

## Cereal prices remain stable

### Key points:



Mountain and southern districts remain worse off than northern areas



Use of negative coping strategies is lower among households who buy food compared to those who produce their own food



Maize meal and wheat flour prices remain stable compared to April



### Situation update

May was characterised by light rain showers in some areas, and mixed weather conditions in others, with short spells of very cold weather. The harvesting of the main crops – maize, sorghum and wheat – has started. Some households in the foothills and lowlands planted peas and wheat in May. The Lesotho Meteorological Services predict normal-to-above-normal rainfall in some areas between June and August.



**977 Interviews**



**Average  
age of  
respondents**



**Head of household**

**Female: 31%**

**Male: 69%**



**Environment**

**Urban: 11%**

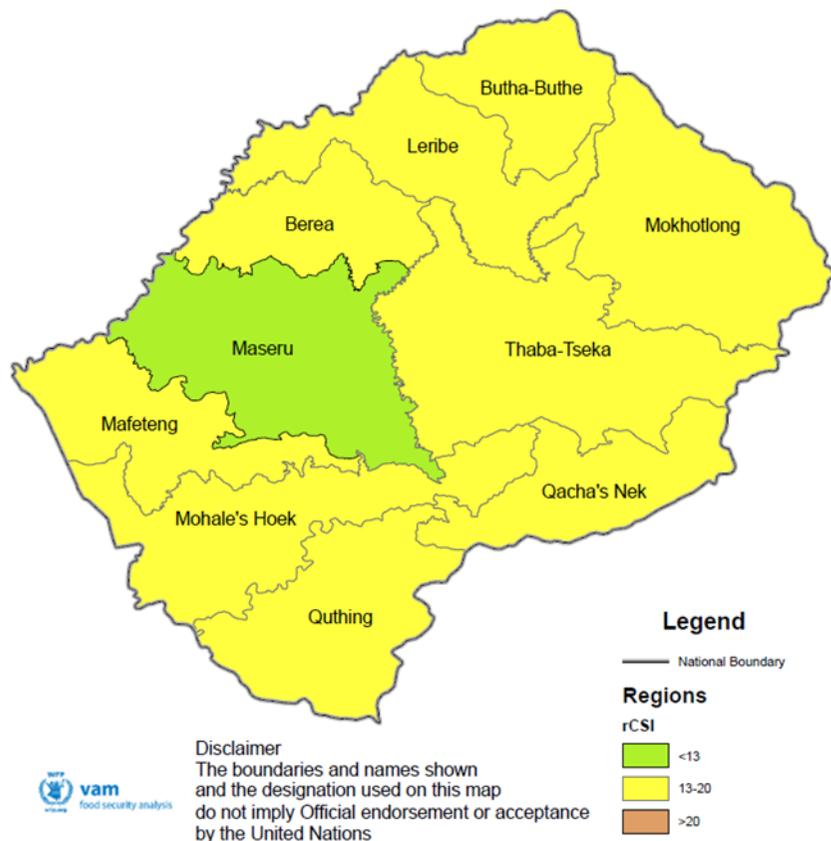
**Rural: 89%**



Households in the mountains and southern parts are under more stress

The national reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI)<sup>1</sup> remained stable in May (rCSI=18). Southern districts recorded the highest percentage of households with poor food consumption followed by the mountain districts, while Maseru and northern districts have the lowest proportion of households in the poor food consumption group (Figure 1). Similarly, households in the mountains and southern parts have a higher rCSI than their counterparts in the north and in Maseru (Figure 2).

