PRESS RELEASE

Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Environment
DEPARTMENT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND METEOROLOGICAL SERVICES

PROSPECTS FOR THE 2009/2010 RAINFALL SEASON IN MALAWI

The thirteenth Southern Africa Regional Climate Outlook Forum (SARCOF-13) was held in Harare, Zimbabwe from 26 to 27 August 2009 to come up with a consensus climate forecast for the 2009/2010 rainfall season for the SADC region. Climate scientists from the National Meteorological Services within the SADC region, including Malawi, have prepared this consensus forecast using national inputs. Additional contributions were from the SADC Drought Monitoring Centre (DMC, Botswana), International Research Institute for Climate Prediction (IRI, USA), European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (ECMWF, UK) and Climate Prediction Centre (CPC, USA).

This forecast covers the rainfall season from October 2009 to March 2010 and is relevant only to seasonal time-scales and relatively large areas. It does not fully account for local and month to month variations in distribution of rainfall.

The forecast is based on statistical models that use scientifically established relationships between rainfall over Southern Africa and Sea Surface Temperatures over oceans. Currently, El Niño conditions have become established over the tropical Pacific and it is very likely that these conditions will continue at least through the remainder of 2009 and probably up to March 2010.

El Niño conditions are usually associated with below normal rainfall over a greater part of Southern Africa and above normal over Eastern Africa. However, not all El Niño events are associated with below normal rainfall over Malawi, for instance the 1997/98 season.

The climate models used in the thirteenth Southern Africa Regional Climate Outlook Forum (SARCOF-13) indicate that during the period October to December 2009, the northern half of Malawi has 35% chance of rainfall total being above normal, 40% chance of being normal and 25% chance of being below normal while the Southern half has 40% chance of rainfall total being above normal, 35% chance of being normal and 25% chance of being below normal. During the period January to March 2010, the northern half of Malawi has 40% chance of rainfall total being above normal, 35% chance of being normal and 25% chance of being below normal while the Southern half has 35% chance of rainfall total being above normal, 40% chance of being normal and 25% chance of being below normal.

In summary, the models suggest that during 2009/2010 rainfall season, a greater part of Malawi will experience normal total rainfall amounts. However, just like in any El Niño season, extreme weather events such as floods and prolonged dry spells may occur in some places.

This seasonal forecast is issued to users as a planning tool. For day to day operations, users are advised to make use of the short and medium range forecasts and the 10-day Rainfall and Agrometeorological bulletin.

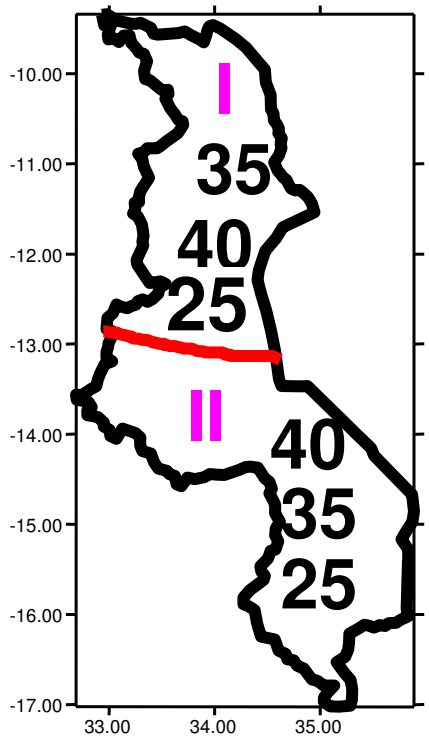
Issued in Blantyre, 1 September, 2009

For further information and interpretation of this seasonal forecast, users are advised to contact the Director of Climate Change and Meteorological Services, P.O. Box 1808, Blantyre; E-mail: metdept@metmalawi.com; Tel: (265) 1 822014; Fax: (265) 1 822215. Website: www.metmalawi.com. Users from the agricultural sector are advised to seek advice from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security when applying this forecast in making decisions to plant.

Below are the model output maps for October to December (OND) 2009 and for January to March (JFM) 2010 in the form of rainfall probabilities:

The numbers for each zone indicate the probabilities of rainfall in each of the three categories, below-normal, normal and above-normal. The top number indicates the probability of rainfall occurring in the above-normal category, the middle number is for normal and the bottom number is for below-normal. In case of Map A-OND in Zone I, there is a 35% probability of rainfall occurring in the above-normal category; a 40% probability in the normal category; and a 25% probability in the below-normal category while in Zone II there is a 40% probability of rainfall occurring in the above-normal category; a 35% probability in the normal category; and a 25% probability in the below-normal category. It is emphasized that the boundary between Zone I and Zone II in Map A should be considered as a transition area. In case of Map B-JFM in Zone I, there is a 40% probability of rainfall occurring in the above-normal category; a 35% probability in the normal category; and 25% probability in the below-normal category while in Zone II there is a 35% probability of rainfall occurring in the above-normal category; a 40% probability in the normal category; and a 25% probability in the below-normal category.

MAP A: MALAWI OND 2009



MAP B: MALAWI JFM 2010