is just a member, such is the game of politics.

Meanwhile press reports have further indicated that the *DPP NEC* endorsed Peter Mutharika as the party's presidential candidate for the 2014 general elections. Peter, who is a younger brother of president Mutharika, has always remained mum on his political positions. As some political experts have warned the *DPP* should learn to lead by example by involving its grassroots and every member in making such major decisions. This is what democracy is all about, the voice of the majority without fear or favour. But as evidence has shown the campaign for Peter Mutharika started immediately after the incumbent president was sworn in for a second term.

Still on the *DPP* some Members of Parliament in August asked for the firing of Government's Chief Whip Dr George Chaponda, Government's spokesperson Vuwa Kaunda and Presidential Spokesperson Dr Hetherwick Ntaba. On several occasions the observers have blamed the people that are surrounding president Mutharika for wrongly advising him. These three *DPP* gurus have defended any utterances from the president even when it was not necessary to do so. Viewers of the state owned television have had to watch one of the three almost on a daily basis where they were defending, refuting or commending some issues. It is against this background that the concerned MPs want these removed from their positions.

The month of August could better be described as a month of the State of the Nation Addresses. Malawians witnessed a number of addresses from president Bingu wa Mutharika. Surprisingly most of the things the president said were either defensive or accusatory, when attacking others. In his last address Mutharika pegged the July 20 demonstrations aftermath on some Civil Society leaders. The president blames the deaths of the nineteen people who died during the fracas that engulfed the nation in the last weeks on *CSOs* leaders. People are still finding it difficult to understand why it all turned out to be a day of looting and bloodshed when the demonstrations were meant to be peaceful.

President Bingu wa Mutharika stunned the nation when he dissolved the entire cabinet leaving people with more questions than answers. Proposals to have the cabinet trimmed have been coming from various sectors of the society especially at this time when economically things seem not to be progressing. The Malawi Cabinet numbers 42 ministers and deputies. Some people have welcomed the development and have since advised Mutharika to trim the Cabinet once he decides to hire a new one. As others have noted Mutharika should not try to appease those that surround him by giving them ministerial positions, instead he should appoint people on merit so that he can have a lean and efficient Cabinet. Observers actually questioned the inclusion of some faces that were seen not to be performing in the old Cabinet.

DPP officials were at it again when they infested the airwaves of the state owned television MBC defending the First Lady Callista Mutharika's monthly salary. The issue of Mrs Mutharika's salary came under fire after it was disclosed that she would be getting K1.3 million for doing charity work as a Matron of Safe Motherhood Programme in Malawi. The government shamelessly removed Vice President Joyce Banda from handling the same programme. Surprisingly Joyce Banda never got any salary for doing this work. For this reason civil society has demanded the removal of the First Lady from government's pay roll because charity work should have no salary especially when it is coming from tax payers money. In fact this is one of the demands that civil society have asked President Mutharika in the petition that was sent to the State House on 20th July.

Not all politics reporting is about the ruling *DPP*, there was also media coverage on the *United Democratic Front UDF*. In August Atupele Muluzi held some political rallies in the Northern Region where he informed party followers that Malawi needs young leaders. The youthful Muluzi, who is a lawyer by profession, has shown interest in contesting the 2014 general elections although some old *UDF* gurus have shown reservations. There have been calls from various sectors of the society, that old people in leadership positions seem to have failed us, and it is time for youngsters to have their turn. Could this be the beginning of a new chapter for Malawi's leadership?

ECONOMY

Just when most people expected the gap between imports and exports to increase, reports have shown that it is shrinking. For a long time there has been talk to make Malawi an exporting country but recent information has shown that this dream will not be easily achieved. In so many instances president Bingu wa Mutharika has urged Malawians to produce high quality goods that can compete on the international markets but at present it seems Malawi is not at that level yet. Some experts have noted that the more imports Malawians are making the more Forex that is being lost. Recent reports have shown that Malawi is still has prolonged shortages of Forex even at this time when the tobacco season is still on.

