



**CfSC**

# The Centre for Social Concern

## Basic Needs Basket

Cost of Living for January 2025



### SHARP INCREASE IN FOOD PRICES PUTS PRESSURE ON MALAWIAN FAMILIES

The Centre for Social Concern (CfSC) is deeply concerned about the significant increase in the cost of living between December 2024 and January 2025, which has surged from K615,138 to K694,653, representing a sharp increase of approximately 12.9%. This drastic rise in the cost of living is making it increasingly difficult for many households in Malawi to afford basic necessities, exacerbating financial hardship, particularly, among low-income families.

*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 January 2025					
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	59,375	118,750	Charcoal (50 kgs)	53,125	106,250
Milling (Including Grinding)	850	11,900	Protex	1,469	14,690
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	5,863	37,523	Boom	1,581	12,648
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	21,019	21,019	Clere Body Lotion	2,120	4,240
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	22,361	17,889	Vaseline Blue Seal	3,000	6,000
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	14,363	14,363
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	6,625	26,500	Running Water (meter)	9,673	9,673
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	319	15,312	Housing (3 bedroom)	90,932	90,932
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,929	43,403		<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>258,796</b>
Tomato ( 0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	2,738	41,070	<b>Lilongwe Total Basic Needs</b>		<b>743,135</b>
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	3,049	10,672	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,300	19,500	Education		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	6,575	19,725	Secondary (fees) per year		87,000
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	2,144	42,880	Primary (GPF) per year		3,000
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	3,013	24,104	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		39,000
Kitchen Salt	1,325	1,325	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		42,750
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	344	13,760	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		24,250
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	1,188	19,008		<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>196,000</b>
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>484,339</b>		<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>196,000</b>

Zomba cost of living for a household of six people for January 2025					
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	78,857	157,714	Charcoal (50 kgs)	20,786	41,572
Milling (Including Grinding)	1,000	14,000	Protex	1,543	15,430
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	6,214	39,770	Boom	2,064	16,512
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	20,000	20,000	Clere Body Lotion	3,536	7,072
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	20,000	16,000	Vaseline Blue Seal	3,500	7,000
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	22,759	22,759
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	6,714	26,856	Running Water (meter)	19,213	19,213
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	300	14,400	Housing (3 bedroom)	76,143	76,143
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,457	32,783		<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>205,701</b>
Tomato ( 0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	3,429	51,435	<b>Zomba Total Basic Needs</b>		<b>737,734</b>
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,571	8,999	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,300	19,500	Education		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	6,943	20,829	Secondary (fees) per year		110,159
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	2,457	49,140	Primary (GPF) per year		9,000
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	3,264	26,112	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		57,312
Kitchen Salt	1,200	1,200	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		64,266
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	204	8,160	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		30,132
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	1,571	25,136		<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>270,869</b>
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>532,033</b>		<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>270,869</b>

Blantyre cost of living for a household of six people for January 2025					
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	69,643	139,286	Charcoal (50 kgs)	42,857	85,714
Milling (Including Grinding)	500	7,000	Protex	1,257	12,570
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	6,286	40,230	Boom	1,529	12,232
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	28,571	28,571	Clere Body Lotion	2,500	5,000
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	32,857	26,286	Vaseline Blue Seal	3,500	7,000
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	32,143	25,714	Electricity	21,365	21,365
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	5,500	22,000	Running Water (meter)	21,780	21,780
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	300	14,400	Housing (3 bedroom)	73,193	73,193
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	743	16,718		<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>238,854</b>
Tomato ( 0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	3,371	50,565	<b>Blantyre Total Basic Needs</b>		<b>748,097</b>
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	1,829	6,402			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,221	18,315	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	6,643	19,929	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	2,243	44,860	Secondary (fees) per year		69,624
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	3,129	25,032	Primary (GPF) per year		5,319
Kitchen Salt	1,200	1,200	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		89,712
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	100	4,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		66,696
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	1,171	18,736	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		37,115
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>509,243</b>		<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>268,465</b>

