Food security continues to deteriorate

Key points:

- Food security is worsening as the peak hunger season approaches.
- Almost all respondents are using negative coping strategies: over 62 percent are resorting to the most severe strategies.
- There have been maize grain shortages in some markets.

Situation Update

An urban assessment in October 2016 revealed that 31 percent of the urban population in Zimbabwe is food insecure. The largest food-insecure population was recorded in Matabeleland North (including the Lake Kariba aggregation) for both the rural and the urban livelihoods assessment.

This region also had two of the four districts with a Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) prevalence above 10 percent: Kariba (17.3 percent) and Binga (11 percent).
Negative coping levels increase

Nationally, the percentage of respondents who used at least one negative coping strategy rose from 94.3 percent in August to 95.7 percent in October, signalling an increase in stress within households. The reduced coping strategies index (rCSI) measures the behaviours adopted by households when they have difficulty in meeting their food needs. The food security situation worsened in October as the national median rCSI increased from 15 in August to 17 in October. While the index did not change for households headed by women, there was an increase in the stress faced by households headed by men, bringing their median rCSI to 17 compared to 14 in August (Figure 1).

Almost two thirds are resorting to the most severe coping strategies

The most common strategies applied by people when they could not access enough food were i) relying on less preferred and less expensive food and ii) eating smaller portions. However, as seen in Figure 2, almost two thirds of respondents across Zimbabwe reported using the most severe coping strategy of restricting food consumed by adults so that young children have enough to eat. The proportion of respondent households limiting portion sizes and those reducing the number of meals eaten in a day increased significantly from August.
Those worse off are using more negative coping strategies

Toilet types are used as a proxy indicator to establish a household’s socio-economic status. Similar to August, the worst-off households (those without a toilet or with pit latrines) showed significantly higher stress compared to better-off households (those with flush toilets or Blair pit latrines) (Figure 3).

Maize grain most expensive in Chipinge district

In October, food prices were collected from the main markets of seven districts. Only four of the markets were selling maize grain, and prices were highest in Chipinge, where a 20-litre bucket of maize grain (17.5kg) was selling for an average price of US$6.30. Prices were lowest in the main market of Mwenezi district, with traders quoting US$5.50 for 20 litres of maize grain, US$5.00 for 10kg of maize meal and US$4.00 for 20 litres of sorghum. Some traders reported a shortage of cereals.
Food shortages and lack of income opportunities

“Food is scarce, the little available is not nutritious, we eat few meals a day.”

- Male aged 33, Tsholotsho district

“Food is not in short supply only the means to buy it is the major problem.”

- Female aged 26, Hwange urban district

“People are not eating a well-balanced diet. We miss eating meat, eggs.”

- Female aged 36, Bindura district

“One meal a day is common.”

- Male aged 43, Hurungwe district

The highest prices for maize meal and sugar beans were in Binga. The price of 2 litres of vegetable oil ranged from US$3.31 in Rushinga to US$3.43 in Bikita.

Source: mVAM October 2016

Table 1: Food prices for October 2016 (USD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Maize grain</th>
<th>Maize meal</th>
<th>Sorghum</th>
<th>Sugar beans</th>
<th>Cooking oil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bikita</td>
<td>Nyika</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binga</td>
<td>Binga</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulawayo</td>
<td>Renkini</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chipinge</td>
<td>Checheche</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwenezi</td>
<td>Rutenga</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rushinga</td>
<td>Rushinga</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zvishavane</td>
<td>Mandava</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: mVAM October 2016

Figure 6: Word Cloud
Methodology

Since August 2016, mVAM has been conducting household interviews across Zimbabwe using the short message service (SMS) system. Previously, data was collected using interactive voice response (IVR) systems: the current and future rounds of SMS data will not be comparable to the IVR data. In October, 2,014 respondents were interviewed, randomly selected from a national database of mobile subscribers. The country has been divided into 16 district aggregations derived from ZimVAC 2016 food and nutrition prevalence rates for the household survey (Map 1). The SMS survey 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$0.50 was given to respondents who successfully completed the survey.

Market survey

Live call interviews were carried out with 43 traders in the main markets of each of the following districts: Bikita, Binga, Bulawayo, Chipinge, Mwenezi, Rushinga and Zvishavane. Around 88 percent of the interviewees were formal and informal retailers, 7 percent were both retailers and wholesalers, and 5 percent were wholesalers. Prices were collected for maize grain, sorghum, maize meal, sugar beans and cooking oil.