

Zim: No bargains for Christmas shoppers

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#)

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Zimbabwean retailers have begun their big push for the 13th cheque - bonus money that always comes ahead of the year-end festive season. The Christmas carols are already playing in decorated shops and complexes, and it is all looking beautiful.

But this has not brought cheers to the consumers, particularly those who had procrastinated for knock-down prices that come around during the Christmas period. It had always been the case - except during the hyperinflation decade that ended with dollarisation last year - that at year ends, retailers stock up inventories and discount prices, getting most of their revenue by pushing volumes.

But this is 2010, and it's a year of hard currencies.

Prices peak

Prices of basic commodities have surged to all-time high levels over the past week, and there is no pretence from retailers for the common seasonal bargains.

For the grocery buyers, a 2l bottle of cooking oil, which retailed at around US\$300, has gone up by nearly 35% to US\$4.

A 2kg sugar pack is now retailing at US\$2,20, up from around US\$1,80. The price for a bar of washing soap has gone up to US\$1,25, from US\$0,90. The worrying thing is that most of the commodities whose prices have gone up are manufactured locally.

"This is a bad year for the consumer," a dejected shopper remarked in a Harare supermarket.

Manufacturers optimistic

Yet manufacturers are still hoping for a good season, and have embarked on aggressive marketing campaigns to push through their products that had been overwhelmed by competing imports.

Lyons has unleashed its advertising campaign pushing its beverages under the 'Fresh Taste!' promotion.

Irvine's has come to the market with a campaign targeting foreign imports: "If your chicken is tasteless, it's definitely not an Irvine's chicken".

Household appliance retailers are also making sure they are not left out of the rush for the year-end bonus money. TV Sales & Home has unleashed a 'Christmas bonanza': bring your payslip, pay a small deposit and the balance over nine months, with interest.

Cash or credit? Well, depending on which is a better deal.

ABOUT DUMISANI NDLELA

Dumisani Ndlela is a Zimbabwean journalist specialising in business and financial reporting, with experience reporting on commodities, stock and financial markets, advertising, marketing and the media. He has previously reported from a number of regional countries as well as from the UK and Germany on commodities and regional integration. He can be contacted on dndlela@yahoo.co.uk.

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