REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME

Agromet-Update

Rainfall, Vegetation and Crop Monitoring

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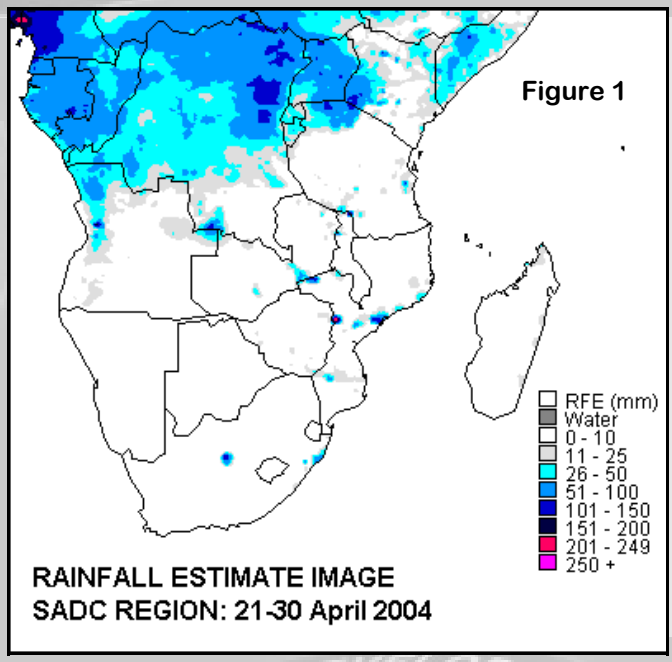
Highlights

- Very low rainfall experienced across most of the SADC region...
- Northern SADC region receive more rainfall than the southern part....
- South Africa to produce about 7 586 050 tons of maize...
- FAO/WFP Crop and Food Assessment Missions (CFSAM) now in progress ...

Rainfall Performance from 21-30 April 2004

It is becoming increasingly evident that the 2003-2004 rain-fed agricultural season is coming to an end. The last dekad of April depicted a typical withdrawal of rainfall back to the northern regions of the sub-region. The entire SADC region did not receive any significant rainfall with the exception of extreme northern Angola and parts of Mozambique and South Africa as indicated by the satellite imagery for the dekad under review (Figure 1). The second dekad of April witnessed some rainfall in parts of Angola, DRC, Tanzania and Mozambique while most of the areas in the region had already started experiencing the end of the rainy season (Figure 2). Satellite imagery (figure 3) indicates that countries in the northern part of the SADC region have received substantial amounts of rainfall (red colour) to support most cereal crops that are traditionally grown in the region. However, it is the distribution of the rainfall that influences a good yield and production assuming inputs are timely and adequate. In some parts of the SADC region, rainfall has been reported to have prolonged after crops have matured and this is affecting crops by causing cob rot as a result of high moisture which is conducive for development of fungal diseases. Assessments regarding the impact of rainfall and other factors is now taking place in the region to ascertain the food security situation. The FAO/WFP Crop and Food Assessment Missions (CFSAM) are now in progress and will take place up to the end of May 2004. The countries involved are Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. It will be clear whether the late rainfall has had a significant impact on yields and production in the region although preliminary reports point in that direction so far.

Figure 1



RAINFALL ESTIMATE IMAGE
SADC REGION: 21-30 April 2004

Figure 3

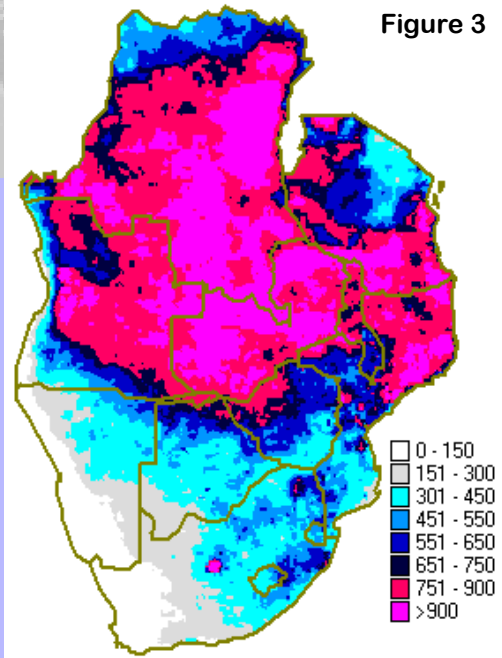
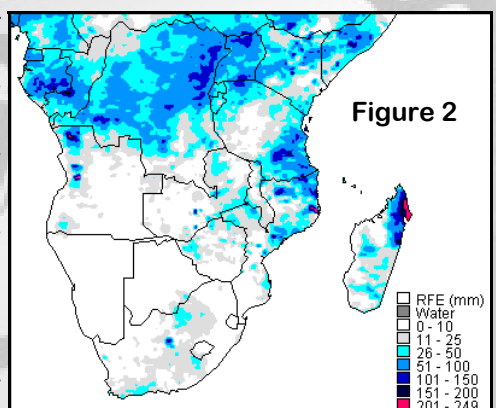


