

WOMEN/FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS ARE LIKELY TO BE MORE VULNERABLE THAN MEN/MALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS EVEN MUCH MORE THAN BEFORE DUE TO HIGH COST OF BASIC NECESSITIES, SAYS CFSC

While the nation is still in shock about the events of the past month, life goes on and the CFSC tries to dig deeper into some of the problems facing Malawi. If these are not tackled it will be very difficult to make progress in the march forward to that 'better Malawi' that is possible and all Malawians of good will are looking forward to and working towards. It will take a coming together of all in government, civil society, the private sector, the faith communities and especially all common folks. Today we look at the feminisation of poverty. The current socio-economic trend in Malawi shows that poverty is feminised in various ways. The UN Malawi country assessment 2010 report shows that even though labour force participation is nearly the same for men and women, women make less money than men. For instance, female-headed households spend 30 % less than male-headed households in terms of mean annual household expenditure. It continues to show that in the informal sector and smallholder farming sector women make only 50% and 71% respectively of what men make. Only 20% percent of chief executives in the private sector are women. Women are commonly seen in the lower paying clerical, teaching and nursing jobs and worse still their economic power is weakened by not rising to more highly paid ranks. Generally, female headed households and women have lower incomes than male-headed households/men. Usually women are entrusted with the responsibility of child upbringing in Malawian set up. However, with the recent trends which shows rising cost of basic necessities considering the CFSC Basic Needs Basket, women are likely to be more vulnerable than men even much more than previous years.

The Centre For Social Concern Urban *Basic Needs Basket* (BNB) for the month of July has shown gradual increases in the prices of food items such as maize, beans, dry fish, Bread, Sugar and cooking oil. A significant increase of costs of non-food items that include charcoal, protex bath soap, boom wash soap, clere body lotion, utility costs of electricity and water and house rental costs. The total for the July BNB for Lilongwe¹ was K56,045, from June's K54,844, an increase of K1,201. The total for food items alone was K26,443 and Cost of non-food items was K29,602. The trend is similar in the other cities, for example Mzuzu² July BNB was K53,060, from June's K45,452, an increase of K7,608. The sharp increase is as a result utility costs which included disconnection fees in the sampled households and also house rental increases making the cost of essential non food items rising from K17,541 in June to K5,609 in July, an increase of K8,157. On the other hand, Blantyre³ July BNB was at K54,398 up from June's K53,440, an increase of K958. While Zomba⁴ July BNB was K50,311 up from K44,288 in June, an increase of K6,023 as a result of high costs of non food items which was at K24,001 up from K18,171 in June's BNB. Of course, there was also a small increase of K193 in the cost of food items.

The intermittent rise in prices of basic necessities has been further influenced by high transactions costs as a result of the unprecedented rise in fuel prices. Thus subsequent hike in transport fees is likely to lead to a spiral of increases in the cost of essential food and non-food items. Hence, says CFSC, "it is important to recognize that high cost of living without tangible coping mechanisms and commensurate rise in household incomes will force households to choose between

¹ See Table 1 ,figure 4 &2

² See figure 1& 6

³ See figure 1 & 3

⁴ See figure 1 & 5

basic necessities especially the urban poor. As such expect more incidences of malnutrition which leads to stunted growth for children, lack of concentration at school, limited economic performance in adults which may lead to long term adverse effects on the nation as a result of inadequate food intake. Thus, laments CFSC, "the fight against malnutrition will be even harder than before and more millions of kwacha are likely to be at stake as it is already the case following the report during the launch of scaling up nutrition initiative campaign Malawi which has been projected to lose k68.4billion kwacha by the 2015".

