

Maize prices fall as the harvest starts in the southern region

Key points:



National negative coping levels remain stable since December 2016



Slight reduction in coping among worse-off households



Poorer food consumption in rural areas than in urban areas



Continued increase in new admissions to nutrition treatment programmes



WFP/Alice Clough

Situation Update

February 2017 marked the eighth month of humanitarian response where 6.7 million people were assisted with food parcels, vouchers and cash in accordance with the 2016 Food Insecurity Response Plan. A full ration of all basic foods was provided. It comprised of 50kg of maize, 10kg of pulses, 2L of vegetable oil and 6kg of Super Cereal for households with pregnant or lactating women with children under the age of two.

Results from the first round of agricultural production estimates indicate that maize production is projected to be 3.2 million metric tonnes. This is a 35.9 percent increase when compared to last year's final round estimates. In a typical season, the final round estimates are around 5 to 10 percent lower than the first round. However, a fall armyworm outbreak in some parts of Malawi could hamper the promising crop production outlook. The extent of this damage is expected to be clear in the second round of estimates in April.



Head of household:

42% Female
58% Male

29

**Mean
age of
respondents**



Number of Interviews:

2000



Wall type:

17% Mud **23%** Unbaked Brick
46% Baked Brick **13%** Cement

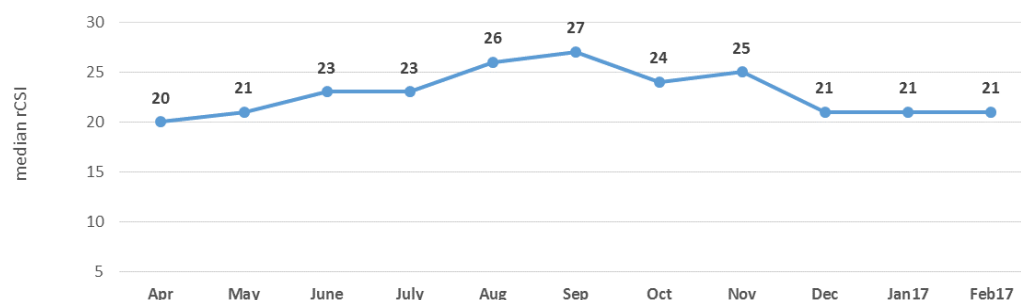


Negative coping levels remain stable since December

The national median reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) remained stable at 21 since December 2016, when it declined from 25 in November (**Figure 1**). However, Dedza-Ntcheu reported a slight decrease from 23 in January to 22 in February. Lilongwe, on the other hand, reported a slight increase from 16 in January to 18 in February probably because it is the peak of the lean season.

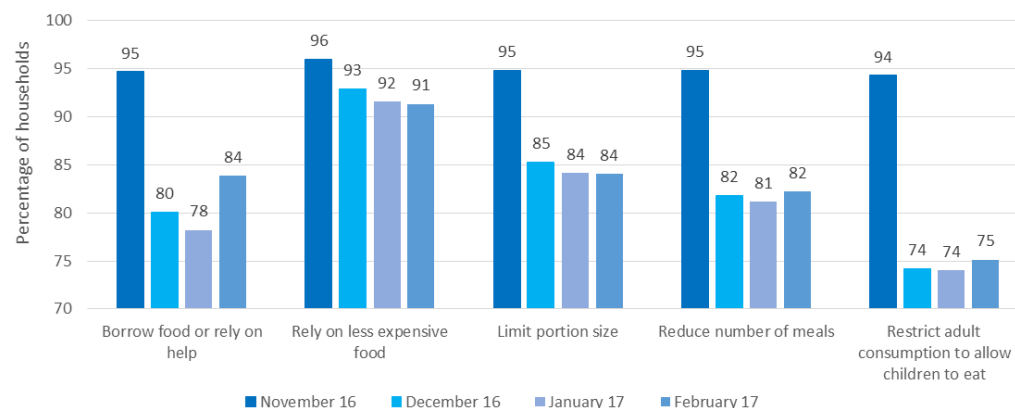
An increase in the use of one of the coping strategies was also observed in February: borrowing food or relying on help from friends. It was the only coping strategy which saw an increase in use (**Figure 2**). This was used by 84 percent of households in February compared to 78 percent of households in January. This indicates that while the situation has stabilised, food insecurity still remains quite high during the peak of the lean of the season.

