TONGA

mVAM Bulletin

The data presented here was collected via the World Food Programme's mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (mVAM) survey. Data collected through telephone interviews, conducted across 5 divisions, using random-digit dialing between September 2023 and October 2023.

HOUSEHOLD FOOD CONSUMPTION

In September 2023, the food consumption patterns of **93%** of Tongan households were at **acceptable** levels. Overall, the frequency and diversity of food groups intake among households remains similar to March 2023. **Five percent** of households reported having borderline and **2%** had poor quantity and diversity of foods groups and nutrients in diets. The proportions of households with borderline and poor food consumption was higher in **rural** areas (8%) compared to **urban** locations (4%).

93% OF HOUSEHOLDS IN TONGA HAVE ACCEPTABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION

Household diet in September 2023, were **more diverse** compared to March 2023. Consumption of staples and protein-rich food remained at over 6 days in a week and the frequency of intake of fats and sugar intake decreased.
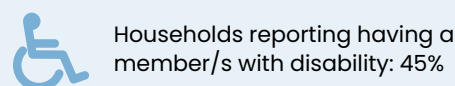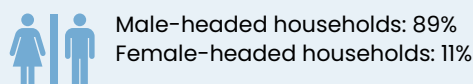
Consumption of fruits, dairy products and pulses, all essential for a balanced and healthy diet, increased by households, although the diversity of food groups differed by regions (for details see sub-national analysis on page 3 of this Bulletin).

Diet quality had **improved** compared to March 2023. In 7 days, the average Tongan household in September 2023 consumed:

STAPLES	PROTEINS	FATS	SUGARS
6.6 days	6.2 days	3.2 days	4.9 days
down from 6.8	down from 6.6	up from 3.1	up from 4.5
FRUITS	**VEGETABLES**	**DIARY**	**PULSES**
2.4 days	4.5 days	3.1 days	1.9 day
up from 1.3	up from 3.1	up from 1.4	up from 0.8

In September 2023, low or no intake of **Hem Iron** was reported by **16%** of the respondents - 3% less than in March 2023. From these households, 2% had not had any iron-rich food, such as animal based proteins - meat, poultry, shellfish and fish - for the past 7 days.

Sample Population at a glance :

Survey Respondents: 1,226 households

Urban Households: 24%
Rural Households: 76%

Male-headed households: 89%
Female-headed households: 11%

Households reporting having a member/s with disability: 45%

Level of education of the head of the household:
- Primary education: 1%
- Secondary education: 87%
- Tertiary education: 12%
- Vocational Training: 2%
- None: 0%

Percentage of interviewed households with low or no intake of nutrient rich food

|	
Hem Iron	16%
Protein	5%
Vitamin A	15%

Insufficient intake of **Protein** was reported by 5% of respondents, lower by 3% compared to the previous round in March 2023.

Low daily intake of **Vitamin A** was mentioned by 13% of the interviewed households: 2% of respondents had not had Vitamin A rich food, such as animal meats, organs, dairy products, fruits, vegetables) included in their diets for the past week at all.

Proportion of households with **low** or **no intake** of these **nutrient-rich food** remained higher among **female-headed** households, indicating additional challenges faced by them in terms of healthy and nutritious food accessibility.

LIVELIHOOD-BASED COPING STRATEGIES (LCS)

LCS identifies negative coping strategies adopted by households and captures the activities households have to engage in when there aren't enough resources available (food, cash) to access essential needs (e.g. adequate shelter, education services, health services or other basic needs).

3.5%
of respondents employing
Livelihood Coping Strategy
Crisis or Emergency
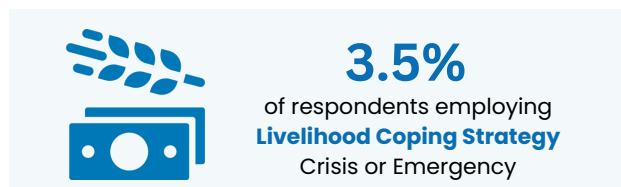
In September 2023, **68%** of households in Tonga reported of **not resorting** to any negative coping strategies to meet their essential needs, reflecting sustainable livelihoods and capacities, when negatively impacted by shocks or disasters.

The proportion of households engaged in crisis, emergency livelihood-based coping strategies remained stable compared to the last round in March 2023, with 3.6% of households employing extreme coping strategies.

