

**JCTR ASKS: WHY HAVE WE NOT REALISED  
THE VALUE OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH ALL THE TIME?**

One of the most effective ways of ensuring that the Zambian people meet basic needs is by significant investment in education and health, says The *Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection* (JCTR). But the question is: why have we not realised the value of health and education all the time?

Truly, the evidence of the role of education and health in development is well documented. Other than facilitating positive changes at the macro level, education and health play a significant role in micro level changes at the household level seen in terms of the ability of households to meet basic needs, lead healthy and productive lives, fighting HIV/AIDS, engaging in political processes for the improvement of their communities, etc. There can never be any good national plan other than that which accords priority to education and health.

According to Muweme Muweme of the Social Conditions Research Project of the JCTR basic needs in Zambia have *by far and for long* been very difficult to meet. This situation of inadequate decent human living conditions is stifling individual creativity, and affecting effective participation by the people in the national development process.

For example, the JCTR monthly *Basic Needs Basket* estimates the cost of food items such as mealie meal, beans, green vegetables, cooking oil meat, eggs, etc., and essential non-food items such as housing in medium density area, energy, wash and bath soap for a family of six. In the month of July, the *Basic Needs Basket* was recorded at K513,870 for food in Lusaka, K501,700 in Livingstone, K494,710 in Kabwe, K557,830 in Ndola, K496,890 in Kitwe and K497,100 in Luanshya.

The JCTR monthly *Basic Needs Basket* provides an independent and evidence based view of what is happening in people's living conditions. "The relationship," says Muweme, "between the cost of basic needs and people's incomes shows to what extent organisations in particular and Zambia in general is either promoting social exclusion or promoting societal integration and people's effective participation in national development."

It is in such a context that the JCTR strongly endorses the view of President Levy Patrick Mwanawasa, SC when he mentioned during the Press Conference of 03 August 2005 that "plans for education and health be developed within sixty days with the participation of trade unions." But our education should be more than passing examinations, it should train the mind, encourage good character and should be original. But above all, there is need to ensure that education and health are reflected in our new Constitution in the Bill of Rights as a basic human right.

JCTR is pleased that the Draft Constitution reflects the Bill of Rights and it is hoped that this will remain as such in the final Constitution. *That way, government will be obliged to make clear efforts to meet the needs of quality education and health and it will also ensure accountability and transparency by the government in its preparation of the National Budget and the distribution of national resources.* In addition to primary education being free in the truest sense, there is need to make primary level education compulsory.

It is the view of the JCTR that the forerunner to effective national development is the meeting of basic needs of the people which in turn depend on education and health. The meeting of basic needs by the people will facilitate social development. Indeed JCTR believes that "social development is economic development". To realise this, there can never be any other route other than significant investment in education and health.

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