



WFP/Rein Skullerud

Liberia

March 2015: Food prices fall in Lofa County

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

Highlights

- In March, households in Lofa used fewer negative coping strategies than in February. The counties with highest levels of negative coping include Bomi, Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu and Lofa.
- Negative coping strategies are most frequently used by the poorest households, by those living in Ebola-affected rural areas and by households headed by women.
- Imported and local rice prices remained stable. As the land preparation season advances, wage rates are improving (+3% compared to February).

Negative coping levels fall in Lofa and remain stable overall

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.

As Figure 1 shows, the overall use of negative coping strategies declined or remained stable in Liberia in March compared to February. The start of the harvest and the lifting of Ebola-related restrictions on movement have improved food availability and led to a recovery in economic activity.

Map 1: Liberia — Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) - March 2015



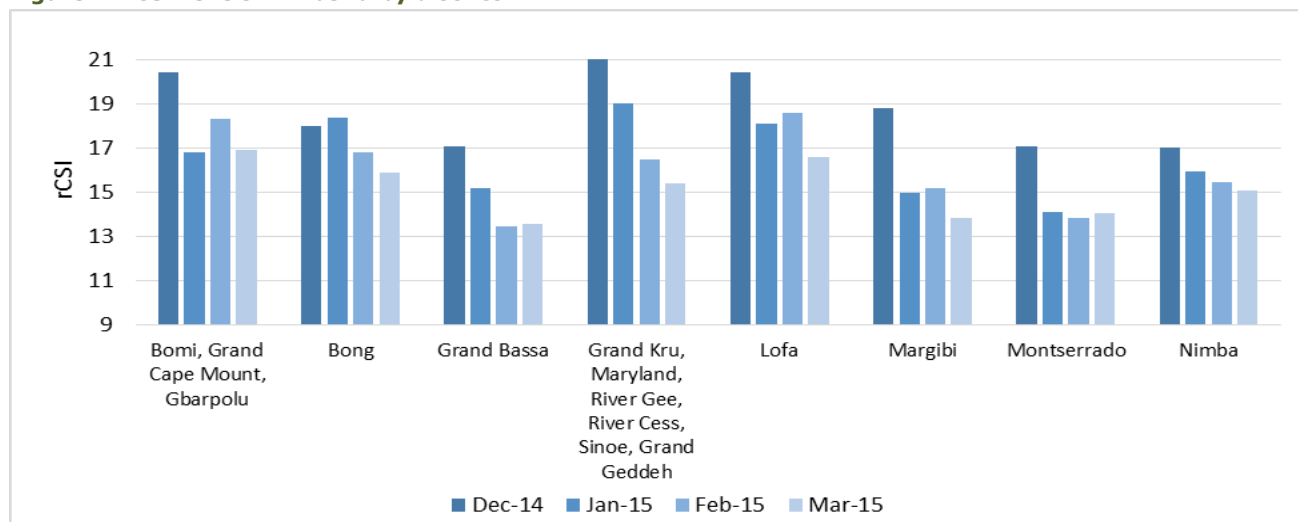
Methodology



March 2015 marked the sixth round of data collection. The data was collected by SMS over one week in mid-March. A total of 1,100 questionnaires were collected in Liberia. The map on the left shows the cell-phone towers from which responses were received. Details on methodology are available [online](#).

Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 1: rCSI levels in Liberia by district



Source: WFP mVAM

The national average rCSI for Liberia did not change significantly, standing at 15 in March compared to 15.6 in February ($p=0.22$). However, negative coping dropped in Lofa, with the rCSI falling from 18.3 in February to 16.6 in March ($p=0.08$). This improvement coincides with lower staple food prices in the county. The results for other counties are statistically similar to previous rounds. Negative coping levels remain highest in the western zone that includes Bomi, Grand Cape Mount and Gbarpolu, as well as Lofa. These areas have had a large number of Ebola cases.

March data continues to show that urban households tend to use fewer coping strategies than rural ones. The better-off parts of Liberia include Montserrat (rCSI=14.0), Grand Bassa (rCSI=13.6) and Margibi (rCSI=13.8).

