LESOTHO

mVAM Bulletin #9: February 2017

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Stable consumption and lower negative coping signal improving food security

Key points:

- Households resorted less to negative coping strategies in January than in December
- Rural households are using livelihoods coping strategies more than urban households
- Purchasing power is lowest in southern districts
- The prices of maize meal, wheat and pulses have been stable since October

WFP/Susanna Sandstrom

Seasonal Outlook

Groundwater levels are not fully replenished and water levels are still low. According to the Normalised Difference Vegetation Index, vegetation levels are normal, except in southern districts where they are below normal. The Water Requirement Satisfaction Index indicates that moisture levels in most districts are sufficient to support crop and plant growth, except in Quthing where most areas are below average. According to the Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee, the number of the people in need of humanitarian assistance fell from 679,437 in May 2016 to 159,959 in the period November 2016 to March 2017. If the reported armyworm infestation in South Africa affects maize production, it could increase maize prices or keep them high during the next consumption year.

995 Interviews

45 years — **Average age of respondents**

Head of household

Female: 28%

Male: 72%

Environment

Urban: 17%

Rural: 83%

Food consumption remains stable and negative coping levels fall

The Food Consumption Score (FCS)[1] was stable from December to January at 45.5. Negative coping levels have fallen slightly: the reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI)[2] dropped from 19 in December to 18 in January. Even though southern and mountain districts continue to show higher negative coping levels than the districts in the north **(Figure 1)**, coping levels decreased in the mountain aggregation of Mokhotlong, Qacha's Nek and Thaba-Tseka in January (rCSI=16) compared to December (rCSI=21).

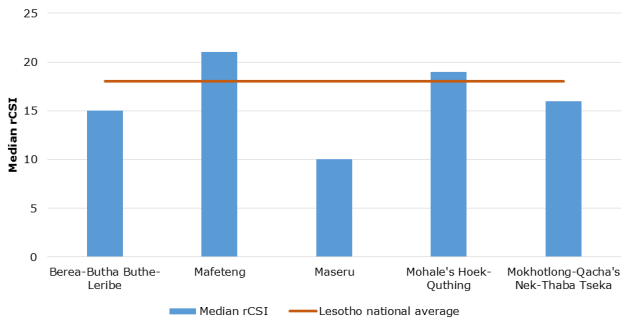
The use of all coping strategies fell significantly across Lesotho in January **(Figure 2)**, signalling that households were under less stress.

Methodology

In January 2017, mVAM conducted household food security monitoring using live telephone interviews. The data presented here were collected through a call centre from a sample of 995 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.

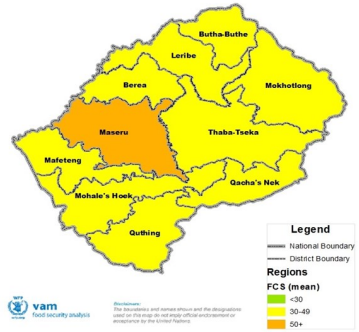
The questionnaire collected data on demographics, food assistance, household food consumption and coping strategies. A final open-ended question gave respondents the chance to share additional information on the food situation in their communities. The data was weighted by the number of mobile phones owned by the household and district population estimates. In addition, food price data were collected between 9 and 20 January from a sample of 62 traders across the 10 districts. 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: Median rCSI by district aggregation



