

## Food availability and access improves for vulnerable households

### Key points:



May harvests bring down maize and pulses prices



The use of coping strategies falls among households led by women and households receiving food assistance

1.2.3

Fewer households receive food assistance as programmes are scaled down



WFP/David Orr

### Situation Update

Harvesting activities intensified in May, improving food security across the country. Horticulture was also reported to be thriving thanks to an abundance of water after average to above-average rainfall. FEWS NET has forecasted a shift from Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security outcomes to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) for the coming three months in high production areas. In marginal cropping areas, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected to improve to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) between June and September. Food assistance programmes by the government, WFP and other organizations are being scaled down. However, current cash shortages could dampen crop earnings, remittances and other livelihood activities.

#### Age Groups

**18-24 years : 19%**  
**25-34 years : 35%**  
**35+ years: 46%**

#### Residence

**Rural: 38%**  
**Urban: 62%**



**2405**

**Interviewed  
Households**

#### Food assistance households

**Assisted : 21%**  
**Not assisted : 79%**

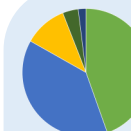
#### Head of household



**Female: 22%**  
**Male: 78%**

#### Respondents

**Female: 32%**  
**Male: 68%**



#### Toilet type

**No toilet: 4%**  
**Pit latrine: 9%**  
**Blair toilet: 37%**  
**Flush toilet: 49%**  
**Composting toilet: 1%**

## 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 May, interviews were held with 2,405 respondents, randomly selected from a database of rural and urban-based mobile subscribers. The country has been divided into 13 district aggregations derived from the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (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

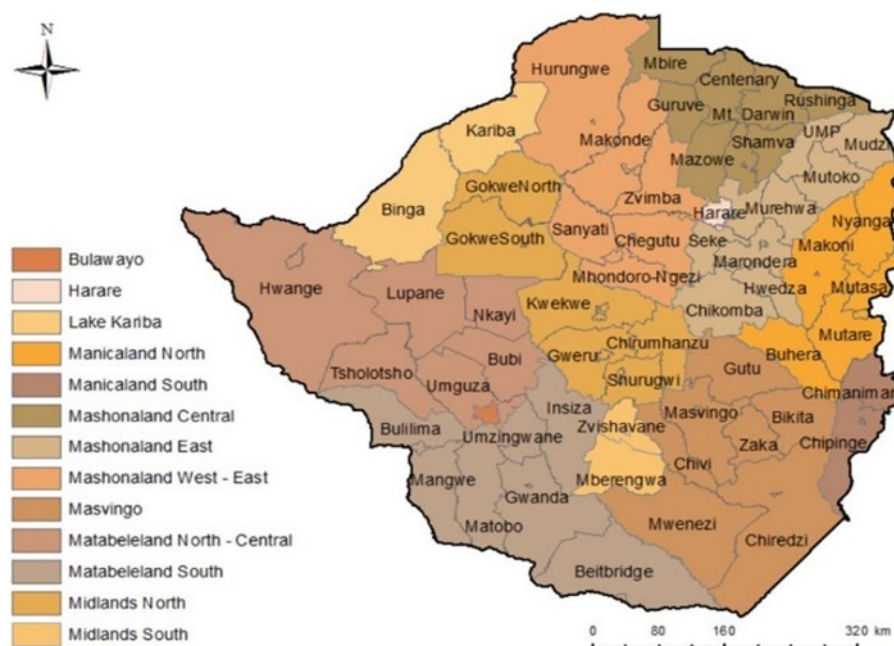
Live voice calls were made to 37 traders in the main market in each of the following districts: Bikita, Binga, Bulawayo, Chipinge, Mwenezi, Rushinga and Zvishavane. The traders were asked about the availability and prices of maize grain, maize meal, sorghum, sugar beans and cooking oil.



