

BASIC NEEDS BASKET REVEALS THAT LUANSHYA IS HIGH COST OF LIVING AREA

People of Luanshya are experiencing one of the highest cost of living among urban areas in Zambia. This is according to recent *Basic Needs Basket* information collected from Luanshya by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR). An analysis of the information has shown that the cost of food alone during the last three months has consistently been higher in Luanshya than Lusaka, Ndola, Kabwe, Livingstone and Kitwe.

According to Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Social Conditions Research Project of the JCTR, the cost of food alone for the months of April, May and June averaged K462,700 for Luanshya compared to the average cost of K456,300 for Lusaka.

The fact that Luanshya has revealed higher cost of living than the other urban areas does not imply that cost of living is affordable in the other areas. What it simply means is that households in Luanshya are experiencing more difficulties in meeting their basic requirements, particularly food than those in other urban areas. "The prevailing high cost of living in Luanshya," says Muweme, "is mainly on account of relatively high prices of mealie meal, bread, tomato, onion, cooking oil, etc."

"Unless fundamental changes occur in the way Zambia manages its social, political and economic affairs," says Muweme "it appears the Zambian people for many years to come, and even for the whole of their life-times, will be unable to meet the most basic of human requirements such as food, decent shelter, access to quality health care and education, etc."

Certainly a number of reasons account for this situation. The reasons have included the longstanding problem of a governance system that does not set and maintain priorities in the face of inadequate resources. The governance system of Zambia and most of Africa has also failed to galvanize, especially in the present time, a national mood of patriotism towards a work ethic that is critical to moving this nation forward and hold promise, especially for the children and women of Zambia.

"Little wonder," says Muweme, "Zambia and most of Africa continue to find it extremely difficult in addressing problems of the huge external debt and imbalances in the global social, political and economic governance."

It is true to say that Zambia and most of Africa have had plans, in some cases well thought out plans, to address the problems of the people. For example, Zambia has had a series of national plans from the time of independence and now has a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). However, these plans have most of the time suffered the fate of lack of effective implementation.

Investment in human beings should remain an all-time high priority area for the Zambian government. "The failure of households to meet their basic needs is in itself an indication of lack of investment in human beings," says Muweme.

According to the JCTR, two ways that Zambian citizens can respond to the economic challenges facing the country are:

1. Give input into the preparation of budget 2005 as requested by Finance Minister Ng'andu Magande, to ensure that effective priority is given to meeting human needs;
2. Push politicians currently fighting each other over minor personal issues to pay attention to larger socio-economic issues affecting the livelihoods of all.

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