



CfSC

The Centre for Social Concern

Basic Needs Basket

Cost of Living for May 2024



THE STRUGGLE OF LOW INCOME EARNERS AMIDST PRICE REDUCTIONS

Despite a reported decrease in the average cost of living between April and May by 4.2%, from K521,936 in April to K500,154 in May, the cost of living remains alarmingly high for low income earners in Malawi. This marginal decline has been driven primarily by significant price reductions in key commodities such as maize and sugar.

Commodity Price Changes:

- Lilongwe: Maize dropped by 13%, and sugar by 31%.
- Mangochi: Maize dropped by 12.5%, and sugar by 26.5%.
- Karonga: Maize dropped by 13%, and sugar by 49.6%.
- Zomba: No change in maize price.

*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 May 2024

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	35,500	71,000	Charcoal (50 kgs)	48,125	96,250
Milling (Including Grinding)	888	12,432	Protex	1,188	11,880
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	3,500	22,400	Boom	1,200	9,600
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	0	0	Clere Body Lotion	1,725	3,450
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	18,634	14,907	Vaseline Blue Seal	2,788	5,576
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	14,973	14,973
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	5,063	20,252	Running Water (meter)	12,809	12,809
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	283	13,584	Housing (3 bedroom)	80,221	80,221
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	790	17,775	Sub-Total	234,759	
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	1,828	27,420	Lilongwe Total Basic Needs 550,174		
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	4,650	16,275			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,025	15,375	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	4,044	12,132	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	1,513	30,260	Secondary (fees) per year	58,500	
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	2,750	22,000	Primary (GPF) per year	3,000	
Kitchen Salt	963	963	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year	24,465	
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	266	10,640	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year	40,685	
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	500	8,000	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term	21,958	
Sub-Total	315,415		Sub-Total	148,608	

Zomba cost of living for a household of six people for May 2024

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	34,286	68,572	Charcoal (50 kgs)	21,286	42,572
Milling (Including Grinding)	1,000	14,000	Protex	1,664	16,640
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	4,000	25,600	Boom	1,357	10,856
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	10,000	10,000	Clere Body Lotion	1,714	3,428
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	10,000	8,000	Vaseline Blue Seal	3,500	7,000
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	15,745	15,745
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	5,000	20,000	Running Water (meter)	14,443	14,443
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	300	14,400	Housing (3 bedroom)	70,520	70,520
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,000	22,500	Sub-Total	181,204	
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	1,486	22,290	Zomba Total Basic Needs 485,017		
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,043	7,151			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,000	15,000	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	3,964	11,892	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	1,500	30,000	Secondary (fees) per year	81,827	
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	2,471	19,768	Primary (GPF) per year	9,000	
Kitchen Salt	1,000	1,000	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year	53,209	
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	151	6,040	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year	57,069	
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	475	7,600	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term	18,714	
Sub-Total	303,813		Sub-Total	219,818	

Blantyre cost of living for a household of six people for May 2024

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	33,214	66,428	Charcoal (50 kgs)	55,714	111,428
Milling (Including Grinding)	400	5,600	Protex	1,350	13,500
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	3,543	22,675	Boom	1,307	10,456
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	23,286	23,286	Clere Body Lotion	1,721	3,442
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	26,429	21,143	Vaseline Blue Seal	2,786	5,572
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	25,857	20,686	Electricity	19,558	19,558
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	4,643	18,572	Running Water (meter)	17,399	17,399
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	250	12,000	Housing (3 bedroom)	67,931	67,931
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	714	16,065	Sub-Total	249,286	
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	1,971	29,565	Blantyre Total Basic Needs 590,741		
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,843	9,951			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	979	14,685	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	4,079	12,237	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	1,500	30,000	Secondary (fees) per year		37,732
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	2,564	20,512	Primary (GPF) per year		5,451
Kitchen Salt	786	786	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		59,375
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	100	4,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		49,011
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	829	13,264	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		21,904
Sub-Total	341,455		Sub-Total		173,472

