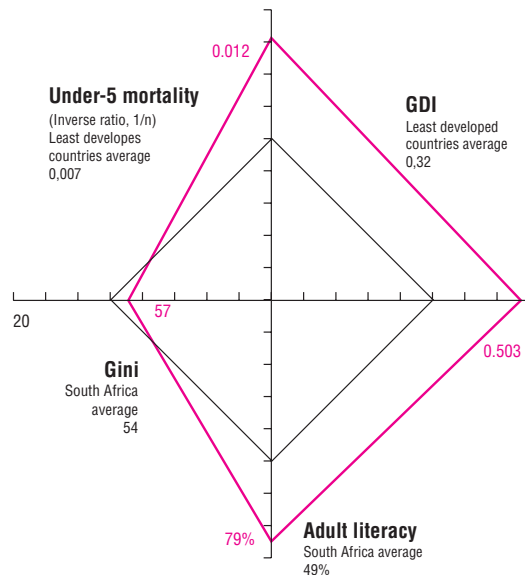


• FRANCIS CHIGUNTA

CLIMAX AND DECLINE



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.

SOCIAL EQUITY

Following political independence in 1964, Zambia was one of Sub-Saharan Africa's most prosperous countries and achieved significant progress in the provision of social services. Then, the government was able to provide free and almost universal social services to its citizenry. However, the economic decline that set in in the mid-1970s, coupled with the subsequent implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme, led to a reversal in the situation.

HEALTH AND EDUCATION

The educational sector is in crisis. Most educational institutions have inadequate teaching staff and low morale due to poor conditions of service, shortage of teaching aids, overcrowded classrooms. In an effort to improve standards in education, the government embarked on the implementation of an Education Sector Integrated Programme (ESIP).

The main thrust of the reforms is cost-sharing and decentralisation of the educational delivery system.

Decentralisation has brought some improvement in the physical conditions of schools. However, with over 70% of the population being «very poor», the introduction of user-fees has reduced the ability of the poor to afford education. The withdrawal of children from schools and late enrolments have become major coping strategies among poor households. Ministry of Education reports show that in 1995, about 59.4% of boys and 56.7% of girls in grade one were above the legal entry age of seven years. **Enrolment in primary schools declined from over 96% in the mid-1980s to less than 80% in the 1990s.**

The result in both rural and urban areas is increasing illiteracy—and increasing misery—among children. Children who drop out of school in urban areas become street children. While there were about 30,000 street children in Zambia in 1991, there are about 70,000 by 1995 (UNICEF, 1996).

The situation in the health sector is similar to that in the educational sector. The health delivery system in Zambia suffers from persistent shortages of essential drugs, inadequate staffing levels

An examination of various aspects of equity in Zambia indicates glaring disparities in access to the country's economic and political structures and institutions.

Government attempts to address inequity are hampered by the lack of will to translate the policies into concrete programmes. As a consequence, nothing much in practice has been achieved in terms of increasing and widening opportunities for people. If Zambia is to move forward as a modern progressive society, the government must take concerted efforts to promote equity.

and medical equipment and dilapidated health infrastructure. Fifty-two percent of the rural population live outside the perimeter of 5 Km to the nearest health centre. This distance is a barrier to health care, particularly among pregnant women. As a result, a big proportion of births take place outside the assistance of trained health personnel.

Maternal and infant malnutrition is also a big and growing problem in Zambia. It contributes to high levels of mortality, especially among infants. According to the 1996 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey, nine percent or 1 in 11 mothers are chronically under-nourished. **The maternal mortality rate is currently estimated at 649 deaths per 100,000 live births (1990–1996) while the infant mortality rate stands at 197 per 1,000 births (ZDHS 1997). The majority of Zambian women have no access to family planning services.**

To prevent further decline in the health delivery system, Zambia has since 1991 embarked on an ambitious and radical health reform process. The Government has committed itself to providing «*equity of access to cost-effective, quality health care as close to the family as possible.*»

The emphasis of the health reforms is the decentralisation of health care services and changes in the health financing strategy. The latter is based on the cost-sharing principle through user-fees and pre-payment arrangements. The fees, coupled with rising levels of poverty in the country, may be responsible for the increase in diseases among the poor and other vulnerable groups. The Poverty Assessment Report for Zambia (World Bank, 1994) estimated that 25% of Zambians were ill.

In spite of this, safe water is not accorded high priority in policy formulation and management. Estimates show that currently, about 51% of the Zambian population have no access to safe drinking water.

In urban areas, access to water decreased from 70% of all households in 1985 to 66% in 1990. This figure has only marginally improved in recent years. It is therefore not surprising that during the 1990s, there has been a steady increase in outbreaks of waterborne diseases such as cholera.

