



CfSC

The Centre for Social Concern

Basic Needs Basket

Cost of Living for October 2025



“FOOD PRICE INFLATION TIGHTENS PRESSURE ON MALAWI’S LOW-INCOME FAMILIES”

The Basic Needs Basket (BNB) Cost of Living Assessment for October 2025 shows that the average survival cost for a low-income household in Malawi rose from **K938,291 in September** to **K945,029 in October**, representing a **0.72% increase**. This rise occurred despite reductions in maize prices in certain cities, demonstrating that other essential commodities have exerted upward pressure on the cost of living.

*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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A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	66,250	132,500	Charcoal (50 kgs)	50,000	100,000
Milling (Including Grinding)	2,000	28,000	Protex	1,950	19,500
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	6,663	42,643	Boom	2,463	19,704
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	35,330	35,330	Clere Body Lotion	3,913	7,826
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	30,966	24,773	Vaseline Blue Seal	5,575	11,150
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	23,492	23,492
Beef (1 kg/day) 4 days	12,000	48,000	Running Water (meter)	16,362	16,362
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	513	24,624	Housing (3 bedroom)	115,954	115,954
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,109	24,953	Sub-Total	313,988	
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	3,092	46,380	Lilongwe Total Basic Needs	916,195	
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	4,040	14,140	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,913	28,695	Education		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	8,663	25,989	Secondary (fees) per year		157,500
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	3,063	61,260	Primary (GPF) per year		4,125
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	3,975	31,800	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		75,450
Kitchen Salt	1,600	1,600	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		56,250
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	438	17,520	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		41,875
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	875	14,000	Sub-Total	335,200	
Sub-Total	602,207		Sub-Total	335,200	

Zomba cost of living for a household of six people for October 2025					
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	66,857	133,714	Charcoal (50 kgs)	22,571	45,142
Milling (Including Grinding)	1,200	16,800	Protex	2,400	24,000
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	7,714	49,370	Boom	2,664	21,312
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	24,286	24,286	Clere Body Lotion	4,229	8,458
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	31,429	25,143	Vaseline Blue Seal	6,414	12,828
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	24,141	24,141
Beef (1 kg/day) 4 days	12,000	48,000	Running Water (meter)	20,435	20,435
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	514	24,672	Housing (3 bedroom)	87,424	87,424
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,343	30,218	Sub-Total	243,740	
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	3,186	47,790	Zomba Total Basic Needs	865,824	
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,700	9,450	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,800	27,000	Education		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	9,643	28,929	Secondary (fees) per year		99,650
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	3,000	60,000	Primary (GPF) per year		9,237
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	4,500	36,000	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		88,277
Kitchen Salt	1,769	1,769	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		91,300
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	742	29,680	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		36,266
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	1,829	29,264	Sub-Total	324,730	
Sub-Total	622,084		Sub-Total	324,730	