Figure 1. National median rCSI



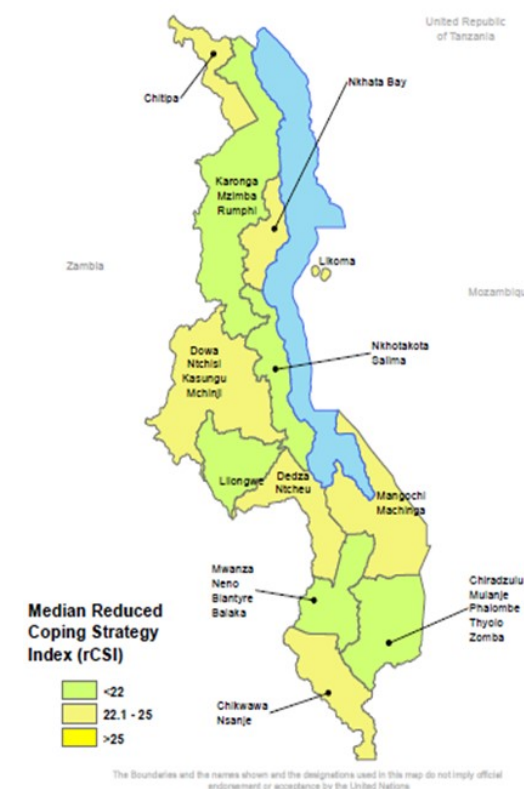
Source: mVAM, February 2017

Figure 2. Percentage of households using negative coping strategies



Source: mVAM, February 2017

Map 1: Median rCSI by district aggregation

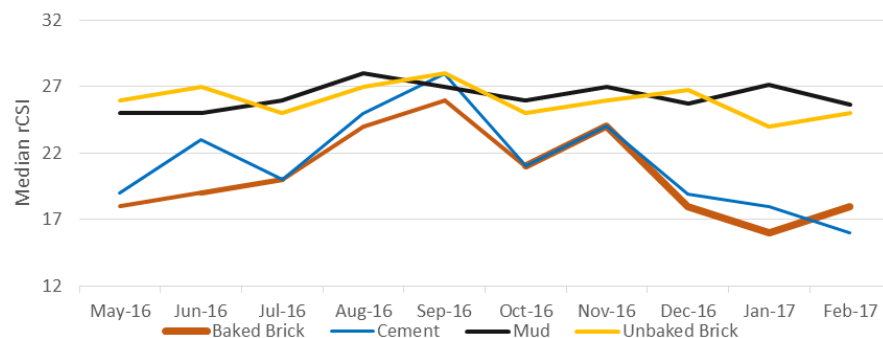


Source: mVAM, February 2017



Slight reduction in stress on worse-off households

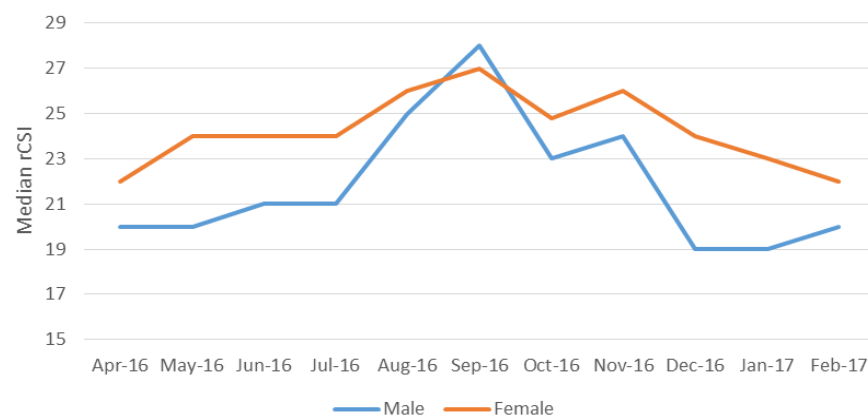
Figure 3: Median rCSI by wall type



Source: mVAM, February 2017

Better-off ← Cement Baked Brick Unbaked Brick Mud → Worse-off

Figure 4: Use of coping strategies by sex of household head

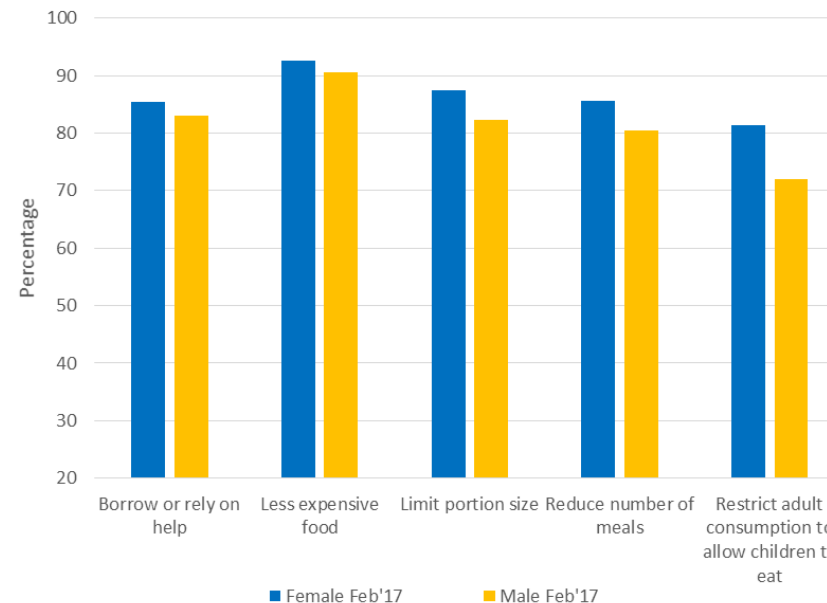


Source: mVAM, February 2017

The type of wall materials used for housing units are used as an indicator to determine that household's socio-economic status. Even though better-off households (those with cement and baked brick walls) reported lower stress compared to worse-off households (those with unbaked brick and mud walls), the rCSI for those with mud walls decreased slightly in February compared to January (**Figure 3**).

Furthermore February results indicate that there was continued improvement for households led by women as their reported rCSI dropped further (**Figure 4**). However, these households also continued to engage more in negative coping strategies including the most severe of the