

CAMPAIGNS MUST FOCUS ON ISSUES THAT WILL IMPROVE LIVING CONDITIONS OF ZAMBIANS, SAYS JCTR

As the country is preparing for the September 2011 elections, JCTR urges all political parties and electorates to focus on issues that will enhance the quality of living of every Zambian, especially the poor. According to the *Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR)*, a faith based organisation that promotes social justice, “it is imperative that the campaigns and subsequent parliamentary and presidential elections be based on improving household living conditions”. Of utmost importance are the issues relating to availability and accessibility of adequate nutrition and quality social services to the majority of Zambians.

Considering that the country’s macro-economic indicators are stable, it is essential that various parties explain how this will be sustained and how the various human development challenges will be addressed.

From the standpoint of the electorates, election time is meant to critically analyse party manifestoes and promises. It is *JCTR*’s belief that the duty of the electorates should go beyond the actual voting to actively participating in all forms of governance processes after the elections. “Specifically, electorates must make Government accountable and measure its’ success by evaluating their performance on the basis of the promises made during campaigns”, says *JCTR*.

If the process of elections is to be meaningful to Zambian households, they must be seen to be creating positive changes in as far as improving households ability to access basic needs.

The *JCTR* has been collecting information on living conditions on a regular basis since the 1990s using the *Basic Needs Basket (BNB)*, a tool that tracks the average cost of basic food and essential non-food commodities for an average family of six in Lusaka. The *BNB* is now being conducted in ten other towns across Zambia. Overtime, the evidence has consistently shown that most Zambian households face challenges in accessing the most basic of needs, mainly adequate food and essential non-food commodities, such as decent housing facilities.

At the end of July 2011, the *BNB* for Lusaka was K2,922,800. While this showed a reduction of K5,950 from K2,928,750 recorded in June 2011, the average cost is too high for most households to adequately meet essential household needs. Furthermore, as the *JCTR*’s total *BNB* cost excludes household cost of health, education and transport, average monthly costs for most households are higher than would be reflected by the *BNB*.

For basic food alone, the July *BNB* recorded a minor reduction of K550 from K806,650 in June to K806,100 in July. Breakfast Mealie Meal reduced from K46,300 to K45,800 for a 25 Kg bag while 1 Kg Beans reduced from K14,200 to K13,800. Other food items that recorded a reduction were Vegetables and Tomatoes. The reduction in these food items was influenced by increased supply on the local market, normally exhibited during the post harvest period. On the other hand, commodities such as Kapenta and onion recorded an increase per Kg. Kapenta increased by K2,500 from K66,700 to K69,200 while Onion increased by K200 from K9,400 to K9,600 during the period under review. Prices for other commodities such as Bread, Sugar, Cooking Oil and Milk remained unchanged.

Considering the high cost of living, it is contingent upon political parties to seriously debate issues that will bring about real development, that is, development that benefits the majority of the Zambians who are poor. The *JCTR* will keenly follow all political debates especially those hinging on improving living conditions of the people. As such, we demand among others, concrete policy suggestions and strategies on how jobs for Zambians will be created, how children’s stunting levels will be eliminated and how the quality of social services such as education and health will be improved.

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