**Percentage of households resorting to coping strategies**
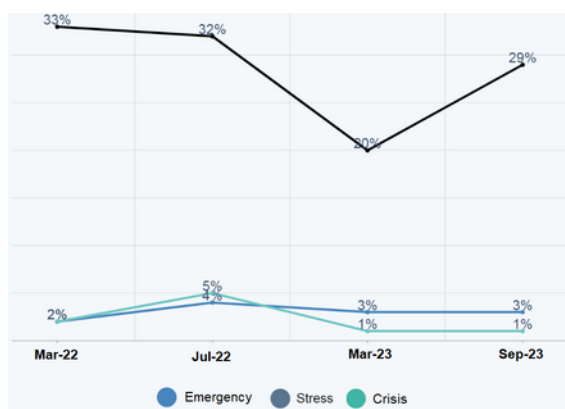
Stress strategies, such as borrowing money or spending savings, indicated a sharp increase of 9% in September 2023 in comparison with March 2023. Although use of stress strategies is not harmful for households livelihoods, their long-term use would impact the ability of households to deal with future shocks given a reduction in resources or increase in debts .

Crisis strategies were adopted by 3% of households in September 2023, with no change from March the same year.

Emergency strategies also saw no change from March 2023 and were used by 1% of interviewed households, indicating the food security conditions of these households were more susceptible to food insecurity, shocks and crisis.

Top **three negative coping strategies** employed by households were spending savings (12%), selling of household assets (8%), and borrow money/food (5%).

12%	8%	5%
Spent savings	**Sold household assets**	**Borrow money/food**
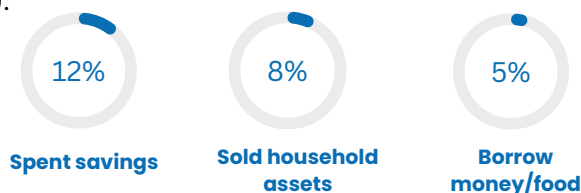
In comparison with the previous round of data collection in March 2023, there was a 5% increase in proportion of households spending savings to deal with a shock and to meet essential needs, making this the primary coping strategy.

The other negative strategy on the respondents top list in March - selling households assets - was replaced with households resorting to selling more animals, followed by borrowing money to acquire food, reported by additional 2% of respondents compared to March 2023 (3%).

The primary **concern** of 3% of the interviewed households was the increase in food prices, followed by disruptions of livelihoods and lack of work at less than 1%.

1	INCREASE OF FOOD PRICES
2	LIVELIHOODS DISRUPTION
3	LACK OF WORK

In September 2023, 2% of the respondents reported reduced income, 3% less compared to March 2023.

In September 2023, there was a slight decrease of 4% in number of households, who received **remittances** in Tonga compared to the previous data collection period in March 2023, when 69% of interviewed households reported receiving external transfers within the last 30 days. In September, 65% of households received remittancies.

The proportion of **female-headed** households receiving remittances was slightly higher than those headed my males - 68% and 65% respectively.

This additional income source may have been a contributor to maintaining consumption patterns and households ability to keep the productive assets and sustain access to markets for food and essential non-food items.

Tongan's food consumption indicate a positive trend in the past 2 rounds of data collection. The region with the highest numbers of households in borderline and poor food frequency and diversity have been '**Eua** and **Ha'apai.**

In September, **14%** of households in **Ha'apai** and reported on having borderline food consumption based on a past 7-day recall, while another **6%** of respondents had poor frequency and diversity of the main food groups. The proportions of households with borderline and poor food consumption patterns were **10%** and **5%** respectively among households in '**Eua** region.

FOOD CONSUMPTION GROUPS (%)

Region	Value
'Eua	85%
Ha'apai	80% / 14%
Niuas	100%
Tongatapu	95%
Vava'u	90%
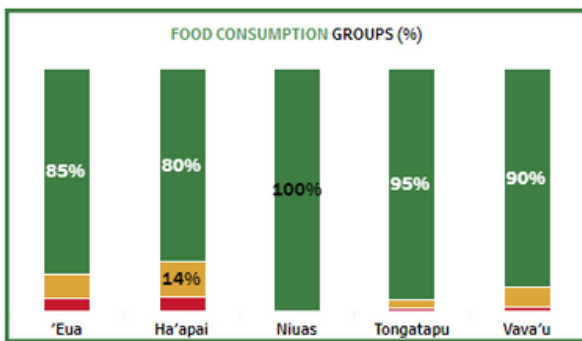
In September, the **nutritional diversity** of the diet in selected regions was limited, and marked by a significant **dependence** on specific food groups over others.

Consumption of staples, proteins, sugars, fats were high, among households in all regions and were consumed between three to seven days in a week.
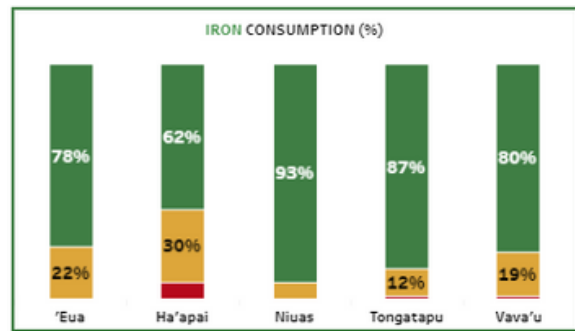
Interviewed households in Ha'iapai reported on low consumption of pulses, dairy, fruits, and vegetables, typically consumed less than 3 times a week.

