



WFP/Wilson Gama

# Liberia

April 2015: Rice and oil prices rise significantly in Lofa County

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

## Highlights

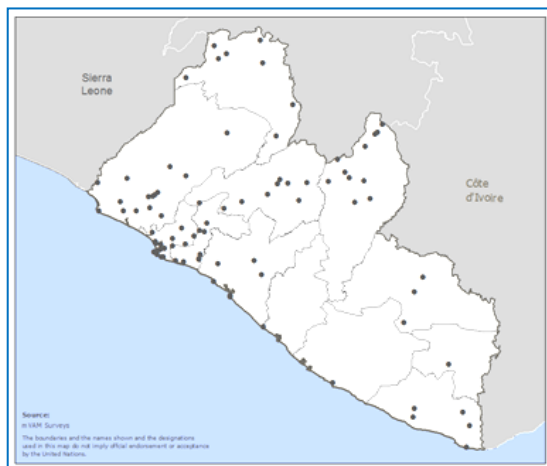
- The use of negative coping strategies remained stable in April.
- National food prices remained stable. However, the price of imported rice, local rice and palm oil increased significantly in Lofa County.
- Wage rates fell by a seasonal 3 percent, and purchasing power also fell by 3 percent.
- Markets are open and functional, but they are operating at reduced levels.

## Negative coping levels remain stable

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.

The national average rCSI did not change significantly, standing at 14.7 in April (Figure 1) compared to 15 in March ( $p=0.57$ ). Negative coping levels remain the highest in Lofa (rCSI 16.5).

April data confirms that urban households tend to use fewer coping strategies than rural ones. In Liberia, the better-off locations include Montserrado (rCSI=13.9) and Margibi (rCSI=13.9). These are the most urban areas of the country, compared, for instance, to relatively rural Bong (rCSI=15.5).



LIBERIA - Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI)  
APRIL 2015



Source: WFP mVAM

## Methodology

April 2015 marked the seventh round of data collection. The data was collected by SMS over one week in mid-April. A total of 1,050 questionnaires were collected. The map to the left shows the cellphone towers from which responses were received. Details on methodology are available [online](#).

### The countdown to being free from Ebola

In the week to 12 April, there were no confirmed cases of Ebola in Liberia. No new cases have been reported for over six weeks, except for 1 case in Montserrado on 20 March.

Source: [Ebola Situation Report - 15 April 2015](#)

As in previous rounds, households headed by women are using more negative coping strategies than those headed by men (Figure 2). Moreover, better-off households are using coping strategies much less frequently than more deprived ones. Households with a flush toilet have an rCSI of 11, compared to an rCSI of 25 for households who use dirt pit latrines or who have no toilet at all (Figure 3).

In April, poorer households (those using dirt pits and the bush as latrines) reported increasing coping, while the rCSI of better-off households was stable or decreasing. This could suggest that worse-off households are becoming more vulnerable and thus will face a harsher lean season. Poorer households reported a lack of jobs as the cause of food insecurity.

### Food prices mostly remained stable or decreased

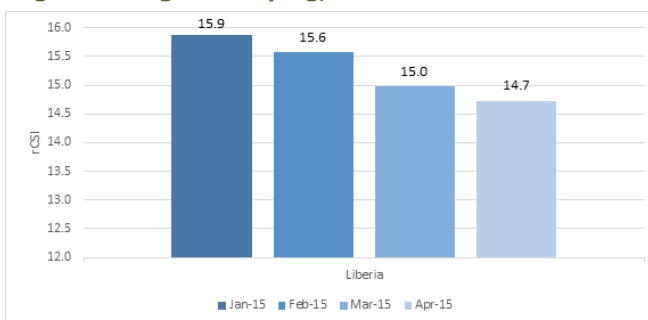
Local and imported rice prices remained stable or decreased in most districts, except for Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Nimba and Lofa. In Lofa, the price of local rice rose by 9 percent, and that of imported rice by 8 percent, offsetting the fall in prices seen in March. The price of palm oil also remained stable or decreased throughout Liberia, reflecting the peak harvest season. Again, the only exception was Lofa, where prices rose by 7 percent. Since borders reopened, areas such as Lofa may have seen an increase in demand for oil and rice coming from neighbouring countries.

### A mixed picture for unskilled labour wages

Manual labour wage rates are down by 3 percent from March. Demand for agricultural labour has slowed down as land preparation for rice and other crops ended in March. In Bomi/Grand Cape Mount/Gbarpolu, April wages were 7 percent lower than in March. Rates also decreased in Bong (-5%), Grand Bassa (-4%), Margibi (-3%) and Montserrado (-2%). Conversely, wage rates increased in Lofa by 5 percent.