Economic reports have shown that at present the cost of basic commodities has risen. According to reports most of the goods have gone up despite not being effected by the newly introduced 16.5% VAT in the 2011/2012 national budget which is the first ever zero deficit budget. Government introduced 16.5% VAT on some of the basic necessities like milk, newspapers and bread. Already Malawians have experienced a sharp increase in all these commodities. In its monthly survey on the cost of living, the *Centre for Social Concern CFSC* has also revealed that the price of basic needs have gone up. Surprisingly not too many households' incomes still remain the same despite the ever-increasing prices of commodities.

The *Malawi Economic Justice Network MEJN* in August spoke against the continued use of ministerial cars by some ex-ministers. In the same month president Bingu wa Mutharika exercised his powers and dissolved the entire Cabinet amid pleas and demands from various sectors of the society to have the Cabinet trimmed. Some organizations have wondered why these ministers are still clinging to ministerial perks at a time it has been made clear there are no ministers in Malawi. Still on the same issue press reports have indicated that Malawi has saved K11 million in just two weeks due to the absence of ministers. Taxpayers in Malawi must heave a sigh of relief with such savings.

The spate of violence that we have witnessed in recent months has in a way affected the business atmosphere in Malawi. The hours that shops and offices were closed people lost out on business. Similarly some foreign investors were on the edge due to the protests that led to business disturbances. As some economic experts have warned any instability in the business environment is not good for a country like Malawi. The business environment should not to be volatile because this can easily frustrate potential investors.

FOOD SECURITY

President Bingu wa Mutharika had a rude awakening in August when *The Hunger Project* announced they had stripped him of an honorarium on food security. Mutharika was expected to get a sculpture and K8 million at an event that was to take place later in the year. As reported the withdrawal of the award came after a series of criticisms both local and international on governance issues. It is not a secret that the Mutharika administration has made grave errors in as far as governance is concerned and therefore no one can question the *Hunger Project's* decision. But instead of receiving the news with remorse government officials have actually defended Mutharika by saying even if they strip the award, there is still food security in Malawi.

The 8th Agricultural fair was opened in the month of August at the Chichiri Trade Fair Grounds in Blantyre. The fair attracted companies that deal with agricultural produce and other related things. Press reports have shown that a number of agricultural organizations and companies share notes and experiences during the fair. The theme of this year's agricultural fair was Value Addition for Increased Economic Returns.

Reports on food security also took time to mention about local food recipes. As writers have observed some local dishes are slowly disappearing from the tables of many Malawians. But as nutritionists have disclosed the shunned local dishes are always rich in nutrition. An example is that of natural local plants like *Luni* and *Chisoso*. Not too many families have these natural vegetables on their dining tables. Similarly *mice*, which are a delicacy in some parts of Malawi and are very rich in nutrients, are being shunned by many. It is against this background that some experts are advocating for more of these local foods in families.

Shocking news about maize continued in the month under review. Press reports have disclosed that Malawi is leading in informal maize markets in the entire Southern Africa. There have been reports that Malawians are more into informal maize exports out of all the six countries in the region. The country has recorded bumper harvests in recent years resulting in a surplus for farmers. With all this maize surplus farmers at times have nowhere to sell and have resorted to exporting it to neighboring countries. According to *Famine Early Warning Systems FEWS*, in a space of three months from April to June Malawians have informally exported close to 40 million metric tones of the cereal to neighboring countries. In past months traditional leaders and other stakeholders also commented on the informal trading of the staple grain and they complained that if this trend continued it would spell doom for the nation.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Chairperson of the *Episcopal Conference of Malawi ECM* His Grace Bishop Joseph Mukasa Zuza is perhaps among the most talked about people at the moment in Malawi. Without fear or favour the man of God spelt it as it is in his sermon at the national reconciliatory prayers in Blantyre. The Prayers were organized by the clergy with the aim of reconciling the Malawi nation after a series of bad vibes from all corners of the country in recent months. The Bishop did not mince his words when he advised those in authority to stop threatening the civil society and the media. In his sermon Zuza reminded people that Malawi chose democracy in 1993 and as such every citizen has a duty to preserve that. A number of individuals and organizations have commended Bishop Zuza for his sermon which came at the right time when things are slowly sliding into dictatorship. As some writers and observers have said the onus is on those that are in authority.

