

Press Statement

23 October 2020

About us

The Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) International, Lusaka is an NGO that was established in 2000 to function as a center for research, advocacy and networking on issues of trade and development, economic governance and consumer welfare.

The mission of the center is to function as a resource, co-ordination, as well as networking center, to promote South-South cooperation on trade and development by involving state and non-state actors (NSAs).

For further information please contact: The Director, Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS), House No 32, Plot 407, Kudu Road, Kabulonga, Lusaka. Email: lusaka@cuts.org or phone: 0957944739.

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Food Security Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Why is this important to the Consumer?

Consumers have the right to access safe and nutritious food that meet their dietary needs. Therefore, it is important for consumers to access adequate information that will enable them to make informed decisions on the kinds of foods they eat. Unfortunately, due to the cultural demand of a maize meal diet, it is very difficult to change the mindsets of people to eat healthier foods. CUTS role in the diverse diet's conversation provides information to the general public that will enable them to make healthier decisions

Statement

On the 16th of October Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) joined the rest of the world in commemorating World Food Day (WFD) under the theme **Grow Nourish Sustain Together**.

In light of the this, CUTS hosted a webinar on October 21, 2020 on the topic **Food Security Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic**. The webinar had four panellists: Mr. Ishmael Zulu from CUTS, Mr. Sosten Banda from the National Food and Nutrition Commission (NFNC), Mr. Matthews Mhuru from Civil Society for Scaling up Nutrition (CSO-SUN), Mr. William Chilifya from Hivos, and. Dr Stellah Mungaila from Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR).

The webinar started with opening remarks from Mr Ishmael Zulu who highlighted some of the work CUTS is working on to ensure the food security of the nation. He added that this work is important as over 50 percent of the population in Zambia is hungry and sustainable diet diversification is key to ensuring the food security of the nation.

Following Mr Zulu's remarks Mr Banda from NFNC gave the current overview of the food security situation in Zambia. He highlighted that the current state of affairs with regards food security in Zambia is concerning and that there is need for all relevant stakeholders to participate in providing solutions to this challenge. Mr Banda further explained that a good policy framework plays a critical role in realizing better nutrition, and highlighted the importance of revising the NFNC Act that will help coordinate food and nutrition programs.

Mr. William Chilufya from Hivos highlighted that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a reduction in citizens disposable income which has negatively affected their ability to diversify their diets. He added that the pandemic has continued to draw resources from other sectors which are being diverted to the Ministry of Health to help combat the pandemic. Mr Chilufya acknowledged that despite the importance of this shift in resources, it is important for the government to ensure that they remain focused on the diversification agenda.

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Dr Stellah from CSPR in her comments noted that there is need to identify ways in which we can enhance our fight against the COVID-19 pandemic because of the adverse impacts it has on the most vulnerable people that are highly dependent on agriculture for their income. She explained that the travel restrictions have further limited market access for farmers in the most rural parts to sell their produce to urban markets. She further highlighted that there is need to enhance sensitisation in the most remote areas as they do not fully understand the effects of the COVID-19.

Following Dr Stellah's comments, Mr Mhuru from CSO-SUN explained that they are over 1.5 million people who are food insecure and the cause of this food insecurity is the floods that have affected some parts of Northern, Luapula, North-Western and Western provinces. He added that stakeholders should take into consideration the outbreak of locusts in Central, Southern as well as Western provinces as this outbreak can cause huge challenges in food production. Further, he explained that the border lockdowns brought by the pandemic have caused escalation of food prices in the urban sector, thereby increasing food insecurity. He then applauded government on the 2021 budget allocation towards the agriculture sector through the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP) and highlighted that going forward government must mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on food security.

In his closing remarks Mr Zulu emphasized the need to look at food security from a holistic perspective and not only from the COVID-19 pandemic lens, highlighting the need for increased food production, supply and diversification. To this end, CUTS together with the Food Policy Council have developed the Food Security Initiative. The purpose of this food security initiative is to provide a general framework for the improvement of the food system in the city of Lusaka. The initiative is based on the realisation that as the city of Lusaka grows, the needs of food by the inhabitants are also growing and even faster raising concerns of sustainability now and soon. The growing population also means that more diversity in food consumption is going to be expected, and therefore the city needs to respond in a more systematic manner.

By Jane Zulu, Assistant Programmes Officer.