

Prices of staple foods are lower than this time last year

Key points:



8 percentage point reduction in households reporting poor food consumption between January and February



Negative coping strategy levels remain stable since January



Price of maize meal is 4 percent lower than the same time last year



Heavy rains hinder access to markets



WFP/David Orr

Situation Update

February has been characterised with rains across all districts, with normal to above normal vegetation levels for most parts of the country. The Water Requirement Satisfaction Index (WRSI) shows that moisture levels are conducive for crops to grow, especially maize. According to the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA), Katse and Mohale dams are at 63.83 and 64.1 percent full. The Lesotho Meteorological Services predict normal rainfall levels during the March to May period.



894 Interviews



**Average
age of
respondents**



Head of household

Female: 27%

Male: 73%



Environment

Urban: 18%

Rural: 82%



Reduction in households with poor food consumption

The Food Consumption Score (FCS) and reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) both remained stable across Lesotho. However, compared to January, there was an 8 percentage point reduction in the number of households reporting poor food consumption (**Figure 1**). The reduction in poor food consumption signals a gradually improving food security situation even though there was an almost equivalent rise in households reporting borderline food consumption.

Almost all of this improvement comes from the decrease in reporting of poor consumption in rural areas (**Figure 2**) among the economically worse-off households. The material used for the walls of the household's residence was used as a proxy for socio-economic status. Households with baked brick walls are likely better off whereas those with mud walls are worst-off. Those with unbaked bricks fall in the middle.

As shown in **Figure 3**, 29 percent of households with mud walls reported poor food consumption in February compared to over 44 percent in January. The gradual improvement in consumption could be the result of increased agricultural labour opportunities and the availability of green harvests (which are mature crops that can be harvested and consumed, but are not dry enough to be milled). Green consumption is reported to be higher than it was last year in the same month and wheat, planted by some in the winter, has been harvested. However, southern parts of Lesotho and the highlands continued to report higher levels of stress (higher rCSI) compared to northern parts (**Figure 4**).

Figure 3: Inadequate consumption by wall type

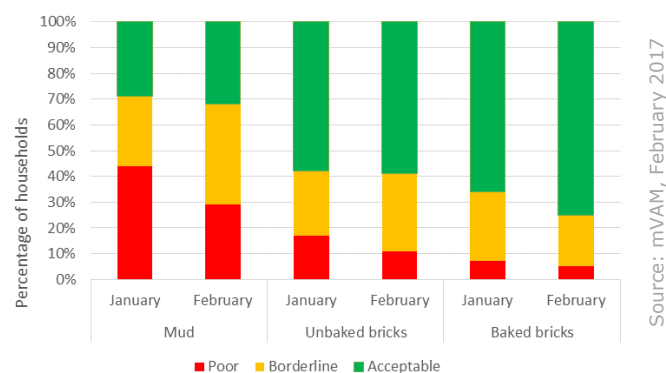


Figure 1: Inadequate consumption for Lesotho

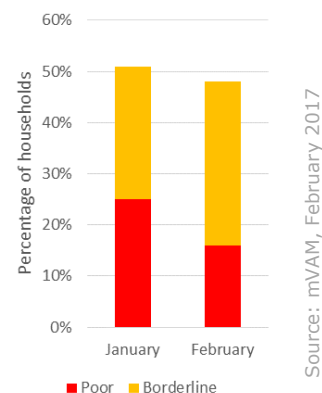


Figure 2: Inadequate consumption by rural/urban

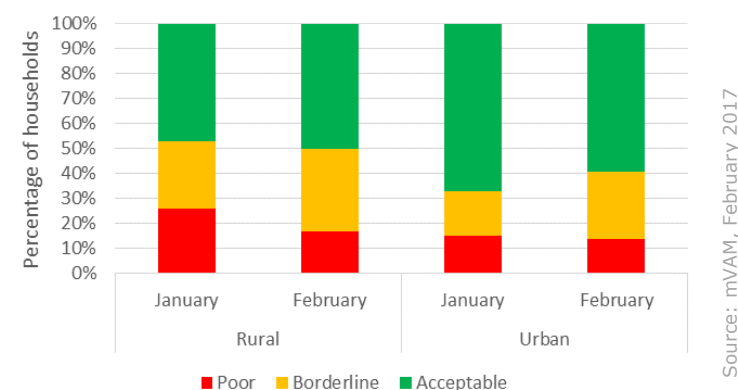
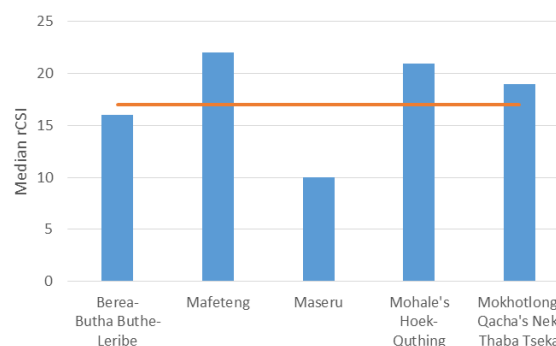
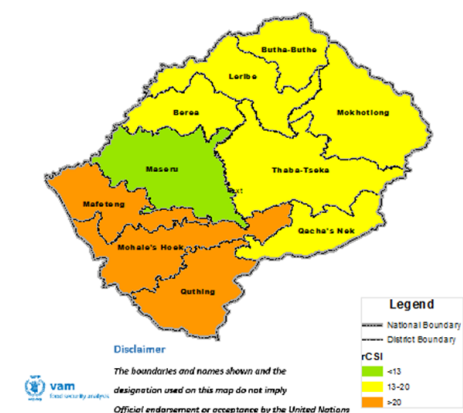


