

Malawi

January 2016: Assistance improves food security in the southern region

Highlights

- **National coping levels remain unchanged since the last data collection round. While still food insecure, coping levels in Chiradzulu-Mulanje-Thyolo-Zomba-Phalombe in the southern region improved significantly, likely attributed to food and cash distribution.**
- **There have been significant improvements in the perceptions of food security across southern and central Malawi, with humanitarian assistance focused on the region likely contributing to the improvement. Nevertheless, households in southern Malawi still have more negative perceptions of food security than in other parts of the country.**
- **Food prices remain high across the country, especially in the southern region. Erratic rain has eroded labour opportunities, food production, wages and purchasing power.**

Methodology: SMS and live call surveys

January 2016 marked the second round of remote data collection. The survey was conducted using text messaging (SMS) on 4 January 2016 reaching 1000 households. Participants were randomly selected from a national database of mobile subscribers. Respondents opted in to the SMS survey and were asked questions on socio-demographics, coping behaviour and manual labour wages as well as an open-ended question on food security. To increase completion rates an airtime credit incentive of US 50 cents was provided to respondents who successfully completed the survey. Results are aggregated due to small sample sizes within districts.

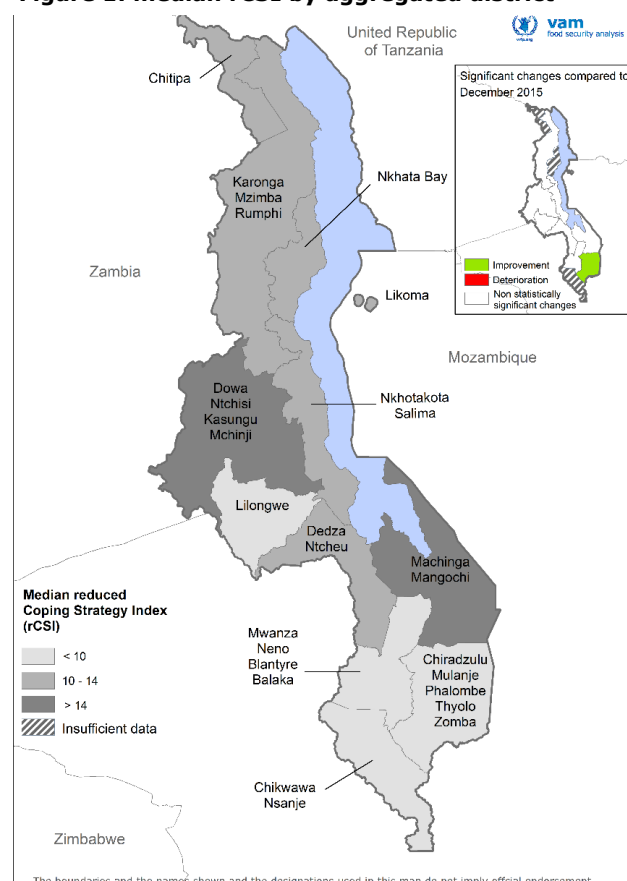
WFP Malawi's in-house call centre has been operational since the end of December 2015 and has been collecting information from key informants on food commodity prices (maize, cow peas, pigeon peas and beans), food availability and market accessibility.

It is acknowledged that the SMS and phone surveys contain inherent response biases towards better-off and literate households. Due to the possible biases in the data, this bulletin avoids giving precise estimates of food insecurity, but rather captures patterns and trends. Additional information on methodology is available in the first bulletin and [online](#).

Below average rainfall expected throughout January to March

Drier than average conditions especially in the southern region (50%-70% below long term average in October-December) have delayed the planting season by 2 to 4 weeks. This has resulted in a lack of job opportunities in what should otherwise be the peak labour season. Continuation of below average rainfall is forecasted from January to March, which is a key stage for maize production. Thus a below average harvest is likely, which will compound problems arising from low stocks and high food commodity prices ([WFP Seasonal Monitor](#)) already affecting increased numbers of food insecure resulting from last year's poor crop performance.

