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Editor's note

This week, Zambia AIDS Law Research and Advocacy Network warned that 85 percent of Zambians still don't know their HIV status. One wonders then how the experts have determined that Zambia's HIV prevalence rate stands at 14.3 percent. As one wonders about the figures of malaria cases – considering that many remote areas often run out of malaria tests. This week, we were also reminded that malaria mortality has fallen by 66 percent in Zambia. Well, not according to the figures I have just seen from the United Nations. Granted, certain areas suffer from a lack of statistical data – but others have too many. The data are produced by Zambia, donors, NGOs or other experts – often based on different methodologies – making it rather confusing to come up with authoritative trends. Even for one of the most important indicators: poverty. As the Central Statistical Office changed its methodology from the Living Conditions Monitoring Survey in 1998 to the one in 2002 (making poverty – statistically – worse), figures cannot be compared directly. Another problem is what is being measured. In the World Bank's index for Doing Business 2011, Zambia is ranked 6th best out of 163 economies in the category "Getting Credit". The World Bank has obviously never tried to get a bank loan in Zambia! At closer scrutiny, it turns out that "Getting Credit" measures the legal rights of borrowers and lenders as well as the credit information available AFTER a private company has obtained a bank loan. Honestly! Figures should be taken with a pinch of salt.

MAIZE: Benefitting from others' problems



Kenya is facing a looming food crisis. Bad for Kenya. Good for Zambia – and its otherwise unsellable bumper harvest of maize. That is, until some of the maize turned out to be discoloured.

Poor rainfall has affected maize production in Kenya's bread basket, the Rift Valley. The country expects to be short of about 3.8 million 90-kg bags of maize between June and December. The shortage has forced many millers to suspend their operations – and a 2-kg packet of mealie meal in Kenya has hit an all time high of 140-160 shillings (about 8,000 Kwacha).

As a result, the East African country has allowed millers to import maize free of duty – and, more controversially, approved the importation of genetically modified maize. The latter move was met with fierce opposition from several MPs, NGOs and hundreds of people, marching in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. The protesting farmers

and environmentalists believed a shipment of GM maize from South Africa had already arrived.

Not so, assured Diamond Lalji, Chairman of Kenya's Cereal Millers Association – which otherwise had been lobbying for GM maize, arguing it is about 30 percent cheaper than non-GM maize.

In fact, the consignment of 8,560 tonnes of maize that had arrived in the port of Mombasa on 4 July originated from Malawi and Zambia (2,224 tonnes were from Zambia) – and the millers were only awaiting the mandatory clearance by the Kenya Bureau of Standards.

"[W]e are not in a rush to import the GM maize because of the perception that it is not good for the country," said Lalji – and added that millers would only consider GM maize if stocks from Zambia and Malawi failed to meet demand: Then "we will have no other alternative but to turn to South Africa for GM maize".

Hardly had he spoken, before the Bureau of Standards blocked about 5,000 tonnes of the consignment because the maize was discoloured, according to the Business Daily cited by Bloomberg – endangering the millers' total order of 55,000 tonnes of maize from Malawi and Zambia.

Meanwhile, protests picked up in Nairobi, as the police fired tear-gas at hundreds of protestors, demonstrating against high prices of food and fuel.

Zambia has recorded two consecutive bumper harvests of 2.8 million and 3.0 million tonnes of maize in the 2009/10 and 2010/11 seasons. However, the country only needs about 1.8 million tonnes of maize annually – and has struggled to export the rest, as the Food Reserve Agency, in order to be regionally competitive, is forced to sell it cheaper than what it bought it for from farmers (Nation.co.ke 5, NairobiStar.com 5, Bloomberg.com 5, Reuters.com 6 and BBC.co.uk 1/7).

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A new national flag carrier?



A group of investors from Zambia and South Africa is planning to launch a new national flag carrier – Fly Zambia Airline – in September. The group is in consultations with the government on the possibility to use the logo used by the defunct Zambia Airways on their Fokker aircraft. Zambia Airways – not to be confused with the later Zambian Airways – went into liquidation in 1995. Fly Zambia

Airlines will start with four aircraft, two Fokker 100 and two Fokker 50, one of which will be a cargo aircraft, explained the company's CEO Theunis Crous. Fly Zambia Airline will start with local and regional routes to Angola, DR Congo, South Africa and Zimbabwe, and later expand into the international market (Times 6).

Rocade of permanent secretaries

President Banda has appointed Peter Mumba as new Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources. He takes over from Lillian Kapulu, who has been relieved of her duties with immediate effect. Kapulu had been sitting in the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources since February 2010, when she was transferred from the Ministry of Education, in the same capacity. Mumba is a former Permanent Secretary in the Ministries of Home Affairs as well as Energy and Water Development (Times 6).

Two rhinos arrive in Lusaka

The Lusaka National Park has received two white rhinoceroses donated from the South African government as part of its on-going re-stocking exercise, explained Minister of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources Catherine Namugala (who has just replaced defected MMD MP Sylvia Masebo as MMD's Chairlady for Women's Affairs). The fully fenced, 46 square-kilometre park located south of Lusaka is seen as central to tourism development. It will be stocked with a minimum of 500 animals of different species (antelopes in particular) before its official opening – which last year in December was set for this year in February. Zambia Wildlife Authority has trained rhino monitoring and surveillance teams in military and anti-poaching tactics, law enforcement and elementary wildlife management in order to protect these two and other rhinos in Zambia (Reuters.com 3 and Times 4).

FIGURES: Female representation

15 percent of Zambia's MPs are women. In 1997, SADC set a target of 30 percent representation by women in decision-making bodies by 2005 – but has now raised the target to the African Union commitment of 50 percent female representation by 2015 (Post 3).



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Quotes



We are usually met with hostility by the teachers and they accuse us of bringing anarchy in schools when we state that beating children is a violation of article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (...) and is also contrary to the ruling by the High Court in the Banda v. the People of 1999 case which upheld that corporal punishment violates article 15 of our Constitution.

Zambia Civic Education Association (ZCEA) executive director Judith Mulenga commenting on the beating of a Grade 9 pupil in Ndola (Post 2).

Let's not listen to doom speakers who say that there is corruption in the country.

President Rupiah Banda (Post 5).

The good thing about Africans is that we are the ones who have borne the brunt of the IMF medicine (...) and we have been the ones, I think, who have made significant transformation from the 80s. Most of these Europeans and Americans were not through [the same]. So if there was any person or continent that can offer people the best advice on how to make adjustments to the economy, it is the Africans.

Minister of Finance and National Planning Situmbeko Musokotwane on the appointment of Christine Lagarde as new IMF chief. Historically, the IMF has had a European chief and the World Bank an American; however, many rising economies have criticised this principle as being archaic – and argued that a non-European would be better suited for tackling Europe's financial crisis (Post 6).

We also hope to decongest our offices whenever people want to pay for these services, but congestion is people's problem since they wait until the last day; hence coming at the same time and yet they can buy these certificates in January for the whole year.

Road Transport Safety Agency Head of Information Technology Cyton Kibela on a new partnership with ZSIC Group of Companies to decentralise the issuance of road taxes (Post 7).