Figure 4: Median rCSI by district aggregation



Map 1: Median rCSI by district aggregation



¹The Food Consumption Score (FCS) indicates the diversity and frequency of food consumption for a household, the higher the FCS the better the food consumption

²The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) indicates the frequency and the severity of coping strategies used by households



Heavy rains negatively affect access to markets

Majority of traders (67 percent) cited that markets were difficult to access due to heavy rains in February as most markets, especially in rural settings, were not easily accessible by customers and vehicles bringing supplies. Traders from Qacha's Nek, Thaba-Tseka and Mphahle's Hoek mentioned that some bridges had been washed away. Despite the fact that majority of traders reported to have received stock after 1-2 days of ordering, more than half of the them (67 percent) reported shortages in stocks of maize meal, wheat flour, pulses, cooking oil, sugar and salt; whereas, in January, almost all interviewed traders reported having no shortages. Maize meal continued to be sourced within the district of operation by more than half of the traders (59 percent), while an additional 41 percent reported that they sourced from other districts in Lesotho. The majority of traders (82 percent) continued to re-stock weekly, and others reported ordering less frequently. All of the traders (100 percent) reported having subsidized stocks of maize meal, beans and peas in February compared to 90 percent in January.



High negative coping among households headed by women

Households headed by women continue to show higher adoption of both food-related negative coping strategies (**Figure 5**) as well as livelihood coping strategies than those headed by men. However, in February, 49 percent of households headed by women reported that they were borrowing food or relying on help from friends, compared to over 57 percent in January. As this is one of the more severe coping strategies, a reduction in its use indicates a reduction in stress on the generally more vulnerable households headed by women. A higher proportion of households headed by men reported selling animals (**Figure 6**) than those headed by women. This could be because approximately 49 percent of households headed by men owned animals compared to only 36 percent of those headed by women.

Figure 5: Use of negative food-related coping strategies by sex of household head

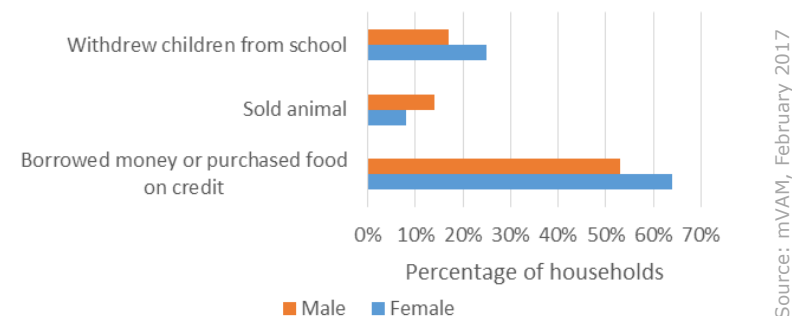


Methodology

In February 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 894 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 16-27 February from a sample of 27 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 6: Use of livelihood coping strategies by rural/urban

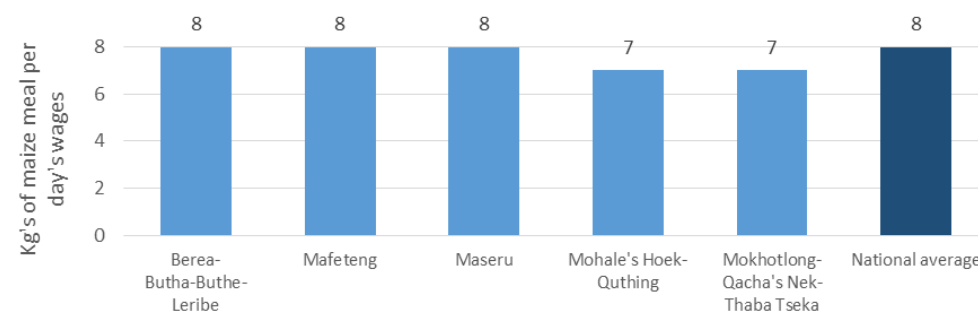




Purchasing power remain stable

Purchasing power – measured by the quantity of maize meal a household can buy with a day's earning from manual labour – in most districts has remained stable over January and February. The northern districts continue to maintain a higher purchasing power than the southern lowlands and highlands (**Figure 7**).