Figure 2



RAINFALL ESTIMATE IMAGE
SADC REGION: 11-20 April 2004

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Malawi

The country did not receive any rainfall during the dekad under review (Figure 1). The country experienced some dry spell which lasted most of March 2004. This prolonged dry spell caused stress in crops particularly the late planted maize which was at critical flowering and silking stages in lower Shire Valley and some isolated areas in southern Malawi. On the other hand, in the central and northern parts of the country, the dry spell facilitated drying and harvesting of matured crops. Following relatively poor rainfall performance, overall maize production is expected to be lower than last year's. Better production is however expected in central and northern parts of the country than in the south. Most of the maize produced in Malawi is grown in the central region. The FAO/WFP crop and food supply assessment mission is currently under way and the reports that were being received during the season will be verified.

Lesotho

Due to low temperatures, some crops were reported to have been affected by frost at some places in Thaba-Tseka, Quthing and Semonkong especially those that were still at tender stages. However, there seem to be some gradual deterioration on maize crop resulting from exposure to low temperatures. This has caused crop to show signs of drying up while still at developing stage hence no further development can be expected under this condition. On the other hand, sorghum though not planted in plenty still stands the chance of reaching maturity, however, there are some crops that are still at younger stages. Summer wheat is reported to be at maturity stage and at some places harvesting has commenced. The crop is at poor to fair condition.

Swaziland

The country received insignificant rainfall during the dekad under review in the Highveld, Middleveld and Lubombo with the Lowveld receiving no rainfall at all. A significant portion of maize is being harvested while some are still green especially in the Lowveld. The continuous rainfall received in the past dekads have had a negative effect on the early planted crop, causing cob rot in maize, thereby reducing the expected production in the country. Using a crop water requirement index model, the meteorological service in the country estimates that the country will produce around 82,010 tons of maize this season. However, other production factors such as availability of inputs, draught power etc may reduce the figure.

South Africa

South African agriculture was also affected by the poor start of the 2003/2004 agricultural season. The Crop Estimate Committee (CEC) report of 20 April 2004 indicates that the area planted to yellow and white maize is 2 645 600 ha and it is anticipated that this will produce about 7 586 050 tons of maize. This is lower than what the country normally produces. A reduction in maize production in South Africa usually has effects felt in the rest of the SADC region.

Tanzania

Most of the country did not record any significant rainfall during the dekad under review (Figure 1). However, the satellite imagery shows some rainfall received in the bimodal area near lake Victoria. The maize crop is reported to be in good condition, and in ripeness phase. In some areas mostly in the unimodal rainfall areas, harvesting of the crop is reported to have started in Rukwa, Tabora, parts of Shinyanga, Singida, Iringa, Mbeya, Ruvuma, Mtwara and Lindi regions. However, the maize crop is reported to be at vegetative phase in the north eastern highlands (Arusha, Kilimanjaro and Ngorongoro), Tanga, Pwani and Mara regions. Preliminary assessments indicate that the maize yield prospect this season may be in the average particularly in the uni-modal areas where the crop has already attained flowering and ripeness phases. Most of the rice crop in the unimodal rainfall area is reported to be in the flowering stages. Elsewhere in the country, the crop is at various levels of vegetative phase.

Zimbabwe

The country did not receive any significant rainfall during the dekad under review. Harvesting of the early crop is still the major activity in all the provinces. The recently received rains in March improved the situation of the late-planted crop in Mashonaland Central and Masvingo provinces. However in Marange and Mutare districts of Manicaland province the late crop, which is at soft dough stage is experiencing moisture stress. In Mashonaland West province, there is a high prevalence of cob – rot due to excessive moisture. Witch weed has caused reduction in yield in Kariba district. **Small Grains (mhunga, sorghum and rapoko)** harvesting and bird scaring are the major activities. The recent rains have improved the crop situation of the late crop in Mashonaland Central province. Huge losses are being incurred from birds in all provinces.

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