



NATIONAL GRAND COALITION PARTY



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BACK TO THE MARKET: HARDSHIP AND SURVIVAL IN SIERRA LEONE

NGC conducts another market survey after three years of SLPP rule

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The news in Sierra Leone today is dominated by allegations and counter-allegations of big time corruption in high places. Meanwhile the ordinary man or woman in this country continues to suffer big time from the rising cost of living and an income that is either standing still or even falling. People are more concerned about finding the basic things for the family to survive than about the “egregious” corruption by big political personalities that is rocking the State at this time. Since 2018, the National Grand Coalition party (NGC) has been insisting on the need for Government to pay attention to the issue of hardship in the country and the increasing number of families who are going without food due to the galloping prices of basic foodstuffs. One senior personality in Government described our action in bringing this up as “mere politics”; almost as if we were inventing a problem that does not exist. Others would simply brush it aside because, as they say, hardship was not created by them, and they would recite the number of plans they have, the school fees that government is paying, the corruption that they are fighting and the unfairness of critics who they say do not appreciate the strides they are making. This Government has gone stone deaf; and they just cannot see that people are starving!!!

As we have been doing before, today we return to the market, and compare the prices of basic food items since 2018. This is not beef steak and chips, chicken nuggets, shrimp cocktail, barracuda steak, lobsters and great Californian wine that successful people swallow every day in beach restaurants and hangouts. This is garri, rice, bonga, palm oil, plassas, maggi, items that Mammy Fatu needs to put a small pot of soup together so that her children or grandchildren will not starve.

ITEM	PRICES IN MARCH 2018	PRICES AS AT AUGUST 2019	PRICES AS AT AUGUST 2020	PRICES AS AT MARCH 2021	PERCENTAGE % INCREASE
RICE PER BAG	Le 235,000	Le 280,000	Le 330,000	Le 360,000	53%
OIL PER GALLON	LE 170,000	LE 210,000	LE 210,000	LE 260,000	53%
PINT OIL	LE 3,500	LE 4,000	LE 4,500	LE 6,000	71%
RICE PER CUP	Le 1,200	Le 1,700	Le 2,500	Le 2,000	67%



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GARRI PER CUP	Le 500	Le 1,000	1,250	Le 700	40%
FISH (FOR ONE SMALL BONGA)	LE 500	LE 1,000	LE 1,000	Le 1,250	150%
PALM OIL (PER GALLON)	Le 120,000	Le 170,000	Le 180,000	Le 200,000	67%
PALM OIL (PER PINT)	Le 2,500	Le 3,500	Le 4,000	Le 4,000	60%
PLASAS (SMALL TIE)	Le 500	Le 1,000	Le 1,000	Le 1,000	100%
ONIONS PER BAG	Le 120,000	Le 350,000	Le 250,000	Le 210,000	75%
ONIONS (UNIT PRICE)	Le 500	Le 2,500	Le 1,000	Le 1,000	100%
BULGUR (PER CUP)	Le 2,500	Le 4,000	Le 5,000	Le 5,000	100%
CHICKEN FEET PER CARTOON	Le 125,000	Le 170,000	Le 170,000	Le 190,000	52%
MAGGI (UNIT)	Le 250	Le 700	Le 500	Le 500	100%
BEEF (PER POUND)	Le 18,000	Le 22,000	Le 25,000	Le 28,000	56%
COOKERY (PLATE)	Le 3,000	Le 4,000	Le 5,000	Le 5,000	67%



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PEPPER (PER CUP)	Le 700	Le 1,000	Le 7,000	Le 4,000	471 %
USA DOLLAR (SELLING RATE)	Le 750,000 \$100	Le 980,000 \$ 100	Le 1,090,000 \$ 100	Le 1,040,000 \$100	39 % increase in dollar vs drop in Leones
USA DOLLAR (BUYING RATE)	Le 765,000 \$ 100	Le 995,000 \$ 100	Le 1,080,000 \$100	Le 1,030,000 \$ 100	35 % increase in dollar value vs Leones

You will notice that everything has gone up. And since 2018 the lowest increase has been the price of garri (40% increase) whereas the highest is the price of pepper which increased by 471%!!!

Another striking aspect is that apart from the case of palm oil, it is cheaper to buy large quantities than in small units which is what the majority of poor people can afford and which cost more. For instance, whereas the price of rice per bag increased by 53%, the price of a cup of rice increased by 67%. Similarly, the price of a bag of onions between 2018 and 2021 increased by 75% but the price of one onion for the same period increased by 100%. It can be argued of course that this is the normal difference between wholesale and retail but it seems as if the poorer you are the more expensive life becomes for you. Throughout this period, one indicator of improved income is the rise in the minimum wage from Le 500,000.00 to Le 600,000.00. But this increase is only 20% and does not even match the lowest price increase of 40%, which is for garri.

The situation is serious. In a single income family of four (Papa, Mama and two children) earning the minimum wage, survival is a miracle. If they cook rice and soup at home costing approximately Le 40,000 per day the wage will last for only 15 days. They will have to resort to cookery and if each family member eats only a plate of cookery per day, the monthly bill for food alone will be Le 620,000.00 that is Le 20,000 more than the monthly income. And yet these people need clothes to cover their naked ness; they have the landlord on their backs all the time; they need transport to go to work or to school; they need light; the whole family is thrown into panic when someone is sick and needs to be taken to the hospital; the family must provide school uniforms for the children and lunch. The “Hands off our girls” project is crumbling due to the economic situation wherein mothers and daughters are forced to do shameful things while fathers look away helplessly because they do not have the means to protect their dignity.



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It is in this same country that we hear about hundreds of millions of leones being spent on furniture, travels, coffee and hosting fine ladies! It is in this same country that we hear of 1.748 billion leones being spent for media and event promotion services. In this country, where a total sum of 3.116 billion leones could be spent on a two-day launching program. And as children of the poor continue to struggle for food, I ask the question: where is our conscience? What has happened to us?

I am just returning from a trip to the provinces. This time I spent the night not in a big town or city guest house or hotel, but in the bedroom of a peasant in a village who was so happy to offer me hospitality in his "home". What I saw there was deprivation, emptiness and a lack of hope. They are totally forgotten by the rest of us who hail from those parts but who have completely abandoned them to their condition. When we go up there, we do not really visit them, we barely see them, and we only wait for the experience to end and return back home to Hill Station or Spur Loop or Adonkia, to wash ourselves clean of the dirt. When they die unnecessary deaths due to lack of basic health care, we will send kassankay or even attend the funeral so that the people will see us and say that we "are with them". The fact is this: we do not love our tribesmen, we hate them and make sure that they stay poor so that we can use them to elect us to the high places. They starve while we choke with the good things of life. But our poor countrymen and women still believe in God, they go regularly to the mosques or chapels, and they pray. Someday, the suffering we have abandoned them to will become a curse upon all those who neglect them while promising to make their lives better. *God day!!!*

The NGC is not proposing solutions anymore. All we have been suggesting to the Government has been treated with royal contempt by people who think that only they know how to run this country. So while they move, we sit with our people, and wait!

Dr. Dennis Bright,

Chairman and Leader, NGC.