

# Liberia and Sierra Leone

March 2015: Wage rates improve in Liberia and Sierra Leone

*Tracking food security during the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak*

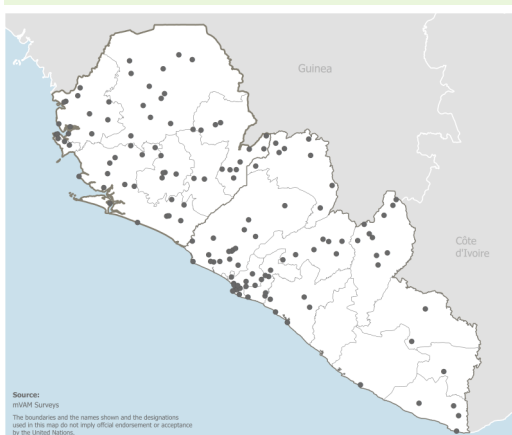
## Highlights

- In March, households in Lofa county, Liberia used fewer negative coping strategies than in February. The counties with highest levels of negative coping include Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu and Lofa. In Sierra Leone, negative coping is highest in the districts of Kailahun, Kono, Bombali, Tonkolili and Koinadugu.
- Negative coping strategies are most frequently used by the poorest households, by those living in Ebola-affected rural areas and by households headed by women.
- Imported and local rice prices remained stable in Liberia but increased modestly in Sierra Leone. As the land preparation season advances, wage rates are improving in both Liberia (+3%) and Sierra Leone (+7%).

LIBERIA, SIERRA LEONE - Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI)  
MARCH 2015



Source: WFP mVAM



## Methodology

March 2015 marked the sixth round of data collection. The data was collected by SMS over one week in mid-March. A total of 1,100 questionnaires were collected in Liberia, and 1,050 were collected in Sierra Leone. The map on the left shows the cell-phone towers from which responses were received. Details on methodology are available [online](#).

## Ebola continues to spread in Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital

In the week to 22 March, the number of confirmed Ebola cases in Sierra Leone was 33, which is the lowest weekly total since early June 2014. In the capital, Freetown, Ebola case incidence was the highest in the country with 13 new confirmed cases. Other confirmed cases in Sierra Leone came from the neighboring districts of the capital. In Liberia, there were no cases reported for three consecutive weeks, except a new confirmed case on 20 March in Montserrado county. None of the other counties have reported a confirmed case within the past 21 days.

Source: [Ebola Situation Report – 25 March](#)

## Negative coping levels remain stable and decline in Lofa

The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) measures the frequency and severity of the behaviours households engage in when faced with food shortages. A higher score indicates that households are resorting to more frequent or severe negative coping strategies.

As Figure 1 shows, the overall use of negative coping strategies has been declining or remained stable in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. The start of the harvest and the lifting of Ebola-related restrictions on movement have improved food availability and led to a recovery in economic activity.

In Sierra Leone, national average coping levels remained unchanged between February and March. The highest levels of negative coping are found in Kailahun/Kono (rCSI=16.6) and in Bombali/Tonkolili/Koinadugu (rCSI=16.4). Both of these zones have been much exposed to Ebola.

The national average rCSI for Liberia did not change significantly, standing at 15 in March compared to 15.6 in February ( $p=0.22$ ). However, negative coping has significantly dropped in Lofa, with the rCSI falling from 18.3 in February to 16.6 in March ( $p=0.08$ ). This improvement coincides with lower staple food prices in the county. The results for other counties are statistically similar to previous rounds. Negative coping levels remain highest in the western zone that includes Bomi, Grand Cape Mount and Gbarpolu, as well as Lofa. These areas have had a large number of Ebola cases.

March data continues to show that urban households tend to use fewer coping strategies than rural ones. The lowest coping levels were again observed in urban parts of Western Area (rCSI=10.9) in Sierra Leone. In Liberia, the better-off locations include Montserrado (rCSI=14.0), Grand Bassa (rCSI=13.6) and Margibi (rCSI=13.8).

As in previous rounds, households headed by women use more negative coping strategies than those headed by men. Better-off households use coping strategies much less frequently than more deprived ones: households with a flush toilet in Sierra Leone have an rCSI of 7, compared to an rCSI of 25 for households that have no toilet at all.

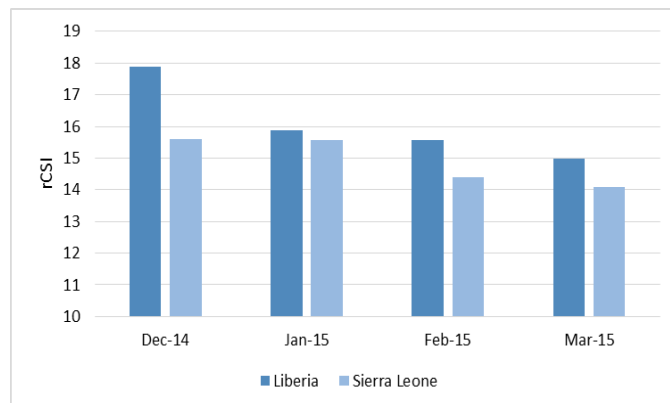
## Imported and local rice prices decline in Lofa

Overall, local and imported rice prices were stable in March in Liberia, but they are still at their highest level since May 2012. In Lofa, there was a 6 percent decline in the price of imported rice and local rice prices fell by 8 percent, possibly thanks to lower fuel prices this month. This may also reflect an improved food supply in Lofa following the lifting of restrictions to trade. Although palm oil prices were stable in March in Liberia, they fell by 4 percent in Lofa, reflecting the peak harvest season.

