



Liberia

January 2015: Households are using fewer negative coping strategies in Monrovia

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

Highlights

- **Households in Monrovia used fewer coping strategies in January than in December. However, negative coping levels remained high in Lofa and Bong counties. Poorer households and households headed by women are the most food insecure.**
- **Local and domestic rice prices were stable in January, and wage levels improved. As the land preparation season begins (January-May), labour and agricultural input markets should continue to be monitored to assess prospects for the 2015 crop.**

Map 1: Liberia — Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) - January 2015



Source: WFP mVAM

Methodology

January 2015 marked the fourth round of data collection. The data was collected over a week in mid-January. The sample size was increased to provide more granular estimates: 1,100 questionnaires were collected by SMS. Details on the samples, questions and possible mode effects are available [online](#).

January 2015: Ebola continues to affect north-western Liberia

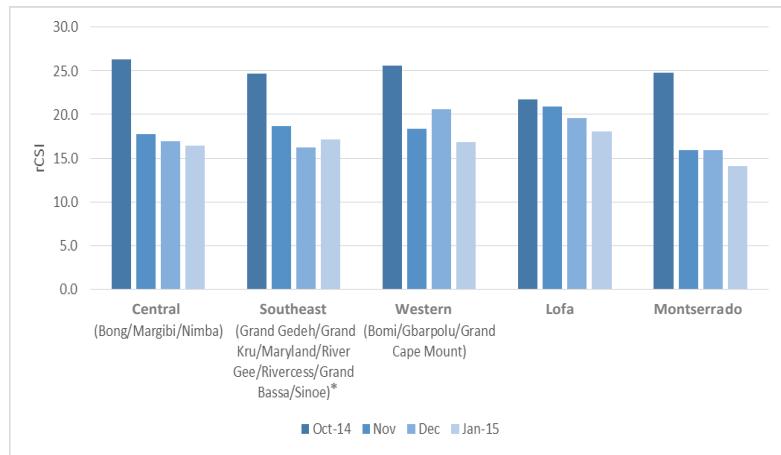
In Liberia, four confirmed cases were reported from Montserrado, the district that includes the capital, Monrovia, in the week to 25 January.

Source: [WHO Ebola Situation Report 28 January](#)

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.

As shown in Figure 1, coping levels have eased in Monrovia (rCSI=14.1, p=0.03), the most populous area of the country. Thanks to the new sampling strategy adopted for round 4, we are able to present data at the county level for more areas.

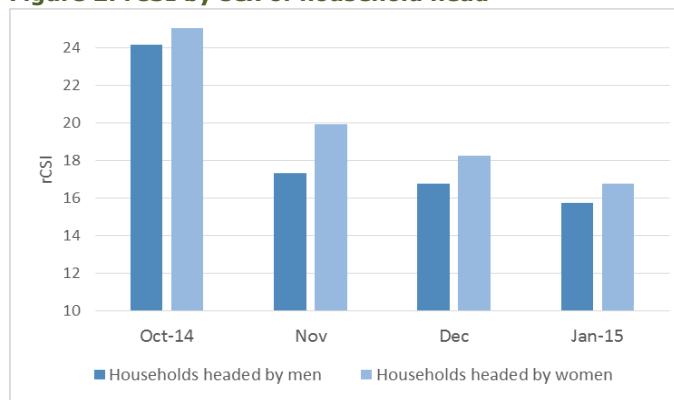
Figure 1: rCSI levels



Source: WFP mVAM

shows, households with access to their own or a shared flush toilet, 15.9 for a shared flush toilet) than those with other latrine types (rCSI above 20 for dirt pit latrine and 'bush').

Figure 2: rCSI by sex of household head



Source : WFP mVAM

Food prices

According to WFP data for January, the price of local rice was stable.