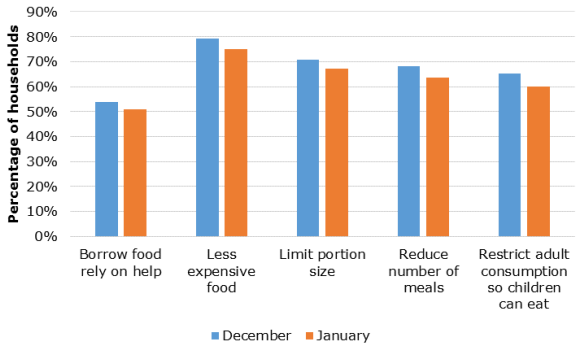
Source: mVAM, January 2017

Map 1: Inadequate food consumption by district aggregation



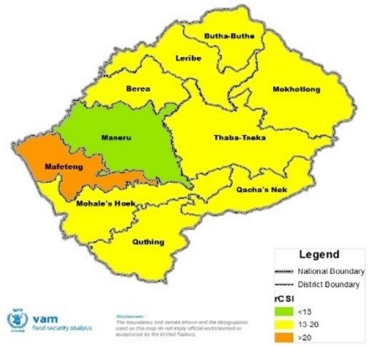
Source: mVAM, January 2017

Figure 2: Use of negative food-related coping strategies



Source: mVAM, January 2017

Map 2: Median rCSI by district aggregation



Source: mVAM, January 2017

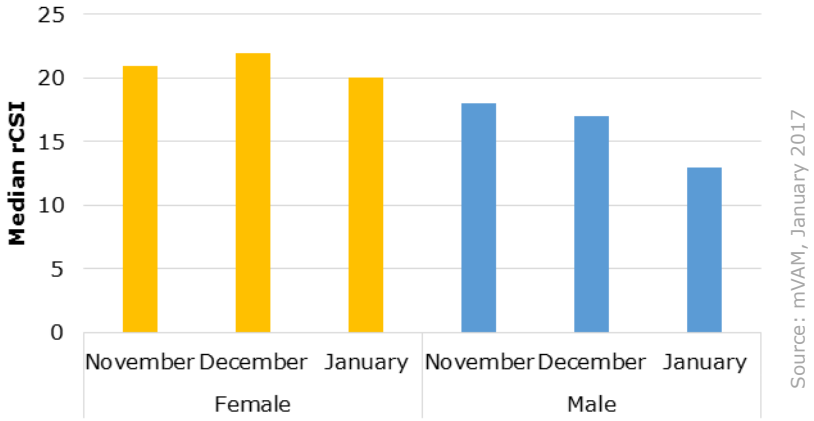
[1]The Food Consumption Score (FCS) indicates the diversity and frequency of food consumption for households. The higher the FCS, the better is the food consumption.

[2]The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) indicates the frequency and severity of coping strategies used by households. A higher rCSI indicates a higher use of coping strategies.

High negative coping among households headed by women

Households headed by women continue to show higher adoption of negative coping strategies than those headed by men. Figure 3 shows a clear improvement for households headed by men between November and January, yet the rCSI for households headed by women remains high. Over 88 percent of households headed by women continue to employ coping strategies, compared with 80 percent of those headed by men.

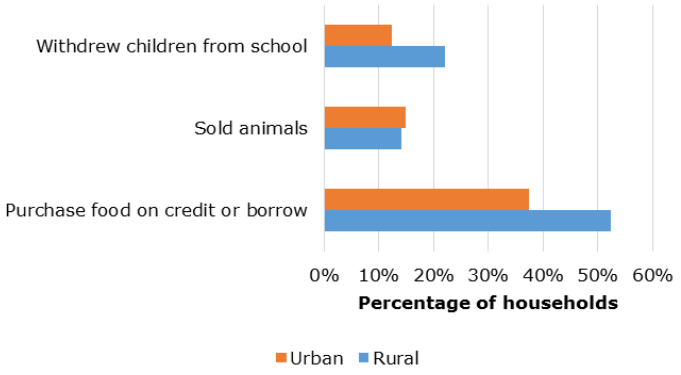
Figure 3: Median rCSI by sex of household head



