SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Malawi Household Food Security Bulletin

Mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (mVAM) on the Effects of COVID-19 in Malawi – Round 7

(12th Nov – 11th Dec 2020)

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

⇒ Food insecurity continues to deteriorate in Round 7, as observed by a decrease in the proportion of households classified as having *acceptable* food consumption compared to the previous six rounds.

⇒ The proportion of households who are employing the most severe consumption-based coping strategies and emergency livelihood coping strategies continues to increase in the current round of data collection as compared to all previous data (Rounds 1-6), indicating that households are applying adverse coping strategies in order to maintain good food consumption during the ongoing lean season period.

⇒ Reported access to markets has slightly increased in Round 7 but remains within the same trends for all previous rounds (1-6) owing to economic problems faced by households to access money to procure items from the markets. Urban-based households reported having greater physical access to markets as compared to rural-based households, likely due to their high market dependency and better income opportunities.

⇒ The reported cases of fever and cough have increased in the current round compared to previous rounds. However, this is in-line with seasonal trends with the onset of the rainy season and may not be directly linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

BACKGROUND

As with many other countries around the world, Malawi has recently experienced an increase in the number of new cases of COVID-19, resulting in heightened mitigating measures. It will be interesting to see how the uptick in cases affects the economy and overall food security in the coming weeks.

The rainy season has begun, and most areas of the country have already planted crops. The Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services (DCCMS) indicated that global models are currently projecting weak La Nina conditions during the 2020/2021 rainfall season. This forecast implies that there is a high chance that many parts of the country will receive good rainfall.

However, since La Nina conditions are established, extreme weather events such as floods in flood-prone areas are like to occur due to heavy rains, while some parts of the country are likely to experience pockets of prolonged dry spells during the season.[1] Recently, warnings have been issued of the occurrence of tropical cyclones from the Mozambique Channel that are likely to extend their impact to Malawi. This will require further monitoring and alerting people along its path to evacuate to higher grounds if necessary.

[1] Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services, September 2020. Prospects for the 2020/2021 Rainfall Season in Malawi.

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The **Food Consumption Score (FCS)** is a composite score of diversity and frequency of food groups consumed over the past 7 days by household members, weighted by the relative nutritional importance. Based on the scores and the standard thresholds, households are grouped into three categories: Poor, Borderline, and Acceptable.

The **Reduced Coping Strategy (rCSI)** is an experience-based indicator measuring the behaviour of households over the past 7 days when they did not have enough food or money to purchase food.

METHODOLOGY

The Seventh Round of remote household-level survey data collection in response to COVID-19 monitoring and seasonal trends in food security took place in November-December 2020. The survey for this report was conducted using live telephone calls from the 12th of November to the 11th of December 2020, collecting information from some 1,814 households in all districts and major cities.

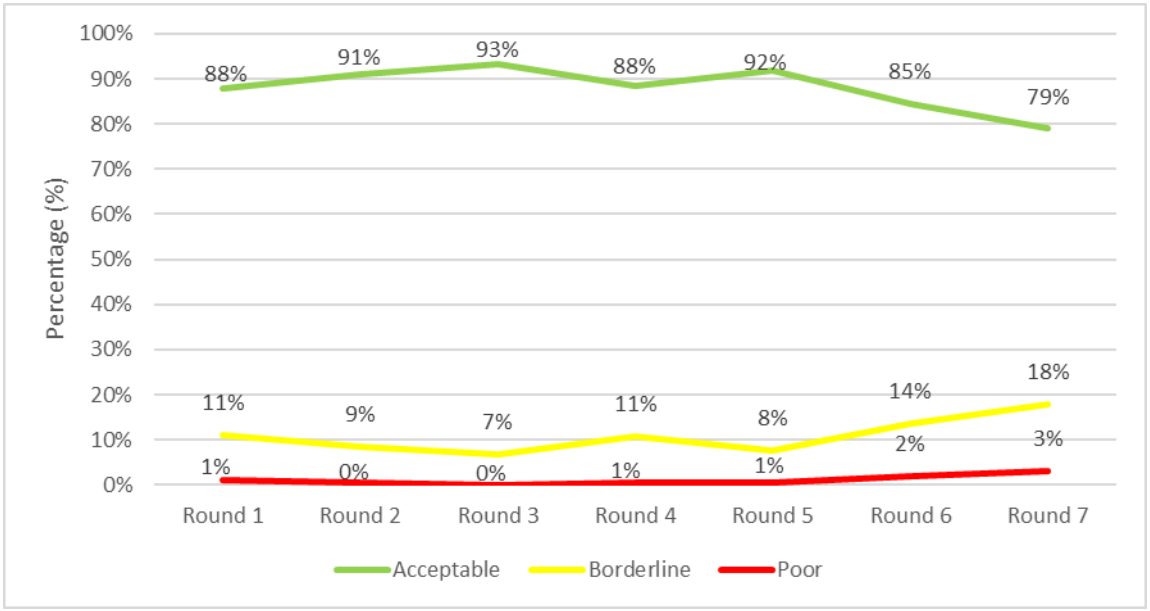
The sample size was calculated based on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Technical Manual (Version 3.0) guideline of having at least 150 samples per strata. Additional details on this methodology are available in *Annex 1*.