## Higher stress in rural areas

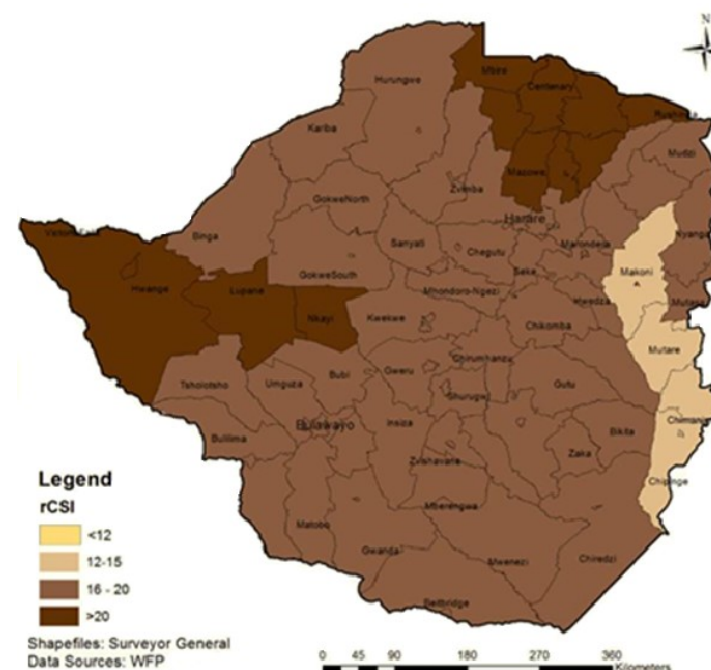
The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) is used to measure the severity and frequency of the behaviours that households engage in when faced with a shortage of food or a shortage of money to buy food. While the national median rCSI was 18 in May (**Map 2**), there was a difference between coping levels in urban areas (rCSI=16) and those in rural areas (rCSI=19), indicating higher rural stress.

Map 1: District aggregations



Source: mVAM, May 2017

Map 2: Median rCSI by district aggregation



Source: mVAM, May 2017



### Reduced use of coping strategies by households led by women

Across the country, the proportion of households limiting portion sizes and restricting adult food consumption to allow children to eat was lower in May than in the previous three months (**Figure 1**). There were significant reductions in the use of certain coping strategies (borrowing food or relying on help, limiting portion sizes, and restricting adult food consumption) amongst households headed by women; these reductions were not observed in households headed by men (**Figure 2**).

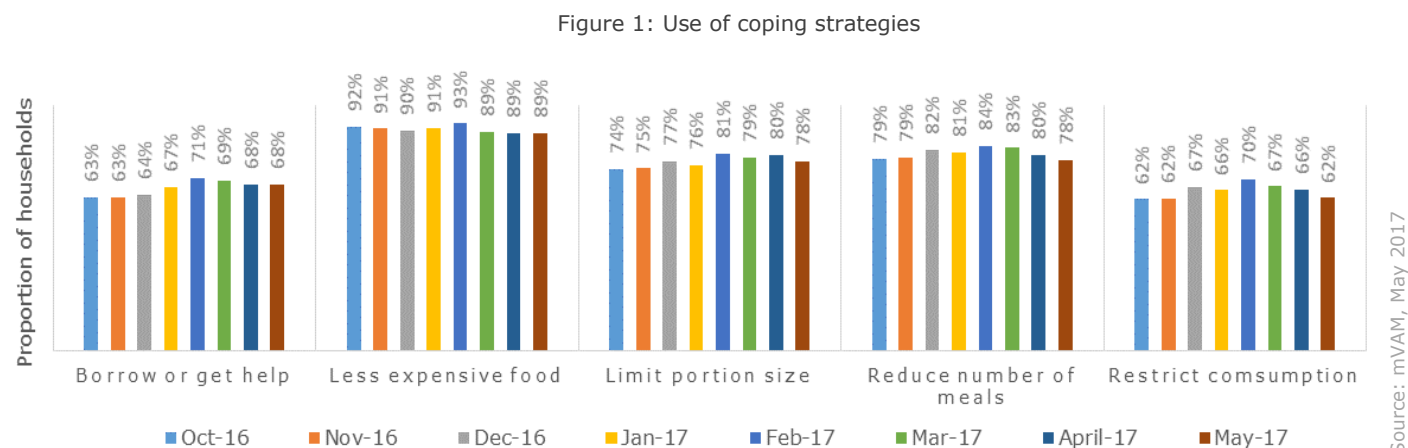
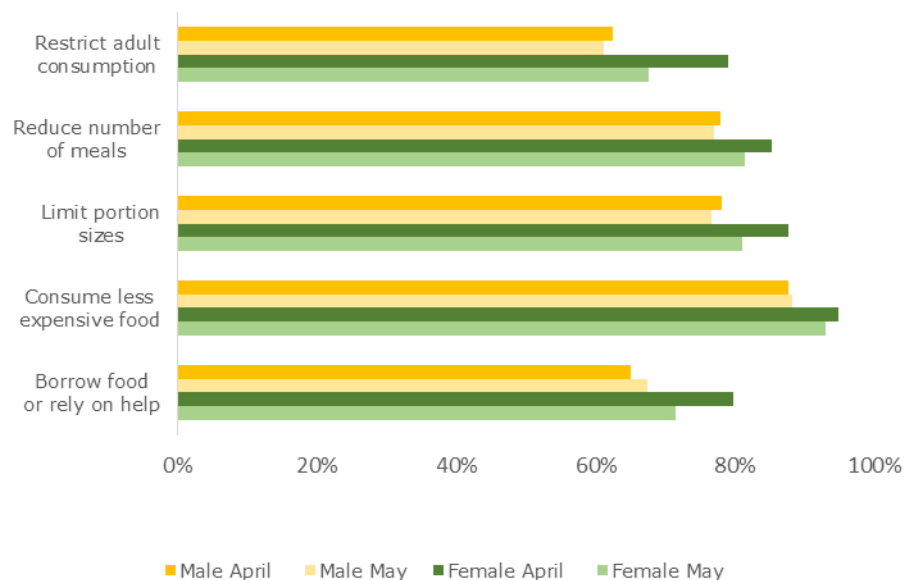
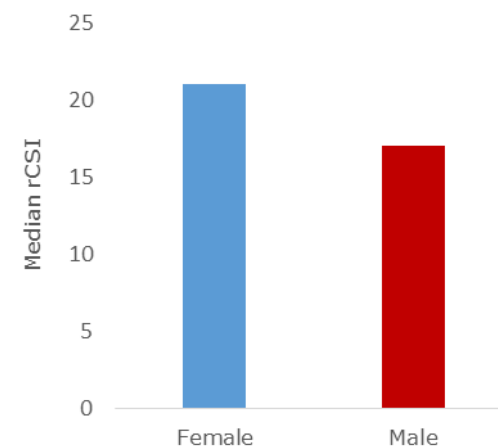


