

Food security improves as humanitarian assistance reaches 97 percent of vulnerable population

Key points:



Negative coping levels reduce across Malawi but remain high for households headed by women



Maize prices are stable as humanitarian assistance reaches 97 percent of targeted population



New admissions increase in malnutrition treatment programmes for children, adolescents and adults



Situation Update

In December 2016, humanitarian assistance was delivered to 6.5 million people in the form of in-kind food and cash-based transfers, as per recommendations from the 2016 Food Insecurity Response Plan. However, whilst maize remains at full ration, resource constraints meant that pulses, vegetable oil and their corresponding cash transfers remained at half rations. In December, 21 districts received assistance and in January, Rumphi, Mzimba and Ntchisi will also be included, meaning that all 24 food-insecure districts should receive assistance.

As the cropping season progresses, most areas continue to receive normal rainfall, so the early production outlook is shaping up positively, though yet to be ascertained. The previous two consecutive seasons were poor: 2015/16 was characterized by flooding, and 2016/17 saw prolonged and severe El Niño-induced dryness that decimated maize production.



Head of household

56% Female

44% Male

29

Mean
age of
respondents



Number of
Interviews:

1999



Wall Type:

19% Mud 23% Unbaked Brick

41% Baked Brick 17% Cement

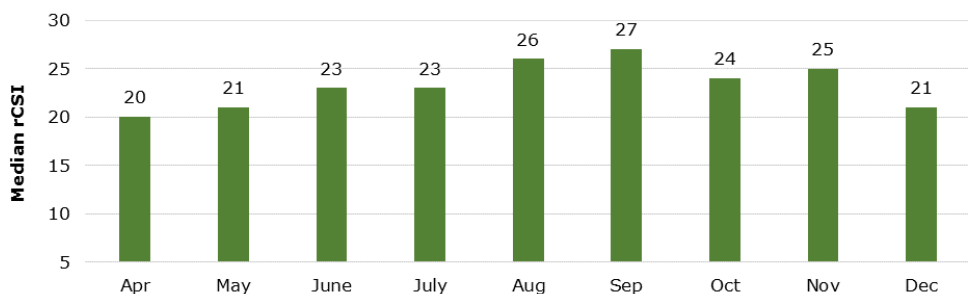


Negative coping levels fall across the country

The national median reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) fell from 25 in November to 21 in December, back to levels last seen in May 2016 (Figure 1). The proportion of households using at least one coping strategy reduced to 95.9 percent.

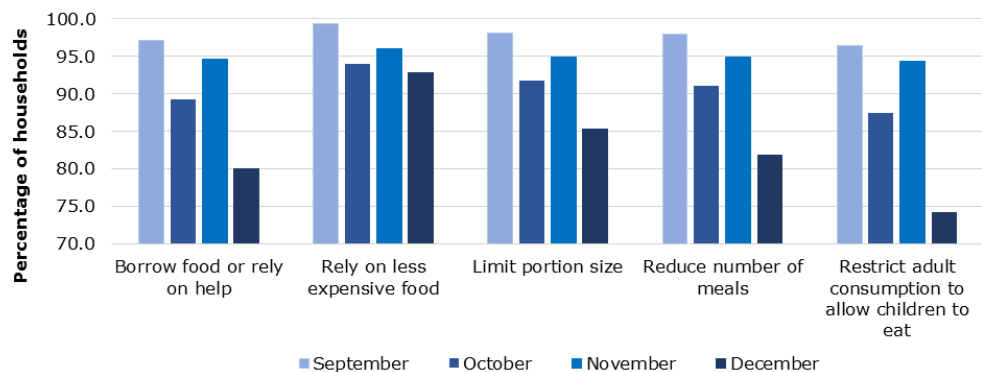
More importantly, the proportion of households using the most severe strategies dropped significantly compared to the previous round. The proportion borrowing food fell to 80 percent, compared to 94.7 percent in November and those restricting adult consumption so children can eat fell to 74.2 percent, compared to 94.3 percent in November. The most frequently used coping strategy remains relying on cheaper or less expensive food (Figure 2). At district level, median rCSI improved in Lilongwe in Central Region; in Blantyre, Mwanza, Neno, Balaka, Chikwawa and Nsanje in Southern Region; and in Mzimba, Karonga and Rumphi in Northern Region (Map 1).