KEY FINDINGS

Food Consumption Score (FCS)

Findings from Round 7 of data collection continued showing—for a second consecutive month—a decrease in the proportion of households who are classified as having *acceptable* food consumption (79%), compared to 85% in Round 6. This suggests that the food security situation in the country is deteriorating further following the onset of the 2020/2021 lean season. Approximately 18% of surveyed households were classified as having *borderline* food consumption, which is higher than all previous rounds and indicates that some households who previously had *acceptable* consumption levels have now transitioned to having *borderline* consumption, likely because they have depleted their stocks and are relying more on market purchases to make ends meet. Similarly, approximately 3% of surveyed households were classified as having *poor* food consumption, a slight increase from previous rounds as many more households become food insecure (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1: Food Consumption Score Trends



Similar to Round 6, in Round 7 less female-headed households (71%) were classified as having *acceptable* food consumption compared to male-headed households (80%). This trend has become typical across all previous rounds, indicating that female-headed households are generally consuming less diversified food groups as compared to male-headed households.

Photo page 1: WFP/Badre Bahaji

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The **Reduced Coping Strategy (rCSI)** is an experience-based indicator measuring the behaviour of households over the past 7 days when they did not have enough food or money to purchase food.

Further, households residing in urban areas are consuming more diversified food groups, with 83% classified as having *acceptable* food consumption compared to 78% of households in rural areas. Despite this, in both urban and rural areas, a decrease by 12% and 5%, respectively, in the number of households classified as having *acceptable* food consumption compared to the previous round was observed. It is important to note that food security seems to be deteriorating more rapidly in urban areas compared to rural areas. This trend can likely be extrapolated to also include Boma areas. Further, approximately 15% of the urban-based and 19% of the rural-based households were classified as having *borderline* food consumption.

At a regional level, the Rural South has the highest proportion of households classified as having *acceptable* food consumption (82%), with a similar number of households (81%) in the Rural North also classified as having *acceptable* food consumption. This indicates that households in these areas are consuming more diversified food groups compared to households residing in the Central Region (73%) (*Figure 2*). Despite experiencing relatively low crop production compared to the other regions, the Rural South had the highest acceptable food consumption in Round 7. This implies that these households consumed diversified types of food from different sources to fulfil their needs.

Figure 2: Percentage of Households by Food Consumption Score Classifications

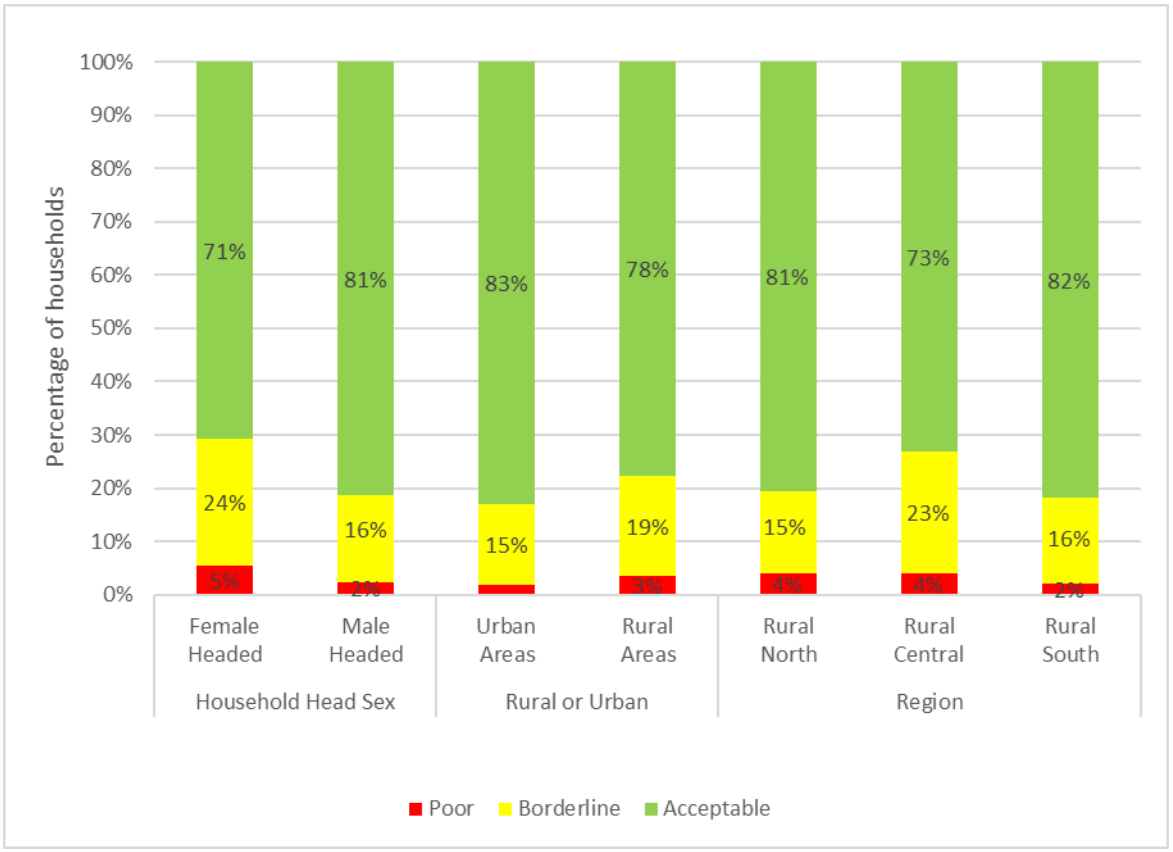


Photo page 1: WFP/Badre Bahaji

Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI)