Figure 1: median rCSI by aggregated district



Source: WFP mVAM, January 2016

Households in southern region are coping better than in northern and central regions

Nationally, the median reduced coping strategy index (rCSI) was 11 in January 2016 which is not a significant change from December 2015 (rCSI = 13).

In this round the southern region was using slightly fewer negative coping strategies (median rCSI = 10) than the northern and central regions (median rCSI = 12) and than last month (rCSI = 13; $p < .05$). In the southern aggregated district of Chiradzulu-Mulanje-Thyolo-Zomba-Phalombe the median rCSI fell from 14 to 9.5, indicating that people were better off ($p < .05$). Humanitarian assistance in the southern region may have contributed to the improved food security. The median rCSI (15) of Machinga-Mangochi appears high on the map but the difference between that and other aggregated districts in the southern region was not statistically significant.

Urban areas still appear more food secure

On 4 January 2016, there was some evidence that aggregated districts with urban centres are more food secure than entirely rural aggregated districts. Households in Lilongwe district employed fewer negative coping strategies (rCSI = 8) than the two neighbouring rural aggregated districts of Dedza-Ntcheu (rCSI = 12) and Dowa-Ntchisi-Kasungu-Mchinji (rCSI = 15) at the $p < .05$ level.

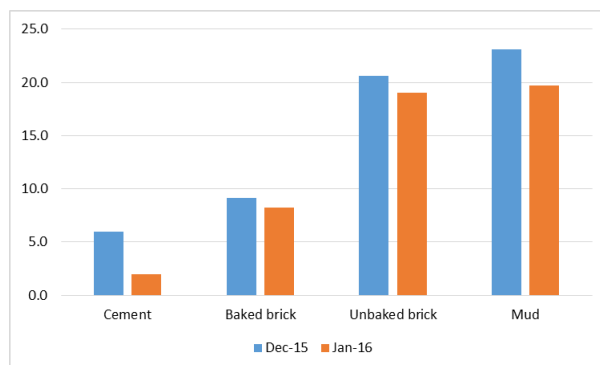
Improvement in negative coping levels observed in wealthiest and poorest households

In Malawi, wall type, based on housing in the 2008 Census, is used as a proxy for household wealth.

As seen in **figure 2**, in January 2016, poorer respondents, i.e. those living in houses with mud walls (median rCSI=19.7) and unbaked brick walls (median rCSI=19.0) reported using many more negative coping strategies for food shortages than wealthier ones, i.e. those living in houses with cement (median rCSI=2) and baked brick walls (median rCSI=8.2). The difference is significant at the $p < .05$ level.

However, negative coping levels improved significantly for households in both the poorest (mud) and wealthiest (cement) categories between December 2015 and January 2016 ($p < .05$), which is likely attributed to food and cash distribution. However, our sample is currently skewed toward wealthier households (households with cement and baked brick make up 73% of the sample) so it may be more difficult to capture monthly changes in poorer households.

Figure 2: Median rCSI by wall type



Source: WFP mVAM, January 2016

Female headed households slightly more food insecure

Female-headed households (rCSI = 12) used slightly more negative coping strategies than male-headed households (rCSI = 11), significant at the $p < .05$ level. The table below shows the prevalence of different negative coping categorized by gender of household head and wall type. The most common coping strategy of total respondents was to buy less expensive food (76 percent), followed by limiting the portion size and reducing number of meals, with the prevalence of 62 percent and 61 percent respectively.

Figure 3: Median rCSI by sex of household

Gender of household head	Wall type	Negative coping strategies				
		Borrow food	Less expensive food	Limit portion size	Reduce number of meals	Restrict consumption
Female	Mud	80%	88%	82%	88%	75%
	Unbaked Brick	73%	85%	77%	75%	60%
	Baked Brick	51%	81%	62%	58%	52%
	Cement	34%	63%	44%	33%	19%
Male	Mud	77%	90%	83%	84%	62%
	Unbaked Brick	83%	92%	87%	84%	64%
	Baked Brick	49%	72%	56%	55%	35%
	Cement	39%	53%	37%	35%	22%

