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BNNB Statement

August 2nd, 2024.

A Call for Action to Address the High Cost of Living

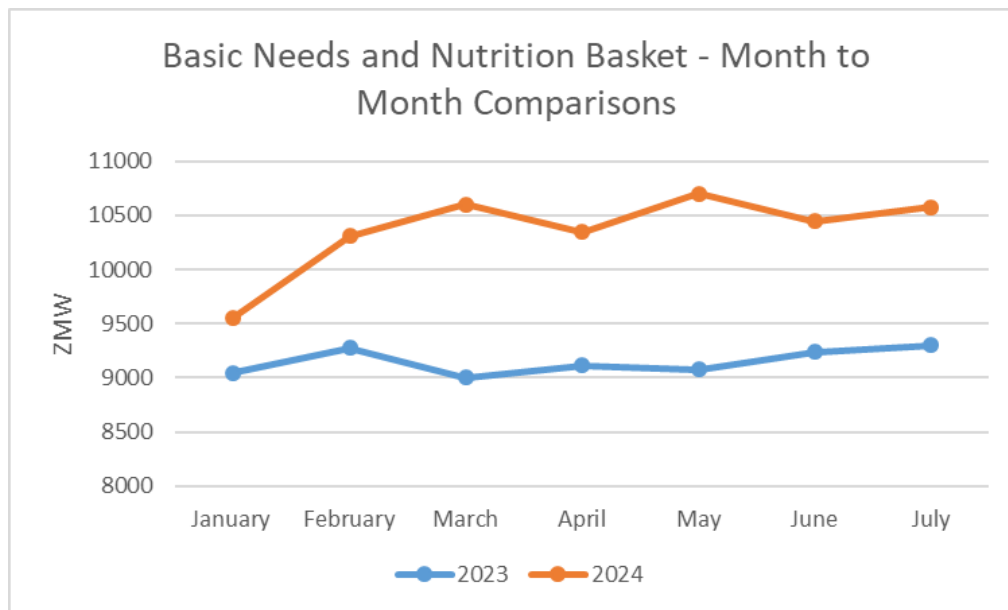
The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) observed an increase in the Basic Needs and Nutrition Basket (BNNB) survey, which now stands at K10, 575.93, reflecting a K133.48 increase compared to the month of June. This rise was attributed to increases in the prices of various commodities. Notably, the cost of a 25kg bag of roller mealie meal rose to K284.08 from K262.14. The price of 1kg of kapenta increased to K377.52 from K294.74, and the price of 40 kg of vegetables went up to K554.46 from K498.40. Additionally, the price of bananas increased to K19.99 from K17.35 per kilogram. Conversely, the price of a 90kg bag of charcoal decreased to K856.66 from K950 among non-food items.

Reflecting on key items of interest, the rising price of kapenta — a rich source of protein and vitamin A, particularly important for children who can consume it as a "whole fish" — remains a significant concern. For many households, kapenta has traditionally been a staple, often forming a substantial meal for larger families when combined with items such as beans and vegetables. Its ability to be dried and preserved without requiring a steady electricity supply further underscores its importance. Furthermore, as we approach the dry season, there is growing concern about the availability and rising prices of vegetables. This situation has the potential to worsen ongoing food security issues, highlighting severe challenges in the availability, affordability, and accessibility of essential food items. Such conditions have the potential to erode human dignity, as many households struggle to meet their basic nutritional needs and daily sustenance. It is worrying to note that common and basic foods are slowly becoming unaffordable for average and poor households in Zambia.

The Centre has observed a fluctuating trend in year-to-date figures, with a net increase indicating significant limitations in the effective control or support of interventions to stabilize price changes.

"A JUST ZAMBIAN SOCIETY GUIDED BY FAITH, WHERE EVERYONE ENJOYS FULLNESS OF LIFE"

This trend is further highlighted by monthly comparisons during the same period in 2023 (see figure below).



Several underlying factors continue to affect commodity prices, including the depreciation of the kwacha, which directly impacts fuel pump prices, poor rainfall patterns affecting food production, and the seasonal availability of certain food items. While the JCTR acknowledges the initiatives such as empowerment and social protection programs aimed at mitigating the high cost of living, these efforts have not fully translated into improved living conditions, as evidenced by the persistent high cost of commodities relative to lower incomes. It is therefore evident that the cost of living, despite its multifaceted nature, remains unacceptably high, posing a significant challenge for households and affecting the overall performance of economic activities.

Therefore, the Centre calls for stronger and more targeted actions to address the escalating cost of living. In light of these challenges, we present the following recommendations to effectively tackle this issue.

1. *A Road map of Actions:* We urge the government to clearly outline their strategy for addressing the high cost of living, with a particular focus on middle-income households burdened by tax obligations and rising expenses. This strategy should encompass both income-based and cost-

based approaches. Specifically, we recommend the implementation of employment creation programs to boost income levels, as well as measures to control and reduce the cost of essential goods and services.

2. *Enhancing Food Production:* To improve food production and availability in the next farming season, we recommend intensifying the sensitization and financial support for the cultivation of a diverse range of crops beyond maize as well as intensifying winter food production initiatives. By implementing sustainable food systems, we can enhance food security, nutrition, and environmental care.
3. *Empowerment Programs:* While numerous empowerment programs are available, it is crucial for the government to evaluate these initiatives to ensure their effectiveness and viability. This will help translate these programs into tangible improvements in living conditions for beneficiaries.

As a nation, we are reminded by the Church's Social Teaching that the organisation of our society—economically and politically—directly impacts the lives of all individuals and their ability to fully participate within their communities. Therefore, citizens have both the right and responsibility to engage in economic, social, and cultural activities. On the other hand, the government has a crucial role in protecting the rights and dignity of its citizens. We call on the government to uphold its duty by taking decisive action to address the high cost of living.

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

2024-08-02

July 2024 Basic Needs and Nutrition Basket Statement: A Call for Action to Address the High Cost of Living

Siamachoka, Muchimba

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection

<https://repository.jctr.org.zm/handle/20.500.14274/1841>

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