Following the devastating 1992/93 drought, the government is paying more attention to this matter. However, it is oriented towards commercialisation and privatisation of water utilities.

ACCESS TO SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMMES

The Public Welfare Assistance Scheme (PWAS) in the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) is the official social safety net in Zambia. The PWAS aims at reducing and alleviating poverty among the poorest of the poor, the disabled, widows and other severely impoverished individuals.

Programmes under the scheme include school bursaries, the Health Care Cost Scheme, and the Nutrition and Food National Social Safety Council. The government also recently established a Poverty Eradication Programme and is now working towards developing a National Plan of Action Against Poverty.

However, these programmes have failed to improve the conditions of the poorest of the poor. **Indeed, poverty levels in the**

country have continued to rise. Social sector schemes are characterised by inadequate funding, delays in releasing budgeted funds, poor management and administration of the schemes, lack of clear targeting or priorities, and low public awareness about the schemes. Above all, the capacity of the Department of Community Development and Social Services, which is charged with the responsibility of assisting persons who have been negatively affected by structural adjustment, is almost non-existent, apart from being a drain on the same meagre financial resources that are set aside for the poor. **From 1990 to 1992, only 15% of eligible beneficiaries actually received assistance from the PWAS.**

ECONOMIC EQUITY?

In 1975, only 60% of the Zambian population was poor (World Bank, 1994); in 1991, it was 71% (IAOS/AFSA, 1995) and by 1993, overall poverty had increased rapidly to 86%. While urban poverty increased by 22 points, rural poverty grew by six percentage points (1991–1993).

The incidence and intensity of poverty increased with structural adjustment programme (SAP) in Zambia. The social and economic costs of SAP were massive job losses due to retrenchment and redundancies in the public and private sectors, decline in real wages, increased taxation, reduced access to economic resources, and the deterioration in the quantity, quality and access to social services (health, education, and water and sanitation). Urban households (especially the working poor) are more susceptible to the SAP-induced changes than the already marginalised rural households.

The Gini coefficient rose from 0.48 in 1959 to 0.59 in 1975 (World Bank, 1994). In 1985, the distribution of income improved slightly over 1975. To some extent, the implementation of SAP has led to reductions in the overall income inequality in Zambia, most notably the rural–urban income gap. In urban areas, wages for highly paid employees declined while no significant fall in wages for the lowly paid was recorded. (Seshamani and Kaunga, 1996).

Quality and access to social services deteriorated more in urban than in rural areas. The distribution impact of SAP was more severe on women and children, who are the main users of social services (health, education, water etc.), and whose access is diminishing as social sector reform programmes of «cost sharing» intensify.

LAND, HOUSING AND CREDIT

Zambia has vast arable lands. Land reforms designed and implemented by the current government aim to attract investment by attaching value to land and creating a land tenure system. Land can now be bought and sold through property agents like any commodity, with its price determined by market forces.

Although there is almost free access to land and housing in Zambia, the degree of access differs by group. In urban areas,

access to land and housing is skewed towards the rich and affluent (World Bank, 1994). The less affluent live in squatter and shanty compounds termed «illegal settlements». Most squatters do not possess title deeds to land or houses, and hence cannot use them as collateral. The urban poor cannot easily access decent housing and illegal shantytowns have mushroomed. Land grabbing has increased in recent years despite the existence of laws against this scourge.

Furthermore, liberalisation has infused stiff competition in the financial sector and consequently, financial instability, which has seen the collapse of at least five commercial banks and the folding of the co-operative movement in Zambia since 1993. This has affected the flow of credit to rural and peri-urban households, and has deepened economic inequalities.

With the collapse of the rural and peri-urban credit delivery systems, informal lenders have sprung up in a bid to provide credit. The informal lending system is commonly known as «kaloba». Interest rates on «kaloba» can be as high as 100% for the period of one month or less.

EMPLOYMENT AND SALARIES

The formal and informal labour force grew by almost 50% from 1986–1994, with the current employment above 3.6m. The rise is partly accounted for by a change in labour force composition, which currently includes all persons above age twelve. **According to the Central Statistical Office, over 40% of the increase was child labour.** Children work (mainly in the informal sector) to supplement family income or to survive in the streets. The increase in the labour force is unevenly distributed between the sexes, with a 21% rise for men and only 14% increase for women in 1987–1991.

Unemployment in the same period rose. Between 1989 and 1994, 38,500 jobs were lost and a total of 26,448 registered redundancies were recorded. While SAP caused a decline in formal employment, it led to a surge in informal sector employment. For women in particular, the informal sector has proved valuable in providing alternative sources of income given their exclusion from mainstream economic activities. **However, at present, the informal sector offers neither job security nor social protection.**

Real wages in the public sector fell to approximately 45% of their 1984 value (Seshamani and Kaunga, 1996). This erosion in real wages is attributed to three digit inflation rates that emerged with the onset of SAP in 1989–1994. The average public sector wage currently stands at K92,300/month, slightly below what is needed for a month's worth of basic food and services.

