

**FOOD COSTING K326,500: JCTR SAYS CURRENT POLITICAL
DEBATES SHOULD ALSO ADDRESS SOCIO-ECONOMIC REALITIES**

The current focus of political debates in the country has distracted the critical question of looking at the needs of the people, observes the Economic and Social Development Research Project of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

The prevailing socio-economic situation in Zambia marked by inflationary pressures, hunger situation, unemployment, etc., is working against any meaningful improvements in people's lives. This combination of problems is inhibiting Zambia's sustainable development efforts that the country desperately needs.

"The ways to addressing these problems should be as central in our public debates as are political issues such as who belongs to what party!" says Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Economic and Social Development Research Project.

Indeed, the current political debates are important in moving the country forward in a truly democratic fashion. However, these debates should also be taking into account the *critical* question of how people's needs, especially those of the poor, are going to be met effectively and equitably.

It is important that the same level of intensity characterizing political debates should also characterize socio-economic debates, particularly also as this relates to the current hunger situation in the country. People's ability to have access to food is both an end of development as well as a fundamental means to that development.

The JCTR survey of basic needs comes out at the end of every month and reveals to what extent people are in difficult situations. The *Basic Needs Basket* September report shows that a family of six in Lusaka needs K326,500 a month to spend only on necessary food.

If costs of non-food items such as decent housing, wash and bath soap, electricity, water, etc., are added, the cost of the Basket comes to K825,100. "Yet," says Muweme, "even this amount, so high in comparison with the general low levels of wages, does not take into account cost of transport, health, personal care, etc." Compared to the previous month of August, there has been an upward adjustment in the overall cost of the *Basic Needs Basket* of K3,300.

The JCTR, together with the Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre (KATC), is currently looking at the hunger situation in the light of the GMO dispute. It is the view of JCTR that Zambia must build a sustainable foundation upon which its people, especially the poor, will have access to nutritionally balanced food that will assure them good health and participation in the process of development.

[For more information, contact Muweme Muweme, Economic and Social Development Research Project of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, P.O. BOX 37774, Lusaka, Zambia; tel: 260-1-290410; e-mail: socialjctr@zamnet.zm; internet: www.jctr.org.zm]