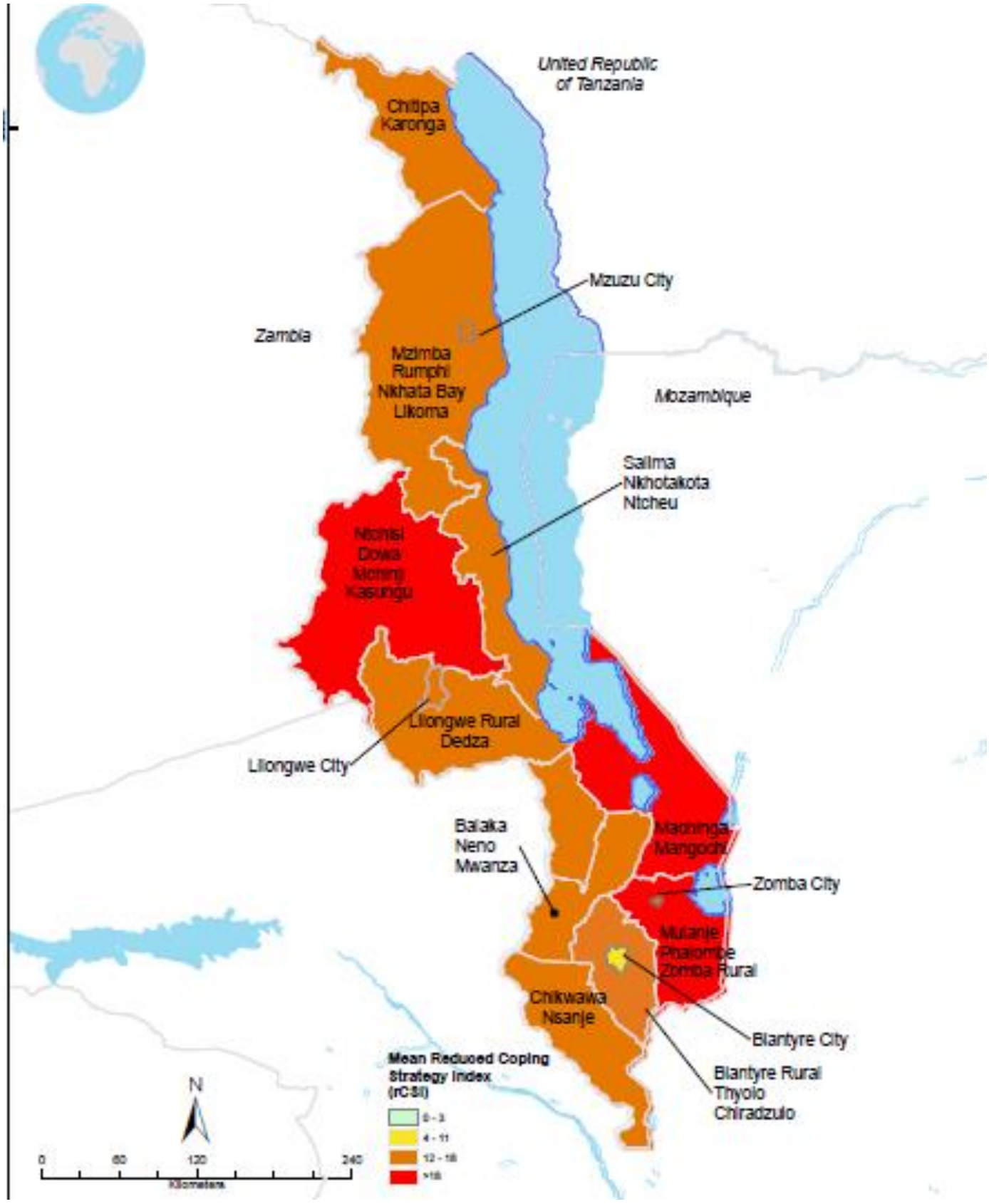
In Round 7, the mean Reduced Coping Strategy Index (rCSI) has increased to sixteen (16) compared to fourteen (14) observed in Round 6. This means that households are, in general, engaging in more or more severe consumption-based coping strategies to access food. The rCSI trend is expected to increase as we approach the peak of lean season in January/February, when household-level stocks are at a yearly low and market prices are high, particularly for maize.

