

APPROPRIATE AND PROMPT POLICY RESPONSES IN AGRICULTURE VITAL, OBSERVES JCTR

As signs of rainfall become conspicuous and thus signalling the beginning of the agricultural season, the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, (JCTR) is calling for adequate preparedness in making available sufficient agricultural inputs (fertilizers, seed, etc) to enable adequate crop production.

Without adequate preparations, Zambia may have to import maize again next year. *It should be noted that Zambia need not import maize next year unless in circumstances beyond the country's control such as drought and floods.* Observes Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Economic and Social Development Research Project of the JCTR.

Poor agricultural production leads to increases in the cost of living as we are witnessing now. The JCTR Food Basket for a family of six in Lusaka is now costing K358,400 compared to last month's cost of K357,300.

According to Muweme, the rise is mainly attributed to the rising cost of mealie meal which has seen an adjustment to feed a family of six from K72,900 for the month of September to K75, 000 for October. "Where we can, let us as a country avoid such trends in cost of living which hurt the poor most," says Muweme.

Muweme further says that what seems to be more worrying is the lack of prompt and accurate policy responses to a lot of difficulties the country goes through, particularly those pertaining to agriculture. No where is this more evident than what we are experiencing now as revealed by the JCTR monthly Food Basket and the current situation concerning maize stocks in the country.

The words of one socio-economic analyst, Dr. Peter Henriot puts it more succinctly and aptly when analysing the agricultural situation in Zambia when he says, "Zambia seems to suffer from double drought. *First*, a policy drought where there is often too little and too late effective meeting of farmers' needs to produce food. *Second*, a natural drought where there is too little rain to enable crop production."

We can see here that the first kind of drought can be easily controlled compared to the second one. The failure to deal with the first kind of drought usually exacerbates the second kind.

It is therefore JCTR's hope that the country will this season have appropriate rainfall to enable crop production as well as appropriate policy responses to the situation in the agricultural sector.

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