



CfSC

The Centre for Social Concern

Basic Needs Basket

Cost of living for March 2023



ENDLESS STRUGGLE OF LOW INCOME EARNERS IN MALAWI

The Centre for Social Concern (CfSC) has revealed that the cost of living for an average family of six living in the city of Zomba, Blantyre and Mzuzu and peri-urban areas of Karonga and Mangochi has risen drastically. That's from an average of MK356,108 in January to MK405,669 in March 2023, representing an increase of 14% from January to March. The city of Blantyre has been the most expensive city from January to March with the cost of living recording MK412,819, MK 430,560 and MK459,960 in January, February and March respectively.

*Centre for Reflection,
Research and Action on
Issues of Social Concern in
the Light of the Gospel and
the Church's Social
Teaching*

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Lilongwe cost of living for a household of six people for March 2023

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	40,500	81,000	Charcoal (50 kgs)	22,675	45,350
Milling (Including Grinding)	463	6,482	Protex	894	8,940
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	1,475	9,440	Boom	888	7,104
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	10,438	10,438	Clere Body Lotion	1,325	2,650
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	10,250	8,200	Vaseline Blue Seal	2,263	4,526
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	11,660	11,660
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	3,913	15,652	Running Water (meter)	6,944	6,944
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	150	7,200	Housing (3 bedroom)	71,212	71,212
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	425	9,563	Sub-Total		158,386
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	1,619	24,285	Lilongwe Total Basic Needs		409,629
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	1,056	3,696			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	594	8,910	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	3,575	10,725	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	1,294	25,880	Secondary (fees) per year		44,280
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	1,481	11,848	Primary (GPF) per year		2,560
Kitchen Salt	644	644	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		22,647
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	250	10,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		38,184
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	455	7,280	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		20,086
Sub-Total		251,243	Sub-Total		127,757

Zomba cost of living for a household of six people for March 2023

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	41,314	82,628	Charcoal (50 kgs)	15,500	31,000
Milling (Including Grinding)	571	7,994	Protex	921	9,210
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	1,971	12,614	Boom	866	6,928
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	7,714	7,714	Clere Body Lotion	1,164	2,328
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	8,143	6,514	Vaseline Blue Seal	2,500	5,000
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	8,143	6,514	Electricity	13,712	13,712
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	3,929	15,716	Running Water (meter)	13,656	13,656
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	180	8,640	Housing (3 bedroom)	56,776	56,776
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	836	18,810	Sub-Total		138,610
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	3,129	46,935	Zomba Total Basic Needs		425,130
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	1,500	5,250			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	514	7,710	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	3,957	11,871	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	1,300	26,000	Secondary (fees) per year		68,771
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	1,514	12,112	Primary (GPF) per year		9,000
Kitchen Salt	593	593	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		49,114
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	139	5,560	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		52,912
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	209	3,344	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		15,185
Sub-Total		286,520	Sub-Tota		194,982

Blantyre cost of living for a household of six people for March 2023

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	40,357	80,714	Charcoal (50 kgs)	30,000	60,000
Milling (Including Grinding)	400	5,600	Protex	843	8,430
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	1,686	10,790	Boom	836	6,688
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	14,686	14,686	Clere Body Lotion	1,157	2,314
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	15,357	12,286	Vaseline Blue Seal	1,779	3,558
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	20,143	16,114	Electricity	15,466	15,466
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	3,857	15,428	Running Water (meter)	15,922	15,922
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	150	7,200	Housing (3 bedroom)	64,249	64,249
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	543	12,218	Sub-Total	176,627	
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	2,271	34,065	Blantyre Total Basic Needs		459,960
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	1,543	5,401	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	479	7,185	Education		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	3,686	11,058	Secondary (fees) per year		37,397
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	1,236	24,720	Primary (GPF) per year		5,624
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	1,500	12,000	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		65,121
Kitchen Salt	557	557	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		47,138
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	70	2,800	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		21,217
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	657	10,512	Sub-Total	176,498	
Sub-Total	283,333				

