



REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME

Agromet-Update



Rainfall, Vegetation and Crop Monitoring

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Highlights

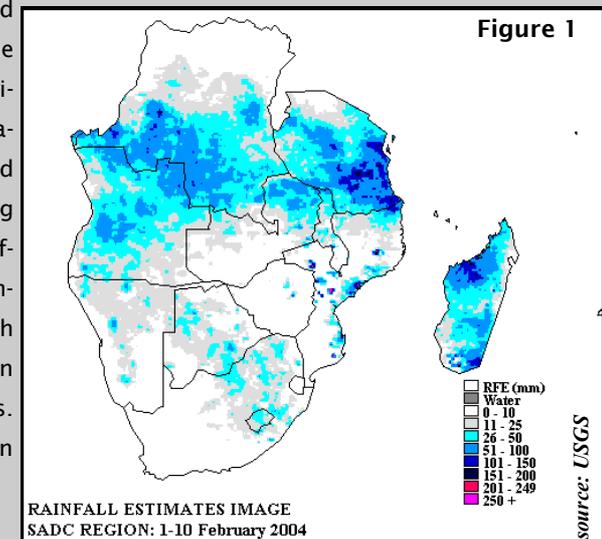
- Y Favourable rainfall in the northern half of SADC during the dekad...
- Y Late planted crop could suffer reduced yields...
- Y Good progression of the main summer rains in Tanzania...
- Y Planting, replanting, weeding and fertilizer application, major activities in Zimbabwe...
- Y Armyworm infestations reported in several districts in Tanzania...

Rainfall Performance in the first 10 days of February 2004

Convergence Zone (ITCZ) oscillating over the extreme northern parts of the region. These favourable rains indicate a good start to the main summer rains in Tanzania. The rest of the sub-region had no or very little rainfall. The dry period may have been good for some parts of the region to allow for some agricultural activities such as weeding and fertilizer application. However, good rains were still needed in those parts of the region where planting has been late such as Swaziland, South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe to improve the soil moisture condition. The high rainfall in Lesotho damaged some crops in Mafeteng and Qacha's Nek districts.

Rainfall during the first dekad of February was concentrated mainly in the northern half of the region (figure 1), as a result of the Inter-tropical

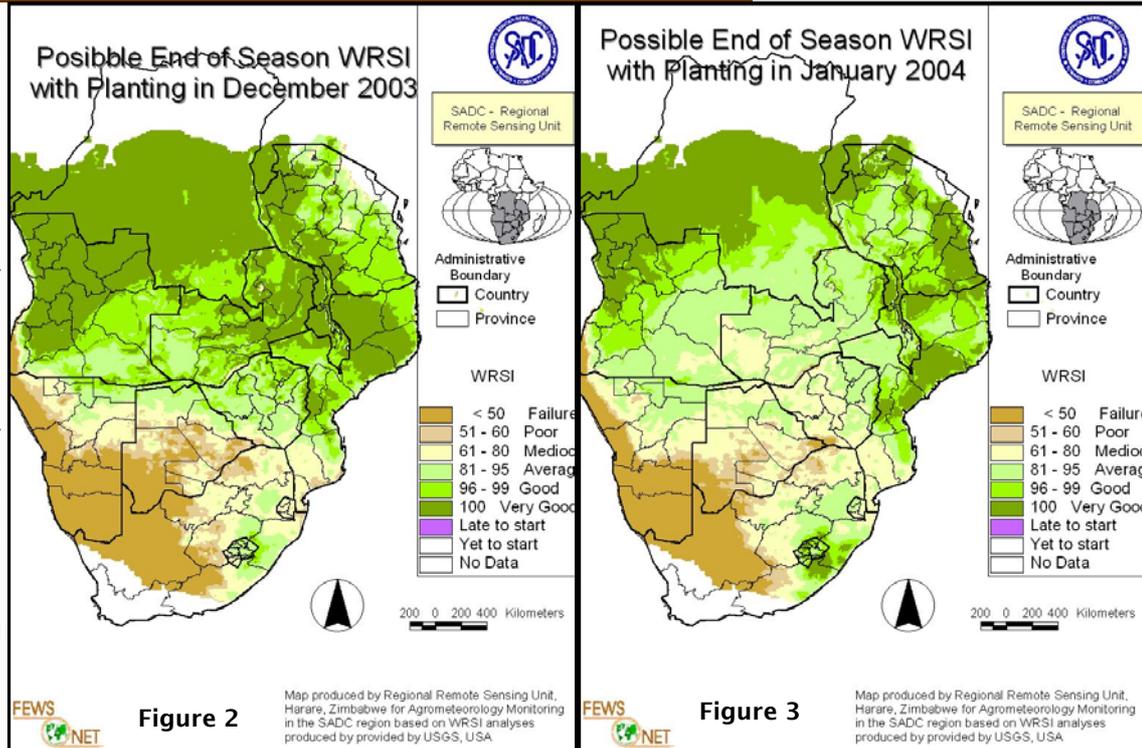
Convergence Zone (ITCZ) oscillating over the extreme northern parts of the region. These favourable rains indicate a good start to the main summer rains in Tanzania. The rest of the sub-region



Swaziland is still experiencing poor rainfall performance, increasing the stress on crops.

