



CFSC-RURAL BASIC NEEDS BASKET PROJECT: TAs MASEYA (CK) AND KANYENDA (KK)

MARCH 2026 RURAL BASIC NEEDS BASKET SURVEY REVEALS PERSISTENT FOOD SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NKHOTAKOTA AND CHIKWAWA

The Centre for Social Concern (CfSC) has released findings from its Rural Basic Needs Basket (RBNB) survey conducted in Traditional Authority (TA) Kanyenda in Nkhotakota District and TA Maseya in Chikwawa District **for** March 2026.

The survey assessed household food security, cost of living, income levels, and coping mechanisms used by rural households in response to prevailing economic conditions.

Key Findings

1. Food Security Situation

The findings reveal contrasting food security conditions between the two areas.

In TA Kanyenda, the average daily calorie intake was 1,973 kilocalories per person, which is above the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recommended minimum requirement of 1,800 kilocalories per person per day. This suggests that, on average, households in the area were able to meet their minimum dietary energy requirements.

However, in TA Maseya, the average daily calorie intake was only 1,367 kilocalories per person, significantly below the recommended threshold. This indicates a serious food deficit and heightened vulnerability to hunger and malnutrition among households in the area.

2. Cost of Food and Basic Needs

The cost of securing an ideal food basket remained high in both districts.

- TA Kanyenda: **K256,725**
- TA Maseya: **K346,155**

Households in TA Maseya required almost 35 percent more resources to obtain an ideal food basket than those in TA Kanyenda, reflecting higher food costs and increased pressure on household incomes.

The cost of non-food basic necessities was also substantial:

- TA Kanyenda: **K117,650**
- TA Maseya: **K136,000**

Average school-related expenses stood at K26,000 in both locations.

3. Income and Cost of Living

The March 2026 Rural Basic Needs Basket survey reveals that households in both TA Kanyenda and TA Maseya are unable to earn enough income to meet their basic needs. While a household in TA Kanyenda requires K400,375 per month to afford essential food, non-food items, and education expenses, the average monthly income is only K252,145. Similarly, households in TA Maseya require K508,155 per month but earn only K159,409 on average.

The situation is particularly severe in TA Maseya, where the average household income can cover only about **31 percent** of the required cost of living. In TA Kanyenda, average income covers only about **63 percent** of the required cost of living.

Worrying Coping Mechanisms

The survey found that many households are resorting to negative coping strategies to survive.

Labour and Borrowing

- **90%** of households in TA Kanyenda and **70%** in TA Maseya reported working in other people's fields to earn food or income.
- **50%** of households in TA Kanyenda and **32%** in TA Maseya reported obtaining loans at exploitative interest rates (usury).

These figures suggest that many households are struggling to generate sufficient income from their own productive activities.

Food Consumption Reduction

A significant proportion of households reported reducing food consumption:

- **30%** of households in Kanyenda and **66%** in Maseya reduced meal portions.
- **25%** in Kanyenda and **26%** in Maseya reduced the number of meals consumed each day.
- **15%** in Kanyenda and **36%** in Maseya spent an entire day without eating.
- **25%** in Kanyenda and **40%** in Maseya reduced adult consumption so that children could eat.

These indicators point to serious food insecurity, particularly in TA Maseya.

Education and Asset Depletion

- **20%** of households in Kanyenda and **18%** in Maseya reported children staying away from school due to economic challenges.
- Some households reported selling household assets, cooking grain reserved for seed, and engaging in environmentally destructive activities such as cutting trees for firewood and charcoal production.

These coping mechanisms undermine future livelihoods and threaten long-term household resilience.

Centre for Social Concern's Observations

The Centre notes with concern that although average incomes appear relatively high, many households continue to employ severe coping strategies. This suggests that economic gains are not translating into improved food security for all households.

Particularly concerning is the situation in TA Maseya, where calorie consumption remains well below the minimum recommended level and a significant proportion of households are reducing food intake or going entire days without eating.

The prevalence of high-interest borrowing, school absenteeism, and depletion of productive assets further indicates that many households remain vulnerable to economic and climatic shocks.

Recommendations

The Centre for Social Concern recommends that:

1. Government and development partners strengthen food security interventions in areas experiencing food deficits, particularly TA Maseya.
2. Agricultural support programmes should promote climate-resilient farming technologies and improve access to affordable farm inputs.
3. Financial institutions and community-based savings groups should expand access to affordable credit to reduce dependence on exploitative lenders.
4. Social protection programmes should be strengthened to support the most vulnerable households.
5. Investments in irrigation and livelihood diversification should be prioritized to improve household resilience and income generation.
6. Environmental conservation initiatives should be intensified to reduce unsustainable exploitation of natural resources.

