

Greater vulnerability of female-headed households

Highlights



On average, 15.1% of households have a poor or borderline food consumption score across the country. This proportion is much higher in the Northwest region where more than half of the households have poor or borderline food consumption.



The national average of the reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) is 11.4 points, with 62.5% of households having used at least one negative coping strategy in the past seven days.



Households headed by women are found to be the most vulnerable, with a proportion of these households having a poor or borderline food consumption score 3.1 times higher (40.5%) and an rCSI 1.7 times higher on average (19.0) than those headed by men.



Context

The Republic of Cameroon ranks 150 out of 189 on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2019). 39% of the country's population lives below the poverty line. Most regions are frequently exposed to climate shocks, including floods and droughts. Added to this is the COVID-19 pandemic, the first case of which was recorded in Cameroon on March 06, 2020. As of mid-September 2020, a total of over 20,000 cases had been recorded in the country.

Variability between the ten regions of the country is great, and household vulnerability and food security is worsened by shocks and stresses, such as insecurity and increasing displacement in some regions. The majority of people in need of humanitarian assistance are concentrated in some regions where WFP is currently providing assistance, namely the North, Far North, Adamawa, East, North-West and South-West regions ([WFP Cameroon, 2020](#)).

Cameroon currently hosts 421,692 refugees ([UNHCR, August 2020](#)), mainly as a result of conflicts in north-eastern Nigeria and the Central African Republic. Internal population displacements are also caused by the activities of Boko Haram in the Far

North of the country, as well as the crisis in the North West and South West, which put additional pressure on already vulnerable communities.

In terms of food security, previous assessments indicate that around 22% of households have a poor or borderline food consumption score (FSMS, 2020). The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) is at an average of 11.8 points in the North West and South West regions, but significantly lower in the rest of the country, with only 5.2 points. (FSMS, 2020).

Chronic malnutrition also remains a public health problem, with 32% of children 6-59 months suffering from stunting. High rates of malnutrition are also the result of limited consumption of nutritious foods, diarrheal diseases that limit nutrient absorption, and the lack of access to clean water, sanitation and health services.



Socio-economic profile of households

In June-July 2020 (round 14 of the mVAM in Cameroon), 2,070 households were surveyed in all regions of the country. Among respondents, the most represented age groups are 18-30 (33.2%), followed by 30-40 (30.1%), 40-50 years (20.2%) and over 50 (16.4%). The average age of respondents is of 37.8 years. Household size ranged from 1 to 37 people, with a national average of 7 people per household, of which 25.4% aged 60 and over. The Far North region has the highest average household size, with 9 people per household. Globally, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) is low (2.8%), but disaggregating by region, the majority of displaced households reside in the North-West (59.6%) followed by the South-West (21.1%). 4.5% of respondents declared sheltering IDPs, the majority of whom have been displaced for more than 6 months.

15.2% of household heads have an education level equal to or lower than primary education, 11.4% have a primary education level, 1.8% incomplete primary and 2.0% indicate no education level. 59.3% of heads of household have a secondary education level and 25.6% a higher level than secondary education. The main sources of income are distributed as follows: Skilled workers (30.2%), agricultural production and sale (13.7%), unskilled workers (12.9%), small trade (11.6%) and civil servants (8.1%). The high number of heads of households with at least secondary education may explain the high percentage of skilled workers in the sample.

The source of water supply is mainly piped water (36.2%), while 32.6% of households source water from public taps and 18.1% use wells. Finally, with regards to the source of food consumed in the household, most households buy their food (78.9%) and only 19.3% produce what they eat, although these results are likely influenced by the predominantly urban mVAM sample.

