



Sierra Leone

March 2015: Wage rates and terms of trade improve in Sierra Leone

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

Highlights

- Imported and local rice prices increased modestly in March. A recovery in economic activity is leading to an improvement in unskilled wage rates (up 7 percent compared to February).
- The households who are depending the most on negative coping strategies are in the districts of Kailahun, Kono, Bombali, Tonkolili and Koinadugu.
- March data continues to show that 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.

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

SIERRA LEONE - Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI)
MARCH 2015



Source: WFP mVAM

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 1,050 questionnaires were collected in Sierra Leone. The map on the right shows the cell-phone towers from which responses were received. Details on methodology are available [online](#).

Negative coping levels remain stable 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.

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

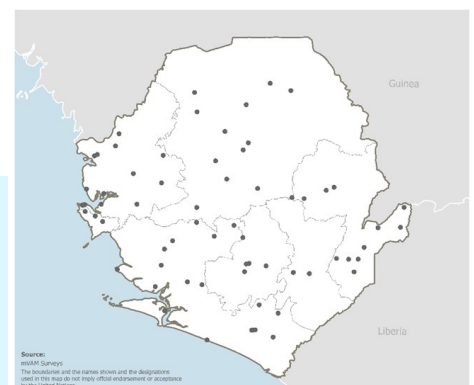
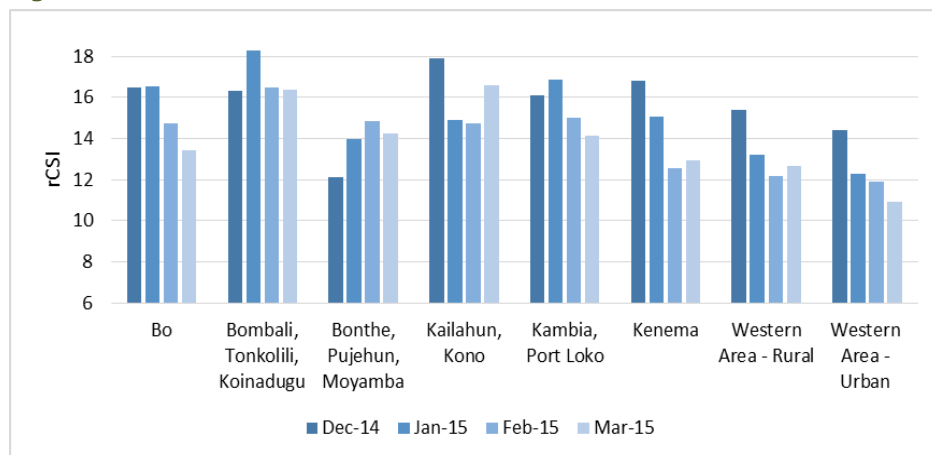


Figure 1: rCSI levels in Sierra Leone



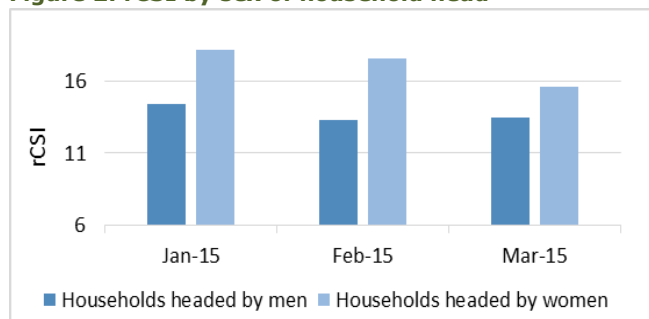
Source: WFP mVAM

In Sierra Leone, national average coping levels were almost unchanged between February and March. The highest levels of negative coping are found in Kailahun/Kono (rCSI=16.6) and in Bombali/Tonkolili/Koinadugu (rCSI=16.4). In Kailahun and Kono, which were exposed to Ebola, the level of negative coping increased between February and March, but this difference was not statistically significant ($p=0.17$).

March data continues to show that urban households tend to use fewer coping strategies than rural ones. The lowest coping levels were again observed in urban parts of Western Area (rCSI=10.9).

