

Press Statement

29th August 2019

Mealie meal price hikes have detrimental effects on households

Of late, Zambia's staple food has undergone price distortions and is pegging at K120 for a 25kg bag of roller meal. This price is too high, especially that many households exclusively depend on it for survival and is cardinal for prevention of hunger and malnutrition.

The rise in mealie meal price is attributed to many factors, among them; shifting weather patterns due to climate change which has threatened food production and a reduction in the supply of maize on the market, more especially in areas such as Southern and Western Provinces. While the supply of maize seems to be reducing on the market, the demand for it and mealie meal has remained high both within Zambia and in neighbouring countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). This situation seems also to have induced traders to take advantage of the situation and hike prices of the commodity. Load shedding has further had a strong influence on the current price of mealie meal. As millers invest in other sources of energy used in production, this has in turn increased their production costs which they have opted to pass on to consumers.

If no quick action is taken to control and prevent further increase in mealie meal prices, living costs may increase further and as a result poor households will continue to be deprived of a dignified livelihood. The recent JCTR monthly survey has established a family of 5 living in Lusaka needs K5,979.57 to afford a basic needs and nutrition basket. This is beyond the capacity of many households. The current situation is great concern given that 41% of Zambians are unemployed, 40 percent of children under 5 years suffer from chronic malnutrition.

It is therefore imperative for Government to act quickly to address the current situation. Government needs to own up the current situation and have open and honest conversation with stakeholders including the farmers and millers and cooperating partners. Government also needs to come up with long term measures to boost agriculture and energy sectors. These measures should include promoting drought resistance crops, water harvesting, sustainable organic farming practices, and diversification in both sectors. Further, Government needs to work closely with stakeholders that are promoting nutrition by enacting policies that will ensure Zambians buy and consume local foods which are nutritious and good for their health. In planning ahead Government also needs to consider progressive measures including adjusting upwards beginning with the 2020 national budget, the non-taxable income threshold from the current K3, 300 to a minimum of K4, 000. This is simply because cost of living has drastically increased over time with the cost of essential goods being beyond the ability of most citizens and households. Generally, salaries and incomes have not increased overtime to correspond with the high cost of living being experienced.

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The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, established in 1988 is a research, education and advocacy team that promotes study and action on issues linking Christian Faith and social justice in Zambia and is dedicated to promoting the fullness of human life for all.