

## Households in rural areas are worse off than those in towns

### Key points:



The use of food-related coping strategies falls in March



Households are engaging more frequently in at least one livelihood coping strategy



Maize meal prices continue to fall, reaching 9 percent below 2016 levels



Stock availability improves in markets



WFP/Leonie Marinovich

### Seasonal outlook

March was characterised by light-to-moderate rain. The green consumption period ended, and the main crops will be harvested from April to July. The Lesotho Meteorological Services predict normal-to-below-normal rainfall between April and June.



**690 Interviews**



**Average  
age of  
respondents**



**Head of household**

**Female: 28%**

**Male: 72%**



**Environment**

**Urban: 19%**

**Rural: 81%**

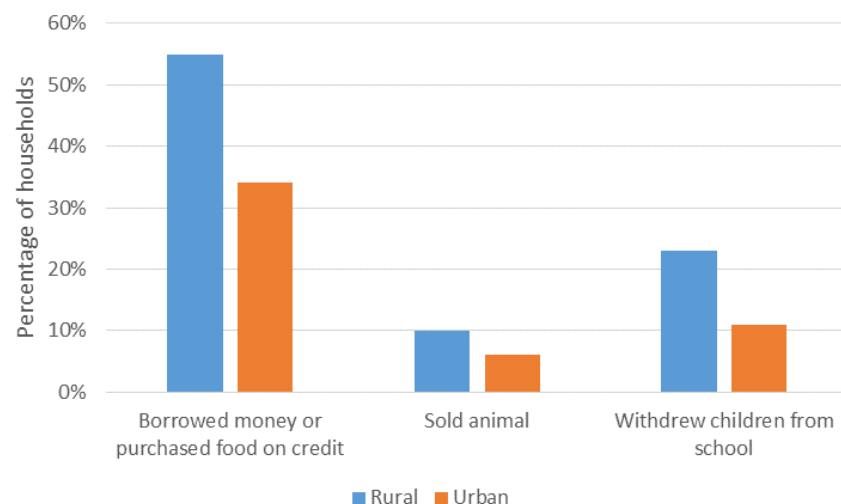


### Rural households are more stressed than urban households

The Food Consumption Score (FCS) remained stable over February and March at 45; the reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) dropped from 17 to 16 across Lesotho over the same period. Even though food consumption has been stable and coping levels have improved, rural households are worse off than their urban counterparts. As **Figure 1** shows, 23 percent of households in rural areas recorded poor food consumption compared to 12 percent of those in urban areas. A higher proportion of rural households adopted food-related coping strategies in March: 76 percent bought less preferred food, compared with 61 percent of urban households. Similarly, 70 percent of rural households reduced portion sizes in order to bridge the food gap, compared with 49 percent of urban households (Figure 2). However, 5 percent fewer rural households borrowed or bought food on credit in March, and 3 percent fewer sold animals to buy food compared to February.

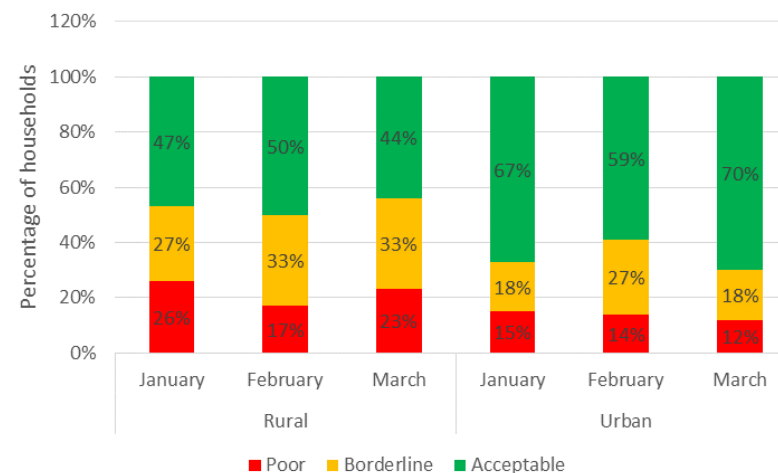
More rural households are adopting livelihood coping strategies than households in the towns. Borrowing money and purchasing food on credit was a common strategy for both rural and urban households, but rural households resorted to the strategy more frequently. On the same note, a quarter of rural households withdrew children from school when experiencing a food gap, compared with 11 percent of urban families (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Use of livelihood coping strategies by urban/rural



