



# REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME Agromet-Update



## Rainfall, Vegetation and Crop Monitoring

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### Highlights

- Favourable rainfall concentrated in the central parts of the region...
- Good crop expected in central and northern Malawi...
- Southern parts of the region continue to receive poor rainfall...
- Caprivi Strip consistently receives high rainfall...
- Lesotho and Swaziland receive less than 75% of normal rainfall...

### Rainfall Performance from 11-20 February 2004

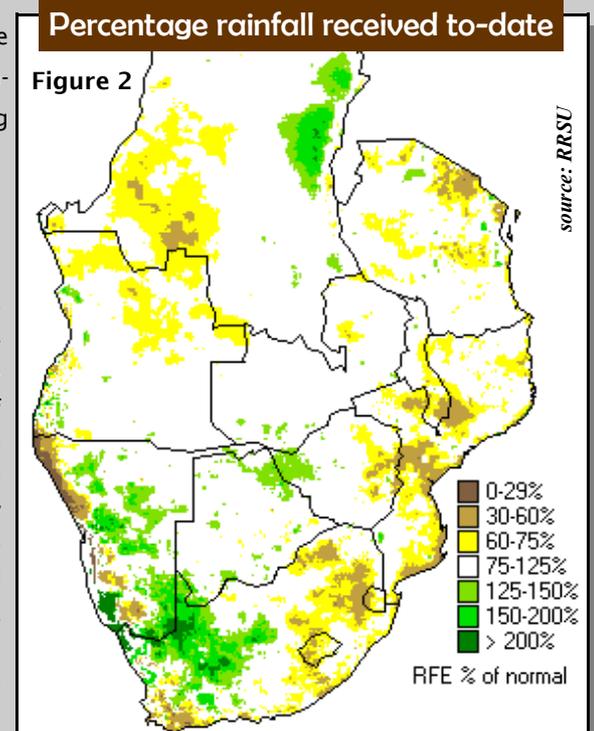
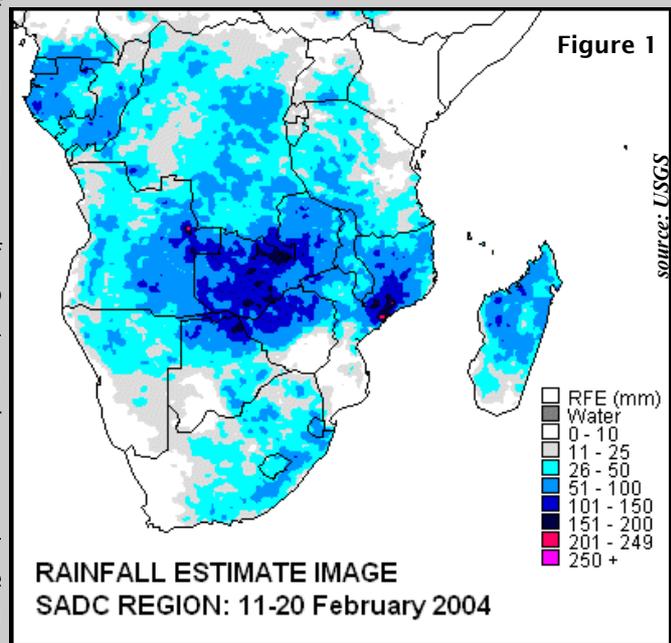
bique receiving high amounts of rainfall (figure 1). For Zambia, the entire country was covered while in Zimbabwe, rainfall was concentrated in Mashonaland West and Central as well as in Matebeleland North. The rest of the provinces received little or no rainfall at all. In Angola, significant amounts were received in the entire country with higher

amounts in the eastern parts covering Lunda Sul, Bie, Moxico and Cuando Cubango provinces. The Democratic Republic of Congo received medium rainfall in most parts of the country while Tanzania had its rainfall concentrated in the western part of the country. Countries in the southern parts of the region which include Swaziland and Lesotho received minimal rainfall, although Swaziland recorded a substantial amount which would improve the condition of the pastures especially in the western parts of the country (figure 1). Southern parts of Mozambique continue to suffer very low rainfall while the cereal growing areas of Namibia received good amounts increasing the prospects of a good season but also raising fears of flooding.

### Unsatisfactory cumulative rainfall in parts of the region

The timing of rainfall during a season plays a critical role in agricultural production. Analysis of rainfall performance through the Agromet-Update indicates that the distribution of the rainfall during the 2003/2004 growing season has been poor and erratic. This conclusion is supported by the number of re-plantings that have been reported in most countries in the region including Malawi, Tanzania, Mozambique, Swaziland and Lesotho. While the distribution has been erratic, the cumulative rainfall statistics have also been unsatisfactory in certain parts of the region including most of Lesotho and Swaziland, Limpopo, Free State and Kwa-Zulu Natal provinces in South Africa, Manicaland and Mashonaland East provinces in Zimbabwe, Maputo, Inhambane, Manica, Sofala and Zambezia provinces in Mozambique. These provinces have received less than 75% of normal rainfall as of 20 February 2004 (figure 2). Coupled with poor distribution, crop performance will be affected leading to low yields.

