

MORE EFFORTS NEEDED AT ADDRESSING ZAMBIA'S IMMINENT DEEPER SOCIAL CRISIS, SAYS JCTR

Zambia has a vast potential in almost all sectors to advance the quality of life of its people. We *need not* and *should not* be facing the current socio-economic problems of hunger, loss of value of the Kwacha, high cost of living, etc. says the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

These difficulties in the midst of massive potential are a reflection of a lack of priority setting and adhering to those priorities, inadequacies in policy design, failure in programme implementation, etc. Obviously such a situation must be addressed in more *pragmatic* and *holistic* ways. There must be change in the way we have been doing things as a country.

According to Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Economic and Social Development Project of the JCTR, "What we know and have seen is obviously that these individual problems tend to reinforce each other and this is particularly true with the current hunger problem."

The recently announced increase in fuel prices will make the situation even more desperate. We know for certain the wider implications that come with a rise in the price of fuel. The cost of all basic human necessities will rise. Muweme notes that "Even before the upward adjustment of the price of fuel takes effect, we saw an increase in the prices of basic food and non-food essentials mainly due to the loss of value of the Kwacha."

For example, the November JCTR monthly *Basic Needs Basket* (measuring cost of living for a family of six in Lusaka) indicates K357,000 as minimum requirement to meet the barest of needs of food such as mealie meal, beans, cooking oil, sugar, etc. When you add to this cost of food other essentials for survival such as soap, housing, energy sources, etc., the cost goes to K863,400. This is up from an October level of K836,550. The rise in the cost of the *Basic Needs Basket* is mainly attributed to the rise in the price of mealie meal, charcoal, meat, etc. It is clear that in the near future, the price of mealie meal will rise even further following the recent increase in the price of fuel and the growing shortage of maize.

Also important to note is the fact that even though the *Basic Needs Basket* report is only confined to Lusaka, the cost of living, particularly in relation to mealie meal is much higher in many other parts of the country.

Muweme states that "In a situation such as prevailing today, price increments become even more unbearable to the poor. Coping or survival strategies have been almost exhausted especially in those areas that experienced low agricultural production due to drought. Indeed, as past trends have shown, it is even more worrying to note that people will face more survival difficulties in the coming months of December and January."

Because of this critical situation, the JCTR expresses strong compassion for and solidarity with the suffering people in the country. We pledge to redouble our efforts to promote a just response to meet their needs. We call upon all political parties, churches, NGOs, international partners, government offices and political figures to commit themselves to meeting the crisis as their number one priority in the weeks ahead.

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