
BNNB Statement

28th March, 2024.

Strengthening Resilience in the Face of Food Insecurity - An Easter Message of Hope

As we prepare to celebrate Easter, we are reminded of new beginnings, of renewal and hope knowing that God has never abandoned us, and in his perfect love of mankind we remember that our lives are in the hands of the Creator who sent his only Son to die for us. We seek to overcome fear and uncertainty about the future. In Zambia, amidst food insecurity and rising costs, this message of Easter resonates deeply. Recognising the challenges encountered by communities affected by the threatening food insecurity, we should still aim to instill hope and foster collaborative efforts. As Easter signifies renewal and new beginnings, it is an opportune time to come together, extend support, and work towards sustainable solutions for food security.

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) observed an increase in the Basic Needs and Nutrition Basket (BNNB) which now stands at K10, 603.40 for the month of March representing a 2.9% increase in comparison to the month of February. The increase in the basket was due to an increase in the prices of some food items such as a 25kg bag of roller mealie meal which cost K284.43 from K226.67 and fruits such as oranges and apples which stood at K43.22 from K27.21 per kg. Despite the increase in the overall basket, it was also observed that the price of 40 kgs of vegetables reduced to K571.43 from K689.97. It is worth noting that these changes reflect a combination of factors driving up the cost of living, including the impacts of El Niño-induced weather patterns on agricultural production, exchange rate depreciation affecting the cost of imported goods, fluctuating fuel prices, and other interconnected economic dynamics.

The significance of the continued rise in the BNNB cannot be overstated, particularly in its implications for the daily lives of countless households across Zambia. With each incremental rise, the burden on families endeavoring to meet their fundamental needs becomes more difficult. This is compounded by drought that has affected most parts of the country. The Centre is therefore calling for both immediate government responses in terms of food relief and medium term government-led initiatives and investments, such as setting up irrigation projects and promoting winter maize cultivation, among others. Concurrently, a call is extended to civil society organisations, faith groups, and individuals to persevere in their solidarity efforts and resilience-building endeavours within our communities. Through engagement in community-driven initiatives like community gardens, cooperative farming, and knowledge-sharing platforms, we can lay the groundwork for a future with ample food security.

As the nation celebrates the recent agreement by Zambia to restructure its debt with bondholders, the JCTR observes that this milestone presents opportunities in addressing food security concerns within the country as debt restructuring may free up financial resources that could potentially be allocated towards critical sectors such as agriculture and food security initiatives. It is imperative for policymakers to prioritise the protection of essential social programs, particularly those aimed

at ensuring food access and nutrition for vulnerable populations. While addressing debt obligations is crucial for stabilising the economy, safeguarding the well-being of citizens, especially amidst rising food prices and food insecurity, should remain a top priority. The JCTR therefore makes the following recommendations:

1. Household Gardening: The Centre continues to encourage households to grow food items such as vegetables whenever possible to supplement daily meals.
2. Food Relief to Vulnerable Households: To address immediate food needs, the government should expand on already existing food distribution programs and establish community food banks. Collaboration with other actors can further enhance these efforts, offering immediate relief alongside the development of longer-term strategies
3. Strengthen the practice of Agroecology: As the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations emphasises, agroecological diversification enhances socio-economic and ecological resilience. In an effort to diversify diets and farming practices, it is essential that farmers, especially smallholder farmers practise agroecology in order to maintain soil fertility and adapt to the climatic conditions.
4. Considerable moves such as the sensitization of the masses on alternative foods especially drought resistant crops for instance cassava, millet and sorghum. This change will require a mindset shift through cultural reorientation for sustainability.
5. Provide information and support to small scale farmers on how best they can access the irrigation equipment, with the newly announced tax waivers on all agriculture equipment. It is prudent that smallholder farmers are well informed and supported to take advantage of this to help strengthen Zambia's food security and cushion the consumer demand to address food scarcity.
6. We re-echo the need for fostering a culture of knowledge sharing and community upliftment in the aspects of better farming technologies that are sustainable especially with the waiver on irrigation equipment.

We call upon individuals, organisations and policymakers to embrace their roles in striving towards a future where every Zambian has access to nutritious food. Let us draw inspiration from the power of hope, unity and joint efforts to address food insecurity and create a community where no one will die of hunger.

Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

*"I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."
Fear can overtake us, but God is all-powerful and will offer us all the strength we need.*

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.