Overall, roughly 40% of surveyed households reported having relied on the most severe consumption-based coping strategies to make ends meet, representing an increase from the previous round (30%). This is an indication that some households have already depleted their stocks with the onset of the lean season, forcing them to adjust their consumption patterns, which results in an increase in the rCSI. Further, the proportion of households not employing any consumption-based coping strategies has reduced to 18% in Round 7 compared to 24% in Round 6, further illustrating that many households are resorting to the adverse coping strategies to make ends meet. Commonly employed strategies include reducing adult family members' food portions to enable children to have food to eat in a day and/or going a full day without food, indicating a prevalence of food stress amongst surveyed households.

Further, nearly 42% of surveyed households reported having used moderately severe reduced coping behaviours (rCSI 4-18) such as borrowing food from friends or relatives and/or adults skipping meals in order to provide for children compared to 46% in Round 6. An additional 24% of households reported that they had employed at least one of the least severe behaviours of eating less preferred foods and/or reducing the number of meals (rCSI 0-3) (*Figure 4*).

At a district level, analysis is done by grouping districts into strata. The groupings of Mulanje, Phalombe, and Zomba Districts had the highest mean rCSI (20), meaning that households in these areas reported resorting to more adverse coping strategies as compared to households in other areas. This was followed by Machinga and Mangochi Districts and Ntchisi, Dowa, Mchinji, and Kasungu Districts, where the mean rCSI was nineteen (19). It is not surprising that the Southern Region districts have the highest mean rCSI, as they consistently have poor crop production due to small land sizes and the early onset of the lean season. This forces households in these areas to employ food consumption reduction strategies to cope up with the situation earlier than people within other areas. Ntchisi, Dowa, Mchinji, and Kasungu Districts continue to have relatively high mean rCSIs despite having good production. This could be attributed to poor dietary practices, as households are often not consuming enough diversified food groups. When looking at urban areas and in-line with findings from previous rounds, Zomba City had a slightly higher mean rCSI (16) compared to Blantyre (rCSI of 11), Lilongwe (rCSI of 13), and Mzuzu Cities (rCSI of 15) (*Figure 3*).

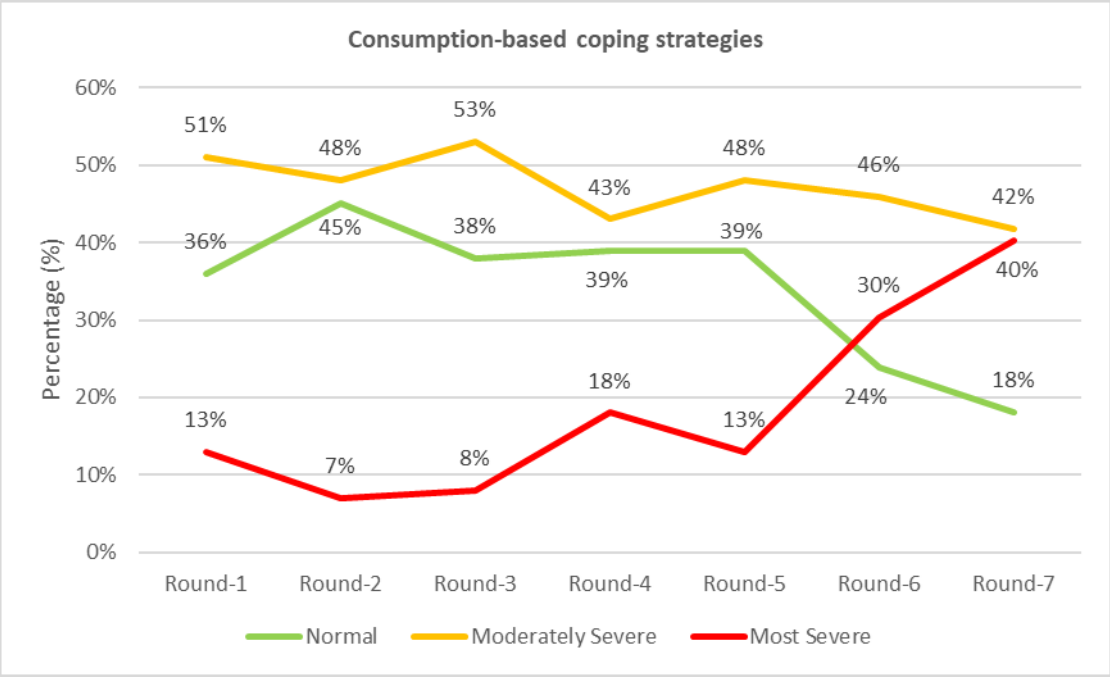
Figure 3: Map of Malawi Showing the Mean rCSI by District Grouping (Strata)



The **Livelihood Coping Strategies Indicator (LCSI)** is derived from a series of questions regarding a household's experience with livelihood stress and asset depletion during the 30 days prior to the survey.