Mzuzu cost of living for a household of six people for May 2024

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	32,083	64,166	Charcoal (50 kgs)	18,683	37,366
Milling (Including Grinding)	2,400	33,600	Protex	2,275	22,750
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	2,508	16,051	Boom	850	6,800
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	8,750	8,750	Clere Body Lotion	2,083	4,166
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	26,000	20,800	Vaseline Blue Seal	2,500	1,066
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	4,917	3,934	Electricity	8,314	8,314
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	7,000	28,000	Running Water (meter)	6,761	6,761
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	300	14,400	Housing (3 bedroom)	39,512	39,512
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,135	25,538	Sub-Total	126,735	
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	2,272	34,080	Mzuzu Total Basic Needs 489,646		
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,145	7,508			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,200	18,000	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	4,367	13,101	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	1,683	33,660	Secondary (fees) per year		60,000
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	3,033	24,264	Primary (GPF) per year		4,580
Kitchen Salt	2,276	2,276	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		57,000
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	250	10,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		46,900
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	299	4,784	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		18,770
Sub-Total	362,911		Sub-Total		281,049

Mangochi cost of living for a household of six people for May 2024

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	35,000	70,000	Charcoal (50 kgs)	8,333	16,666
Milling (Including Grinding)	800	11,200	Protex	2,000	20,000
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	3,000	19,200	Boom	1,200	9,600
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	19,000	19,000	Clere Body Lotion	2,500	5,000
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	19,200	15,360	Vaseline Blue Seal	3,500	1,600
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	19,667	15,734	Electricity	9,170	9,170
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	6,000	24,000	Running Water (meter)	9,543	9,543
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	300	14,400	Housing (3 bedroom)	42,944	42,944
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,911	42,998	Sub-Total		114,523
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	1,233	18,495	Mangochi Total Basic Needs		477,744
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	3,467	12,135			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	500	7,500	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	4,200	12,600	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	1,500	30,000	Secondary (fees) per year		69,363
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	2,500	20,000	Primary (GPF) per year		4,627
Kitchen Salt	1,000	1,000	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		57,713
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	300	12,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		53,708
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	1,100	17,600	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		36,047
Sub-Total		363,221	Sub-Total		221,458

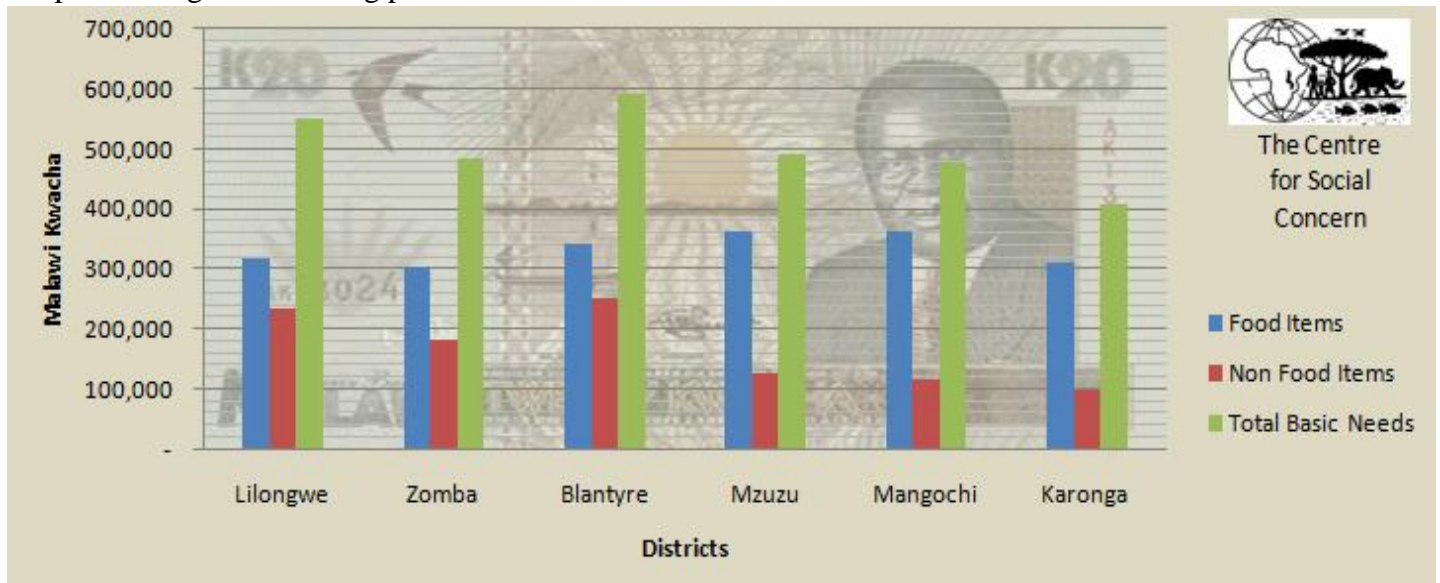
Karonga cost of living for a household of six people for May 2024

