

Food insecurity persists

Key points:



Over half of rural households continue to use the most severe negative coping strategies



Over two thirds of socio-economically worst-off households are buying food on credit



A little over half the traders have stocks of basic foods



Average maize meal prices are 7 percent higher than one year ago



WFP/Richard Lee

Seasonal Outlook

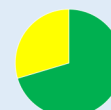
From October to December, the northern districts of Lesotho – Butha-Buthe, Leribe and Berea – received normal to above-normal rainfall. The other districts received normal to below-normal rain. From January to March, rainfall is expected to be average across Lesotho and some places are likely to receive above-average rainfall. There will still be dry spells but these will be interspersed with good rains.



929 Interviews



**Average
age of
respondents**



Head of household

Female: 27%

Male: 73%



Environment

Urban: 17%

Rural: 83%



Higher levels of negative coping in southern and mountain districts

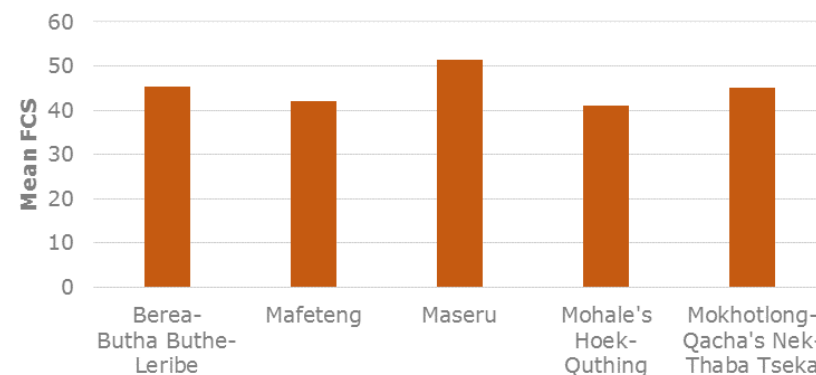
The proportion of households employing at least one negative food-related coping strategy fell from 92 percent in November to 88 percent in December. Households in southern and mountain districts continued to show higher stress: the northern districts (Butha-Buthe, Leribe, Berea and Maseru) had better food consumption scores (FCS) and lower levels of coping (**Figures 1 and 2**). Even so, the percentage of households using coping strategies decreased in the southern aggregation of Mohale's Hoek and Quthing.

Methodology

In December 2016, mVAM conducted household food security monitoring using live telephone interviews. The data presented here were collected through a call centre from a sample of 929 respondents from 10 districts. Participants were randomly selected from a national database of mobile subscribers. An airtime credit incentive of US\$0.50 (M7.00) was provided to respondents who successfully completed the survey.

The questionnaire collected data on demographics, food assistance, household food consumption and coping strategies. A final open-ended question gave respondents the chance to share additional information on the food situation in their communities. The data was weighted by the number of mobile phones owned by the household and district population estimates. In addition, food price data were collected between 16 and 20 December from a sample of 60 traders across the 10 districts. Because of network coverage issues, some traders were not reachable. The survey questions focused on the prices of the basic foods eaten by an average household in Lesotho, and indicators of market functioning.

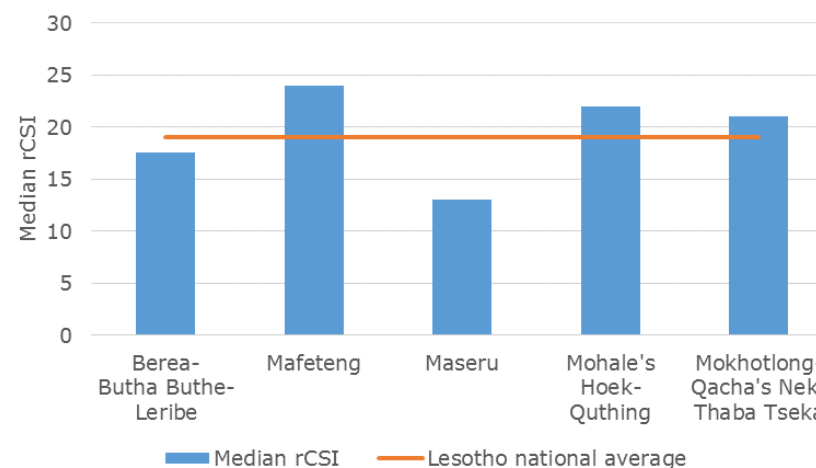
Figure 1: Mean FCS by district aggregation