Conclusion

The March 2026 Rural Basic Needs Basket survey demonstrates that while some households are managing to meet basic calorie requirements, many rural families continue to face significant

economic and food security challenges. The widespread use of negative coping mechanisms is a clear indication that many households remain vulnerable and require sustained support to achieve sustainable livelihoods and food security.

Cost of Ideal Food Items for a Family of Six for the Month of March 2026

IDEAL FOOD ITEMS	WEIGHT	TA KANYENDA (NKHOTAKOTA)		TA MASEYA (CHIKWAWA)	
		UNIT PRICE(MK)	TOTAL COST(MK)	UNIT PRICE(MK)	TOTAL COST(MK)
Maize	20kg	1,000	20,000	1,000	20,000
Rice	10kg	4,000	40,000	2,500	25,000
Sugar	3kg	5,000	15,000	5,500	16,500
Beans	7kg	3,500	24,500	4,000	28,000
Eggs	40eggs	600	24,000	600	24,000
Goat meat	5kg	11,000	55,000	10,000	50,000
Tomato	20Kg	1,000	20,000	4,000	80,000
Mustard	15kg	615	9,225	3,077	46,155
Cooking oil	3litres	6,000	18,000	8,500	25,500
Bananas	150	200	30,000	200	30,000
Salt	1kg	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Total Ideal Food Cost		256,725		346,155	
Total Kilocalories (Kcal) - FAO	Approx. 1800	1973		1367	

Average Kilocalorie Intake per Person per Day for March 2026

TRADITIONAL AREA	DISTRICT	ACTUAL AVERAGE KILO CALORIE INTAKE
Kanyenda	Nkhotakota	1973
Maseya	Chikwawa	1367

Cost of Ideal Non-Food Items for March 2026

ITEM	QUANTITY	TA KANYENDA (NKHOTAKOTA)		TA MASEYA (CHIKWAWA)	
		UNIT PRICE(MK)	TOTAL COST(MK)	UNIT PRICE(MK)	TOTAL COST(MK)
Butex	4 tabs	3,000	12,000	3,500	14,000
Nirma	15 tabs	1,000	15,000	1,000	15,000
Clere	3 bottles	2,500	7,500	2,700	8,100
Glycerin	3 bottles	1,600	4,800	1,600	4,800
Body care	1 bottle	5,000	5,000	5,500	5,500
Airtime	1	4,500	4,500	4,500	4,500
Phone Charging	10x	250	2,500	200	2,000
Charcoal	2 bags	20,000	40,000	30,000	60,000
Batteries	9	800	7,200	600	5,400
Matches	9 packs	250	2,250	200	1,800
Kukonola	5 tins	1,200	6,000	1,000	5,000
Milling	5 tins	1,200	6,000	1,000	5,000
Bicycles	1	4,900	4,900	4,900	4,900
Total Cost		117,650		136,000	

Average Monthly Income for March 2026

INCOME SOURCE	TA KANYENDA(MK)	TA MASEYA(MK)
Cash Brought Forward from February	85'580	24,639
Casual Labour	23'750	18,048
Small Business	33'200	23,762
Loans from VSL	52'350	2,070
Loans from Others	41'000	46,240
Usury/Katapila	0	17,280
Crop Sales	450	5,600
Livestock Sales	5'100	19,140
Remittances	850	1,490
Rent of Property	7'365	1,140
Other Sources	2'500	0
Total Income	252,145	159,409

THE COST OF LIVING

THE COST OF LIVING (Ideal food cost + Ideal nonfood cost, including average school expenses)

ITEM	TA KANYENDA	TA MASEYA
Kcal	1973	1367
Ideal FoodCost	256,725	346,155

Ideal NonFood Cost	<i>117,650</i>	<i>136,000</i>
School Expenses	26,000	26,000
Cost of Living	400,375	508,155
Average Monthly Income	<i>252,145</i>	<i>159,409</i>

COPING MECHANISMS

COPING MECHANISMS	KANYENDA (%)	TA MASEYA (%)
working in other people's fields	90	70
Selling household assets	5	4
Cooking grain meant for seed	15	10
Reducing portions at meal times	30	66
Reducing number of meals per day	25	26
Skipping the entire day without eating	15	36
Reducing adult consumption so children can have something to eat	25	40
Relying on less expensive or less preferred types of food	5	4
Cutting down fruit trees and sale for firewood	5	0
Gathering unusual types or amounts of wild food/fruit	0	2
Uncontrolled cutting down of trees for sale as firewood or charcoal	5	2
School children staying at home	20	18
Breaking up of marriages	5	0
Abandoning household plots to become tenants in estates	0	0
Getting Usury	50	32

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NB: 1 USA dollar (\$) = K1, 739.02 Malawian Kwacha (MK). Source:

<https://www.oanda.com> .

**The Social Conditions Research Programme of the CfSC conducted
these quarterly surveys in the month of March 2026 in TAs
Kanyenda in Nkhotakota; and Maseya in Chikwawa.**

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