Higher use of livelihood coping strategies among rural households

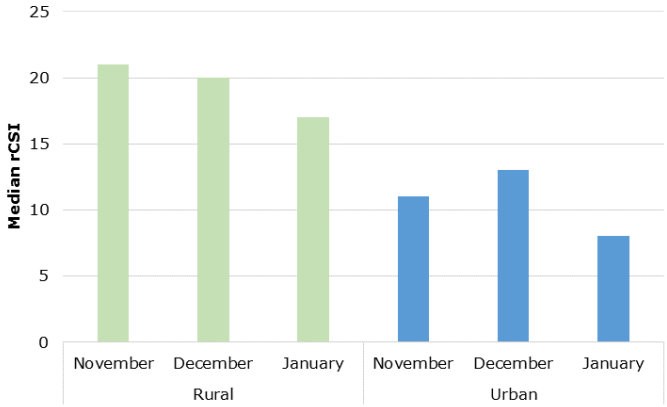
Food consumption continues to be worse in rural areas (FCS=44) than in urban parts (FCS=53) (Figure 6). To cover the food gap, over half of rural households borrowed or purchased food on credit compared with one third of urban households. Over a fifth of rural households withdrew children from school, a strategy that deeply impacts future growth and livelihoods opportunities **(Figure 4).** However, median rCSI for rural households fell from 20 in December to 17 in January, showing an improvement in the situation **(Figure 5).**

Figure 4: Use of livelihood coping strategies by rural/urban



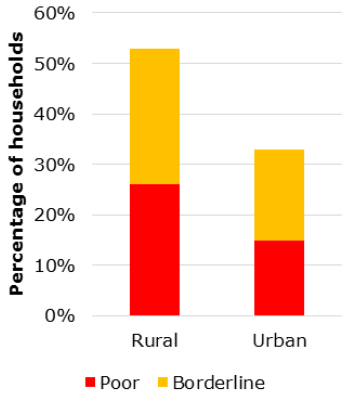
Source: mVAM, January 2017

Figure 5: Median rCSI by urban/rural



Source: mVAM, January 2017

Figure 6: Inadequate consumption by rural/urban

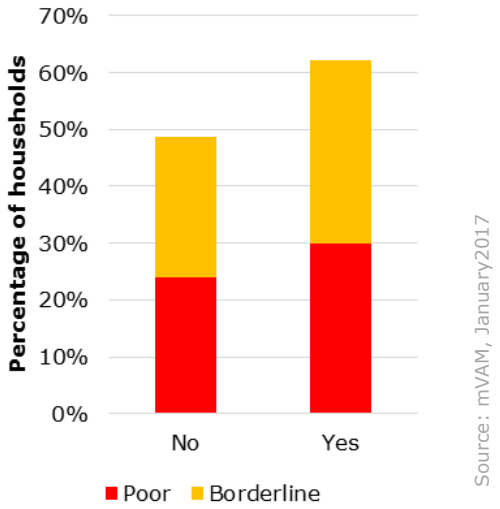


Source: mVAM, January 2017

Poor food consumption among households receiving food assistance

Even though humanitarian assistance is available in most districts, January mVAM data shows that households who receive assistance have worse consumption patterns that those who receive no assistance **(Figure 7)**.

Figure 7: Inadequate food consumption by households receiving assistance



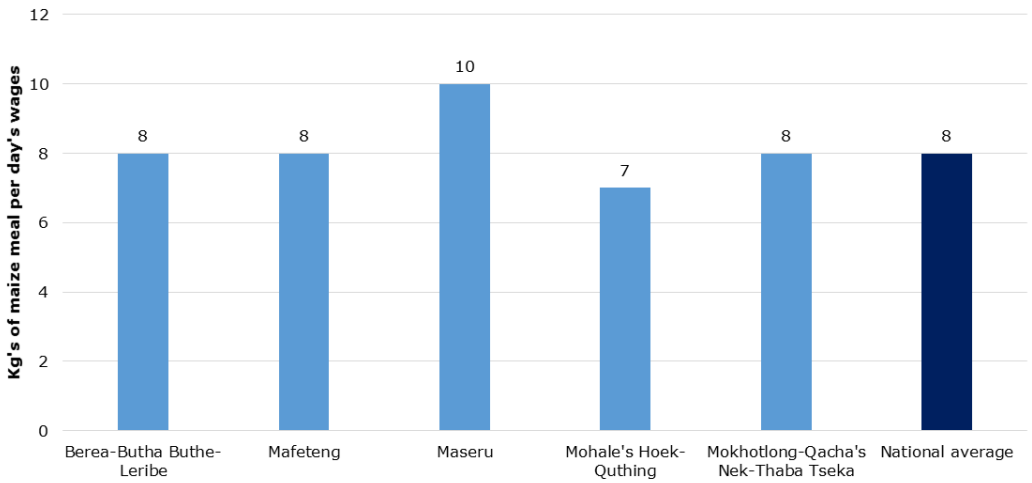
Improvement in availability of food stocks

