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

The Centre for Social Concern

Basic Needs Basket

Cost of Living for March 2026



Households under pressure as
maize prices push living cost
above K1 million

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Lilongwe cost of living for a household of six people for March 2026

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	48,125	96,250	Charcoal (50Kg)	59,375	118,750
Milling (Including grinding)	3,743	52,402	Protex	2,500	25,000
Beans(0.8Kg/day) 8 days	5,750	36,800	Boom	2,463	19,704
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	32,288	32,288	Clere body lotion	4,000	8,000
Dry Utaka (200g/day) 4 days	37,596	30,077	Vaseline Blue Seal	6,000	12,000
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	24,752	24,752
Beef (1 Kg/day) 4 days	12,000	48,000	Running Water (meter)	10,679	10,679
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	500	24,000	Housing (3 bedrooms)	126,256	126,256
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,936	43,560	Sub-Total		345,141
Tomato (0.5Kg/day) 30 days	2,736	41,040	Lilongwe Total Basic Needs		963,591
Onion (116g/day) for 30 days	4,219	14,767			
Fresh milk(250mls/day)30 dys	1,938	20,070	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kukoma Oil(100mls) for 30dys	8,688	26,064	Education		
Bread (5 bkfs/wk) for 20 days	3,238	64,760	Secondary(fees) per year		0
Sugar (2Kgs/week)	5,350	42,800	Primary(GPF) per year		0
Kitchen Salt	1,725	1,725	Uniform/Shoes(primary)/year		142,812
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	500	20,000	Uniform/Shoes(Secondary)/year		135,147
Cassava/Potatoes(2Kgs/Bkfs)	928	14,848	Other (pens,books, etc)/term		49,650
Sub-Total		618,450	Sub-Total		326,609

Zomba cost of living for a household of six people for March 2026

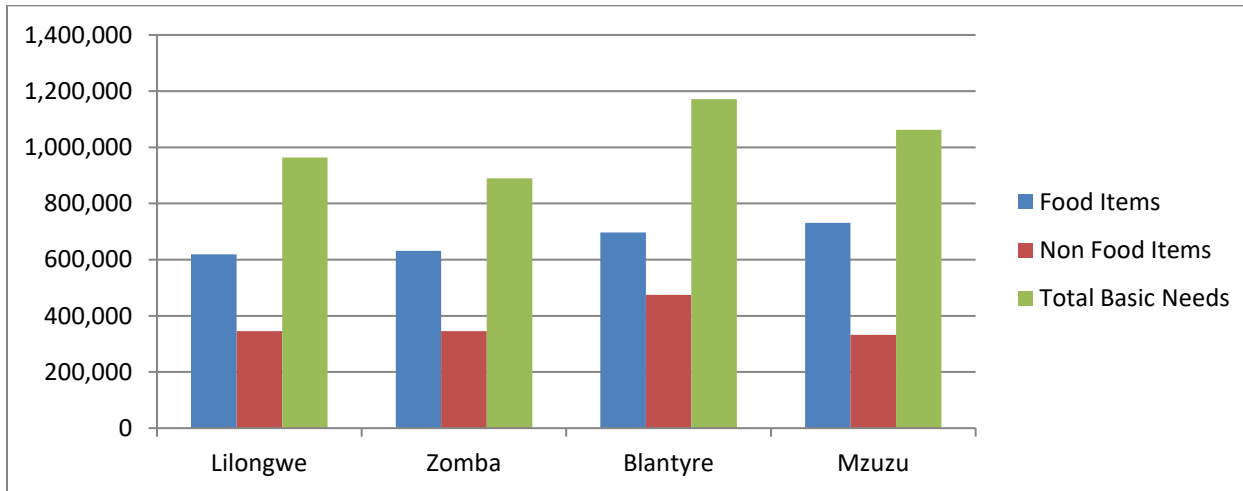
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	62,000	124,000	Charcoal (50Kg)	25,000	50,000
Milling (Including grinding)	1,500	21,000	Protex	2,814	28,140
Beans(0.8Kg/day) 8 days	8,000	51,200	Boom	2,571	20,568
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	22,857	22,857	Clere body lotion	4,157	8,314
Dry Utaka (200g/day) 4 days	25,000	20,000	Vaseline Blue Seal	6,929	13,858
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	22,436	22,476
Beef (1 Kg/day) 4 days	14,000	56,000	Running Water (meter)	18,299	18,299
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	500	24,000	Housing (3 bedrooms)	96,827	96,827
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	2,429	54,653	Sub-Total		258,442
Tomato (0.5Kg/day) 30 days	2,921	43,815	Zomba Total Basic Needs		889,802
Onion (116g/day) for 30 days	3,829	13,402			
Fresh milk(250mls/day)30 dys	1,886	28,290	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kukoma Oil(100mls) for 30dys	9,357	28,071	Education		
Bread (5 bkfs/wk) for 20 days	2,800	56,000	Secondary(fees) per year		0
Sugar (2Kgs/week)	5,100	40,800	Primary(GPF) per year		0
Kitchen Salt	1,857	1,857	Uniform/Shoes(primary)/year		165,995
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	621	24,840	Uniform/Shoes(Secondary)/year		150,384
Cassava/Potatoes(2Kgs/Bkfs)	1,286	20,576	Other (pens,books, etc)/term		41,136
Sub-Total		631,360	Sub-Total		357,515