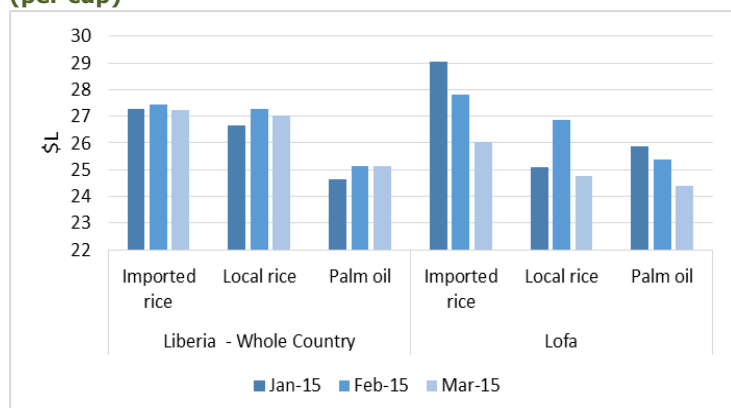
As in previous rounds, households headed by women use more negative coping strategies than those headed by men. As seen in Figure 2, the March rCSI of households headed by women was 16.5, compared to a more moderate 14.6 for households headed by men.

Better-off households continue to use coping strategies much less frequently than more deprived ones. As shown in Figure 3, the rCSI of households who have their own flush toilet was 11.4, while the rCSI of households who use the bush as their latrine was almost twice as high (22.5).

Prices of imported and local rice fall in Lofa

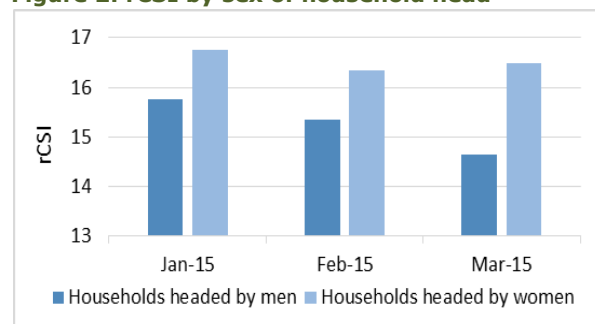
Overall, local and imported rice prices were stable in March in Liberia, but they are still at their highest level since May 2012. In Lofa, there was a 6 percent decline in the price of imported rice, and local rice prices fell by 8 percent, possibly thanks to lower fuel prices this month. This may also reflect improved food supply in Lofa following the lifting of restrictions to trade. Nationally, palm oil prices were stable, although they fell by 4 percent in Lofa, reflecting the peak harvest season.

Figure 4: Prices of palm oil (per pint) and imported/local rice (per cup)



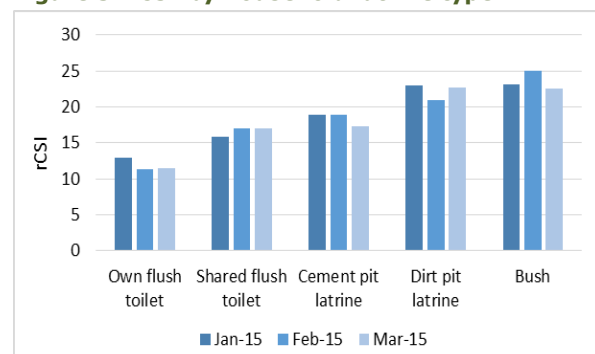
Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 2: rCSI by sex of household head



Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 3: rCSI by household latrine type



Source: WFP mVAM

One confirmed Ebola case in Montserrat but none in other counties

After three consecutive weeks with no new Ebola cases, a new confirmed case was reported on 20 March in Montserrat. Lofa, which was the county most afflicted by Ebola, has not reported a confirmed case for over 90 days, and none of the other counties have reported a confirmed case within the past 21 days.

Source: [Ebola Situation Report - 25 March](#)

The terms 'farm', 'farming' and 'farmer' were also more common among the respondents in high rCSI areas and the respondents who are worse off. This suggests that in high rCSI areas, people are more concerned about food production compared to those in low rCSI areas.

In this round, respondents no longer referred to transport and road blocks, as they did in previous rounds. This suggests the lifting of quarantines and road opening measures are effective and are noted by the respondents.

Women provided more positive answers to open questions than men. Words such as 'good' and 'easy' are more commonly used by women, as opposed to 'hard' and 'poor', which men use more frequently.

In the words of the respondents:

- "The food situation in my community is not stable: sometimes the prices of food items rise, and then they fall" – Male respondent from Margibi.
- "The food issue is hard in my area because only few people have very little farm produce due to the lack of seeds, tools, and cash. That is why almost everyone lives on buying foods" – Male respondent from Bong.
- "The food situation in our community is not that bad. People try to get something to eat every day. It is not enough but at least they eat every day" – Female respondent from Grand Bassa.



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