

BNNB Statement

15th August, 2023.

Lack of Measures to Counteract Shifts in Production Inputs (Fuel, Maize) Worsening the Cost of Living

The cost of living for a family of five, as measured by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) Basic Needs and Nutrition Basket (BNNB) for the month of July 2023 in Lusaka, stood at K9, 301.18. In comparison to the recorded figure of K9, 239.45 in June 2023, this signifies an increase of K61.73. The basket's upward movement can be attributed to price increases in food items such as two bags of roller mealie meal which increased by K39.67 from K321.99 (K161/25kg) to K361.66 (K180.83/25kg). Chicken increased by K75.68 from K256.49/5kg (K102.60/2kg) to K332.17/5kg (K132.87/2kg) while vegetables increased by K174.48 from K449.35/40kg to K623.83/40kg. Non-food items section recording a reduction in the charcoal that saw a drop in price, with two 90kg bag(s) reducing by K40 from K700 (K350.00/90 kg bag) to K660 (K330/90 kg bag).

The high cost of living, undeniably a global crisis, has continued to be driven by factors such as seasonality, fuel pump price fluctuations and exchange rate variations. These movements have continued to cause a steady increase in the price of both food and non-food items. This scenario makes it difficult for households to attain fundamental basic necessities, as incomes and livelihoods rarely adapt in sync with fluctuations in prices.

The staple food, mealie meal, which has seen sustained higher prices than usual this year, is one commodity worth highlighting. For a family of five as estimated by JCTR, two 25kg bags of “roller” mealie meal is required per month for consumption. The July BNNB data revealed a worrying trend, with the cost of two bags of roller mealie meal exceeding the K360 mark, thereby eroding the purchasing power of households and making it increasingly challenging for households to manage their daily expenses. This means that the monthly cost of Zambia’s staple food has now exceeded the monthly disbursement of K200 per household provided under the Social Cash Transfer meant to bolster the resilience of vulnerable families. This alone highlights the gravity of the situation especially for vulnerable households. The picture becomes worse when we look at the impact of rising cost of other essentials like ZESCO tariffs, fuel and transport.

The Centre therefore calls upon the government to establish strategic reserves of essential commodities like mealie meal to buffer against supply shocks and price fluctuations. The government must quickly put in place strategies to reduce the cost of farming inputs aimed at bolstering maize production and other key cereals, in order to incentivise local farmers and to enhance domestic supply. By offering financial support or incentives to farmers, the government can foster increased cultivation. The Zambia National Service (ZNS) must come in to supplement the supply of mealie meal for the local market only while the private sector must be supported through consistent export policies in the sub-sector and other incentives to supply the yearning export market. ZNS must not be allowed to crowd out the private sector as far as export market is concerned.

In addition, the Centre urges the general public at large to broaden their dietary choices in order to decrease dependence on a single food product and obtain all necessary nutrients. Roller mealie meal, which offers greater nutritional value, comes at a comparatively lower cost compared to breakfast

mealie meal. Further, a deliberate policy to increase production of a diverse selection of food in different agricultural landscapes, builds resilience for the country even when it comes to crises like climate change, which has more recently presented itself in Zambia as floods and drought. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* states we have a moral obligation to take care of creation through investment in rural infrastructures, a better organization of local or national markets, systems of irrigation, and the development of techniques of sustainable agriculture.

For further clarifications contact the Social and Economic Development (SED) Programme at the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) on 0955295881 and 0954755319. Email: jctr.sed@gmail.com and jctr.info@gmail.com. Martin Mwamba Road, Plot 3813 Martin Mwamba Road, Olympia Park – Lusaka. P. O. Box 37774 Lusaka – Zambia.