DIETARY DIVERSITY
Round 12: Sep 23

	'Eua	Ha'apai	Niuas	Tongatapu	Vava'u
STAPLES	6.4	6.5	6.4	6.7	6.4
PROTEINS	5.6	4.9	5.9	6.5	5.4
VEGETABLES	4.4	3.2	5.1	4.7	4.3
SUGARS	4.2	2.9	4.1	5.4	3.3
DAIRY	3.1	2.8	5.6	2.9	4.1
FATS	2.8	2.5	4.1	3.3	3.0
FRUITS	2.8	2.3	4.1	2.2	3.1
PULSES	1.5	1.0	2.1	2.1	1.5

The intake of specific nutrient rich food by households in selected regions of Tonga declined compared to the previous data collection in March 2023.

Low or no intake of **Hem Iron** was reported by 37% of the respondents in Ha'apai, 22% in 'Eua and 20% of interviewed households in Vavu'i.

Hem Iron is a crucial macronutrient required for the prevention of anemia and is typically found in animal based proteins such as meat, poultry, shellfish and fish.

IRON CONSUMPTION (%)

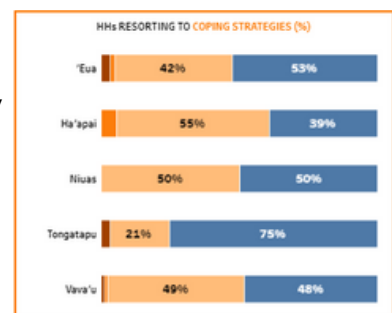| Region	Value
'Eua	78% / 22%
Ha'apai	62% / 30%
Niuas	93%
Tongatapu	87% / 12%
Vava'u	80% / 19%

In September, consumption of **Vitamin A** rich food improved considerably in comparison with March. **Ha'apai** region with 25% and **Tongatapu** region with 22%, recorded the highest percentages of households with insufficient intake of **Vitamin A** rich food. This was lower by 27% and 22% respectively compared to March.

The low levels of vitamin A consumption is attributed to the inadequate intake of Vitamin A rich food groups - animal meats, organs, dairy products and fruits.

VITAMIN-A CONSUMPTION (%)

Region	Value
'Eua	93%
Ha'apai	77% / 14%
Niuas	100%
Tongatapu	84% / 15%
Vava'u	94%
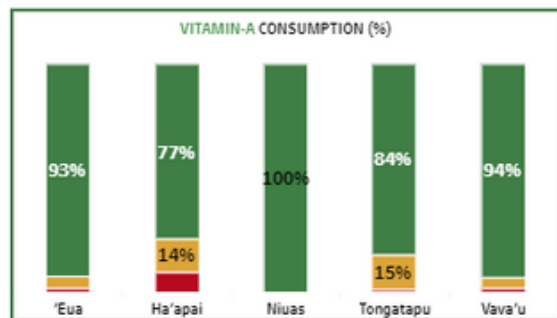
Households in **Ha'apai** region reportedly consumed the lowest quantity of **protein**. Insufficient intake of protein was reported by **10%** of the households. They had indicated consuming iron-rich food for 1-6 days, while another **3%** had not had these food groups at all in the last 7 days.

Tongans in rural areas were seen to employ mostly **stress coping strategies** to sustain their livelihoods and consumption patterns.

HHs RESORTING TO COPING STRATEGIES (%)

Region	Orange	Blue
'Eua	42%	53%
Ha'apai	55%	39%
Niuas	50%	50%
Tongatapu	21%	75%
Vava'u	49%	48%

In September, households in all regions adopted strategies, such as borrowing money or spending savings, by 20% to 30% more frequently compared to March 2023.

Extreme forms of coping strategies (crisis and emergency) were used by less than 5% of households, indicating an improvement compared to the previous two rounds of mVAM in March 2023 and July 2022.

Methodology:

This mVAM Bulletin reflects data collected from September and October 2023 via remote data collection facilitated through telephone calls in participants preferred language, either Tongan or English. The telephone numbers were generated using random-digit dialing, yielding 1,226 households. The questionnaire contained questions on households livelihoods, food consumption, diet nutritional quality, livelihood based coping strategies, multi-dimensional deprivation index, remittances, and debt. A final open ended question gives respondents the chance to share any additional concerns regarding disruptions about food security in their community. The Information collected through mobile interviews may be biased towards gender and households subscribed to the phone provider.

Other Resources: Tonga mVAM Dashboard

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