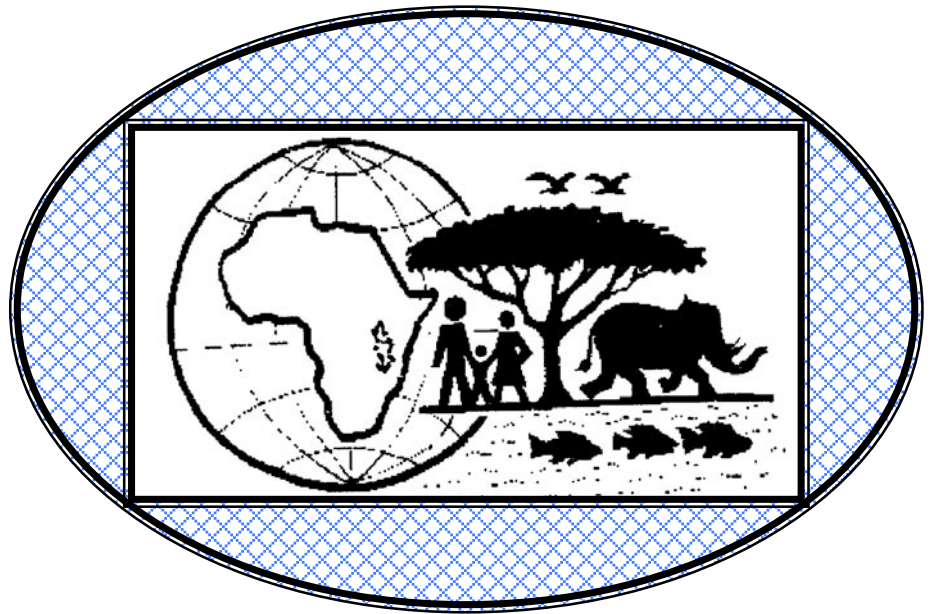


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**SEPTEMBER
2011**

**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

Congratulations are in order to those that have been hired in the new lean Cabinet. There are a few new faces and the same old *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* members of parliament. From a 42 member cabinet to 32.

President Bingu wa Mutharika released details of the Cabinet when everybody least expected. A day after the ruling *DPP* had lost Rumphu Central constituency to the *Alliance For Democracy AFORD*, a party that was on its death bed. The timing of the release of a new Cabinet was all good for the *DPP* because it switched people's attention from the loss of the bye elections to the new Cabinet.

After weeks of debating and speculation about who was going to be included in the new Cabinet, Mutharika came up with a list of ministers and deliberately removed his vice Mrs Joyce Banda.

A leaner cabinet is what various sectors of society had been looking forward to. Opposition parties had been asking Mutharika to trim the Cabinet because economically Malawi should not have a bloated number of ministers especially at this time when we are struggling financially. Listeners to independent radio called Zodiak Broadcasting Station also shared the same sentiments. Some even proposed that deputy ministers should be scrapped.

On the other hand civil society leaders, in their July petition which they sent to President Mutharika, also asked him to address the option of a lean Cabinet. Therefore it was not surprising to hear some civil society leaders commend Mutharika for a leaner Cabinet.

A closer look at the Cabinet one only sees a handful of new faces. Many are the same old faces. There have been worries among some who feel the old faces were part and parcel of the old Cabinet and therefore have nothing new to offer. By dissolving the Cabinet people expected a new team of experts in various fields. The new Cabinet members will only be judged by their works after some time.

POLITICS

The ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP* dazzled many people when it publicly congratulated the newly launched *People's Party PP* in September. Just some weeks ago the *DPP* was busy trying to frustrate each and every move to have the *PP* registered. Vice President Joyce Banda went to greater heights to have the *PP* registered. The registration of the *PP* did not just happen without some court visitations. After a series of frustrations from both government and other opposition political parties, the *PP* got their mandate to be one of the many parties that are there in Malawi. Now to have the *DPP* congratulate the Vice President's party is very questionable. Some people have actually said the *DPP* is doing this to save face.

