



# Food Security Early Warning System Agromet Update



**2013/2014 Agricultural Season**

Issue 04 Month: March

Season: 2013-2014

31-03-2014

## Highlights

- Good rainfall experienced across most central parts of the region
- Dry conditions negatively affect production prospects in Swaziland
- South-western Angola continues to receive poor rainfall
- Late planted areas face good production prospects if rains continue until early April

## Regional Summary

Rainfall intensified considerably in the central parts of the region, after a slow start in November/December 2013. As a result of the high rains, many of the central areas have received above-normal seasonal rains (Figure 1), including most parts of Botswana, southern half of Madagascar, southern and central Mozambique, north-eastern Namibia, northern South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. The above normal rains brought drought relief to areas like parts of Botswana and Namibia which had experienced moderate to severe droughts over the last 1 to 2 seasons, and resulted in improved water availability and grazing conditions. In several areas across the region however, the intensity associated with the heavy rains resulted in flooding and many communities were affected. In some areas like Swaziland, although above-normal seasonal totals were received, the rains were poorly distributed, and crops were negatively affected by prolonged dry conditions.

In contrast to the good rains received in the central areas, western parts of the region generally received below normal seasonal rainfall totals (Figure 1). In particular, north-western Namibia and south-western Angola received below normal rainfall conditions which could have negative impacts on local livelihoods. A few areas in Tanzania also indicate below-average rainfall conditions, which is associated with the poor *Vuli* (short season) rainfall performance

The vegetation index anomaly image (Figure 2)

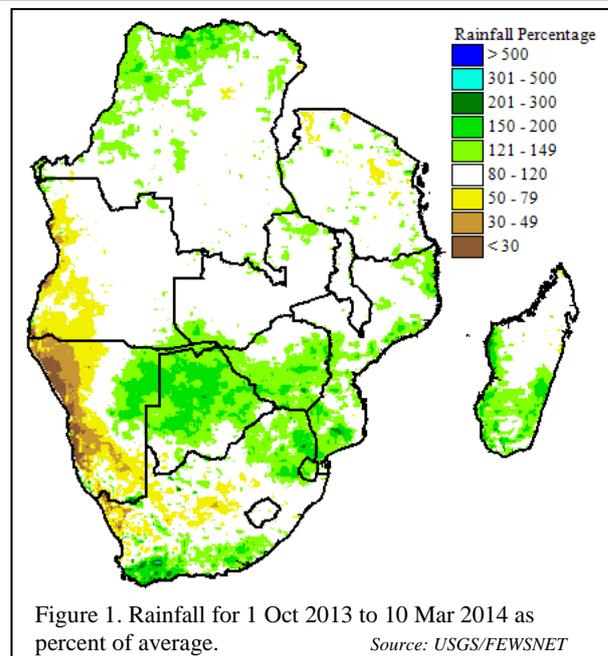


Figure 1. Rainfall for 1 Oct 2013 to 10 Mar 2014 as percent of average. Source: USGS/FEWSNET

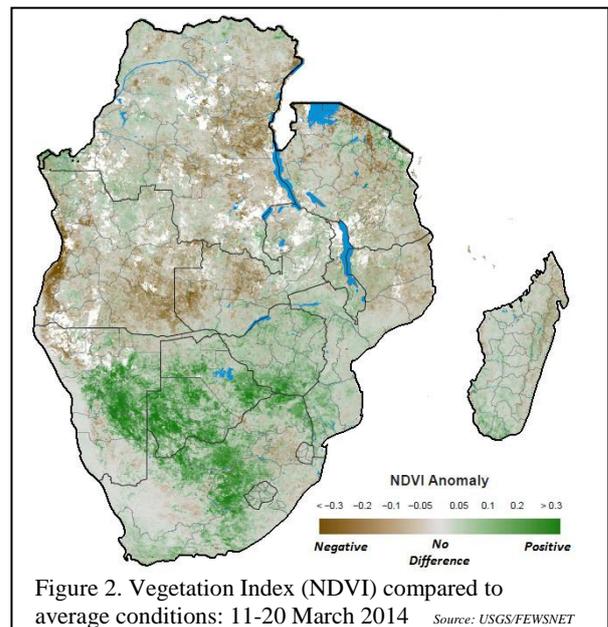


Figure 2. Vegetation Index (NDVI) compared to average conditions: 11-20 March 2014 Source: USGS/FEWSNET

shows a similar picture as the rainfall situation. The central parts of the region, including much of Botswana, southern Mozambique, eastern Namibia, northern South Africa, and much of Zimbabwe were showing above-average vegetation conditions for as of March 20, due to the high rainfall that has been received in these areas over much of the season. The main maize growing areas in South Africa (central South Africa) are also showing well above average vegetation conditions, tallying well with reports of good crop production prospects this season. As with the rainfall situation, the vegetation image shows below average vegetation conditions in western Angola and north-western Namibia, raising concerns of poor pasture and crop conditions in these areas. The vegetation analysis also shows below average vegetation conditions in much of the northern half of the region, as well as in parts of Swaziland and eastern South Africa. Ground reports from Swaziland confirm that these below average vegetation conditions are associated with poor crop production prospects.