Fig. 1. National median rCSI



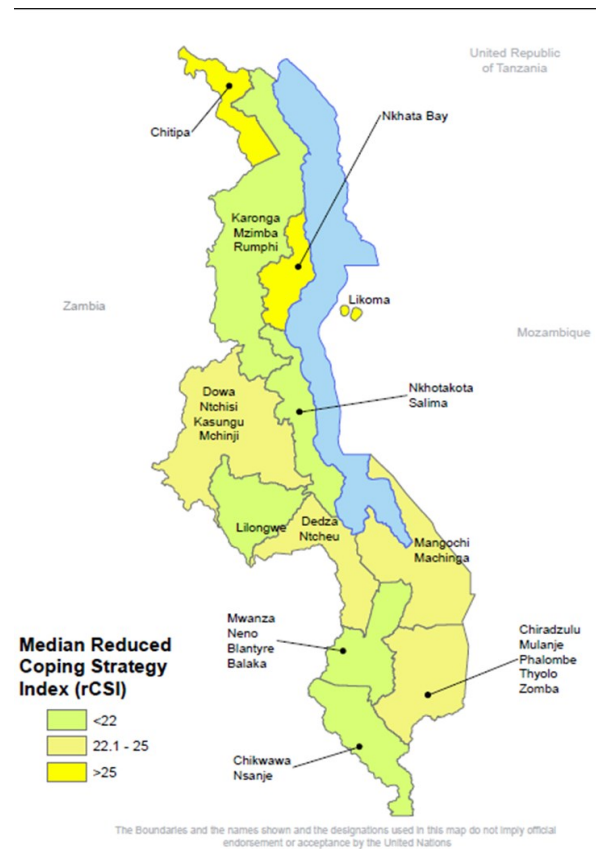
Source mVAM, December 2016

Fig. 2. Percentage of households using negative coping strategies



Source mVAM, December 2016

Map 1: Median rCSI by district aggregation



Source mVAM, December 2016

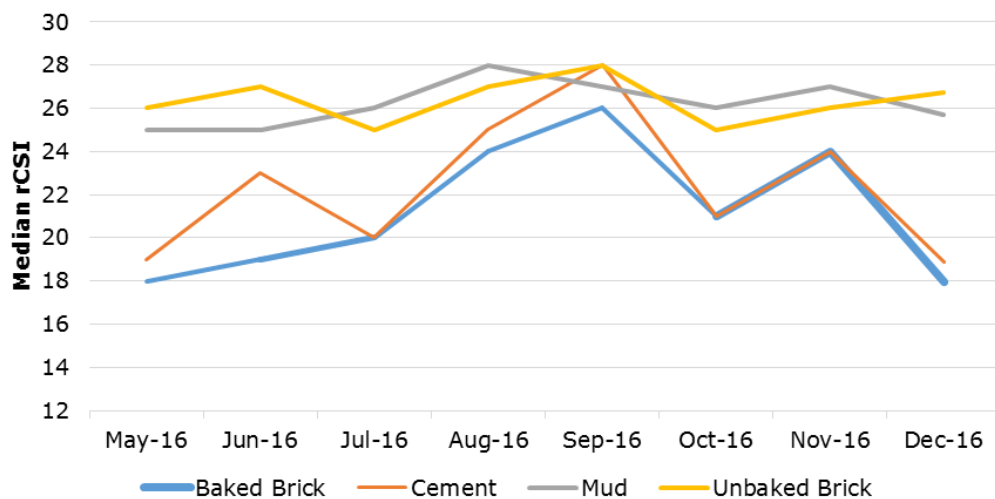


Negative coping remains high among worst-off households

Wall types are used as a proxy indicator to determine a household’s socio-economic status. Households who are worse off (those with mud or unbaked brick walls) continue to resort to more negative coping strategies than those who are better off (with cement or baked brick walls) (Figure 3).

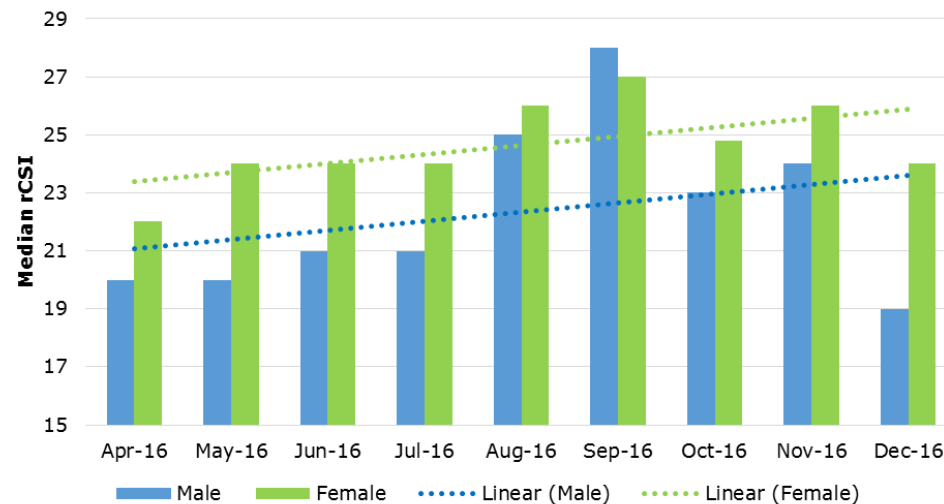
December results continue to confirm that households led by women are engaging more in negative coping strategies than those led by men (Figure 4). As seen in Figure 4, coping levels fell among households headed by men by a much greater amount than they did for households headed by women.

