

Participatory Exercise
DissComm 2019
June 12

Introduction

You are a senior communications specialist for Statistics Wakanda, the national statistical institute of a small nation in an undisclosed part of sub-Saharan Africa.

Stats Wakanda's primary vehicle for communication and dissemination is your website, where you post news releases, data sets, and other detailed materials. Your agency has a Twitter account which is typically used to issue data headlines and outreach messages. In addition, you have e-mail subscription lists to notify users of new information.

It is a few days before a fiercely contested national election. Inflation in Wakanda has been uncharacteristically high over the past year and has become a major issue in the political campaign, especially for the main opposition party. The Wakanda Consumer Price Index (CPI) for May, produced by your agency, is **scheduled for release today at 8:30am**. It is the final major economic indicator before the election.

The data show an increase in the all-items CPI, driven by relatively modest increases in food and housing prices which outweigh small declines in apparel, medical care, and recreation prices (see attached news release.)

Of course you came into the office early today to prepare for release activities. You have had your first cup of coffee and are sitting at your desk.

It is 7:30am. Your phone rings. The head of your IT department is on the line, who informs you that all connectivity from Stats Wakanda to the internet has just gone down. Users cannot access your website, you cannot send e-mail, you cannot access Twitter from your network, etc.

It is not clear why connectivity has been lost. It could be a system failure on the part of your service provider, it could be a system failure on your end, it could be a cyber-attack, it could be something else altogether. The IT department is working as hard as they can to identify and fix the problem. You emphasize how important it is to reestablish connectivity before 8:30.

As you are digesting this, your phone rings again. It is the head of your agency (the Director-General / Chief Statistician / Commissioner.) She is alarmed that you may not be able to release the CPI as usual and demands talking points for that possibility as soon as possible.

You call your top staff together. What statement will you prepare for the head of your agency? What will you do if your internet is still down at 8:30?

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Update #1

It is 8:00am. 30 minutes to go before release.

The IT department still has not fixed the problem but suspects that it was caused by a malicious intruder.

A staff member comes into your office and tells you that Wakanda's major news organizations have begun calling. Reporters have noticed that your website is off-line and want to know whether the CPI will be released on time.

How will you respond to the media inquiries?

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Update #2

It is 8:20am. 10 minutes to go before release.

The IT department still has not fixed the problem but is now certain that it was caused by a malicious intruder.

The leader of the opposition party has just issued a statement, which is being carried by major media organizations, accusing the government of deliberately trying to hide unfavorable news and implying that inflation has surged yet again.

The head of your agency wants updated talking points from you.

Do you change the material you drafted for the head of your agency? How? Do you respond to the statement by the leader of the opposition party? How?

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Update #3

It is 8:40am. The release occurred 10 minutes ago.

Internet connectivity was restored at 8:28 and your news release, social media posts, etc. were issued as they typically are.

The leader of the opposition party has just issued another statement, which is being carried by major media organizations, accusing the government of distorting the CPI report. The opposition leader claims that inflation actually rose significantly yet again, and suggests that the website outage was deliberate so that the data could be changed before release.

Reporters from your country's major news organizations are asking what happened and whether you have a reaction to the statement by the leader of the opposition party.

What do you do?



News Release

Statistics Wakanda: Vibranium-Quality Data for the Nation

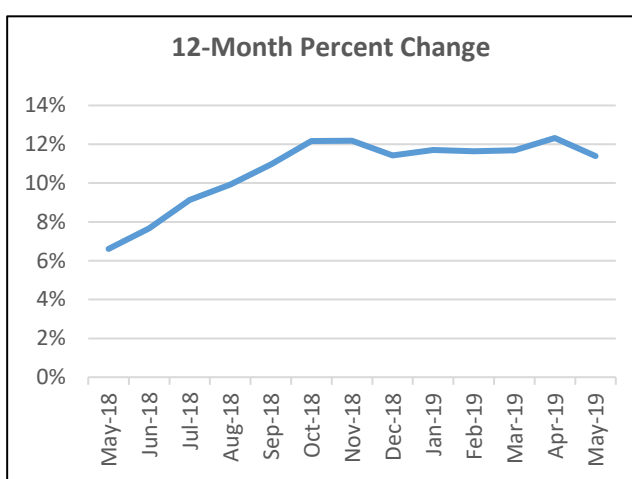
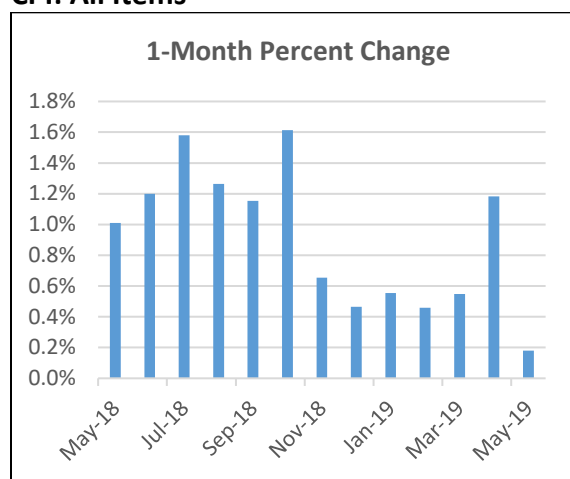
Transmission of material in this release is embargoed until 8:30 a.m. June 12, 2019

