

MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT ESSENTIAL IN IMPROVING LIVING CONDITIONS, SAYS JCTR

The idea of stakeholder cooperation and support to the PF government in accelerating poverty reduction and overcoming the growing inequalities is one that need not be overemphasised says JCTR, Social Conditions Programme Officer, Mr. Sosten Banda. The Centre therefore welcomes, the European Union's undertaking, made at the recent Commemoration of the European Union Day, to support the objectives of the government through provision of technical assistance to reduce poverty and also add its voice to the sentiments of the EU head of delegation, that although the country was doing well, few citizens benefited from the country's economic growth. It is therefore our hope that the technical assistance pledged will fundamentally aim to improve access by the poor to a greater range of economic opportunities and overcome the current inequalities says Mr Banda.

Livelihood improvement means every citizen should be able to live to their full potential, meeting their basic needs sustainably, while living with dignity in a just and peaceful society. This is dependent on their involvement in the economy as private agents or as employees. One the biggest challenges that we are facing is that the economic benefits that the country enjoys are yet to be fully enjoyed by the majority of citizens due to their limited involvement in the economy. This prevailing situation coupled with the current high cost of living in Zambia is hindering the ability of the majority of citizens to meet their basic needs as evidenced by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) monthly Basic Needs Basket (BNB) findings and analysis.

According to the latest BNB for the month of April 2012, the cost of living in Lusaka for a family of five stood at a staggering high of K2, 907,540 with the cost of food and essential non-food items at K776, 840 and K2, 130,700 respectively.

JCTR Social Conditions Programme Officer Mr. Sosten Banda says, "This high cost of living is not only typical to Lusaka but also to the other eleven urban towns where the monthly Basic Needs Basket is being conducted. This means a great number of citizens, including employees in the formal and informal sector are still not able to meet the current high cost of living and if this situation is left unchecked, income poverty will remain perpetual for many Zambians."

The JCTR Basic Needs Basket has also shown that, over the years the cost of meeting basic food and essential non-food items has remained consistently high and unaffordable for most Zambians when compared to the wages or salaries that the majority of the employees, both in government and the private sector are getting. In view of this, the JCTR recognises the crucial role that various stakeholders can play in addressing the high cost of living as reflected by the JCTR monthly baskets.

The involvement of multiple stakeholders such as "Government, Cooperating Partners, Trade Unions, Civil Society, including the Private sector, in addressing low returns on the economic benefits will ensure coordination of interests and objectives. Different perspectives and broader experiences will ensure realistic policies and plans. Such involvement is critical in order to deliver the much needed economic benefits to lift the majority of Zambians out of poverty", says Mr. Banda. Specific priorities for action should depend on careful prioritisation and broad consensus if the actions are to benefit the poorest of the poor. Stakeholder involvement will also ensure greater political support and strengthening of institutional capacities in poverty reduction at all levels.

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