Overall, given, the good rains received this season, production prospects are generally good in most parts of the region. In areas where the onset of rains was delayed by a month or more, rainfall has been consistent, and production is expected to be good if the rains continue until end of March or early April. These areas include southern Malawi, central/northern Mozambique, eastern Zambia and northern Zimbabwe.

The February 2014 report of the International Red Locust Control Organisation for Central and Southern Africa (IRLCO-CSA) indicated that red locusts are expected to have successfully bred at the end of February in several outbreak areas including parts of Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. The report indicated that the red locusts need to be controlled in order to avoid serious damage to agriculture. While armyworm outbreaks had been reported in previous months in Malawi and Zambia, in February, the IRLCO-CSA report only cited armyworm outbreaks in parts of Tanzania, which were subsequently controlled.

## ***National Agrometeorology Summaries***

### **Angola**

Angola has received below-normal rainfall in the western half of the country, and vegetation images indicate below average vegetation conditions in parts of the country. The low rainfall is likely to negatively affect agriculture and pastures in these areas. The south-western parts of the country experienced poor rainfall conditions in the previous season, and the repeat droughts is negatively impacting livelihoods in the south-western parts of the country, particularly in the provinces of Namibe and Cunene.

### **Botswana**

Most parts of Botswana have received above-normal rainfall this season. This excludes the southern and eastern-most parts of the country, which received near normal rains. The generally good rains allowed some recovery from the long term drought conditions (which spanned 1-to-2 years), and pastures improved considerably in many areas. However, in the southern areas which received near-normal rains, the rainfall this season was insufficient to completely reverse two consecutive seasons of below-normal rainfall. Above normal to normal rainfall will be required in the coming season to enable river and dam levels in some areas to approach normal levels.

### **Lesotho**

Maize crops in Lesotho were reported to be ranging from flowering to maturity stage by mid-March 2014. Analysis indicates that this is a late timing for the crop, and is therefore likely to be affected by frost, especially in the mountain areas. Crops were negatively affected by extreme weather events, pests and weeds at the beginning of the season. Persisting dryness through winter and early summer delayed pasture regeneration thus impacting livestock. Nonetheless, satellite vegetation

images suggest that pasture conditions have since improved, although a few areas are still showing below average vegetation conditions.

## **Malawi**

Despite a late onset of rains in southern Malawi the maize crop was generally reported to be doing well, and good harvests are expected if rainfall continues until at least end of March. Rainfall was good throughout much of the season in most areas. However, in parts northern Malawi, particularly Karonga, extended periods of low rainfall resulted in permanent wilting and crop failure. After earlier reports of armyworm in southern Malawi in January, there have been no reports of fresh armyworm outbreaks received.

## **Mozambique**

As a result of good rains received, crops are reported to have good production prospects at the country level, despite localized floods and an outbreak of pests (armyworm and stalk borer) that affected crops. Heavy rains were received in northern and central areas in February, as well as in the southern areas in March, resulting in flooding that affected many people, including cultivated areas. The combined impact of flooding, pests and diseases is estimated to have resulted in losses of approximately 0.6% of the planted area. Production prospects are good this year; harvesting has already started in the south, and the crop is nearing maturity stage in the other parts of the country.

## **Namibia**

North-eastern parts of Namibia received above normal rainfall during the season. This helped to alleviate the impacts of the drought conditions that affected the country last season. However, western parts of the country, particularly the north-western areas, have so far had a second consecutive season of below-normal rainfall.

## **South Africa**

Most of the major maize producing areas in South Africa received good rains this season, although the north-western areas experienced an erratic onset, which was highlighted by below average vegetation conditions into early February. By late March, satellite vegetation images showed well above normal vegetation conditions in the most major maize production areas. A very good maize harvest is expected. Many of South Africa's maize growing areas have experienced below average rainfall totals in the last two seasons.

## **Swaziland**

Although Swaziland received above normal rainfall totals this season, the country experienced extended dry spells that negatively affected crops. Due to the impact of the dry spells, crop production prospects are poor this season.

## **Tanzania**

The *Masika* (long season) has now started in the bimodal areas in the north of the country. The preceding *Vuli* (short season) was poor due to low rainfall. Planting was still taking place in several areas by mid-March, although in other areas, the crop was in emergence stage. In some eastern areas, heavy rainfall negatively affected the germinating crop. In the unimodal areas, which comprise the majority of the country, crops were ranging from tasselling to maturity stage, and were reported to be in good conditions, with expectations for good harvests in many areas. In some north-eastern parts of the country however, the crop had wilted due to dry spells.

## **Zambia**

Most parts of the country have received good consistent rains throughout the season, and crops are reported to be doing well in most areas. Although below normal rainfall was experienced in some of the southern, western, and central areas, reports indicate that these low rains had minimal negative impacts on crops.. Maize crops in most areas were reported to have reached flowering to grain filling stage by mid-March. The late planted crops in the eastern parts of the country were also reported to be at grain filling stage, and are unlikely to be affected by an early cessation of rains.

## **Zimbabwe**

As a result of good rainfall that has been received in most parts of the country throughout the growing season, crop conditions are generally good, and vegetation conditions are above average in most areas. Heavy rainfall however resulted in high rates of leaching in some areas. Overall, though, given the good season experienced, crop production prospects are good this season. Pasture conditions are also in good condition due to the good rains received.