

Food consumption slightly deteriorates across Lesotho

Key points:



Use of negative coping strategies was stable in April



There was a 5 percent increase in households with poor food consumption



Maize meal was 22 percent cheaper than the same time last year



WFP/Leonie Marinovich

Seasonal outlook

April was characterised by light-to-moderate rains and mixed weather conditions, with short spells of very cold weather. Some areas have started harvesting main crops. The Lesotho Meteorological Services predicts normal-to-below-normal rainfall between April and June.



766 Interviews



**Average
age of
respondents**



Head of household

Female: 29%

Male: 71%



Environment

Urban: 19%

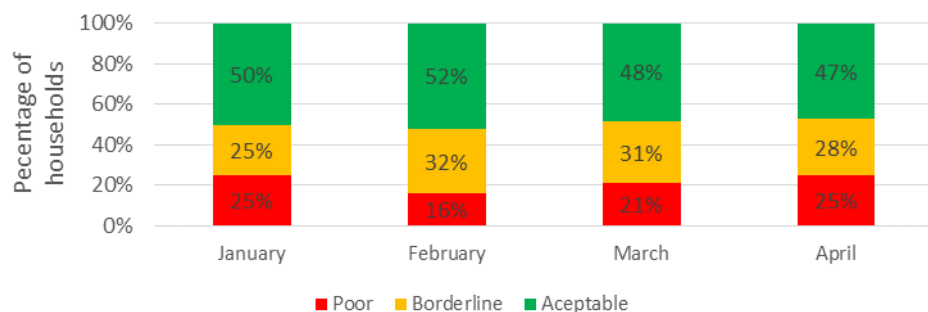
Rural: 81%



Food consumption deteriorates slightly

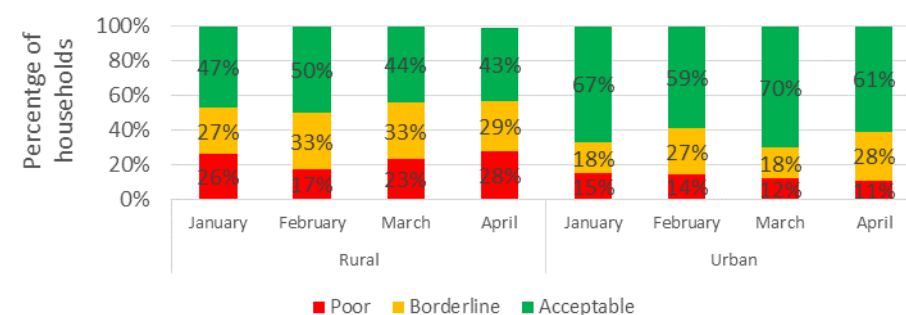
The national Food Consumption Score (FCS)¹ and the reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI)² remained stable in April (FCS=44.43, rCSI=17). However, there was a 4 percent increase in households with poor food consumption (**Figure 1**). In rural areas, the share of households with poor food consumption rose by 5 percent between March and April (**Figure 2**).

Figure 1: Food consumption, January to April 2017



Source: mVAM, April 2017

Figure 2: Food consumption by urban/rural area, January to April 2017



Source: mVAM, April 2017

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

²The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) indicates the frequency and the severity of coping strategies used by households: a lower rCSI indicates less stress on the households.