The second dekad of February performed reasonably well in the central parts of the region with Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozam-



**Malawi** Light to moderate rainfall amounts were received during the second 10-days of February. This supported agricultural activities as well as growth and development of crops. Reports indicate that most crops have reached the flowering stage (critical) which requires sufficient soil moisture while in other parts, the maize crop is at flowering and cob formation stages. In parts of the country where maize was planted early, it has reached physiological maturity and households have started consuming green maize. However, in parts of the country particularly in the south where maize was planted in mid January is at vegetative stage. The major concern for this crop is that rainfall in the south normally tails off by end of March and this might impact negatively on the crop production this season. Overall, better crop production is expected in the central and northern parts of the country than in the south because the rains have performed slightly better in the two regions than in the south.

**Swaziland** Rainfall improved during the dekad being reported. The maize crop in areas not affected by drought range from tasselling/flowering stage. This is a critical stage at which consistent rainfall is needed for pollen development and fertilisation. However, reports countrywide indicate that crop condition is not very good and even worse in the lower Lowveld's, where the crop continues to deteriorate irrespective of the good rains that has been received. The crop planted in late January, and even worse that planted in February, may not yield well considering the season may be coming to an end, as well as the fact that the winter is approaching and low temperatures do not support photosynthetic (plant food manufacturing process) activity.

**Namibia** The dekad continued to perform very well in terms of rainfall particularly in the main cereal growing area of Namibia, the Caprivi province (figure 1). Although the area has had reports of locust outbreak as well as flooding, the prospects of a good harvest still look very good considering that the area has not performed well in the past. In terms of cumulative rainfall, the Caprivi area has received between 75-125% of the normal rainfall, an indication of water requirement likely being satisfied in a way.

**Zambia** The rainfall performance has since improved over many areas of the country especially looking at the slow start of the season. Only Chipata in the Eastern province has recorded 40% above normal rainfall. Apart from Mpika (-34% below normal rainfall) the northern half of the country has received normal rainfall. However, parts of the southern half of the country has been recording below normal rainfall. After the dry spell that was experienced during the previous dekads, the situation has improved in as far as crop development is concerned. The sunny intervals over the southern half of the country was very conducive for the crops which are at grain filling stage. The crop is almost ready to be taken as green cobs over many areas of Zambia.

**Lesotho** There was rainfall improvement over some parts of the southern lowlands as compared to the previous dekad. Mohale's Hoek and Quthing in the southern region reported 68.9mm and 65.9mm respectively. There has also been a rapid crop development resulting from the rains received up to the current dekad at some places. However, there are reports of severe crop damage at several places around the country caused by hailstorms. Crops sustained permanent damage especially maize and sorghum. Some crops at the critical stage of flowering are likely to be affected impacting on crop production. However, crops (maize, sorghum) are generally at vegetative to grain filling stages and crop condition ranges from poor to good. Wheat is at grain forming to wax maturity with poor to good condition.

**Mozambique** The rainfall performance during the second dekad of February improved in the northern and central parts of the country. However, it was again very poor in the south of the country (figure 1). Rainfall estimate analysis indicates poor cumulative rainfall percentages for the south. Most parts of Manica, Sofala, Inhambane, Zambezia and Maputo provinces have received less than 75% of normal rainfall. While farmers may make efforts to replant their crop, the chances of performing well are limited. Gaza and Maputo provinces have particularly been affected a lot with the erratic rainfall such that replanting may not achieve the intended benefits.

**Tanzania** Rainfall during the dekad being reported concentrated on the western parts of the country covering mostly the unimodal rainfall area. The previous Agromet-Updates reported poor performance of the *vuli* rains this season, which occurred in the bimodal rainfall areas from October to January, leading to a significant reduction in cereal production. However, the recent *vuli* rains and the current seasonal *msimu* rains (falling in unimodal areas between October to May), have been more favourable for some crops as well vegetation. The recent rains (January and February) and food aid distributions programme have led to a number of marginal food security improvements in the country.

**Zimbabwe** Rainfall during the second dekad in Zimbabwe, was concentrated in Mashonaland West and Central, as well as in Matebeleland North. The rest of the provinces received little or no rainfall at all. The maize crop in the country varies from vegetative stage to flowering. This is as result of multiple replanting incidences as a result of poor rainfall distribution and prolonged dry spells. The National Early Warning Unit is embarking on a crop and livestock assessment mission to commence on 1st March and terminate on 13th March. The country has had a mixed season with some parts receiving sufficient rainfall especially in the northern districts while the southern and eastern districts have recorded rainfall deficits. The small grain crops are reported to be performing very well although assessment reports will verify these reports.

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