Food security improves in Bulawayo and Masvingo provinces

Key points:

- Food consumption has worsened in Harare but has improved in Bulawayo and Masvingo
- Three quarters of rural households are restricting adult food consumption to cope with the lack of food compared with two-thirds of urban households
- More beneficiary households have been relying on help from friends and relatives to obtain food, compared to those not receiving assistance
- Households
- Cereal prices have fallen for the first time since October 2016
- Maize grain was 10.33 percent cheaper in February than in January

Situation Update

Heavy rains across Zimbabwe caused flooding in the southern areas of Masvingo province, southern Midlands and Matabeleland in February, damaging crops, livestock and infrastructure. By the end of the month, most areas had received up to 200 percent of their normal rainfall (source: FEWSNET), and the average national dam level was 71.5 percent. The 2016–17 harvest is projected to start in April, while the bulk of the cereal crop will be harvested in May and June. Even though this coming cropping season had been expected to be better than the last thanks to the wetter conditions, production forecasts have now been lowered for the areas affected by hazards such as flooding and the armyworm outbreak.
Food security worsens in Harare

The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) is used to measure the severity and frequency of behaviours that households engage in when faced with a shortage of food. A higher score indicates more frequent and/or more severe coping strategies. The rCSI deteriorated by 36 percent in Harare from 14 in January to 19 in February. However, the situation improved in Bulawayo, where the rCSI fell from 20 in January to 16 in February (Map 2).

The proportion of households using at least one coping strategy rose from 91 to 97 percent in Harare, and from 90 to 98 percent in Manicaland North. By contrast, in Masvingo province the proportion of households using at least one coping strategy fell from 98 to 94 percent. The situation may be improving in Masvingo as small grains and early-maturing maize varieties were planted in the southern districts and are now becoming available for consumption.

Households headed by women continued to report higher stress compared with those headed by men: a larger proportion are engaging in every food-related negative coping strategy covered by the survey (Figure 1).

There was also a significant difference in the stress levels of households receiving humanitarian assistance compared with those who were not. Humanitarian assistance includes programmes implemented by the government, non-governmental organisations and other community organisations such as churches. A higher proportion of assisted households were using the most severe strategies of borrowing food from a friend or relative and restricting adult food consumption so children could eat. Around 76 percent of assisted households had to restrict adult food consumption compared with 68 percent of non-beneficiary households (Figure 2). This indicates that the government and humanitarian organisations are indeed targeting the most vulnerable households, those who are engaging more often in negative coping activities.
Toilet types are used as a proxy indicator to determine household socio-economic status. In February, the median rCSI remained higher for the poorest households (with no toilet) compared with households with other toilet types. Households with flush toilets and Blair toilets continued to have the lowest stress (Figure 3).

Similarly, there was higher food insecurity in rural areas compared with town centres. A larger proportion of households in rural areas were using each of the coping strategies in the survey compared with their urban counterparts (Figure 4).
February mVAM data show that maize grain and maize meal prices fell for the first time since October last year. In the surveyed markets, maize grain was 10.33 percent cheaper and maize meal was 1.58 percent cheaper in February compared with January 2017 (Table 1). Prevailing prices were also lower than the national average maize prices prevailing at the same time last year and lower than the five-year national average. The findings are consistent with data collected through face-to-face price monitoring.

Compared with January, sorghum prices fell by 17 percent and cooking oil prices by 0.63 percent. Sugar beans were 20.39 percent more expensive because pulses are in short supply at this time of the year (Table 2). Mwenezi has had the lowest sorghum prices for the past six months. However, cooking oil has been most expensive in Mwenezi and Binga.

### Table 1. Maize prices (USD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Oct-16</th>
<th>Nov-16</th>
<th>Dec-16</th>
<th>Jan-17</th>
<th>Feb-17</th>
<th>Feb-16</th>
<th>5yr average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maize grain</td>
<td>20L</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>6.56</td>
<td>7.88</td>
<td>6.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maize meal</td>
<td>10kg</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>5.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2. Basic food prices by district (USD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Maize grain (20L)</th>
<th>Maize meal (10kg)</th>
<th>Sorghum (20L)</th>
<th>Sugar beans (500g)</th>
<th>Cooking oil (2L)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bikita</td>
<td>Nyika</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binga</td>
<td>Binga</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulawayo</td>
<td>Renkini</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chipinge</td>
<td>Checheche</td>
<td>6.92</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwenezi</td>
<td>Rutenga</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rushinga</td>
<td>Rushinga</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zvishavane</td>
<td>Mandava</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: mVAM, February 2017
In the words of respondents

“The food situation was bad before but due to a good rainy season it is better now.” - Female respondent aged 22 years, Zvishavane

“With good rains we have started harvesting and we expect a good harvest.” - Male respondent aged 32 years, Umguza

“In our community people are not enjoying a better life because there is not enough money to buy food for their families.” - Male respondent aged 38 years, Sanyati

“The food situation is difficult in my community. People are relying on remittances sent to them by their children in neighbouring countries.” - Male respondent aged 47 years, Matobo

“There are food shortages in my area causing some people to migrate to other areas.” – Male respondent aged 29 years, Binga

Methodology
Since August 2016 mVAM has conducted interviews across Zimbabwe using the short message service (SMS) system. Before then, data were collected using interactive voice response (IVR) systems. In February 2017 interviews were held with 2,256 respondents, randomly selected from a national database of rural and urban-based mobile subscribers. The country has been divided into 16 district aggregations derived from the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) 2016 food and nutrition prevalence rates for the household survey (Map 1). The SMS survey asked questions on socio-demographics and coping strategies 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 voice calls were made to 41 traders in the main market in seven districts: Bikita, Binga, Bulawayo, Chipinge, Mwenezi, Rushinga and Zvishavane. The traders were asked about the availability and prices of maize grain, maize meal, sorghum, sugar beans and cooking oil.

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