

BNNB Statement

11th September, 2023.

The Undeniable Urgency of the Cost of Living Crisis Should Not Be Underestimated

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 August 2023 in Lusaka, stood at K9, 267.34. In comparison to the recorded figure of K9, 301.18 in July 2023, this signifies a reduction of approximately K34. Our research attributes this reduction to the reduced average prices of vegetables that moved to K413.88/40kg from K623.83/40kg, the price of cooking oil reduced to K139.92/3.6 liters from K160.66/3.6 liters and soya pieces reduced to K114.60/2kg from K143.82/kg. Despite reduction in the basket, the research also revealed an increase in the prices of food items such as roller mealie meal which increased to K195.17/25kg bag from K180.83/25kg bag. Rice increased from K231.34/4 kg to K257.06/4kg while cassava flour increased from K111.73/6kg (K18.62/kg) to K139.90/6kg (K23.32/kg) and the price of milk increased from K231.34/10 liters to K257.06/10 liters. Lastly, the price of charcoal increased from K330/90kg bag to K455/90kg bag.

The Jesuit Center for Theological Reflection observes that the cost of living in the country remains high, and the government has yet to give a clear road map for addressing this challenge. The Centre remains concerned about the lack of more stringent measures to improve the cost of living. As we approach the year's end, the cost of living has remained consistently above the K9, 000 mark in Lusaka, with the national average cost exceeding K6, 000. As a point of reflection for the two years in government marked this August 2023, JCTR, like the rest of the citizenry, is still looking forward to the fulfillment of government's commitment to "Restore Economic Growth and Safeguard Livelihoods" and particularly in relation to addressing the cost of living "*we must sustain livelihoods ensure affordable cost of living as well as food and nutrition security for our people*"¹.

The year 2023 for one has seen the price of mealie-meal increase drastically. Some indicative drivers have been cited to be the increased price of inputs specifically of maize as well as the limited supply of grain sometimes worsened by the fact that private maize buyers and millers offer a higher price on the market. The JCTR observes that this scenario has continued to exert upward pressure on the price of mealie meal. As a result, consumers are now paying more for a bag of mealie meal, impacting their household budgets and the overall cost of living. The rising price of mealie meal, the country's staple food and widely consumed by many, cannot be ignored as it threatens the food security and livelihoods of many Zambians. Even the nutritious roller mealie meal, on an average is costing K204.35/25kg bag². Is this something that the majority of people can afford? The answer is certainly negative!

As we draw closer to the budget reading, JCTR would like to re-emphasize the need for the government to treat the cost of living challenge with utmost urgency through priority sectors, especially those that directly seek to positively impact the lives of those suffering the most from this crisis. In times such

¹ [Speech by His Excellency](#)

² <https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Vol-245-of-2023-The-Monthly-August.pdf>

as now, there is a need to strengthen social safety nets as they impact positively on the vulnerable groups. Programmes such as the social cash transfer must be expanded both, by capturing more beneficiaries and scaling up the value transfer amount of K400 as a bi-monthly payment, if indeed the cash in kind grant is to be meaningful.

Since the current farming season has witnessed the informal exportation of the commodity using unusual and unmonitored routes, it is critical that the Food Reserve Agency prioritizes the nation's strategic grain reserves and additional maize for price stabilization during the lean season. In the long term this challenge requires broader strategies, including agricultural development, investment in infrastructure, and poverty reduction programs. Lastly, during the month of August, the Ministry of Agriculture discovered 1, 600 duplicates³ under Farmer Input Support Programme. The process of cleaning up and strengthening this programme must be prioritized to ensure the support reaches the intended beneficiaries in the coming farming season.

In 1986, the Zambian Conference of Bishops labeled the soaring prices of basic commodities such as mealie meal as unjust shackles that place a heavy burden on our society, especially on the poor and marginalized. Today, the country is still grappling with the same challenges of rising mealie meal prices, high unemployment and inadequate wages, and JCTR much like them, calls on the government to put up greater effort to redress the injustice faced by so many Zambians today with the prevailing high cost of essential commodities.

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³ <https://www.agriculture.gov.zm/?p=5390>

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Advocacy on Living Conditions

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