

## **PRICE STABILITY, DECREASE AND INCREASE CHARACTERISE FOOD BASKET**

As we move into the second quarter of the year, the Economic and Social Development Research Project of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) monthly food basket has shown a varied trend in prices of the cost of items.

According to Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Economic and Social Development Research Project, the price of mealie meal, cooking oil, eggs, salt, vaseline, for example, has shown a very marginal decrease as compared to last month's cost while meat and wash soap have recorded marginal price increase.

However, charcoal has recorded a very high increase. This is because of transportation and other difficulties associated with its production during the rainy season. The increase in the price of charcoal from K26,000 to K38,000 for two 90 kg bags for a family of six has accounted significantly for the rise in the cost of the food basket which now stands at K335,300 from the February figure of K328,080.

This is against a situation where the use of charcoal is very high among poor households because of the high electricity tariffs. For example, one woman interviewed noted that "I use charcoal when cooking such food items as beans and fish as these take very long to cook."

"It is obvious that the current high charcoal price will greatly disadvantage many poor households leading to heightened poverty situations," says Muweme.

Other items such as bread and bath soap have not shown any changes, they have remained stable.

The marginal price decreases recorded in some cases, show very little correspondence in the economy between the commodity prices and the strengthening of the Kwacha.

Muweme further observes that "significant price decreases on most of the essential commodities would greatly ease the hardships the Zambian people are experiencing everyday."

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