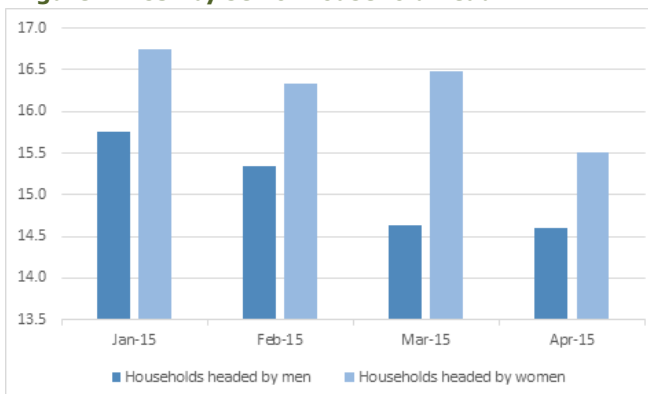
Lower wage rates saw wage-to-imported-rice terms of trade fall by 3 percent in April. The most notable decrease was in Bomi/Grand Cape Mount/Gbarpolu, where terms of trade have dropped by 11 percent since March. With a daily wage of 8.2 cups of imported rice, purchasing power is the lowest in Lofa. In other, better-off places such as Montserrado, people can buy 10.6 cups of imported rice a day with their daily wage.

Figure 1: Negative coping, Liberia



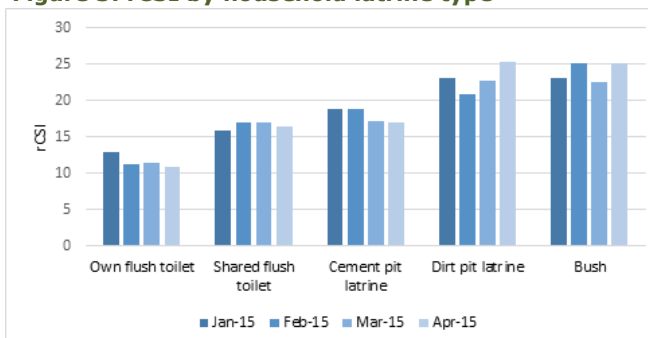
Source : WFP mVAM

Figure 2: rCSI by sex of household head



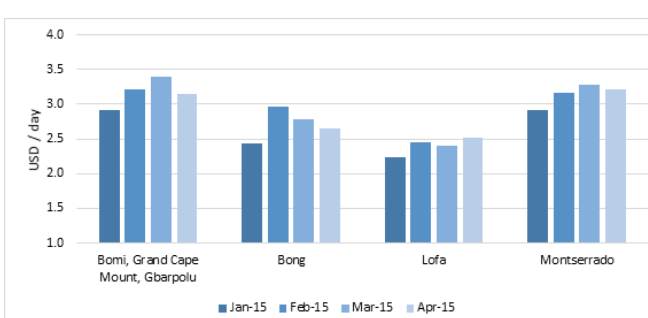
Source : WFP mVAM

Figure 3: rCSI by household latrine type



Source : WFP mVAM

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



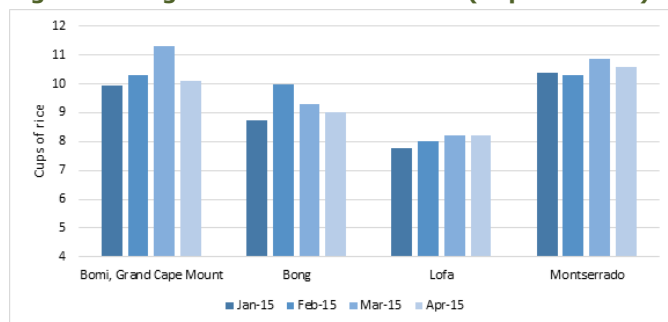
Source : WFP mVAM

Table 1: Food price trends

	February - March changes			March - April changes		
	Imported rice	Local rice	Palm oil	Imported rice	Local rice	Palm oil
<b>Liberia</b>	-1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	-1%
Lofa	-6%	-8%	-4%	<b>9%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>7%</b>

Source : WFP mVAM

**Figure 5: Wage-to-rice terms of trade (imported rice)**



Source: WFP mVAM

**Figure 6: Word cloud**



#### In the words of the respondents:

- "The food situation in my community is better!" – Female respondent from Lofa
- "There are so many difficulties surrounding food in my community, most homes heads are not working" – Female respondent from Montserrado
- "The food condition in my community has relatively improved because we are able to move around a bit freely" – Male respondent from Bomi
- "The food situation in my community is very bad because the road to the market is too far, you have to pay for transportation to go to the market" – Male respondent from Grand Bassa

## Conclusion and Outlook

In April, labour and economic activities in parts of Liberia continued to recover, albeit moderately offset by seasonal trends. Public services have also improved in both countries, although food insecurity remains a concern. Food prices were mostly stable in both countries, with some districts experiencing increases caused by higher transportation costs, trade restrictions in Ebola-affected areas and increased demand from neighbouring countries.

Coping levels are still higher in rural areas that have been affected by Ebola, as well as for households headed by women and for the poorest households. In fact, poorer households using dirt pit or bush latrines have actually seen their rCSI increase, while for better-off households, rCSI is either stable or falling. As the June–August lean season approaches, assistance should make these more vulnerable groups a priority.



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