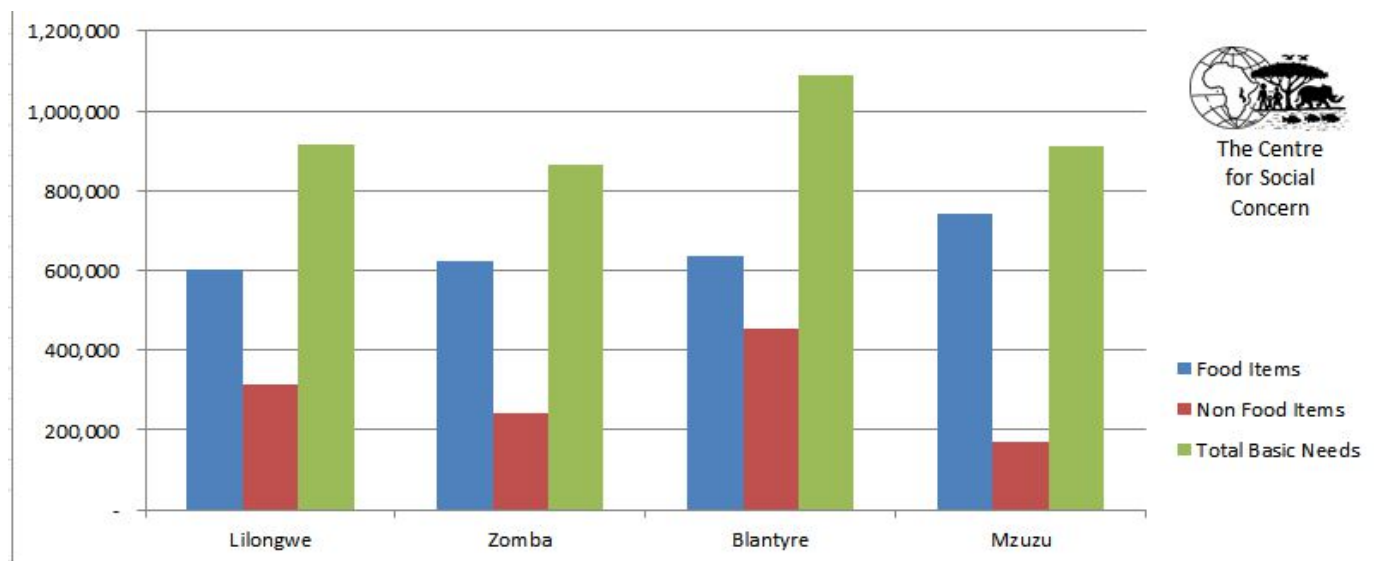
Blantyre cost of living for a household of six people for October 2025					
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	64,643	129,286	Charcoal (50 kgs)	128,571	257,142
Milling (Including Grinding)	500	7,000	Protex	1,779	17,790
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	6,657	42,605	Boom	2,343	18,744
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	32,143	32,143	Clere Body Lotion	3,686	7,372
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	35,429	28,343	Vaseline Blue Seal	5,143	10,286
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	51,429	41,143	Electricity	24,611	24,611
Beef (1 kg/day) 4 days	11,429	45,716	Running Water (meter)	25,885	25,885
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	486	23,328	Housing (3 bedroom)	89,862	89,862
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	886	19,935	Sub-Total		451,692
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	3,457	51,855	Blantyre Total Basic Needs		1,087,501
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	3,000	10,500			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,957	29,355	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	9,364	28,092	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	2,857	57,140	Secondary (fees) per year		75,000
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	4,943	39,544	Primary (GPF) per year		3,000
Kitchen Salt	2,000	2,000	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		127,220
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	150	6,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		100,694
Cassava /potatoes (2KgX2Bkfst/)	2,614	41,824	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		53,525
Sub-Total	635,809		Sub-Total		359,439

Mzuzu cost of living for a household of six people for October 2025					
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	67,500	135,000	Charcoal (50 kgs)	24,333	48,666
Milling (Including Grinding)	3,000	42,000	Protex	2,417	24,170
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	6,342	40,589	Boom	2,300	18,400
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	40,000	40,000	Clere Body Lotion	3,600	7,200
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	64,167	51,334	Vaseline Blue Seal	5,400	1,066
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	27,500	22,000	Electricity	10,900	10,900
Beef (1 kg/day) 4 days	14,000	56,000	Running Water (meter)	8,865	8,865
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	550	26,400	Housing (3 bedroom)	50,356	50,356
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,995	44,888	Sub-Total		169,623
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	3,832	57,480	Mzuzu Total Basic Needs		910,597
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	4,492	15,722			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	2,417	36,255	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	14,883	44,649	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	3,500	70,000	Secondary (fees) per year		105,000
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	4,467	35,736	Primary (GPF) per year		5,424
Kitchen Salt	3,130	3,130	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		491,994
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	300	12,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		521,994
Cassava /potatoes (2KgX2Bkfst/)	487	7,792	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		88,796
Sub-Total	740,974		Sub-Total		1,213,208

Table showing cost of living per district

District	Food Items	Non Food Items	Total Basic Needs
Lilongwe	602,207	313,988	916,195
Zomba	622,084	243,740	865,824
Blantyre	635,809	451,692	1,087,501
Mzuzu	740,974	169,623	910,597

Graph showing cost of living per district



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

Key Factor: A Rise in Prices of Essential Non-Maize Food Items and Household Commodities

Contrary to typical trends where maize is the main inflation driver, the October 2025 cost-of-living increase was largely influenced by **non-maize food items, vegetables, protein sources, and household essentials**.