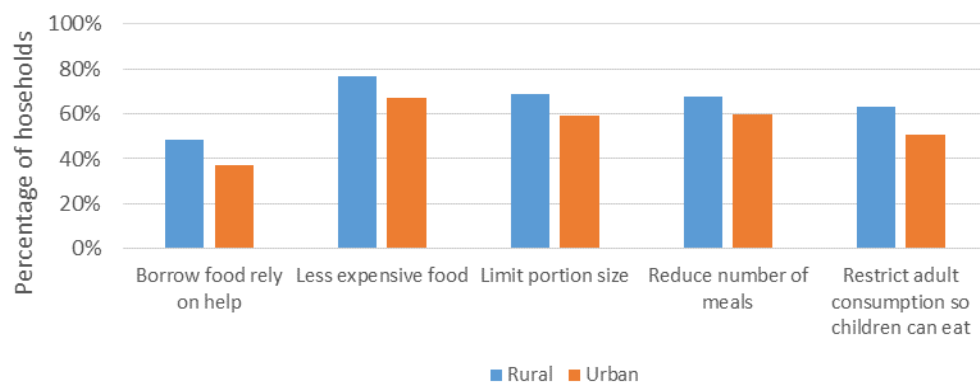


Use of negative coping strategies is higher in the rural areas

Although the adoption of food-related negative coping strategies is common among both rural and urban households, they are more prevalent among the former. As seen in **Figure 3**, both types of household resorted most to buying less expensive food, followed by limiting portion sizes and eating fewer meals a day.

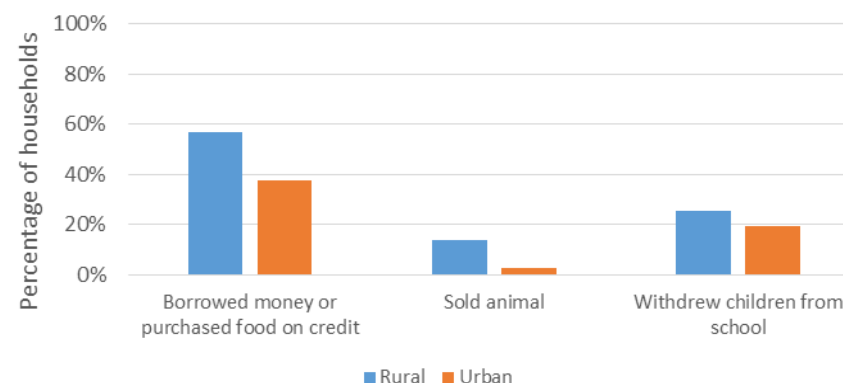
Similarly, livelihood-related negative coping strategies such as borrowing money or purchasing food on credit were common among rural and urban households, with a higher prevalence in rural areas (**Figure 4**).

Figure 3: Use of food-related negative coping strategies by urban/rural area



Source: mVAM, April 2017

Figure 4: Use of livelihood-related negative coping strategies by urban/rural area



Source: mVAM, April 2017



Markets are functioning despite difficult road conditions

Although 67 percent of interviewed traders said that access to markets was difficult, the majority (87 percent) continued to receive their stock one or two days after placing an order. Roads were damaged by heavy rains in February. Around 47 percent of traders reported stock shortages of maize meal, wheat flour, pulses, cooking oil, sugar and salt. Just over half reported sourcing maize from other districts in Lesotho. Around 46 percent ordered stock weekly; 27 percent ordered every two weeks and the remainder ordered monthly. Some traders said their businesses were being limited by low demand triggered by unemployment and customers' lack of money and by competition with foreign-owned shops.

Methodology

In April 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 766 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.

