



REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME

Agromet-Update



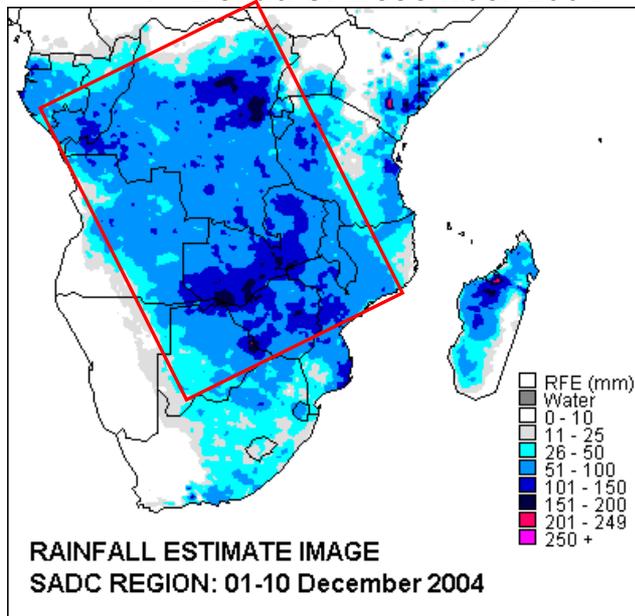
Rainfall, Vegetation and Crop Monitoring

Issue 02 Dekad: 01 Month: December Season: 2004-2005 Release date: 21-12-2004

Highlights

- ❑ Heavy rainfall amounts received in the central parts of region...
- ❑ Poor rainfall performance in Lesotho during the dekad...
- ❑ Agricultural activities intensify in the region...
- ❑ Poor rainfall continues in South Africa...

Fig 1 Rainfall Performance during 1st Dekad of December 2004



Source: NOAA/FEWS

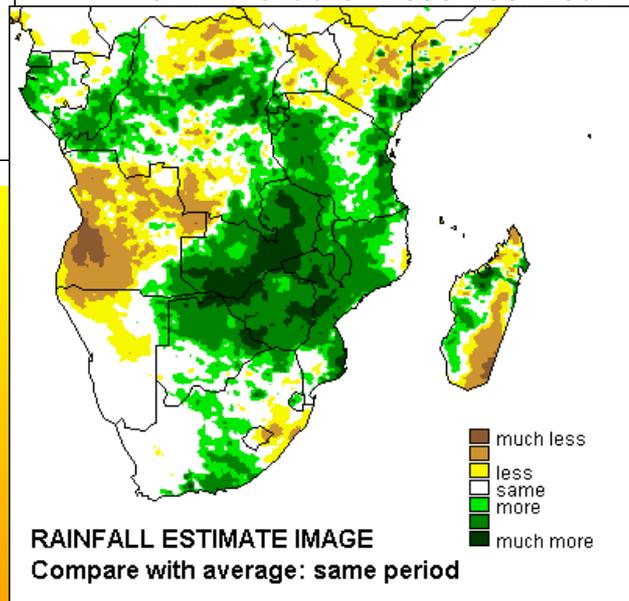
Quantitative Rainfall Anomaly

November and December rainfall is critical for the sowing of crops. Poor performance of rainfall in these two months always signifies a bad onset of rainfall. Comparison of rainfall with the previous seasons provides an opportunity to evaluate how the current season/dekad is performing compared to the past. The long-term average is used to make this assessment. The rainfall received in the first dekad of December when compared to average for the same first dekad shows that the central parts of the region covering parts of Botswana, South Africa and Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe have received a lot more rainfall than the average figure 2. *Continued on page 2*

Dekadal Rainfall Performance

The first dekad of December 2004 saw some improvement in the rainfall performance in the region. The region experienced heavy rainfall in a diagonal form stretching from the north-west to the south-east of the region as shown by red box (figure 1). According to the RFE Image (figure 1), Angola, DRC, Malawi, Mozambique, part of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe experienced rainfall exceeding 100mm in some areas in the 10-day period being reported. The DRC, Southern Zambia and Zimbabwe show some areas with probably over 150mm of rainfall. The rainfall helped to improve the soil moisture situation. It is expected that this will improve the general vegetation condition.

