



Food Security Early Warning System Agromet Update

2011/2012 Agricultural Season



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Highlights

- Below normal rains in central/eastern parts of the region
- Tropical storm makes landfall in southern Mozambique bringing heavy rains to Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland

Regional Summary

Many parts of the region received below normal rains throughout the month of December 2011 and in early parts of January 2012 (Figure 1, yellow and brown colours). Areas where below average rains were received include northern DRC, southern Malawi, parts of central and southern Mozambique, parts of South Africa and Swaziland, much of Zambia, and central/western parts of Zimbabwe. In contrast, much of Tanzania, as well as the area around northern Namibia, southern Angola, western Zambia, and northern Botswana received above-average rainfall (green colours, Figure 1). Eastern Zimbabwe also received above-average rainfall during this period, and these rains resulted in a potential flood alert being raised by the Met Office. In some of the areas which received low rains as indicated by figure 1, the early part of the season was characterized by an erratic onset of rains. In southern Malawi for example, some farmers only finished planting in early January when significant rains were received after prolonged dryness. In mid-January, a tropical Storm “Dando” made landfall in Mozambique, causing very high rainfall amounts in southern Mozambique, eastern South Africa, and Swaziland.

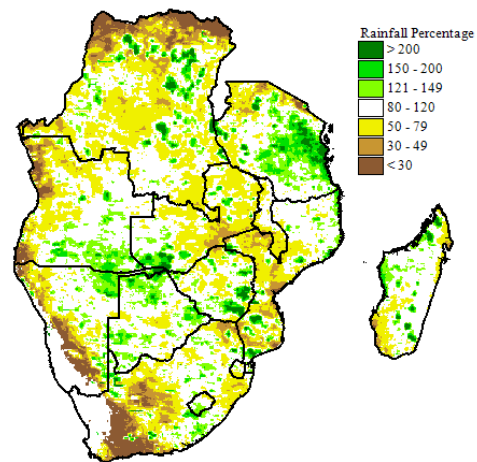


Figure 1. Rainfall for 1 Dec 2011 – 10 Jan 2012 as percent of average

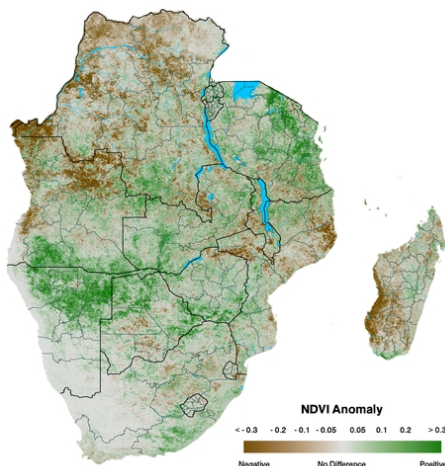


Figure 2. Vegetation Index as at 15 January 2012
Source: USGS/USAID/FEWSNET/NASA

The rainfall distribution impacted on the vegetation condition (Figure 2). The high rainfall received in parts of the region (as indicated in Figure 1) resulted in improvements in the vegetation conditions in areas like northern Namibia, northern Botswana, Tanzania, and southern Zimbabwe, among others (Figure 2, green colours). This has positive implications for pasture. In contrast, parts of central and northern Mozambique, and Malawi showed below average vegetation conditions dryness (brown colours, Figure

1), likely as a result of the erratic rains experienced there for much of the early part of the season. The good rains received in these areas during the first dekad of January are likely to help facilitate a recovery soon.

Agricultural Activity

Malawi

Poor and erratic rains persisted in central and southern Malawi throughout December 2011, with good rains being experienced in the first dekad of January. The good rains allowed farmers to complete their planting before the 15th of January, which is considered the cut-off date for rainfall-season planting in Malawi. High rains in the south however also led to flooding in some valley areas. In northern Malawi, good rains were received in the first of December and the first dekad of January, facilitating crop development. The dryness in the south and the central areas resulted in delayed planting, and there were reports of wilting in some areas. By early January, most of the maize was reported to be at vegetative stage in good condition, with expectation of good production if rains persist through March, particularly in the north.

Mozambique

Throughout December, rains were mostly below average in much of the southern and central parts of Mozambique. Heavy rains were received in a few of the southern areas during December. In the first ten days of January, heavy rains were received in the northern areas, but in the central and southern areas, little to no rainfall was received. Crops were reported to be mostly in the vegetative stage in most parts of the country. In mid-January, Tropical Storm “Dando” made landfall in southern Mozambique, causing heavy rains. National reports indicate that the expected impacts of the tropical storm include lodging of crops, toppling of fruit trees, and flooding in low-lying areas.

South Africa

Rains in South Africa were generally normal to below-normal in most parts of the country. Below normal rains were particularly over the northern-most parts of the country, as well as the western and semi-arid areas. The central parts of the country received near-normal rains, particularly in the high-production areas, which had experienced a delayed start due to erratic rains. The eastern parts of the country received very heavy rains in mid-January due to Tropical Storm “Dando”.

Swaziland

During the month of December, below-normal to normal rains were received in the southern and north-eastern parts of the country, while near-normal rains were received in most other areas. As a result, most crops (mostly maize, and pumpkins intercropped with maize) were reported to be in good condition, apart from the Lowveld (eastern Swaziland), where crops had been affected by erratic rains. Maize was reported to be mainly in the mid-to-late vegetative stage. The country received very heavy rains in mid-January, particularly in the north, due to Tropical Storm “Dando”, with some areas receiving over 100mm in 2 days.

Zambia

Although good rains were received in the western parts of the country, below-normal rains fell in the southern and central parts of the country during December. Despite this, national reports indicate that there were no reports received of moisture stress having affected crops, which were reported to be in the vegetative stage.