



Food Security Early Warning System Agromet Update



2011/2012 Agricultural Season

Issue 06 Month: February Season: 2011-2012 Release date: 19-03-2012

Highlights

- Tropical cyclones and tropical storms bring more rain to Madagascar and Mozambique
- Dry spell affects cropping in southern parts of the region, including Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho, Southern Malawi, southern Mozambique and southern Zimbabwe

Regional Summary

Rainfall from early February into early March of 2012 was significantly below average in much of the southern half of the SADC region (Figure 1, brown and yellow colours). This dryness impacted on crops in several countries, including eastern Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa and southern Zimbabwe. Malawi was also impacted by the low rainfall in Southern Malawi, resulting in reduced yields in some areas. Although the dry spell also reached southern Mozambique, reports indicate that the crop is already being harvested. This could likely have mitigated the impact of the dry spell, although reductions in yields are likely to have occurred due to the dryness. The WRSI shows areas where any planted crops were potentially most affected by the dry spell (Figure 2, red and brown colours), including South Africa, southern Zimbabwe and eastern Botswana. More than 70% of the total rain normally falls by end of February in most parts of the SADC region, so not much more rainfall is expected climatologically. In addition, the latest forecast by the SADC Climate Services Centre suggests that normal to below normal rainfall can be expected in the March-to-May period. As such, high rainfall amounts and extended periods of rainfall activity are unlikely to occur for changing the situation.

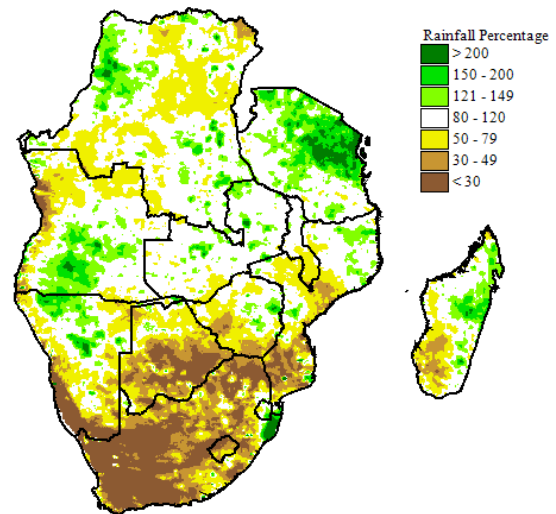


Figure 1. Rainfall for 11 Feb – 10 Mar 2012 as percent of average

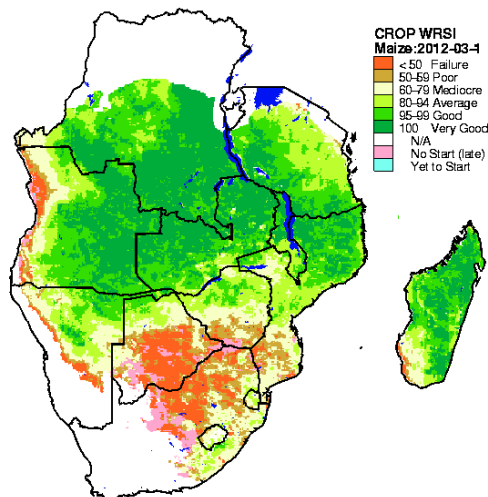


Figure 3. WRSI as at 10 March 2012

Tropical storms and cyclones brought heavy rains to parts of Mozambique and Madagascar in February and early March, resulting in deaths, destruction of infrastructure and property, and loss of agricultural production. Several tropical cyclones and tropical storms have passed through the Mozambique Channel this season, with some bringing heavy rains to parts of Mozambique, Madagascar, South Africa and Swaziland.

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Agricultural Activity

Botswana:

Satellite imagery indicates that the main crop growing areas in the eastern parts of the country experienced very low rainfall, particularly in the period between 11 February and 10 March. Vegetation indices in these growing areas are also suggesting below normal performance. As such, it is likely that poor production will result in these areas. In the productive crop growing regions in northern Botswana, rainfall has been favourable, and good production is likely in these areas. Botswana is a net importer of grain. In some of the livestock production areas, rainfall has been slightly below average when averaged over the growing season, and was significantly below average from early February to early March. Vegetation indices in these areas also indicate below average performance.