Meanwhile some political analysts have said that there are signs of fear of the newly launched *PP* among *DPP* members. This observation has come about after some cabinet ministers organized a press briefing with the aim of ridiculing the *PP* and its leadership. Among other things the senior ministers asked vice president Joyce Banda to resign from her position. Just when people expected *DPP* officials to find ways of gaining back the people's confidence, the party's leadership is busy castigating Joyce Banda and her *PP*. What a waste of airtime on state radio and television.

Some opposition political leaders have expressed shock over president Bingu wa Mutharika's use of threatening words like war. In one of his speeches the Malawi president warned his critics that he is ready for war. While some political leaders find it hard to understand why the president is all of a sudden threatening to go to war, his advisers are of the contrary view. Presidential adviser Dr Hetherwick Ntaba has shamelessly defended Mutharika saying the president never meant actual war but war on poverty. Whatever this means!

After some weeks without ministers, president Bingu wa Mutharika appointed a relatively smaller Cabinet. Mutharika named a 32 member cabinet at a time when people were asking for a leaner Cabinet. Previously Malawi had 42 ministers. Even those that Mutharika has labeled as his enemies came in the open to congratulate him for coming up with a leaner Cabinet. But as is always the case some observers are not too happy with the allocation of ministers in certain ministries. An example is that of Dr Ken Lipenga who is at the helm of the Finance ministry. Lipenga is a well known public speaker, a linguist and very good at literature, should have been given another ministry such as information or tourism. Similarly others have noted that the composition still shows the same old faces with a handful of new faces.

Still on the same issue of Cabinet president Bingu wa Mutharika deliberately removed his deputy the vice president Mrs. Joyce Banda from the list of cabinet ministers. Mutharika, who has made himself Minister of Agriculture and Commander in Chief of the Malawi Army, never gave the Veep any position in the Cabinet a thing that has left some people wondering why Mrs Banda continues to suffer at the hands of the same government that ushered her into power. It is not a surprise to see Mutharika and Joyce Banda's working relationship falling apart because past experience has shown that Mutharika in his first term of office also had problems working with Cassim Chilumpha the then Vice President.

It has been the same old story in the *Malawi Congress Party MCP*. Some members of the oldest party still do not get it right when it comes to democracy. They are still living in the dark ages of ruling with an iron fist. The *MCP* expelled its legally elected Secretary General

Chris Daza for openly saying he will contest for the position of the party's president. The only crime that Daza committed was to have ambitions that would see him challenge the incumbent leader John Tembo. But experts have since told the *MCP* leaders that the firing of Daza is illegal because the position of Secretary General is an elected post. Daza was elected to this post at the party's convention and therefore a few individuals cannot fire him.

It seems other trouble is also brewing in Malawi's *MCP*. Sosten Gwengwe, one of the young and intelligent Members of Parliament of the party, who was also *MCP*'s spokesperson on financial matters in the National Assembly, ditched the party in September. Gwengwe, who had been in *MCP* president's bad books for some months joined the ruling *Democratic Progressive Party DPP*. Gwengwe's defection seems very ironic to the *MCP* because the young MP comes from the same district as the party's president John Tembo where most MPs are from the once mighty *MCP* and it is considered to be one of the strongholds of the party. To add salt to the wound Gwengwe's constituency is just adjacent to Tembo's.

Recent turn of events in neighbouring Zambia have given some politicians food for thought. The victory of opposition leader Michael Sata in the just ended general elections in Zambia should act as an inspiration to other political leaders in Malawi. With the many blunders that the incumbent ruling party in Malawi has made, the opposition for now should keep their houses in order in readiness for the 2014 general elections. As some political commentators have said, Malawians need a united opposition and new leaders. It should be noted that at present there are squabbles and endless in fighting and division in the main opposition political parties in Malawi.

