The JCTR Press Statement on Measures to Cushion Poor Households in the Wake of COVID-19

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The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) is of the view that amidst the fight against COVID-19, there is a need for mechanisms to be put in place that will protect and safeguard human dignity. The JCTR is therefore appealing to the Government to utilize the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU) to ensure that vulnerable and poor households do not face starvation as Government implements restriction of citizens’ movements and operations of some businesses to curb spread of COVID-19. Some of the measures have resulted in reduction of economic activities and erosion of household sources of income causing untold suffering on poor and vulnerable households.

The JCTR is of the view that the DMMU must already have in place a data base of communities that need food relief in rural areas. The Unit must also spread their identification of needy households even in urban areas due to reductions in income or loss of jobs in the wake of COVID-19. It is very important that emphasis has been on curbing the spread of the virus. However, it is equally important that as a nation, we must ensure that the living conditions of vulnerable citizens do not deteriorate any further than was the case before the onset of this epidemic.

There are other issues currently affecting poor households such as the floods in Northern, Luapula and Eastern provinces where scores of people have been affected and in need of urgent relief food. Mealie meal prices in some parts of the country are also beyond the reach of many. These factors coupled with the coming in of COVID-19 have further exposed the vulnerable households to increased poverty.

The JCTR urges Government to mobilize resources to effect people-centered interventions such as expansion of social protection programmes especially the social cash transfer to reach poor households in both rural and urban areas to ensure continued nutrition even in the wake of COVID-19. To support the Government’s efforts in effecting people-centred interventions, the JCTR calls on the business community and people of good will in Zambia to find innovative ways of supporting poor and vulnerable households.
It is pleasing to learn that some of the citizens are stepping up to support their workers by paying them a month’s salary so that the workers can stay at home for one month in keeping with the World Health Organisation’s and the Ministry of Health’s advice as a way of curbing the spread of COVID-19. This is just one example of how to support poor and vulnerable households during this time. We all know one or more poor and vulnerable households. We all must do something to provide a descent cushion to our brothers and sisters. We can all make a difference.

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