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	25,000	50,000	Charcoal (50 kgs)	8,250	16,500
Milling (Including Grinding)	1,500	21,000	Protex	1,200	12,000
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	700	4,480	Boom	1,098	8,784
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	15,000	15,000	Clere Body Lotion	3,700	7,400
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Vaseline Blue Seal	2,850	5,700
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	13,000	10,400	Electricity	5,580	5,580
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	5,000	20,000	Running Water (meter)	8,498	8,498
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	300	14,400	Housing (3 bedroom)	32,958	32,958
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	800	18,000	Sub-Total		97,420
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	2,450	36,750	Karonga Total Basic Needs		407,603
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,825	9,888			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,225	18,375	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	4,100	12,300	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	1,500	30,000	Secondary (fees) per year		91,998
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	2,900	23,200	Primary (GPF) per year		7,488
Kitchen Salt	390	390	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		56,277
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	250	10,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		75,278
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	1,000	16,000	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		22,153
Sub-Total		310,183	Sub-Total		253,194

Table showing cost of living per district

District	Food Items	Non Food Items	Total Basic Needs
Lilongwe	315,415	234,759	550,174
Zomba	303,813	181,204	485,017
Blantyre	341,455	249,286	590,741
Mzuzu	362,911	126,735	489,646
Mangochi	363,221	114,523	477,744
Karonga	310,183	97,420	407,603

Graph showing cost of living per district



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

THE STRUGGLE OF LOW INCOME EARNERS AMIDST PRICE REDUCTIONS

These reductions, while notable, have not sufficiently alleviated the financial burden on low income households. The average cost of living remains problematically high, exacerbating economic hardship and limiting access to essential goods and services.

Impact on Low Income Earners

Low income earners continue to struggle to meet basic needs such as food, healthcare, and education. The slight decrease in costs does little to bridge the gap between stagnant wages and rising living expenses. Many families are forced to make difficult choices, often compromising on nutrition and other essential needs, which can have long-term detrimental effects on health and wellbeing.

Recommended Measures

To ensure that the cost of living continues to decline and ultimately offers relief to low income earners, we propose the following measures:

1. Subsidies and Price Controls

Introduce targeted subsidies: The government should provide subsidies for essential commodities such as maize, sugar, cooking oil, and other staples to reduce their prices. This would make these essential items more affordable for low income families.

Implement price controls: Price controls on key goods can prevent exploitative pricing practices. By setting maximum prices for essential commodities, the government can protect consumers from sudden and significant price hikes that exacerbate financial strain.

2. Agricultural Support

Enhance support to farmers: Providing subsidies on farming inputs and access to affordable credit can help increase productivity and reduce production costs. This, in turn, can lead to lower prices for agricultural products.

Invest in storage facilities: Improved storage facilities can reduce post-harvest losses, stabilize market prices, and ensure a more consistent supply of essential commodities throughout the year.

3. Income Support Programs

Expand social safety nets: Programs such as cash transfer initiatives can provide immediate relief to the most vulnerable households. These transfers can help families cover basic living expenses and reduce the impact of high living costs.

Adjust minimum wage policies: Reviewing and adjusting minimum wage policies to reflect the current cost of living ensures that wages are sufficient to meet basic needs, thereby improving the financial stability of low income earners.

