

FUEL CRISIS TO AFFECT MORE THE POOR, SAYS JCTR

There is no doubt at all that the current fuel crisis affects more strongly those members of our society that are already living on the margins of survival. But the crisis also exposes the downside of our current development approaches, says the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

While we can talk about blanket or across-the-board impact of the current fuel crisis in the country, we must remember that it is the widows, the unemployed, the rural populations, those who have been waiting for their terminal benefits for a long time, those who cannot afford three meals per day, etc., who will bear the greatest impact of this situation both immediately and in the long terms, says Muweme Muweme of the Social Conditions Project of the JCTR.

Therefore as we attach great importance to strategic planning in regard to the management of fuel in Zambia -- which has certainly not been effective this far -- also it is critical to remember that crises of this nature will always have varied impacts across society. Thus there is the danger of placing some sections or members of society in a much more difficult situation of recovery.

In addition, the current fuel crisis should remind us in Zambia, in Africa and in the wider developing world to realise how precarious our socioeconomic situations are and more seriously to rethink our development approaches. "Today," says Muweme, "talk of development is more inclined towards simply wealth and material acquisition, and that is how come one hears in the discourse of Zambia's development sentiments like replacing "poverty reduction" with "wealth creation". But this implicitly suggests that regardless of what is happening to the earth's resources, we have to move on. Unfortunately, this is a common but certainly a false and non-sustainable approach to addressing our problems."

Much as it is obvious that the current fuel crisis is not predicated on over-consumption of the commodity here in Zambia, it is important that the country's development efforts strongly respect, care and properly utilize the earth's resources. Shouldn't Zambia be setting an example to the rest of the world in the utilisation of resources, particularly to those that are consuming more of the earth's resources such as crude oil?

The JCTR *Basic Needs Basket* (measuring the cost of living for a family of six in Lusaka, Livingston, Kabwe, Ndola, Luanshya and Kitwe) is a *highlight* of food and non-food items necessary for a decent and sustainable human survival. Its composition is certainly not designed to promote movement towards unnecessarily higher levels of consumption. Rather it shows only basic requirements for survival, which unfortunately even at that level has continued to be beyond many households in Zambia. For example, in the month of September, the cost of basic needs, food and non-food in Lusaka stood at K1,353,790.

It is JCTR's view that Zambia can become a force for change by moving away from the current approaches to development designed on massive consumption of the earth's resources. The current fuel crisis offers a challenging occasion to reflect on the kind of development Zambia is taking. One might well view Brigadier General Miyanda's cycling as a political ploy but one could also ask, is it demonstrating an approach that makes more sense to have a sustainable world?

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