In June 1991, average female earnings were 72% of average male earnings; in March 1993, the relevant ratio was 82%. The Employment of Women and Young Persons Act is supposed to protect the interests of women at places of work. However, the fact that women continue to receive lower earnings than men suggests that the existence of progressive social legislation does not necessarily mean eradicating, or even reducing wage inequalities. **Employers evade the rules by giving the same job a different name depending on whether it is done by a man or a woman.** Also, regulation of private companies is more difficult.

The labour codes were overhauled to protect the rights and the conditions of service of the workers during and after the privatisation and liquidation of companies. Although the labour code stipulates the minimum wage, most workers receive wages below the gazetted minimum. Complacency of the enforcing agency and illiteracy of workers perpetuates exploitation of labour.

POLITICAL EQUITY

When Zambia re-introduced plural politics in October 1991, it was held up as a model for democratisation in Africa. However, President Chiluba's Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) failed to reform the electoral process in a manner that would ensure full participation in elections by the citizenry. The 1996 general elections were widely condemned as having been manipulated by the MMD. The leading opposition party and six other parties boycotted the elections, and voter turnout was low. The franchise in Zambia has become less accessible since the 1991.

Also, until recently, the Zambian trade union movement was one of the strongest and most militant in Africa (Simutanyi; 1996). The emergence of the unions in the early years of the nationalist struggle spawned the birth of political organisation in Zambia. The re-introduction of pluralist politics in Zambia in 1990 depended on strong support from the trade union movement, which also provided the top leadership of the new mass political movement (MMD).

Aware of the trade union movement's enormous political power, which comes from its strategic position in copper mining, the government passed legislation to institutionalise industrial relations in an effort to discourage strikes and promote peaceful industrial relations. **The unions are further weakened by job loss as the government divests itself from the economy. Workers who lose their jobs lose their union membership.**

The state also controls trade unions by sowing divisions amongst them or by planting key pro-government personnel in their administrations (Mufune, 1996). Where this has failed, the state has employed strong arm tactics to control and suppress strikes, including dismissing all striking workers. Thus, as Mufune (1996) observes, under the MMD government, unions have been battered and are a shadow of their former selves.

Similarly, compared to other countries in Africa, the Zambian judiciary is relatively independent. Even under the one-party political system it was relatively free. As Maipose (1996) observes, the challenge under the new political regime is to build and improve upon what was already achieved. Analysts point to the willingness of the executive to allow cases against the State to go un-hindered as evidence of the continuing independence of the judiciary.

Still, the independence of the judiciary has been undermined in two ways: first, court decisions both under the previous government and the current one have tended to favour the state by not questioning the merits of state actions in constitutional matters; second, there is a tendency to remove judges from the courts and appoint them to political office.

Freedom of expression is guaranteed by Zambia's constitution. This freedom has largely been protected and strengthened since the 1991 re-introduction of the multi-party system. Nevertheless, recent political developments in the country have demonstrated that the standing of freedom of expression hangs in the balance.

As Chikulo and Sichone (1996) observe, since the MMD government took office, there have been several incidents in which the government and/or senior MMD officials have attempted to restrict freedom of expression. Cases in point are arrest of three journalists from the independent press and the attempt by the government to curtail public debate on the controversial 1996 constitution.

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS EQUITY

It is now generally agreed that ethnic conflict is not a continuation of pre-colonial tribal conflict or warfare but is mainly an aspect of contemporary politics in both urban and rural areas. Thus, it is not the traditional village elder but the young educated elite and other middle class elements who have appealed to ethnicity to ensure their success in political and economic competition as well as in electoral politics (Scott, 1978).

To overcome ethnic rivalry, former president Kaunda devised a political strategy that would mould Zambians into one United Nation. It relied heavily on political engineering, euphemistically called tribal balancing. Using the slogan «One Zambia, One Nation», President Kaunda's government deliberately posted civil servants outside their areas of origin, encouraged inter-ethnic marriages and, more significantly, applied the principle of tribal balancing in Cabinet appointments. Whatever the merits and demerits of Kaunda's ethnic formula, his government succeeded in molding diverse ethnic groups into one entity called Zambians, with their own national values, beliefs and culture distinct from those of neighbouring countries. Thus, alongside Tanzania, Zambia became one of the few African countries not to experience serious ethnic conflict.