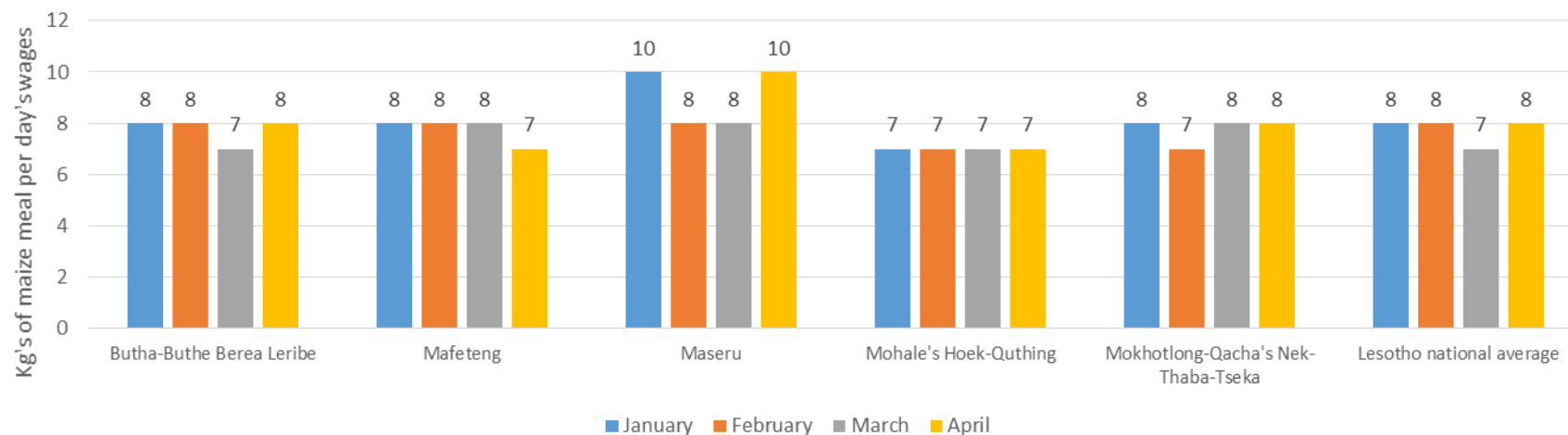
The questionnaire collected data on demographics, food assistance, household food consumption and coping strategies. A final open-ended question gave respondents the chance to share additional information on the food situation in their communities. The data was weighted by the number of mobile phones owned by the household and district population estimates. In addition, food price data were collected between 12 and 25 April from a sample of 30 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.



Purchasing power remains stable

Purchasing power – measured by the quantity of maize meal a household can buy with a day's earning from manual labour – has remained stable in most districts since February, except in Maseru where it has risen slightly (**Figure 6**).