strategies covered by the survey - restricting adult food consumption to allow children to eat (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5: Use of different negative coping strategies by sex of household head



Source: mVAM, February 2017



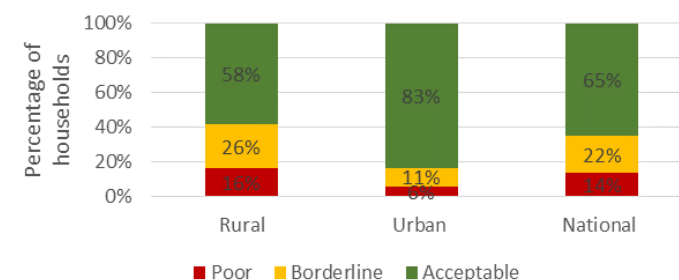
Poorer food consumption in rural areas

The Food Consumption Score (FCS) is a key food security indicator that measures dietary diversity, food consumption frequency and the relative nutritional importance of the food consumed. In February across Malawi, 14 percent of households reported poor food consumption while 22 percent reported borderline levels (**Figure 8**). mVAM data indicates that rural households were twice as likely to report poor or borderline food consumption compared to their urban counterparts, indicating higher rural distress.

¹FCS categorizes households into three food consumption categories:

- Poor: Households that are not consuming staple foods and vegetables every day and never or very seldom consume protein-rich food such as meat and dairy.
- Borderline: Households that are consuming staples and vegetables every day, accompanied by oil and pulses a few times a week.
- Acceptable: Households that are consuming staples and vegetables every day, frequently accompanied by oil and pulses, and occasionally meat, fish and dairy.

