

Malawi

April 2016: The harvest brings lower food prices

Highlights

- Food prices have fallen by 40 percent countrywide since March, increasing household purchasing power.
- However, this trend is expected to be short lived due to low crop yields. The low yields mean households are still using negative coping strategies.
- Better food availability and cheaper maize have improved household perceptions of food security, but sentiment scores remain negative.

Methodology: SMS and live call surveys

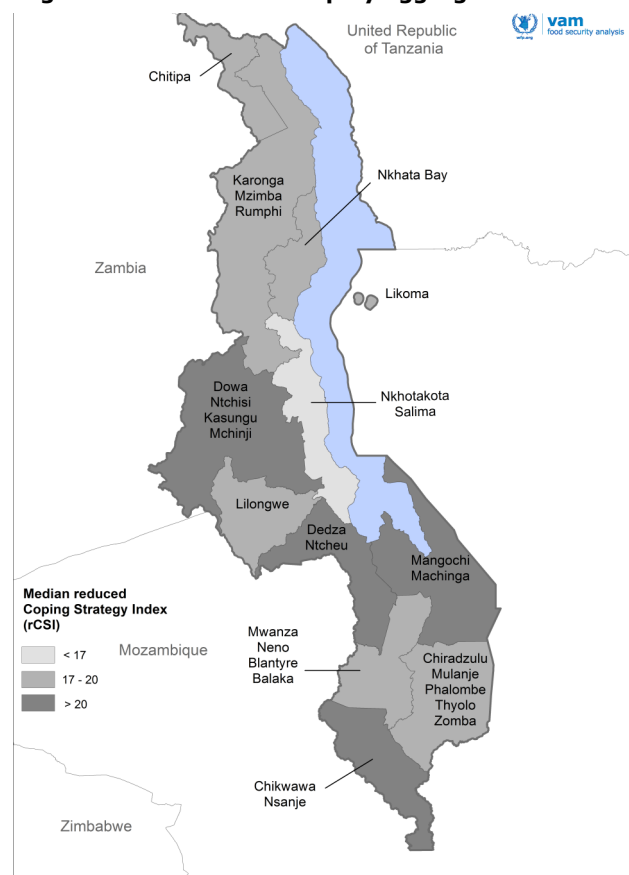
April 2016 marked the fourth round of remote data collection in Malawi. The survey was conducted using text messaging (SMS) from 5 to 21 April 2016, reaching 2000 households. The March round was not conducted because of new SMS survey regulations from the mobile network operator. Questions on negative coping levels have been modified to improve clarity, thus rCSI comparison with the last round is not attempted. 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. WFP Malawi's in-house call centre has been operational since the end of December 2015 and is collecting weekly information from key informants on food commodity prices (maize, cow peas, pigeon peas and beans), food availability and market accessibility. The call centre is also monitoring new admissions to nutrition programmes by contacting 70 health facilities in seven districts (Phalombe, Chikwawa, Mulanje, Nsanje, Kasungu, Balaka and Karonga). Bi-weekly phone surveys are conducted to monitor admissions of acutely malnourished children aged 6-59 months, as well as adolescent and adult admissions to Supplementary Feeding, OTP, Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) and TB programmes. 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](https://resources.vam.wfp.org/) and online. (<https://resources.vam.wfp.org/>).

Seasonal update

Malawi's rainfall season is over. Short-term forecasts predict a continuation of the lack of rainfall in central and southern regions. While the country received above-average rainfall at the end of March, this will have little effect on the seasonal crop yield because the intense dryness during the planting period severely damaged early crop development.

Source: WFP Seasonal Monitor

Figure 1: median rCSI map by aggregated district



Source: WFP mVAM, April 2016

Negative coping levels remains high despite the harvest

The national median reduced coping strategy index (rCSI*) remained high in April (rCSI=20) because prolonged dryness has led to an insufficient harvest. With low crop yields, households will be relying on markets again sooner in the year than usual.

Households in drought-affected central and southern regions are resorting to more negative coping than those in the north (see **Figures 1 and 2**). The rCSI of Dowa-Ntchisi-Kasungu-Mchinji districts was 25, which is 25 percent higher than that of the Mzimba-Karonga-Rumphi and Nkhata Bay-Chitipa-Likoma. Households in Nkhotakota-Salima are resorting less to negative coping strategies than those in other aggregated districts.