Figure 3: Median rCSI by wall type



Source: mVAM, December 2016

Figure 4: Median rCSI by sex of household head



Source: mVAM, December 2016



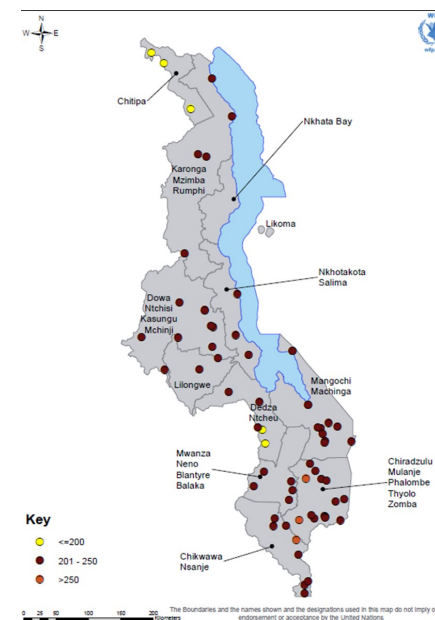


Humanitarian assistance and release of grain on the local market by private traders stabilizes maize prices

Nominal maize grain prices were stable on local markets at an average MWK235/kg in December. Although ADMARC markets were still open, consumers preferred buying from private traders whose prices are slightly lower than the ADMARC price of MWK250/kg. Across the 68 monitored markets, maize prices ranged between MWK190/kg and MWK260/kg, with relatively lower prices in the north and parts of the central regions compared to the south. The stability of maize prices is attributed to increased humanitarian response; in December, the relief programme reached 97 percent of the 6.7 million food-insecure people. The increase in the availability of the commodity on the local market as a result of the release of the grain by private traders who had been hoarding the commodity for speculative purposes is another factor. However, current maize prices are still 57 percent above the average a year ago and almost 100 percent higher than the three-year average price (Figure 5).

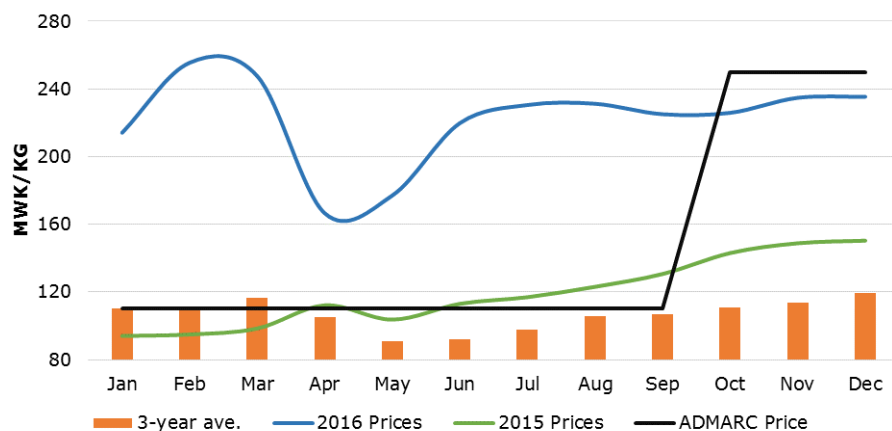
In December, beans continued to be more expensive in the south than in the central and northern regions. Overall, the average price of beans increased by 5 percent compared to November, while pigeon peas and cowpeas fell by 4 percent. The higher bean prices could be resulting from increased demand for them as seeds during the current cropping season. On average, beans cost MWK903/kg, pigeon peas cost MWK454/kg and cowpeas cost MWK544/kg (Figure 6).

