

Article

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IMPLICATIONS OF THE CURRENT MEALIE MEAL CRISIS ON THE COST OF LIVING

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The current mealie-meal shortage on the Zambian market is as a result of poor planning of the 2022-23 farming season by Government. The onset of the 2022-23 farming season witnessed chaos in organizing the beneficiaries list of the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP), late distribution of farming input, distribution of incomplete farming input sets, high cost of farming inputs and shortage of farming inputs on the markets. Subsistent and small scale farmers seriously depend on the availability, affordability and accessibility of farming inputs for them to produce beyond the household consumption.

Subsistent and small scale farmers in Zambia feed the nation. Hence any disturbance in satisfying the farming input needs unleashes a ripple effect on household's food security and nutrition outcomes. Food availability, affordability and accessibility at household level in Zambia is heavily dependent on agriculture. Families depend on agriculture as source of food, nutrition and income. The current mealie meal short only manifests as an effect of inadequate strategic preparation of the 2022-23 farming season by the Government. Understandably, food availability, affordability and accessibility in Zambia continues to be by other exogenous factors like climate change which caused floods on some parts of the country. However, for factors that Government can control, like the availability, affordability, accessibility and diversity of farming input, it must strategically plan for such.

The mealie-meal shortage on the market will have an economic bearing on already struggling families to access basic food. The shortage of mealie meal is likely going to drive up the price of the commodity and in turn this will increase the cost of living, which is the amount of money required to cover necessary expenses in a particular place and time. Necessary expenses include food, housing, clothing, health care, education and transport. Mealie meal is a key component of food items that JCTR's monitors to assess the cost of living on a monthly basis. Therefore, we should all be concerned that the current mealie meal situation is likely to cause more financial distress in vulnerable households.

Before implementing the short term measure of importing mealie meal from South Africa to stabilizing the mealie meal price, Government must assess the current maize stock in the country's reserves and communicate to the nation measures to sustain food security in the country. There is a need for an effective strategy to better manage the farmer input support to subsistence and small scale farmers in the 2023-24 farming season in order to boost maize production. The mealie meal smuggling problem must be addressed constructively by strategically dealing with all the identified contributing factors. Investment in irrigation farming (to enable farmers to grow crops throughout the years) must be prioritized alongside scaling up of agro-ecological practices among small scale farmers which include building of household seed banks and promoting planting of open pollinated seeds (local) seeds by small scale farmers to reduce dependence on commercialized and chemicalized farming inputs to enhance food security and improve nutrition outcomes.

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