Figure 8: Food consumption score by urban/rural areas



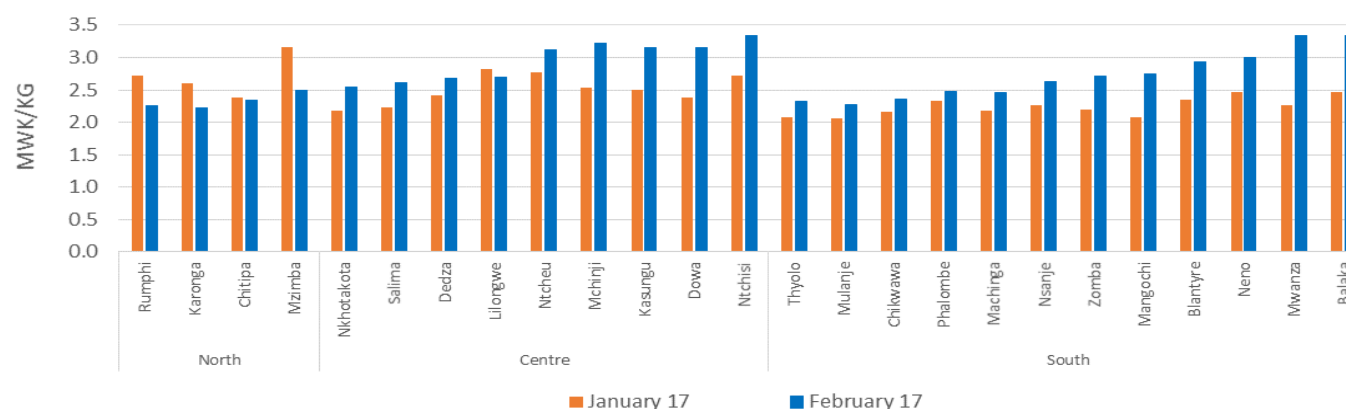
Source: mVAM, February 2017



Purchasing power continues to improve in the south but worsens in the north

In February, the average national manual labour wage remained stable at MWK600. Purchasing power, which is measured in the kilograms of maize that can be purchased with wages from a day of manual labour, improved across the country except in the Northern region districts. The improvement in purchasing power in the Central and Southern regions is due to the low maize prices. This occurred because households were consuming the green harvest in the Central region while those in the south were beginning to harvest. Harvesting is yet to begin in the Northern region, and there are informal sales to neighbouring countries from the north. As a result maize prices in the north have increased, worsening purchasing power. There is also massive humanitarian assistance in the south and central districts, moderating maize prices, while the north has had lower humanitarian support and it has a late start of harvest as per seasonal calendar.

Figure 9: Purchasing power by district (kg of maize per day's labour)



Source: mVAM, February 2017

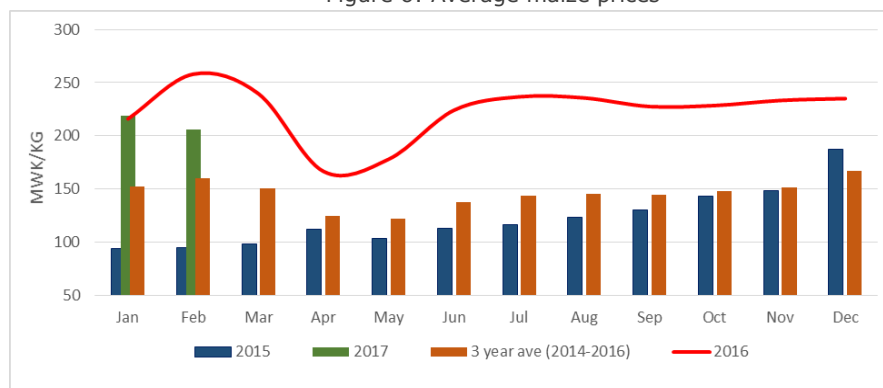


Maize prices fall due to harvest in the Southern region

The average maize price continued to decrease across the 25 monitored districts. It decreased by six percent compared to the previous round in January. This decrease is attributed to the beginning of the harvest season in the southern districts as households began to depend on their own production in addition to humanitarian aid. While ADMARC markets remained open, consumers preferred buying from private traders whose prices are lower than the ADMARC price of MWK250/kg. Across the 70 monitored markets, maize prices ranged from MWK160/kg to MWK230/kg. Current maize prices are 20 percent lower than last year. However, they remain 116 percent higher than 2015 prices and 29 percent higher than the 3-year average price (**Figure 6**). The downward price trend is expected to continue due to a promising crop production outlook despite an outbreak of fall armyworm (an invasive species), which reportedly caused minimal damage.

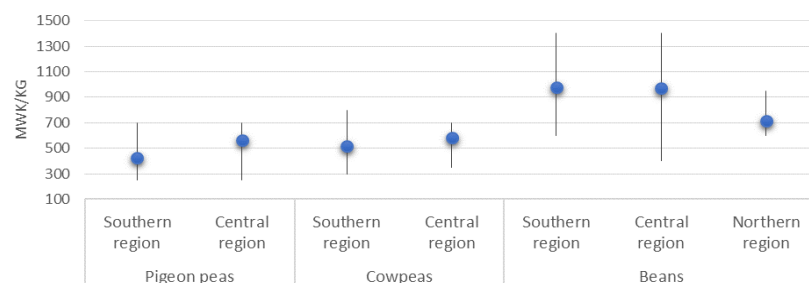
In February, prices of pulses remained stable compared to the last round. On average, beans cost MWK937/kg, pigeon peas cost MWK448/kg and cowpeas MWK 532/kg (**Figure 7**).

