

**EMPOWER YOUTH WITH JOBS TO MEET THEIR BASIC NEEDS, SAYS JCTR**

This year Zambia commemorated Youth Day under the theme, “accelerating youth empowerment for sustainable development”. Accordingly, national youth policies and programmes should call for respect for their rights, and the promotion of sustainable development in order to contribute to job creation, says Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection Social Conditions Programme Manager, Ms. Munyongo Lumba.

Zambia’s policy framework in response to the challenges of youth development is embedded in a number of policies and strategies including the national youth policy, Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training sector plan, the National Employment and Labour Market Policy and the National Micro Small and Medium Enterprise Development Policy of the Government. These policies and plans are products of changes in time and context of the situation of the youth in trying to effectively engage them in national development. However, there still remains need for greater harmonization of these national instruments in order to realize youth rights, empowerment and consequently job creation, a key requisite for national development.

Ms Lumba says, “Zambia has a young population and one of the key ways to accelerate youth empowerment is the recent pronouncement to design and include national youth employment strategies in national development frameworks. This can then form the basis for enhanced accountability, monitoring and evaluation of youth policies and plans in order to ensure optimal use of the youth as a national resource and the progressive realization of their rights. The youth need empowerment through jobs especially by developing and promoting their entrepreneurial skills as this will allow them to become employers and consequently play an active role in realizing the national agenda for job creation.”

Zambia has a high population growth rate with an estimated 46% of the total population of 13 million under the age of 15 years. The national population in 2000 was estimated at 9.9million, a jump from 7.4 in 1990 and 5.7 million in 1980. Zambia’s current working age population is estimated at 5.2 million and between 1990 and2000, human development was on the decline with only a recent improvement at the turn of the century. In 2010, Zambia’s human development rating was 150<sup>th</sup> out of 169 countries, placing it in the low human development category. Increasing urbanization and a mismatch between the increasing labour force and the rate at which the economy can absorb this labour force therefore remain challenges for sustainable development.

According to the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) that conducts the *Basic Needs Basket (BNB)*, a price survey tool that depicts the average cost of living in a specific town, “The February Lusaka BNB analysis depicts the cost of living at K 2, 996,120 with food taking up approximately 30% of the basket at a cost of K 871, 520. This analysis actually shows an upward shift from January in the cost of the total basket despite a reduction the cost of some food items such as mealie meal, beans, and dry fish, among others. Therefore as we commemorate youth day, we are expectant that the proposed national youth employment strategy responds to practically enabling youth especially the poor to meet their basic needs, says Ms Lumba.

According to the JCTR, all attempts at sustainable development by its very definition should always be premised on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. As such, government must focus on the needs of the today’s youth and develop policy frameworks and accountability structures that provide for a progressive realization of the rights of the youth. Zambia’s poverty reduction efforts will only be realized when all citizens can exercise their rights and lead decent lives, especially in allowing them to have adequate nutrition.

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