



REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME

Agromet-Update



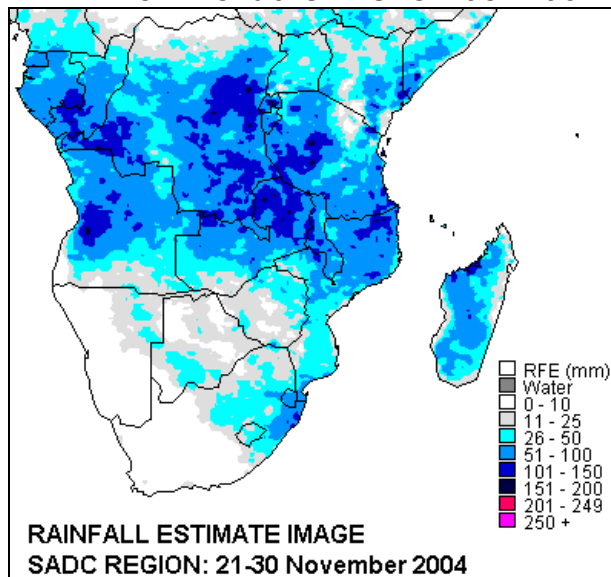
Rainfall, Vegetation and Crop Monitoring

Issue 01 Dekad: 03 Month: November Season: 2004-2005 Release date: 06-12-2004

Highlights

- ❑ Substantial amount of rainfall received in northern parts of region...
- ❑ Parts of SADC experience delayed onset of up to 30 days...
- ❑ Land preparation and sowing reported in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe...
- ❑ Poor rainfall continues in South Africa...

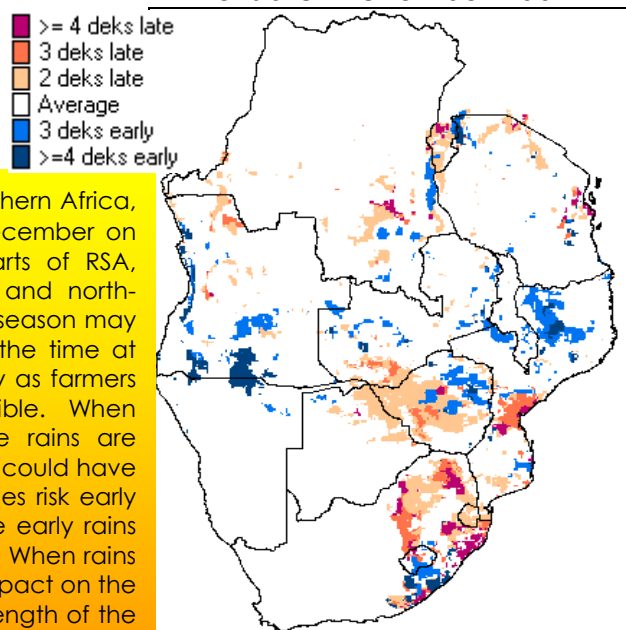
Fig 1 Rainfall Performance during 3rd Dekad of November 2004



Dekadal Rainfall Performance

The third dekad of November 2004 saw some improvement in the rainfall performance in the region. The rainfall pattern usually starts from the northern part of the sub-region and moves southward as the ITCZ moves south. According to the RFE Image (figure 1), Angola, DRC, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia experienced rainfall exceeding 100mm in the 10-day period being reported. Good rainfall was also reported in the south-western parts of the region covering parts of Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa (figure 1). The amount of rainfall received in November should allow for earnest land preparation and sowing of seed in the SADC region.

