

JCTR *BASIC NEEDS BASKET* RECORDS LOW MEALIE MEAL PRICE, OTHER FOOD ITEMS REMAIN HIGH

One of the key benefits of focusing on agriculture, especially sustainable ways of maize production in the Zambian context, is its positive impact on the cost of living of all our citizens, says the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

This is according to the *Basic Needs Basket*, the JCTR monthly estimation of the cost of living for a family of six in Lusaka. Once again the Basket has recorded some reduction in the price of mealie meal. The price of mealie meal has declined by K3,500, moving from K30,500 for the month of June to K27,000 for the month of July.

“While this reduction is a positive outcome, particularly in the urban setting, there must be a balance in which such a situation is taking care of the interests of both the producers of maize, especially the small-scale farmers, and the urban consumers,” says Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Social Conditions Research Project of the JCTR.

This reduction could be a reflection of a very low price at which the maize is being acquired. This may be because the small-scale farmers are unable to store the maize for sale later when the price is favourable. They may also have to sell even at a lower price than the recommended “floor price” of K30,000 because of other pressing household needs.

It is also important to acknowledge that while the price of mealie meal has gone down, other food items such as meat, eggs, cooking oil, bread, sugar, kapenta, dry fish, etc., have remained high, meaning that households continue to experience serious difficulties in meeting their daily essential requirements.

The cost of food only is now K357,200. For the month of June it was K365,400. The cost of essential non-food items such as charcoal, wash and bath soap, jelly (for example, Vaseline), etc., is now K648,200. The cost of essential non-food items has gone up slightly by K1,500 from the month of June figure of K646,700. Thus the total cost of the *Basic Needs Basket* (i.e., cost of food plus cost of essential non-food items) for the month of July stands at K1,005,400 compared to K1,012,100 for the month of June. “This is indeed a very slight decrease,” says Muweme.

The JCTR conducts the *Basic Needs Basket* survey as a way of highlighting the daily challenges that the majority of Zambian households encounter in trying to meet decent sustainable livelihoods. “The inability,” states Muweme, “to lead decent lives on account of meeting food as well as non-food requirements in sufficient ways has unfortunately been one of the most prominent failures of the Zambian society. As a consequence, it must be taken into serious consideration during the current contentious discussions on civil servants wages and conditions of service.”

[For more information, contact Muweme Muweme, Social Conditions Research Project of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, P.O. Box 37774, Lusaka, Zambia; tel: 260-1-290410; fax: 260-1-290759; e-mail: socialjctr@zamnet.zm; internet: www.jctr.org.zm]

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