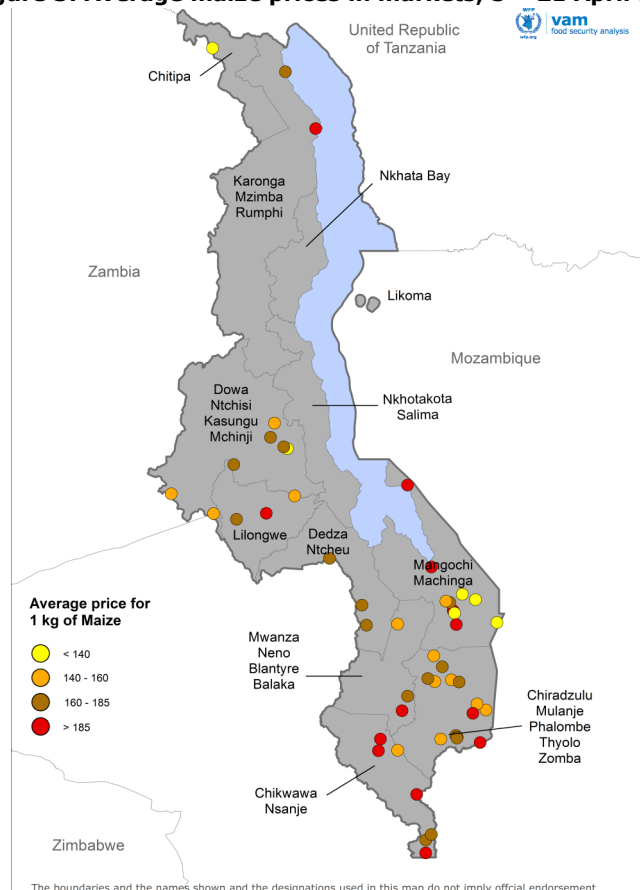
Maize prices fall with the harvest

In the 17 monitored hotspot districts, the price of maize fell by 40 percent between March (from 7th to 31st) and April (from 5th to 21st) due to the harvest. The most expensive maize was in Thyolo (MWK 204/kg), Mangochi (MWK 198/kg) and Nsanje (MWK 195/kg), all in the southern region most affected by the drought. The lowest maize price was found in the northern region of Chitipa, where none of the survey respondents reported a lack of ADMARC maize (see **Figure 4**).

Despite the decrease, prices are still higher than usual. April 2016 maize prices were 35 to 85 percent higher than last April, and 45 to 95 percent higher than the three-year average ([source: FAO GIEWS](#)). While the April harvest has indeed pulled prices down, below-average yields are hampering recovery towards the seasonal average. This downward price trend is expected to be short lived, as households will have to depend on markets earlier than normal.

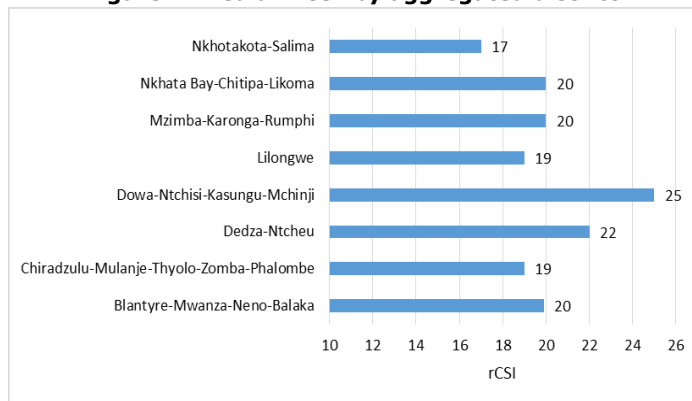
As seen in **Figure 3**, drought-affected southern districts are more likely to experience high maize prices, similar to the last round of data collection. Prices in southern districts are also higher for pigeon peas, cowpeas and general beans (see **Figure 5**).

