



# REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME

## agromet update



### Rainfall, Vegetation and Crop Monitoring

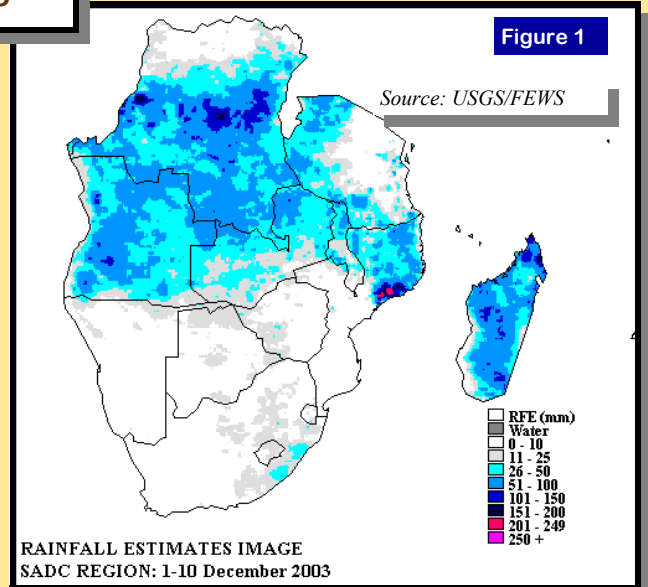
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### Highlights

- Poor rainfall performance in the first ten days of December across much of the region...
- Many areas in the region have received poor rains so far since September 1...
- Drought in south-eastern part of the region continues...
- Eastern Tanzania continues to receive poor rains...

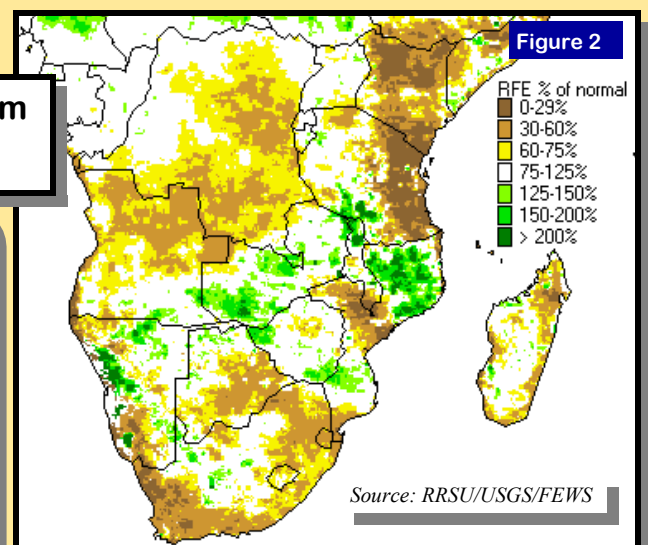
### Rainfall performance during 1st dekad of December 2003

The first 10 days of December were characterized by dry conditions across most of the southern half of the sub-region. Satellite-derived rainfall estimates (Figure 1) suggest that most areas in Botswana, Lesotho, southern Malawi, southern to central Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, southern Zambia, and Zimbabwe received little to no rainfall. Comparing with the average scenario, the rainfall season is expected to have started by now in most of these areas, particularly the more productive areas. However, up to now, the season has not had a good start in areas including parts of southern Mozambique, South Africa, Lesotho, and Swaziland. In the northern half of the sub-region, many areas received good rains. This excludes eastern Tanzania, where dryness continues to aggravate the conditions there. In a few areas which received good rains in the previous dekad, the moisture should suffice for this dekad. However, in a number of areas where the season has had a poor or delayed start, this should start to become a cause of concern.



### Rainfall performance for the season from September 1 to present

Comparison of the total rainfall to-date with the long term average often provides a good summary of how the season is performing so far. Figure 2 shows an image of the cumulative rainfall from September 1 to present expressed as a percentage of the average rainfall for the same period. The image suggests that so far, areas in the central parts of the sub-region have received normal (white colors) to above normal (green colors) rainfall. The dark brown colors over eastern Tanzania and the central Mozambique/southern Malawi areas indicate that these areas have received less than 30% of their average rainfall. Overall, many areas in the region have not received very good rains since September 1, as suggested by the yellow and brown colours.



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**Drought in south-eastern part of the sub-region continues**

The general area of Lesotho, southern Mozambique, eastern South Africa, and Swaziland is in the throes of an extensive drought (Figure 3a). The particularities of this drought differ within the specific areas, but generally, this is a long-term drought which has spanned more than one season. In the affected areas in Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland, the drought has a relatively long history, with the past two seasons having recorded significantly below normal rains.

