

Caritas Zambia Statement on the Mealie-Meal Shortage

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Maize grain and mealie-meal are the most important food commodities and indicators of food security in Zambia. Caritas Zambia has been keenly following the unfolding of the current discourse on the shortage of the staple food commodity mealie-meal in some parts of the country where citizens were reported to be queuing to buy the commodity. As such, we note with grave concern, continued reports of shortages and increase in price of the staple food commodity mealie-meal as it has an impact on the country's food security. To effectively address this issue, Caritas Zambia underscores the need for government to act with sustained urgency and coordination.

According to the Crop Forecast Survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2022, maize production for the 2021/2022 production season reduced from 3,620,244 Metric Tonnes (MT) in 2020/2021 to 2,706,243 MT in 2021/2022. This represents a decline in production of 25.24%, a reduction when compared to the five-year average. This continued decline possess a huge threat on the country's food and nutrition security.

While the compounding impact of the climate crisis, high cost of inputs as well as unsustainable farming practices are some of the root causes of the decline in production over the years, we also recognise the importance of intensifying efforts related to improving soil health and fertility, climate change adaptation and resilient food systems.

We appreciate the commitment of government to address the mealie meal shortage affecting certain parts of the country. However, to address the mealie meal shortage, prevent recurrence of this situation as well as ensure sustained food and nutrition security in the country, we reiterate our call on government to address the following short-term, medium-term and long-term priorities.

In the short-term;

- **The government needs to update the country on the current status of the maize grain balance sheet** to illustrate short-term and long-term trends. This is going to address issues of anxiety and panic buying among citizens and help stabilise the current shortage.

- The government should enhance and intensify security while upholding the rule of law by controlling illegal exportation and smuggling of mealie meal to neighbouring Countries. Furthermore, the mealie meal shortages being experienced should not be an avenue to import mealie meal which may contain GMO's. Zambia has for a long time maintained its Zero-Tolerance stance on GMOs especially on the staple crop maize.

In the medium to long-term;

- As the harvesting period for the maize crop gets underway, **government must ensure that the interests of smallholder farmers are protected from briefcase buyers.** As such, government should consider revising upwards the maize floor price for the year 2023 to at least K250 per 50Kg bag.
- As the harvesting period for the maize crop gets underway, the **government working through the Food Reserve Agency (FRA) should ensure to purchase and store sufficient quantities of stock in order to replenish the country's Strategic Grain Reserve.** With increasing climate variability, this will assure food security in times of food stress as well as other sorts of calamities that create volatility in prices and availability.
- According to the 2022 Crop Forecast Survey, smallholder farmers accounted for 96% of the total maize production for the 2021/2022 season while the commercial farmers accounted for only 4%. Despite this, smallholder farmers are the ones that are most likely to be negatively affected and vulnerable to impacts of climate change. As a result, we are restating our demand that **the government immediately puts into place mechanisms and strategies that will quickly assist smallholder farmers in adapting to the impacts of climate change and strengthening climate-resilient agricultural practices in time for the 2023/2024 farming season.**

ENDS//

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