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



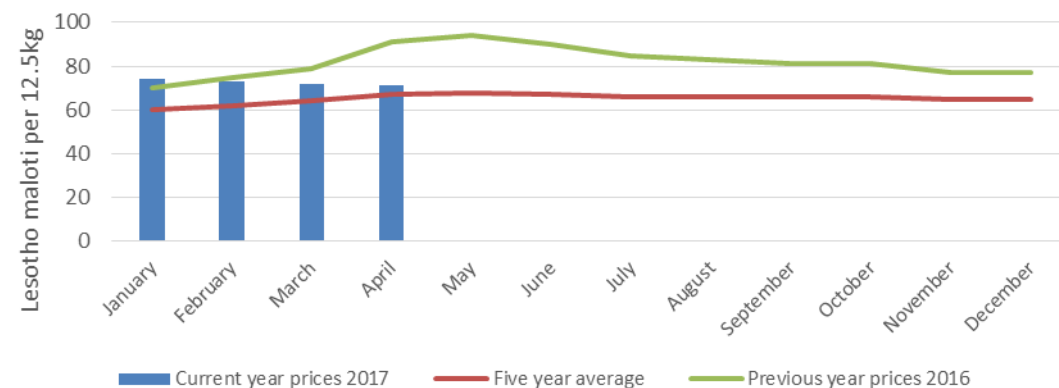
Source: mVAM, April 2017



Maize meal prices fall slightly

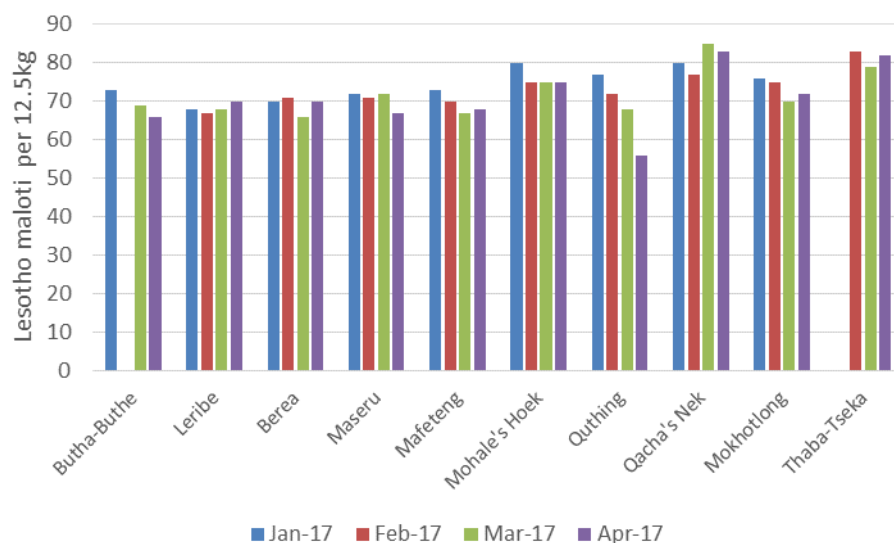
Average maize meal prices fell from M72.00/12.5kg in March to M71.00/12.5kg in April (**Figure 7**). Prices were 22 percent lower than in 2016 but 6 percent higher than the five-year average (2012–2016) (**Figure 8**). The national average price of wheat flour was stable at M86/12.5kg over March and April (**Figure 9**).

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



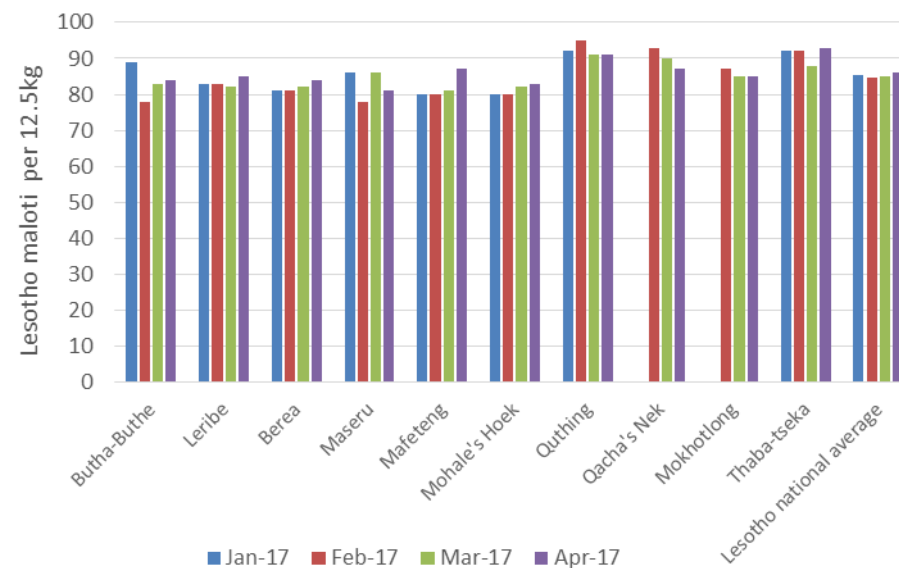
Source: mVAM, April 2017

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



Source: mVAM, April 2017

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



Source: mVAM, April 2017

Table 1. Prices of basic foods (in maloti)

District	Cooking oil (750ml)	Sugar (500g)	Salt (500g)	Cabbage (1 head)	Sugar beans (500g)	Dried peas (500g)
Butha-Buthe	19	8	4		19	7
Leribe	16	8	5	10	10	9
Berea	18	8	4	14	7	6
Maseru	17	8	5	5	10	9
Mafeteng	15	8	4	13	10	9
Mohale's Hoek	18	8	4	8	7	7
Quthing	17	8	5	10	9	10
Qacha's Nek	18	9	5		11	10
Mokhotlong	16	8	4	8	9	7
Thaba-Tseka	21	8	6	10	8	7

Source: mVAM, April 2017



In the words of respondents

"Unemployment is the problem in our community"- Male respondent from Berea

"Drought is the main problem to farming"- Male respondent from Butha-Buthe

"People are unemployed not able to buy their own food" - Female respondent from Leribe

"Lack of jobs and farming inputs" - Female respondent from Mafeteng

Figure 10: Word cloud



Source: mVAM, April 2017



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