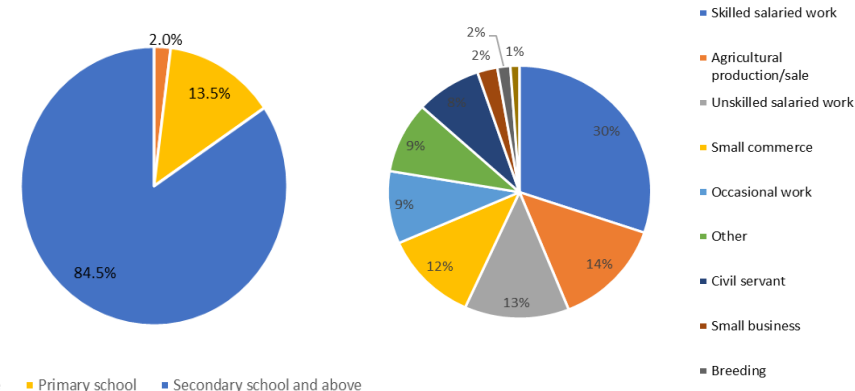


Fig. 1: Education of the head of household

Fig. 2: Main source of income



Food Consumption Score

The national average of households with an acceptable food consumption score is 84.9%, compared to 15.1% of poor or borderline consumption. The majority of households with poor or borderline food consumption are found in the Northwest (60.0%) and Center (46.5%) regions. Similarly, the Northwest has the highest proportion of households with poor food consumption, with 10.8%, followed by the Center (9.2%). Regarding households' status, IDPs have on average a lower food consumption score than the rest of the population, with 56.1% of displaced households having a poor or borderline score. We also note a greater proportion of households having a poor or borderline food consumption score among those with a female household head (40.5%, compared to only 13.0% of male-headed households).

The national average food consumption score is at 52.8 points, well above the acceptable food consumption threshold of 35.0 points. Out of the 10 regions of the country, 9 have an average food consumption score considered to be acceptable. The only region that stands out is the Northwest, with an estimated borderline food consumption score of 33.6 in June-July 2020, against 38.0 in June 2019. This is partly due to the growing political instability in this region.

Oils and fats are the most consumed food group, at 6.0 days per week on average, followed by grains and tubers (5.9 days out of 7), vegetables (5.4 days) and proteins (3.8 days). Other food groups are consumed 3 days a week or less.

Methodological changes in the composition of the mVAM sample from June 2020 limit comparisons with data from previous months. Generally, the national average food consumption score was 48.3 over the past six months, peaking at 52.4 in June. It seems in particular that the regions of Adamawa, East, West, Center and Northwest, which have food consumption levels below the national average, have also seen their food consumption deteriorate over the past year.

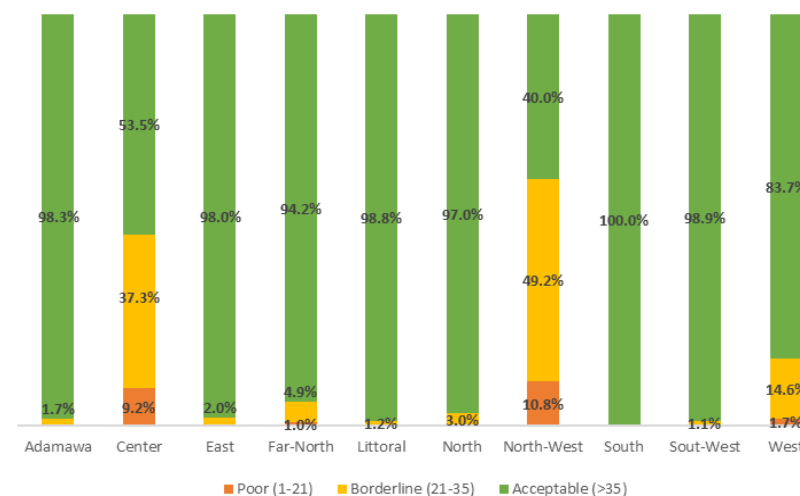


Fig. 3: Food Consumption Score by region



Reduced and livelihood Coping Strategies Index

The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) indicates the severity of the food strategies adopted by households to cope with reduced access to food, in the event of a deficit in their food consumption. The national average of rCSI was 11.4 points in June-July 2020, that is to say 1.0 points lower than the previous month and 2.9 points lower than the average of the last six months (14.3 points). The highest rCSI was recorded in April 2020, the month following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Cameroon.

Female-headed households use more negative coping strategies than their male counterparts, with respectively 19.0 and 11.4 points. Displaced households are also significantly more vulnerable, with an average rCSI of 28.3 points. However, the sample is too small to be statistically robust for these groups.