Atupele Muluzi son to the former president Dr Bakili Muluzi announced in September that he is going to stand as president in the next general elections. The young Atupele who is a member of parliament in his home district Machinga was once leader of the Legal Affairs Committee of parliament. He is a trained lawyer and this is his second term of office in the National Assembly. He made it known that he has ambitions to become the first young person to vie for the presidency in Malawi. Atupele's announcement comes at a time the *United Democratic Front UDF* is trying to mend the party. It is not known what the other gurus in the *UDF* will say.

ECONOMY

The effects of devaluation will continue to be felt among Malawians in the years to come. Press reports have disclosed that many shop owners who rely on imported goods have now raised their prices of commodities due to the devaluation of the Malawi Kwacha. Their argument is that they have lost their buying power as they are now gaining less when they change Malawi currency into other currencies. It is not a hidden fact that prices of goods have increased drastically in recent months. While this is happening many employees are still underpaid making one wonder how they are making it.

The *International Monetary Fund IMF* made it clear that one of the conditions for its resumption of aid programme for Malawi is to devalue the Kwacha further. Calls for the devaluation of the Malawi Kwacha have been in the press for some time. But like any other issues various economic experts have given in their views and opinions on the matter. Even President Bingu wa Mutharika has been against the devaluation of the Malawi currency. But he eventually swallowed his pride and the Malawi Kwacha was devalued by 10 % which the *IMF* felt is not much.

Some trade experts have warned that continued unrest in the country is not good for the Malawi nation. The current atmosphere is so volatile that even some foreign businesses are not so sure about what is going to happen each passing day. This has been a season of demonstrations and vigils and in a way these have affected the business environment. On some days when vigils and demonstrations took place some business operators have had to close their premises for fear of damages. That fear will always haunt people as long as the civil society and government continue with their wrangle.

Still on the same issue of business the press have disclosed that the continued scarcity of foreign currency has also affected some foreign investors. Economic reports say that the situation is scaring some investors away for fear of what they will repatriate to their countries of origin. As experts have noted foreign investors have problems to repatriate because of the shortage that has been there for some time now.

Civil society organizations that were advocating for a no to the signing of the *Economic Partnership Agreement EPAs* have all the reasons to relax because the Malawi government is still not decided on the issue. Press reports have disclosed that Malawi is still not making any commitment. There have been calls by various civil society organization to ask the Malawi government not to sign the *EPAs* in their current form. According to government officials there are a number of countries that have not signed the *EPAs* and negotiations are still in place over the issue.

FOOD SECURITY

As the next farming season gets closer issues of government's subsidy programme continued to fill the pages of newspapers in recent months. Concerns of how fertilizer is distributed came have been in the press ever since the programme started. There are worries among some recipients who always complain the farm inputs reach them at a wrong time. When it is time for fertilizer the farm input is not available. Again some people have complained about how beneficiaries are identified.

On the same issue, the fact that there is a shortage of foreign currency in Malawi has also affected the delivery of fertilizer. Companies that are assigned to supply fertilizer in Malawi are at present reported to be having problems with to purchase the commodity due to forex scarcity. Reports have further disclosed that only 20% of the required amount of fertilizer is all suppliers have managed to source. As media reports have put it at the same time last year suppliers had delivered over 40% of the fertilizers. This only shows that forex shortage has affected the purchase of subsidy fertilizers this time around. It is not known what will happen when the rains start and farmers need their fertilizers. Every farmer is hoping that the farm input will be available when they need it most.

Food security reports have shown that there is plenty of food in Malawi although we are approaching the lean period. In the months of December to March normally that is the time some areas run out of food. But this year the situation is better because there is plenty of maize in the country. According to the *Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee MVAC* Malawi's food picture for Malawi at present is very good. *MVAC's* findings further describe the situation at present as favourable because Malawi still has 1.2 million metric tonnes of maize surplus. Meanwhile retail prices of maize are reported to be lower than was the case same time last year.