Source: WFP mVAM, January 2016

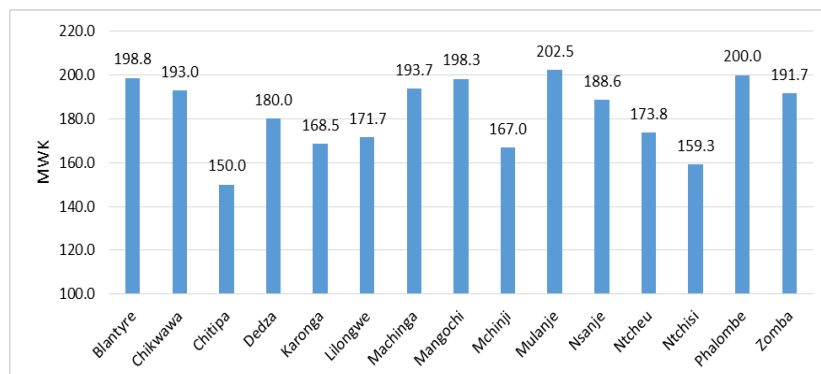
Food prices higher in the southern region

Maize prices are higher in the southern region (e.g. Blantyre, Chikwawa, Machinga, Mangochi, Mulanje, Nsanje, Phalombe, Zomba) than in the central and northern regions, as seen in **figure 4**. The highest prices were observed in Mulanje (MWK 202.5) and the lowest in Chitipa (MWK 150.0).

All mVAM respondents in Chitipa district mentioned the availability of ADMARC maize in the area, which may have attributed to the lower price of maize.

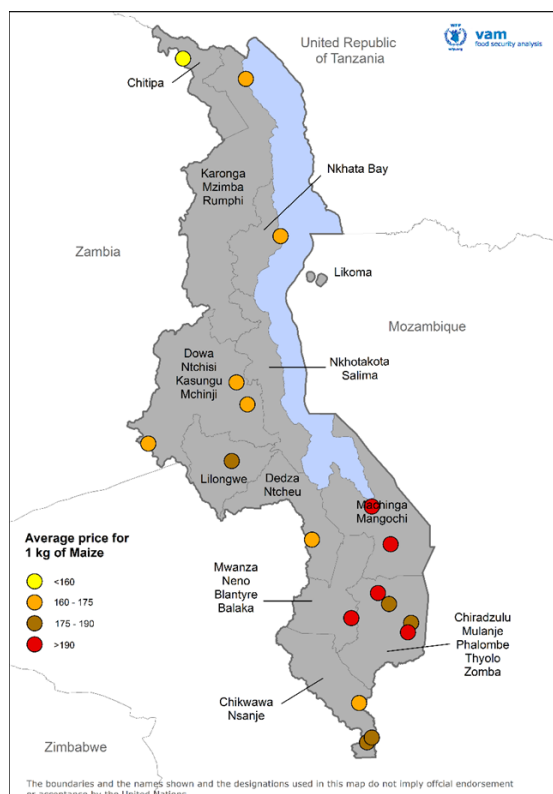
In urban centres, maize prices were among the highest in Blantyre (MWK 198.8) and lower in the capital Lilongwe (MWK 171.7). This may be due to the difference in food availability between the districts. Some 56 percent of respondents surveyed in Blantyre reported lack of maize, including that of ADMARC maize, compared with none in Lilongwe.

