

New maize supplies bring lower prices

Key points:



New supplies are lowering maize prices



Negative coping levels have been stable for four consecutive months



Purchasing power remains stable amid lower prices and a fall in manual labour wages



New admissions of malnourished children, adolescents and adults continue to rise



WFP/Alice Clough

Situation Update

March 2017 marked the ninth and final month of the biggest humanitarian response in the history of Malawi, which was triggered when 6.7 million people – 40 percent of the population – were deemed unable to meet their annual minimum food requirements (Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee [MVAC] report, 2016). As per the 2016 Food Insecurity Response Plan, the food-insecure population was provided with in-kind food assistance, hybrid vouchers and cash-based transfers.

Findings from the 2017 pre-harvest assessment conducted by MVAC in March point to a rebound in maize production – especially in southern and central areas – compared to the previous cropping season. However, it notes that a fall armyworm infestation is being reported in almost all districts across the country, with enormous impact in northern region, especially in the district of Karonga. The second round crop estimates forecast maize production of 3.3 million metric tons, an increase of 37 percent compared to the same round last year.



Head of household:

39% Female
61% Male

29

Mean
age of
respondents



Number of Interviews:

2000



Wall type:

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



Four consecutive months of stable negative coping levels

Since December 2016, the national median reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) remained static at 21, signalling a stable food security situation after the index fell from 25 in November (**Figure 1**). However, at the district level, Lilongwe reported an increase in rCSI from 12 to 18 in March due to the fact that households had not yet started harvesting. By contrast, the district cluster of Chiradzulu-Mulanje-Thyoloy-Zomba and Phalombe saw its rCSI fall from 25 to 19 over the same period, thanks to increased green consumption as well the early maize harvest.

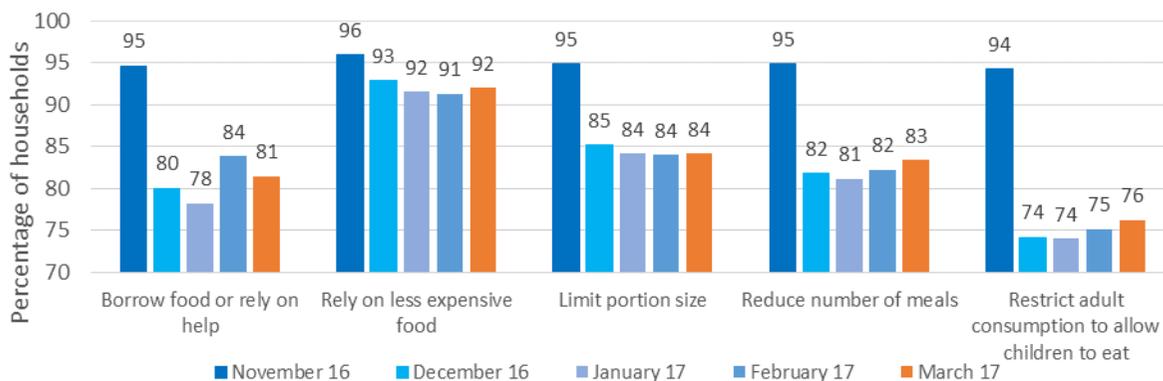
More importantly, the only food-related negative coping strategy – *borrowing food or relying on help* – decreased from 84 percent in February to 81 percent in March (**Figure 2**). This signals improved food security situation at the time when households are relying on own production as the harvesting season progresses. All other coping strategies remained stable compared to the previous round.