Source: mVAM, December 2016

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Figure 2: Median reduced coping strategies index (rCSI) by district aggregation



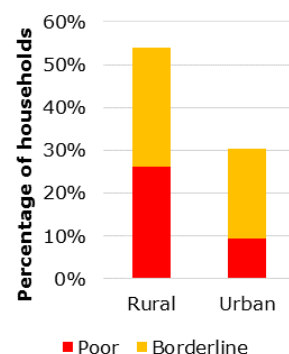
Source: mVAM, December 2016



High use of the most severe coping strategies in rural areas

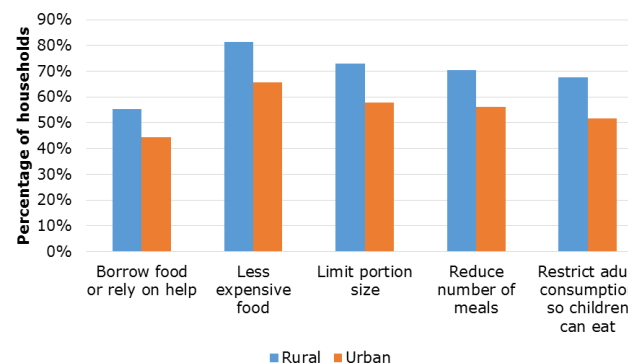
As shown in Figure 3, inadequate food consumption was more prevalent in rural areas than in urban settings. A higher share of rural households also reported using negative food-related coping strategies (Figure 4). Over half of rural households were using the most severe coping strategies of borrowing food and of restricting adult food consumption so that children can eat. Similarly, coping levels continued to be higher among households headed by women (rCSI =22) compared to those headed by men (rCSI=17).

Figure 3: Inadequate food consumption by rural/urban



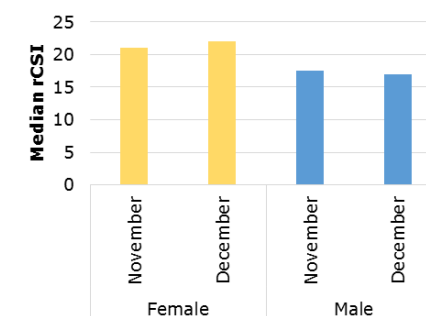
Source: mVAM, December 2016

Figure 4: Use of negative food-related coping strategies by urban/rural



Source: mVAM, December 2016

Figure 5: Median rCSI by sex of household head



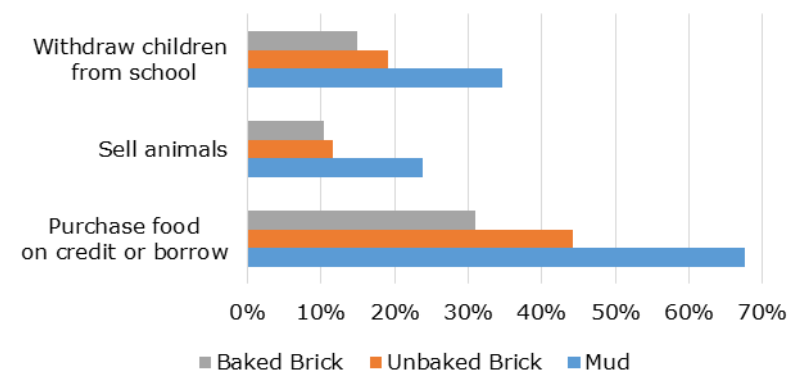
Source: mVAM, December 2016



High livelihood coping levels among worse-off households

The wall type of a household's dwelling is used as a proxy indicator to determine their socio-economic status. The use of negative livelihood coping strategies was more prevalent among the worst-off households (those with mud walls); these strategies have a much longer term negative impact than food-related coping strategies. More than two thirds of households with mud walls reported borrowing or purchasing food on credit compared to less than one third of the better-off households (those with baked brick walls). Less than 15 percent of better-off households withdrew children from school compared to 35 percent of those worst off (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Use of livelihoods coping strategies by wall type