Lesotho:

Lesotho is expecting poor production this season, after dry spells affected the first part of the growing season, resulting in reductions in the area planted to maize, as well as late planting of crops in many areas. Due to the late planting, there is an increased risk of frost affecting maize crops which have not yet reached maturity. Some crops were also affected by waterlogging which happened in the Lowlands.

Malawi:

Malawi experienced dry conditions in parts of the country during the month of February, particularly in some of the southern and central parts of the country, and this is generally expected to have caused reduced crop yields in some areas. The dryness particularly affected crops in the southern parts of the country, where lower maize production is now expected compared to the previous season. In the central and northern parts of the country, near-normal production is expected. In general, maize was reported to be ranging from vegetative to maturity and drying stages. More rain is required for crops planted late in the season to reach maturity stage.

Mozambique:

Crops in the northern parts of the country were reported to be in good condition, in the vegetative and maturity stage. In the central parts of the country, crops were in the maturity stage, and some crops were already being harvested. The crops were reported to be in good condition in most areas except in the semi-arid areas, where some crops had to be replanted due to the irregular rainfall. Replanting is a common practice in some of the semi-arid areas. In the south, most crops were reported to be undergoing harvesting. There is a possibility that some of the crops that were planted late could have been affected by dryness in the south. Overall, good production is expected in the northern parts of the country if good rains continue. Several cyclones and tropical storm have passed near or through parts of Mozambique this season, with the latest, Tropical Storm *Irina* in early March. Agricultural assessments indicate that close to 42,000 Ha of crop have been lost due to storms and cyclones in Mozambique this year.

South Africa

Except for December, most parts of South Africa experienced below normal rainfall for much of the season thus far. The impacts of the dryness was reduced by good soil moisture reserves that had been built up from the waterlogging experienced in the previous season, but even this moisture reserve had been significantly depleted in many areas. The low rainfall at the start of the season was

synonymous with a late onset of rains, resulting in late plantings. As a result, maize crops in many areas are still in vegetative and flowering stages. For these late planted crops, rainfall will be needed until April or May in some areas, in order for the crops to reach maturity. Good rains as late as May are not typical of the climatology in many areas. An early onset of frost could also damage the crop before maturity. A production estimate of 11.7 million MT of maize was given in late February, but this figure is likely to be reduced significantly with the dryness extending into March.

Swaziland

Most of the maize crop was reported to be at maturity stage, with some crop already in the drying phase, while a few of the crops are still at cob formation stage. The crop is in good condition in the Highveld, which is the main Maize growing region. Despite the good crop conditions, an erratic start of season, constrained access to inputs and draft power led to reduced area planted, and the total production is likely to be lower than last year.

Tanzania

In Tanzania, good rains that fell in some of the central unimodal areas between early February and early March allowed the continued development of crops in the unimodal areas. Most crops, including maize, paddy, wheat, sorghum and cotton were reported to be in good condition. Maize was reported to be at various stages between emergence and flowering. Good rains also fell in the bimodal areas, and while this was too late for the Vuli season (which was a failure), the rainfall facilitated land preparation and planting activities for the Masika season.

Zambia

Zambia has experienced a good season in most areas, although seasonal rainfall has been below normal in parts of Southern Zambia. The maize crop is now reported to be at its maturity stage in most parts of the country, and performing well. The late planted crop was reported to be at flowering stage, and also doing well. However, there were reports of flooding of crops in parts of Kaoma district in Western Zambia, which may reduce yields locally.

Zimbabwe

The country received good rainfall in the northern part of the country, with good chances for the crop production to be fair to good. The extended dryness experienced in the southern half affected crops in many areas, resulting in permanent wilting of crops in some areas, and crop production is likely to be poor in the southern half of the country.