Media reports on food security disclosed that maize export licenses are available and are for free. Ministry officials in the Trade and Industry Ministry announced that those that have sufficient maize for export and consumption should do all the procedures and get the license from the ministry of trade. Of course those that are selling the grain outside Malawi without legal permission have been cautioned by traditional leaders. A case in mind is that of Chitipa where locals were selling their maize to people from Tanzania because they had no where to sell it within Malawi. But as the ministry officials have disclosed licenses are available for free. It is reported that after 3 months one has to renew the maize export license.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Muslims around the world celebrated Eid-ul-fitr in the month of September. The Malawi Muslim community also took part in the celebration across the nation. The main event took place in Mangochi where various speeches were made. Muslims the world over go for a one month fast in the month of Ramadan and at the end of the month is when they celebrate with a big feast.

Still on the same issue of Muslims, the press has disclosed that there have been cries from some quarters in the religion's circles that the present government is sidelining them. According to reports it seems some people are not happy with the fact that there are not as many Muslims in the Cabinet and other higher positions. There is no Muslim among the principle secretaries and other higher offices and therefore they feel sidelined. But government spokesperson Patricia Kaliati has defended the government saying there are some Muslims in the Cabinet and therefore there is no need for one to worry.

Although there are trainings all over the nation on conflict resolution, the many arguments that are surfacing in Malawi at present surely need people to use the skills acquired. Reports have shown that civil society leaders and government at present seem not to be good partners and one can safely say the dialogue team is not helping to ease the situation. Almost on a daily basis Malawians have to listen to either sides blasting the other. Civil society leaders announced that they had pulled out of dialogue talks only to announce that they are prepared to come back.

It is evident that even among the civil society leaders there is no unity. Divisions are emerging and it is obvious to observers that the CSO leaders are not fighting for one course. This was literally seen during the not so successful 21 September national wide 3 day vigils. Some of the leaders made it clear before the proposed date of the vigils that they would not take part in the 3 day vigils. During the 3 days people were expected to stay away from work for the entire 3 days. But as it was to be press reports only disclosed that there were no vigils on the remaining 2 days because some people got warnings from the government that they would be fired if they stayed away from work.

Still on people's daily debates is the homily president by Bishop Joseph Mukasa Zuza at the national Reconciliation Prayers a month ago. Bishop Zuza is being praised for spelling it as it is in his sermon at the national prayers. In the present of president Bingu wa Mutharika, Zuza told the nation that each and every person is responsible for the current situation in Malawi. The Bishop went on to say if we continue to point fingers at other we only in a way accusing ourselves. Meanwhile press reports have shown that Zuza has the blessing of the clerics and the entire Catholic community.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

When rules are made there are always some few individuals who deliberately go against them. The government changed the school calendar so that some traditional assignments like initiation ceremonies can be done without interfering with children's education. When school opens children should be able to go to school. But to anyone's surprise some traditional leaders in Machinga kept children away from school as a new term began.

Human rights experts in September noted that ex-prisoners are finding it hard to get employment. It is reported that some prisoners have at times special skills and therefore can be employed. At the same time prisoners have excelled in their studies in many spheres and their employers should give them a chance. While this could be true there seems to be a problem with employing ex-prisoners as they are discriminated against. But as some officials in the labour ministry have said prisoners should not be discriminated against and have rights just like anybody.

Still on the same issue of labour the *Malawi Council for the Handicapped MACOHA* in September also asked employers to employ people with disabilities. This plea comes after reports had shown that there is a tendency of sidelining people living with disabilities. Just like any Malawians people living with disabilities also have a right to employment.

Whatever it is that is causing the fire in Malawi at the moment is not known. Businesses have been lost to fires that gutted Malangalanga market, Blantyre and Lilongwe Flea Markets in September. We have witnessed a lot of fires in recent times but to date some of the causes of the fires are not known. Government has accused civil society of causing fires in the markets just to get to the vendors who in the end should be angry with government. Civil society leaders and some opposition party leaders have also been victims of such fires. Reports show that Reverend Mc Donald Sembereka's house in Balaka caught fire after unknown people threw a petrol bomb into the house. Two cars belonging to an independent radio station *Zodiak Broadcasting Corporation ZBS* were also torched in the same style. As some observers have noted there is more than what meets the eye.