Source: mVAM, December 2016



Subsidized maize meal, peas and sugar beans available in most markets

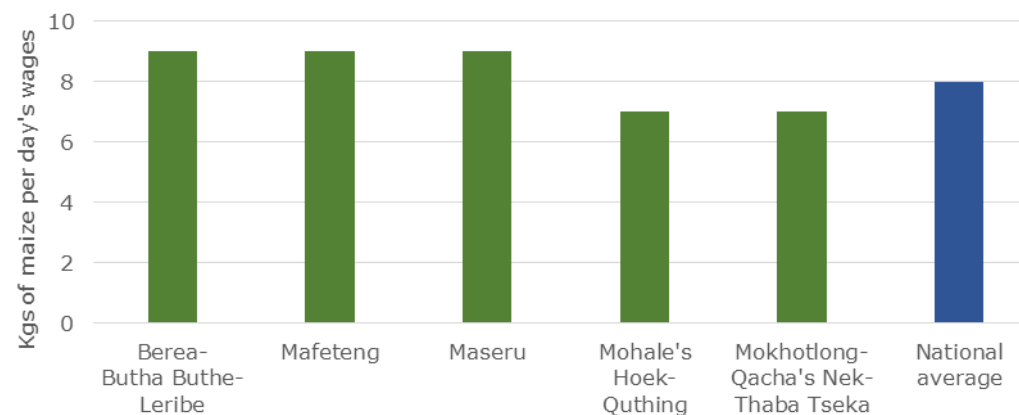
In December, more than half the traders had stocks of maize meal, wheat flour, pulses, cooking oil, sugar and salt. Half of the traders complained about increasing prices. Around 82 percent of them continued to order stock weekly, while the rest were ordering less frequently. Maize meal was sourced within the districts of operation by 57 percent of traders, followed by 33 percent who sourced in other districts in Lesotho. Over half the traders took 1-2 days to receive the stock after placing an order, while the rest could take up to 10 days. Around 60 percent of traders reported having subsidized stocks of maize meal, beans and peas. Other traders did not have these stocks because of low customer demand.



Lower purchasing power in southern and mountain districts

The national average manual labour rate was M47.00 in December. Purchasing power – measured by the quantity of maize meal a household can buy with a day's earnings from manual labour – ranged between 7 kg and 9 kg across the districts (Figure 7). Northern households have higher purchasing power than those in the mountains and most of the south. However, manual labour activities are not carried out daily: they are occasional sources of income depending on the area and the availability of such opportunities.

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



Source: mVAM, December 2016



Stable prices for maize meal, wheat flour and pulses

December mVAM data shows that average maize meal prices remained stable at M73.00/12.5 kg (Figure 8). Lower prices continued to be recorded in most of the lowland districts (M59.00–M75.00), while prices were slightly higher in mountain districts (M78.00–M81.00). December maize meal prices were above the five-year average (2011–2015) by 24 percent; they were 7 percent higher than in December 2015 (Figure 9).

The national average price of wheat flour has remained stable since October. In December, wheat flour prices ranged between M87.00–M94.00 (Figure 10).

The national average prices for beans and peas have also remained fairly stable since October at M9.00/500 g (Figures 11a and 11b). Subsidized sugar beans have maintained prices similar to regular sugar beans, ranging from M7.00 to M13.00 per 500 g across the districts. A drop in prices was reported in most districts in November, possibly because of the ongoing monitoring of subsidy implementation that month. In December, prices in Thaba-Tseka and Mokhotlong rose compared to November. This might have been observed because of the low compliance by traders after monitoring ceased.