Mzuzu cost of living for a household of six people for March 2023

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	42,167	84,334	Charcoal (50 kgs)	20,667	41,334
Milling (Including Grinding)	1,500	21,000	Protex	1,000	10,000
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	2,117	13,549	Boom	658	5,264
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	4,500	4,500	Clere Body Lotion	1,150	2,300
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	10,967	8,774	Vaseline Blue Seal	2,100	1,066
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	4,000	3,200	Electricity	6,465	6,465
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	4,500	18,000	Running Water (meter)	6,102	6,102
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	150	7,200	Housing (3 bedroom)	34,631	34,631
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	793	17,843	Sub-Total	107,162	
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	1,456	21,840	Mzuzu Total Basic Needs		391,545
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	1,273	4,456	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	800	12,000	Education		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	3,817	11,451	Secondary (fees) per year		60,000
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	1,400	28,000	Primary (GPF) per year		4,650
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	1,600	12,800	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		51,520
Kitchen Salt	1,230	1,230	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		72,000
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	200	8,000	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		13,924
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	388	6,208	Sub-Total	202,093	
Sub-Total	284,383				

Mangochi cost of living for a household of six people for March 2023

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	43,333	86,666	Charcoal (50 kgs)	12,167	24,334
Milling (Including Grinding)	700	9,800	Protex	1,300	13,000
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	1,600	10,240	Boom	900	7,200
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	13,500	13,500	Clere Body Lotion	1,300	2,600
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	16,667	13,334	Vaseline Blue Seal	2,000	1,600
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	16,000	12,800	Electricity	8,358	8,358
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	4,000	16,000	Running Water (meter)	8,858	8,858
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	150	7,200	Housing (3 bedroom)	38,525	38,525
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	850	19,125	Sub-Total		104,475
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	2,200	33,000	Mangochi Total Basic Needs		407,812
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,000	7,000	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	600	9,000	Education		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	3,800	11,400	Secondary (fees) per year		67,287
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	1,200	24,000	Primary (GPF) per year		4,500
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	1,500	12,000	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		50,136
Kitchen Salt	800	800	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		48,891
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	250	10,000	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		34,631
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	467	7,472	Sub-Total		205,445
Sub-Total	303,337		Sub-Total		205,445

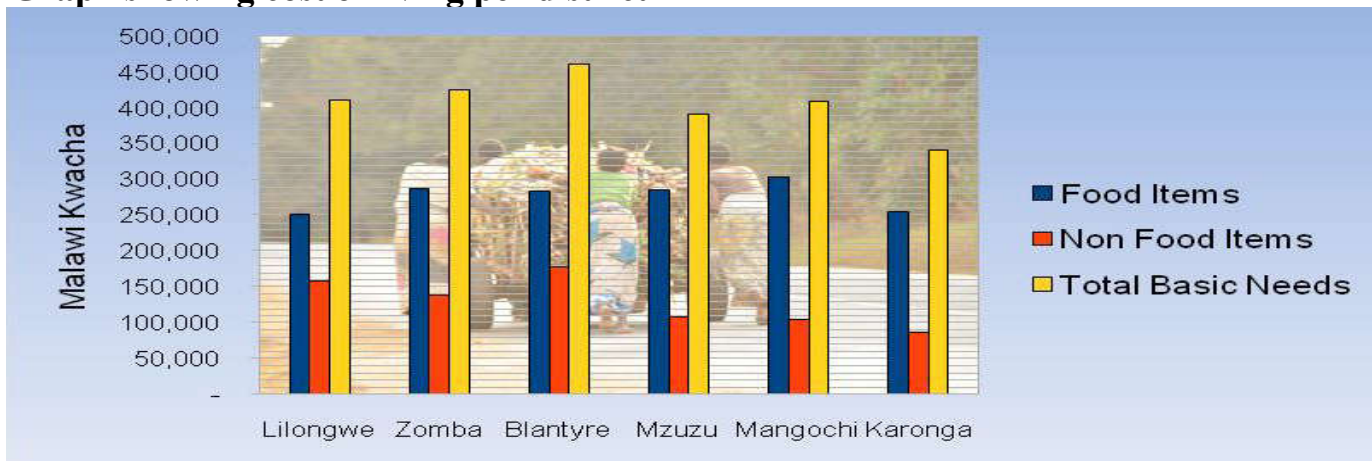
Karonga cost of living for a household of six people for March 2023