Figure 2: Use of coping strategies by sex of household head



This indicates that there was a greater fall in stress levels for households headed by women compared to those headed by men, even though the latter continued to have lower rCSI (rCSI=17) than the households led by women (rCSI=21) (**Figure 3**).

Figure 3: Median rCSI by sex of household head

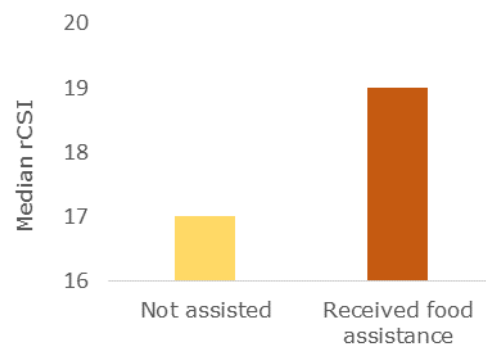




## Vulnerable households less stressed

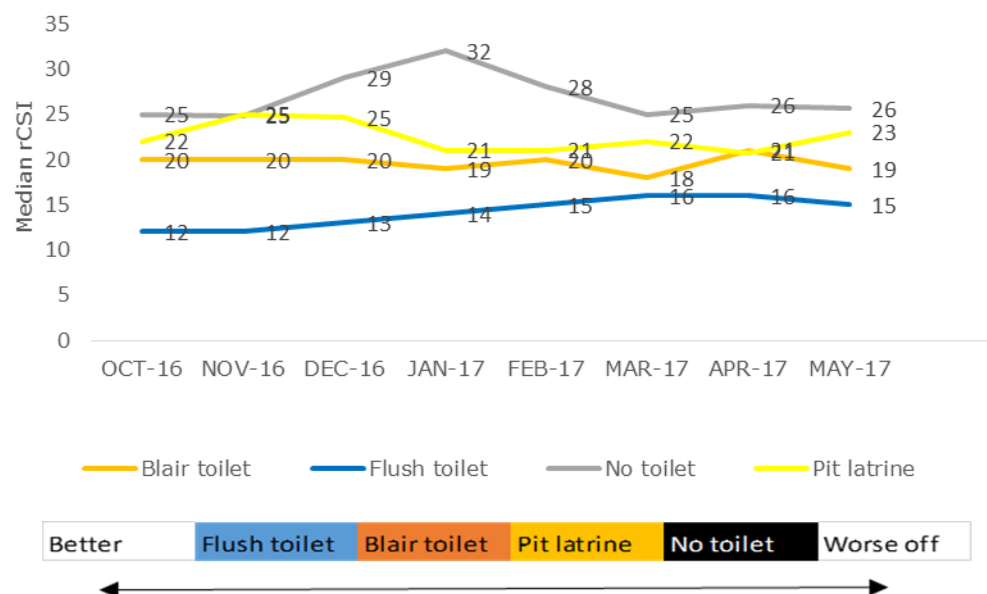
Households that did not rely on food assistance had a lower median rCSI than those that received food assistance in May (**Figure 4**). While only non-beneficiary households saw a reduction in the practice of limiting portion sizes, the use of the most severe strategy of restricting adult food consumption decreased among both beneficiary and non-beneficiary households. This indicates that even those worst-off have seen a reduction in severe stress levels.