In January, almost none of the traders reported any shortages in stocks of maize meal, wheat flour, pulses, cooking oil, sugar and salt. This is a significant improvement from December, when just under half of the traders reported having some kind of shortage. Some traders continued to mention high prices and issues with competition from foreign-owned shops that operate at a larger scale than local businesses. Maize meal was being sourced within the district of operation by 80 percent of traders, with 20 percent sourcing from outside their districts but within Lesotho. The majority of traders re-stocked weekly, with others ordering less frequently. Around 82 percent of traders said it took 1 to 2 days to receive stock after placing an order; the rest waited longer for delivery. The number of traders who reported having subsidized stocks of maize meal, beans and peas rose from 60 percent in December to 90 percent in January.

Purchasing power lowest in Mohale's Hoek and Quthing

In January, the national average manual labour rate was M49.00. 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 10 kg across the districts (Figure 8). Because of below-average manual labour wages and higher maize meal prices, the southern districts of Mohale's Hoek and Quthing seem to have the lowest purchasing power of all districts. However, it should be noted that 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 8: Purchasing power by district aggregation (kg of maize meal per day's labour)



Source: mVAM, January2017

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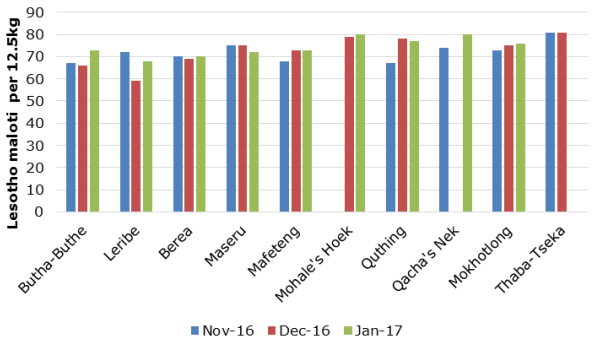
Stable prices for maize meal, wheat flour and pulses

January mVAM data show that average maize meal prices remained stable at M74.00/12.5 kg **(Figure 9)**. Prices continued to be higher in mountain districts (M76.00–M80.00) than in the lowlands (M68.00–M73.00). Although prices have been stable since October, January prices are 27 percent higher than the five-year average (2012–2016) and are up 9 percent from January 2016 **(Figure 10)**.

The national average price of wheat flour has been stable since October. In January, wheat flour prices ranged between M80.00 and M90.00 **(Figure 11)**.

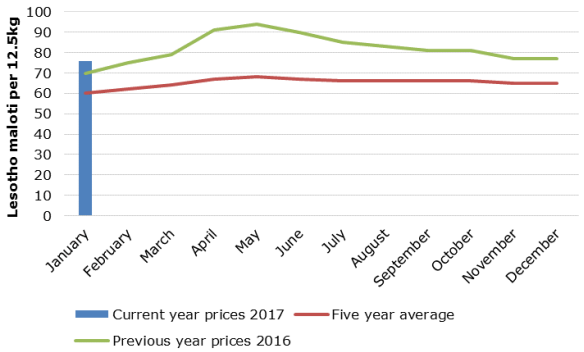
The national average prices for beans and peas have also remained stable since October at M10.00/500 g **(Figures 12a and 12b)**.