4. Market Regulation

Strengthen market regulations: Effective regulation can prevent price gouging and ensure fair trade practices. Monitoring and controlling the supply chain can help maintain fair prices from producers to consumers.

Enhance transparency: Increasing transparency in the supply chain can reduce inefficiencies and ensure that savings are passed on to consumers. This involves monitoring pricing at each stage of the supply chain to prevent undue markups.

5. Economic Diversification

Promote economic diversification: Encouraging investment in various sectors can create more employment opportunities and reduce dependency on a few industries. This diversification can enhance economic stability and provide more job opportunities for low income earners.

Invest in education and training programs: Enhancing skills and employability through education and training can help individuals access better-paying jobs in diverse industries, thereby improving their financial situation.

6. Public Awareness Campaigns

Conduct public awareness campaigns: Informing consumers about their rights and ways to manage household expenses effectively can empower them to make better financial decisions. Awareness campaigns can also highlight available support programs and resources.

Encourage community-based initiatives: Initiatives such as bulk purchasing and cooperative farming can reduce costs for individuals. These community-based efforts can foster collaboration and shared resources, lowering the overall cost of living.

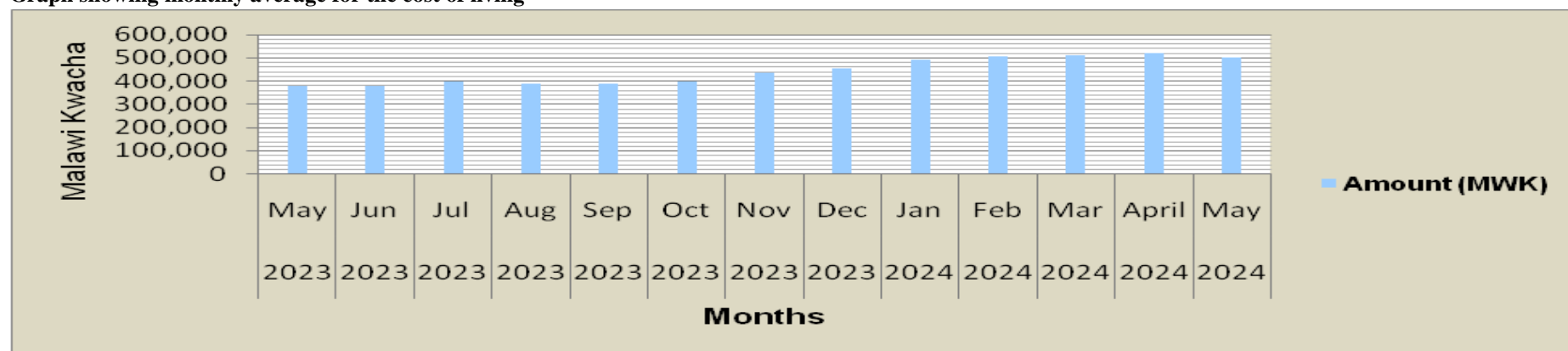
Conclusion

By implementing these measures, the government can create a more resilient and equitable economy that supports all citizens, particularly those most vulnerable to economic shocks. It is imperative that the government takes immediate and decisive action to ensure that the cost of living becomes manageable for low income earners, granting them the much-needed relief and stability

Monthly average for the cost of living

Monthly Average	2023	2023	2023	2023	2023	2023	2023	2023	2023	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024
	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	
Amount (MK)	377,892	378,812	395,993	386,192	389,455	397,134	433,793	455,707	491,037	503,876	510,720	521,936	500,154	

Graph showing monthly average for the cost of living



Fuel Cost

Fuel (cost at the pump)		
Diesel (per litre)		K2734
Petrol (per litre)		K2530
Paraffin (per litre)		K1910

Minibus Fare

Minibus fare to town and back		
Lilongwe		K3000
Zomba		K1400
Blantyre		K1200
Mzuzu		K 1600
Mangochi		K1000
Karonga		K1900

NB: 1 USA dollar (\$) = K1, 749.74 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 22nd to 23rd May, 2024 in the cities of Blantyre, Zomba, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and peri-urban areas of Karonga and Mangochi

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