Figure 4: Median rCSI by food assistance received



Source: mVAM, May 2017

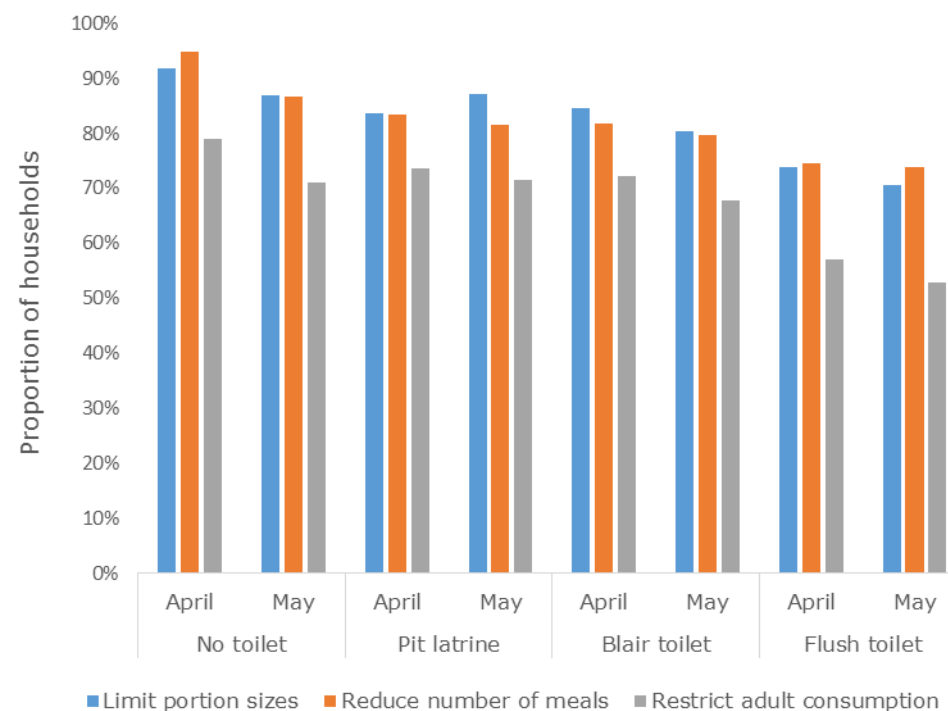
Figure 5: Median rCSI by toilet type



Source: mVAM, May 2017

Toilet type is used as a proxy indicator for household economic status: the worse-off households are those without toilets or those using unimproved sanitation facilities. While these households continue to have a higher rCSI and therefore higher stress (**Figure 5**), the proportion of households without toilets eating fewer meals in a day fell from 95 percent in April to 87 percent in May. Better-off households (those with Blair toilets or flush toilets) reported a fall in the use of other strategies: limiting portion sizes at meal times and restricting adult food consumption (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6: Use of coping strategies by toilet type



Source: mVAM, May 2017





## Food prices fall as harvests intensify

The price of maize has fallen sharply since January. Maize grain prices were 41.39 percent lower in May than in January; maize meal was 6.54 percent lower. Maize prices are also lower than the same time last year and the five-year average. This is attributed to the availability of food from own production and reduced demand for purchased cereals. The harvest is much better than it has been in the last few years.

