

JCTR SAYS DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS SHOULD BRING CHANGES AT A FAMILY LEVEL

Because the family is the basic unit of social cohesion and the primary determinant of a nation's character, there is need to pay particular attention to conditions within households in the current socioeconomic context, says the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR). We should all critically examine the household environment in which we are bringing up children, in terms of not only the material wellbeing but also the attitudes and values communicated to young people.

"The family," says Muweme Muweme, Coordinator of the Social Conditions Research Project of the JCTR, "provides the foundation for the socialisation of children which includes passing on such values as honesty, responsibility, respect, love for others, etc. It is the primary level and preparatory stage for individual contribution to wider society. A child who is raised without good values will always struggle to make positive impacts in life."

Since national change is to a larger extent influenced by what is happening at the family level, a nation must undergo some analysis at the family level if it begins to see problems such as high levels of poverty, corruption, undesirable social behaviour, etc.

For this reason, the JCTR produces the *Basic Needs Basket*, which monitors the cost of essential food and non-food items to an averaged-sized family of six. On one level, the *Basic Needs Basket* shows how families struggle to provide for the minimum need to survive with a decent standard of living. But, according to Muweme, at a deeper level the *Basic Needs Basket* exposes the difficult faced by parents to raise children who have strong values, hopes for the future, confidence in their own abilities, faith in the benefits of hard work, etc.

For example, in the month of October the cost of food alone was K509,060 in Lusaka, and adding costs of essential non-food items, the cost of basic needs totals K1,348,860. If a family cannot afford this cost, what is the effect on children? It means negative effects such as a lack of concentration at school, poor nutrition resulting in stunted growth, street children, etc.

The JCTR attaches great importance to the statement by President Mwanawasa that there should be responsible parenthood in our nation. It is indeed irresponsible to have children when one cannot look after them in terms of not only meeting their material needs but also ensuring that they grow into responsible adults.

However, much as the responsibility of bringing up children rests with parents, it is important to recognise that it is the responsibility of communities and government to create a suitable environment to help parents raise children well. This means the creation of sustainable sources of livelihoods, development of infrastructure, increased access to adequate and quality health care, offering affordable quality education, etc. One necessary step to ensuring that this happens is to have in the Zambian Constitution's Bill of Rights explicit inclusion of economic, social and cultural rights to legally assure enjoyment of these basic necessities.

The economic problems of Zambia have had a negative effect of not only making it difficult for households to effectively meet their needs but also have eroded the ability of parents to fulfil their obligations to their children. It is the view of the JCTR that approaches to national development must include efforts to strengthen values at the family level (i.e., honesty, responsibility, hard work, etc) alongside efforts to fight other forms of deprivations.

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2005-11-02

November 2005 Basic Needs and Nutrition Basket: JCTR Says Development Interventions Should Bring Changes at a Family Level

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