Many respondents in Liberia said that the recent harvest had improved food supply. Interestingly, respondents from low-income households tended to emphasize high prices and low purchasing power. "Food is not hard to find, but families can't afford anything to eat," reported a male respondent in Montserrat. Respondents from households with higher incomes tended to offer a more positive outlook on food security in their community. One of them told us "the food situation in my community is not bad, it is just that prices are not stable."

At this time of year, palm oil sales are a complementary income source for rural households. In line with seasonal trends, palm oil prices fell by 11 percent in Liberia in January.

Wages recover in Liberia

Daily wage rates increased in all areas in January, ranging between \$L200 and \$L270. Daily wages are above \$L250 everywhere except in Lofa, where they remain low at an average of \$L205. Wage rates have rebounded strongly in western Liberia, after being hit by movement restrictions in December. In general, the improvement in wage rates is thought to be seasonal: harvesting activities have ended and threshing is now taking place, a labour-intensive occupation that commands higher wages.

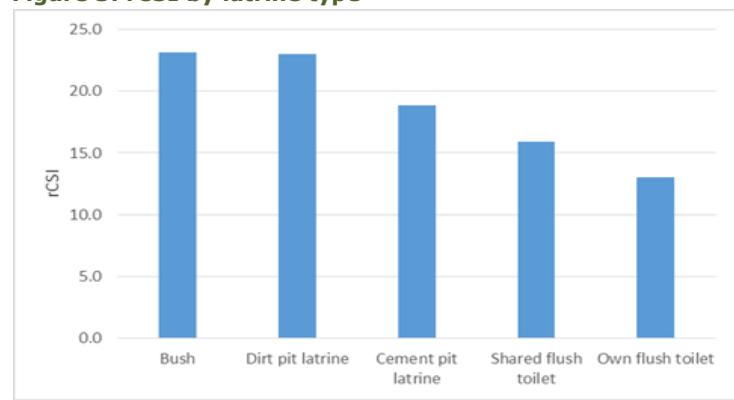
The analysis shows that negative coping levels remained high in the counties of Lofa (rCSI=18.1), Bong (rCSI=18.4) and Maryland/Grand Kru (rCSI=19). Lofa and Bong were hard hit by the Ebola virus disease epidemic. While the Ebola caseload has now declined in these areas, food insecurity remains a concern.

Households headed by women and poorer households are worse off

The data collected over the four monthly rounds has consistently shown that households headed by women engage in more severe coping strategies than those headed by men (see Figure 2).

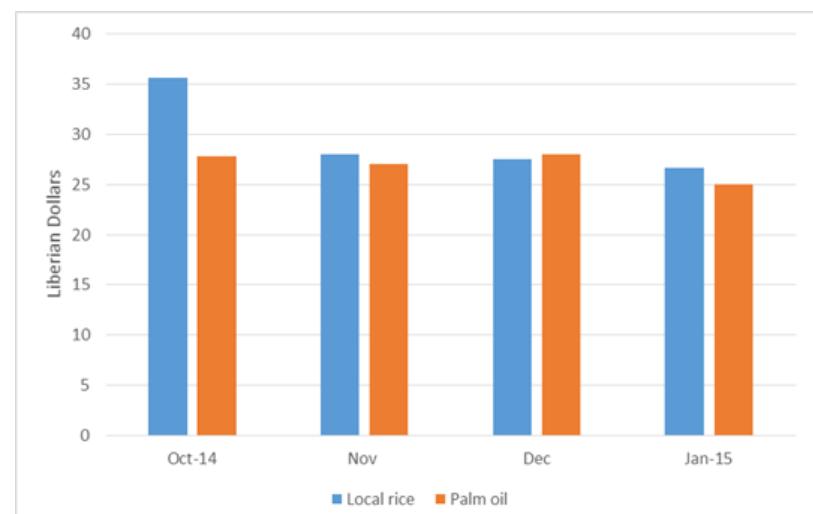
More deprived households also appear to show higher levels of negative coping. In Liberia, households were asked about their latrine type, as this is a proxy for household wealth. As Figure 3