Coping is classified into broad categories: **Stress Strategies, Crisis Strategies, Emergency Strategies and Not coping/Food Secure.**

Figure 4: Trends on Households Employing Consumption-based Coping Strategies



In Round 7, households in rural areas (44%) applied more severe consumption-based coping strategies or a combination of several coping strategies as compared to households residing in urban areas (28%). This could be attributed to the fact that most households in cities have greater income-generating opportunities, including petty businesses, to supplement income sources as compared to those residing in rural areas. As a result, they tend to employ less severe consumption-based strategies as compared to households in rural areas whose main income source is derived from the sale of agricultural produce (Table 1). These findings are higher than the previous round whereby 34% of rural-based households and 19% of urban-based households applied more severe consumption-based coping strategies. This follows seasonal trends with the onset of the lean season and is indicative of a deterioration of the situation.

Approximately 46% of households residing in the Rural Central and 45% in the Rural South employed the most-severe consumption-based coping strategies, while only 39% of households in the Rural North resorted to the most-severe strategies to make ends meet. That said, all regions have registered an increase in the rCSI due, in large part, to the onset of the lean season whereby household-level stocks have run out and many households are forced to resort to most severe consumption-based coping. Households in the Rural Central and Rural Southern Regions have been most affected (*Table 1*).

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Coping is classified into broad categories: **Stress Strategies, Crisis Strategies, Emergency Strategies and Not coping/Food Secure.**

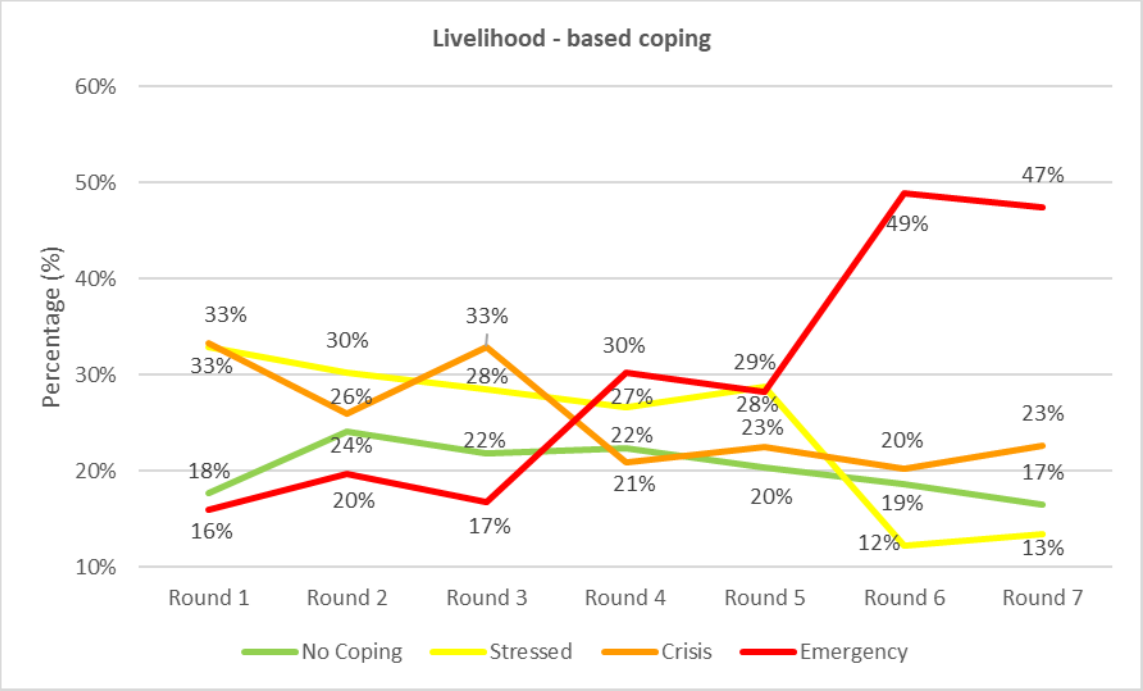
Table 1: Percentage of Households Employing Consumption-based Coping Strategies

		Normal	Moderate-ly Severe	Most Severe
Overall	Round-7	17%	43%	40%
Household Head Sex	Female-headed	13%	39%	48%
	Male-headed	20%	42%	38%
Rural or Urban	Urban Areas	29%	44%	28%
	Rural Areas	15%	41%	44%
Region	Rural North	16%	45%	39%
	Rural Central	13%	41%	46%
	Rural South	16%	39%	45%

Livelihood Coping Strategies

Overall, 47% of the surveyed households in the country reported having employed *emergency* livelihood-based coping strategies within the last 30 days to access food. The findings are slightly lower than Round 6 (49%) but higher than all other previous rounds (1-5). The increase in the use of *emergency* livelihood coping strategies is typical during the lean season, as households tend to sell or lend out some of their land to cope with the situation. A further 23% of surveyed households reported having employed *crisis* coping strategies, while 13% resorted to *stressed* coping strategies to make ends meet. (*Figure 5*).