However, gains achieved by the former government are being eroded by the current MMD government and ethnicity is rearing its ugly head in Zambia. There is a growing perception of Bemba dominance (the President is Bemba) in the country's political and economic institutions. Bemba dominance is particularly obvious in political appointments to positions of deputy ministers, permanent secretaries and diplomats. Similarly, appointments to top positions in state-owned enterprises have tended towards Bemba speakers. This seems to have been accompanied by a subtle elevation of Chibemba language to national language.

GENDER EQUITY

In Zambia, systematic gender-based inequalities in decision-making exist at household, community and national levels. Although women perform most of the household subsistence work

and are the major agricultural producers, they largely remain implementors of decisions made by men. Despite government efforts, women are still under-represented in decision-making processes at all levels.

Decision-making in the average Zambian family is dominated by the husband. This dominance is based on his stronger economic position and the prevailing traditions among most ethnic groups in Zambian society. The socialisation process embedded in the culture and traditions of Zambian society condone male superiority. Women are taught to be submissive, non-argumentative, and selfless. Girls grow up believing they are inferior to boys. Thus also the very high number of victims of domestic violence, in spite of the fact that women's organizations (ie «Women for Change», WILDAF and YWCA) have designed programmes and campaigns, and implemented refuges.

Munachonga (1989) argues that the lack of participation by women in decision-making in Zambian homes also emanates from colonialism. She argues that the introduction of a cash crop economy changed the economic roles of Zambian men and women and the basis of family decision-making to the disadvantage of women.

Women's lack of a voice is further reinforced by traditional practices such as lobola or «bride price», which are commonly practised by most ethnic groups in the country. Lobola gives husbands rights over their wives' reproductive and productive powers (Sampa, 1997). Munachonga (1989) observes that, given the current economic difficulties in Zambia, fathers capitalise on marriage payments for their daughters and oppose divorce to avoid paying back the lobola.

Although an increasing number of women aspire to political careers, politics is exclusively male dominated. An independent monitoring group—the Foundation for Democratic Process (FODEP)—attributes the low participation of women in national political life to the pattern of women's education that prepares them primarily for domestic duties, and the reluctance of men, despite utterances to the contrary, to accept women as equal partners in politics.

The number of women appointed to ministerial positions and other senior positions in the government and civil service has been low since independence. There is general consensus that the position of women has declined since the re-introduction of multi-party politics (Table 1).

TABLE 1.

Senior Government Officials in 1996		
Position	Female	Male
Ministers	1	23
Deputy Ministers	4	34
Permanent Secretaries	9	32
Directors	3	33
Supreme Court Judges	2	7
High Court Judges	3/4	14

Source: FODEP, 1996



On average, the percentage of male and female participation in Parliament is 94% and 6% respectively. Table 2 shows that the number of female Members of Parliament (MPs) has risen from 1 in 1968 to about 15 in 1996.

TABLE 2.

Male and Female Parliamentarians					
Year Elections	Held Male/Female Parliamentarians			Total Elected	
1968	Male	104	Female	1	105
1973	Male	120	Female	5	125
1983	Male	122	Female	3	125
1988	Male	119	Female	6	125
1991	Male	144	Female	6	150
1996	Male	136	Female	14/1	150

Source: FODEP 1996.

The pattern of marginalisation of women in government decision-making repeats itself in the private and public enterprises and trade unions. An illustrative 1993 survey of Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation (ZESCO) employees shows that the number of women in managerial positions was very low. Of 167 employees in lower management only five were women. Labour and wage data on women's participation are equally discouraging.

On the other hand, although the constitution gives women equal rights in Zambia, they do not have rights to ownership of land under customary law, nor do they inherit family property. Women may be given land to cultivate in their new marital home by the husbands or village headman. These «user rights» end if the marriage is terminated, either through divorce or death of the husband, and use of the land usually reverts to the husband's family. (See further Section 3.0)

POLITICAL WILL

At present in Zambia, efforts are being made to improve the socio-economic status of women and increase their participation in the social and economic development of the country. The government, NGOs and the donor community are focusing on basic needs of women. Various strategies and programmes are being implemented to provide women with access to resources, assets and social services. An increasing number of programmes and projects concentrate on women's access to education, credit, improved maternal health, and decision-making. NGOs are assisting women to gain access to credit through specially financed and managed micro-credit funds.

The government has established a department for women at the National Commission for Development Planning (now part of

the Ministry of Finance). Although commendable, this is insufficient to deal with the complex nature of gender inequality in Zambia. The way forward is for civil society to make concerted efforts to ensure that society adopts a more positive attitude towards women. Furthermore, civil society should pressure the government to adopt the National Gender Policy to redress the historical and cultural prejudices.

- **Women for change.** By Francis Chigunta with contribution from Samuel Mulenga

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