***Press Release 14th June, 2017.***

**Increased social protection funding to reduce poverty levels**

According to the central statistics demographics of 2015 Zambia has a population of 15,473,905 million people and a GDP of $21.15 billion. The 2015 living conditions monitory survey showed that 40.8% of Zambians are living in extreme poverty. The survey also revealed that 54.4% of the country’s population is poor, while 13.6% of the population is moderately poor. These statistics show how high poverty levels are in our country and why we all need to get worried and act quickly.

Government has put up various measures to fight poverty, one of the measures is increased budgetary allocation to social safety nets such as the social cash transfer and public service pension fund amongst others. The budget allocation to the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) programme increased by 83 percent, from K302 million in 2016 to K552 million in 2017. SCT covered 239,000 poor households in 2016 and is expected to cover over 500,000 poor households in 2017. The amount for social cash transfer has increased from K70 in 2016 to K90 in 2017. The JCTR credits the move by government to inject K500 million in social cash transfer this year. While the amount for social cash transfer may seem small, it may prove a critical source of capital and survival for many households who would otherwise have nothing to fall on.

The **May 2017** JCTR Basic Needs Basket (BNB) for a family of five living in Lusaka stood at **K4, 952.69** which is **K20.34** less than the **April** Basic Needs Basket which was at **K4,973.03**. This is in line with the Central Statistics Office inflation rate which reduced from **6.7%** **in April** to **6.5% in May**. The decrease in the BNB could be attributed to reduced costs in some food items which include; **Kapenta** which reduced from **K208.17 per kg** to **K196.5 per kg**, **Beans** also reduced from **K30 per kg to K28.5 per kg**. The supply of kapenta has improved in the markets which has led to reduced prices. The prices of beans have also decreased due to the abundance of fresh beans on the market. The BNB shows an increase in the prices of some food items such as; **Fish** which increased from **K96.35** per kg to **K130.55** per kg, **cooking oil** also increased from **K45.98** per **2.5L** to **K48.71** per **2.5L**, **tomato** increased from **K5.33 per kg** to **K7.33 per kg**. Non-food items like charcoal reduced from **K143.33** to **K135** per **90 kg** bag. The increasing demand for fish and additional fishing pressure has resulted in increasing prices. The Basic needs basket still remains high for most families and the high cost of commodities continues to deprive families of the required basic needs and nutritious meals they are required to have in a day in order to live a healthy life.

The Social Cash Transfer aims to reduce extreme poverty, increase the number of children attending primary school education and reduce the rate of mortality and morbidity among children under-five years old. Further, it aims to increase the number of households having a second meal per day and increase the number of households owning assets such as livestock.

The JCTR has noted in the past that distribution of SCT has proved to be a challenge, when it comes to identifying and reaching vulnerable households. The JCTR therefore urges government to develop transparent and efficient and ways of identifying beneficiaries and distributing these funds respectively.

**For more information, contact the Social and Economic Development Programme of**

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