Map 1: Median rCSI by district aggregation

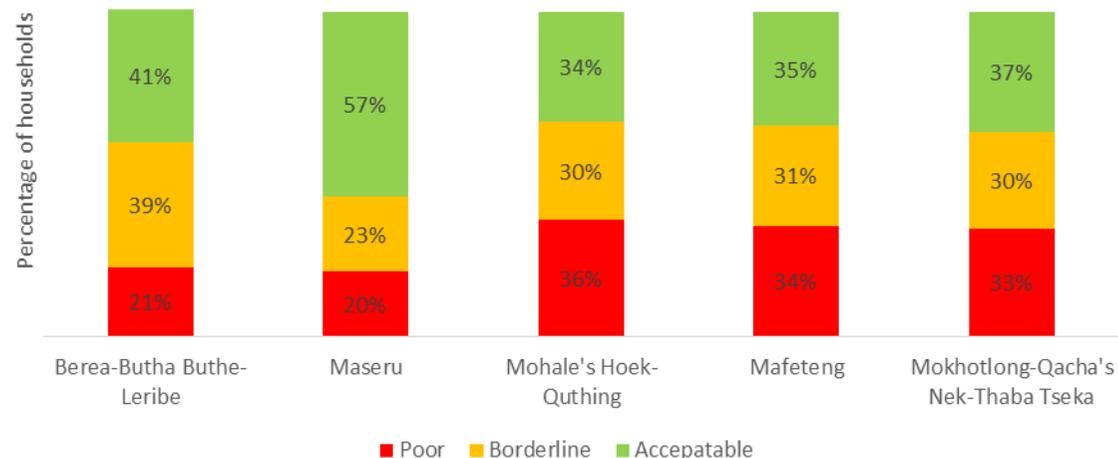


Source: mVAM May, 2017

<sup>1</sup> The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) indicates the frequency and the severity of coping strategies used by households: a lower rCSI indicates less stress on the households.

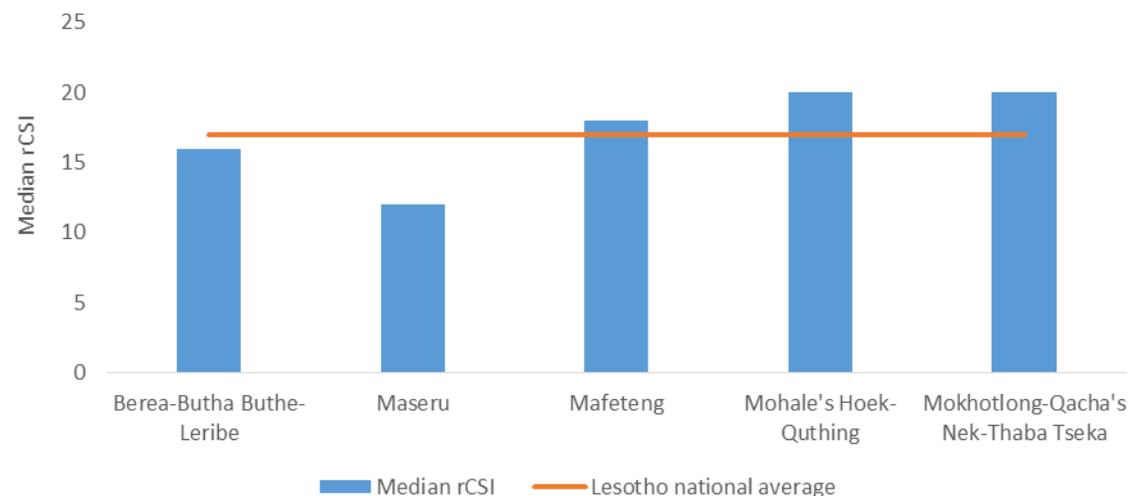
<sup>2</sup> The Food Consumption Score (FCS) is a composite of dietary diversity and food frequency. Poor food consumption refers to a diet composed mainly of maize on a daily basis and vegetables for a maximum of four days per week. 'Borderline' food consumption is classified as a diet made up of cereals and vegetables on a daily basis plus oils/fats for five days and sugar/sugar products for three days per week. 'Acceptable' food consumption is classified as daily intake of cereals, vegetables, oil and sugar, and at least one day's consumption of foods rich in protein.