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	42,500	85,000	Charcoal (50 kgs)	10,100	20,200
Milling (Including Grinding)	700	9,800	Protex	850	8,500
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	700	4,480	Boom	850	6,800
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	5,000	5,000	Clere Body Lotion	1,800	3,600
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	3,000	2,400	Vaseline Blue Seal	2,250	4,500
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	5,653	5,653
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	3,500	14,000	Running Water (meter)	7,486	7,486
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	200	9,600	Housing (3 bedroom)	28,389	28,389
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	700	15,750	Sub-Total		85,128
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	1,700	25,500	Karonga Total Basic Needs		339,938
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	1,300	4,550	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	700	10,500	Education		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	3,600	10,800	Secondary (fees) per year		66,139
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	1,300	26,000	Primary (GPF) per year		5,578
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	1,600	12,800	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		44,269
Kitchen Salt	390	390	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		62,394
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	150	6,000	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		23,763
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	765	12,240	Sub-Total		202,143
Sub-Total	254,810		Sub-Total		202,143

Table showing cost of living per district

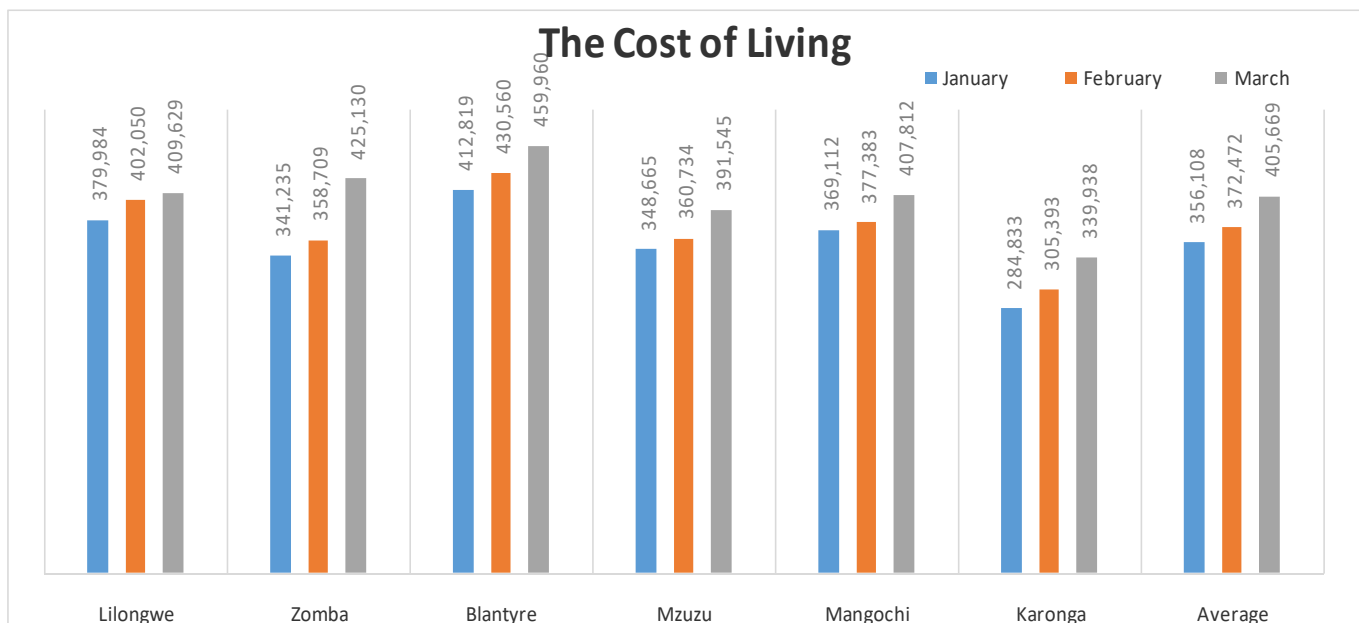
District	Food Items	Non Food Items	Total Basic Needs
Lilongwe	251,243	158,386	409,629
Zomba	286,520	138,610	425,130
Blantyre	283,333	176,627	459,960
Mzuzu	284,383	107,162	391,545
Mangochi	303,337	104,475	407,812
Karonga	254,810	85,128	339,938

