

## **JCTR CALLS FOR INTRODUCTION OF A SERIOUS FEEDING PROGRAMME IN ALL PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

The *Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection* (JCTR) is calling upon government to *seriously* and *urgently* consider providing feeding programmes in all primary schools across the country. The JCTR makes this call in light of three major factors. *First*, on the basis of the *Basic Needs Basket* information that has increasingly shown household difficult economic situations. *Second*, as a response to the recently launched 2006 UNICEF Report "State of The World's Children." *Third*, on the basis of the recent World Bank Report entitled "Repositioning of Nutrition as Central to Development."

According to Muweme Muweme Coordinator of the Social Conditions Research Project of the JCTR, the monthly *Basic Needs Basket* has consistently shown a disproportionate situation of high cost of living on one hand and a general situation of low incomes of many households on the other. For example, in the month of February, the cost of food alone for a family of six in Lusaka was K508,450 compared to K506,250 in January. In Livingstone food alone was costing K533,200, Kabwe K465,020, Ndola K512,680, Kitwe K504,880 and Luanshya K507,710. This highlight of food alone is designed to give prominence to the foremost of needs for every human being, the need for food. The inability to meet or afford food presents us with all kinds of serious consequences for the household and the overall economy.

The introduction of feeding programmes in all primary schools has the potential of being a practical way of creating schools as centres of attraction for children. This will not only promote enrolment and retention rates in our schools but will more importantly improve the nutrition status of our children, which is key especially to those children affected and infected by HIV/AIDS and those children from economically disempowered households. Moreover, these feeding programmes will lead to more effective learning by our children who will no longer be distracted by chronic hunger and regular illness.

A proposed response of such great magnitude should not only be evaluated in terms of its short-term economic costs, but also in terms of its moral foundation and long-term economic benefits. Improving the nutrition of our children is a profoundly moral action that has a deep and significant potential of giving all our children an equal start to life. It has the potential of bringing on board "excluded and invisible children" (which unfortunately are too many in Zambia), to give these children an opportunity to feel what it really means to be a true human and to live in a society that promotes human values.

But such a move would also have serious economic consequences in the long-term, as observed by the World Bank in its latest report "Repositioning of Nutrition as Central to Development." The Report observes, among other things, that malnutrition not only leads to school dropout, inadequate incomes in adulthood and less benefits from schooling, but also costs poor countries up to three percent of their yearly GDP. But the Report also emphasizes that "unless action is taken within the first two years of a child's life to improve nutrition, children will suffer irreparable damage, ultimately adversely affecting the country's economic growth."

Though feeding programmes won't target children in the first two years of life, the JCTR strongly believes that providing feeding programmes in primary schools could also free up additional resources to improve nutrition of pregnant women and infants.

"At the end of the day," says Muweme Muweme, "the realisation that people are a means and an end of development must reign supreme in *our minds, actions and policy directions*. Certainly reports from UNICEF and the World Bank have yet reminded us of that imperative. But more importantly we are eager to see the kind of action that government and each one of us is going to take to promote child welfare."

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