In Sierra Leone, a seasonal trend towards higher food prices is noted for imported rice (+3%), local rice (+2%) and palm oil (+3%). In March, there was a sharp increase in imported rice in Bombali/Tonkolili/Koinadugu (+9%), a more remote area of the country that is prone to price fluctuations. Local rice prices rose by 9 percent in the district of Kenema in March.

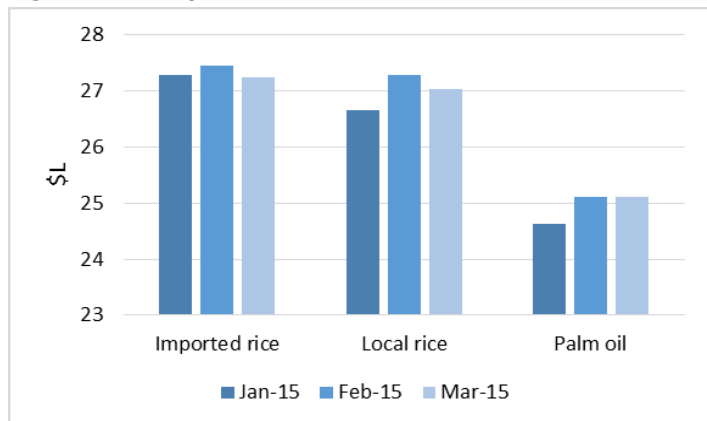
Palm oil prices increased in all districts of Sierra Leone except in urban and rural parts of Western Area. The increase in palm oil prices is thought to be favourable for the households who produce palm oil at this time of year.

**Figure 1: Negative coping, Liberia and Sierra Leone**



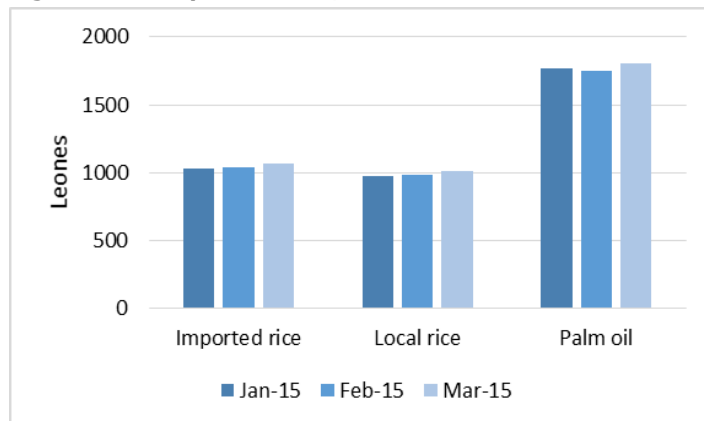
Source: WFP mVAM

**Figure 2: Food price trends, Liberia**



Source: WFP mVAM

**Figure 3: Food price trends, Sierra Leone**



Source: WFP mVAM

## Wage rates for unskilled labour rise in Sierra Leone and Liberia

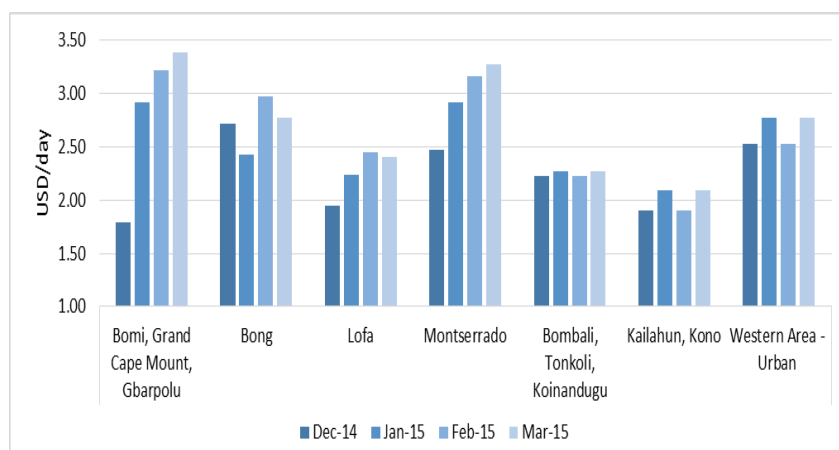
Manual labour wage rates are up by 3 percent in Liberia as demand for agricultural labour returns. In Grand Bassa, March wages were 11 percent higher than in February. Rates also increased in the south east (+5%) and in Montserrado (+3%). Conversely, wage rates fell in Bong (-6%), Lofa (-2%), Margibi (-3%) and Nimba (-2%).

