



FOOD SECURITY EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

Agromet Update

2007/2008 Agricultural Season



Issue 06 Month: December Dekad 2 and 3 Season: 2007-2008 Release date: 08-01-2008

Highlights

- ❑ Heavy rains continue in the central parts of the region
- ❑ Flooding becomes a concern in Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe
- ❑ Rainfall performance improves in Tanzania during the second dekad of December

Rainfall activity during 11-31 December

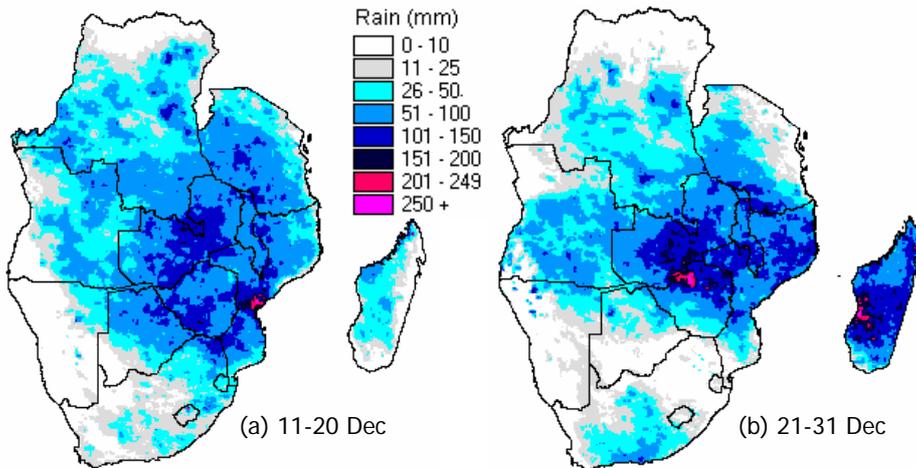


Figure 1. Rainfall for (a) 11-20 December 2007 and (b) 21-31 December 2007, from rainfall estimates (data source: NOAA/FEWSNET)

Significant heavy rains were received in the central parts of the SADC region between 11 and 31 December, while less rainfall was received in the northern and the southern parts of the region during the same period (Figure 1). In particular, Malawi, Mozambique, southern Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe received very high, above normal rains during this period. The sustained high rains have led to flooding in parts of these countries, and waterlogging which is already threatening to lower yields in some areas. In areas where the rains have not been excessive though, they have been beneficial to cropping and pasture in general. In other parts of

the region, rainfall has been moderate to low over the last 21 days of December. Although much of Botswana received above normal rains during the second dekad, it received less rains during the third dekad of December. Much of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland also received heavy rains in the second dekad, while lower rains were received during the third dekad. In Tanzania, high rainfall was received during the second dekad throughout most parts of the country, providing relief from the poor rains that have affected the country, especially in the north. Dekad 3 of December was wet in the south and drier in the north in Tanzania.

Seasonal Rainfall for 1 Oct - 31 Dec 2007

Analysis of the rainfall between 1 October and 31 December 2007 (Figure 2) indicates that most parts of the region have received above normal rains (green colours, Figure 2). Central Namibia, northern Madagascar, and northern Tanzania are the main exceptions to this observation. The consistently high seasonal rains in most parts of the region have been beneficial to early cropping, pastures, and water supply in many areas. However, flooding has now become a problem, particularly in Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe, where some flooding has already occurred, and renewed flooding is quite possible, with the current forecasts for continued rainfall. There have also been reports of waterlogging negatively affecting crops, and even hampering late planting due to the excessive nature of the rains in some areas. Dark green colours in figure 2 shows areas which have received more than twice their normal rainfall, and these are some of the areas where flooding has already been recorded, and is a major concern, particularly in the Mozambique/Zambia/Zimbabwe area.

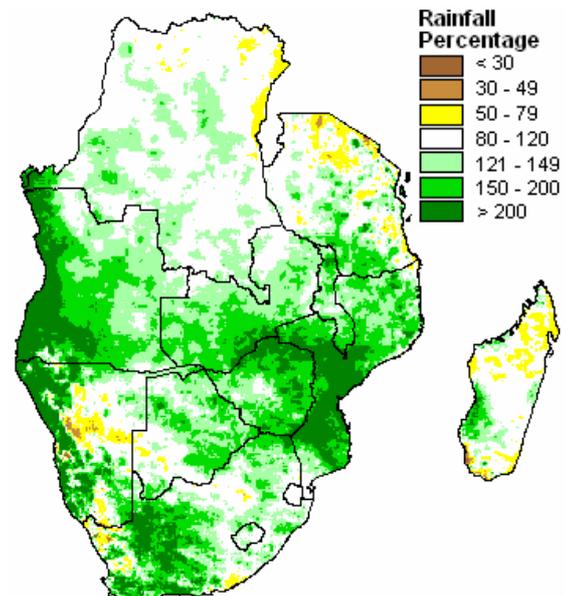


Figure 2. Seasonal Rainfall for 1 Oct – 31 Dec 2007 expressed as percentage of average, from rainfall estimates (data source: NOAA/FEWSNET)