A woman in Lilongwe startled the nation when she burnt to death her own newly born baby. Just when people expected mothers to be happy with the birth of their babies, the Chilinde woman acted contrary to expectations had other ideas. She killed her own child to the displeasure of the residents of the high density location in the Capital. Such barbaric behaviour is a strange story among Malawians and this is perhaps why the Chilinde residents took the law in their hands and beat the woman. Reports have further indicated that the lady is in police custody.

EDUCATION

The delay in releasing the results of the Standard 8 and Form Two *Primary School Leaving Certificate PSLCE* and *Junior Certificate Examination JCE* respectively caused some debates among several stakeholders. When government officials changed the school calendar, which saw the first term of a school year starting in summer in the months of September or October, many people assumed all classes would commence at the opening of the first term this was not the case. It is against this background that some stakeholders have asked the government to be serious and release the examinations.

Finally the *Malawi National Examinations Board MANEB* released the 2011 *JCE* and *PSLCE* examination results. The results have been very impressive because there has been an increase in the percentage of those who have passed. Reports have shown that 66.43% pass rate for *JCE* and 68% pass rate for *PSCLE*. As usual some observers have condemned *MANEB* for the late release of examinations which they say is not in line with the new school calendar. Government secondary schools had to start without Form 1 and 3 as students were waiting for the examination results.

The Ministry of Education in the month under review gave a warning to private universities in Malawi that it will revoke their licenses if they do not meet the set standards. While admitting that the private sector plays a vital role in complimenting government's efforts in offering university education, there are standards that have to be met. The set standards include syllabuses that meet the development goals of Malawi. At present there are plans to introduce 6 more public universities across the nation but as officials in the ministry responsible have said these will again not be enough because of the increasing demand for university education.

Some teachers in the urban areas have received a directive from the Ministry of Education with a pinch of salt. In September reports have shown that some teachers are afraid that by telling them to teach all subjects government is trying to get rid of the teachers. Although some teachers specialized in teaching certain subjects the education ministry still wants them to teach all the subjects. The situation has raised fears among some teachers who feel government is deliberately targeting them so that it gets rid of them. But officials have assured the teachers that the new directive is only meant to avoid laxity among some teachers.

HEALTH

Shortages of drugs in public hospitals have not only affected those on Anti Retroviral drugs only but also epileptic patients. This is the case because reports show that there are no epileptic drugs in public hospitals. According to the umbrella body for people living with disabilities the *Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi FEDOMA*, the situation is critical and needs urgent attention. Reports further show that there have been no epileptic drugs in government hospitals for six months. Now epileptic patients have to buy the drugs in pharmacies at K4,000 per month. For those that cannot afford this amount it means they are living with little hope of getting better.

The health sector has also been hit hard by the erratic supply of electrical power. Not a week passes without a power failures. Much as household power failure is becoming part of life as the sole supplier of electricity the *Electricity Supply Commission of Malawi ESCOM* is failing to cope with the demand for power by consumers, the fact that the problem is also affecting hospitals is deplorable. A recent report that a mother lost her newly born baby at *Mzuzu Central Hospital* because of a blackout have shocked many. For sure the situation can be avoided easily.

Circumcision though it is a secret topic in Malawian society, is slowly becoming a hot issue among men. Health reports have indicated that circumcision reduces the risk of contracting HIV. Surveys have shown that circumcised men were less likely to get the virus than uncircumcised ones. East Africa is well known for circumcision and it is not even an issue to see one go for this minor operation. In Malawi certain religions and tribes circumcise their male children but the practice has not been embraced by other tribes and religions. Meanwhile *Auction Holdings Limited AHL* is encouraging its male staff to go for circumcision to reduce the spread of HIV.