Figure 6: Average maize prices



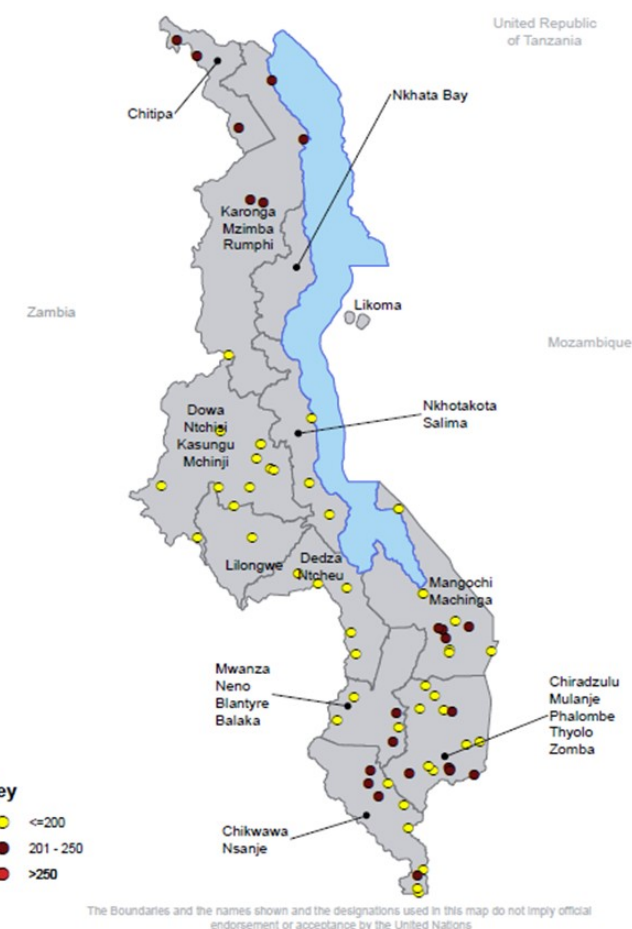
Source: mVAM, February 2017

Figure 7: Pulses prices by region, 23 February to 28 February 2017



Source: mVAM, February 2017

Map 2: Maize prices (MWK/kg) in markets, 23 February to 28 February 2017



Source: mVAM, February 2017



Continued increase in new admissions for nutrition treatment amidst stabilising food security situation

Monitoring of the nutrition situation continued in 70 sentinel sites in the areas affected by the El Niño-induced food insecurity in February 2017. The monthly mass screening exercise for children under 5 was conducted in 80 percent of the sentinel sites with support from the Ministry of Health and UNICEF. New admissions for both severe and moderately malnourished patients increased from December 2016 through February 2017 (**Figure 10**).

This coincided with the peak of the lean and rainy season which is associated with high food insecurity. There is generally a higher incidence of childhood diseases like malaria, diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections (ARI) during this period, thus heightening malnutrition.

Figure 11 shows the comparison in trends of admissions between 2016 and 2017. Compared to 2016 admissions, the rate of increase between January and February 2017 was lower. January to February 2017 saw an increase of 13.2 percent and 4 percent among moderately malnourished (MAM) children and adults respectively, compared to a 171 percent and 71 percent increase between January and February 2016. The reduction in the rate of increase from 2016 to 2017 may be attributed to the several interventions that were put in place in the 2016/2017 emergency response by the nutrition and food security clusters following an unprecedented increase in malnourished cases during the 2015/2016 emergency response. Some of the interventions included inclusion of preventive ration and nutrition-related social behaviour change communication (SBCC), active case findings through mass screening and timely provision of commodities for treatment of acute malnutrition in children, adolescents/adults.

