

mVAM Food Security and Markets Update: Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone: February 2016

Key messages

- February marks the end of the rice cultivation season and peak agricultural activity in the region. Household food security levels measured through the rCSI are virtually identical to those measured in December 2015.
- In Liberia and Sierra Leone, the average national rCSIs have improved since last year, February 2015. In Guinea, the rCSI has also improved compared to June 2015.
- At the end of the rice harvest season, prices of rice are slightly higher in February 2016 compared to December 2015 in Guinea and Sierra Leone.
- In Liberia and Sierra Leone, comparing prices from February 2015 to February 2016, commodity prices have not increased considerably while manual labour wages have risen approximately 10%. As a result, average household purchasing power, measured in terms of trade, have improved since last year.

Figure 1: Average rCSI levels, February 2016



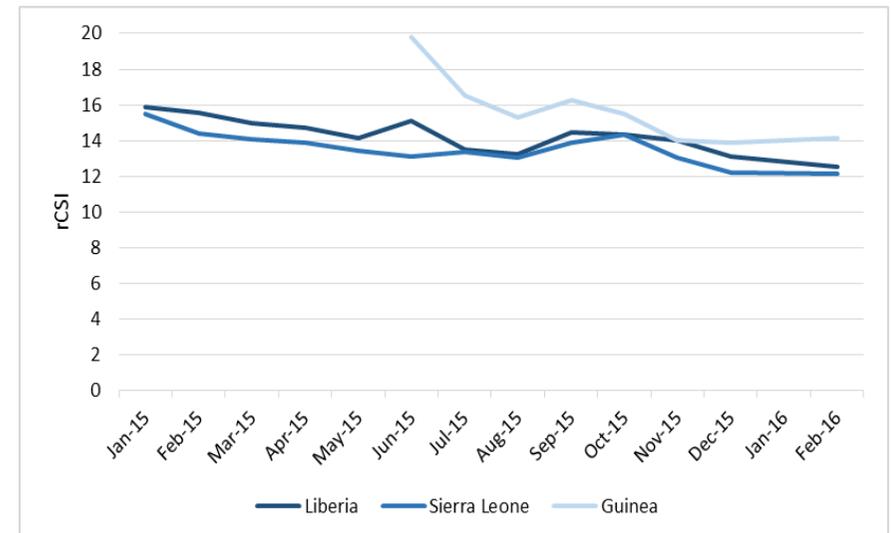
Coping Strategies

The Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) measures the frequency and severity of the mechanisms households employ when faced with food shortages such as skipping meals. A higher score indicates households are resorting to more frequent and/or severe negative coping strategies. Detailed information on the rCSI can be found [here](#).

Starting September 2015, with the end of the lean-season, coping improved gradually across the three countries. Improvements in coping have since leveled-off as coping levels are nearly identical in December 2015 and February 2016. There are no statistically significant differences in the rCSI or duration of specific coping strategies at national, sub-national levels or wealth groups. Changes in the rCSI by gender (sex of head of household) are also not appreciably different from December though as normally seen in all three countries, female headed households have higher average negative coping levels than male headed households .

Household food security, measured by the rCSI, has improved since last year. Comparing median rCSI scores from February 2015 to February 2016 there has been improvement in median rCSI scores in Liberia (from 14 to 11) and Sierra Leone, (from 13 to 10). In Guinea, median rCSI scores have improved considerably, comparing June 2015 (19.2) to February (12.4). (all reported rCSI scores use $p < 0.05$, Mann-Whitney test).

Figure 2: rCSI by Country January 2015–February 2016



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Prices, Wages and Terms of Trade

Corresponding with the end of the rice harvest season, prices of rice have increased slightly since December 2015. In Guinea, the price of local rice in February 2016 is 2% higher while the price of imported rice is 2% higher in Sierra Leone. Daily wages for manual labor did not change significantly from December 2015 to February 2016 neither consequently did terms of trade.

Guinea: In Guinea, comparing June 2015 to February 2016, prices have increased slightly (+2% local rice, +1% imported rice, +4% palm oil). With little change to manual daily labour wages, terms of trade for labour to commodities have not improved since June 2015.

Liberia: Comparing prices and wages in February 2015 to February in Liberia, price differences are not statistically significant while manual labour wages have increased 11%. As a result, terms of trade have improved on average 10% for households.

Sierra Leone: In Sierra Leone, the price of palm-oil has increased 6% while wages have increased 9%. Terms of trade have improved 9% for wages to imported rice and 10% for wages to local rice. (all reported price figures use $p < 0.05$, Welch's t-test).