Mzuzu cost of living for a household of six people for January 2025					
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	65,417	130,834	Charcoal (50 kgs)	24,167	48,334
Milling (Including Grinding)	2,400	33,600	Protex	2,400	24,000
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	4,275	27,360	Boom	1,850	14,800
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	15,000	15,000	Clere Body Lotion	2,642	5,284
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	39,167	31,334	Vaseline Blue Seal	2,638	1,066
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	6,917	5,534	Electricity	8,554	8,554
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	7,000	28,000	Running Water (meter)	7,331	7,331
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	350	16,800	Housing (3 bedroom)	41,552	41,552
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,380	31,050		<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>150,921</b>
Tomato ( 0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	2,830	42,450	<b>Mzuzu Total Basic Needs</b>		<b>669,453</b>
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,688	9,408			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,583	23,745	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	6,750	20,250	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	2,500	50,000	Secondary (fees) per year		90,000
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	3,733	29,864	Primary (GPF) per year		5,488
Kitchen Salt	3,160	3,160	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		69,254
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	300	12,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		80,000
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	509	8,144	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		29,258
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>518,532</b>		<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>572,509</b>

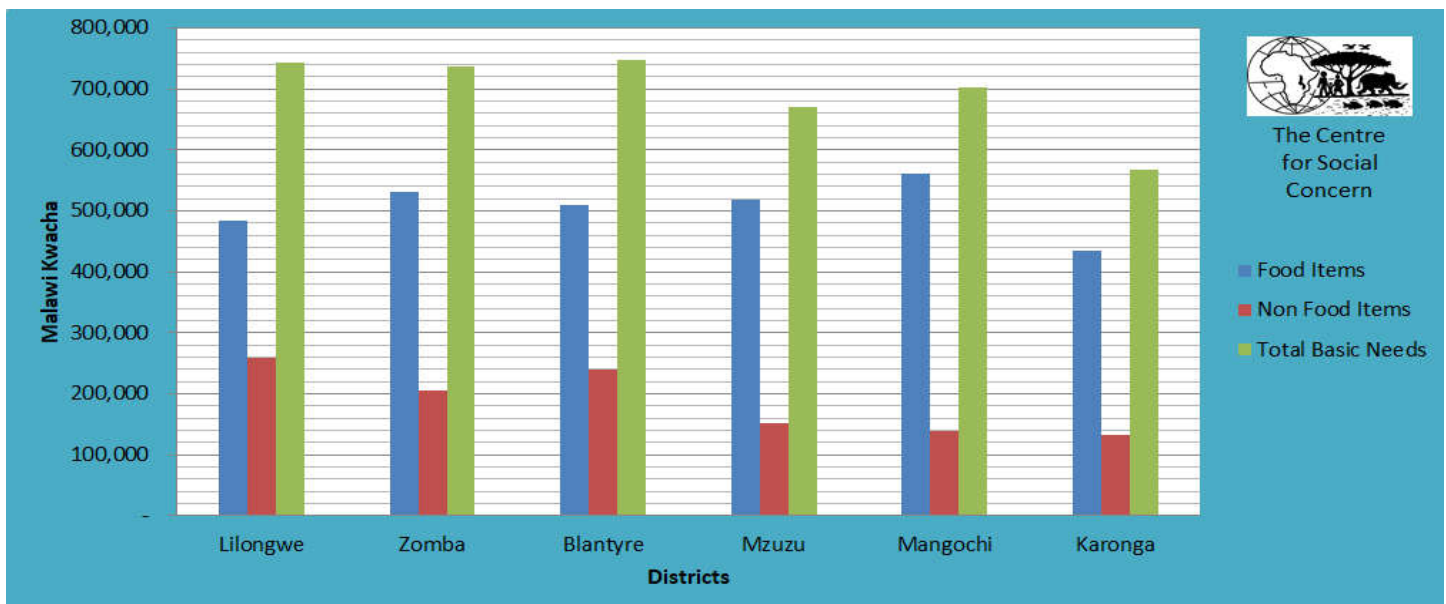
Mangochi cost of living for a household of six people for January 2025					
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	70,000	140,000	Charcoal (50 kgs)	17,000	34,000
Milling (Including Grinding)	1,000	14,000	Protex	2,500	25,000
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	5,000	32,000	Boom	1,300	10,400
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	31,000	31,000	Clere Body Lotion	2,500	5,000
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	33,333	26,666	Vaseline Blue Seal	4,000	1,600
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	32,000	25,600	Electricity	9,648	9,648
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	7,000	28,000	Running Water (meter)	9,113	9,113
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	350	16,800	Housing (3 bedroom)	45,260	45,260
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,733	38,993		<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>140,021</b>
Tomato ( 0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	2,933	43,995	<b>Mangochi Total Basic Needs</b>		<b>702,108</b>
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,867	10,035			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,000	15,000	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	8,333	24,999	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	2,300	46,000	Secondary (fees) per year		97,992
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	3,300	26,400	Primary (GPF) per year		9,384
Kitchen Salt	1,000	1,000	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		87,063
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	400	16,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		88,388
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	1,600	25,600	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		50,809
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>562,087</b>	<b>Sub-Total</b>		<b>333,637</b>

