



JESUIT CENTRE FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

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BNNB Statement

1st March, 2024.

Urgent Call for Solidarity with the Poor as the Cost of Living Continues to Rise

In the face of a challenging economic landscape, the people of Zambia remain confronted with an urgent and compelling reality - the rise in the cost of living. Particularly those already grappling with financial vulnerability find themselves navigating increasingly difficult waters. Furthermore, resilient individuals, who have long relied on the promise of a fruitful farming season, find themselves confronted with the harsh consequences of ongoing poor rainfall. The circumstances have had an impact on the cultivation of seasonal crops, including pumpkins, vegetables, sweet potatoes, and groundnuts. These crops serve a dual purpose, functioning not only as a means of livelihood but also as an affordable alternative food source. In this critical juncture, the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), makes an urgent call for solidarity that resonates as a beacon of hope and support for those navigating the tumultuous waters of economic adversity in Zambia.

JCTR's recent evaluations have revealed an alarming rise in living expenses concerning essential commodities with an upward adjustment of 7.9 percent in comparison to January, 2024. The cost of living for a family of five as measured by JCTR Basic Needs and Nutrition Basket (BNNB) in February 2024 in Lusaka now stands at K 10, 307.01. This marks a substantial rise of K751.48 from the previous month's figure of K9, 555.53. The average prices of various food items on the baskets increased, with the cost of vegetables moving to K689.97 per 40kg from K571.99 per 40 kg and other fruits increasing to K27.21 per kg from K12.72 per kg. Additionally, the price of rice increased to K160.07 per 5kg from K145.00 per 5kg. The food items continue to be influenced by seasonality of the products on one hand and on the other hand the scarcity of the commodities on the market of some products is due to their importation expenses which tend to be affected by the exchange rate.

The BNNB report also highlights an increase in prices within the non-food items section in Lusaka, primarily attributed to increased utilities in the reviewed month. A housing survey conducted by the Centre investigated the average costs of essential services like electricity, water, and the cost of rental for a 3-bedroom house in medium-density areas of Lusaka. The survey, conducted both physically and online, revealed an increase in the costs of these utilities. On average, a 3-bedroom house now costs K3, 967, with households spending approximately K653 and K300 on electricity

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and water, respectively. These findings underscore the urgent need for concerted efforts to address the challenges faced by the majority of Zambians.

Looking ahead, it is evident that our country will soon grapple with the repercussions of an unfavourable farming season. The anticipated water scarcity and resulting agricultural setbacks pose significant threats, leading to food insecurity, income loss, and an increase in living costs. Vulnerable communities, already burdened by challenging living conditions, are at risk of sliding into poverty, putting their dignity at stake. The need for urgent and effective actions from the government becomes apparent, not as a political matter but as a responsibility to safeguard and support its citizens. While various factors contribute to the rising cost of living, proactive strategies and policies to mitigate the effects remain lacking. In light of these interconnected challenges, JCTR advocates for a comprehensive approach that addresses poor rainfall mitigation alongside the escalating cost of living.

While acknowledging the governments' longstanding efforts to stabilise the economy and set up concrete long term solutions that tackle the root causes of vulnerability and enhance resilience, there is an urgent need for immediate interventions to cushion the worsening situation at hand. Some key recommendations include:

1. Expedite the implementation of existing social welfare programs to provide immediate support to vulnerable populations, including cash transfers, healthcare assistance, and education support.
2. Implement short-term measures to stabilize the prices of crucial goods, working with stakeholders in the supply chain. Notably, fuel has consistently played a pivotal role in determining overall prices for goods and services. The present fuel prices are poised to worsen an already critical situation.
3. Provide financial support directly to farmers to help them recover from losses incurred during the poor start to the farming season. This can include grants, low-interest loans, or debt relief programs
4. Invest in short-term water resource management strategies, such as water trucking to affected areas, temporary water storage solutions, and efficient water distribution systems to address immediate water shortages. This can be achieved utilising options such as the Constituency Development Fund disaster component, which must be expanded to provide meaningful interventions to the affected communities. At the same time strict measures to continuously restrict the exportation of maize supplies to safeguard the already available limited resources for its citizens need to be strengthened.

More broadly, there should be initiatives aimed at improving knowledge and empowering individuals to efficiently manage their resources in response to the increasing cost of living.

Collaborative efforts involving government, businesses and community groups can lead to solutions that ensure that basic goods and services are accessible and affordable.

JCTR remains dedicated to promoting the common good and upholding the values of the Catholic social teachings. As Pope Francis has said, “We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them.” (Evangelii Gaudium, §48). Once again, we urge the government, civil society organisations and all stakeholders to unite in this collective mission as we prepare to face challenges brought about by the poor rainfall crisis and its impact on living costs. The future well-being of our nation hinges on the collaborative action we take today.

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.

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR)

JCTR Repository

<https://repository.jctr.org.zm>

Statements

Advocacy on Living Conditions

2024-03-01

February 2024 Basic Needs and Nutrition Basket Statement: Urgent Call for Solidarity with the Poor as the Cost of Living Continues to Rise

Siamachoka, Muchimba

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection

<https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14274/1830>

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