



## THE REAL THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY

On 6<sup>th</sup> October last year, the NGC in its first monthly press briefing called the attention of Government to the extreme hardship that people were experiencing in their daily lives due to the worsening economic situation in the country. We made the following statement:

*“The problem of hardship in Sierra Leone has gone way beyond the issue of unemployed youths; hardship is strangulating the entire society, affecting those who have jobs as well as the jobless”.*

To prove the point that it was getting more and more difficult for ordinary people to cope, we went down to the market and did a survey on the prices of basic foodstuffs in October 2019 as compared to the prices in March 2018. We discovered an alarming increase in prices whereas the income of the majority of households had not changed.

As a party that is sensitive to the sufferings of the common folk and that puts the interest of the country first we did a research in November 2019 into the reasons ‘why di gron dry.’ We concluded and recommended that Government needed to deal with hunger and hardship as an emergency and invite critical economic operators to the table to find out what their views were and discuss a way out of the current economic situation. Unfortunately, this Government does not seem to be very good at listening.

And now the Afrobarometer survey dated 19<sup>th</sup> August 2020 is out, confirming exactly what the NGC has been talking about since October last year!



*“Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life”.*

This is how the Afrobarometer report on Sierra Leone begins:

*“Only one-third of Sierra Leoneans say the country is going in the right direction, a significant decline after some optimism with the change in government in 2018, a new Afrobarometer survey shows. Sierra Leoneans are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with their personal living conditions and the country’s economy, and very few citizens believe the government is doing a good job of handling the economy. Dissatisfaction with the country’s economy and personal living conditions is reflective of citizens’ increasing levels of deprivation in their everyday lives, as large majorities experience shortages of food, clean water, and other basic necessities.”*

This was not written by the NGC or any other opposition party. These are world-renowned specialist researchers that have done similar surveys in up to 38 countries.

One major problem with governance in Sierra Leone today is that while, according to the Afrobarometer survey, more than 65% of the people say that the Government is going in the wrong direction, the Government on the other hand is satisfied that it is heading in the right direction! When Emerson unveiled his latest hit “coconat ade,” paopa apologists raided the social media with long lists of what they considered to be outstanding achievements so far by the Government. The priorities of the Government do not seem to be the same as the priorities of the people. People are hungry, and that’s a fact. In the past year, nearly half the population has either always or several times gone without enough food, says the Afrobarometer survey. Basically, this means



that food is becoming more expensive and in some cases unaffordable for the majority of our people. This month of August 2020 the NGC has returned to the market to find out the prices of basic foodstuffs compared to what they were in March 2018. Our reason for doing this is because our Government seems to be doing everything except addressing the economy and hardship.

ITEM	PRICES MARCH 2018	AUGUST 2020	PERCENTAGE INCREASE AS AT AUGUST 2020
RICE PER BAG	Le 235,000	Le 330,000	40%
RICE PER CUP	Le 1,200	Le 2,500	108%
GARRI PER CUP	Le 500	1,250	150%
FISH (HERRING)	Le 1,500	Le 8,000	433%
PALM OIL (PER GALLON)	Le 120,000	Le 180,000	50%
PALM OIL (PER PINT)	Le 2,500	Le 4,000	60%
PLASAS (SMALL TIE)	Le 500	Le 1,000	100%
ONIONS	Le 120,000	Le 180,000	50%



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PER BAG			
ONIONS (UNIT PRICE)	Le 500	Le 1,000	100%
BULGUR (PER CUP)	Le 2,500	Le 5,000	100%
CHICKEN FOL FOOT PER CARTON	Le 125,000	Le 170,000	36%
MAGGI (UNIT)	Le 250	Le 500	100%
BEEF (PER POUND)	Le 18,000	Le 25,000	39%
COOKERY (PLATE)	Le 3,000	Le 5,000	67%
PEPPER (PER CUP)	Le 700	Le 7,000	900%
USA DOLLAR (BUYING RATE)	Le 765,000 \$ 100	Le 1,080,000 \$100	41% increase in dollar value vs Leones
US \$ DOLLAR SELLING RATE	Le 750,000 \$ 100	Le 1,090,000 \$ 100	45.% increase in dollar vs drop in Leones



So, there is a steady increase in the prices of these food items and no corresponding increase in income.

Given these prices we have estimated the basic cooking budget of a family of four people (father, mother and two children) at Le 46,000 a day.

ITEMS	QUANTITY	PRICES IN LEONES
POTATO LEAVES	3 tie	Le 3,000
OGIRI	4 pieces	Le 4,000
PALM OIL	2 pints	Le 8,000
PEPPER	1 cup	Le 7,000
ONION	1 big size	Le 1,000
MAGGI	4 Pieces	Le 2,000
FISH ( HERRING)	1 doz	Le 8,000
RICE	4 cups @ Le 2,500	Le 10,000
CHARCOAL	3 packets	Le 3,000
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>Le 46,000</b>

This means that they will be spending Le 1,426,000 on cooked food alone for a month if they prepare food every day. This does not include other essential expenses such as electricity bills, transport, medical, clothing, house rent, water bills and mobile phone credits. For the labourer who earns the minimum wage of Le 600,000 a month, his family cannot afford to cook at home, and he will need in one month up to Le 620,000 for a daily plate of cookery for all four



members of his family. We interviewed a teacher, head of a family of four, who has served for 35 years and is now in grade 7. After the 30% New Direction increment, he now earns a monthly salary of Le 1,350,000. When he calculated his monthly expenditure on chop money, transport, lunch, electricity and phone credit he arrived at a total of Le 2,126,000.

In his address at the State opening of Parliament last year His Excellency President Bio celebrated his Government's revenue successes, announcing that domestic revenues collected in 2018 increased by one trillion leones to a total of 4.35 trillion. "From April 2018 to March 2019 government collected a total of 5.09 trillion of domestic revenue giving a monthly average of 424 billion". However, in his present condition, the ordinary man does not feel the impact of all this in his daily life, even with the Free Quality Education that has relieved him from paying school fees. We can all still hear the farewell song that the people chanted against the APC government in 2018: "Tolongbo nor go sidom ya, angri boku oh!" Well, the hunger has not gone away, rather it seems to have become more acute. Once again we ask the Government to treat hunger as the real threat to national security. Once again we urge Government to convene economic operators, farmers, economists, business people, importers etc. to consider, from their different perspectives, such temporary measures that are needed to address hunger and bring some relief to the ordinary man.

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