Traders reported low maize meal and sugar bean sales, with rural households mainly consuming staple food and legumes from their own production. Maize meal prices were highest in the districts of Zvishavane and Bulawayo, potentially because the markets surveyed in these two districts were urban markets where demand would be higher, whereas for the other districts, the markets surveyed were rural. In Zvishavane, maize meal was retailing at US\$6.07/10kg – 9.39 percent more than in April. Traders in Bikita and Mwenezi reported that they had started selling pearl millet from this year's harvest – this is a popular cereal in southern districts.

Some traders in Bikita and Bulawayo reported using different methods to overcome challenges caused by the current cash shortage in the country. Some are now using electronic money to purchase goods for re-sale, especially mobile money and bank transfers. They were also accepting electronic purchases. One in ten traders were offering credit lines to certain customers such as their own employees, civil servants and other select groups.

Table 1. Maize prices (USD)

|             | Unit      | Oct -16 | Nov -16 | Dec -16 | Jan- 17 | Feb -17 | Mar -17 | Apr -17 | May -17 | May -16 | 5-year average |
|-------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| Maize grain | 20 litres | 6.00    | 6.50    | 6.81    | 7.32    | 6.56    | 5.69    | 4.79    | 4.29    | 7.35    | 6.48           |
| Maize meal  | 10 kg     | 5.43    | 5.68    | 5.71    | 5.96    | 5.87    | 5.88    | 5.70    | 5.57    | 5.80    | 6.10           |

Figure 7: Cereal prices

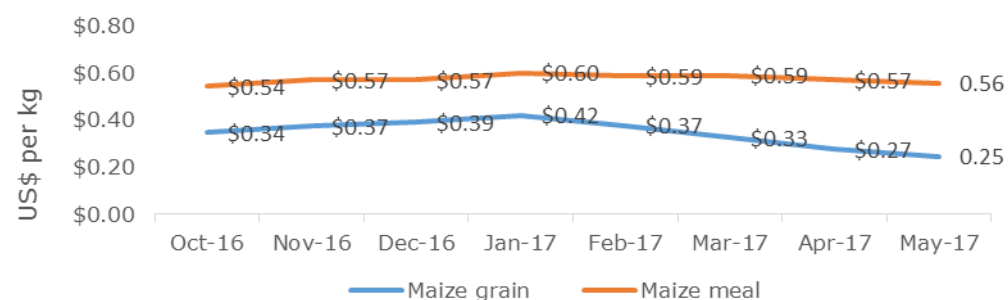


Table 2. Basic food prices by district (USD)

| District   | Market    | Maize grain (20 litres) | Maize meal (10kg) | Sorghum (20 litres) | Sugar beans (500g) | Cooking oil (2 litres) |
|------------|-----------|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Bikita     | Nyika     | 5.00                    | 5.29              |                     | 1.00               | 3.12                   |
| Binga      | Binga     |                         | 5.75              |                     | 1.20               | 3.50                   |
| Bulawayo   | Renkini   | 4.60                    | 6.00              | 4.75                | 1.00               |                        |
| Chipinge   | Checheche | 3.89                    | 5.29              | 3.17                | 0.99               | 3.11                   |
| Mwenezi    | Rutenga   | 4.00                    | 5.75              | 3.00                | 1.20               | 3.37                   |
| Rushinga   | Rushinga  |                         | 5.78              |                     | 1.13               | 2.98                   |
| Zvishavane | Mandava   |                         | 6.07              |                     | 1.10               | 3.13                   |



*"Food stocks are limited due to excessive rains which destroyed the crops." Female respondent aged 26, Beitbridge*

*"Many households have a bumper harvest."  
Female respondent aged 37, Bindura*

*"There are good harvests so many people will be okay for a while." Male respondent aged 54, Chimanimani*

*"There is food in shops but the biggest problem is cash shortage, there is no money in the banks." Male respondent aged 49, Plumtree*

*"This year people have harvested much better though some were affected by the rains which damaged their crops." Female respondent aged 26, Binga*

*"Our crops were affected by wild animals." Male respondent aged 38, Mbire*

*"Many may not get what they want but only have what is there because of financial constraints." Male respondent aged 21, Harare*

Figure 8: Word cloud



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### mVAM Resources:

**Website:** [http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam\\_monitoring/](http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/)  
**Blog:** [mvam.org](http://mvam.org)  
**Toolkit:** <http://resources.vam.wfp.org/mVAM>



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