Map 2: Maize prices (MWK/kg) in markets, 5 December to 9 December 2016



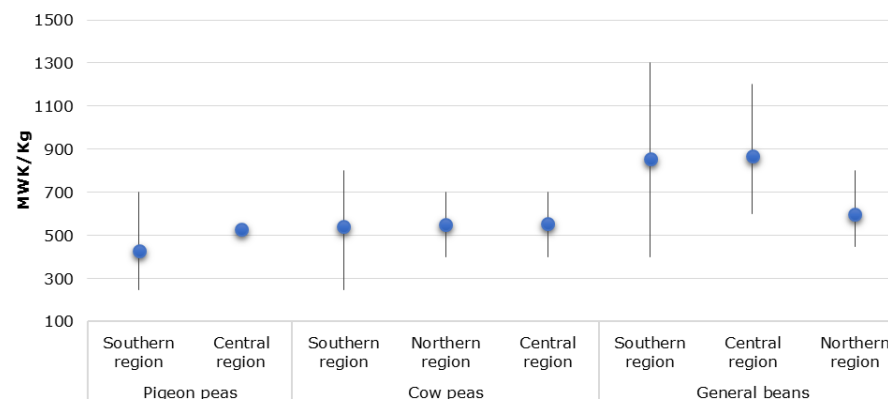
Source: mVAM, November 2016

Figure 5: Average maize price (MWK/kg) in 24 districts



Source: mVAM, December 2016

Figure 6: Pulses prices by region, 5 December to 9 December 2016



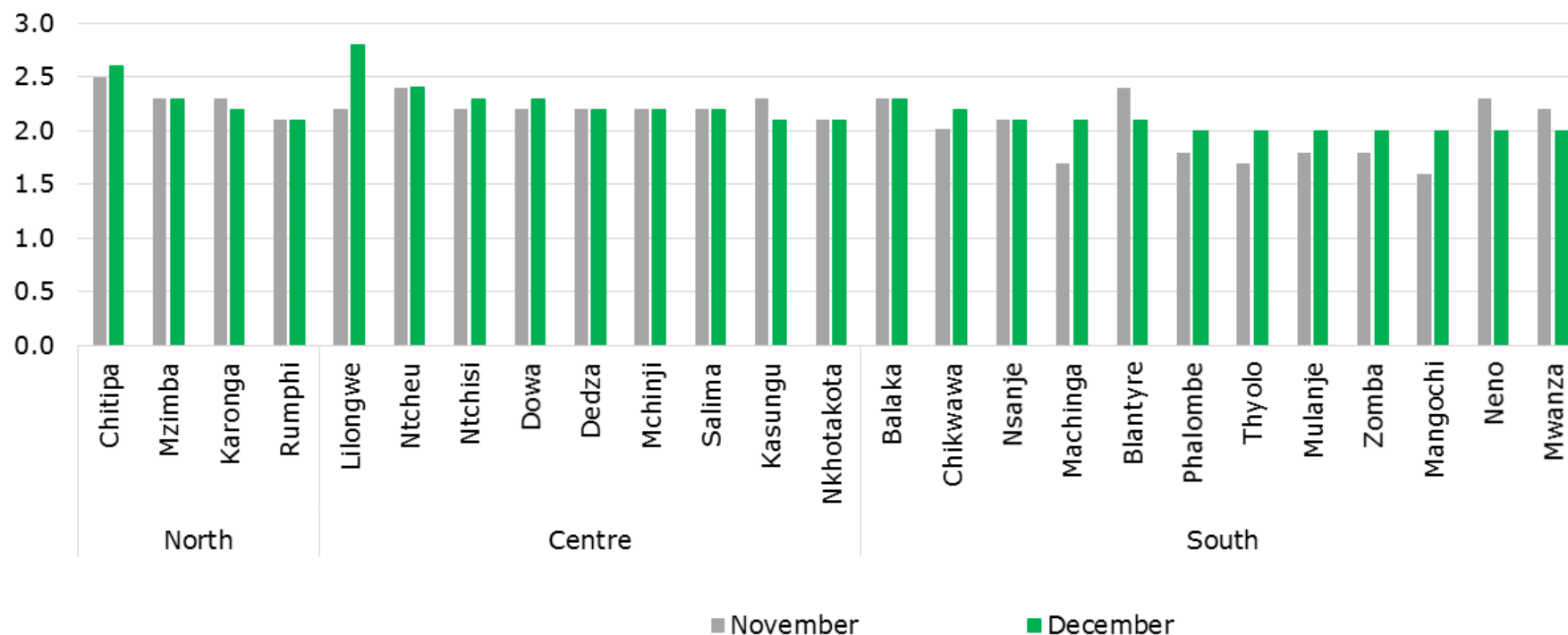
Source: mVAM, November 2016



Purchasing power improves across the country

The December national manual labour wage was MWK580, an increase of 25 percent compared to the previous month. Purchasing power (measured in kilograms of maize per day of labour) improved across the country except in Karonga in Northern Region; Kasungu in Central Region; and Blantyre, Neno and Mwanza in Southern Region. The improvement in purchasing power are mainly attributed to increased demand for manual labour as the maize cropping season nears its peak of activity, with weeding and fertilizer use.