Maize Prices Declined in Key Markets

The BNB data shows that **maize prices fell** in several cities:

The decrease in maize prices, however, was not enough to offset increases in other essential spending categories.

Key Drivers of the Increased Cost of Living

1. Rising Prices of Vegetables and Condiments

- **Tomato:** Lilongwe K3,022 → **K3,092**; Zomba K3,022 → **K3,186**; Mzuzu K3,022 → **K3,832**
- **Onion:** Lilongwe K3,479 → **K4,040**; Mzuzu K3,479 → **K4,492**

These vegetables form part of daily meal preparation, making their increases highly inflationary for households.

2. Increased Prices of Protein Sources

Protein items rose significantly in several cities:

- **Dry Utaka/Mcheni:** Lilongwe K29,866 → **K30,966**
- **Dry Usipa:** Mzuzu K37,731 → **K40,000**
- **Beef:** Mzuzu K12,000 → **K14,000**

These increases raise household expenses because protein is consumed several times per week in typical low-income diets.

3. Cooking Oil Inflation

Cooking oil recorded major price hikes:

- **Zomba:** K8,563 → **K9,643**
- **Mzuzu:** K8,563 → **K14,883**

Cooking oil is used daily, meaning even marginal increases significantly impact monthly budgets.

4. Sugar Price Increases

- **Lilongwe:** K3,450 → **K3,975**
- **Zomba:** K3,450 → **K4,500**
- **Blantyre:** K3,450 → **K4,943**

Sugar remains a key household commodity for energy.

5. Rising Costs of Household Essentials

Several hygiene products increased nationally:

- **Protex:** increased in all cities
- **Vaseline Blue Seal:** Lilongwe K5,250 → **K5,575**
- **Clerc Lotion:** Lilongwe K3,763 → **K3,913**

These non-food items contribute significantly to the monthly Basic Needs Basket and cannot be substituted by poorer households.

Impact on Low-Income Earners

Despite maize becoming cheaper, the cumulative effect of rising prices in other essential goods has continued to undermine the ability of low-income households to meet basic living standards.

1. Reduced Quantity and Quality of Meals

Higher prices for vegetables, cooking oil, and protein sources reduce meal diversity and nutritional balance.

2. Increased Household Financial Stress

Families divert spending from education, health, and sanitation to cover food items, worsening long-term well-being.

3. Erosion of Purchasing Power

Wages for low-income Malawians have not increased in line with inflation, resulting in diminished real income.

4. Heightened Urban Vulnerability

Urban families, who depend fully on market purchases, feel the impact more severely than rural households.

Policy Recommendations for Government Action

To protect low-income earners and stabilize the cost of living, the following practical and targeted policy measures are proposed:

1. Strengthen Market Surveillance and Price Regulation

- Enforce measures against excessive price mark-ups by intermediaries.
- Implement fair pricing guidelines for essential food commodities and household goods.
- Increase ADMARC presence in urban markets for stabilizing staple food prices.

2. Expand Social Protection Interventions

- Adjust cash transfer programs to **match inflation trends**.
- Introduce **urban food vouchers** targeting highly vulnerable households.
- Increase funding to the **School Feeding Programme** to support nutrition for children.

3. Boost Local Production of Vegetables and Protein Sources

- Provide subsidies and extension support for irrigation horticulture.
- Promote community-based fish farming and small livestock production.
- Support farmers with market linkages to reduce dependence on expensive imported protein sources.

4. Reduce Production and Transportation Costs

- Address high fuel and logistics costs that elevate food commodity prices.
- Support cooperatives with affordable storage and transport options to minimize spoilage and supply disruptions.

