

CFSC-RURAL BASIC NEEDS BASKET PROJECT: MASEYA (CHIKWAWA) AND KANYENDA (NKHOTAKOTA)

April 2025 Report

Ideal Food Cost

During the month of April 2025, the cost of ideal food items that make up 1800 kilocalories increased across both TAs, with the highest cost at **K276, 345 from K188, 951 in December 2024** in TA Kanyenda (Nkhotakota) and the lowest at **K223, 455 from K143,943** in December 2024 in TA Maseya (Chikwawa).

In TA Kanyenda, for example, a household would have needed **K276, 345** to purchase food items providing the minimum 1800 kilocalories, while the average monthly income of **K31, 400** in the area is no longer sufficient to cover both food costs and other basic needs.

Cost of Living

In April 2025, the overall cost of living, including both ideal food and non-food costs, also saw a significant increase. The highest cost of living was reported in **TA Kanyenda** (Nkhotakota) at **K395, 745 (in December 2024 it was K288, 774)**, while **TA Maseya** (Chikwawa) had the lowest at **K344, 355 from K258,878 in December 2024**

Kilocalorie Intake

The average kilocalorie intake decreased compared to the previous quarter, reflecting the rising food costs. The minimum requirement according to FAO/ WHO/WFP is 2100 kilo calories per person per day

Traditional Area	District	Actual Average Kilocalorie Intake
Kanyenda	Nkhotakota	1260
Maseya	Chikwawa	1220

Average Cost of Ideal Food Items for a Family of Six for the Month of April 2025

Ideal Food Items	Ideal Quantities	Chikwawa		Nkhotakota	
		Unit Price	Total Cost	Unit Price	Total Cost
Maize	20kg	900	18000	2500	50000
Rice	10kg	2500	25000	2000	20000
Sugar	3kg	3500	10500	4000	12000
Beans	7kg	6000	42000	2000	14000
Eggs	40 eggs	450	18000	500	20000
Goat Meat	5kg	6000	30000	10000	50000
Tomato	20Kg	800	16000	2000	40000
Mustard	15kg	597	8955	923	13845
Cooking Oil	3 litres	8000	24000	6000	18000
Bananas	150	200	30000	250	37500
Salt	1kg	1000	1000	1000	1000
Total			223,455		276,345
Total Kilocalories Approx. 2100 (Kcal) – FAO/WHO,WFP			1220		1260

Average Cost of Ideal Non-Food Items for April 2025

Ideal Non-Food Items	Ideal Quantities	Chikwawa		Nkhotakota	
		Unit Price	Total Cost	Unit Price	Total Cost
Butex	4 tabs	3000	12000	3000	12000
Nirma	15 tabs	800	12000	900	13500
Clere	3 bottles	1700	5100	1200	3600
Glycerin	3 bottles	1000	3000	1200	3600
Body Care	1 bottle	5000	5000	3000	3000
Airtime	1	4500	4500	4500	4500
Phone Charging	10x	200	2000	200	2000
Charcoal	2 bags	15000	30000	16000	32000
Batteries	9	400	3600	450	4050
Matches	9 packs	200	1800	250	2250
Kukonola	5 tins	1300	6500	1000	5000
Milling	5 tins	1300	6500	1000	5000
Bicycles	1	2900	2900	2900	2900
Total Cost			94,900		93,400

Average Monthly Income for April 2025

Household Income sources	Chikwawa	Nkhotakota
casual labour	14,143	26,767
Small business	8,528	500
Loans	10,533	0
Usury	6,033	4,133
Crop Sales	283	0
Livestock and livestock product sales	13,300	0
Wages/Salaries	15,667	0
Remittances	2,703	0
Selling Firewood	267	0
Selling Charcoal	0	0
Selling wild fruits	0	0
Total	71,458	31,400

Cost of Living (The Ideal Food Cost + Ideal Non-Food Cost + Average School Expenses (K26, 000)

With a combined increase in food and non-food costs, the overall cost of living for December 2024 is as follows:

