



REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME

agromet update



Rainfall, Vegetation and Crop Monitoring

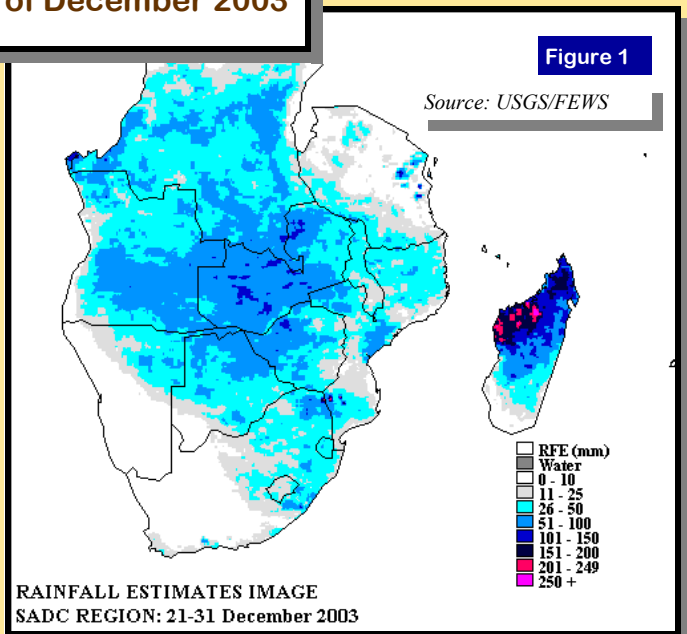
Issue 06 dekad: 03 Month: December Season: 2003/2004 Release date: 07-01-2004

Highlights

- Rainfall performance improves slightly in the southern half of the region...
- Delayed start of season may affect crop performance...
- Drought in south-eastern part of the region continues...
- Dryness returns to eastern Tanzania...

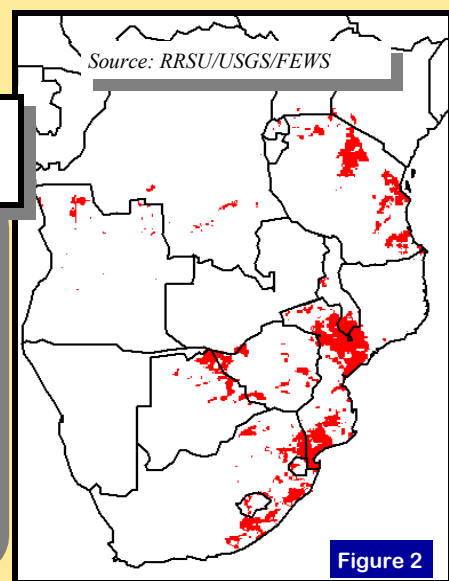
Rainfall performance during 3rd dekad of December 2003

Rainfall in the last 10 days of December was much more widespread than that experienced in the first 20 days of December. Some meaningful rains were finally experienced in the southern half of the region, after many areas in this part of the region had experienced a 2-dekad dry spell. Although the rains bring some marginal relief to parts of the drought-affected area of southern Mozambique, eastern South Africa, and Swaziland, much more rainfall will be needed over the coming dekads to recover from the drought. Part of central Mozambique also received some relief after an initial poor start to the season. However, southern Malawi continued to receive poor rains, a situation which is starting to get worrisome, with reports of wilted crops, and many areas not yet having planted this late in the season. In Tanzania, where the rains in the previous dekad had eased the drought situation, dryness again set in this dekad. On a positive note, parts of Zambia received good rains, as did southern Angola, the Caprivi area in Namibia, eastern Botswana, and western half of Zimbabwe.



Start of Season Performance for 2003/2004 Growing Season

Rainfall patterns can be studied in such a way that they define the start of season (SOS) which would best support planting and germination of cereal crops. Such a start of season has been defined over the past few seasons, thereby allowing further analysis to provide an evaluation of the current season's performance. Figure 2 shows in red areas where already poor rains have resulted in the season being delayed by more than 40 days. The implication is that this will considerably shorten the length of the season, and may result in poor crop performance in these areas.



This Agromet Update bulletin is a joint product of the SADC Regional Early Warning Unit (REWU); Regional Remote Sensing Unit (RRSU), and USAID FEWSNET.

