



REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME

Agromet-Update



Rainfall, Vegetation and Crop Monitoring

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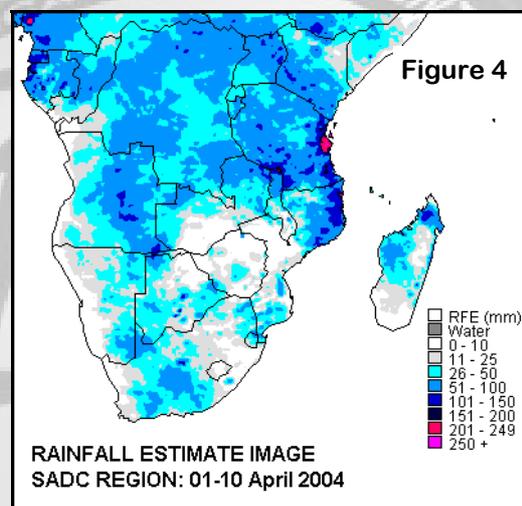
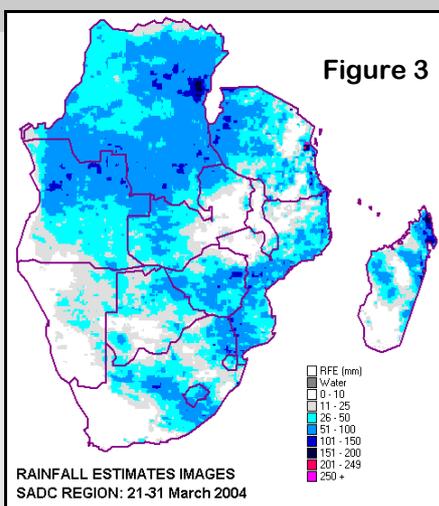
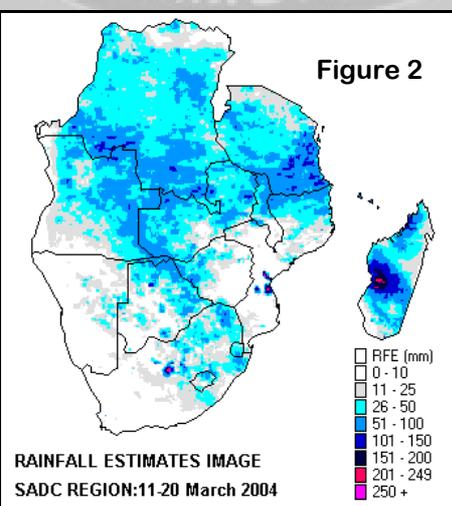
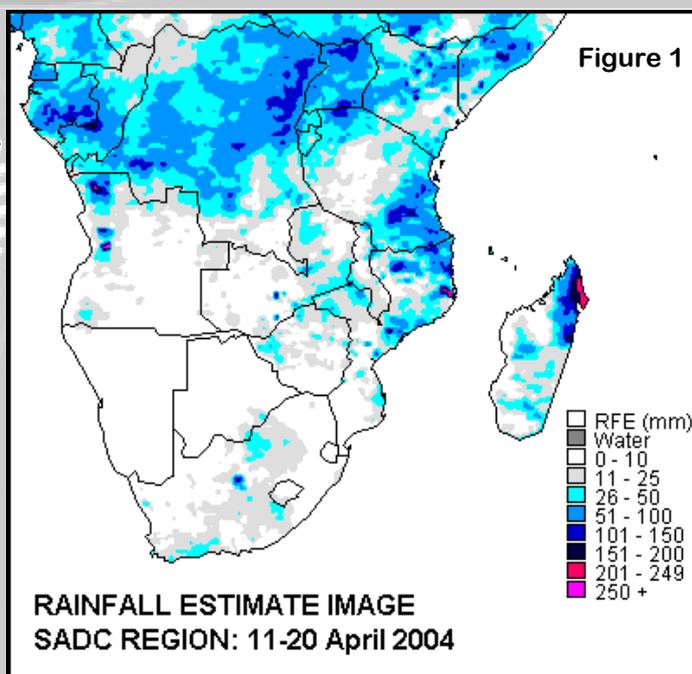
Highlights

- ♣ Wide spread conditions of little or no rainfall in southern Africa ...
- ♣ Malawi experiences dry spell of up to 30 days in parts of the southern region...
- ♣ 20000 people displaced by flooding in the Caprivi strip ...
- ♣ Lower rainfall received in the north of Lesotho...