Traditional Area	Cost of Living
Kanyenda	K395,745
Maseya	K344,355

Households are now spending more than they earn on essential needs. Measures to reduce food prices and non-food expenses are needed to ensure household survival through the coming months and prevent the deepening of poverty and hunger

Coping Mechanisms as the % of the total population

Chikwawa: 50 households

Nkhotakota: 40 households

Analysis of Coping Mechanisms in Chikwawa and Nkhotakota

1. Contextual Overview

Indicator	Nkhotakota	Chikwawa	Implication
Ideal food cost	K276,345	K223,455	Food is significantly more expensive in Nkhotakota.
Cost of living	K395,745	K344,455	Households in Nkhotakota face the highest overall economic pressure.
Average kcal/day	1260	1220	Both below the minimum 2100 kcal, but slightly better in Nkhotakota.

This suggests that **Nkhotakota households face higher financial pressure**, but are managing to maintain **slightly better nutritional intake**, possibly due to **better coping capacity** or access to food despite high costs.

Note: The reference of **2,100 kilocalories (kcal) per person per day** is a **widely accepted minimum standard** used by major international organizations for assessing **basic energy requirements** for a **moderately active adult**. This figure is most commonly cited by:

Sources of the 2,100 kcal Standard:

1. **World Health Organization (WHO)**
2. **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**
3. **World Food Programme (WFP)**
4. **Sphere Handbook (Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response)**

2. Analysis of Coping Mechanisms

A. High-Frequency Coping Mechanisms (Above 40%)

Coping Mechanism	Chikwawa (%)	Nkhotakota (%)	Analysis
Working in other people's fields	80	23	Very high in Chikwawa, likely due to low food access and fewer alternatives despite lower food prices. A sign of extreme reliance on casual labor (ganyu).
Reducing meal portions	57	50	High in both districts; shows widespread food stress. Households are stretching what they have.
Skipping the entire day without eating	60	43	Very severe and more common in Chikwawa. Reflects acute hunger. Aligns with lower calorie intake .
Reducing adult food for children	33	43	Higher in Nkhotakota, possibly due to high food costs , forcing adults to sacrifice their portions.
Reducing number of meals per day	13	43	High in Nkhotakota, suggesting a chronic pattern of food shortage and rationing .

B. Moderate-Frequency Coping (10–33%)

Coping Mechanism	Chikwawa (%)	Nkhotakota (%)	Analysis
Getting usury loans	23	13	Higher in Chikwawa. High cost of living and low food intake may push households to borrow at high interest.
Abandoning land to become tenants	17	0	Only in Chikwawa. Households may be abandoning agriculture due to poor yields or desperation for income . In Chikwawa Rural BNB is being implemented, many households have lost their land to the cultivation of sugarcane and shire river bank is full of sand that maize is difficult to grow.

Coping Mechanism	Chikwawa (%)	Nkhotakota (%)	Analysis
Cooking seed grain	0	13	Only in Nkhotakota. Suggests high pressure from expensive food leading to consumption of future planting materials.
Breaking up of marriages	0	10	Seen only in Nkhotakota. May reflect family strain due to high living and food costs .

C. Low-Frequency Coping (<10%)

Coping Mechanism	Chikwawa (%)	Nkhotakota (%)	Analysis
Selling household assets	7	0	Only in Chikwawa. Possibly a result of exhaustion of regular income options .
School children staying home	3	7	Present in both, higher in Nkhotakota. Hunger or school costs may affect attendance.
Cutting fruit trees for firewood	0	7	Only in Nkhotakota—may indicate rising pressure on natural resources due to high food costs.
Uncontrolled tree cutting	0	3	Low but environmentally concerning.
Relying on less preferred food / gathering wild food	0	0	Not practiced—may indicate limited availability or access to wild food options.