5. Improve Market Information Systems

- Introduce real-time price monitoring and reporting to ensure government intervention is timely.
- Promote affordable digital platforms for farmers and consumers to access price updates.

Conclusion

The October 2025 increase in the cost of living is a clear signal that Malawi's inflationary pressures now extend beyond maize. Despite falling maize prices, rising costs of vegetables, protein sources, cooking oil, sugar, and household essentials have pushed household budgets upwards, disproportionately affecting low-income earners.

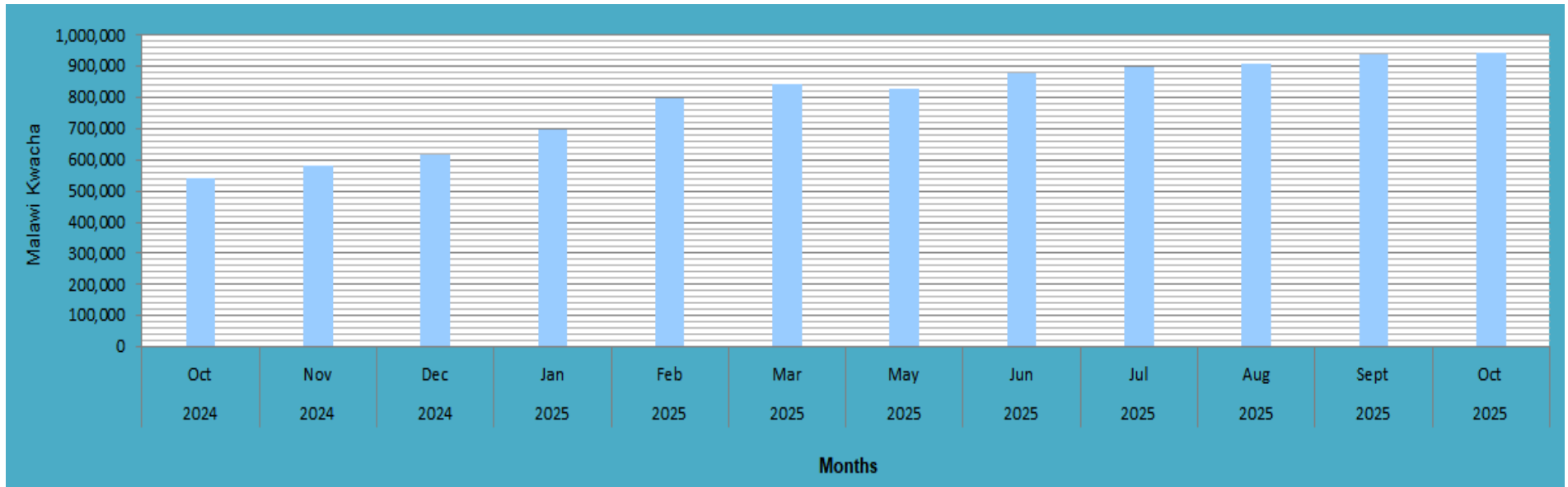
The Government of Malawi, humanitarian partners, civil society organizations, and the private sector must work collaboratively to stabilize essential commodity prices and cushion vulnerable families from further economic strain.

Ensuring affordability of basic goods is central to safeguarding the dignity, health, and economic well-being of all Malawian households.

Table showing monthly average for the cost of living

Monthly Average	2024	2024	2024	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct
Amount (MWK)	540,353	578,843	615,138	694,653	797,908	841,219	825,520	880,053	896,980	910,131	938,291	945,029

Graph showing monthly average for the cost of living



Fuel Cost

Fuel (cost at the pump)	
Diesel (per litre)	K3500
Petrol (per litre)	K3500
Paraffin (per litre)	K1920

Minibus Fare

Minibus fare to town and back	
Lilongwe	K5000
Zomba	K3000
Blantyre	K2500
Mzuzu	K2,000

NB: 1 USA dollar (\$) = K1,724.54 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 1st to 2nd October, 2025 in the cities of Blantyre, Zomba, Lilongwe and Mzuzu

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