Figure 1. National median rCSI



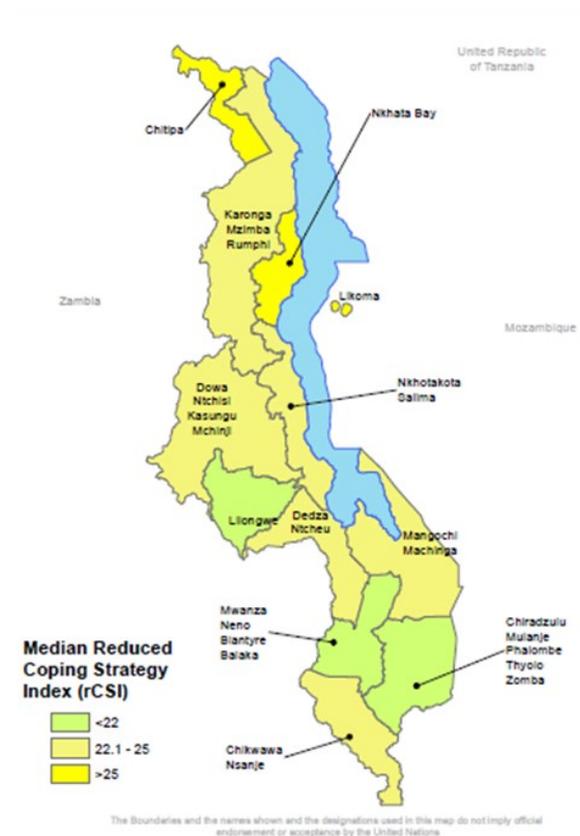
Source: mVAM, March 2017

Figure 2. Percentage of households using negative coping strategies



Source: mVAM, March 2017

Map 1: Median rCSI by district aggregation



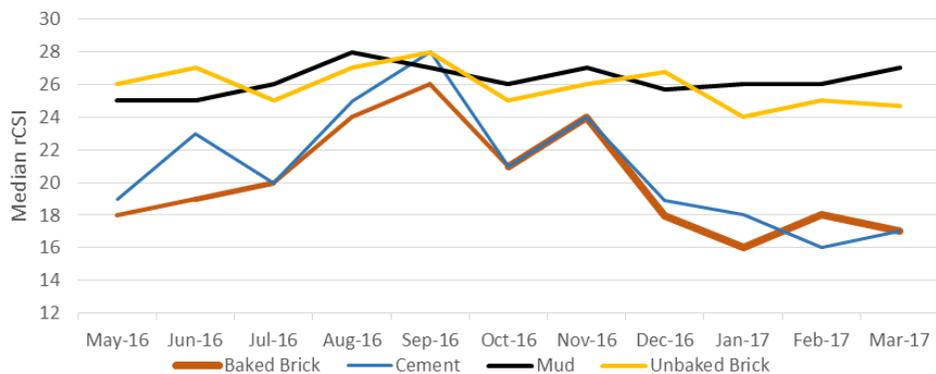
Source: mVAM, March 2017

¹In a typical season, harvesting starts in the south then gradually progresses towards the north.



Negative coping levels remain high for worse-off households

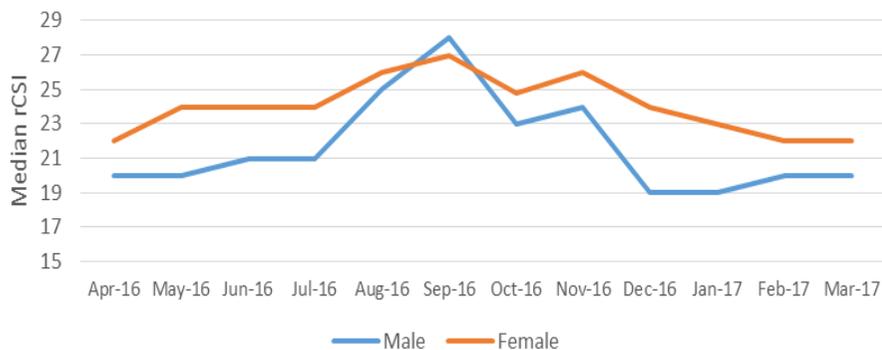
Figure 3: Median rCSI by wall type



Source: mVAM, March 2017



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



Source: mVAM, March 2017

The type of walls of a household’s dwelling is used as a proxy indicator to determine their socio-economic status. Between September and March, the rCSI for better off households (those with cement or baked brick walls) fell significantly, but that of worse off households (those with mud or unbaked brick walls) remained high. This indicates that food security is still fragile for the worse off as they continue to resort to more negative coping strategies.

March negative coping levels were also stable for households led by men and those led by women. There has been a significant decline in rCSI for both types of household since September last year (Figure 4). However, compared to households headed by men, those headed by women continued to engage

Figure 5: Percentage of households using negative coping strategies by sex of household

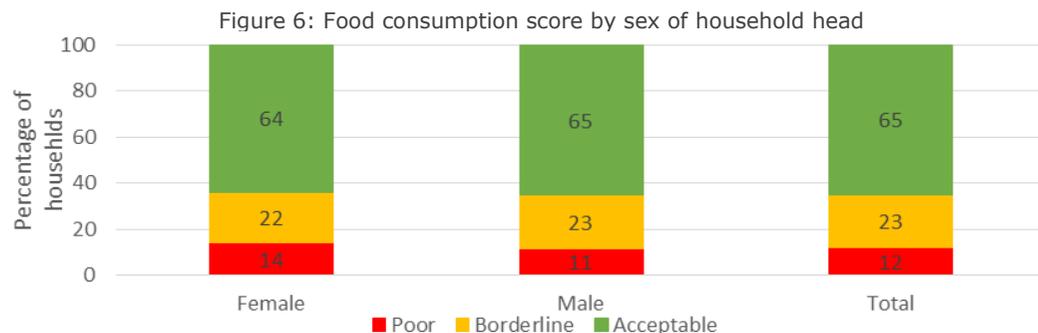


Source: mVAM, March 2017



Food consumption scores remain unchanged

The food consumption score (FCS²) is a food security outcome indicator that measures the dietary diversity, food frequency and the relative nutritional importance of the food consumed by households. In March, 12 percent of households had a poor FCS, 23 percent were borderline and 65 percent had acceptable food consumption. Broken down by gender, 14 percent of female respondents had a poor FCS compared to 11 percent of male respondents. There was no change in the levels of acceptable FCS from the previous round. By contrast, poor consumption prevalence fell from 14 percent to 12 percent and