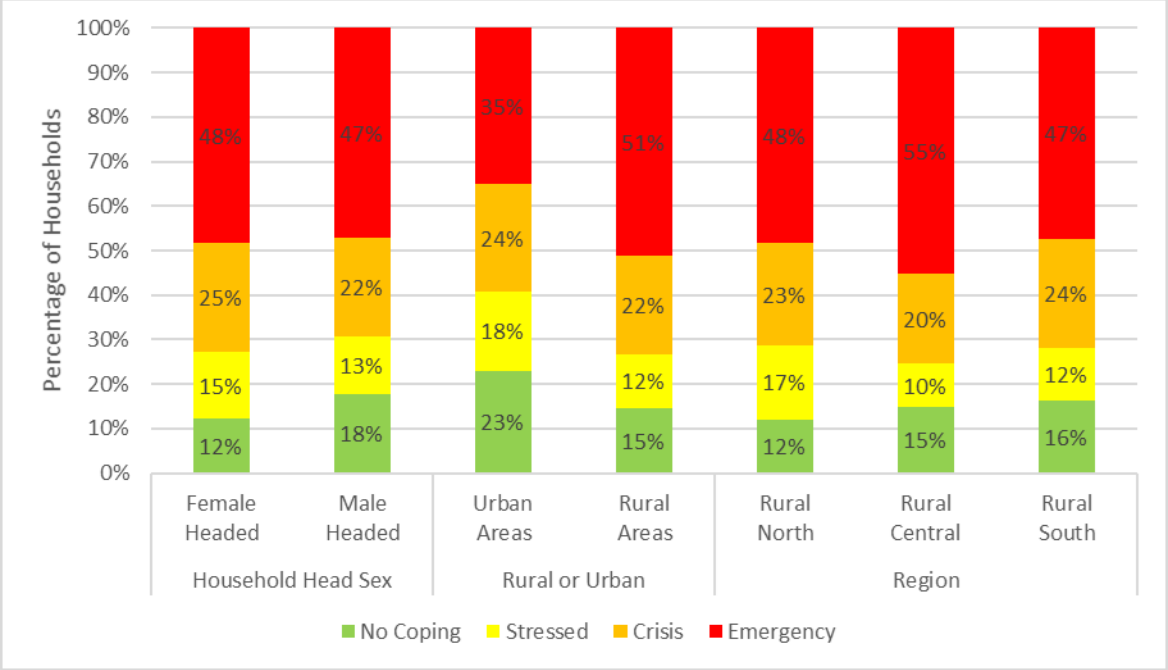
Figure 5: Trends on Households Employing Livelihood-based Coping Strategies



In the current round, a very slight difference was observed between female- and male-headed households (48% and 47%, respectively) who are employing *emergency* coping strategies. Similarly, 25% of female-headed and 22% of male-headed households reported that they are employing *crisis* coping strategies this round.

The findings further show that more rural-based households (51%) were employing emergency coping strategies compared to those in urban areas (35%), signifying higher food stress in rural areas where households have more limited means of coping with stress. On the other hand, the Rural Central Region had the highest proportion of households employing emergency coping strategies (55%) compared to the Rural North (48%) and Rural South (47%) (*Figure 6)*. This is attributed, at least in part, to the practice of selling or lending out land for farming, a practice that is more prevalent in the Central Region as compared to the North and South. Finally, 23% of urban-based households did not employ any coping strategies compared to 15% of households based in rural areas (*Figure 6*).

