Significant drop in maize grain prices

Key points:

- Stress levels reducing for vulnerable households
- Fewer households are reducing the number of meals they eat in a day
- Maize grain and maize meal prices are decreasing

Situation Update

The harvesting of the 2017 food and cash crops has commenced and is expected to continue into May and June. Production forecasts are positive this season thanks to the normal to above-normal rainfall received across most of the country. Water availability for domestic use, livestock and crop production, and other uses is good. Food assistance programmes targeting rural households have been scaled back (source: FEWS NET). The Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) plans to conduct a rural livelihoods assessment from 11 to 28 May with the broad objective of assessing prevailing food and nutrition insecurity.
The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) is used to measure the severity and frequency of the behaviours that households engage in when faced with a shortage of food or a shortage of money to buy food. The national median rCSI was 19. The Bulawayo aggregation had the lowest median rCSI (rCSI=16) followed by the Harare aggregation (rCSI=17).

The median rCSI for households headed by men (rCSI=17) was much lower than that for households headed by women (rCSI=24). More households headed by women employed coping strategies to deal with a lack of food or money to buy food. Although significantly fewer households headed by men were reducing the number of meals eaten per day in April, there was increase in the proportion of households headed by women who ate smaller portion sizes and cheaper foods to cope (Figure 1).

Toilet types are a proxy indicator for household economic status. There was a significant difference in the rCSI of households using flush toilets compared with those using Blair toilets or pit latrines. However, the rCSI for households with pit latrines declined, indicating an improvement in their food security status.
Food security improves for poorer households

Maize prices have continued their downward trend since the beginning of the year. This is attributed to increased household cereal stocks from own production. Maize grain prices have dropped by 35 percent and maize meal prices by 5 percent since January 2017. These prices are lower than prices than the 5-year averages for both maize grain and maize meal.

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### Table 1. Maize prices (USD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</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>Mar-17</th>
<th>Apr-17</th>
<th>Apr-16</th>
<th>5-year average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maize grain</td>
<td>20 litres</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>6.56</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>7.83</td>
<td>6.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize meal</td>
<td>10 kg</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>6.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Maize grain (20 litres)</th>
<th>Maize meal (10kg)</th>
<th>Sorghum (20 litres)</th>
<th>Sugar beans (500g)</th>
<th>Cooking oil (2 litres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bikita</td>
<td>Nyika</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binga</td>
<td>Binga</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulawayo</td>
<td>Renkini</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chipinge</td>
<td>Chechehe</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>3.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwenezi</td>
<td>Rutenga</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rushinga</td>
<td>Rushinga</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zvishavane</td>
<td>Mandava</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the words of respondents

“I would not know much about the food situation in my community, people mind their own problems,” Female respondent aged 23, Bulawayo

“In our community the food situation is very good,” – Male respondent aged 31, Chegutu urban

“We are expecting a bumper harvest,” Male respondent aged 32, Mangwe

“Food is a problem because we are not going to work,” – Female respondent aged 42, Zvishavane urban

“We live hand to mouth,” – Male respondent aged 28, Marondera

“We thank the Government for assistance,” – Female respondent, aged 27, Bindura urban

Methodology

Since August 2016, mVAM has conducted interviews across Zimbabwe using the short message service (SMS) system. Before then, data was collected using an interactive voice (IVR) system. In April, interviews were held with 2,309 respondents, randomly selected from an individual database of rural and urban-based mobile subscribers. The country has been divided into 13 district aggregations derived from ZimVAC 2016 food and nutrition prevalence rates for the household survey (Map 1). The SMS 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 of US$0.50 was given to respondents who successfully completed the survey.

Market Survey

Live voice calls were made to 35 traders in the main market in each of the following 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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