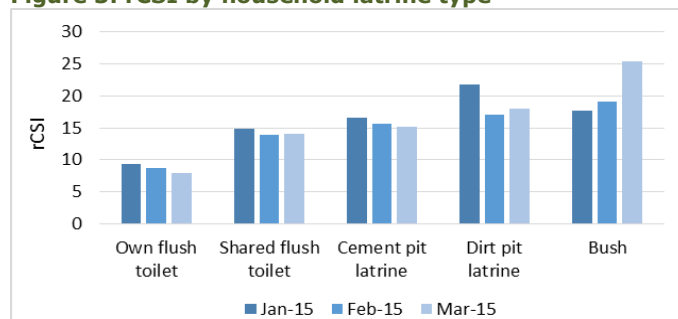
As in previous rounds, households headed by women are using more negative coping strategies than those headed by men (Figure 2). Better-off households use coping strategies much less frequently than more deprived ones: households with a flush toilet in Sierra Leone have an rCSI of 7, compared to an rCSI of 25 for households that have no toilet at all (Figure 3).

Figure 2: rCSI by sex of household head



Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 3: rCSI by household latrine type



Source: WFP mVAM

Ebola continues to spread in Freetown

In the week to 22 March, the number of confirmed Ebola cases in Sierra Leone was 33, which is the lowest weekly total since early June 2014. Ebola case incidence was highest in the capital, Freetown, with 13 new confirmed cases. Other confirmed cases in Sierra Leone came from the capital's neighbouring districts.

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

Price increases for imported and local rice

Food prices rose in line with seasonal trends in March for imported rice (+3%), local rice (+2%) and palm oil (+3%). The higher prices reflect reduced seasonal availability and increased demand due to land preparation. Imported rice prices increased sharply in Bombali/Tonkolili/Koinadugu (+9%), a more remote area of the country that is prone to price fluctuations. The biggest rise in local rice prices was in Kenema (+9%).

Table 1: Food price changes, imported rice/local rice (per cup) and palm oil (per pint)

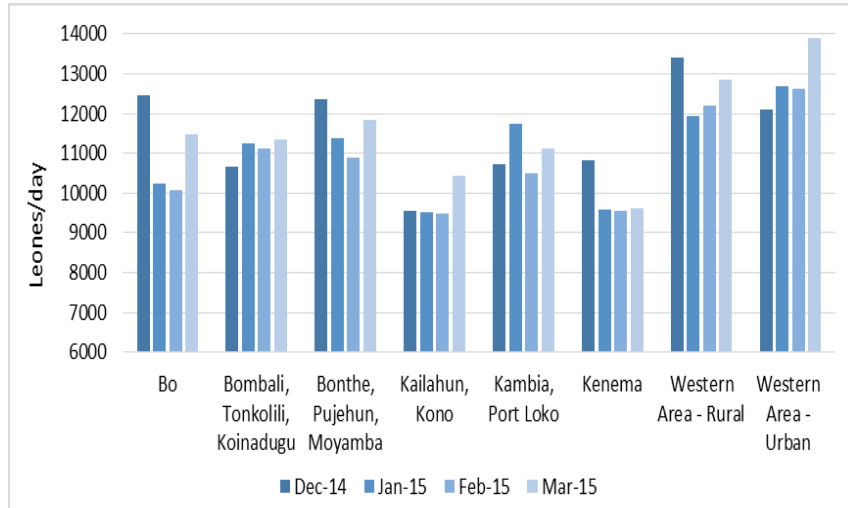
Aggregation	Jan - Feb changes			Feb - Mar changes		
	Imported rice	Local rice	Palm oil	Imported rice	Local rice	Palm oil
Whole country	+1%	+2%	-1%	+3%	+2%	+3%
Bombali, Tonkolili, Koinadugu	-2%	+1%	-1%	+9%	+5%	+6%
Bonthe, Pujehun, Moyamba	+3%	+2%	+0%	-2%	+0%	+8%
Kenema	+4%	+2%	+2%	+2%	+9%	+1%

Palm oil prices increased throughout Sierra Leone except in urban and rural parts of Western Area. The biggest rise was seen in the districts of Bombali/Tonkolili/Koinadugu (+6%) and Bonthe/Pujehun/Moyamba (+8%). Higher palm oil prices are thought to be favourable for households who produce palm oil at this time of year.

