

POLITICS OF IMPROVING THE ECONOMY KEY TO FINDING SOLUTIONS TO ZAMBIA'S PROBLEMS, SAYS THE JCTR

Zambia's need for a strategic and effective focus on its economy remains at all times highly critical. "This focus on the economy is one that must not be in proclamation only. It should translate into actions that will lead to improved living conditions by the majority of Zambian people through having access to employment, adequate and nutritionally balanced food intake, quality education and health care, employment, etc." says Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Social Conditions Research Project of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

The longstanding need for focus on the national economy and improving standards of living among the Zambian people should also be seen as a political issue that every politician should be challenged to address beyond daily rhetorical statements that the Zambian people have been subjected to.

The people of Zambia have faced a lot of challenges, among them the ever rising cost of living that mean always inadequate food intake, lack of access to quality health care and education. The *Basic Needs Basket* that shows the cost for fundamental survival for a family of six in Lusaka has again revealed the magnitude of the challenges faced by the Zambian people. In the month of September, the Basket has recorded increases, among others, in the prices of meat, dry fish, kapenta, beans and eggs.

According to one Lusaka meat trader, "The price of meat has gone up because of reduced supply of the product to the market. This is because there has been no pressure among households that own cattle to sell some of their cattle in order to meet other food requirements such as maize, as is usually the case during seasons of poor agricultural production. This has resulted in reduced supply of meat leading to price increases in the commodity in urban areas."

Food *only* is now costing K384,450. In the month of August, food *only* was costing K367,700. There has been an upward adjustment of K16,750. The *total* cost of the *Basic Needs Basket*, that is, food and non-food essential items such as energy, water, housing, electricity, wash and bath soap, etc., for the month of September is K1,027,450. This figure represents an increase of K12,950 from the August figure of K1,014,500. The *Basic Needs Basket* does not include costs for other necessary requirements such as personal care, transport, health, education, etc.

It is true that *what* people can effectively achieve in national development is influenced by enabling conditions of good health, access to quality education, creation of economic opportunities, etc. All these elements, as already observed, are unfortunately strikingly lacking in Zambia. "It is also true that Zambia is in greater need of a culture of initiatives or creativity. For such a situation to be achieved, it is critical that people are released from the *incessant* daily preoccupations of meeting basic needs," says Muweme.

It is JCTR's hope that in the months to come, as the Republican President has indicated, the nation will move towards more explicit focus on social economic issues that will lead to the improvement of people's lives in Zambia.

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