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



Source: mVAM, February 2017

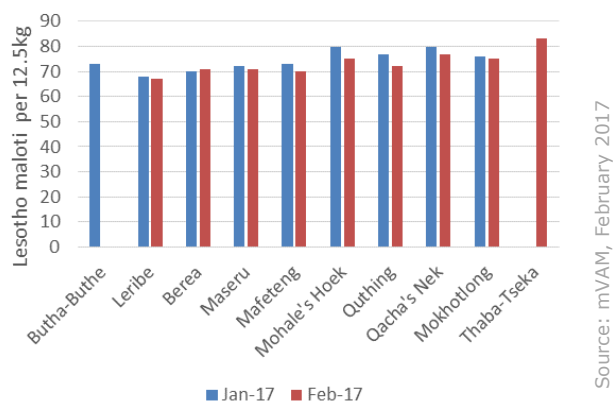


Maize meal prices decrease

February mVAM data shows that average maize meal prices decreased from M74.00/12.5 kg in January to M72.00/12.5kg in February (**Figure 8**). Although recorded prices were 3 percent lower than last year (2016), they were still 18 percent higher than the five-year average (2012–2016) (**Figure 9**).

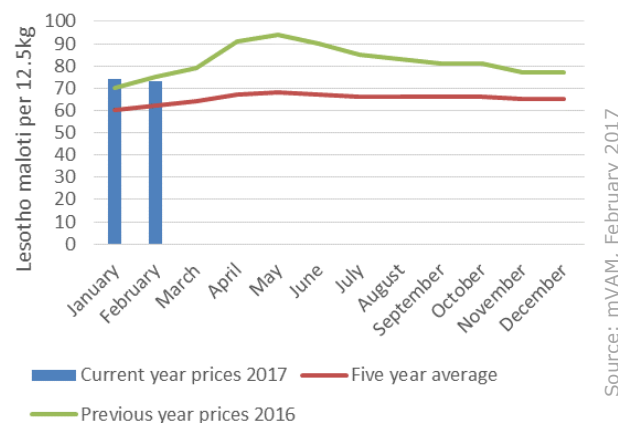
The national average price of wheat flour has remained stable at M85/12.5kg over January and February (**Figure 10**). The national average prices for beans and peas have also remained stable since October at M9/500 g.

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



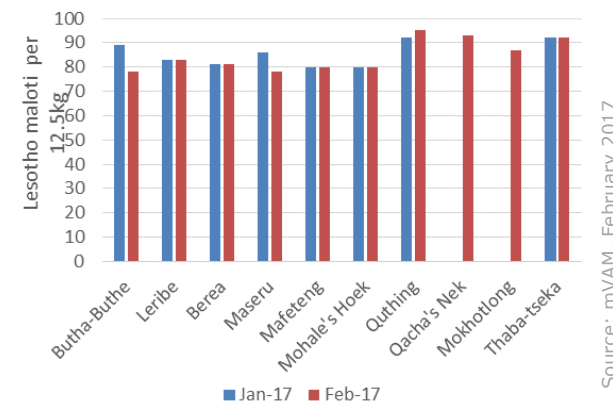
Source: mVAM, February 2017

Figure 9: Average prices of maize meal (in maloti per 12.5 kg), compared to 2016 and the five-year average



Source: mVAM, February 2017

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



Source: mVAM, February 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	-
Leribe	18	9	5	7
Berea	17	8	3	10
Maseru	17	8	5	10
Mafeteng	15	7	3	5
Mohale's Hoek	16	8	4	9
Quthing	18	8	5	15
Qacha's Nek	19	11	7	-
Mokhotlong	18	8	7	13
Thaba-Tseka	21	8	7	12

Source: mVAM, February 2017



In the words of respondents

"People are unemployed, thus not able to buy their own food." - Male respondent from Butha-Buthe

"Climate change makes people unable to plant and grow food." - Male respondent from Leribe

"There is a lack of jobs and people in the rural areas were affected by drought." - Female respondent from Berea

"Weather conditions are problematic: there is either too much rain or no rain at all. We need employment opportunities within the private sector as the government is not doing enough to create jobs." - Female respondent from Maseru

Figure 11: Word cloud



Source: mVAM, February 2017



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