

JCTR CALLS FOR SERIOUS EFFORTS AT MEETING MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN ZAMBIA

The recent meeting called by the government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to review Zambia's progress towards attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) revealed a serious situation of hunger that deserves everyone's attention and a significant shift away from looking at hunger as a way of life, says the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

Inadequate food not only affects education and health -- such as retarding growth in children -- but also results into loss of productivity in the nation leading to a compromise of national development. "The failure," says Muweme Muweme of the JCTR, "to reduce the number of people suffering from hunger is indicative of the fact that there are other considerations that need to be looked at in order to enable households have access to adequate food all the time other than considerations of food production, distribution, communication infrastructure, etc."

Prominent among issues to pay attention to is the question of household income in Zambia. It is a well known fact that there are serious problems of household's access to food on account of income.

The JCTR has constantly highlighted this situation through its simple but very useful monthly *Basic Needs Basket* that has revealed a general inadequacy of household incomes in relation to meeting essential needs. The *Basic Needs Basket* is compiled through gathering of prices of essential food and non-food items to estimate cost of living for a family of six in Lusaka, Livingstone, Kabwe, Ndola, Luanshya and Kitwe. The *Basic Needs Basket* only highlights the essential requirements of food such as mealie meal, kapenta, green vegetables, cooking oil, milk, etc., as well as non-food requirements such as housing water, energy, soap, etc.

In the month of August, the cost of food alone in Lusaka was recorded at K513,590 while the total for the *Basic Needs Basket* was at K1,358,990. Note that this figure does not include other essential costs such as transport, health, fuel, etc. If these are added, the cost would be much higher than K1,358,990.

At another level, the failure to reduce the number of people suffering from hunger is indicative of the inadequate attention being given to the attainment of MDGs. Zambia needs a behaviour that is consistent with identified or set priorities and a scenario where there are clearly defined links between MDGs and other national development processes taking place.

For example, in a situation where we have inadequate household incomes, it means efforts must be directed at practical ways of creating employment with clear targets of measuring the number and kind of jobs being created. "Improvement of people's lives calls for not only having clearly identified priorities but most importantly also calls for sticking to priorities day-by-day, month-by-month and year-by-year," says Muweme Muweme.

The JCTR strongly believes that there must be *drastic* measures seen in expansion of education and health, including more efforts in agricultural development as well as measures such as significant creation of quality employment opportunities and a certain work ethic for Zambia to start recording serious progress in towards meeting the MDGS.

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2005-09-05

September 2005 Basic Needs and Nutrition Basket: JCTR Calls for Serious Efforts at Meeting Millenimum Development Goals in Zambia

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