

## JCTR SAYS FINDING CURRENT AND FUTURE SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO FOOD CRISIS IMPERATIVE

The current food crisis situation in Zambia -- marked by discussions about GMOs, hunger, winter irrigation, etc. -- requires sustainable solutions, observes the Economic and Social Development Research Project of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

It is a well known fact that Zambian households spend a huge proportion of their incomes on meeting food requirements. This situation obtains regardless of the situation of food availability in the country. According to Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Economic and Social Development Research Project of the JCTR, "One only needs to look at the relationship, for example, between the cost of meeting food requirements and the amount of average take-home pay."

It is also important to note that despite a huge proportion of household income going to food, it is still inadequate to meet nutritional food requirements leading to very high levels of undernourishment. The wages are constantly falling behind prices of basic needs.

The JCTR *Basic Needs Basket* that measures the cost of living for a family of six in Lusaka is currently estimated at K334,250 for food only, and K831,350 if other costs such as housing, energy, wash soap, jelly, bath soap, etc., are added.

Muweme further says that while the JCTR effort at estimating the cost of living is only confined to Lusaka, it is important to realise that the situation in the rural parts of the country is even more critical, especially looked at from the current hunger situation. Indeed, it is one thing to hear of the hunger problem from secondary sources and yet another to experience the pain of that hunger first hand.

Theoretically, the initiative of growing maize in winter that the Zambian government has put in place is an encouraging effort at averting hunger in drought situations. Encouraging too is the idea that government intends to extend these efforts to other parts of the country. "However," says Muweme, "what is of prime importance in these efforts at averting hunger is to see to how the *poor*, the majority of whom are *women*, will benefit."

In an economy where the majority of households lack sufficient income for their livelihood, the growing of maize in winter by irrigation in its current approach may not directly benefit the poor. One question that needs to be asked regarding the food produced under such an arrangement is, "What will be the relationship of the poor to the food that will be produced?"

According to JCTR, two issues are inevitably critical to addressing the current and future hunger problems. The *first* is that of enabling households through improvements in their incomes -- which may not happen in the immediate future -- to have access to adequate food. The *second* is to create capacity for households, particularly those in rural areas, to grow their own food under irrigation, that is, extending the growing of winter maize to poor rural households.

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