Wage rates for unskilled labour rise in Sierra Leone

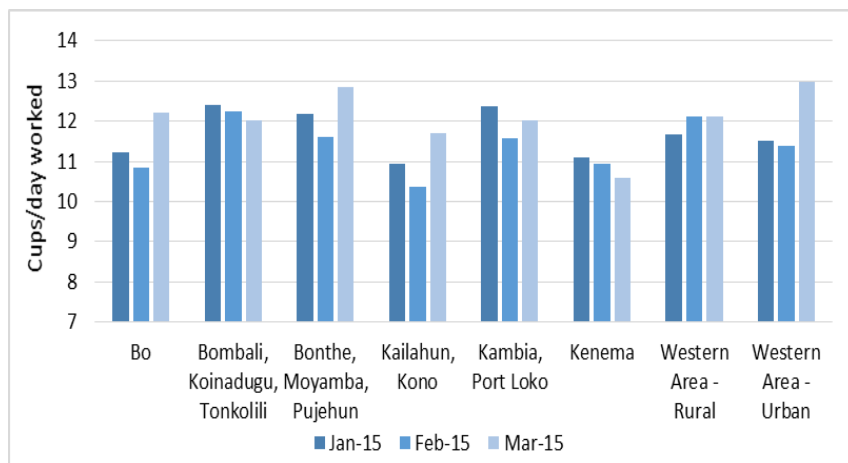
There has been a strong rebound in wage rates, with an increase of 7 percent in March. Wage rises were noted in all districts, led by Bo (+14%), urban parts of Western Area (+10%) and Kailahun (+10%). The rise in wage rates is attributable to the resumption of economic activities. There has been an increase in trading activities as well as in public works. The lifting of quarantine measures and increased seasonal demand for agricultural labour may also have contributed to the rebound.

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



Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 5: Wage-to-rice terms of trade (local rice)



Source: WFP mVAM

Figure 6: Word clouds



In the words of the respondents:

- “There is a shortage of food because of the Ebola epidemic. It has disturbed agricultural activities greatly in this community” – Male respondent from Bombali
- “The food supply is better since the Sierra Leone and Liberia border has opened, but the food is still expensive” – Female respondent from Koinadugu
- “The food situation in my community is no problem. The only thing disturbing us is a source of income” – Male respondent from Bonthe

Wage-to-local-rice terms of trade improved by 6 percent in March: wages increased in a context of modest increases in the price of rice. The most significant improvements were seen in the districts of Bo (+12%), Bonthe/Moyamba/Pujehun (+11%) and Kailahun/Kono (+13%). However, terms of trade fell in the Ebola-affected northern districts of Bombali/ Tonkolili/Koinadugu (-2%) and in Kenema (-3%), where a day’s wage purchases 10 cups of rice, compared to 13 in Freetown.

Perceptions of food security in March

The term ‘Ebola’ was the sixth most-mentioned word in all open responses from Sierra Leone, while in neighbouring Liberia it ranked sixteenth. This matches the relatively high rates of Ebola in Sierra Leone compared to Liberia.

‘Ebola’ ranked even higher in high rCSI areas such as Bombali, Tonkolili, Koinadugu, Kailahun and Kono, where it was outranked only by neutral terms such as ‘food’, ‘community’ and ‘people’. By contrast, the term ranked ninth in areas with a low rCSI.

The fourth most-mentioned word was ‘expensive’. Considering that the most frequently used words are neutral terms, this rate is very high. This finding held true for all subgroups (i.e. male/female, low/high rCSI, latrine type). This suggests that while the wage rate and terms of trade are increasing, respondents still feel that food is too expensive.

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 noticeable.

Women provide 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.

Conclusions and Outlook

In March, wage levels recovered in Sierra Leone, suggesting that economic activity is resuming now that quarantine measures are no longer in place and there is increased demand for agricultural labour as the land preparation season advances. Many public works have resumed and trading activities have also picked up. The improved economic activity is contributing – in the aggregate – to better household food security outcomes.

We continue to see higher negative coping levels in rural areas that have been affected by Ebola, as well as for households headed by women and for the poorest households. 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/index.html