Blantyre cost of living for a household of six people for March 2026					
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	62,500	125,000	Charcoal (50Kg)	132,143	264,286
Milling (Including grinding)	500	7,000	Protex	2,471	24,710
Beans(0.8Kg/day) 8 days	6,571	42,054	Boom	2,414	19,312
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	35,714	35,714	Clere body lotion	3,343	6,686
Dry Utaka (200g/day) 4 days	45,714	36,571	Vaseline Blue Seal	1,307	2,614
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	57,143	45,714	Electricity	25,145	25,145
Beef (1 Kg/day) 4 days	12,286	49,144	Running Water (meter)	25,482	25,482
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	500	24,000	Housing (3 bedrooms)	105,987	105,987
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,400	31,500		Sub-Total	474,222
Tomato (0.5Kg/day) 30 days	4,357	65,355	Blantyre Total Basic Needs		1,171,172
Onion (116g/day) for 30 days	6,071	21,249			
			C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh milk(250mls/day)30 dys	1,786	26,790	Education		
Kukoma Oil(100mls) for 30dys	9,364	28,092			
Bread (5 bkfs/wk) for 20 days	2,771	55,420	Secondary(fees) per year	0	
Sugar (2Kgs/week)	5,071	40,568	Primary(GPF) per year	0	
Kitchen Salt	1,914	1,914	Uniform/Shoes(primary)/year	156,722	
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	150	6,000	Uniform/Shoes(Secondary)/year	119,068	
Cassava/Potatoes(2Kgs/Bkfs)	4,429	54,864	Other (pens,books, etc)/term	58,459	
	Sub-Total	696,950		Sub-Total	334,249