3. Interpretation and Key Differences

Theme	Chikwawa	Nkhotakota
Main Pressure	High cost of living, low kcal intake, fewer food coping options	High food cost, highest cost of living, better kcal intake but chronic stress
Common Strategies	Casual labor (ganyu), meal skipping, borrowing, asset sales	Rationing meals, prioritizing children, eating seed, cutting trees

Theme	Chikwawa	Nkhotakota
Coping Intensity	Severe, labor-based, and hunger-driven	Chronic, more diversified, affecting household structure
Vulnerability	Very high—linked to economic hardship and hunger	High—linked to unaffordable food and social strain

4. Conclusion

- **Chikwawa households** are highly vulnerable due to low caloric intake, high living costs, and heavy reliance on labor and extreme food reduction. Though food is cheaper, households cannot afford enough and use more desperate, survival-driven coping like skipping meals or borrowing.
- **Nkhotakota households**, though better nourished on average, face higher food and living costs. Their coping is more structured but risky, involving rationing, seed consumption, and social sacrifices (like disrupted families and child schooling).

Policy Implications

- **Chikwawa:** Needs food assistance, access to affordable livelihoods, and debt relief or cash transfers to reduce harmful coping like asset sales and meal skipping.
- **Nkhotakota:** Needs food price stabilization, seed security, and social protection measures to cushion households from long-term deterioration due to chronic coping and resource depletion.

Centre for Social Concern's Advice to the Malawi Government

1. Strengthen Social Protection and Safety Nets

- Expand and adequately fund targeted cash transfer and food assistance programs to support ultra-poor and food-insecure households.
- Ensure timely disbursement and geographic targeting of social safety nets in districts like Chikwawa and Nkhotakota where coping mechanisms signal extreme hunger.

2. Address rising Cost of Living and Food Prices

- Review and stabilize maize and food prices through ADMARC and NFRA interventions to reduce the food burden on low-income households.
- Monitor and regulate prices of essential goods through the Competition and Fair Trading Commission (CFTC) and consumer protection units.

3. Ensure Access to Productive Assets and Livelihoods

- Provide access to affordable farm inputs, irrigation, and extension services to support household production.
- Promote sustainable income-generating activities and employment programs, especially in high-vulnerability districts.
- Address land tenure insecurity and discourage land-grabbing, which push people into tenancy or abandonment of farms.

4. Implement a Living Wage and Index Minimum Wage

- Review the minimum wage and align it with the actual cost of living and basic needs basket as tracked by CfSC.
- Encourage the private sector and government departments to implement a living wage policy to reduce dependency on coping mechanisms.

5. Promote Nutrition and Food Sovereignty

- Invest in nutrition-sensitive agriculture, especially for vulnerable groups (children, pregnant women).
- Encourage local food diversification and discourage dependency on expensive imported or hybrid foods.
- Strengthen community awareness on nutritional adequacy, not just food quantity.

6. Integrate Research and Evidence into Policy

- Use CfSC's monthly Cost of Living Reports, Coping Mechanism Monitoring, and Kilocalorie Tracking to inform district-level programming.
- Institutionalize regular data collection and public reporting on household food access and poverty trends.

7. Promote Climate-Resilient Agriculture

- Invest in flood and drought-resilient infrastructure in vulnerable districts like Chikwawa.
- Strengthen climate-smart agriculture practices to reduce the impact of erratic weather patterns on food production.

Conclusion

The Malawi Government must recognize that widespread use of harmful coping mechanisms like meal skipping, child school withdrawal, or asset selling reflects policy failure in ensuring basic human rights, especially the Right to Food. CfSC's advice would be to urgently scale up both emergency support and long-term structural reforms to protect household dignity, reduce poverty, and prevent intergenerational hunger.

NB: 1 USA dollar (\$) = K1, 724.97 Malawian Kwacha (MK). Source:

<https://www.oanda.com/currency-converter/en/>?

The Social Conditions Research Programme of the CfSC conducted these quarterly surveys in the month of April 2025 in TAs : Kanyenda in Nkhotakota and Maseya in Chikwawa.

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