On the same day the National Reconciliatory Prayers were being held, leaders of civil society organizations announced that they had postponed the national vigil that was expected to take place on August 17. The vigil had been planned to again show that the people were still not impressed with government as many of the issues that civil society want to be addressed have not been tackled by government. The postponement of the vigil gave more time to both government and civil society to indulge in dialogue and to map the way forward. Memories are still fresh of how the July 20 peaceful demonstrations ended in chaos. Perhaps the organizers of the vigil did not want a repeat of the July 20 demonstrations where some people looted and damaged goods and property. Meanwhile plans are underway for another action in the form of strikes and vigils on 21 September.

First Lady Callista Mutharika stunned the nation when she poked her nose into issues that have nothing to do with her office. Madam Mutharika in plain words told *Non Governmental Organizations NGOs* to go to hell at one of her charity works meetings. Mrs Mutharika told the *NGOs* to stop confusing people from the villages with the fuel shortages because all they need is food which they have in abundance. She went on to say that villagers do not need to march for fuel because they do not need it. Callista's utterances have irked some *NGOs* who feel by telling them to go to hell Mrs Mutharika has crossed a line. Meanwhile some observers have asked the First Lady to stop commenting on issues that have got nothing to do with her office instead she should concentrate on her charity work.

The *Malawi Human Rights Commission MHRC* in August disclosed that its findings on the July 20 demonstrations have shown that the police indeed used live bullets. Nineteen people, most of whom are the youths, died during the fracas that resulted from the fights between the police and people who had gone for to participate in the peaceful demonstrations. Although some of the people that died are reported to have had bullet wounds the police still insisted they never used live bullets because no officer was issued with a bullet. *MHRC* has strongly asked government to look into the issue.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIVES

Members of the bereaved families that lost their relations in the 20 July demonstration aftermath have expressed disappointment over president Bingu wa Mutharika's remarks about the departed souls. In one of his speeches Mutharika is reported to have carelessly said that those that died during the chaos that resulted from the demonstrations died in vain and are thieves. Culturally Malawians are known for respecting the dead and Mutharika's comments are totally strange looking at his position. According to press reports Mutharika should have been the first one to give his condolences to the families but instead he chose to ridicule them. It is against this background that the families are asking the Malawi leader to leave the victims to rest in peace. President Bingu wa Mutharika has of late been very careless with words a thing that has raised tempers of some people who feel offended by his utterances.

Some observers have received the news that Malawi was ranked 22 on the *Mo Ibrahim Political and Governance Index* with mixed reactions. This follows the results that were released recently where Malawi is on number 22 out of 53 African countries. The observers feel the results are not a true reflection of the situation in Malawi on governance. Evidence has shown that the data was taken from 2002 to 2009 and things have drastically changed in the past two years. On the other hand the government has welcomed these results with pride saying they are the best and only show that Malawi is performing well.

Some traditional leaders are still of the view that they will have more powers and recognition only when the senate is back. Chiefs in Malawi seem to be slowly losing their value and are therefore asking for the reinstatement of the senate because they feel it will enhance their powers. Of late there have been complaints from some chiefs who feel magistrates are settling cases that are meant for the traditional leaders leaving them with no work at all. Meanwhile the same chiefs have also asked government to consider enactment of the Recall Provision. There have been proposals to have the Recall Provision back in the Constitution but the *Malawi Law Commission* dismissed such proposals. Evidence has shown that a number of people want the Recall Provision back in the Constitution and presentations were made at the *National Constitutional Review Conferences* that were held some years ago.