At the regional level, households in the Northwest and West regions more often resort to survival strategies such as eating cheaper, less preferred foods, borrowing food, reducing portions, reducing consumption by some household members for the benefit of children, or reducing the number of meals per day, in order to meet their food needs. The effects of conflicts in some regions and internal displacements of population plays a key role in the resort to these negative coping strategies.

Regarding the livelihood Coping Strategies Index (ICSI), 50.3% of households have used so-called crisis or emergency strategies during the past month, or have not adopted these strategies because they had done so already in previous months and were thus not able to do so anymore due to the deterioration of the goods available within the household. Here too, households headed by women use more coping strategies than those headed by men. This consistent and substantial difference indicates that female-headed households are more vulnerable than male-headed households. As for displaced households, 86.0% used crisis or emergency strategies during the past month.

Regional disparities also exist: In the Adamawa, East and Southwest regions, the majority of households have implemented crisis or emergency livelihood strategies (98.9%, 99.4% and 99.5% respectively), and to a lesser extent in the West (84.6%) and Northwest (63.8%) regions. Finally, we find a high level of emergency strategies implemented by households in the Southwest (73.0%) and Northwest (63.8%).

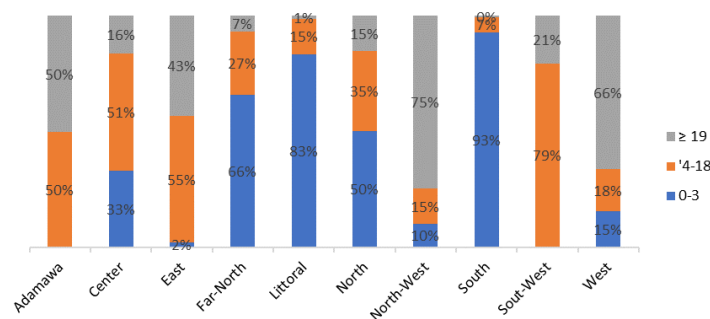


Fig. 4: Reduced Coping Strategies Index by region

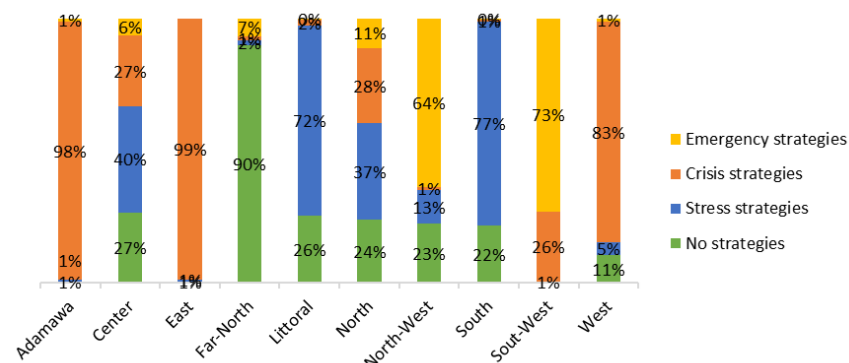


Fig. 5: livelihood Coping Strategies Index by region



Gender

In the June-July 2020 mVAM round, 69.0% of respondents were male and 31.0% female. This confirms the fact that, in general, men have more telephone access than women. This gap widens when considering the gender of the head of household. The contains 7.4% female heads of household, compared to 26.2% in June 2019. This highlights a potential selection bias, which is worrying as households headed by a woman tend to be more vulnerable. Indeed, the recorded proportion of female-managed households with a poor or borderline food consumption score is 40.5%, compared to 13.0% of male-managed households. Likewise, a third (33.3%) of households headed by a woman have implemented an emergency strategy in the past week, compared to only 15.3% of households headed by a man. The average rCSI is also significantly higher for female-headed households, at 19.0 compared to 11.4 for male-headed households.

Various statistical tests carried out on the sample data confirm the greater vulnerability of households headed by a woman, but the reasons why should be further investigated to tackle the root causes. An independence test and a proportions comparison test were ran between the sex of the household head on one hand, and the results of the key food security indicators (FCS, rCSI and ICSI) on the other. However, given the small number of female headed-households included in the June-July sample, these results are not statistically robust at this point in time.