Comparison of the cost of the BNB across the Malawian cities from January to July,2011 (Table 1, Figure 1)

Table 1: 2011 Trend of Cost of Basic Needs (Cost of Living)

Months	Lilongwe	Zomba	Blantyre	Mzuzu	City Average
January	51336	42608	52080	43312	47334
February	52267	43097	53111	43699	48044
March	52356	43377	54701	46015	49112
April	52825	44241	52723	46492	49070
May	53731	45200	53621	44293	49211
June	54844	44288	53440	45452	49506
July	56045	50311	54398	53060	53454

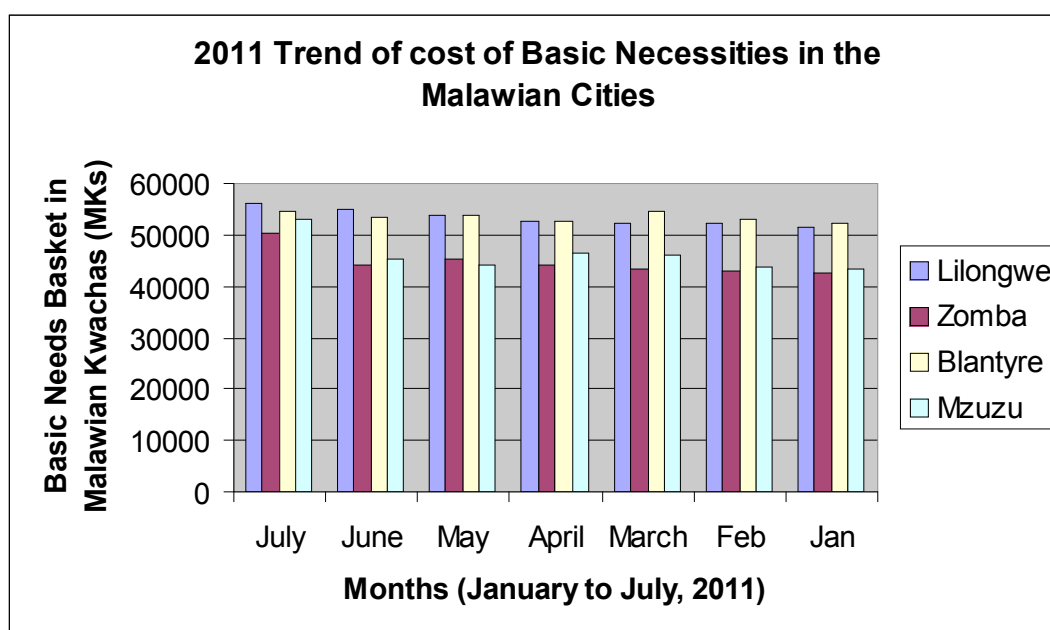


Figure 1