Graph showing cost of living per district

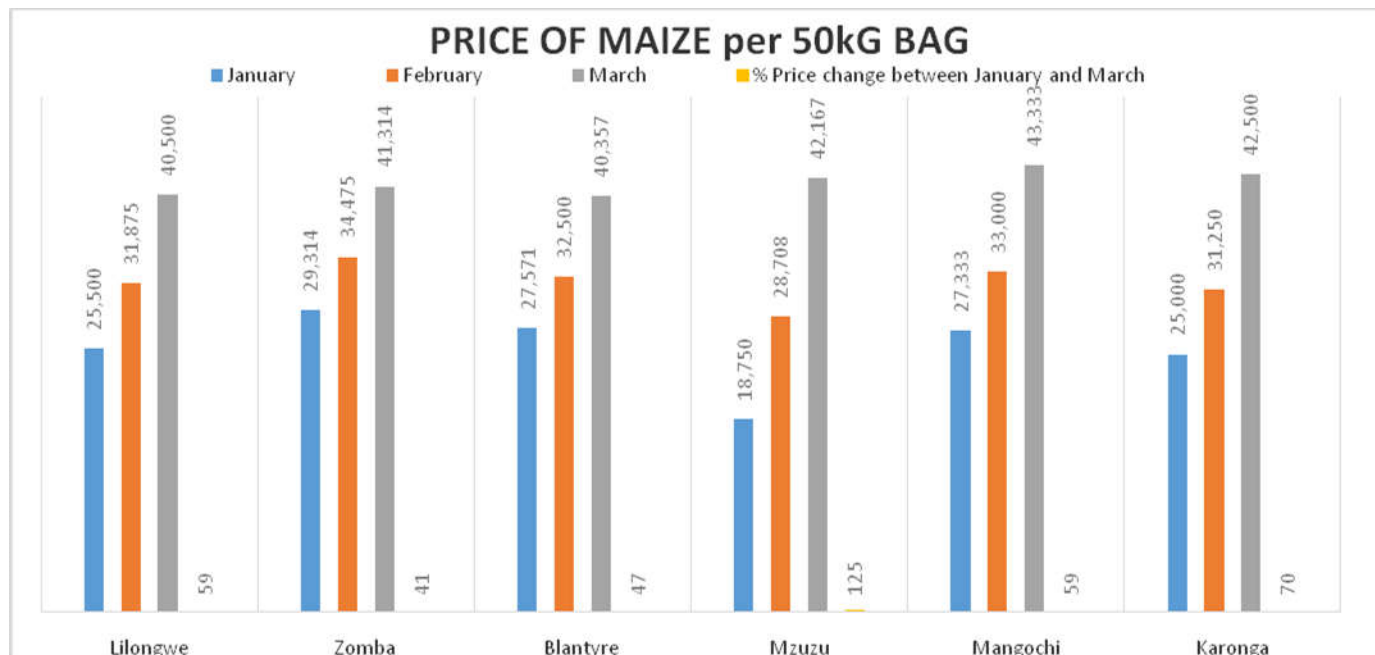


Note: Total Basic Needs is calculated from Total Food Items + Total Non Food Items

Cost of living comparison for the months of January, February and March 2023 per district



Among all the commodities, the price of maize gives an explanation for the rise in the cost of living in the areas mentioned above. Between January and March 2023, maize price has increased by an average of 67% with Mzuzu recording the price change of 124%. Between January and March as a whole the price of maize went up from MK18,750 to MK42,167 per 50Kg, representing 125% price change. Mangochi, however, was even more expensive than other towns or areas recording MK43,333 per 50Kg.