Fig 2 Quantitative Rainfall Anomaly as of 1st Dekad of December 2004



Source: NOAA/FEWS

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A continuous sign of rainfall being above average for a particular dekad is always a good indication of the season performing better. With experience in food security, it becomes possible to make yield and production estimates of the coming marketing season. However, cumulative rainfall totals for South Africa and Lesotho indicate below average rainfall performance and this is a worrying sign as South Africa is the highest grain producer in the region.

MALAWI So far there has been very good distribution of rains both in space and time across the country during the first 10-days of December 2004. This has contributed to maintenance of soil moisture necessary to support planting, germination of seed, crop growth and development. Meanwhile farmers are continuing planting of crops, application of fertilizer and weeding. The maize crop is reportedly in good condition and ranges from germination to early vegetative stages in most areas. The rains have also increased pasture availability for communal grazing. The amount of rainfall for the farmer to start planting crops will depend on the type of crop, climate of a particular locality, the soil type, methods and quality of land preparation plus other aspects. In general, planting of crops starts when the soil has enough moisture to support germination of the particular crop one wants to grow.

SOUTH AFRICA Rainfall in the first dekad of December was relatively good with most parts of the country receiving some rainfall (figure 1). Considering that the amounts received were not very high, this will make it difficult for the soils to reach field capacity and hence continue with insufficient soil moisture. South Africa is the highest maize producing country in the region and helps supply the region with grain and a poor rainfall performance may have serious implications in the region in terms of grain availability and food security. The maize crop area estimation for 2004/05 is given as 2.854 million hectares.

ZIMBABWE The country showed a significant improvement in rainfall amounts received during the dekad being reported. The RFE imagery (figure 1) shows areas with high rainfall amounts including Matebeleland south. Reports from the ground indicate that amounts less than 40 mm were recorded in areas such as Mvurwi in Mashonaland Central, Chinhoyi, Karoi and Beatrice in Mashonaland west, Gutu in Masvingo and Lusulu in Matabeleland North. The most significant rainfall amounts occurred over Binga (180 mm), Chipinge (191 mm) and Nkayi (172 mm). Agricultural activities including land preparation and sowing have intensified especially after the first dekad rainfall. There are no reports of input shortages including diesel used for ploughing.

Mozambique The first dekad of December saw the country receive a lot of rainfall as in the third dekad of November. Figure 1 indicates that Niassa, Nampula, Zambezia and the central provinces excluding Maputo received substantial amounts of rainfall. The country has also experienced above normal rainfall (fig 2).

In Sofala and Inhambane, there are areas that received high rainfall amounts and this will improve the food security prospects considering that the last bulletin reported delay in onset of 20-30 days. The southern tip continues to perform poorly.

Lesotho The northern parts of the country received above normal dekadal rainfalls of 114.6mm in Ox-Bow, 47.9mm in Butha-Buthe and 40.5mm in Leribe but generally poor rainfall during the dekad. Crops (maize and sorghum) in the western and northern lowlands are at emergence stage to early vegetative stage. At some places in the low-lying areas planting is in progress. Due to excess heat and small amounts of rain experienced, crops find it difficult to survive as water is rapidly lost through evapotranspiration. Weeding is in progress in most parts of the highlands and some parts of the lowlands.

ZAMBIA

More than average rainfall was received in many parts of the country. During the first dekad of December, Lusaka City Airport reported the highest dekadal rainfall of 156mm in 06 days followed by Livingstone in Southern province which had 155mm in 7 days. Solwezi in the Northwestern province had 145mm in 8 days while Mount Makulu in Chilanga recorded 131mm in 8 days. Many areas in the country have received sufficient rainfall for land preparation and planting. Meanwhile crops are doing fine at germination and vegetative stages especially in the northern parts of Zambia. Planting activities, particularly over the eastern and southern parts of Zambia has continued and should be coming to an end.