



Liberia and Sierra Leone

April 2015: Coping remains high in Ebola-affected Kambia and Port Loko

Tracking food security during the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak

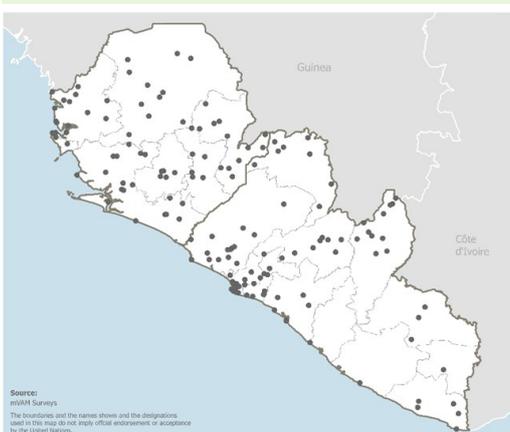
Highlights

- In April, fewer households used negative coping strategies in Sierra Leone, notably in the districts of Kailahun/Kono and Bombali/Tonkolili/Koinadugu. The highest levels of negative coping are seen in the Ebola-affected districts of Kambia and Port Loko. In Liberia, use of negative coping strategies remained stable.
- Poorer households in Sierra Leone resorted more to negative coping strategies in April than in March.
- National food prices remained stable in both countries. However, the price of imported rice, local rice and palm oil increased significantly in Lofa, Liberia.
- Wage rates were stable in Sierra Leone, while Liberia experienced seasonal wage decrease of 3 percent. Stable food prices meant that purchasing power remained the same in Sierra Leone and fell by 3 percent in Liberia.

LIBERIA, SIERRA LEONE - Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI)
APRIL 2015



Source: WFP mVAM



Methodology

April 2015 marked the seventh round of data collection. The data was collected by SMS over one week in mid-April. A total of 1,050 questionnaires were collected in Liberia, and 1,020 were collected in Sierra Leone. The map to the left shows the cellphone towers from which responses were received. Details on methodology are available [online](#).

Ebola abates but new cases still reported in Sierra Leone

In the week to 12 April, Sierra Leone reported 9 confirmed cases of Ebola, the same total as in the previous week. Cases were reported from three western districts: Kambia (4 cases), Port Loko (1 case), and Western Area Urban, which includes the capital, Freetown (4 cases). During the same week, there were no confirmed cases in Liberia. No new cases have been reported in Liberia for over six weeks, with the exception of 1 case reported in Montserrado on 20 March.

Source: [Ebola Situation Report – 15 April 2015](#)

Negative coping levels remain stable in Liberia and fall in Sierra Leone

The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) measures the frequency and severity of the behaviours households engage in when faced with food shortages. A higher score indicates that households are resorting to more frequent or severe negative coping strategies.

The overall use of negative coping strategies remained stable in Liberia and decreased by 2% in Sierra Leone. Off-season cropping may have improved food availability and land preparation activities in February and March and may have increased household income.

As Figure 1 shows, in Sierra Leone, national average coping levels fell by 2 percent in April compared to March (rCSI=13.9, $p=0.05$). The highest levels of negative coping are found in Kambia/Port Loko (rCSI=16.0); these were the only areas to report Ebola cases in April. Negative coping decreased by 4 percent in Kailahun/Kono (rCSI=15.9, $p=0.04$) and by 9 percent in Bombali/Tonkolili/Koinadugu (rCSI=14.9, $p=0.04$): these are areas with above-average coping levels.

The national average rCSI for Liberia did not change significantly, standing at 14.7 in April compared to 15 in March ($p=0.57$). Negative coping levels remain the highest in Lofa (rCSI 16.5).

April data confirms that urban households tend to use fewer coping strategies than rural ones. In Sierra Leone, the lowest coping levels were again observed in urban parts of Western Area (rCSI=11.4). In Liberia, the better-off locations include Montserrado (rCSI=13.9) and Margibi (rCSI=13.9), the most urban areas of the country, compared to relatively rural Bong (rCSI=15.5).