Although the government last year (2022) increased the minimum wage to MK50,000 per month, this speaks nothing the wage earners as it is not enough to cater for monthly basic food items as per Centre's basket. Prices of commodities (both food and non-food items) are increasing on daily basis; hence, making it difficult for consumers to have some savings. This situation may generate tension among people especially the middle and low-income earners. The possibility of them making investments remains to be a dream. On the contrary, these people tend to find other alternatives or means of or for survival.

From the above picture, it is evident that managing the cost of living in Malawi cannot be achieved as long as there is food insecurity. The government as well as private sector need to be creative in introducing and encouraging the creation of commercial industries as part of the long term solution to what the country is facing today. This will also create employments to the youths. Our education system too should focus on how the students will be self-reliant on completion of their school instead of relying entirely on government.

Moreover, in order to ensure food security, Centre for Social Concern recommends the following:

1. **Diversify national food balance sheet in order to reflect food consumption patterns of the population.** This should include crops which give significant contribution to people's consumption. This will ensure a precise definition of food gap. Nsima is not the only food. Maize production is important; however, diversification of crops will ensure food security and minimize post-harvest losses. Production alone is not enough; markets must function properly and the prices should be controlled by the government in order to support the poor who are net food buyers.

2. **The role of markets is fundamental and has to be prioritized in addressing access and availability of food.** Moreover, there is a need for the government to remove unnecessary market distortions, ensure effective functioning of grain reserves and reduce post-harvest losses.
3. **The role of Strategic Grain Reserves (SGR) has to come in to support emergency and non-emergency operations.** During bumper harvests, there is a need to consider effective price stabilization. The grain reserves need not to be limited to maize, but also other crops. Future and forward markets need to be explored in time than overly on physical grain stocks, which attract storage costs and post-harvest losses.
4. **Enact the Right to Food Bill:** When the Right to Food Bill will be enacted into law, every person will have the right to adequate food and nutrition which includes the right to freedom from hunger and food security. This food includes maize, which is considered to be main staple food in Malawi, and also contributes highly to the cost of living. The proposed law states that, “Food must be available, adequate and of good quality; and that the quality of the food must be in line with the specific needs of specific categories of persons.”

According to the Bill, “The State shall take steps, individually and through international assistance and co-operation, especially economic and technical, to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the right to adequate food, including freedom from hunger and adequate nutrition, by all appropriate means.” The proposed law also explicitly obliges the Government to respect, protect, promote and fulfill the right to food.

Centre for Social Concern, therefore, urges parliamentarians to discuss and pass the bill in 2023 as this would ensure each family, as well as individual to see the right to food as a right and not a privilege.

Monthly average for cost of living

Monthly Average	2022	2022	2022	2022	2022	2022	2022	2022	2022	2023	2023	2023
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Amount (MK)	250,243	257,028	270,799	288,180	307,724	307,368	325,902	327,606	328,522	356,108	372,471	405,669

Fuel cost

Fuel (cost at the pump)	
Diesel (per litre)	K1920
Petrol (per litre)	K1746
Paraffin (per litre)	K833

Minibus fare

Minibus fare to town and back	
Lilongwe	K2,200
Zomba	K2,000
Blantyre	K1,600
Mzuzu	K2,700

NB: 1 USA dollar (\$) = K1,033.39 Malawian Kwacha (MK). Source: <https://www.oanda.com/currency-converter/en/> : The Social Conditions Research Programme of the Centre for Social Concern. Conducted these surveys from 21st to 23rd March, 2023 in the cities of Lilongwe, Zomba, Blantyre, Mzuzu and peri urban areas of Mangochi and Karonga.

NOTE: The data on electricity, housing, water and other additional costs is collected and analyzed on quarterly basis