

INADEQUATE RESPONSES AND A COMPLEX INTERACTION OF FACTORS BEHIND INCREASES IN POVERTY: JCTR CALLS FOR *REAL* ACTION DURING THE GLOBAL WEEK OF ACTION

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) says that it is very clear that inadequate responses and a complex interaction of both local and international factors has made the fight against poverty increasingly difficult in Zambia. According to the Social Conditions Research Project of the JCTR, both local and international responses to the poverty problems have rather been *inadequate* and in some cases merely *cosmetic*.

The above situation has given rise to low direct investment in human capital, the problem of provision and accessibility to social services (such as clean water, proper sanitation, solid waste management, provision of good roads, etc.), inadequate and inappropriate energy for both cooking, unemployment, inadequate food and nutrition, a poor health and education system and to top it all the escalation in the HIV/AIDS problem. These problems together with the high cost of living have led to suffering of the majority ordinary Zambians, especially women who have in a *versatile but stressful* fashion responded to these problems.

For example, the cost of the *Basic Needs Basket*, -- which is a monthly survey of the cost of essential food and non-food items that comprise the bare-minimum basket of goods needed for an urban family of six to survive with a decent and healthy standard of living -- has consistently shown the extent of suffering of most Zambian households.

It is true to say, as observed by the Co-adjutor Archbishop of Lusaka Catholic Archdiocese, Telesphore Mpundu, "that the majority of Zambians struggle to make ends meet." For example, in March 2005 the cost of a nutritious basket of food alone for an average family was K466,900 in Livingstone, K421,910 in Kabwe, K474,010 in Luanshya, K493,130 in Ndola and K469,810 in Kitwe. The *Basic Needs Basket* totalled K1,331,950 in Lusaka, K1,091,900 in Livingstone, K874,750 in Kabwe, K804,990 in Luanshya, K989,230 in Ndola and K997,310 in Kitwe.

From the above figures and comparing them with the previous month of February, we can see that in spite of an increase in fuel prices and a serious drought in some parts of the country, the cost of living across these urban areas remained fairly unchanged during the month of March. However, it is most likely that the upward adjustments in the cost of the Basket will occur in the near future because of the effects of the drought in some parts of the country and fuel prices.

But what is important to realise is that addressing the challenge of high cost of living and other associated problems is not a simple task that will be achieved overnight and by only looking at the local causes. It is one problem that needs to address also a tripod of international factors. First, through addressing the current trade injustice which has undermined the ability of poor countries to earn adequate resources. Second, ensuring that there is total external debt cancellation of poor countries which have disadvantaged resource allocations to the provision of social services, education, health, etc., in favour of allocations to debt servicing. Third, there must be adequate resource flows to poor countries in the form of increased amounts of aid.

One of the important preconditions for achieving the above is participation and commitment of each and every Zambian working in partnership with a devoted government, and in solidarity with people around the world. This concerted effort is being engendered primarily by an

inherent distinct characteristic of being human, which is the great sense of empathy with the majority suffering people of the world.

This is the message of the **Global Week of Action**, 10 to 16 April 2005, during which millions of people in over 70 countries across the world will be taking action in their local regions in support of a call to “Make Poverty History!” In Zambia, JCTR working with other partners will be leading discussions, rallies, workshops, visitations to Government Ministries, radio call-in programmes and drama performances within Lusaka, Livingstone, Monze, Mongu, Kasama and the Copperbelt in order to add the strong voice of the Zambian people to the global cry to end the unacceptable evil of poverty.

The **Global Week of Action** is a call to each one of us to challenge situations, policies, etc., that are entrenching our suffering in various ways. The complex interaction of trade injustice, debt and inadequate aid flows coupled with local factors such as less than optimal resource allocations to education and health have given rise to failed investment in human beings and high cost of living. Shouldn't we as Zambians do something during the **Global Week of Action** for the sake of ourselves, our brothers and sisters, our children and posterity? That is the challenge of our present day Zambia, it is the time for real action around a tripod of *trade justice, debt and aid!*

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Advocacy on Living Conditions

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