Fig 2 Rainfall Onset Anomaly as of 3rd Dekad of November 2004



Rainfall Onset Anomaly Across much of Southern Africa, the rainy season starts around November and December on average. A few exceptions are the eastern parts of RSA, Swaziland and Lesotho; as well as the northern and north-western Zambia, Angola and DRC, where the rainy season may start even earlier than that. In any given season, the time at which the rains start has a bearing on food security as farmers normally sow their seed with the first rains when possible. When the first rains fall much earlier than usual, these rains are sometimes followed by a dry spell, and farmers who could have sown their seed with these very early rains sometimes risk early crop stress and ultimately crop failure. Areas where early rains fell this season are shown in blue colours on Figure 2. When rains are significantly later than usual, this can have an impact on the length of time over which the crop can grow (the length of the growing season may be reduced). *Continued on page 2*

Source: NOAA/FEWS

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The effect of this is that crops may not have reached maturity by the time the rainfall season comes to an end. It is advised that special attention be paid to these areas during the monitoring of the season. These areas are denoted in red colours in Figure 2. In areas such as southern Zambia, southern and western Zimbabwe, and northern RSA, the rainfall season has not yet started well, and is now at least 20 to 30 days late in these areas.

MALAWI The amounts of rainfall received so far over the country have improved soil moisture levels favourable for seed germination and crop growth. The increase in rains has also prompted farmers to speed up and finalise land preparations and planting. The rains so far received will also increase availability of pasture for animal feed.

The amount of rainfall required for the farmer to start planting crops depends on the type of crop, climate of a particular locality, the soil type, methods and quality of land preparation plus other aspects. However, in general, planting of crops starts when the soil has enough moisture to support germination of the particular crop one wants to grow. Sowing of seed has actually commenced in the country.

SOUTH AFRICA Rainfall in November 2004 was mainly restricted to Mpumalanga and Kwazulu Natal. Isolated good falls towards the end of November were also received in the Free State and Northwest but it was in most cases not sufficient to start the planting process. Dry and hot conditions were responsible for a very dry upper part of the soil profile and rain in the last week of November was not enough to penetrate this dry upper layer to ensure favourable planting conditions. About 30% of the western maize growing area received at least 30mm in November, which enabled farmers to at least start the cultivation process. The important maize growing districts of Lichtenburg, Delareyville, Bothaville, Viljoenskroon and Kroonstad received in general less than 30mm. Growing conditions are at least average over Mpumalanga and southern Kwazulu Natal. Delayed onset of rainfall is being experienced by maize farmers in the Eastern Free State with very little rain received by the end of November 2004 and the optimum planting window is almost coming to an end. It is anticipated that the maize area in the Eastern Free State will probably be smaller than the intended area and alternative crops like dry beans, Soya and sunflower will be considered.

Source: EnviroVision

ZIMBABWE The rainfall situation has been improving in the country. The dekad being reported received rainfall throughout the country with significant amounts in the main agricultural area of the country (figure 1). However, the onset has delayed in Matebeleland north and south as well as in parts of the Midlands while all the Mashona-land provinces have areas that have experienced an early start rains of about 30 days. Land preparation and sowing is currently taking place and there has been no unfavourable reports so far with regard to supply of inputs. It is anticipated that should the rainfall perform as expected, yields may be much better this season than last season (2003/2004).

Mozambique The third dekad of November saw the country receive a lot of rainfall. Figure 1 indicates that Niassa, Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Zambezia received substantial amounts of rainfall. The northern parts of the country have had areas that have had an early start of rainfall by as much as 30 days (figure 2).

In Sofala Inhambane, Gaza and Maputo, there are delays of onset of rainfall for periods ranging from 20-30 days (figure 2). The rest of the country seems to have normal onset of rainfall and it is anticipated that land preparation is in progress.

Lesotho The crops in the highlands are reported to be in good state (Ministry of Agriculture) and the recent rains are satisfactory. In the Lowlands, the crops are at the emergence to early vegetative and most of the arable land is still unplanted. Planting is still in progress in some parts of the low-lying areas. The winter wheat in the Lowlands is at maturity stage in a fair to good condition. It is probable that the wheat production may be below the normal production due to the low area planted caused mainly by the erratic rains at the beginning of the season.

ZAMBIA

The country has received sufficient rainfall since the onset of the season. The dekad being reported had high rainfall in all the provinces except southern and parts of western provinces. The southern province has always been the problematic area where chronic food insecurity poses a challenge. For the current season, southern province is showing areas with delayed onset ranging from 20-30 days (figure 2). Reports indicate that land preparation and sowing is continuing in many parts of the country with some germination already reported.

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