Figure 9. Average prices of maize meal (in maloti per 12.5 kg)



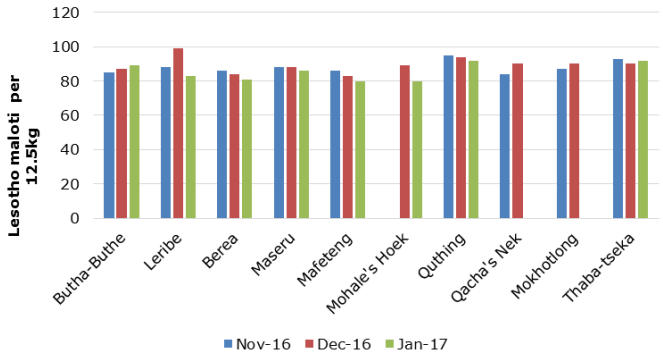
Source: mVAM, January 2017

Figure 10. Average prices of maize meal (in maloti per 12.5 kg), compared to 2016 and the five-year average



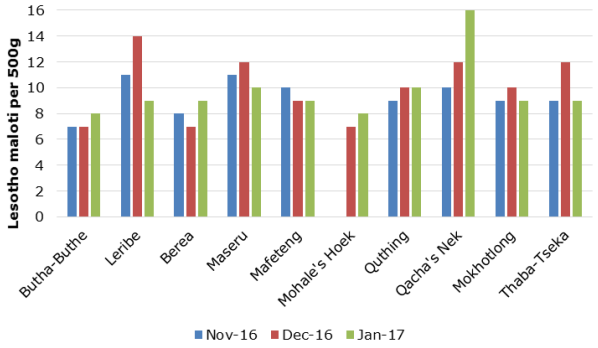
Source: mVAM, January 2017 and Bureau of Statistics

Figure 11. Average prices of wheat flour (in maloti per 12.5 kg)



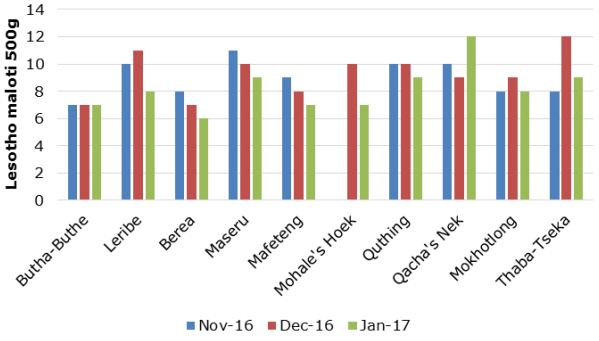
Source: mVAM, January 2017

Figure 12a. Average prices of beans (in maloti per 500 g)



Source: mVAM, January 2017

Figure 12b. Average prices of peas (in maloti per 500 g)



Source: mVAM, January 2017

Table 1. Prices of basic foods (in maloti)

District	Cooking oil (750ml)	Sugar (500g)	Salt (500g)	Cabbage (1 head)
Butha-Buthe	17	8	4	8
Leribe	17	9	5	10
Berea	17	8	5	10
Maseru	18	8	5	11
Mafeteng	17	7	4	10
Mohale's Hoek	19	7	5	10
Quthing	16	7	5	12
Qacha's Nek	18	10	7	15
Mokhotlong	18	8	5	10
Thaba-Tseka	19	8	7	10

Source: mVAM, January 2017

In the words of respondents

"There is a drought so people can't produce, and inflation is too high so things are expensive. There aren't enough jobs for everyone." – Male respondent from Leribe

"Climate change is disrupting the production of crops." – Female respondent from Quthing

"There is a drought, and there is lack of planting material and draught animals that help with farming." – Male respondent from Mafeteng

"There is unemployment: there is a need for job creation in the village, so that people can work." – Female respondent from Butha-Buthe

Figure 13: Word cloud

Source: mVAM, January 2017

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mVAM Resources:

Website: http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/

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