Figure 3: rCSI by latrine type



Source : WFP mVAM

Figure 4: Prices of local rice (1 cup) and palm oil (1 pint)

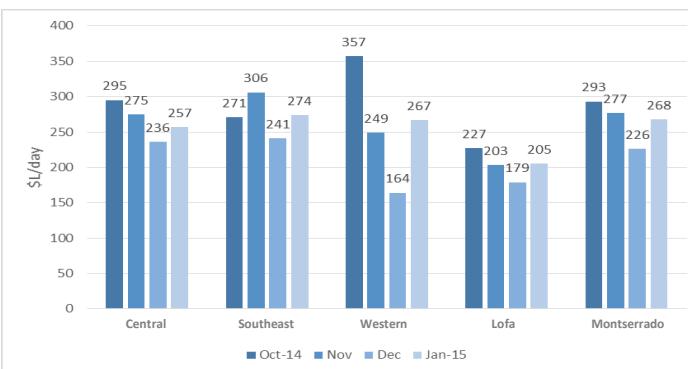


Source : WFP mVAM

The impact of Ebola on Liberian labour markets has been documented in recent [World Bank phone surveys](#), which show that non-farming self-employed wage earners and women are bearing the brunt of the socio-economic consequences of the epidemic.

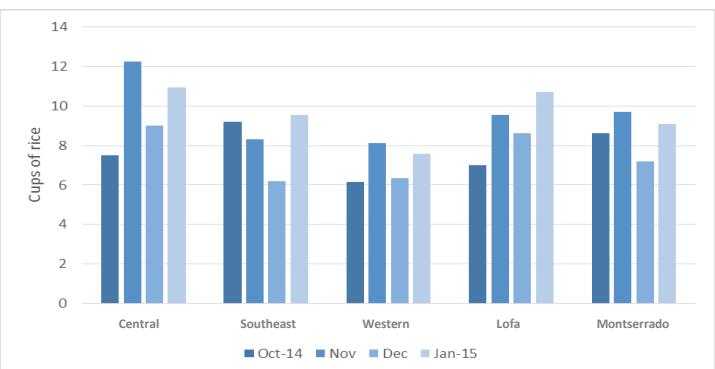
Terms of trade improved in all monitored areas in January, thanks to a recovery in wage rates and stable rice prices, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 5: Wage rates, unskilled labour in \$L/day



Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 6: Terms of trade, wages to rice (cups of local rice)



Source: WFP mVAM

Perceptions of food security in January

During the survey, 60 percent of respondents took the opportunity to describe their perception of food security in their community. The following word cloud illustrates the terms most commonly found in their responses.

Responses were divided between people who thought the food security situation was good and those who were worried about it. Those who were concerned cited high food prices, rather than food scarcity, as the main problem. Less well-off households tended to be more pessimistic about their community's food security.

In the words of the respondents:

- “Because of Ebola, most of us were not working.” – female respondent in Maryland.
- “Food is not hard to find, but families can't afford anything to eat.” – male respondent in Montserrado.
- “The food situation in my community is not bad, it is just that prices are not stable.” – male respondent in Montserrado.

Figure 7: Key terms used by respondents to describe their community's food security situation



Conclusion and Outlook

Food security improved in January with households resorting to fewer negative coping strategies, especially in Monrovia. Nonetheless, households continued to use negative coping strategies in Lofa, a county that was relatively food secure before the epidemic. This suggests that in some areas, communities are still recovering from the Ebola crisis. The data has consistently shown that poorer households and those headed by women are worse off than others.

Labour markets seem to be recovering in Liberia, which should support household incomes over the coming months. On-the-ground assessments should seek to determine whether farmers will have access to the inputs and casual labour needed to prepare their land for the 2015 agricultural season.



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To download mVAM data on the Ebola-affected countries, please visit: http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/index.html