The press announced that police officers got a thank you from government in the month under review. Officers are reported to have received K60,000 each as a token of appreciation for a job well done. The hefty allowances have come at a time when a number of people are bitter with the way the police conducted themselves during the July 20 demonstrations in the name of providing security to the marchers. There is evidence that the same police that received a thank you from government beat up marchers and shot and injured some people and killing others.

EDUCATION

In a bid to improve the dwindling standards of education the ministry responsible announced it was going to close all tertiary institutions that are below standards. In the past the ministry was in a campaign that saw some private primary and secondary schools being closed after inspection. Although this exercise caused some debates as some concluded it was targeting private schools only other commended authorities for a job well done. This time around government has announced that all tertiary institutions that are below par will be shut down. Tertiary institutions should therefore take the announcement seriously.

The *Malawi Schools Certificate of Education Examinations MSCE* are now behind us, and candidates are patiently waiting for the results. It is good to note that this year's *MSCE* examinations have been labeled as the best in terms of the way they were administered. The media revealed that there were fewer cases of cheating. In this regard the *Malawi National Examinations Board MANEB* has applauded the 2011 *MSCE* examinations as successful. In recent years a number of scandals have been associated with these examinations ranging from leakages way before examination dates and high cases of cheating.

Education experts disclosed that it is now time to review the secondary school curriculum. Talk about the review has been there for some time and finally it seems there is light at the end of the tunnel. Others have proposed that the curriculum should indeed be changed so that it follows the trend of present events. A lot of changes have happened both on the local and international scene and therefore the curriculum should include such developments where necessary.

It has now been over six months since the fight for academic freedom started. There have been disruptions of learning and teaching at some of the public universities. The cry for academic freedom has taken a different twist at present with students demanding the removal of University Council. In the meantime students at the other constituent colleges are either studying or writing examinations. The students have been staging a vigil at the university office and civil society leader Benedicto Kondowe has joined the beleaguered students. Meanwhile the courts have stopped the *Council of the University of Malawi* from closing the college. Earlier on the council had ordered that all students should leave the campus but the courts saved the latter's day. The situation at the college has been going on for some time now raising fears that there is too much being wasted on the academic freedom impasse.

HEALTH

Drug shortages in government hospitals seem to be going from bad to worse. One can easily conclude that the situation has now reached a crisis point. If reports in the press are anything to go by, there is an acute shortage of drugs in all government hospitals. As if this is not enough patients have to bring their own drips when admitted at some of the public hospitals. Although health ministry officials are downplaying the shortages, the truth of the matter is accessibility of drugs is going down every minute in pharmacies at government hospitals. Meanwhile reports have indicated that patients at some public hospitals are being told to buy drips and drugs from pharmacies.

There was news that gave relief to some Malawians in the health sector. Government announced it had managed to get more *Anti Rabies Vaccines ARVs*. There has been an outcry over the shortage as some hospitals were running with no cure for rabies. A number of cases have been reported and now that the *ARVs* are available it has caused some kind of relief among hospital personnel. Government came under heavy attacks in recent years for failing to have the *ARVs* in stock. The attacks came after it was reported that the country recorded some cases of patients that died after being bitten by rabid dogs.

The issue of *Traditional Birth Attendants TBAs* resurfaced in the press in August. To have or not to have *TBAs* this is an issue that has refused to die for a long time. It is very difficult to find the exact information on whether *TBAs* have completely stopped practicing because it seems some are still operational. This is evidenced by reports of *TBAs* in areas like Chitipa where they boasted to have been assisting women in childbirth. Some Malawians have difficulties accessing health facilities so the other option is the use of *TBAs*. Following government's ban on the *TBAs* some traditional leaders have since introduced fines to those that are still in the practice.

