

BNNB Statement

7th February, 2023.

STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION REQUIRED TO REDUCE THE HIGH COST OF MEALIE MEAL PRICES

The cost of living for a family of five as measured by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) Basic Needs and Nutrition Basket (BNNB) for the month of January 2023 in Lusaka stood at K9, 047.31. This reflects a K64.49 increase from the K8, 982.82 recorded in December, 2022. The upward movement in the basket is attributed to increased prices in food items such as 2 bags of 25kg mealie meal (roller) which went up by K51.28 from K245 (K122.50/25 kg bag) to K296.28 (K148.14/25 kg bag), 2kg chicken which went up by K41.46 from K272.49 (108.99/2kg) to K313.95 (K125.58/2kg), 1kg kapenta which went up by K28.63 from K239.36 (K239.36/1kg) to K267.99 (K267.99/1kg) and 40kg vegetables which went up by K38.06 from K441.96 (K441.96/40 kg) to K480.02 (K480.02/40 kg). The basket, however, recorded notable decreases in food items such as 6kg cassava flour which went down by K44.46 from K109.50 (K18.25/1kg) to K65.04 (K10.84/1kg) and 4kg onion which went down by K37.78 from K117.69 (K29.42/1 kg) to K79.91 (K19.98/1kg).

The JCTR observes that the Zambian kwacha depreciated against major currencies such as the dollar during the month of reflection. It should also be noted that, while the annual inflation rate recorded by the Zambia Statistics Agency fell to 9.4 percent in January from 9.9 percent in December 2022, and the Energy Regulation Board pump price of petroleum products fell in the month of reflection, the cost of living increased slightly. Food items, particularly mealie meal, drove this increase. To that end, the JCTR is concerned about the market's high mealie meal prices and the fundamental right to bodily integrity to the means necessary for the proper development of life which among other include the right to food¹.

Mealie meal remains an important staple in Zambian households. The commodity's high prices (trading at K250/25kg per bag for breakfast meal in some cases), combined with stagnant or declining disposable income for various households across the country, is already limiting access to the valuable commodity. This has serious consumption and nutritional implications for the average Zambian household, and it is even worse for low-income households, who will be disproportionately affected if this persists. As a result, the JCTR is urging the government to prioritize action to address the high mealie meal prices while continuing to present efforts to reduce the high cost of living.

The JCTR strongly considers the Cost of Diet linear programming when constructing the basic needs and nutrition basket, which selects the least expensive combination of local foods that meet the specifications for energy, macronutrients, and micronutrients and are consistent with typical dietary habits. As a result, roller meal remains a more nutritious option when compared to breakfast mealie meal. However, the challenge on the ground is that it is the least preferred, despite being slightly

¹ https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html

cheaper. As a result, while consumer choice is important, more awareness of the nutritional value of the roller meal, which can temporarily be used as an alternative to the high priced breakfast meal while the government addresses its high price, must be raised. Households are encouraged to consider consuming roller meal to improve nutritional outcomes.

Given the foregoing, the JCTR suggests the following measures:

1. To ensure food security, the government must control any illegal mealie meal exportation and consider implementing policy instruments such as the ban on maize and mealie meal exportation.
2. The government must hold a stakeholder consultation forum in order to find a long-term and inclusive solution to the commodity's high prices.
3. While it is important and commendable that the government increased agricultural allocations in the 2023 budget, JCTR urges the government to commit resources to further support the sector and accelerate the implementation of any national investment programs.
4. Lastly, JCTR calls on government to complete the development (and ultimate roll out) of the comprehensive agricultural program to enable capacities of small scale farmers to accommodate alternatives to mealie meal.

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