

PUBLIC - PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS, CRUCIAL TO DEVELOPMENT, SAYS JCTR

Zambia is facing human development challenges that call for concerted efforts among various players. It is therefore encouraging that the Government has been calling for enhanced Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) by entering into agreements with the private sector through contracts between a public-sector authority and a private party, in which the private party provides a public service or project and assumes substantial financial, technical and operational risk in the project. PPPs can foster desired economic growth, reduce poverty and provide an effective and appropriate mechanism to manage the complexity of the development challenges.

Zambia is facing major challenges in making a dent in reducing the high poverty levels currently at 64% with rural poverty pegged at a staggering 80%. While poverty levels are lower in urban areas, says the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), the rising cost of living has continued to make it challenging for many urban households to meet their basic needs and subsequently lead decent lives. For instance, for the month of March, the *Basic Needs Basket (BNB)*, which measures the cost of living in high density areas of Lusaka and other towns across Zambia, showed an increase in basic commodities. In Lusaka for instance, the average cost of living increased by K26,450 from K2,982,350 at the end of February to K3,008,800 at the end of March. This was mainly as a result of an increase in the cost of food to the tune of K945, 400 from K919,950 in February. All food items rich in proteins such as Kapenta, Meat and Eggs showed a significant rise in prices. This is likely to inhibit households from buying food items rich in protein.

Additionally, the JCTR's Rural Basket, a quarterly survey that measures household food security, social delivery and livelihood strategies in the selected rural areas of Zambia also indicates nutritional deficiencies in average food consumed. The JCTR conducts the Rural Basket in seven areas: Saka, Lisomona and Fifungo in Masaiti District, Malama in Mambwe District, Tengama in Chongwe District, Matushi in Mufumbwe District, Libala in Kazungula District and Ngandwe in Shangombo District. In comparison to the World Health Organisation (WHO) that peg the average nutrient requirements per person per day at 2400 kilocalories, 30g of protein, 450mg of calcium and 13mg of iron, households in these areas could not meet most of the recommended nutrients. For instance, for February 2011 average calorific intake was 1500 per person per day, 40g of Protein, 150mg of calcium and 15mg of iron. The results indicate that deficiencies were recorded in energy (calorific) levels and calcium. "This has the potential of retarding good socio-economic, health, and cognitive development of affected persons," says Sosten Banda, Social Conditions Programme Officer at the JCTR.

According to Mr. Banda, "the JCTR's urban BNB and Rural Basket continue to reflect serious development challenges, especially in rural communities making the role of the public-private partnerships even more relevant".

Government alone cannot adequately address the poverty and food insecurity situation. Therefore, it is imperative that other stakeholders like the private sector and Non State Actors played a more active role in partnering and supplementing government programmes and initiatives if sustainable economic development is to become a reality for Zambia.

In the view of the above developments, JCTR reiterates its call for concerted and sustained efforts by different stakeholders to effectively partner and support developmental initiatives, especially those that aim to reduce rural poverty and consequently improve food security of the majority of rural households that have remained extremely poor. Similarly, effective public-private partnerships should aim to benefit the public, especially the marginalized groups in society and concerned about the integrated social, economic and ecological development.

“The importance of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) as an integral entity in fostering sustainable socio-economic development, rural development and the realisation of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Number One of reducing poverty and hunger by half by the year 2015 can therefore not be overemphasised”, says Mr. Banda.

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