



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

## Highlights

- In Lofa County, many households are continuing to resort to coping strategies in spite of the recent harvest.
- Local rice prices have dropped in all regions of Liberia, making rice more accessible to the general public. Despite falling wages, the purchasing power for local rice has improved.
- Data shows that Montserrado County is more food secure than other areas of Liberia.

**Map 1: Liberia - Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI)**

November 2014



Source: WFP mVAM

### Methodology

In Liberia, WFP switched from collecting data via Interactive Voice Response in October to using SMS in November. As such, a strict comparison cannot be made between round one and round two results, except for Lofa County, which was surveyed by SMS in both October and November. During round two data collection, 800 households were surveyed. For more information on mVAM's data collection methods, visit the [mVAM website](#).

### rCSI: Highest rCSI levels reported in Lofa and south-eastern counties

The rCSI expresses the frequency and severity of the coping strategies that households use to access food. Data shows that rCSI levels in many areas of Liberia in November are lower than in the previous month. However, as explained, these results should be interpreted with caution because of the change in data collection method between rounds. Even so, the lower rCSI scores could reflect an improvement in food security thanks to the harvest and the end of the state of emergency.

After round one, Lofa County (where SMS were used to collect the data for both rounds) has experienced little change in rCSI, falling only slightly from 21.7 to 20.9 ( $p=0.61$ ). Given that Lofa is a rice-producing area, an elevated rCSI level during the November harvest may be indicative of worsening food security.

<sup>1</sup> The rCSI captures the severity and frequency of consumption-related coping strategies. The more strategies households implement, the higher the rCSI.

Round two data suggests that the lowest rCSI level is in Montserrado County (mean rCSI = 15.9), where fewer new Ebola virus disease (EVD) cases were reported last month. In contrast, rCSI levels are high in the central (rCSI=17.8), western (rCSI=18.4), and south-eastern (rCSI=18.7) regions of the country. These divergences in rCSI may indicate that urban households (those in/around Monrovia, Montserrado County) are likely better off than those in rural areas. According to a recent [UNDP policy note](#), remote communities have felt the burden of price movements more than urban communities, leading to worsened livelihoods and deepening inequalities between urban and rural households. In addition, given the low number of EVD cases in the south-eastern region, the elevated rCSI for November may indicate chronic food insecurity.

### EVD trends in Liberia

The highest number of cumulative EVD cases have been registered in Montserrado (3,636), Margibi (1,137) and Lofa (623) counties. The South East has been somewhat less affected. As of November, the epidemic has been slowing, and the state of emergency has been lifted. (Source: [WHO](#))

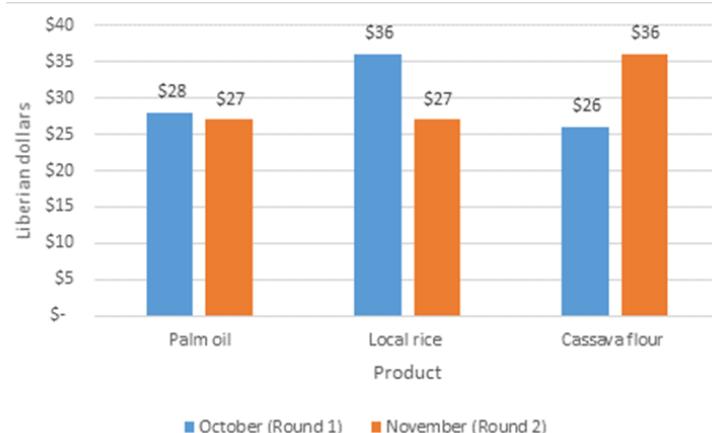
### Food prices

Data shows that the price of local rice decreased across Liberia from October to November: this is to be expected as the rice harvest is currently underway. Lofa County – a rice-producing area – experienced the largest price decrease from \$L40 to \$L30 per cup. Although local rice prices have fallen, the price of a 50kg bag of imported rice has remained largely constant between round one and round two, at an average price of \$L3,050.

While palm oil prices have generally remained stable at around \$L27 per pint, cassava flour prices have risen from \$L22 in round one to \$L36 in round two. However, this increase is in line with expected seasonal fluctuations. In the south-eastern region of Liberia, cassava flour prices peaked at \$L39 in round two, the highest in the country.

### Average commodity prices

**Figure 1—Comparison of October and November Average Prices for Basic Commodities**



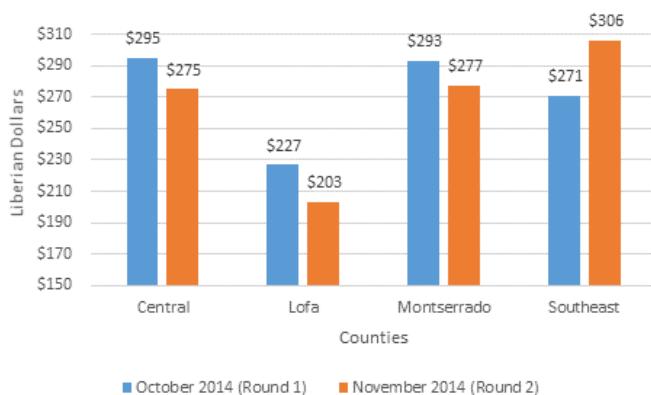
Source: WFP mVAM

### Manual labour wages

Manual labour wages have not changed drastically between rounds one and two. However, in Lofa, where the harvest should have led to higher wage levels, mean wages have decreased from \$L230 to \$L203. They remain the lowest in the country.

## Mean daily manual labour wage

Figure 2—Comparison of Manual Labour Wages for October and November



Source: WFP mVAM

Secondary data indicates that the EVD outbreak has affected labour markets. Over the last few months, many households across the country have lost some of their income sources, lowering their purchasing power. A [Mercy Corps report](#) published in November 2014 indicates that 66 percent of households reported a decrease in household income, 94 percent of whom said this reduction was abnormal at this time of year.

### Terms of trade

Throughout Liberia, terms of trade for local rice increased from round one to round two, meaning more local rice can be bought with a labourer's daily wage. This is likely because of the ongoing rice harvest, which has led to decreases in local rice prices. In October 2014, a day labourer's wage in Lofa County was equivalent to 5 cups of local rice; in November, the same wage equated to 7 cups of local rice. Nevertheless, Lofa remains the county with the lowest food purchasing power, in line with October 2014 findings. This is true for local rice, imported rice, palm oil and cassava flour. Recent findings from the Liberia Food Security Cluster identify Lofa County as being one of the areas most-affected by EVD.

## Conclusions

While November rCSI data shows that households across Liberia are implementing fewer and/or less severe coping strategies, it is difficult to predict whether this perceived improvement in food security will continue. The latest trends indicate a slowdown in the spread of EVD. The state of emergency has been lifted, allowing for greater mobility across Liberia. This may lead to improved trade and the re-opening of markets but it could also increase the potential spread of EVD.

It is unclear how far the harvest will improve food security. While many households will benefit from improved access to food through lower prices and own production, the quarantine measures still in place will probably continue to affect trade and livelihoods. The fact that an elevated level of negative coping continues to be observed in food surplus-producing Lofa County illustrates this risk. The reopening of cross-border markets would help sustain cash crop sales and the casual labour market in the coming months.



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mVAM data can also be accessed at: [data.hdx.rwlabs.org](http://data.hdx.rwlabs.org)