

Zambia



The Republic of Zambia is a landlocked country in southern Africa. It covers an area slightly larger than the state of Texas; its population is about half the size of that state's. Less than half of the population live near a city—most are spread out across the vast rural countryside. Once a British colony called Northern Rhodesia, Zambia became independent in 1964 and took its new name from the Zambezi River which flows through the western part of the country. The capital city of Zambia is Lusaka.



Zambia is a country of high plateaus and a few hills and mountains. There are two main seasons: rainy (November to April) and dry (May/June to October/November). Because

most Zambians grow their own food, they pay very close attention to the weather as it predicts their growing seasons and the reliability of their crops. Most people who live in Zambia are Christian (about 95%); the majority are Protestant (about 75%). The remaining 20% are baptized Catholics. The other 5% of Zambians are Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, or say they have no religion.

The Zambian diet is heavily dependent on maize, or corn. It is usually eaten in a thick porridge, almost like grits, called nsima (pronounced en-SEE-ma). It is eaten with vegetables, beans, fish, and when it is available, meat.

Only a little over half of all Zambians have access to running water in their homes. Diseases from contaminated drinking water, like hepatitis A, and typhoid fever are a big problem. Malaria and dengue fever, which are carried by insects, are also an issue. The HIV/AIDS infection rate is currently about 15% of the population of Zambia. The country currently has only 2 doctors for every 3000 people.

MCA in Zambia

Because much of Zambia is an agrarian culture, their statistics for child labor are high—about 41% of all children between the ages of 7 and 14 work. Out of necessity, most of them can be found in their family's fields helping to grow their own food.

Due to so many children working and not attending school, the country's literacy rate is relatively low. Only about 61% of people over 15 years of age in Zambia know how to read and write.

The majority of Zambian children attend a government school. These schools are nominally free for grades 1-7; but parents do have to pay many fees, including fees for uniforms. For many Zambians families, this makes school unaffordable. Some of these children will attend a "community" school. These schools are based in the local village. Teachers are volunteers for the most part, or receive a small stipend for their work, unless the school is sponsored by a charity. These schools are inexpensive to attend and cater to students who either cannot afford the cost of a government school or live too far away from one. Zambian schools are chronically short on funds and their educational standards are quite low.

Higher education is very limited: there are just three universities and a few technical institutes in all of Zambia.

Because the need was so great, beginning



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in the 19th century, Christian missionaries started building free mission schools. Now, private schools run by the Church are becoming more common. These schools run on the American or British education system and are considered educationally superior to the government or community school.

One such school, built by the Missionary Childhood Association (MCA) is Saint Atanazio Basic School in the Diocese of Chipata. Children in grades 1-4 attend this mission school without charge. They learn the basics of math, language skills, and even personal hygiene. For some little ones, it is their first experience with a toothbrush!



Pre-schoolers at Saint Atanazio School sing a welcoming song to a visitor

Math class is held outside. Though the children have pencils, there is often not enough paper: they practice writing their numbers in the dirt of the school yard.

Last year, members of Missionary Childhood worldwide sacrificed \$55,000 so that the children of Chipata Diocese could continue to receive a strong Catholic education.

Missionary Childhood Association

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