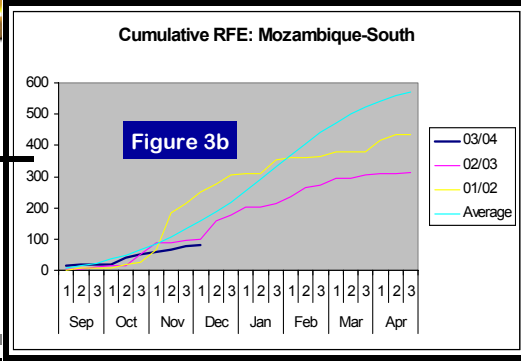
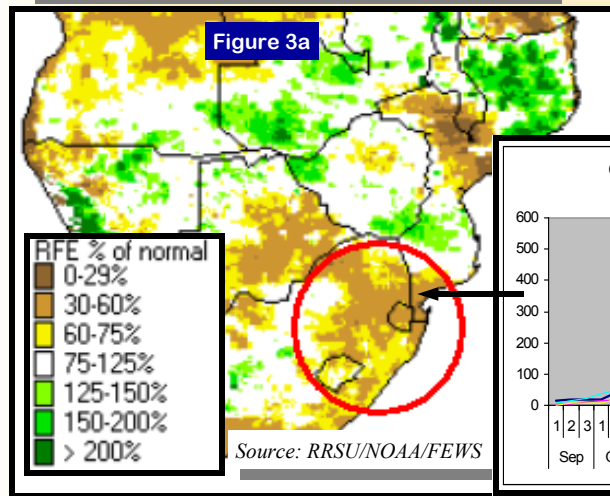


Figure 3b, a cumulative rainfall graph for southern Mozambique, describes the typical scenario in these areas. The light blue line is the average rainfall. The shorter dark blue line is the current rainfall for the 2003/2004 season. The purple line is the cumulative rainfall for the 2002/03 season, and the yellow line represents the 2001/2002 season. Figure

3b thus tells the story that the total rainfall for this season so far is about half of normal. The 2002/2003 season was about half of normal when it ended. The 2001/02 season was also below normal. So this season is basically the third consecutive season of below normal rains. This situation, true in southern Mozambique, is the same in Swaziland and surrounding provinces in South Africa. In Lesotho, the drought is not as long-term - rains from the previous season (2002/03) were only slightly below normal, and in the season before that (2001/02), rains were above normal. However, winter precipitation for the last season was very poor, and compounded by the poor rains so far this season, this has made the situation quite unfavorable in the mountain Kingdom.

This drought situation has not improved in the last ten days. Reports indicate that rivers and reservoirs are already at critical levels, thus threatening water supplies for human consumption, livestock, and crop irrigation. Crops and pasture in some of these areas are reported to be performing poorly, due to the low soil moisture levels. Unless the water/rainfall situation improves very soon, the implications of this situation on food security for the communities in these areas, as well as the region at large, may be quite severe. South Africa is one of the major producers of grain in the region, and often exports grain to surrounding countries. However, the unavailability of water for crop use will affect the country's ability to export to the region.

**Season Monitoring in other countries in SADC**

**Malawi** Light rains were experienced over most areas in Malawi in the first dekad of December. Substantial rains were received only in isolated areas. Good rains for planting have been sporadic since the start of this cropping period, and there are areas where farmers have not planted yet due to the unavailability of effective rains. Most areas in the south of the country have so far received less than half of their normal rains up to this point in time. The onset of rains normally occurs around November in the south and December in the north.

**Zimbabwe** Most of the country was generally dry throughout the first ten days of December. However, the effects of this dryness should not be severe since most of the country enjoyed some good rains in the previous dekad. Follow-up rains will be necessary in the coming period to support germination of any recently planted crops

**Mozambique** The northern part of Mozambique enjoyed some good rains in the period between 1-10 December. This part of the country normally has an onset of rains in early December. Much of this area also received good rains in the previous dekad, making this a conducive scenario for planting of crops.

**Tanzania** The dry spell in the eastern and northern parts of Tanzania continued through the first ten days of December, and little to no rainfall relief has been experienced in both the unimodal and the bimodal areas. Already there have been reports of wilting of crops in some areas. Farmers have not planted in many areas where normally they would have planted by now due to the unavailability of rains. The quantity and quality of pasture is reported to have deteriorated significantly. The effect of the dry spell is reportedly approaching critical levels.

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