It sounds bizarre but it is the reality on the ground. To imagine that some men are denying male doctors to examine their wives and test them for cervical cancer could be laughable but this is more and more common and women could be at a greater risk of the deadly disease. Media reports have shown that although the disease can be prevented and treated when it is at an early stage, men in some areas cannot stomach the idea of a man checking their wives for cervical cancer. This situation has been attributed to the increasing cases of cervical cancer. At the same time some experts have also pinned down early sex as one of the reasons for increased cases of cervical cancer.

ENVIRONMENT

Some experts have revealed that young people should not be left out in any environmental issues. According to reports when the youth are included in any policy making forums on environment they start understanding the issues at an early stage. Like they say teach them while they are young some environment experts would want the youths' involvement in environment management. According to Lisa Vickers, the ambassador from the United States of America in Malawi, environmental management is a challenge that is affecting many youths in Africa. A young population who are well equipped on how to manage the environment means a well-safeguarded future on natural resources and the environment.

In a related development some youths in Malawi are part of the Caravan that is going around countries in the fight for climate change justice. Reports have shown that some Malawian youths have joined 200 young people from all over the world and they will be traveling in some parts of Africa as they campaign for climate change policy. At the end of the day the world youths on a caravan are expected meet in Durban, South Africa. It is disclosed that as they pass through some of countries, including Malawi, the youths will be giving concerts with the aim of encouraging the youths on the environment.

The charcoal selling issues also appeared in the press in the month of August. It seems to date there are no clear rules on charcoal vending. It is common knowledge that many households use charcoal as a source of energy and therefore the sellers are assured of a ready market. In the absence of other reliable forms of energy in Malawi many households resort to the use of charcoal which is readily available. It is against this background that despite any efforts to have the charcoal trade stopped, the sales continue. It is further reported that there is lot of money that is being made from charcoal. More and more trees are cut to cater for the production of charcoal leaving the mountains and hills bare.

Environmental journalists have welcomed the statement made by faith leaders in Malawi on the environment. The leaders who met at the lakeshore district of Mangochi in the month of August came up with a communiqué on climate justice. Of late many people have come to realize that the clergy should be included in any climate and environmental issues. Again the voice of faith leaders has worked wonders in political circles and in the same spirit environmentalists have welcomed every effort by the clergy on climate change and the environment. If they made it work in many other subjects like politics for sure they can also move mountains in the environment circles.

GENDER

Columnists in August went a step further in encouraging women to go an extra mile in inspiring for great things. In a Malawi set up the last thing that many women look up for is marriage and having children. Once a woman becomes a mother other things like upgrading their careers become almost a nonstarter. But all this is slowly but surely changing because many women are not upgrading their careers despite being mothers and wives. This also calls for all women to dream big in their professions. According to some female Trade Union members from Ghana the time is over for women to shy away from training and education opportunities.

A very interesting article came out in the press in the month under review. Not too many people take issues of equality as their cup of tea and that is a fact. But as the article says there are some men who are in the forefront in the fight for gender equality. These are the kind of species that is very rarely found among the men. Those that are in the know how recognize that the fact that a few men are into equality is a good sign. This is a positive development towards achieving gender equality. As some observers have noted women cannot work in isolation in the fight for equality, therefore the organization *Men for Gender Equality Now MEGEN* should be commended.

Analysts have noted that the composition of the some decision making entities like Parliament have not been to the advantage of women. The fact there are a handful women in the National Assembly has also contributed to the small number of policies on women's issues. Even at government hierarchy there are only a few women. This has had an impact on issues on women and gender policies. During decision-making meetings there are a few women who can voice women's needs. Because of their small numbers policies on gender have suffered for a long time. An example is that of gender related bills that have not been discussed in parliament for a very long time.

We still have only four years to 2015 there is no hope that Malawi will achieve the *Millennium Development Goals MDGs* on gender equality. Although Malawi adopted the eight millennium goals and vowed to fulfill them by 2015 chances still remain slim. Among other things writers on gender issues have disclosed that Malawi as a nation should start by educating more women if we are to achieve 50% of women in decision making positions. Evidence has shown that only educated women have ambitions to make it to higher positions in a society.