Figure 10: Average prices of wheat flour
(in maloti per 12.5 kg)

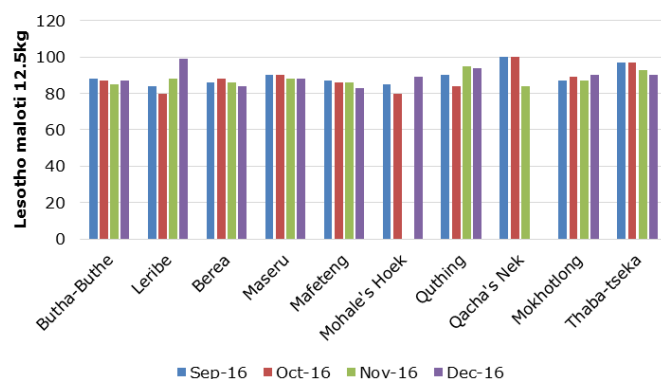
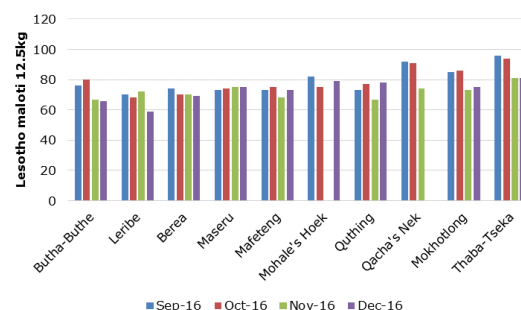
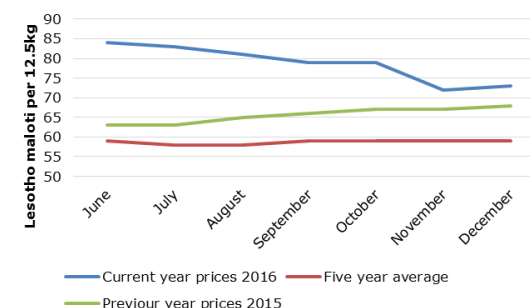


Figure 8: Average prices of maize meal
(in maloti per 12.5 kg)



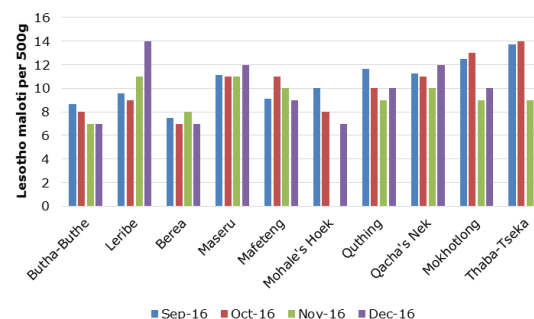
Source: mVAM, December 2016

Figure 9: Average prices of maize meal (in maloti per 12.5 kg), compared to 2015 and the five-year average



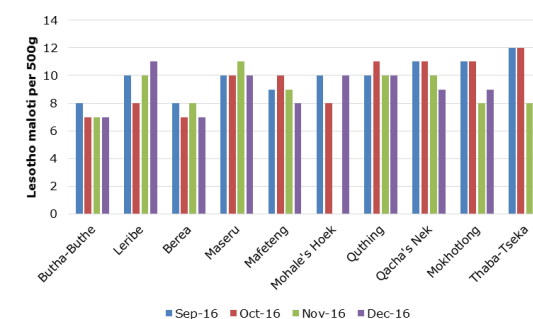
Source: mVAM, December 2016 and Bureau of Statistics

Figure 11a: Average prices of beans
(in maloti per 500 g)



Source: mVAM, December 2016

Figure 11b: Average prices of peas
(in maloti per 500 g)



Source: mVAM, December 2016

Table 1. Prices of basic foods (in maloti)

District	Cooking oil (750 ml)	Sugar (500 g)	Salt (500 g)	Cabbage (1 head)
Butha-Buthe	17	8	4	-
Leribe	17	8	6	11
Berea	16	8	3	9
Maseru	17	8	6	11
Mafeteng	17	8	4	8
Mohale's Hoek	18	7	5	13
Quthing	17	8	5	13
Qacha's Nek	20	9	9	15
Mokhotlong	17	8	5	11
Thaba-Tseka	17	8	6	13

Source: mVAM, December 2016



In the words of respondents

"There was a drought last year and people could not plant. The area is dry, we can't even plant vegetables in the yard." – Male respondent, Leribe

"There is not enough money to buy food." – Female respondent, Maseru

"We need seeds to plant so we can sustain ourselves." – Male respondent, Leribe

"Climate change is affecting farming processes." – Male respondent, Quthing

Figure 12: Word cloud



Source: mVAM, December 2016



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mVAM Resources:

Website: http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/
Blog: mvam.org
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food security analysis