Figure 10: Trends in admissions for severely and moderately malnourishment children- 2016 vs 2017 ²

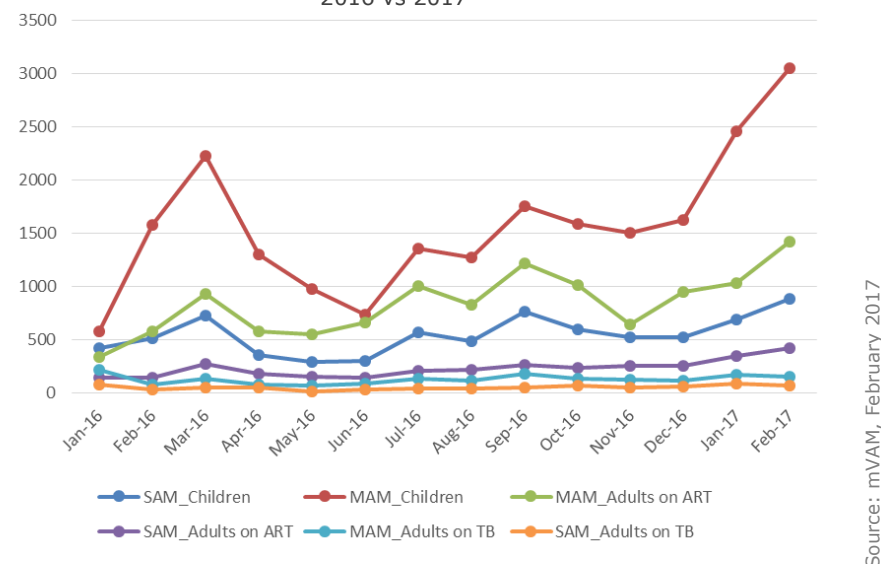
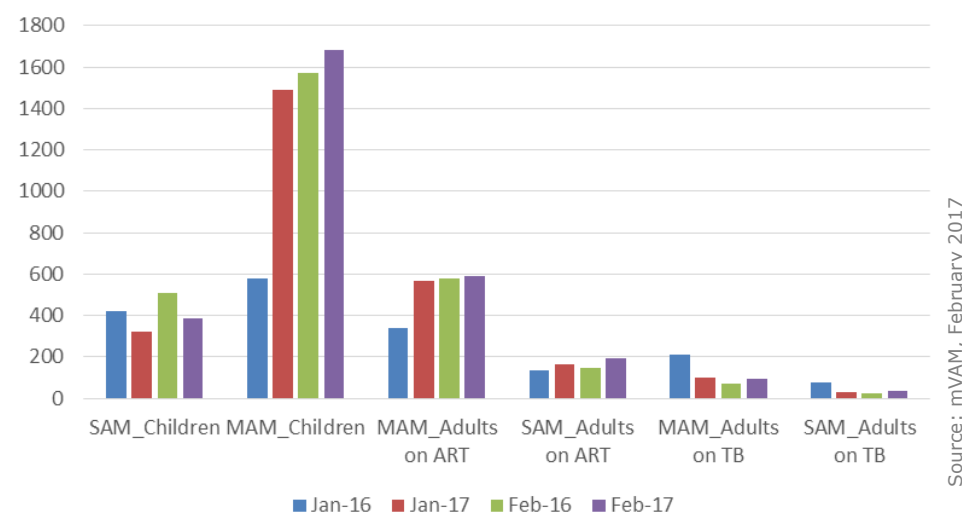


Figure 11: Trends in admissions for severely and moderately malnourished adults on ART-2016 vs 2017



² 41 sentinel sites between January 2016 and June 2016; 70 sites between July 2016 and February 2017.



In the words of the respondents

"In February the price of maize has gone down from MWK1200 to MWK800 per 5 litre pail." - Female respondent, Lilongwe.

"Maize prices on the market have gone up and some households do not have food. However, the situation is not very bad because there are substitute food items." - Male respondent, Chitipa.

"As of now, people are able to access food at lower prices due to more competition on the market." - Male respondent, Mponela-Dowa.

"The food situation is stable since people have enough food through the dimba (wetland area). And even in the field, the maize has matured." - Female respondent, Mchinji.

"Maize is available at the market, and is being sold at better prices by vendors as compared to ADMARC. But the problem is to get money to buy food." - Male respondent, Machinga.

Figure 12: Word cloud



Source: mVAM, February 2017

Methodology

Details on methodology are available online at the mVAM monitoring site:

http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/malawi.html



For further information

Coco Ushiyama

coco.ushiyama@wfp.org

Arif Husain

arif.husain@wfp.org

Jean-Martin Bauer

jean-martin.bauer@wfp.org

Andrew Odera

andrew.oder@wfp.org

mVAM Resources:

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

Blog: mvam.org

Toolkit: <http://resources.vam.wfp.org/mVAM>



vam
food security analysis