Rainfall Performance from 11-20 April 2004

The month of April is normally the month that rainfall in southern Africa begins to reduce and crops are expected to have reached their maturity. The commencement of rainfall normally starts from the northern parts of the sub-region moving south wards down to Kwa-Zulu Natal although other systems contribute to rainfall in South Africa. The cessation takes a reverse process withdrawing from the south to the northern parts of the region. During the first two dekads in April, there was

wide-spread conditions of little or no rainfall in southern Africa as suggested by figures 1 and 3. However, significant rainfall was experienced in the Democratic Republic of Congo, northern Tanzania and Niassa, Cabo Delgado, Nampula and Zambezia provinces of Mozambique (Figure 1). Tanzania has been experiencing food deficits as a result of the failed vuli rainy season. However, the Masika season may provide the much needed food as a result of good rains that are being experienced in the uni-modal rainfall region where agricultural activity is currently in progress. According to satellite-derived rainfall estimates (Figures 1-4), it is becoming evident that 2003/2004 rainfall season is coming to an end due to patchy rainfall especially in the southern parts of the region.



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Malawi

During the second 10-days of April, rainfall activity over Malawi showed signs of subsiding signifying the end of rainfall season. Relatively dry weather returned to most parts of the country. This facilitated drying and harvesting of matured crops. The maize crop was generally at maturity and drying stage with dry conditions necessary for the crop to dry properly. Reports indicate that harvesting of early planted maize crop was gaining momentum in all the three regions. Moderate to heavy rains were received over parts of the country particularly the northern lakeshore areas. These supported growth and development of root and tuber crops. However, on the other hand, if wet weather persists up to end of April, then drying and harvesting of matured crops particularly maize will be disturbed and field losses due to rotting might increase.

Lesotho

During the second dekad of April, the country experienced reduced rainfall throughout and temperatures were also low. Due to the drop in temperatures that resulted in frost occurrence at some places, crops (maize, sorghum) were affected in the Thaba-Tseka, Quthing and Semonkong areas especially those that were still at tender stages. Elsewhere, crop damage was mainly seen on horticultural crops such as beans and pumpkin. Otherwise, low temperatures experienced do not favour the development of such crops as maize and sorghum, therefore, the late ones are not expected to develop further.

Namibia

Namibia has been experiencing some natural disasters as a result of excess water from the Zambezi river flooding the areas in the Caprivi strip. However, the entire country was dry in the dekad under review as well as the upper Zambezi Basin (Angola and Zambia) which fuels the excess water down stream. This will stabilise the river levels before they start to recede in next couple of weeks. However, the agricultural system has already been disturbed with both crops and livestock being washed away. While the 2003/2004 rainy season was very promising for the agricultural areas of the Caprivi region, the flooding has pushed the potential back, putting rural communities at risk of food insecurity.

Swaziland

In line with other countries in southern Africa, Swaziland also experienced minimal rainfall during the dekad under review. According to reports, the dekad

experienced a maximum of two rainy days while the rest was dry. Except for the maize planted late in the Lowveld, most of the maize in the country has reached maturity and is drying (figure 5). In areas that planted very early, the maize is being harvested. However, due to poor distribution of rainfall coupled poor onset and prolonged dry spells during the beginning of the season, the country will not be able to produce sufficient maize for consumption. Therefore, sourcing grain from outside the country will be necessary.



Figure 5

Zambia

While the first dekad of April 2004 was characterized by moderate to heavy rainfall over the extreme northern parts of the country and light or no rainfall at all in the southern part, the second dekad of April was relatively dry in most parts of the country. This is also a sign of the withdraw of rainfall indicating the cessation of the 2003/2004 rainy season. Like other countries in SADC, Zambia has also had its share of challenges with the southern parts of the country starting off very badly in terms of rainfall onset and distribution as well as excess rainfall leading to flooding and washing away of crops in the Luangwa valley and the western provinces. Reports indicate that the crop is doing very well in the northern and central parts of the country.

Zimbabwe

The last dekad of March and the first and second dekad of April have been relatively dry (figures 1, 2 & 4). The reduction in rainfall in the country, like in other countries in the sub-region, is a sign of the beginning of the end of the 2003/2004 rainy season. The country has had mixed performance in terms of rainfall with some parts receiving more than average rainfall. Matebeleland north and south have received more rainfall this season than the previous two seasons. Mashonaland provinces have also performed better than the previous season. In Matebeleland South province, the crop planted in December/January is expected to give a better yield in all districts. There are reports of possibilities of significant crop write-offs especially in Kezi, Gwanda and Insiza districts due to poor rainfall.

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