Mzuzu cost of living for a household of six people for March 2026					
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	47,083	94,166	Charcoal (50Kg)	50,000	100,000
Milling (Including grinding)	2,917	40,838	Protex	3,433	34,330
Beans(0.8Kg/day) 8 days	11,250	72,000	Boom	2,767	22,136
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	20,000	20,000	Clere body lotion	4,333	8,666
Dry Utaka (200g/day) 4 days	64,000	51,200	Vaseline Blue Seal	5,525	11,040
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	10,000	8,000	Electricity	23,492	23,492
Beef (1 Kg/day) 4 days	14,000	56,000	Running Water (meter)	16,362	16,362
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	600	28,800	Housing (3 bedrooms)	115,954	115,954
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	3,685	82,913		Sub-Total	331,980
Tomato (0.5Kg/day) 30 days	3,045	45,675	Mzuzu Total Basic Needs		1,062,520
Onion (116g/day) for 30 days	5,032	17,612			
			C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh milk(250mls/day)30 dys	2,467	37,005	Education		
Kukoma Oil(100mls) for 30dys	10,717	32,151			
Bread (5 bkfs/wk) for 20 days	3,500	70,000	Secondary(fees) per year	0	
Sugar (2Kgs/week)	5,200	41,600	Primary(GPF) per year	0	
Kitchen Salt	4,180	4,180	Uniform/Shoes(primary)/year	101,248	
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	400	16,000	Uniform/Shoes(Secondary)/year	127,325	
Cassava/Potatoes(2Kgs/Bkfs)	775	12,400	Other (pens,books, etc)/term	35,900	
	Sub-Total	730,540		Sub-Total	228,673

Table showing cost of living per district

District	Food Items	Non Food Items	Total Basic Needs
Lilongwe	618,450	345,141	963,591
Zomba	631,360	345,141	889,802
Blantyre	696,950	474,222	1,171,172
Mzuzu	730,540	331,980	1,062,520



Graph showing cost of living per district

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

The Centre for Social Concern (CfSC) has released its latest Cost of Living Analysis for March 2026. The findings show that the total cost of living for an average Malawian family has increased from MK966,297 in February to MK1,021,771 in March. This rise highlights the continued vulnerability of low-income households who are already struggling to meet basic needs.

Key Drivers of the Increase

The rise in the cost of living was largely driven by an increase in maize prices across major cities:

- Lilongwe: MK45,000 to MK48,125
- Zomba: MK52,000 to MK62,000
- Blantyre: MK60,000 to MK62,500
- Mzuzu: MK45,000 to MK47,083

Maize is the staple food for most Malawian households. Any increase in its price immediately reduces household purchasing power and worsens food insecurity.

Impact on Low-Income Earners

The current cost of living remains far beyond the income levels of most workers in the informal and low-wage sectors. The increase means many families must make difficult choices to survive.

Common coping strategies include:

- Reducing the number of meals per day
- Switching to less nutritious foods

- Withdrawing children from school due to fees
- Delaying or avoiding medical treatment
- Increasing borrowing and household debt

Without urgent intervention, more households risk falling deeper into poverty and malnutrition.

Recommendations to Government

CfSC urges Government to take immediate and coordinated action:

1. Strengthen Food Security

Increase investment in irrigation farming and ensure timely access to affordable farm inputs.

2. Improve Strategic Grain Reserves

Strengthen ADMARC and grain reserve management to stabilize maize supply and prices.

3. Review Minimum Wage Levels

Adjust wages in line with the rising cost of living to protect workers' purchasing power.

4. Expand Social Protection Programs

Scale up cash transfer programmes and targeted food assistance for vulnerable households.

5. Support Job Creation

Promote small and medium enterprises and provide access to credit for informal sector workers.

Conclusion

The continued rise in the cost of living threatens the welfare of Malawian households. Immediate policy action is required to prevent worsening poverty and ensure that all families can meet their basic needs

Table showing monthly average for the cost of living

Monthly Average	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	October	Novem	Dece	Jan	Februa	March
	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2026	2026	2026
Amount (MWK)	841,219	-	828,529	880,053	896,980	910,131	938,291	945,029	871,752	938,841	1,014,679	966,297	1,021,771

Fuel Cost

Fuel (cost at the pump)	
Diesel (per litre)	K5,000
Petrol (per litre)	K5,000
Paraffin (per litre)	

Minibus Fare

Minibus fare to town and back	
Lilongwe	K8000
Zomba	K4000
Blantyre	K4000
Mzuzu	K 5000

NB: 1 USA dollar (\$) = K1, 743.69 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 4th to 6th March, 2026 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