Rainfall Forecast and latest rainfall updates

The latest seasonal forecast update for the December-January-February period called for enhanced chances of normal to above normal rainfall for nearly the entire region, excluding Mauritius. Climatic observations and analyses have confirmed that La Niña conditions are now well established. This forecast suggests the need for continued monitoring in parts of the region affected by flooding and flood threat. More recently, sustained heavy rains fell during the period 1-6 January 2008 in Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, and particularly heavy rains were received in southern Zambia on 4 January. South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland and Tanzania also received some significant rains during this time. Short to medium-term forecasts projecting into mid-January are calling for possibility of heavy rainfalls continuing in the central parts of the region that have already been receiving heavy rains.

Onset of Planting Rains

Most parts of the SADC region have by now received sufficient rainfall to allow farmers to plant. Figure 3 shows the dates of the onset of planting rains. Blue colours show areas where the effective planted rains were received in October, green colours signify November and orange colours indicate areas with rains starting in December. According to rainfall estimates, Tanzania received effective planting rains in December, as did northern/central Malawi, parts of northern Mozambique, and parts of Botswana and Namibia. The onset of planting rains does not necessarily imply that planting actually occurred, but in most areas where cropping is practiced, where inputs are timely, and where labour is available, planting often starts with the first timely, effective rains. While many farmers across the region had already planted, some reports received from a number of countries affected by severe waterlogging and flooding have suggested the likely need for replanting in many of the affected areas where crops have been lost. This may prove difficult however, given the advanced stage of the rainfall season, and whether there will be enough time for the crops to reach maturity.

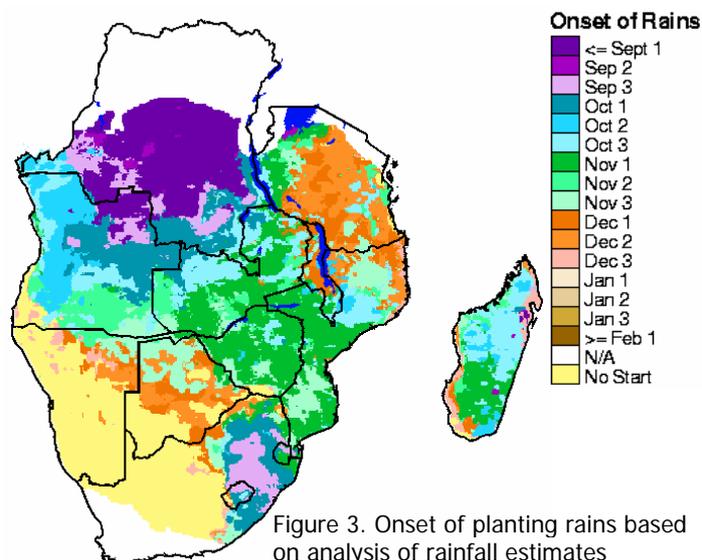


Figure 3. Onset of planting rains based on analysis of rainfall estimates

Agricultural Season performance in selected countries

Lesotho

Lesotho received high rains during the second dekad of December and received reduced rains in the third dekad in most areas. The reduced rains helped to ease the waterlogging that was prevalent in dekad 2. Most summer crops were reported to be at vegetative stage and in good condition.

Zambia

Heavy rains have been received in Zambia since late November, particularly in the western half of the country. Since mid-December, the eastern half of the country has also been receiving heavy rains. The sustained heavy rains have led to flooding in some areas, concerns for extensive flooding and water logging abound, which may result in loss of lives, livelihoods, property and crops.

Malawi

Widespread rains were experienced over the country in the period under review. The high rainfall received in the catchment of Shire river has the potential to cause flooding in Shire Valley if heavy rains continue. The maize crop was reportedly at various stages of development ranging from planting to vegetative stages. The general condition for maize was reportedly

good and no major outbreaks of pests and diseases have been reported in the country so far.

Mozambique

Most parts of Mozambique received sustained heavy downpours throughout the month, and have led to rising river levels in the Zambezi, Buzi Pungoe and Save catchments, and subsequent flood threats. Significant flooding has already occurred, and tens of thousands of people are estimated to be already affected. The problem is worsened by the extensive rains that have been falling upstream in Zambia and Zimbabwe, which are moving downstream and increasing chances of extensive flooding, especially in the Zambezi lower basin. This flooding would threaten lives, livelihoods and properties.

Zimbabwe

Extensive heavy rains have been received throughout December in Zimbabwe, and while they have benefited crops in cases, there have been some cases of flooding, and reports of water-logging in different areas. There are fears of possible extensive crop loss due to water logging, and experts are currently trying to get a handle on the affected areas.

For more details, contact: **SADC Food Agricultural and Natural Resources Directorate.**

Gaborone, Botswana. Tel: 267-3951863; Email: kmasamvu@sadc.int Web:

<http://www.sadc.int>