Figure 1: Food consumption by district aggregation, May 2017



Source: mVAM May, 2017

Figure 2: Median rCSI by district aggregation, May 2017



Source: mVAM May, 2017

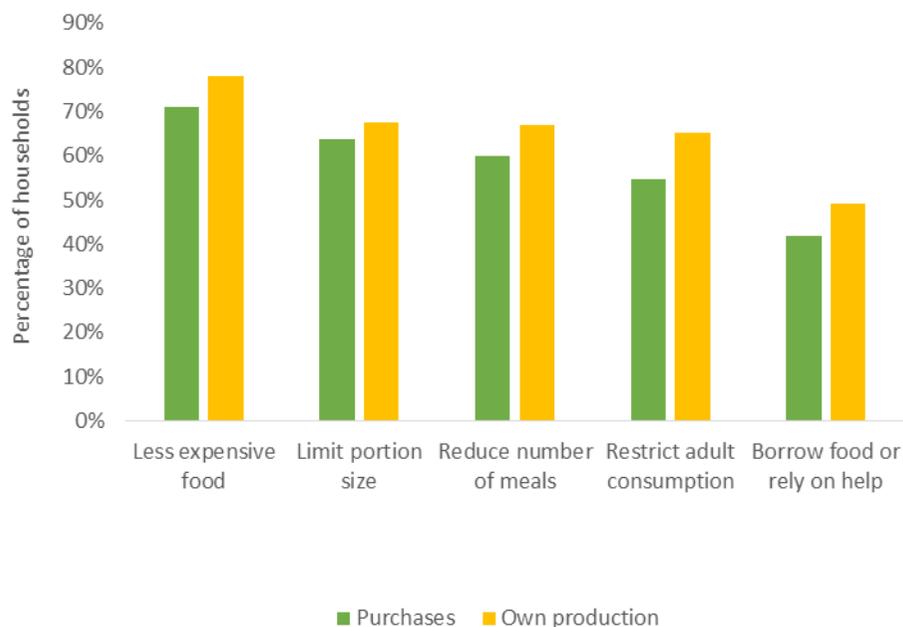


Use of negative coping strategies is lower among households purchasing food

The use of food-related coping strategies was common among both households whose main source of food was purchases and those who relied mostly on their own production. As seen in **Figure 3**, both types of household resorted most to buying cheaper food, followed by limiting portion sizes and eating fewer meals a day. However, the proportion of households adopting such strategies was higher among households depending on own production than among those who are buying food.

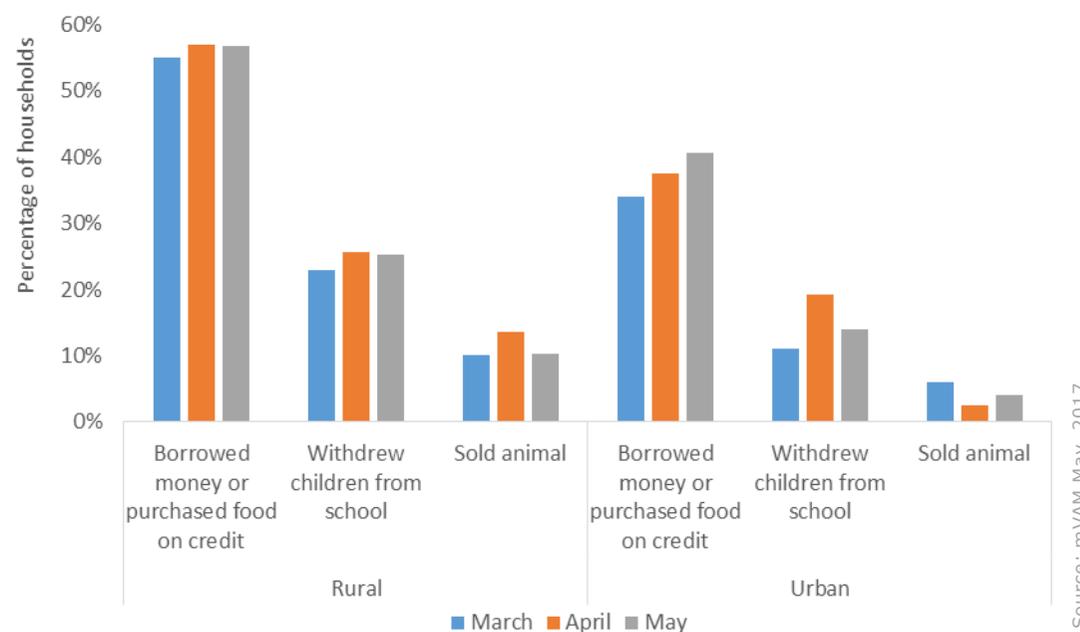
The proportion of rural households who sold more animals than usual due to lack of food decreased by 4 percentage points in May compared to April (**Figure 4**). The reduction in the use of livelihoods coping strategies could signal the positive impact of the current harvest.