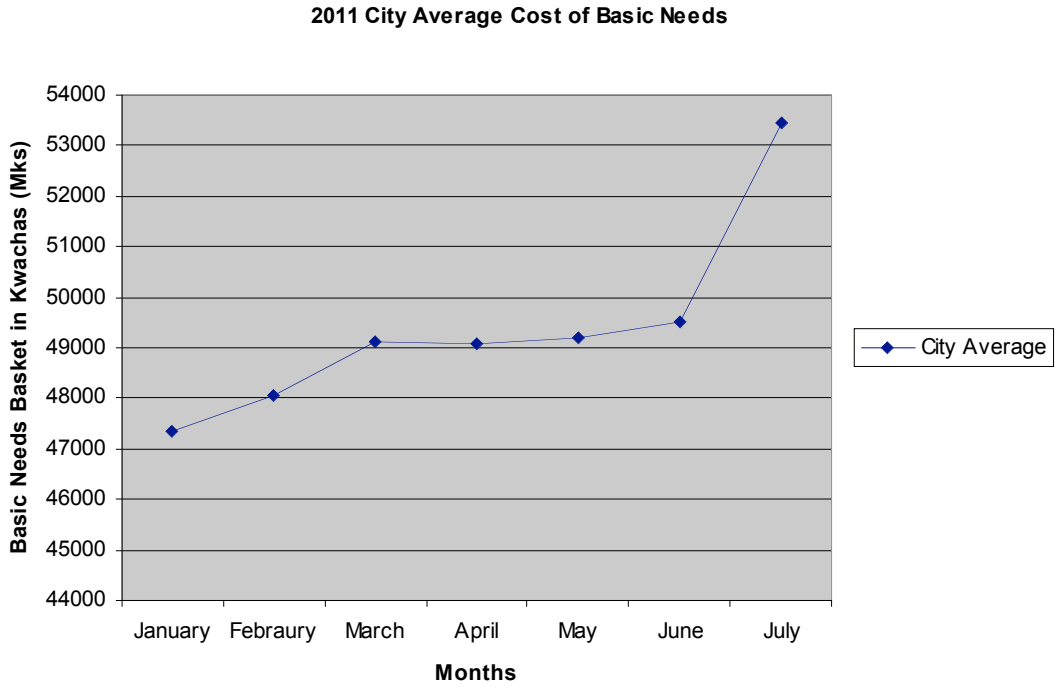


Figure 2

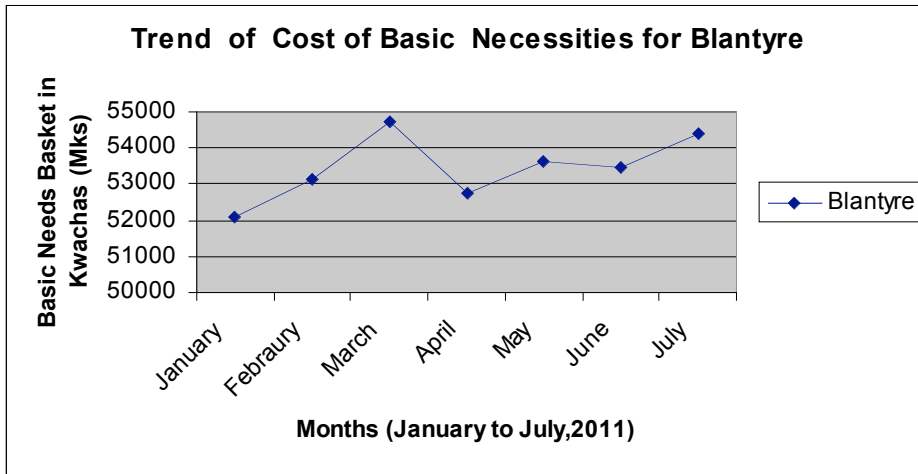


Figure 3

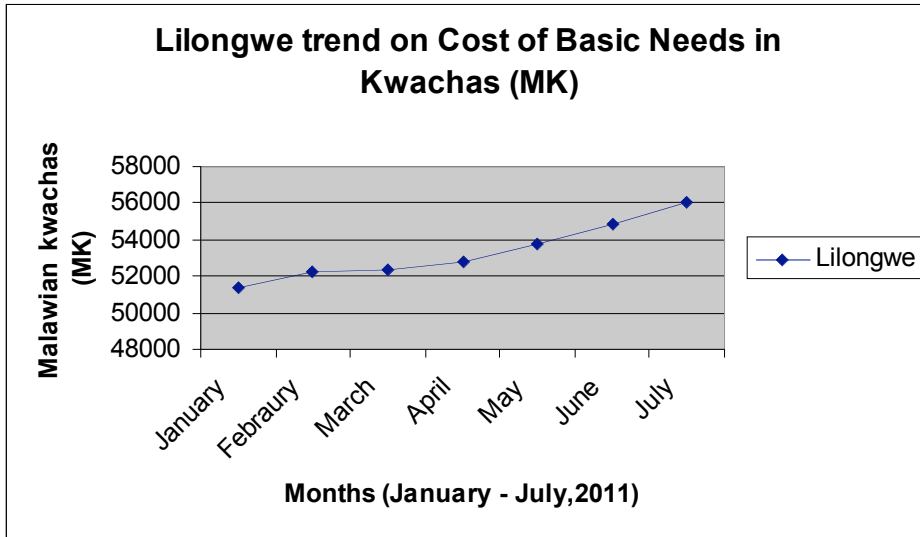


Figure 4

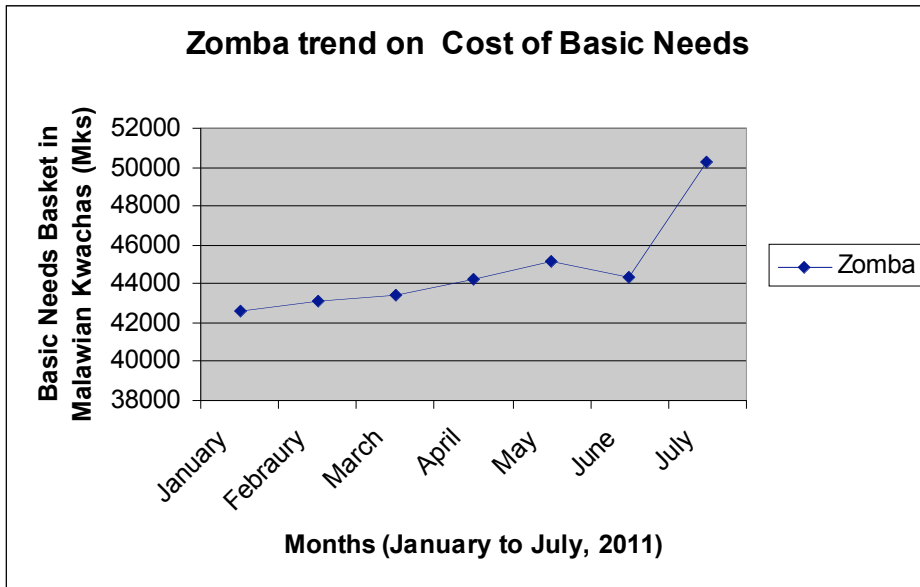


Figure 5

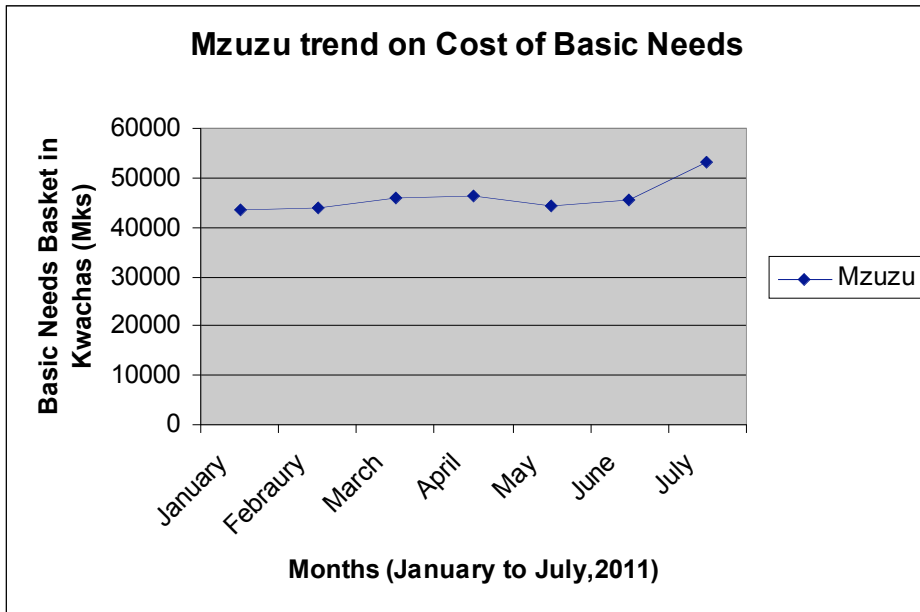


Figure 6