Figure 4: Price of 1 kg of maize across districts, 22 Dec 2015–6 Jan 2016



Source: WFP mVAM, January 2016

Figure 5: Average maize price in markets, 22 Dec 2015–6 Jan 2016



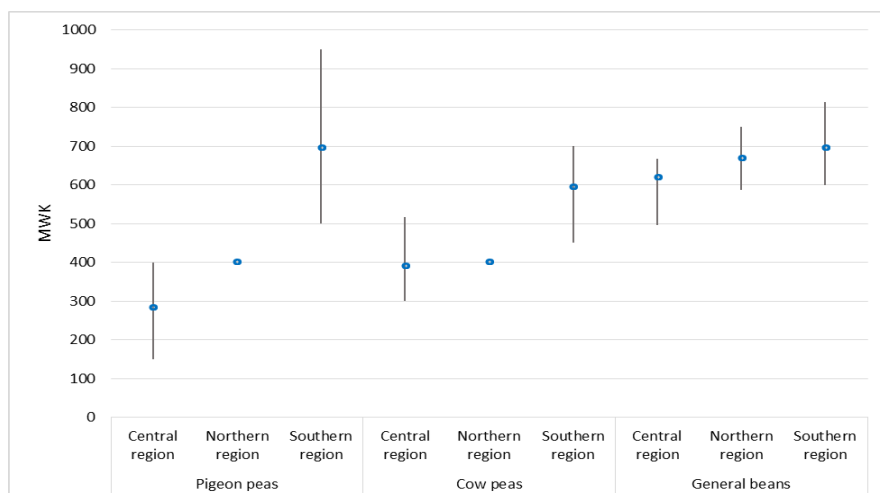
Source: WFP mVAM, January 2016

Across the country, maize prices remain significantly higher than the average price of MWK 93.34 in January 2015 ([WFP VAM market data](#)). Lilongwe prices are 71.7 percent higher than last January (MWK 100). In Nsanje district, the price almost doubled from MWK 98.94 in January 2015 to MWK 188.6 in January 2016.

Price of pigeon peas, cow peas and general beans were also highest in the districts in the southern region. Price of pigeon peas had the biggest variation among regions, ranging from MWK 150 in the central to MWK 950 in parts of the south. Southern region has the most limited access to protein rich diet without assistance.

Apart from maize, beans had the lowest variation among regions (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6: Food commodities price in regions, 22 Dec 2015–6 Jan 2016



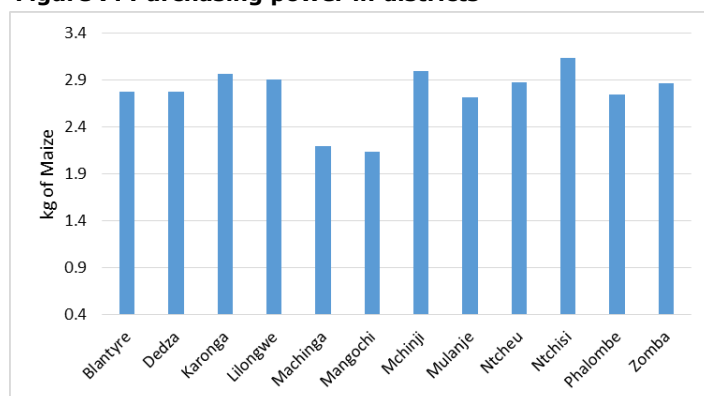
Source: WFP mVAM, January 2016

Purchasing power lowest in Machinga and Mangochi districts

Machinga-Mangochi had the lowest manual labour wage rate of MWK 425, and Blantyre the highest at MWK 552.5. Machinga-Mangochi is particularly affected by lack of agricultural work prospects because of erratic rainfall. The lowest purchasing power in terms of maize was also observed in Machinga (2.19 kg per daily wage) and Mangochi (2.14 kg per daily wage) most likely because of higher food prices and lack of daily wage work (**Figure 7**).

Manual labour wages in Chikwawa-Nsanje aggregation (n=6) and Nkhata Bay-Chitipa-Likoma aggregation (n=8) were not included in the report due to lack of respondents.

Figure 7: Purchasing power in districts



Source: WFP mVAM, January 2016

Perceptions of food security

In this round, "ADMARC" was the second most mentioned word after "maize", and was mentioned almost twice as much as in round 1. Most comments on the ADMARC were negative, such as the lack of maize supplies and long queues. It seems that sustainability of ADMARC supplies is becoming more of a concern across the country.

Respondents from the southern region mentioned "expensive" twice as often as those in the northern and central regions. In Southern region, "expensive" was the second most mentioned word after "maize." This observation is in line with the high food price situation in the region.

Rain was mentioned 43 times in round 2 and ranked sixth among the most commonly mentioned words. The frequency of the word has not changed significantly from the last round. Erratic rain patterns still remain a concern in terms of lack of rain last year, delay of rain this year and heavy rain during the previous growing season washing away crops.