Figure 7: Purchasing power by district (kg of maize per day's labour)



Source: mVAM, December 2016



New admissions increase in malnutrition treatment programmes

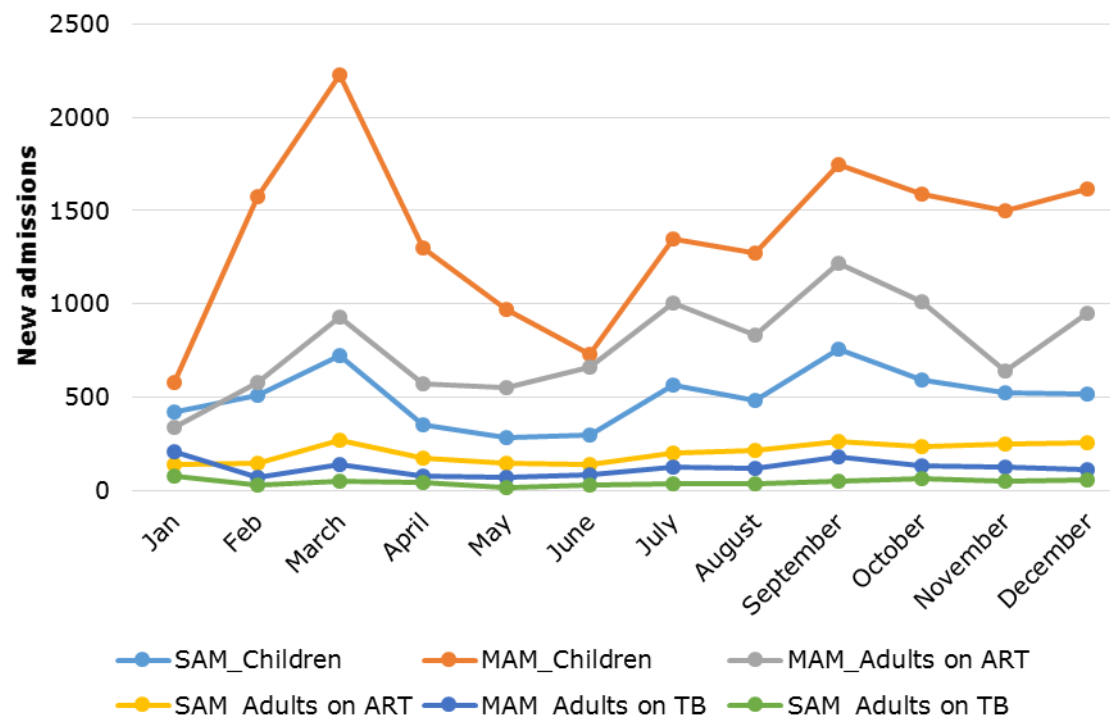
Nutrition monitoring in 70 sentinel sites in the areas most affected by El Niño-induced food insecurity continued in December 2016. The monthly mass screening exercise for children under 5 was carried out by UNICEF in 81 percent of the sentinel sites.

With the launch of mass screening in September 2016, new admissions in malnutrition treatment programmes for children, adolescents and adults increased. Between October and November, there was a decline in new admissions to treatment programmes. It is expected that after a huge mass screening, fewer cases will be seen, however, there are other key barriers that contributed to the decline. These include a lack of motivation by the mothers to take their children to facilities despite being referred, and the temporary lack of food stocks at facilities. To mitigate this, the Nutrition Cluster is enforcing measures to strengthen the screening and referral measures and ensuring the maintenance of a healthy pipeline for nutrition supplies.

In December, the supply situation had improved with nutrition supplies delivered in 77 percent of the sentinel sites at the time of data collection. WFP delivered all nutrition supplies needed to treat MAM in children, adolescents and adults by the end of December. This triggered an increase in new admissions and in people accessing services to treat MAM in children and to treat malnutrition in clients under NCST.

Figure 8 shows the trend in new admissions among different treatment components. Between November and December, new admissions for children with MAM increased by 7.8 percent, while those for MAM adolescents and adults on anti-retroviral therapy (ART) increased by 47.4 percent. New admissions of adolescents with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and adults on TB treatment increased by 12.2 percent.

Figure 8: Trends in new admissions Jan–Dec 2016 (41 sentinel sites from January–June and 70 sites from July–December)



Source: mVAM, December 2016