Source: mVAM, March 2017

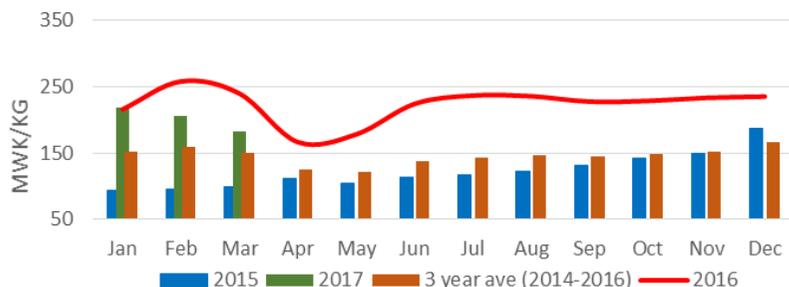
² The FCS categorizes households into three food consumption categories:

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



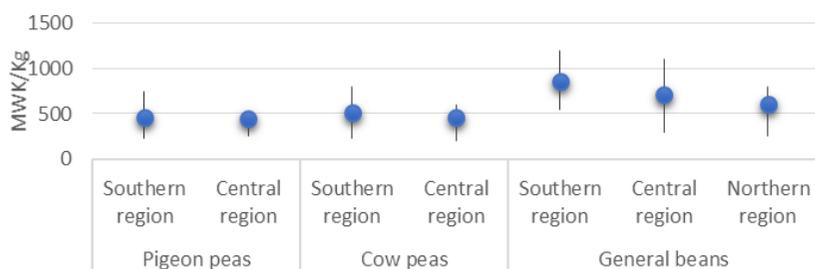
New maize supplies bring lower prices

Figure 7: Average maize prices



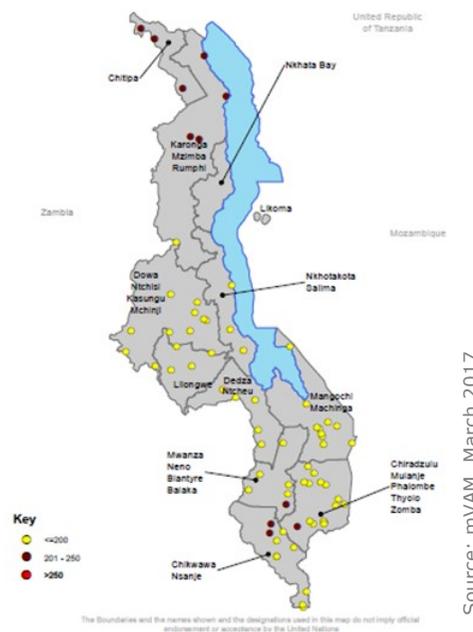
Source: mVAM, March 2017

Figure 8: Pulses prices by region, 13 March to 16 March 2017



Source: mVAM, March 2017

Map 2: Maize prices (MWK/kg) in markets, 13 March to 16 March 2017



Source: mVAM, March 2017

As the harvest season progresses in southern and central regions, the abundance of new supplies in most of the monitored markets meant maize price continued to fall across the country. Maize grain prices fell by 7 percent in March compared to the previous round. ADMARC markets remain open but inactive. Across the 70 monitored markets, maize prices ranged from MWK100/kg to MWK240/kg. The current average price of MWK184/kg is 27 percent lower than the same time last year (when prices were unusually high) but still 88 percent higher than 2015 prices and 22 percent higher than the three-year average price. Falling maize prices coupled with improved production estimates have eased food access constraints for households.

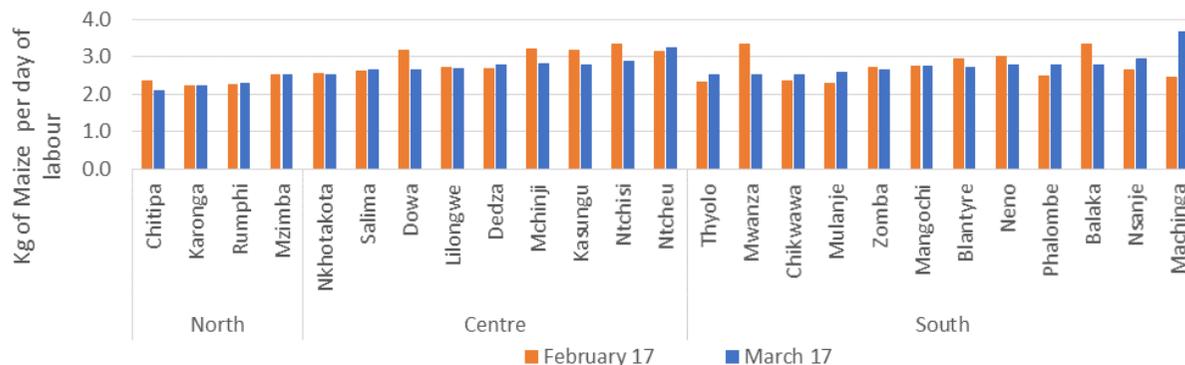
In March, the price of beans fell by 16 percent and that of cowpeas by 7 percent. Pigeon pea prices rose by 2 percent compared to the previous round.