In Sierra Leone, there has been a strong rebound in wage rates, with an increase of 7 percent in March. Wage rises were noted in all districts, led by Bo (+14%), urban parts of Western Area (+10%) and Kailahun (+10%).

Wage-to-imported-rice terms of trade improved by 3 percent in March in Liberia, thanks to better wages and stable rice prices. The exception to this trend is the county of Bong, where terms of trade are down 7 percent from February. At 8.2 cups of imported rice for a day's wage, purchasing power is lowest for people in Lofa.

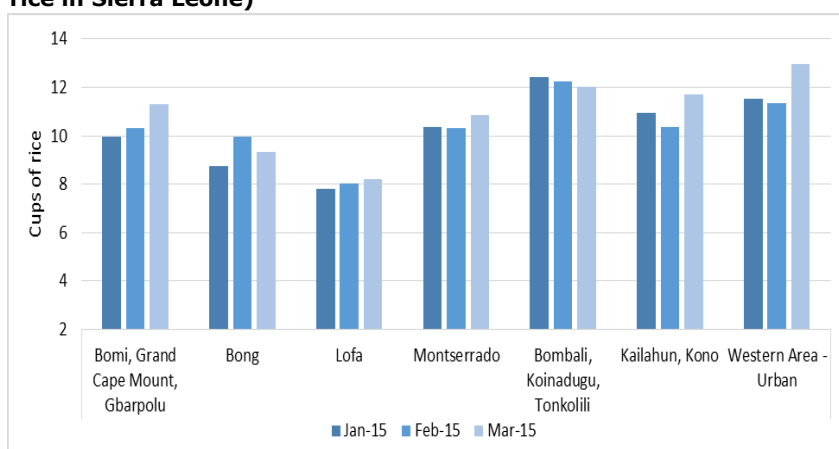
In Sierra Leone, wage-to-local-rice terms of trade improved by 6 percent in March: wages increased in a context of modest increases in the price of rice. The most significant improvements were seen in the districts of Bo (+12%), Bonthe/Moyamba/Pujehun (+11%) and Kailahun/Kono (+13%). However, terms of trade fell in the Ebola-affected northern districts of Bombali/Tonkolili/Koinadugu (-2%) and in Kenema (-3%), where a day's wage purchases 10 cups of rice, compared to 13 in Freetown.

Figure 4: Daily wage rates for unskilled labour (USD/day)



Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 5: Wage-to-rice terms of trade (imported rice in Liberia, local rice in Sierra Leone)



Source: WFP mVAM

## Perceptions of food security in March

In analysing the words used by respondents, it is clear that 'Ebola' is more prevalent in the responses from Sierra Leone than from Liberia: it was the sixth most-mentioned word in all open responses from Sierra Leone, while in Liberia it ranked sixteenth. This matches the relatively low rates of Ebola in Liberia compared to Sierra Leone.

In Sierra Leone, the fourth most-mentioned word was 'expensive'. Considering that the most frequently used words are neutral terms such as 'food', 'community' and 'people', this rate is very high. This finding held true for all subgroups (i.e. male/female, low/high rCSI, latrine type). By contrast, 'expensive' ranked eighth in frequency in Liberian responses, with poorer respondents mentioning the word the most.

In this round, respondents no longer referred to transport and road blocks, as they did in previous rounds. This suggests the lifting of quarantines and road opening measures are effective and are noted by the respondents.

Figure 6: Word clouds

Word cloud for Sierra Leone



Word cloud for Liberia





## In the words of respondents

### Sierra Leone

- “There is a shortage of food because of the Ebola epidemic. It has disturbed agricultural activities greatly in this community.” – Male respondent from Bombali.
- “The food supply is better since the Sierra Leone and Liberia border has opened, but the food is still expensive.” – Female respondent from Koinadugu.
- “The food situation in my community is no problem. The only thing disturbing us is a source of income.” – Male respondent from Bonthe.

### Liberia

- “The food situation in my community is not stable: sometimes the prices of food items rise, and then they fall.” – Male respondent from Margibi.
- “The food issue is hard in my area because only few people have very little farm produce due to the lack of seeds, tools, and cash. That is why almost everyone lives on buying foods.” – Male respondent from Bong.
- “The food situation in our community is not that bad. People try to get something to eat every day. It is not enough but at least they eat every day.” – Female respondent from Grand Bassa.

## Conclusions and Outlook

In March, the recovery of wage levels in Sierra Leone and parts of Liberia suggests that economic activity is resuming, as quarantine measures previously have been lifted in both countries. The economic improvement activity is leading – in the aggregate – to stable household food security outcomes.

We continue to see higher negative coping levels in rural areas that have been affected by Ebola, as well as for households headed by women and for the poorest households. As the June–August lean season approaches, assistance to these groups should be prioritized.



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To download mVAM data on the Ebola-affected countries, please visit: [http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam\\_monitoring/Ebola.html](http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/Ebola.html)