Karonga cost of living for a household of six people for January 2025					
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	62,500	125,000	Charcoal (50 kgs)	24,825	49,650
Milling (Including Grinding)	1,500	21,000	Protex	1,275	12,750
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	700	4,480	Boom	1,325	10,600
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	10,000	10,000	Clere Body Lotion	2,750	5,500
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	10,000	8,000	Vaseline Blue Seal	3,825	7,650
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	10,000	8,000	Electricity	6,304	6,304
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	8,000	32,000	Running Water (meter)	8,022	8,022
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	350	16,800	Housing (3 bedroom)	32,958	32,958
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	950	21,375		<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>133,434</b>
Tomato ( 0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	2,050	30,750	<b>Karonga Total Basic Needs</b>		<b>567,392</b>
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	1,725	6,038			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,450	21,750	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	6,525	19,575	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	2,200	44,000	Secondary (fees) per year		91,998
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	3,100	24,800	Primary (GPF) per year		7,488
Kitchen Salt	390	390	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		56,277
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	300	12,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		75,278
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	1,750	28,000	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		22,153
	<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>433,958</b>	<b>Sub-Total</b>		<b>253,194</b>

Table showing cost of living per district

District	Food Items	Non Food Items	Total Basic Needs
Lilongwe	484,339	258,796	743,135
Zomba	532,033	205,701	737,734
Blantyre	509,243	238,854	748,097
Mzuzu	518,532	150,921	669,453
Mangochi	562,087	140,021	702,108
Karonga	433,958	133,434	567,392

Graph showing cost of living per district



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

## COST OF LIVING SOARS BY 12.9%: THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN MALAWI

The increase in this month has been primarily driven by the rising prices of maize, tomatoes, and sugar, three staple commodities that are crucial for daily sustenance in Malawian homes. Maize, as the country's staple food, plays a vital role in household nutrition, and its sharp price hike directly threatens food security. The soaring cost of tomatoes, a key ingredient in most meals, further strains household budgets, while the rising price of sugar affects not only direct consumption but also small businesses that rely on it for production.

These price hikes are worsening economic conditions, disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations such as subsistence farmers, informal traders, and low-income earners who are already struggling to cope with stagnant wages and high unemployment rates. If not urgently addressed, the escalating cost of living could deepen poverty levels and negatively affect national economic stability.

## Key Commodity Price Changes

A closer look at individual commodities shows substantial price hikes across major cities:

	Maize price in MK		Tomato price in MK		Sugar price in MK	
	December 2024	January 2025	December 2024	January 2025	December 2024	January 2025
Lilongwe	45,625	59,375	1,337	2,738	2,600	3,013
Zomba	59,143	78,857	2,271	3,429	2,729	3,264
Blantyre	58,517	69,643	1,786	3,371	2,786	3,129
Mzuzu	55,833	65,417	2,718	2,830	3,183	3,733
Mangochi	54,667	70,000	2,267	2,933	2,700	3,300
Karonga	52,500	62,500	1,513	2,050	2,800	3,100

**Maize**, Malawi's staple food, has recorded substantial price increases. The most affected districts include Zomba, where maize prices rose by **33.3%** (from K59,143 to K78,857), Mangochi, with an increase of **28%** (from K54,667 to K70,000), and Lilongwe, where prices surged by **30.2%** (from K45,625 to K59,375).

