

# THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE FOOD BASKET

Release of GRZ Budget 2000 has stirred considerable analysis and debate in the past week. An important focus for the national debate is the social dimension of the budget, this highlights government's actual commitment to poverty reduction as a top priority in 2000. The importance of this commitment is underlined when we look at the cost of living faced by ordinary Zambian today. In its on-going analysis of the cost of the living, the Jesuit Centre provides each month an "estimated food basket for a family of six in Lusaka". For January 2000, the estimate is K263,370, up from K257,480 for December 1999.

Widening the range of the survey, the JCTR undertook a study in December 1999 to compare the cost of various food commodities in Lusaka's low, medium and high density locations. This study was meant to assess the factors behind price differences of the same commodities in different locations of the city. Our comparative study covered Kanyama, Chibolya, N'gombe and Matero as high density locations; Chabama, Chilenje, Kabwata and Chelston as medium density locations; and Kabulonga, Woodlands, Roma and Avondale as low density locations. Prices vary from one location to another. This depends among other factors on the distance involved in transportation of goods from place of production to the final consumer. For instance, our study in December 1999 showed that the average prices of mealie - meal (25 Kg bag - Breakfast/Simba) in the locations around Lusaka ranged from K15,550 - K18,000 as can be seen from the table below:

## 25 Kg Mealie - meal (Breakfast/Simba) - December 1999

| High Density Locations |         | Medium Density Locations |         | Low Density Locations |         |
|------------------------|---------|--------------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|
| Ng'ombe                | K18,000 | Chelston                 | K18,000 | Avondale              | K17,500 |
| Matero                 | K17,500 | Chilenje                 | K17,500 | Kabulonga             | K15,750 |
| Kanyama                | K16,750 | Kabwata                  | K17,330 | Woodlands             | K15,550 |
| Chibolya               | K16,500 | Chawama                  | K16,750 | Roma                  |         |

In some cases the distance factor obtains when you compare the average prices of mealie - meal between locations closer to the city centre and those further away from it, i.e., Chibolya (K16,500) and Ng'ombe (K18,000). The study established that the average prices of mealie - meal tend to be on the lower side in the low density locations because the demand for this commodity is slightly lower as families in these locations supplement their dishes with other starch food stuffs, i.e., rice, potatoes, pasta, etc. The other factor that affects the variations in prices is the purchasing power of the consumer communities found in the given locations. For instance, the same study showed that the average prices of meat (Brisket) 1 Kg were higher in the low density locations than they were in the high density locations as can be seen from the table below:

## 1 Kg meat (Brisket) - December 1999

| High Density Locations |        | Medium Density Locations |        | Low Density Locations |        |
|------------------------|--------|--------------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------|
| Ng'ombe                | K4,500 | Chelston                 | K4,900 | Avondale              | K5,400 |
| Chibolya               | K4,250 | Chilenje                 | K4,630 | Kabulonga             | K5,000 |
| Kanyama                | K4,000 | Chawama                  | K4,500 | Woodlands             | K4,900 |
| Matero                 | K3,900 | Kabwata                  | K4,260 | Roma                  |        |

This was also the case with the average prices of vegetables which were more on demand in the low density locations than they were in the high density ones. Higher levels of income in the low density