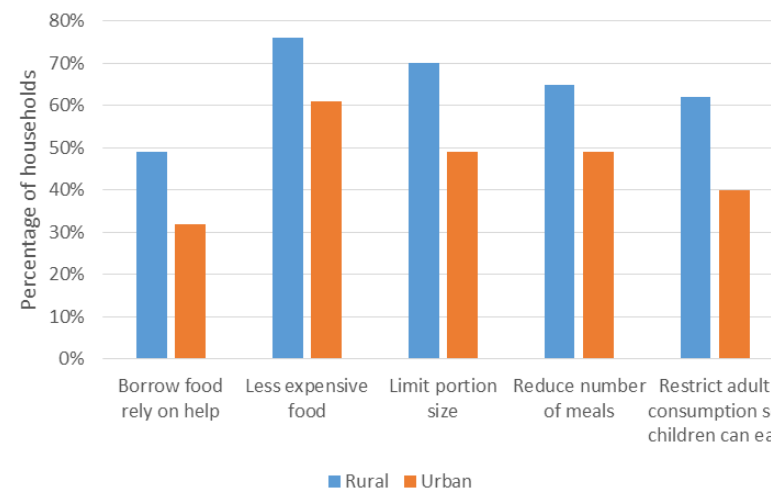
Source: mVAM, March 2017

Figure 1: Inadequate consumption by urban/rural



Source: mVAM, March 2017

Figure 2: Use of food-related coping strategies by urban/rural



Source: mVAM, March 2017

The Food Consumption Score (FCS) indicates the diversity and frequency of household food consumption: the higher the FCS, the better the food consumption.

The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) indicates the frequency and the severity of coping strategies used by households. The higher the rCSI, the greater the reliance on negative coping strategies.



### Availability of stock in markets improves

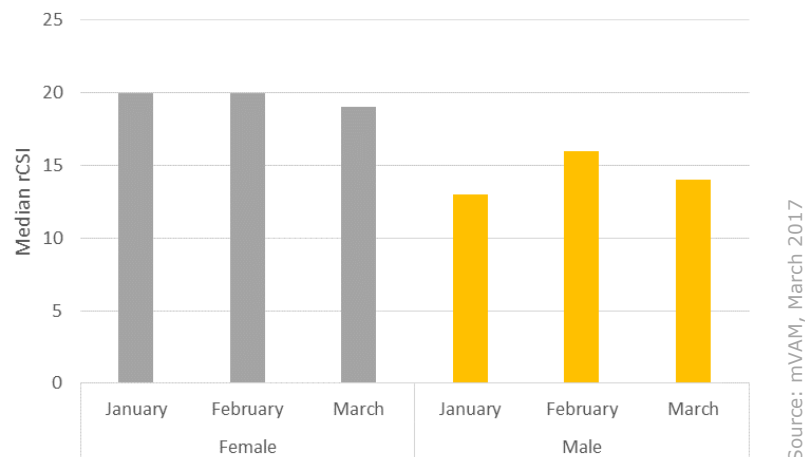
Difficult road conditions remained a challenge for most traders in March: around 60 percent said that road conditions had deteriorated due to heavy rains, making it difficult for suppliers and customers to access the shops. Even so, the majority of traders (81 percent) continued to receive their stock after 1-2 days of placing an order. Fewer traders reported stock shortages in maize meal, wheat flour, pulses, cooking oil, sugar and salt – 37 percent as opposed to 67 percent in February. Around 38 percent of traders continued to order stock weekly in March, compared to 82 percent in February. Maize meal was sourced within the district of operation by 57 percent of traders; the remaining 43 percent sourced it from other districts in Lesotho.



### Households headed by women continue to be more stressed

In all households, buying less expensive or preferred food was the most common strategy. However, households led by women engaged in the strategy more frequently than those headed by men (**Figure 5**). Over 70 percent of households led by women limited portion sizes and reduced the number of meals eaten per day – substantially more than households led by men.

Figure 4: Median rCSI by sex of household head

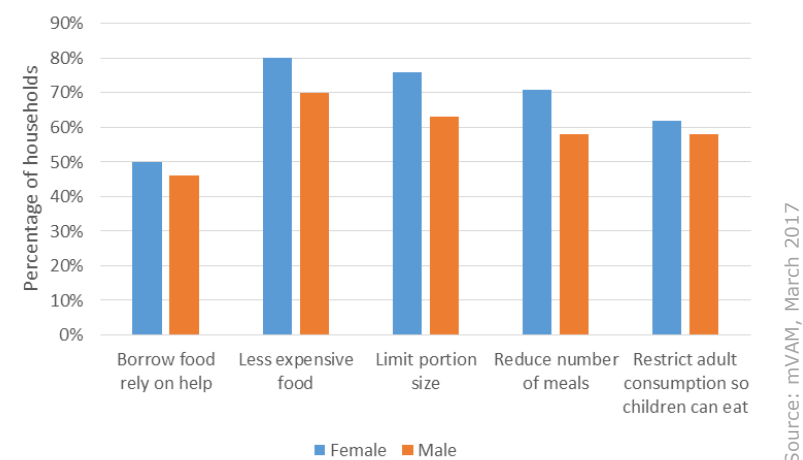


### Methodology

In March 2017, mVAM conducted household food security monitoring in Lesotho using live telephone interviews. The data presented here were collected through a call centre from a sample of 690 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 10 and 17 March from a sample of 37 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 5: Use of livelihood coping strategies by rural/urban