Figure 3: Food-related negative coping strategies by main food source



Source: mVAM May, 2017

Figure 4: Use of livelihood-related coping strategies by rural/urban



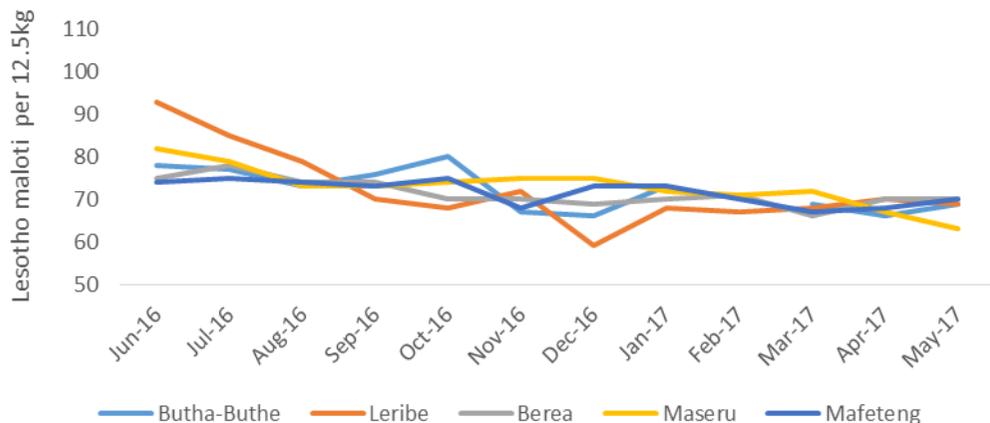
Source: mVAM May, 2017



**Maize meal prices remain stable**

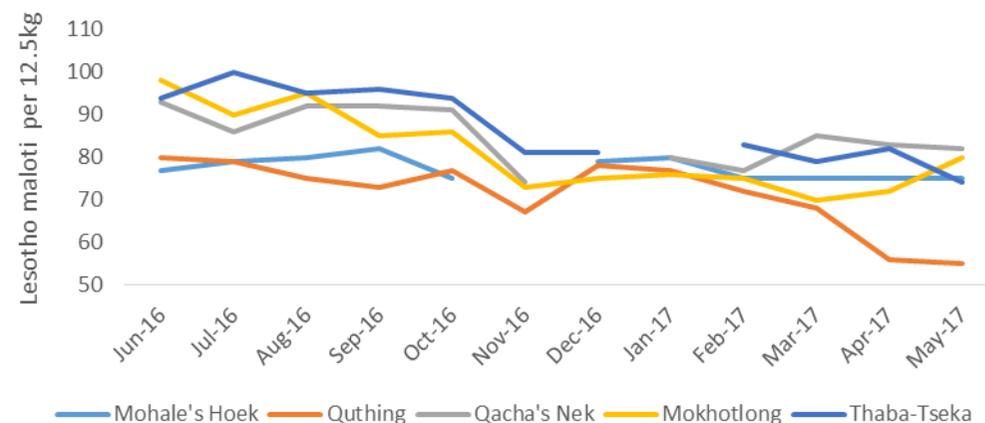
Average maize meal prices remained stable over April and May at M71.00/12.5kg (Figure 6). Prices were 24 percent lower than in May 2016 but still 4 percent higher than the five-year average (2012–2016) (Figure 6). The national average price of wheat flour was stable at M87/12.5kg over April and May (Figure 7).