Figure 3: Food prices: Guinea, Jun.15—Feb. 16

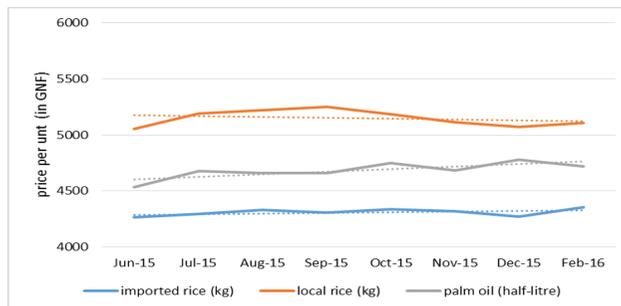


Figure 4: Food prices: Liberia, Jan.15—Feb. 16

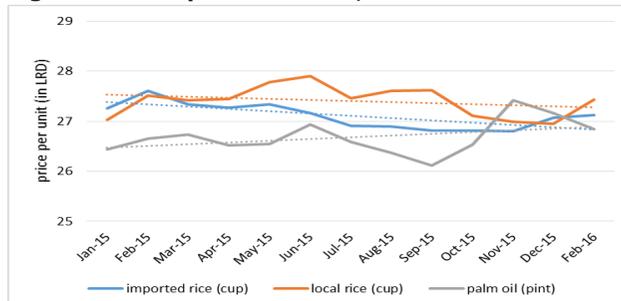
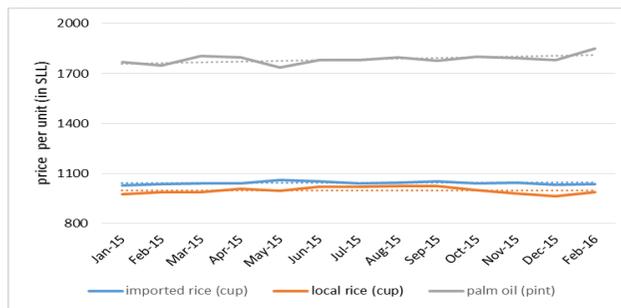
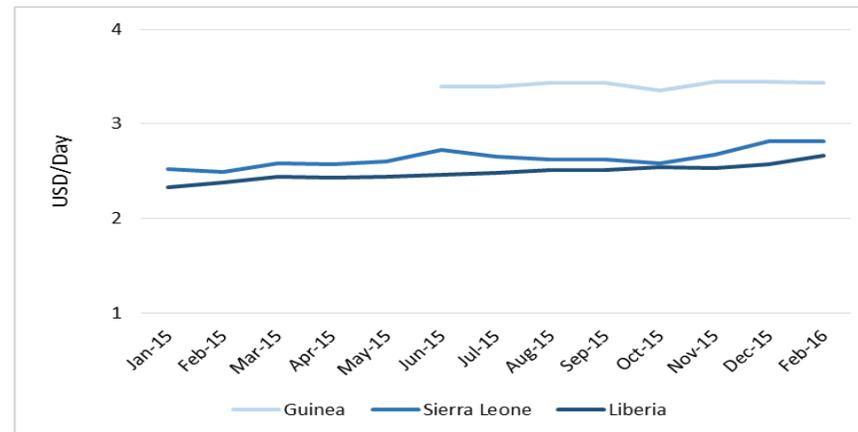


Figure 5: Food prices: Sierra Leone, Jan.15—Feb. 16



(dashed lines illustrate linear trend)

Figure 6: Manual Daily Labour Wages, Jan.15—Feb. 16



(exchange rate to the US dollar at December 31, 2014 : <http://www.oanda.com/currency/historical-rates/>)

Perceptions of Food Security in February

When asked about the overall food security situation in their community, respondents noted: insufficient work opportunities and underemployment; poor transportation networks causing an increase in prices, ability to purchase and sell food. Many participants also mentioned the high cost of meats and condiments and noted that the farmers have finished their harvesting of rice.

Figure 7: Word Cloud, February 2016



Methodology: February 2016 marked the 16th round of remote monitoring using SMS data collection. In Liberia, 1,150 surveys were completed on 12 February; in Sierra Leone, 1,020 surveys were completed between 12-14 February and in Guinea, 945 surveys were completed between 12-15 February. Participants were randomly selected from a database of mobile subscribers and were asked socio-demographic questions, a module on coping behaviors, prices of 3 commodities and manual labour wages as well as an open-ended question on food security. When interpreting results, readers are cautioned to consider response bias as well as biases towards better-off and literate households. Additional information on methodology is available [online](#).

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