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CONSUMER PRICE INDEX – MAY 2019

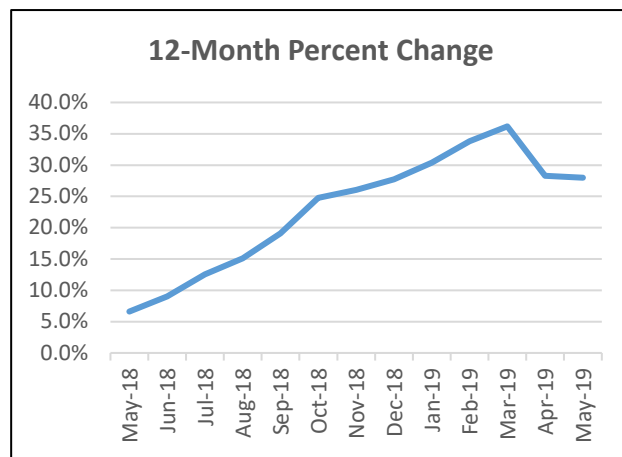
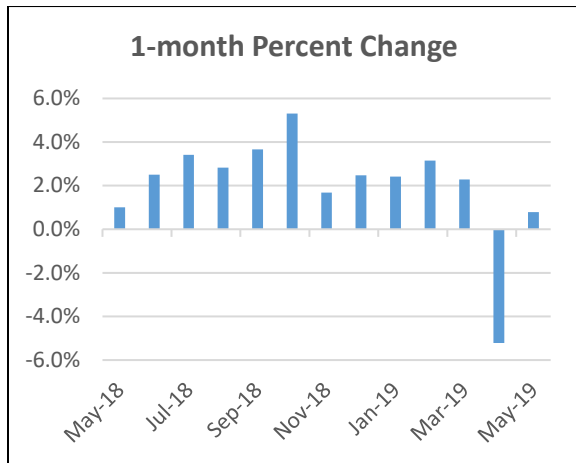
The Consumer Price Index (CPI) for All Items rose 0.2 percent in May, Statistics Wakanda reported today. Over the last 12 months, the all items index increased by 11.4 percent.

CPI: All Items



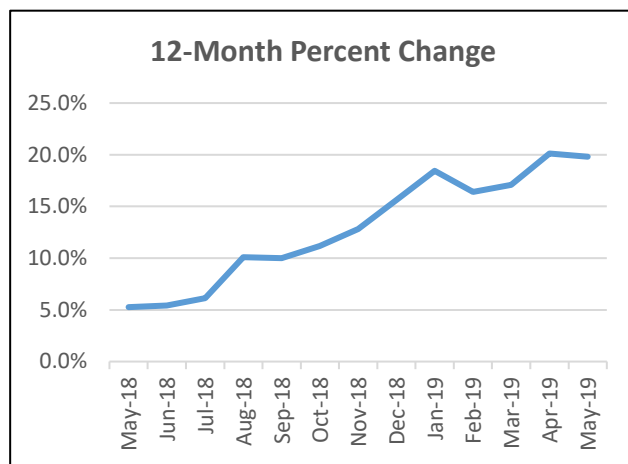
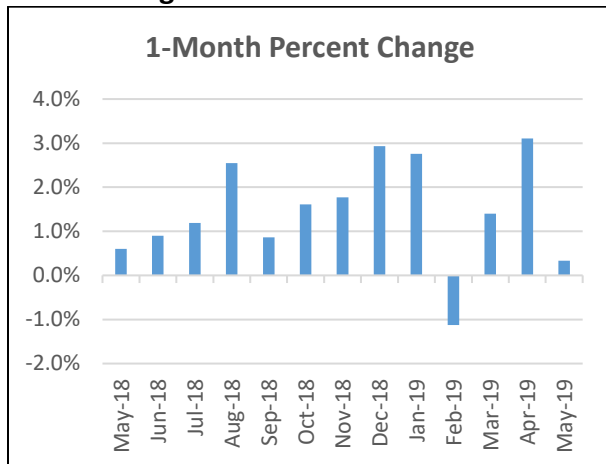
- The May one-month percent change in the CPI is the smallest increase since a 0.2% rise in September, 2017.
- The over-the-year percent change in the CPI has fluctuated between 11% and 12.2% since September, 2018.
- In May, higher prices for food and housing were offset by price declines in apparel, medical care, and recreation.

CPI: Food



- In May, the food index rose 0.8%, after falling 5.2% in April.
- The food index has risen 28.0% over the last year.
- The indexes for maize (+1.1%), tea (+0.3%), and dairy (+0.9%) rose while the index for fish and seafood (-0.1%) and other cereals (-0.3%) fell. The indexes for rice, sorghum, and wheat were essentially unchanged.

CPI: Housing



- In May, the housing index rose 0.3%, after rising 3.1% in April.
- The food index has risen 19.8%% over the last year.

CPI: Other indexes

- The indexes for energy (0.0%) and education (0.0%) remained unchanged in May for the 360th month in a row.