Figure 5a: Average prices of maize meal (in maloti per 12.5 kg)



Source: mVAM May, 2017

Figure 5b: Average prices of maize meal (in maloti per 12.5 kg)



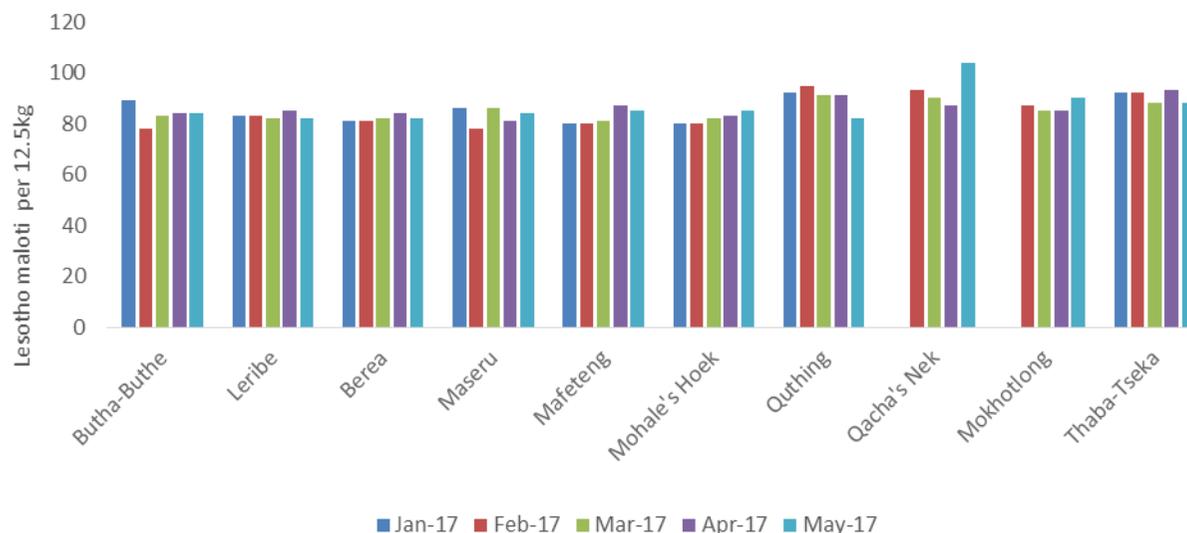
Source: mVAM May, 2017

Figure 6: Average prices of maize meal (in maloti per 12.5 kg), compared to 2016 and the five-year average



Source: mVAM, May 2017 and Bureau of Statistics

Figure 7: Average prices of wheat flour (in maloti per 12.5 kg)