Figure 3: Average maize prices in markets, 5 – 21 April 2016



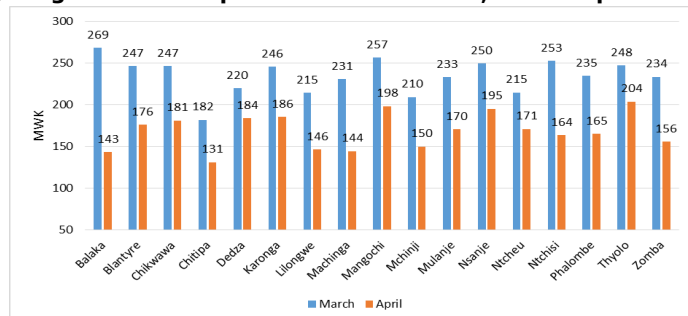
Source: WFP mVAM, April 2016

Figure 2: Median rCSI by aggregated district



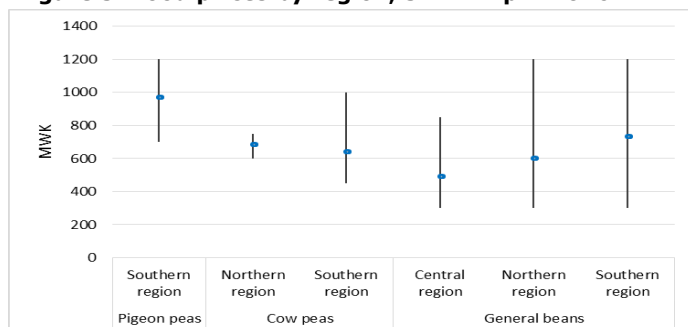
Source: WFP mVAM, April 2016

Figure 4: Maize prices across districts, 5 – 21 April 2016



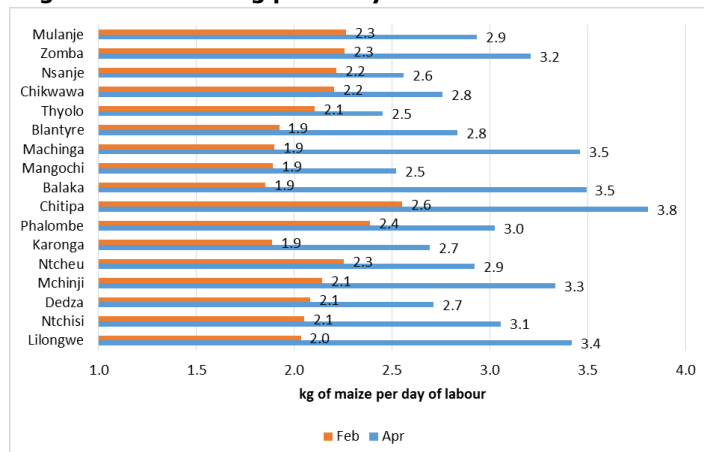
Source: WFP mVAM, April 2016

Figure 5: Food prices by region, 5 – 21 April 2016



Source: WFP mVAM, April 2016

Figure 6: Purchasing power by district



Source: WFP mVAM, April 2016

Purchasing power increases throughout the country

The national median manual labour wage for April was stable at MWK 500, but purchasing power increased throughout the country due to lower maize prices. Chitipa — with the cheapest maize — had the highest purchasing power of 3.8kg of maize per day of labour. Machinga, where average maize price was relatively lower at MWK 144/kg, had higher purchasing power of 3.5kg of maize per day.

The lowest purchasing power was in Thyolo and Mangochi, both southern region districts with high maize prices (see **Figure 6**).

*The reduced coping strategies index expresses the frequency and severity of the mechanisms that households use to access food. The more negative coping strategies households implement, the higher the rCSI.

Health and nutrition monitoring

Cases of malnourishment among children fell in April: moderately malnourished (MAM) admissions decreased by 32 percent and severely malnourished (SAM) admissions by 31 percent. However, there were more new admissions of adults requiring antiretroviral therapy (ART). Cases of adult malnourishment also increased with 38 percent more moderately malnourished admissions and 25 percent more severely malnourished admissions. New admissions of moderately malnourished adults with TB continued to decrease throughout the monitoring period.

