

JCTR CALLS FOR SHARPER FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Attainment of development goals--that is, improvement in people's well being such as having access to education, health care, employment, nutritional diets, etc.--is a process that entails constant analysis, monitoring and focus on issues that lead to attainment of such.

Any form of distraction to that process may lead to losing course of direction and thereby derailing development, people's well being. "This derailment implies only one thing: *prolonged suffering of the Zambian people*," says Muweme Muweme, coordinator, Economic and Social Development Project of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

According to the Economic and Social Development Project, a sharper focus on integral development must not be lost. On one hand, Zambia's human development indicators on almost all accounts, (education, life expectancy, literacy, etc.), are generally very low with no signs of improving. On the other hand, trends in cost of living show a constant increase.

The JCTR monthly food basket, a cost of living survey for a family of six in Lusaka, shows an increase of K8,210 from January's figure of K319,870 to K328,080 for the month of February. (This increase is part of a constant pattern over the past year)

This indeed is a substantial rise that will impact negatively on the well being of the people whose incomes have remained stagnant. It is now a trend for the country to experience price increases in food and other basic necessities for human survival every month. "There must be national commitment to improve people's well being if the country can begin to experience a wind of hope towards poverty alleviation and ultimately its eradication," says Muweme.

Currently, Zambia is in the process of formulating a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which will be a blueprint for the country on national development. This indeed is an important process that equals national planning within the free market economy dispensation. It is an exercise that requires the whole nation to prudently and diligently focus on this important process that can help this country address the overwhelming problem of poverty.

It is against this background that the Economic and Social Development Project of the JCTR calls upon national leaders, of whatever political party, "to sharpen their focus and apply greater vigour and pragmatism on issues that are genuinely pertinent to the development of this country, issues that are at the core of lessening the burden of suffering on the part of the poor."

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