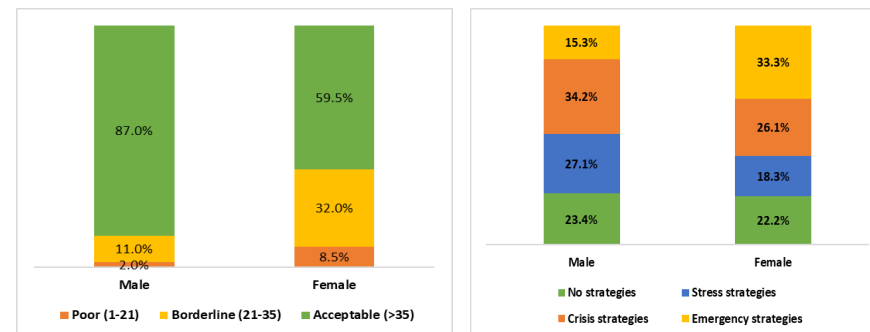


Fig. 6: FCS by sex of household head

Fig. 7: ICSI by sex of household sex



Impact of COVID-19

Cameroon officially registered the first case of COVID-19 on its territory on March 6, 2020, and had registered over 20,000 confirmed cases by mid-September. The pandemic and its consequences on the movement of people and goods has had a negative impact on the Cameroonian economy and the financial situation of households, worsened by an increase in prices on local markets ([WFP Cameroon, Market Monitor, May 2020](#)). However, mVAM data does not make it possible to identify a deterioration in the food security situation of households between the first and the second quarter of the year.

While no deterioration is recorded in key food security indicators at the national level based on mVAM data since the beginning of the pandemic, regional disparities exist. Indeed, the Central and Eastern regions recorded a drop in household's food consumption score, with respectively -3.9 and -5.0 points, while the rCSI worsened in the North-West (+0.8 points), South-West (+2.3), East (+3.9) and Center (+2.2) regions. However, the change in mVAM methodology detailed below, as well as the limited sample, do not allow for a deeper analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on food security and vulnerability in Cameroon.



Methodology

In addition to face-to-face surveys, WFP Cameroon has been carrying out telephone surveys (mobile VAM, or mVAM) on food security in ten regions since June 2019. These surveys complement face-to-face assessments in order to provide more regular data and reach the populations who might be inaccessible for security or sanitary reasons.

The North-West and South-West regions are subject to intensive surveillance with a larger sample and a threshold of displaced persons to be included in the sample, while the other eight regions are subject to a lighter monitoring in terms of sample with no quota related to households' status. The phone calls are conducted in English in high surveillance areas and in French in light surveillance areas. Respondents are selected from a pre-existing database and called back monthly to monitor changes in their situation.

From June 2020 on, following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP Cameroon increased food security monitoring via mVAM in order to have a more representative sample in all regions of Cameroon, set at 240 households in the North-West and South-West and 200 households in other regions, with a daily quota of ten respondents per region and at least six internally displaced persons.

This bulletin analyzes the results of the mVAM monitoring round which took place from June 25 to July 24, 2020 (i.e. the 14th mVAM round in Cameroon), covering a total sample of 2,070 households, thus nearly double compared to previous rounds. Inherent limitations however exist regarding the methodology and comparability of the results with those of other surveys, and the lessons learned from this analysis will serve to improve the representativeness of future mVAM rounds.

Although the mVAM surveys provide an overview of the food security situation in Cameroon, a bias exists due to the fact that the composition of the sample is mainly made up of young respondents with a secondary level of education or higher and working in the professional sector. It can be deduced that the households surveyed live mainly in urban areas and therefore have better access to electricity and telephone services.

The gender bias is also important as we note a predominance of male respondents and heads of household in the sample. No gender-related quota was set in previous rounds, but in view of these results such a quota could if possible ensure a better representativeness of the data.



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Useful links:

[Hunger and COVID-19 Weekly Snapshot Cameroon, 04.09.2020](#)

Website: <https://dataviz.vam.wfp.org/>

Toolkit: <https://resources.vam.wfp.org/>

Blog: mvam.org



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