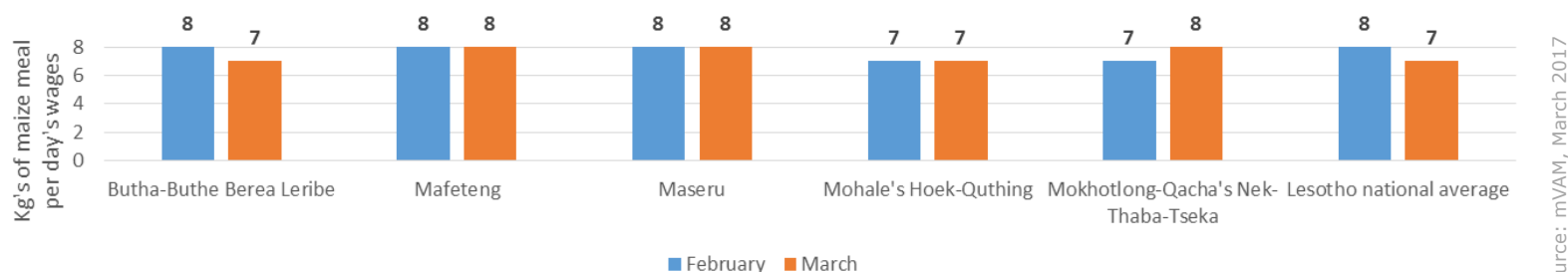




## Purchasing power remains stable

In most districts, purchasing power – measured by the quantity of maize meal a household can buy with a day's earning from manual labour – remained stable over February and March (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6: Purchasing power by district aggregation (kg of maize meal per day's labour)



## Maize meal prices decrease

Average maize meal prices fell slightly from M73.00/12.5 kg in February to M72.00/12.5kg in March (**Figure 7**). Prices were 9 percent lower than the same period in 2016 but 13 percent higher than the five-year average (2012–2016) (**Figure 8**). The national average price of wheat flour was stable at M85/ 12.5kg over February and March (**Figure 9**).

Figure 7: Average prices of maize meal (in maloti per 12.5 kg)



Figure 8: Average prices of maize meal (in maloti per 12.5 kg), compared to 2016 and the five-year average

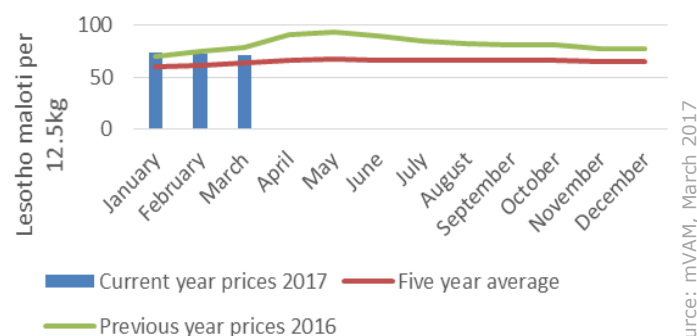


Figure 9: Average prices of wheat flour (in maloti per 12.5 kg)

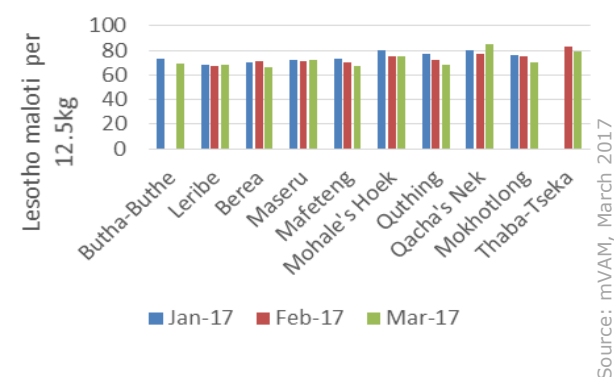


Table 1. Prices of basic foods (in maloti)

District	Cooking oil (750ml)	Sugar (500g)	Salt (500g)	Cabbage (1 head)
Butha-Buthe	18	7	3	10
Leribe	16	8	5	10
Berea	17	8	5	9
Maseru	18	8	5	13
Mafeteng	17	8	5	7
Mohale's Hoek	18	8	4	8
Quthing	17	8	5	12
Qacha's Nek	18	8	6	11
Mokhotlong	18	10	4	11
Thaba-Tseka	19	7	6	10

Source: mVAM, March 2017



## In the words of respondents

"There are not enough jobs and people do not have enough money to buy food." - Male respondent from Berea

"This year the situation is better, the season started well, it's raining we are able to farm." - Male respondent from Butha-Buthe

"Due to high unemployment people do not have enough money to buy inputs grow food." - Female respondent from Leribe

Figure 10: Word cloud



Source: mVAM, March 2017



## For further information:

**Andrew Odera** andrew.oder@wfp.org  
**Mary M. Njoroge** mary.njoroge@wfp.org  
**Vincent Kiwanuka** vincent.kiwanuka@wfp.org

**mVAM Resources:**  
**Website:** [http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam\\_monitoring/](http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/)  
**Blog:** [mvam.org](http://mvam.org)



Kingdom of the Netherlands



**vam**  
food security analysis