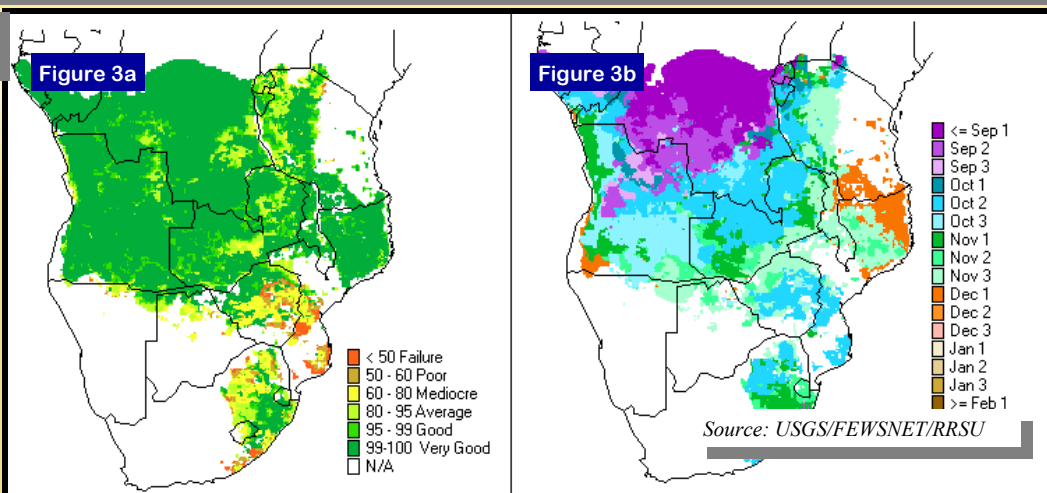
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Drought in south-eastern part of the sub-region continues

Although some marginal rains fell in the drought-affected areas covering Lesotho, southern Mozambique, eastern South Africa, and Swaziland, these rains have not been enough to break the drought-cycle which has so far spanned 3 years in some of these areas. More rains will be needed if a full recovery from the current drought is to occur. In response to this serious drought, South Africa has already set in motion a comprehensive drought mitigation programme in an effort to deal with the potentially disastrous consequences of the drought. It is estimated that already the 2003/04 crop production will be far lower than usual. At the same time, thousands of head of cattle have been lost, and water levels (reservoir, river, groundwater) are very low. Mozambique has drawn up contingency plans that cover possibility of drought, floods and cyclones. In Swaziland, a disaster relief task force is assembling stakeholders from different disciplines for planning sessions, and IRIN reports suggest that in areas, the drought is threatening to result in zero crop yields. The drought in Lesotho is slightly different to the other 3 countries, having started only in the winter season. However, reports indicate that the prolonged dry spells have severely affected crops, and in some areas, have delayed planting to an irredeemable stage

Crop monitoring

Figure 3a shows the most likely condition of cereal crops that were planted in the dates shown in Figure 3b, in so far as these crops are affected by water availability. The white areas are areas where the model suggests that optimum conditions for planting have not yet occurred. Generally, the model suggests



that crops in the northern half of the region have received enough water and should be doing relatively well (green colors, Fig 3a) while those in most parts of the southern half of the region are not doing as well. In Figure 3a, crops in the red areas are in the worst condition, followed by those in brown, and the crops in yellow areas being in a slightly better condition, and those in green being in the best condition. The implication here is that crops in red, brown or yellow colored areas need rainfall soon to avoid poor harvests, although in some areas, it may already be too late (crops wilted). It is important to note that in a few areas where the planting dates suggested in Figure 3b differ substantially from those on the ground, then the actual crop condition will also be different than that shown in Figure 3a.

Season Monitoring in other countries in SADC

Zambia

Crops are reported to be doing well in the northern half of the country, and are currently at vegetative stage. In the Southern province, red locusts are reported to be destroying crops. It is further reported that some areas in the southern half of the country, as well as some of the northeastern parts, experienced a slow start to the rainfall season, and this delayed planting in some of these areas. Some farmers in the extreme south are planting more drought-tolerant crops such as millet and groundnuts.

Zimbabwe

The eastern part of the country is not doing too well in terms of rainfall. The poor rains so far have delayed planting in this part of the country, and by as late as end-of-December, there were reports of farmers in these areas still carrying out land preparation. In many areas where planting has taken place, the crop is at a vegetative stage.

Tanzania

After the dry spell had eased somewhat in the previous dekad, with high rainfall being recorded in that dekad, the period 21-31 December was characterized by little to no rainfall across most of the country. This means that the drought situation across the eastern half of the country continues. This drought has eroded pastures, and has had a significant negative impact on crop agriculture, currently threatening the second season crop in the bi-modal areas.