Figure 6: Percentage of Households Employing Livelihood Coping Strategies

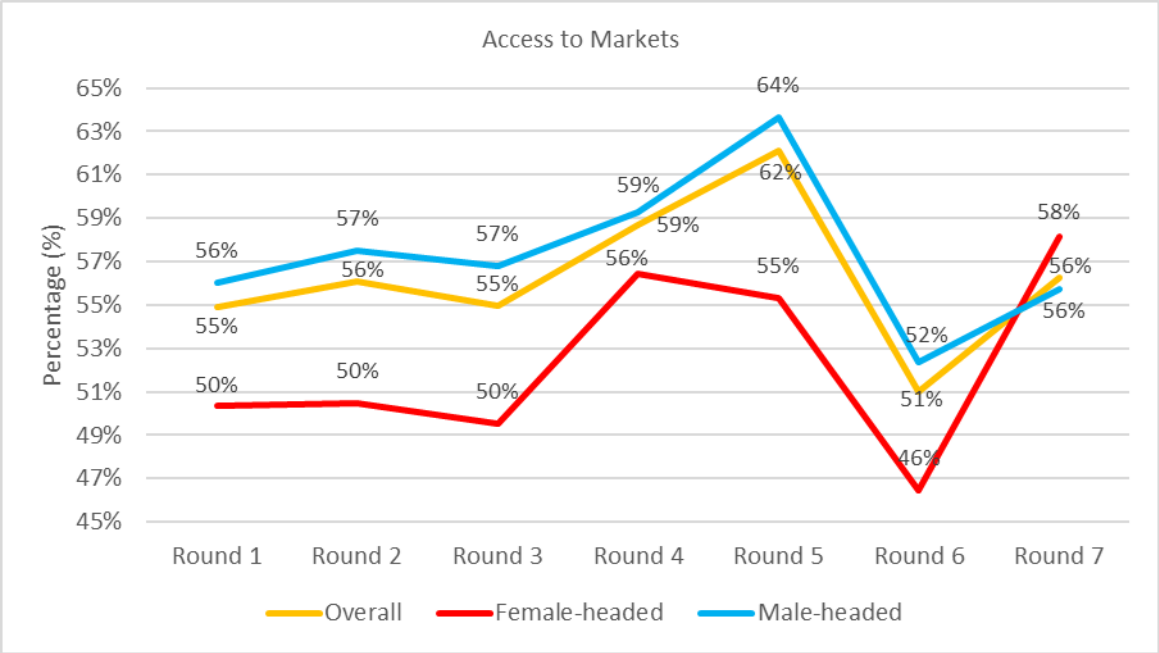


Market Access

During this survey, households were also asked if, at any point 14 days prior to the survey, they were unable to access markets or grocery stores as well as the reasons why. Overall nearly 56% of surveyed households reported that they had unrestricted access to markets and shops, a slight increase from the previous Round 6 (51%) (*Figure 7*). This observation is similar to that observed in previous months. At the time of reporting, COVID-19 pandemic restrictions had been easing up with markets, grocery shops, and other areas opening more to the public than in the past 5-6 months.

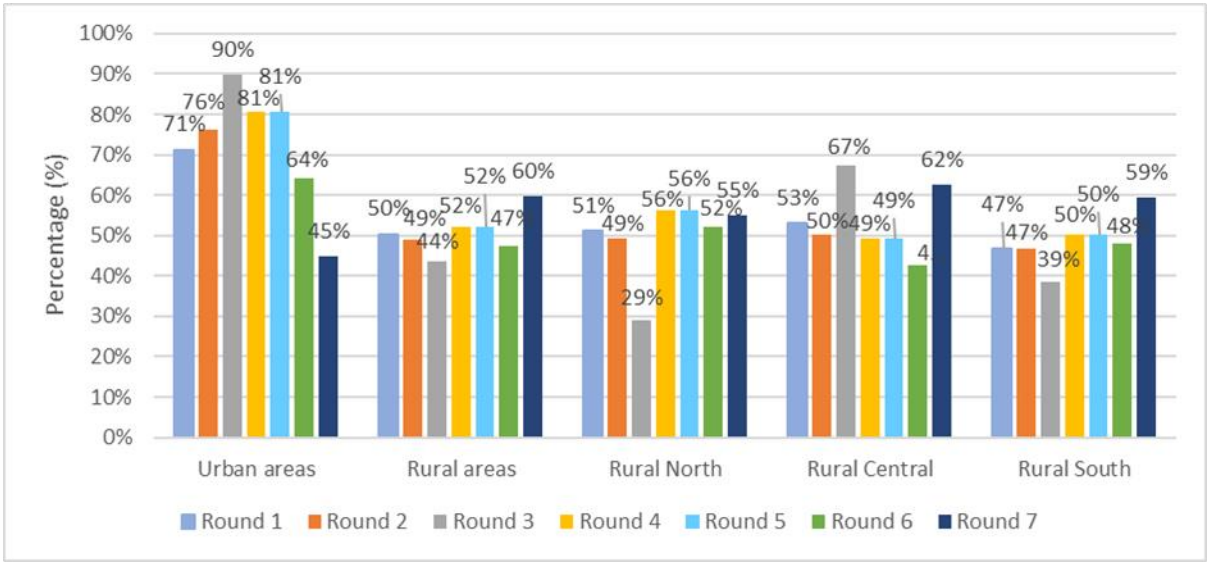
That said, the response rate reported for this question is, however, likely linked to households' understanding of the question, meaning that even though markets are functioning, many households are not accessing them due to a lack of money to purchase food. For those who did not physically access local markets, the majority mentioned that they did not do so due to a lack of money (98%), followed by concerns that the markets are far away (1%).

Figure 7: Trends on Households Accessing Markets



Overall, a slightly higher proportion of female-headed households (58%) reported that they had access to markets in this round compared to male-headed households (56%). Households in urban areas had more access to markets than those in rural areas (71% versus 50%, respectively). This could be attributed to the short distances to markets that are operating on a daily basis in urban areas as compared to those in rural areas where markets may only operates a few days (1-2 days) per week or be located further away from the areas in which households reside. Households based in the Rural Central (62%) had the highest access to the markets, followed by those in the Rural South (59%) and the Rural North (55%) (*Figure 8*).