**Tomato prices** have also skyrocketed. The highest increase was in Blantyre, where prices nearly doubled by **88.8%** (from K1,786 to K3,371). Other notable increases were observed in Lilongwe (**104.8%**, from K1,337 to K2,738) and Zomba (**50.9%**, from K2,271 to K3,429).

**Sugar**, another essential commodity, has seen significant price hikes. The most affected area was Mzuzu, where prices rose by **17.3%** (from K3,183 to K3,733). Other cities such as Mangochi (**22.2%**) and Zomba (**19.6%**) have also experienced significant price increases.

### **Likely Reasons for the Increase in Price**

Several factors have contributed to the rising prices of maize, tomatoes, and sugar:

**Poor Weather Conditions:** Erratic rainfall patterns and prolonged dry spells have negatively impacted maize and tomato production, leading to reduced supply and higher prices.

**High Input Costs:** The rising cost of fertilizers, seeds, and pesticides has increased production costs, which are being passed on to consumers.

**Transportation Costs:** Increased fuel prices and logistical challenges have made it more expensive to transport goods, affecting the final retail prices.

**Market Speculation and Hoarding:** Traders may be hoarding essential commodities in anticipation of further price increases, exacerbating shortages.

**Import Dependency and Exchange Rate Fluctuations:** The depreciation of the Malawi Kwacha in the black market has increased the cost of importing sugar and other agricultural inputs, making locally produced goods more expensive.

**Pest and Disease Outbreaks:** Tomato production has been affected by pest infestations, reducing supply and driving up prices.

**General Economic Crises:** The Malawi economy is facing a lot of challenges which is leading to increase in prices of almost everything in the country. The farmers also consume these other products and therefore will have to sell their products at a price that will allow them to have access to other products in their daily living condition. This has pushed the farmers to increase the prices of their products which is clearly seen in this study.

### **Impact on Malawian Households**

The rising cost of living is exerting immense pressure on Malawian households, particularly low-income earners who are struggling to afford basic necessities. The increase in food prices threatens household food security and may result in malnutrition, especially among children. The burden is even heavier on informal workers whose incomes remain stagnant despite the rising cost of essential goods.

### **Proposed Measures to Address the Cost of Living**

To sustainably reduce the cost of living and cushion vulnerable population, the following measures should be looked into:

**Strengthening Food Security Measures:** The government and its partners will need to prioritize investment in irrigation farming in order to reduce overreliance on rain fed agriculture. This will enhance food production and consequently help stabilize food supply culminating in lowering prices of food.

**Enhancing Agricultural Subsidies:** Expanding the Affordable Inputs Programme (AIP) and ensuring its efficiency can reduce production costs for farmers, leading to lower food prices.

**Improving Market Regulation:** Authorities should take measures to curb price speculation and hoarding by traders, which contributes to artificial price hikes.

**Expanding Social Protection Programs:** Strengthening cash transfer programs and food subsidies for vulnerable groups will help cushion the poorest households from extreme food price shocks.

**Diversifying Energy Sources:** The government should promote alternative sources of energy, such as solar and biogas, to reduce the cost of production for farmers and manufacturers, ultimately leading to lower consumer prices.

**Boosting Local Manufacturing:** Encouraging local production of essential goods, such as cooking oil and others, will reduce dependence on imported commodities and ease pressure on foreign exchange reserves, which in turn stabilizes prices.

The CfSC urges the government to take swift and effective action to address the rising cost of living. If left unchecked, the situation could exacerbate poverty levels and hinder economic growth. We call upon all stakeholders, including policymakers, private sector players, and development partners, to work collaboratively in finding sustainable solutions to ensure affordability of basic necessities for all Malawians.

Table showing monthly average for the cost of living

Monthly Average	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2025
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Amount (MWK)	491,037	503,876	510,720	521,936	500,154	510,634	516,377	519,763	523,648	540,353	578,843	615,138	694,653

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)	K1920

**Minibus Fare**

Minibus fare to town and back	
Lilongwe	K4000
Zomba	K2000
Blantyre	K1800
Mzuzu	K 1800

NB: 1 USA dollar (\$) = K1, 729.91 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 22<sup>nd</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> January , 2025 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**