Source: mVAM May, 2017



**Difficult road conditions remain a challenge for most traders**

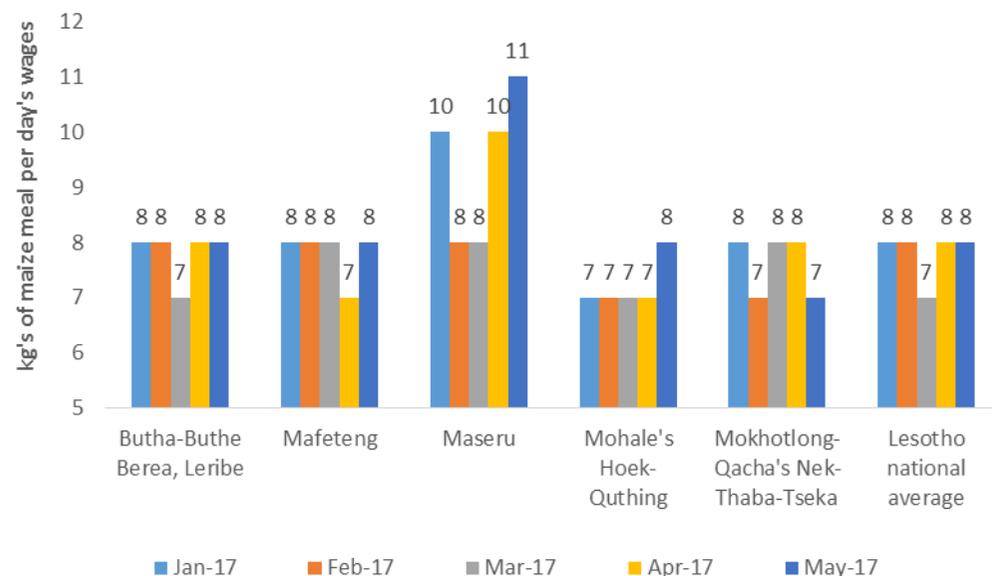
In May, 56 percent of traders said that poor road conditions – which are usually worsened by rains – make it difficult to access the markets. Poor road conditions and low demand caused by unemployment and customers’ lack of money were mentioned as major factors limiting business. Around 37 percent of traders reported stock shortages of maize meal, wheat flour, pulses, cooking oil, sugar and salt. Around 53 percent sourced maize meal within their districts of operation in contrast to April, when around the same proportion ordered stock in other districts. Despite the challenges faced by the traders, 87 percent continued to receive their stock after 1-2 days of placing an order; 35 percent ordered stock weekly and the remainder ordered every two weeks or monthly.



**Purchasing power remains stable**

Purchasing power – measured by the quantity of maize meal a household can buy with a day’s earning from manual labour – has remained stable in most districts since January (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Purchasing power by district aggregation (kg of maize meal per day’s labour)



Source: mVAM May, 2017

Table 1: Prices of basic foods (in maloti)

District	Cooking oil (750ml)	Sugar (500g)	Salt (500g)	Cabbage (1 head)	Dried peas (500g)
Butha-Buthe	18	7	4	12	7
Leribe	16	8	4	10	9
Berea	17	8	4	10	7
Maseru	16	8	5	8	8
Mafeteng	15	8	3	12	8
Mohale's Hoek	18	9	5	11	7
Quthing	17	6	5	13	7
Qacha's Nek	21	11	6	8	10
Mokhotlong	19	8	5		8
Thaba-Tseka	19	8	6	12	7

Source: mVAM May, 2017



**In the words of respondents**

*"Sometimes people are not able to farm due to lack of rain and when it rains it rains too much and destroys the crops" – Female respondent from Thaba-Tseka*

*"The jobs available in our area aren't paying us enough for us to provide and maintain our households"– Male respondent from Berea*

*"We do not have enough equipment to plough. Our pastures are poor and we need to buy food for the animals. This compromises our ability to buy food" – Male respondent from Butha-Buthe*

Figure 10: Word cloud



Source: mVAM May, 2017

**Methodology**

In May 2017, mVAM conducted household food security monitoring in Lesotho using live telephone interviews. The data presented here were collected through a call centre from a sample of 977 respondents from 10 districts. Participants were randomly selected from a national database of mobile subscribers. An airtime credit incentive of US\$0.50 (M7.00) was provided to respondents who successfully completed the survey.

The questionnaire collected data on demographics, food assistance, household food consumption and coping strategies. A final open-ended question gave respondents the chance to share additional information on the food situation in their communities. The data were weighted by the number of mobile phones owned by the household and district population estimates. In addition, food price data were collected between 3 and 30 May from a sample of 43 traders across the 10 districts. The survey questions focused on the prices of the basic foods eaten by an average household in Lesotho and indicators of market functioning.



**For further information:**

**Andrew Odero** andrew.odero@wfp.org  
**Mary M. Njoroge** mary.njoroge@wfp.org  
**Kabelo Nkone** kabelo.nkone@wfp.org

**mVAM Resources:**  
**Website:** [http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam\\_monitoring/](http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/)  
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