

Country profile

Zambia

World Vision

GEOGRAPHY

Zambia is a landlocked country in southern Africa, about one-tenth the size of Australia. Like its neighbours Malawi and Zimbabwe, Zambia lies on an undulating plateau. It is dotted with lakes and covered by forest, grassland or marshes, depending on the amount of rainfall. The Zambezi River, after which the country is named, flows over the Victoria Falls and is a major tourist attraction.

PEOPLE

Zambia's population of 11.3 million has been growing, although many Zambians are losing their lives due to the HIV and AIDS crisis. There are 73 different African ethnic groups, as well as small numbers of Asians and Europeans. Close to 40 percent of the people live in urban areas, making Zambia one of the most urbanised nations in Africa. The official business language of Zambia is English. Local official languages include Bemba, Lozi, Nyanja and Tonga. Many Zambians belong to Christian churches, while many retain traditional beliefs. There are small groups of Hindus and Muslims.



Map courtesy of The General Libraries
The University of Texas at Austin.



Mothers and their babies get health checks and disease prevention tips from trained staff at this World Vision mobile clinic.

HISTORY

The Portuguese established a trading mission in the late 18th century and were the first Europeans in the area. In 1851, the Scottish missionary explorer David Livingstone sailed up the Zambezi River to the Victoria Falls. Forty years later merchants of Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company followed him, seeking minerals and cheap labour. From 1891, this company ruled the territory. In 1923, control was transferred from the company to the British Colonial Office. Copper became the biggest industry when deposits were discovered in the late 1920s.

Africans, lacking a voice in their country's government, formed the African National Congress (ANC) in 1951. Despite their opposition, pressure from the white minority led to federation with Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (now Malawi) in 1953.

Zambia became independent in 1964, with Kenneth Kaunda as President. In 1972, Zambia formally became a one-party state. Riots in 1990 eroded support for the government, and an attempted coup further weakened its standing. Multi-party elections have been held since 1991.

ECONOMY

A colonial history, disease, debt and mismanagement has transformed Zambia from one of the world's largest copper producers and potentially one of the continent's richest countries, to one of the world's poorest. At independence, the new government was able to improve living standards while copper prices were high. However, when demand for copper fell dramatically in the 1970s, Zambia faced serious problems and resorted to heavy borrowing.

Zambia relies heavily on international aid which accounts for 53 percent of the national budget. However, the country qualified for \$3.8 billion of debt relief in 2000, and received a further \$7 billion of debt relief in 2005. Since then, Western donors have praised Zambia's economic growth to above 5%, increased foreign investments, and anti-corruption campaign.

Agriculture provides the main source of income for 85 percent of the population. The main subsistence products are corn, manioc, sorghum and millet. However, most farmers have small plots and produce barely enough to feed their own families. Many men leave the farms to seek employment in urban areas, leaving their wives and children to look after the fields.

LIVING CONDITIONS

In the countryside, people live in thatched mud or burnt brick houses and because of poor roads, many lack access to a range of services. In the towns, poor families live in slums and squatter settlements, and try to earn a living as street traders or labourers. Seventy percent of urban dwellers, but only 28 percent of rural dwellers, have access to safe drinking water. Charcoal and firewood are the main household energy sources, so there is concern about too many trees being cleared.

Maize is the staple food, ground into meal and made into a thick porridge. Basic food prices have increased so much that many people cannot afford what they need. In rural areas, people often go hungry between February and May, when food stores are empty and the next crop is not ready for harvest. Droughts have reduced crop yields and Zambians have suffered through the Global Food Crisis.

Government spending on health and education has decreased due to economic problems, yet the need for these services continues to grow. Easily prevented diseases like diarrhoea, malaria, tuberculosis and measles are common and are exacerbated by poor nutrition. The high incidence of HIV and AIDS is having a huge impact on all facets of life in Zambia and there are hundreds of thousands of orphans.



These sponsored children are supported in their education with new school equipment. World Vision has also helped construct a new classroom block, benefitting classmates and the community.

Comparatively speaking...		
CATEGORY	ZAMBIA	AUSTRALIA
Population	11.3 million	20.9 million
Urban population (as % of total)	35%	89.1 %
GDP per capita (PPP US\$)	\$630	\$34,923
Population living on less than \$2 a day	87.4 %	0
Population with sustainable access to an improved water source	59 %	100%
Adult literacy rate (% age 15 and above)	male – 86.3% female – 74.8%	male - 99.0% female - 99.0%
Net primary enrolment ratio	76%	100%
Life expectancy at birth		
One-year-olds fully immunised against measles (%)	86%	93%
Adults living with HIV/AIDS (% age 15-49)	16.1%	0.02%
Under-five mortality rate (per 1000 live births)	110	6

United Nations Development Programme. 2009, *Human Development Report 2009*, Oxford University Press, New York.

EDUCATION

Around 95 per cent of primary-aged children in Zambia are enrolled at school, but many do not get past grade four. Schools lack basic equipment and many teachers have little formal training. Government cutbacks have led to the reintroduction of fees, depriving the poorest children of the opportunity to learn to read and write.

Unfortunately, even for Zambians who are educated, steady employment is difficult to find in a depressed economy. Unemployment rates for young people in urban areas are extremely high.

The conflicts in neighbouring Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have brought waves of refugees across the borders. There are over 40,000 refugees from Angola and over 60,000 refugees from the DRC living in Zambia.

WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN ZAMBIA

- works with communities to develop primary health care programs including maternal health care, immunisations, and the training of health care workers
- trains farmers to increase crop yields, improve crop storage, and care for the environment.
- encourages women and men to explore other ways to generate income
- improves access to quality education and involves communities and partners skilled in improving reading and basic maths to help school children enrol and stay at school.

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