As in previous rounds, both in Sierra Leone and Liberia, households headed by women use more negative coping strategies than those headed by men. In both countries, better-off households use coping strategies much less frequently than more deprived ones. In Liberia, households with a flush toilet have an rCSI of 11, compared to an rCSI of 25 for households who use dirt pit latrines or have no toilet at all (Figure 3). In Sierra Leone, households with their own flush toilet have an rCSI of 9.1, less than half that of households using dirt pit latrine or the bush as toilets (Figure 2).

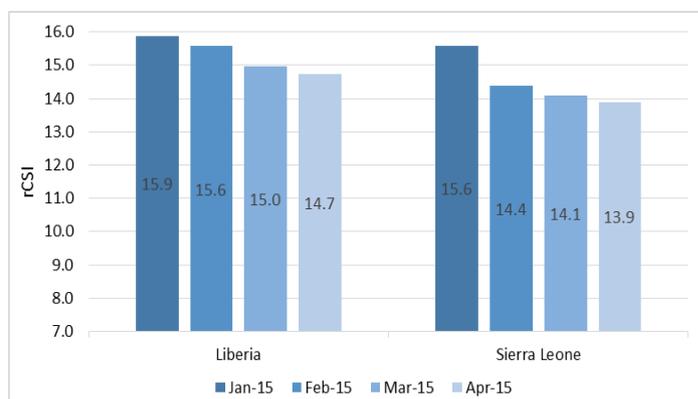
In April, worse-off households (those using dirt pits and the bush as latrines) reported increasing coping in Liberia and Sierra Leone, while the rCSI of better-off households was stable or decreasing. Most notably, households using dirt pit latrines in Sierra Leone saw a 35 percent increase in their negative coping level (rCSI=24.2, $p=0.03$). Overall, this suggests that vulnerability of worse-off households are increasing. Poorer households reported a lack of jobs as the cause of food insecurity.

Food prices remain stable or decrease except in few areas including Lofa and Kambia/Port Loko

In Liberia, local and imported rice prices remained stable or decreased in most districts, except for Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Nimba and Lofa. In Lofa, the price of local rice rose by 9 percent, and that of imported rice by 8 percent, offsetting the fall in prices seen in March. The price of palm oil also remained stable or decreased throughout Liberia, reflecting the peak harvest season. The only exception was Lofa, where prices rose by 7 percent. Since borders reopened, areas such as Lofa may have seen an increase in demand for oil and rice coming from neighboring countries.

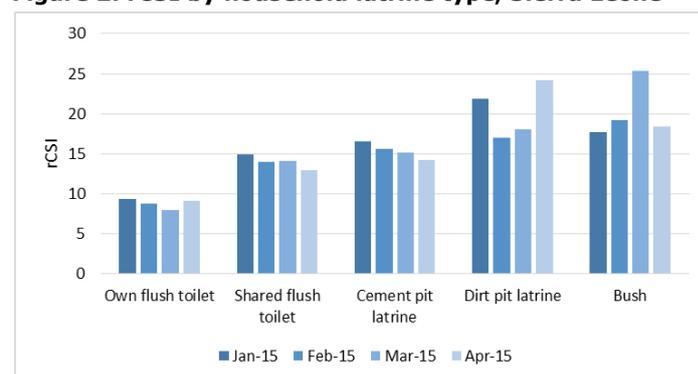
In Sierra Leone, after price increases in March, the national average prices of rice – both local and imported – and palm oil have stabilised. However, the picture is mixed at district level. Prices of imported rice fell in all districts,

Figure 1: Negative coping, Liberia and Sierra Leone



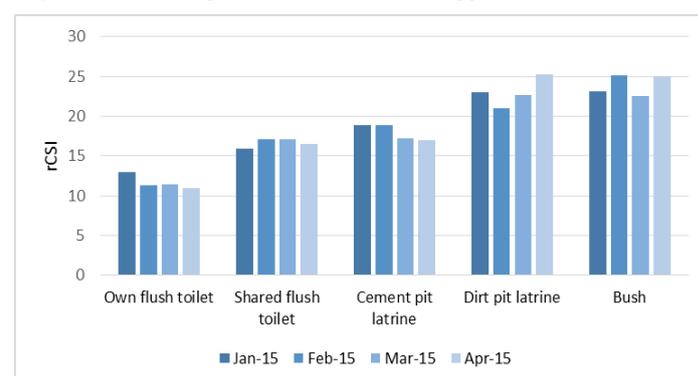
Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 2: rCSI by household latrine type, Sierra Leone



Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 3: rCSI by household latrine type, Liberia



Source: WFP mVAM

Table 1: Food price trends

Aggregation	Feb - Mar changes			Mar - Apr changes		
	Imported rice	Local rice	Palm oil	Imported rice	Local rice	Palm oil
Liberia	-1%	0%	0%	+1%	0%	-1%
Lofa	-6%	-8%	-4%	+9%	+8%	+7%
Sierra Leone	+3%	+2%	+3%	-1%	0%	0%
Kambia/Port Loko	0%	+2%	+5%	+7%	+4%	-3%

except in Kambia/Port Loko (+7%) and in Bonthe/Pujehun/Moyamba (+5%). Local rice prices decreased in all districts, except in Kambia/Port Loko (+4%), Bo (+4%) and Bonthe/Pujehun/Moyamba (+5%). The increases in Kambia/Port Loko – a surplus-producing area – may be linked to continuing Ebola transmission and measures that restrict trade.

A mixed picture for unskilled labour wages

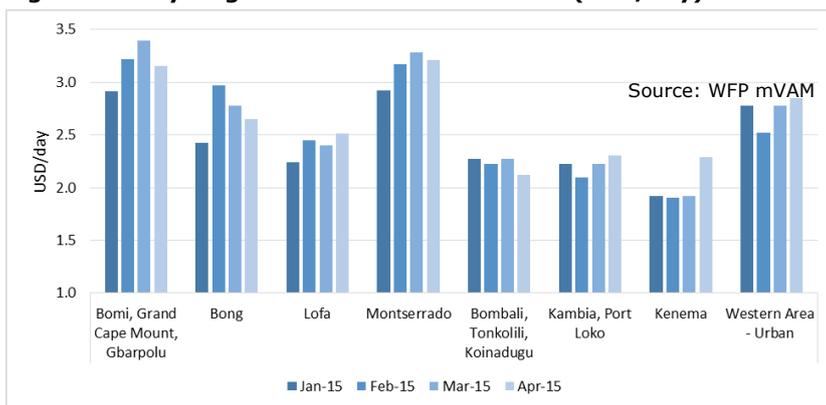
Manual labour wage rates are down by 3 percent from March in Liberia. Demand for agricultural labour has slowed down as land preparation for rice and other crops ends in March. In Bomi/Grand Cape Mount/Gbarpolu, April wages were 7 percent lower than in March. Rates also decreased in Bong (-5%), Grand Bassa (-4%), Margibi (-3%) and Montserrado (-2%). Conversely, wage rates increased in Lofa by 5 percent.

In Sierra Leone, wage rates rose by 1 percent in April, following a 7 percent increase in March. Wage rises were seen in most districts, led by Kenema (+19%), urban parts of Western Area (+3%) and Kambia/Port Loko (+4%). Wage rates fell in Kailahun/Kono (-3%) and Bo (-2%).

Lower wage rates saw wage-to-imported-rice terms of trade fall by 3 percent in April in Liberia. The most notable decrease was in Bomi/Grand Cape Mount/Gbarpolu, where terms of trade have dropped by 11 percent since March. With a daily wage of 8.2 cups of imported rice, purchasing power is the lowest in Lofa. In other, better-off places such as Montserrado, people can buy 10.6 cups of imported rice a day with their daily wage.

