

NUTRITION SHOULD BE CENTRAL TO AIDS TREATMENT DISCUSSIONS, SAYS THE JCTR

At no time has a *holistic* approach to health delivery been more critical than in our current predicament of HIV/AIDS, says the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR). Particularly important in ensuring effective AIDS treatment is good nutrition at household level.

To achieve good nutrition at household level, which will also have some positive impact on the prevailing overstretched health delivery system, requires adequate household incomes. "As it is well known," says Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Social Conditions Research Project of the JCTR, "effective health delivery does not start and end with hospitalization or visitations to health centres. It is a whole 'array' involving the kind of living conditions people experience."

The above premise of a holistic approach held by the JCTR has been one of the reasons for the JCTR's constant calls for adequate household incomes, particularly in light of the ever-rising cost of living in Zambia. This cost is clearly shown in the monthly *Basic Needs Basket*.

For example, in Lusaka at present a family of six needs to spend K450,850 on food alone. This has gone up by K16,850 from the cost in March of K434,000. If other costs such as housing, water, energy, etc., are included the cost is K1,110,150. It is obviously the case that in Zambia today, the majority of households spend a huge percentage of their income on food. However, this does not by any means imply good nutrition and adequate food intake. It is an expenditure confined only to mere survival.

Muweme further says that inadequate incomes have placed a disproportionate burden on women who, in addition to being household managers and in some cases income or food providers, are the majority caregivers in the context of the present day home-based care system. *But critically important in relationship to AIDS treatment of a lack of an adequate household income is the denial of a good home psychological environment necessary for the support and encouragement to AIDS patients.*

To achieve effectiveness in the treatment of AIDS, government should be in the forefront of promoting healthy life styles that will involve people having access to education, nutrition, shelter and all the requirements that make up the totality of healthy living. Without such a situation in place, Zambia will continue experiencing an overstretched health delivery system and the problem of HIV/AIDS will seem insurmountable.

Muweme also says that as the treatment of AIDS is being promoted through a programme of distribution of a cocktail of drugs commonly known as ARVs, it is important, as a matter of policy, that such a programme moves alongside a mechanism of ensuring that those suffering from AIDS have access to good nutrition. In the long-term, the aim should be that of general improvement of nutrition among all the Zambian households.

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