Figure 8: General wordcloud



Source: WFP mVAM, January 2016

Perceptions of food security improve in southern and central region

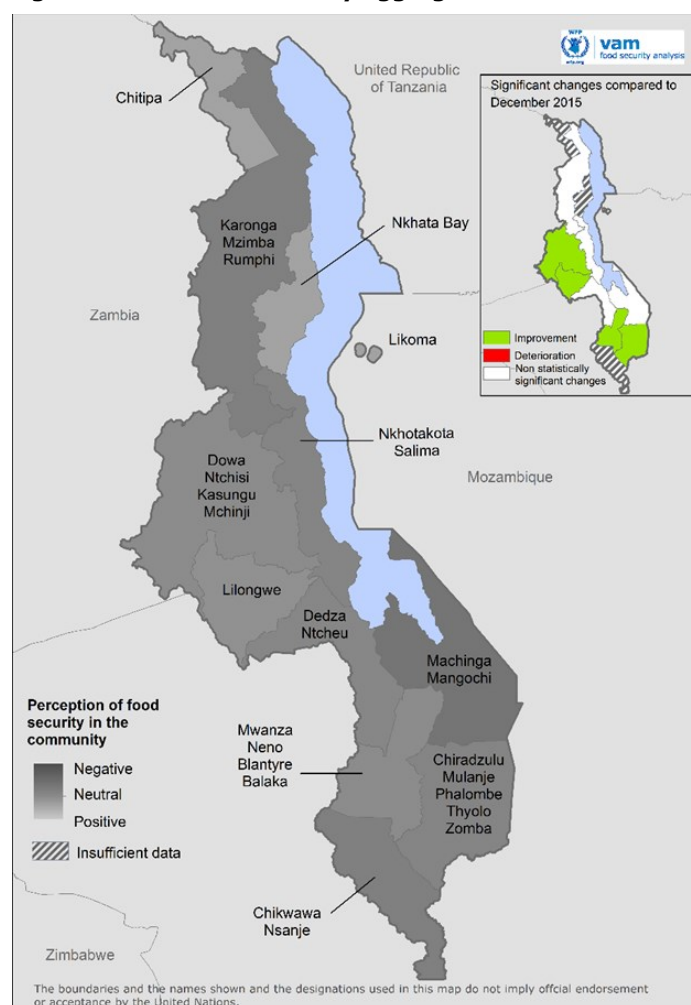
In terms of sentiment score, significant improvements have been observed throughout the southern region. Blantyre-Mwanza-Neno-Balaka aggregation's sentiment score was -0.055, which is 40% improvement from last month ($p < .05$).

Chiradzulu-Mulanje-Thyolo-Zomba-Phalombe aggregation also showed improvement by 0.037 ($p < .05$). This observation is in line with the statistically significant rCSI improvement in the aggregated districts.

The Dowa-Ntchisi-Kasungu-Mchinji aggregation in the central region and Lilongwe also showed significant improvement in the sentiment score by 0.025 and 0.022 respectively ($P < .05$).

Households in the middle wealth categories (i.e., with baked brick and unbaked brick walls) were less negative about the food security situation at the beginning of January 2016 than at the beginning of December 2015 ($p < .05$). The changes in other categories were not statistically significant.

Figure 9: Sentiment score by aggregated district



Source: WFP mVAM, January 2016

In the words of the respondents

- "Here people are sleeping at ADMARC depot to buy maize." – Male respondent from Phalombe
- "High price for staple foods, low wages for ground labour." – Female respondent from Mangochi
- "Food is expensive in our community and many people are starving." – Female respondent from Machinga
- "Food is not enough for the whole year due to less rainfalls." – Male respondent from Nsanje

Conclusion

There has been an overall improvement in negative coping and sentiment score in the southern region since December 2015. This round's data also shows that the food security situation measured by rCSI indicator improved slightly across all wealth categories. However, the improvements are most likely due to humanitarian assistance focused on the southern region. As the lean season continues, sustainability of the assistance and ADMARC supplies remain a concern. Due to erratic rain patterns, seasonal progress is slow in most regions, increasing the price of food commodities and lowering the wage rate and purchasing power.



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