Purchasing power is stable amidst falling cereal prices wages and manual labour wages

The average national manual labour wage fell from MWK600 in February to MWK500 in March. Purchasing power (measured in kilograms of maize that can be purchased with wages from a day of labour) remained stable on account of lower prices, which offset the falling wages. The low wage is the result of the seasonal drop in demand for manual labour, while the lower prices reflect the fact that many households are currently consuming their own produce.

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

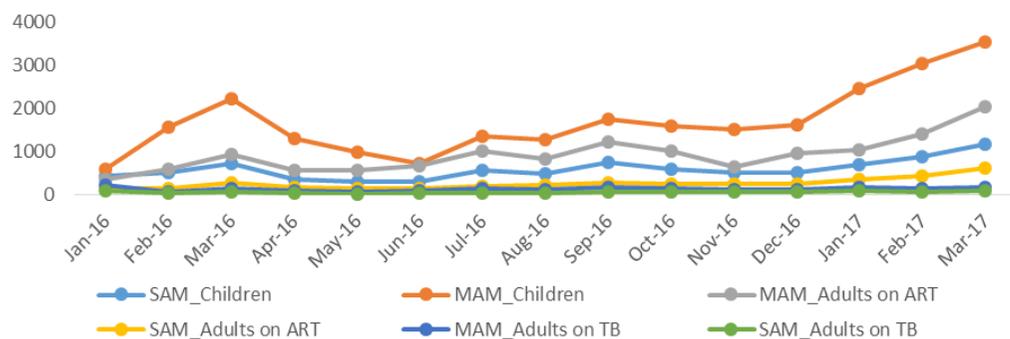


Source: mVAM, March 2017



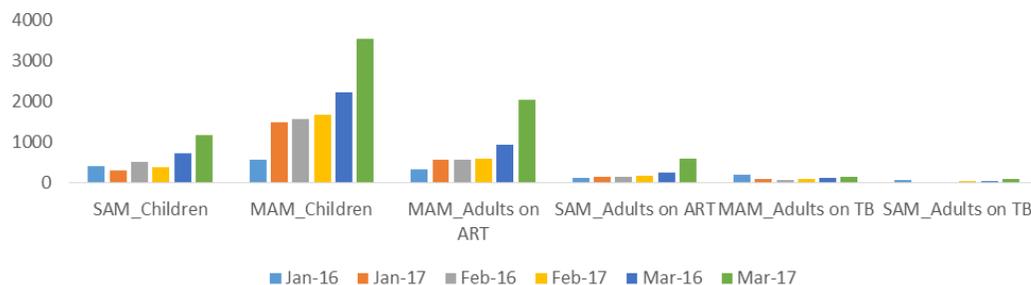
Continued rise in new admissions for malnourishment

Figure 10: Trend of new admissions: Jan 2016 to March 2017



Source: mVAM, March 2017

Figure 11: Trend of new admissions 2016 vs. 2017 – 41 sentinel sites



Source: mVAM, March 2017

Monitoring of the nutrition situation in 70 sentinel sites in the areas affected by El Niño-induced food insecurity continued in March 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. **Figure 10** shows the trends in new admissions among children on anti-retroviral therapy (ART), while Figure 11 shows the trend among adult ART patients.

Admissions for severely and moderately malnourished patients increased from December 2016 through March 2017, coinciding with the peak of rainy season associated with incidences of diseases but also heightened food insecurity locally classified as lean season. Compared to March 2016, admissions of children with moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) were 63 percent higher in March 2017, while those of children with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) were up 61 percent higher. Similarly, among adults MAM cases rose by 46 percent and SAM cases by 44 percent. These increases are due to the deterioration of the nutrition situation but also results from the consistent mass screening supported by partners. As reflected by MVAC results, the affected population increased by over one third compared to 2016: only 2.8 million were food insecure between January and March 2016, while there were an estimated 6.7 million food insecure over the same period in 2017. On a positive note, there are fewer admissions of severe cases among both children and adults compared to moderate cases, indicating that malnutrition is being detected early and that MAM treatment is proving successful.