Perceptions of food security

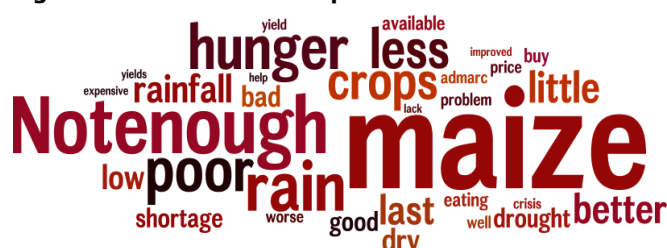
'Harvest' was the most mentioned word after maize. The number of respondents mentioning 'expensive' halved compared to the previous round of data collection, reflecting the drop in market prices. Out of the 206 responses that mentioned the word 'harvest', the majority of the respondents talked about poor crop yields. Around 16 percent of respondents said that the harvest was "not enough," 13 percent mentioned hunger despite the harvest, and 26 percent said the harvest was "poor" or "little". Only 5 percent said the harvest was "good". Most of the respondents attributed the poor harvest to the lack of rain — the third most-mentioned word (see **Figure 8** and **Figure 9**).

Figure 8: Wordcloud of general responses



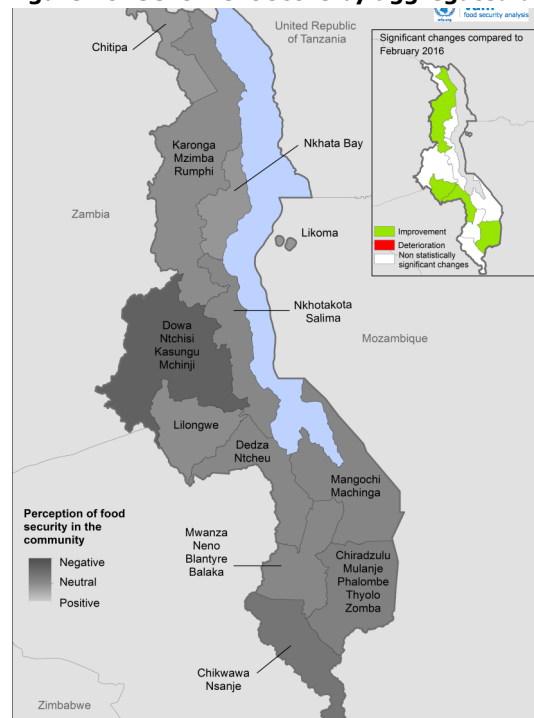
Source: WFP mVAM, April 2016

Figure 9: Wordcloud of responses about the harvest



Source: WFP mVAM, April 2016

Figure 10: Sentiment score by aggregated district



Source: WFP mVAM, April 2016

Perceptions of food security improve throughout the country

Sentiment scores have improved throughout Malawi. Nationwide sentiment has improved 27 percent from -0.1 in February to -0.08 in April. The sentiment score of the southern region of Chiradzulu-Mulanje-Thyolo-Zomba-Phalombe improved 35 percent. In Lilongwe, the score rose by 59 percent, in Dedza-Ntcheu, by 46 percent, and in the northern region of Mzimba-Karonga-Rumphu, by 47 percent (see **Figure 10**).

Sentiment scores also rose for households led by women (up 21 percent) and men (up 28 percent). This improvement can be attributed to the ongoing harvest. Even so, the sentiment scores are still negative, reflecting the ongoing food insecurity.

In the words of the respondents

"People have not harvested well this year. The food cannot keep them for three months, which means by June they will have no food." – Male respondent from Mwanza

"Currently a lot of people don't have enough food due to poor rains and lack of fertiliser. So people did not harvest enough food." – Female respondent from Thyolo

"We see people begging for food or work, and maize price at the market is still high." – Female respondent from Chikwawa

"Now the food situation is at least better because people have started harvesting the little they have." – Male respondent from Nkhosato

For more information, please contact:

Coco Ushiyama
coco.ushiyama@wfp.org

Arif Husain
arif.husain@wfp.org

Jean-Martin Bauer
jean-martin.bauer@wfp.org

Andrew Odera
andrew.oder@wfp.org

Please also visit: http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/Malawi.html