Figure 8: Percentage of Households Reporting Unlimited Access to Markets/Shops



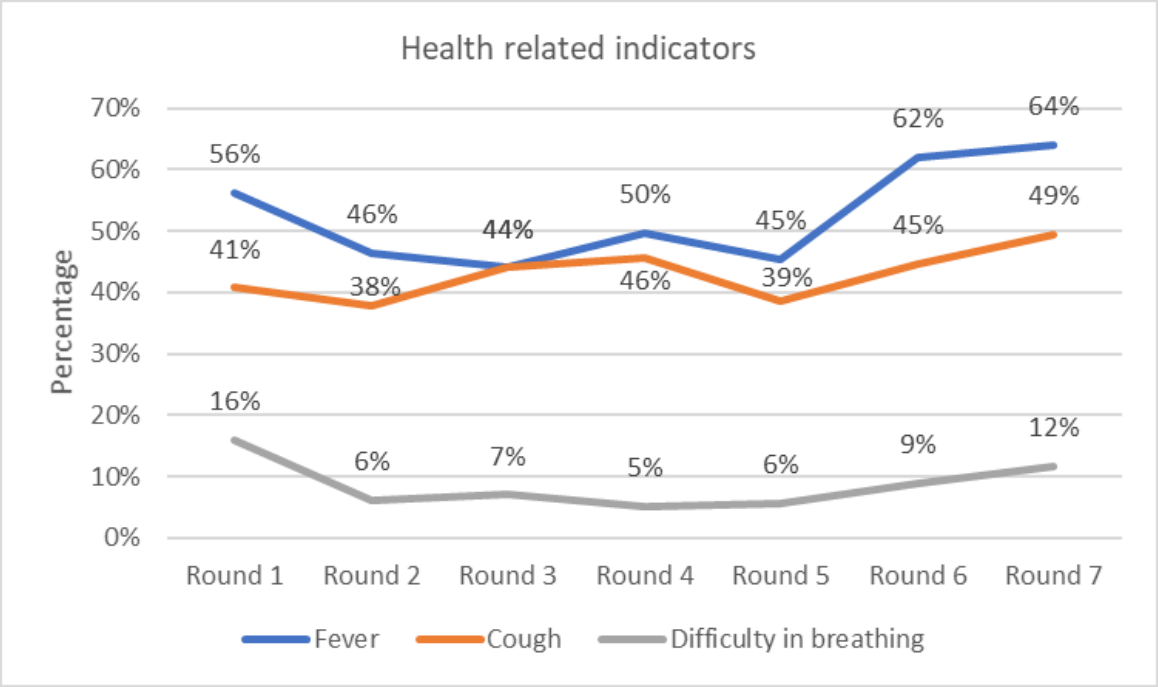
Health Indicators Related to COVID-19

In this round, households were asked whether at least one member of their family had suffered from a fever, cough, and/or had difficulty breathing in the 14 days prior to the survey. Overall, the proportion of households reporting that one or more family members had experienced a fever slightly increased to 64% in Round 7 from 62% in Round 6. Similarly, the proportion of households reporting that at least one member was experiencing a cough also increased in Round 7 to 49% (from 45% in Round 6). The prevalence rates for both fever and cough are oscillating following seasonal trends and are likely not solely increasing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, continued monitoring is required to detect any unusual trends in the coming months.

Further, approximately 12% of surveyed households reported that someone in their family had experienced difficulty breathing within the last seven days. On average, the trend regarding the proportion of households with at least one family member suffering from a fever, cough, or difficulty breathing has been fluctuating from the first to the current Round 7 (*Figure 9*). The prevalence rates are expected to increase during the rainy season due to the effects of other infections including malaria, diarrhoea, and acute respiratory infections which are more prevalent during this time of year.

It is important to note that these questions are asked as primary symptoms of COVID-19 cognizant of the fact that there are numerous reasons why a household member may have one or more of these symptoms and that a household's response may not be directly associated with the coronavirus disease. WFP is, however, working to assess aggregated trend date over time to see if there are any correlations to the number of reported COVID cases within Malawi.

Figure 9: Percentage of Households with at least One Member Suffering from a Fever, Cough, or Difficulty Breathing the Past 14 Days



CONCLUSIONS

The food insecurity situation across Malawi continues to increase, as observed by the decrease in the proportion of households who were classified as having acceptable food consumption as well as an increase in the proportion of households who reported that they are using the most-severe food consumption-based strategies and emergency livelihood-based strategies to cope with the situation. The increased use of severe consumption-based and emergency livelihood-based coping strategies to attain acceptable food consumption is an indication of food insecurity, which visibly emerge when households' coping strategies are beginning to be exhausted with progression of the lean season.

The **food security situation continues to be stable** with the recent harvest but requires continuous monitoring as the lean season approaches.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis by the MVAC has projected **over 2 million people to be food insecure during the lean season** with the depletion of food stocks from **November 2020 to March 2021 requiring assistance.**

Annex: Sampling Methodology

⇒ The sample size was calculated based on the IPC guideline of a minimum of 150 per strata. The total sample size per strata is 180, as it includes a safety buffer of 30 in case the call center could not achieve the full sample in 30 days. Please find the IPC manual here and please refer to page 115, Table 28 for further details.

⇒ The sample was stratified at the ADM1 level to be able to report results at ADM1 level within 30 days of data collection.

⇒ The three regions in Malawi (ADM1) and the four cities of Mzuzu, Lilongwe, Blantyre and Zomba have been divided into 14 strata (ADM1 strata) and quotas have been provided at the ADM1 strata and district (ADM2) level. To compute ADM2 quotas we use Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) to make sure the results are representative at the ADM1 level.

⇒ All ADM1 strata quotas (daily, 10 days and monthly) and AMD2 caps (10 days and monthly) were reached for this sample.

⇒ In the subsequent rounds, WFP will switch to a panel approach after certain days of data collection, and these quotas will be updated to include the quotas for old/new respondents based on the methodology outlined.

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Photo credit: WFP/Badre Bahaji