

# Dying in the heat: Malawi, Zambia and drought

Poor communities in Zambia and Malawi are increasingly suffering from a lack of food. Part of the reason has been the ending of government support for farmers as part of free market programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. But now climate change is increasing the number and frequency of droughts, making the situation even worse.

## Drought in 2005

In 2004 and 2005, southern Africa was hit by a drought which contributed to a crisis in the food supply for ten million people in Zambia and Malawi.

Drought is nothing new to the region, but the frequency and intensity of it is. Old Jonah, a resident of Chikani village in Zambia, said at the height of the crisis:

*"Rainfall is becoming more erratic and there is less each year. The streams and rivers are drying up – which are the source of drinking water. Many rural areas do not have adequate water."*

River of Life, a Malawian Church

*"These are the worst rains ever. The pattern of rainfall is definitely changing. I remember many bad years but this is the first time the river Musaya has ever dried up. This is the first time that we have only had one place to find water."*

By October 2005, half the population of Malawi were dependent on food aid. Lower rainfall was exacerbated by a



A Malawian farmer surrounded by her failed maize crop during a drought in Southern Africa, 2002



political system where government support for farmers had been removed under years of free market policies imposed by the IMF and World Bank. In return for aid and debt relief, Malawi has had to reduce subsidies for fertiliser and privatise the agricultural marketing board.

Rita Munene lives in the Monze district of southern Zambia with her cousin and six children. Rita told the World Food Programme:

*"The drought has been more devastating this year than in previous years. We planted maize but it just didn't grow."*

### When the water goes ...

Climate change will bring increased and more intense droughts to southern Africa leaving millions without access to water and crops. If current carbon emissions are not cut, by 2080, rainfall is predicted to decline by 200mm a year across the region, whilst the Zambezi river could shrink by between 25 and 40 per cent.

The effects of climate change may already be being felt. The Chairman of the UN Food and Agriculture group on climate change has said:

*"Many countries are already in difficulties ... and we see a pattern emerging. Southern Africa is definitely becoming drier and everyone agrees that the climate there is changing. We would expect areas which are already prone to drought to become drier with climate change."*

Reduced water availability from climate change is caused by both lower rainfall, and higher rates of evaporation because of warmer air. The fall in rainfall and its increased variability lower the amount of food grown, as farmers no longer know when to plant their crops to coincide with the rain. Furthermore, in tropical regions throughout the world, higher temperatures lower the rate of plant growth.

## Global injustice

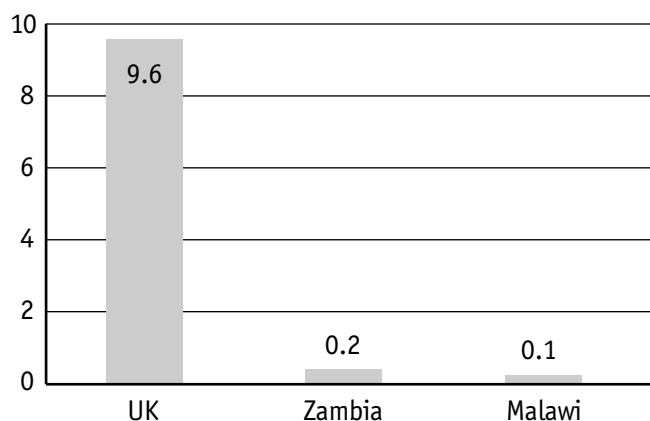
The people of Malawi and Zambia bear no responsibility for climate change. The average UK citizen takes two-and-a-half days to produce as much CO<sub>2</sub> as the average Malawian does in a year. The contribution of countries like Zambia and Malawi to historical greenhouse gas emissions is effectively zero. Meanwhile, the UK's contribution to climate change has risen by around 5 per cent since Labour came to power in 1997.

The failure of the UK government and other rich countries to cut carbon emissions is sounding a death-knell for livelihoods

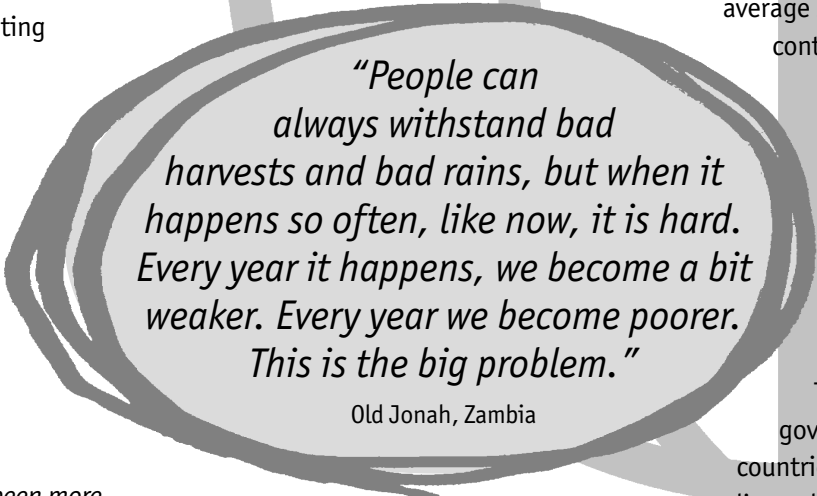
across southern Africa. During international climate change negotiations in 2005, George Mkondiwa, Malawian Minister for Lands, said:

*"As I speak, some five million Malawians, nearly half of the entire population, face starvation and require food aid ... we don't think there is any doubt that this is due to climate change. Malawi does not have the luxury to wait, for instance, for scientific research to prove some indelible link between climate change and recent droughts, because people are dying now."*

### Carbon emissions per person per year (tonnes)



**Take action with WDM to end climate injustice.**



*"People can always withstand bad harvests and bad rains, but when it happens so often, like now, it is hard. Every year it happens, we become a bit weaker. Every year we become poorer. This is the big problem."*

Old Jonah, Zambia