Scenario implications of delayed planting due poor early rains in 2003/2004

The timing of planting has a bearing on the performance of the crop. Depending on the maturity period of the crop, it is supposed to be put in the ground by a particular time. Figures 2 & 3 show the potential extent to which a 120-day crop's water requirements will be met by the end of the growing season, provided that crops were planted in December Dekad 1 and January dekad 1 respectively. In most areas, crops are expected to perform better if they were planted in December than if they were planted in January. Further analysis showed that early-planted crops (October) were not expected to perform well in some areas such as Zimbabwe and central/southern Mozambique. However, farm management practices may help.



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Malawi Dry condition were experienced in most parts of Malawi. The dry spell facilitated weeding and fertilizer application. Crops survived on residual soil moisture. Due to late onset of rains, maize crop stages vary from establishment to vegetative stages in some areas particularly in the south. Elsewhere, early planted maize crop is reported to be flowering and more soil moisture is required for the purpose of cob development. So far no major outbreaks of pest and diseases have been reported. Despite late and erratic onset of rains in some parts of Malawi, the general crop situation looks promising especially where fertilizer has been applied and good harvests are possible particularly if rains are consistent between now and end of March.

South Africa South Africa continues to experience a poor rainfall performance. Rainfall estimates suggest a poor first dekad of February rainfall. Low rainfall amounts were received in the Free State, Mpumalanga, Kwa-Zulu Natal and Limpopo provinces. Revised estimates of area planted to yellow and white maize has now been pegged at almost 3 million hectares while production estimates are on average 7 million tonnes. With the unsatisfactory rainfall performance, the challenges of grain deficits in the region are slowly coming to reality.

Lesotho The first dekad of February received isolated to scattered thunder-showers/storms accompanied by hailstorms especially during the second half of the dekad. Crops benefitted well from the rains received, however, in some places, in the Mafeteng and Qacha's Nek districts, crop damage due to hail was reported. Some of the crops are at the critical stage of tasseling/flowering hence and this is likely affect crop production. Nevertheless, crops are generally at vegetative to grain forming stages. Crop condition ranges from poor to good. Weeding in some places in the lowland areas is still in progress where planting was delayed. The country will generally not have a good harvest.

Swaziland Rainfall was very minimal during the dekad. Most of the country's maize crop range from tasselling/flowering stage in the Highveld and upper Middleveld to soft dough stage in lower Middleveld and a few crops that might have survived the dry spells in the Lowveld. In the Lubombo plateau, the maize crop is mainly at tasseling stage. Reports indicate that crop condition countrywide is not very good and even worse in the lower Lowveld's, where the crop continues to deteriorate irrespective of the good rains which is coming when the crop is beyond recovery. The crop planted in January and February may not yield well considering the short period remaining before the winter season sets in.

Mozambique Rainfall performance was favourable in the northern parts of the country during the first dekad of February, signaling a good progression of the season in the north. However, satellite imagery suggests low to no rainfall in the south. While the country may experience a good harvest in the north where the rainy season has recently commenced; the south has experienced frequent dry conditions, threatening food security.

Namibia The main crop growing area of Namibia, Caprivi, has been receiving favourable rainfall during this season. Current indications are that, by the end of the season, about 85 per cent of the Caprivi's total potential crop of maize and sorghum will be harvested and a good yield is expected. Even though rainfall has been good in the Caprivi, reported locust outbreak at Dudukabe, Ngoma East and West and Itomba, as well as flooding at Sangwali and in the east of the region, could result in a reduction in overall production.

Tanzania The country received a substantial amount of rainfall in the southern and coastal areas. Farmers have started land preparation for *Masika* (long) season. Over the unimodal regions (central and southern sectors) of the country, the early planted maize crop was at pre-tasseling stage, and beans were between flowering and pod filling. In the central regions (Singida and Dodoma) a short dry spell in January slightly affected crops. The average performance so far could be rated as good. Armyworm infestations were reported in several districts in Morogoro Region, Dodoma Region and Manyara Region. Maize, sorghum and paddy have been affected. Stinking hoppers (*panzi kunuka*) have also been reported in Kondo district (Dodoma Region). However, pasture conditions are likely to improve over most parts of the country as a result of soil moisture replenishment experienced during the last few dekads.

Zambia The dekad experienced low rainfall in many areas of the country. This enabled farming activities such as weeding and top dressing of fertilizer application to be done. It should also be noted that despite the rainfall deficits in the south of the country, crops are doing fine. The deficits are a result of the slow start of the rainfall season. The good number of sunshine hours during the almost dry dekad was conducive for the crop development that has already reached flowering stage in most areas of the country. The crop conditions are reported to be even better in the northern areas of Zambia where it is at grain filling stage. The heavy rainfall that has occurred over the northeastern districts of the country including parts of Eastern province has resulted in some flash floods. However, there has been no reported damage to the crops reported.

Zimbabwe Planting, re-planting of maize, weeding and fertiliser application are the major activities in all provinces. The bulk of the crop in all provinces is at vegetative to early reproductive stages; while in Mashonaland Central province half of the crop is at reproductive stage. The Midlands province has reported a shortage of Ammonium Nitrate which is now hindering topdressing. There are reports of armyworm outbreak in Manicaland and Mashonaland West. The national rainfall performance as compared to the usual rains to date translates into 60% to 80% for the belt extending from much of Manicaland to northeastern parts of Mashonaland West, while Harare Province, is trailing behind all Provinces with values ranging from 50%

For more details, contact: SADC FANR Regional Early Warning System, Gaborone, Botswana. Tel: 267-3951863; Email: RMasundire@sadc.int or to 60 % of its normal rains to date.