

BNNB Statement

16th October, 2023.

Seasonal Changes Continue to Exert an Influence On the Pricing of Both Food and Non-Food Items

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 September in Lusaka stood at K9, 146.06. In comparison to the recorded figure of K8, 850.38 around the same time period in September, 2022. Our research observes that the average price of charcoal reduced from K455/90kg bag to K370/90kg bag. The research also revealed an increase in the prices of food items such as roller mealie meal which increased from K180.83/25kg bag to K217.14/25kg bag. Food items such as vegetables also recorded an increase in prices from K413.88/40 kg to K453.37/40 kg.

Once more, the September basket underscores the impact of seasonal shifts, particularly as we transition into the hot season, on the contents of both the food and non-food components within the basket. Comparing the BNNB charcoal price data from the past two years during the same time frame provides valuable insights. In 2022, there was a decrease in the price of a 90kg bag of charcoal, which went from K428/90kg in August to K406.67/90kg by the end of September. Similarly, in 2021, the price of a 90kg bag of charcoal decreased from K369.20/90kg in August to K360/90kg by the close of September. Another key item to high is that of vegetables (green leafy vegetables such as rape, amaranthus leaves also known locally as “bondwe” and pumpkin leaves) which recorded an increase of approximately K38.49. During the dry season, the cost of vegetables often experiences an upward adjustment in prices, and this phenomenon is not unique to Zambia but is observed in many regions around the world.

While the month on month overall basket under reflection observed a temporary reduction, it is essential to acknowledge that this reduction is far from sufficient to address the overarching issue. Being that the cost of living, largely driven by the price of commodities, remains prohibitively high for the majority of Zambians. This persistent challenge continues to burden the Zambian citizens, particularly the vulnerable and marginalized segments of our population as evidenced by the 2022 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey.

Furthermore, it is crucial to consider the fundamental premise of the BNNB within a broader context. The items included the JCTR BNNB basket, determined through extensive consultations, reflect both the realities and aspirations of a typical family striving to meet their basic requirements for a decent standard of living. However, it's essential to recognize that this basket represents the very minimum essentials, excluding additional daily expenses such as airtime and data bundles, transportation costs, and clothing. This implies that the actual cost of living for a family of five in Lusaka may well exceed by far the K9000 threshold.

In essence, the BNNB serves as a valuable reference point for understanding the minimum requirements for a decent living standard. However, it's equally vital to recognize that families are often faced with additional financial burdens beyond the essentials, and addressing these broader economic challenges is essential for improving the overall well-being of households. To achieve this, we call upon the government, civil society, and the private sector to have open and honest conversations, collaborate and develop sustainable strategies that address the root causes of high living costs. Some interventions may include:

1. Adopting an approach that encompasses **measures to combat inflation, increase income levels, and enhance the accessibility and affordability of essential goods and services including fuel pump prices** that have continued to have a negative effect on the cost of commodities and cost of doing business.
2. To address the seasonality challenge, there is a need for **specific policies that would reduce the cost of food production and facilitate all year round food production**. Some possible interventions could include promoting efficient irrigation techniques, improving transportation infrastructure, and encouraging crop diversification to ensure a steady supply of food items throughout the year. The 2024 National budget aims to promote efficient irrigation, as part of the Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Programme. It is key that budgetary promises and subsequent approved allocations are adhered to.
3. To reduce reliance on the use of charcoal, **governments through actors such as the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment need to facilitate the provision of sustainable and affordable energy sources that will respond to the low incomes of the majority Zambians**. Charcoal production entails cutting down of trees and has negative implications on the natural environment contributing to climate change. On the other hand, Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) is a cleaner and sustainable cooking energy source. However, challenges such as affordability, availability and safety concerns persist in achieving widespread public acceptance and usage.
4. Expand and strengthen social safety net programs to support vulnerable populations during times of inflation and economic uncertainty especially where targeted subsidies for essential goods, such as food and fuel, to make them more affordable for citizens cannot be provided.

JCTR urges the government to give profound consideration to the preferential option for the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized when crafting and executing policies. It is imperative that the government actively extends its support and solidarity to these vulnerable segments of society and establishes, as well as effectively enforces, pro-poor policies.

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.