

Press Statement

14th April 2019.

JCTR calls on government to stabilize the mealie meal price

On 3rd March 2019, the Government lifted the mealie meal export ban through a presidential directive. Ever since the ban was lifted the price of mealie meal has increased beyond K100 on the market. This trend has continued unabated. Increased mealie meal export arising from lifting of the ban has reduced mealie meal supplies on the local market and consequently pushed mealie meal retail prices beyond the reach of many consumers.

Even though the JCTR Basic Needs Basket for the month of April for a family of five in Lusaka reduced to K5, 519 from K 5, 543 in March 2019, a minimal decrease of K24, mealie meal price component of the BNB remained high. Contributing to this reduction was the price of charcoal which reduced by K14 from K159 in March to K145 in April per 90 Kg. Other reductions were recorded in the price of dark green vegetables which reduced by K 3 from K13 in March to K10 in April per Kg. However, a significant increase was recorded in the price of tomatoes which increased by K9 from K6 in March to K15 in April per 90kg. Other increases were recorded in the price of Mealie meal which increased by K3 from K100 in March to K103 in April for a 25 kg. The price of onion increased by K3 from K12 in March to K15 in April. Increase in the prices of tomatoes and onion was due to reduced supply of the commodities on the market due to seasonality factors.

JCTR's major concern, however, is in the continued increase in the high price of mealie meal on the market. This is because mealie meal is the staple food for the majority households' especially low income ones and a slight increase in its price adversely affects the cost of living. Hunger levels increase among the poor who do not have the capacity to afford the high cost of mealie meal. This, unfortunately, does not protect the life and dignity of the human person.

JCTR has also noted with dismay the inertia among policymakers to act on people's demands on matters that affect them and yet act at the speed of light at the Presidential directives. It is slowly becoming a trend for policymakers to only act on policy issues after a Presidential directive. JCTR notes that on two occasions policymakers have stayed mute and made no quick actions. The first was when the mealie meal export ban was lifted. Despite being forewarned by various stakeholders on the negative impact of the move, no immediate action was taken. The second was the proposal by Zesco to increase electricity tariffs, various stakeholders again cautioned on the effects this would have but no action again was taken by policymakers. It had again to take a Presidential directive to halt the proposal.

JCTR urges Policy makers to remain professional in their implementation of Government policies and avoid merely acting on presidential directives, but also on the call of the people and heed to their concerns. Policy makers need to provide professional advice to the President and not the other way round. Policy inconsistency and reversals have a potential to damage the economy and adversely affect lives of the poor. Public officers should therefore not always wait for presidential directive to implement policies but also the public officers should be allowed space to intellectually operate

without interference. We once again urge the government to take seriously agriculture diversification which might reduce dependency on one crop and might play a big role in stabilizing the cost of living

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