For some time now there have been debates on abortion among various stakeholders. Some human rights experts have noted that there is a misunderstanding on the current abortion law. In its present form the law does not completely bar women from seeking abortion but only restricts provision of such services. This means that there are no such clinics in Malawi. According to experts abortion is not illegal in Malawi because the law only gives room for abortion when the pregnancy is a threat to one's life. Although this is the case reports further indicate that over 800 people die annually due to unsafe abortions. Evidence has shown that though services are restricted some people still offer it anyway.

ENVIRONMENT

Authorities in Machinga District have come up with ways of doing away with charcoal burning and selling. Police in the district do not tolerate any sales of charcoal. It is now a crime to trade in charcoal even when it is bought somewhere and brought into the district where it is also not allowed. The law enforcers are so strict that even cars moving through the district are not being allowed to carry bags of charcoal. Other districts also need to come up with any kind of initiatives to deal with deforestation. In this regard the efforts by officials in Machinga should be emulated by other communities.

Water as a natural resource is a free gift from God and as such man is in charge of this unique resource. With the dry season many areas are either receiving low supply of water or no water at all at certain times of the day. The Southern Region has had problems of water shortages for some time now. According to Dr Emmanuel Fabiano, University of Malawi Vice Chancellor, water resources need to be managed and it is the duty of all stakeholders to do so.

Environmental reports in September indicated that women are more affected and poorly prepared to adapt to climate change. This is because things that are hit by climate change affect the women directly because of their social roles in a community. Experts have shown that agriculture has been hit by climate change. There is much evidence to show that more women contribute to agriculture than men. Therefore, any changes in the agricultural field resulting from climate change will definitely affect women directly.

Malawi celebrated a tourism week in the month of September. Talk of tourism in Malawi is perceived to be for foreigners and the rich, but the ministry responsible is making all efforts to change such perceptions. All natural resources like game reserves and national parks need patronage not only from foreigners but locals as well. There have been many campaigns to attract Malawians to visit the Lake and many beautiful places like the nature sanctuary in the Capital City, but evidence has shown that not too many people are keen to see animals in the natural habitat.

GENDER

Thanks to the *Common Market for East and Southern Africa* meetings that were held in Malawi in September some vital points were raised for the whole of Malawians to hear. If a country does not empower women it cannot develop. Press reports have shown that countries that do not have the active participation of women in any developmental work are still living in poverty. In numbers women in Malawi form more than half the population on. Therefore, if all the women, even those in the rural areas were empowered issues of poverty would at least minimize.

Earlier in the year some experts complained about gender bills not being tabled and passed in the National Assembly. Since 2009, when a new parliament was ushered into power, Malawians have witnessed years of many political bills being passed in parliament with no consideration for other equally important bills like gender bills. Some controversial bills like the amendment of Section 46, the Injunction Bill and Flag Change Bill were passed with haste at the expense of gender bill and other bills of national interest. Meanwhile female members of parliament from South Africa noted that Malawi is lagging behind on women laws. According to the MPs who visited Malawi in September with fewer women's laws Malawians still have a lot of work if the country is to achieve some of the goals in the *Millennium Development Goals MDGs*.

Although talk about equality has been in the press for some time now, there are still some areas that need to be looked into. As the World Bank has put it women farmers should also be supported the same way men are. In many cases organizations have only supported male farmers. As the World Bank officials have noted if women farmers are supported the production of maize would go up by 11%. There you have it women's efforts should be supported so that they contributed positively to the development of the nation.

As Muslims were celebrating the feast of Ramadhan in September there was a call for employees to respect women from this religion. Press reports have shown that some employers have problems with Muslim ladies putting on their head scarves and long dresses at work. It is against this background that Muslim leaders are asking for more respect to female Muslim employees. Women from this religion around the world have been faced with resistance from school or even work place on their dressing. A case in mind is that of France where people proposed that female students should not wear head scarves also known as a *Hijab* in school.