

SWAZILAND



AGROMETEOROLOGICAL UPDATE



REPORTING PERIOD:
11 – 20 DECEMBER 2008

ISSUE No.: 08

SEASON: 2008/09

RELEASED: 24/12/2008

HIGHLIGHTS

- Much below average rains continues to fall...
- A steady progression in vegetation development....
- Weeding is still a major activity in most parts of the country...
- Poor rains impacting on water availability in drought prone areas...
- Small chance of significant rains expected
- Warmer temperatures anticipated.....
- A decline in soil moisture as a result of the poor rains....
- Cotton amongst crops reportedly planted and in a good state.....

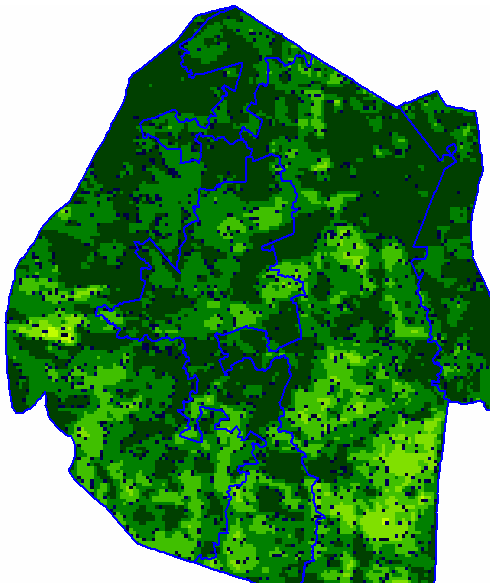


Image 1: Vegetation status as of 1st dekad December 2008

Image delayed

Legend

- ☐ Clouds
- ☐ Water Bodies
- ☐ Bare Soil
- ☐ Almost Bare Soil
- ☐ Initial Vegetation
- ☐ Mode Vegetation
- ☐ Good Vegetation
- ☐ Healthy Vegetation
- ☐ Plantations

Image 2: Vegetation status as of 2nd dekad December 2008

MOISTURE AND HEAT STATUS

Rainfall

Below average rainfall continues in all the four agro-ecological regions of the country with the Lowveld receiving near-average rains during the reporting period (**Table 1**). The distribution of these rains continues to be generally below average (**Figure 1**).

Table 1: Regional Rainfall averages for 11 - 20 December 2008

	HV	MV	LV	LP
Average	59	44	30	42
2008/09	22	24	24	12
Anomaly	-36	-20	-7	-30

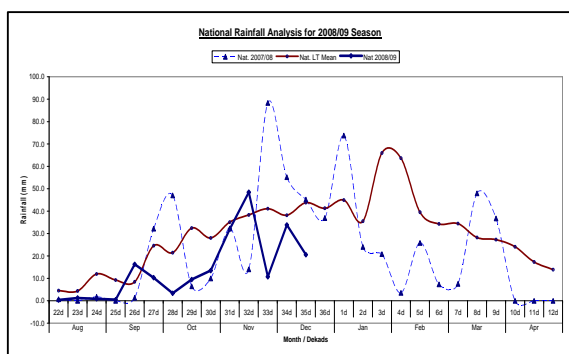


Figure 1: Rainfall distribution as of 2nd Dekad December 2008

Temperatures

Above average temperatures were recorded in area in the Lowveld and the Middleveld with the Highveld and the Lubombo Plateau reporting below average temperature for both Maximum and Minimum Temperatures (**Table 2**). The warmer temperatures in the Lowveld were more detrimental to crops as they were coupled with drier conditions.

Table 2: Temperatures (°C) for 2nd Dekad December 2008

Station	Element	2 nd dek December	Average	Depart
Mbabane	Max	25.3	27.63	-2.3
	Min	16.2	16.90	-0.7
Nhlangano	Max	26.9	27.90	-1.0
	Min	16.9	16.90	0.0
Ngwempisi	Max	-	27.90	-
	Min	16.7	16.70	0.0
Matsapha	Max	-	28.70	-
	Min	18.1	17.90	0.2
Siteki	Max	27.7	28.97	-1.3
	Min	17.7	18.63	-0.9
Mananga	Max	32.0	29.27	2.8
	Min	21.1	18.83	2.3

- stands for No Record due to lack of a maximum thermometer

CROP STATUS

Maize Crop Stage and Condition

The Maize crop ranges from early vegetative – to – mid vegetative stages in most parts of the country. The Lowveld continues to have a reduced area planted to maize as per reports from Rural Development Areas (RDAs). This can be attributed to the poor rainfall received so far in the region, especially the southern part of the region.

Other Crops

Cotton was reported to be planted at Sithobela and other Lowveld areas as part of a new initiative to promote the crop as its market is now offering a better price than previously.

Current Farming Activity

Land preparation was observed in some parts of the Lubombo and Lowveld regions while weeding was more prominent in the Middleveld and Highveld.

VEGETATION AND LIVESTOCK

Vegetation continues to develop positively as seen during field visits conducted during the reporting period. Rotated communal pastures were found to be doing much better than single area pastures.

Livestock status is still good in most parts of the Lowveld, where water scarcity is becoming a new threat for both humans and Livestock.

Outlook for 25 December 2008 – 05 January 2009

Rainfall

Below average rainfall is expected during the forecast period over most parts of the country.

Temperature

Warmer than average temperatures are expected over most parts of the country save for some areas in the west of the country.

Soil Moisture

More significant decline in soil moisture is forecasted especially for eastern parts of the country.

WATER SITUATION

Due to the poor rainfall performance so far, rivers in the Lowveld areas have started to dry (**picture 1**) which is now impacting negatively on irrigation farming and human and livestock water needs.

Some of the boreholes drilled as part of the emergency intervention by the Water Crisis Task Team are also not yielding enough for the drought prone communities.



Picture 1: Water levels at Ngwavuma River near Sigwe

CONTRIBUTORS, PARTNERS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Please Note: *This bulletin is issued in support of the efforts by the National Early Warning System (NEWS) for food Security to provide Swaziland's current cropping and meteorological developments to users, stakeholders, government authorities and international organizations during the farming season.*

The NEWS is currently made-up of a core group of the National Early Warning Unit (NEWU) of Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, the Agromet Unit of the National Meteorology Department and the Agricultural Statistics Unit of Central Statistics Office (CSO).