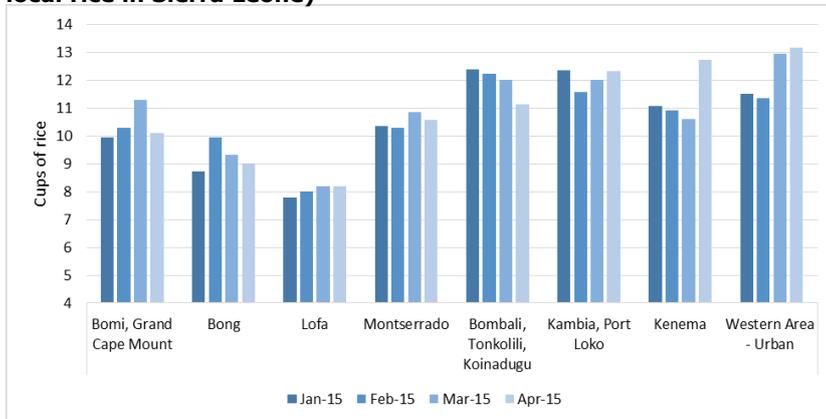
In Sierra Leone, wage-to-local-rice terms of trade remained stable in April: wages and food prices both remained stable. The most significant improvement was seen in Kenema, where purchasing power increased by 20 percent. Smaller increases were also noted in Kambia/Port Loko and parts of Western Area. By contrast, terms of trade fell in all other districts, most noticeably in Bombali/ Tonkolili/ Koinadugu (-8%), Bonthe/Pujehun/Moyamba (-8%) and Kailahun/Kono (-7%). The lowest purchasing power was observed in Kailahun/ Kono, where a day's wage purchases 11 cups of rice, compared to 13 cups in Freetown.

Figure 4: Daily wage rates for unskilled labour (USD/day)



Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 5: Wage-to-rice terms of trade (imported rice in Liberia, local rice in Sierra Leone)



Source: WFP mVAM

Perceptions of food security in April

'Ebola' was the third most-mentioned term in Sierra Leone in April. It was used much less in Liberia, where it was mentioned 30 percent less frequently than in March. These observations are in line with the latest Ebola trends in both countries.

Figure 6: Word cloud for Sierra Leone



Figure 7: Word cloud for Liberia



In Sierra Leone, many respondents attributed Ebola as a cause of road blocks, a lack of farming and high food prices. The term 'expensive' was the most-mentioned term, particularly in Port Loko, where many respondents reported that prices of local products are "sky rocketing".

In Liberia, 'expensive' was mentioned half as frequently as in Sierra Leone. None of the Liberian respondents mentioned roads being blocked, although many of them believe that poor road conditions are a constraint to food security. The start of the rainy season in May/June will deteriorate road conditions further.

In both countries, responses were divided between people who thought the food security situation was good and those who were worried about it. A starker divide can be seen in Liberia where the term 'hard' was ranked first and the term 'good' was ranked fourth. In Sierra Leone, many more respondents said the situation was 'difficult' and 'hard', rather than 'good'.

In the words of respondents

Sierra Leone

- "There is availability of food but the cost is high, especially the locally produced goods" – Male respondent from Port Loko.
- "The food situation in my community today is very poor as people struggle to get food because it is very expensive for the poor" – Male respondent from Kailahun.
- "Presently things are getting better as compared to the past four months especially in my district Kono, which is now free of Ebola" – Female respondent from Kono.
- "We are so much at less food, especially the young children who want to eat twice a day, but we only eat once" – Female respondent from rural Western Area.

Liberia

- "The food situation in my community is better!" – Female respondent from Lofa.
- "There are so many difficulties surrounding food in my community, most homes heads are not working" – Female respondent from Montserrado.
- "The food condition in my community has relatively improved because we are able to move around a bit freely" – Male respondent from Bomi.
- "The food situation in my community is very bad because the road to the market is too far, you have to pay for transportation to go to the market" – Male respondent from Grand Bassa.

Conclusions and Outlook

In April, labour and economic activities in Sierra Leone and parts of Liberia continued to recover, albeit moderately offset by seasonal trends. Public services have also improved in both countries, although food insecurity remains a concern. Food prices were mostly stable in both countries, with some districts experiencing increases caused by higher transportation costs, trade restrictions in Ebola-affected areas and increased demand from neighbouring countries.

Coping levels are still higher in rural areas that have been affected by Ebola, as well as for households headed by women and for the poorest households. In fact, poorer households using dirt pit or bush latrines have actually seen their rCSI increase, while for better-off households, rCSI is either stable or falling. As the June–August lean season approaches, assistance should make these groups a priority.



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To download mVAM data on the Ebola-affected countries, please visit: http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/Ebola.html