



REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME

Agromet-Update



Rainfall, Vegetation and Crop Monitoring

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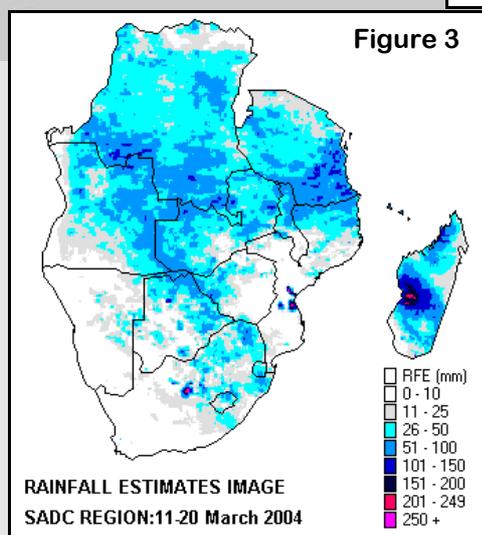
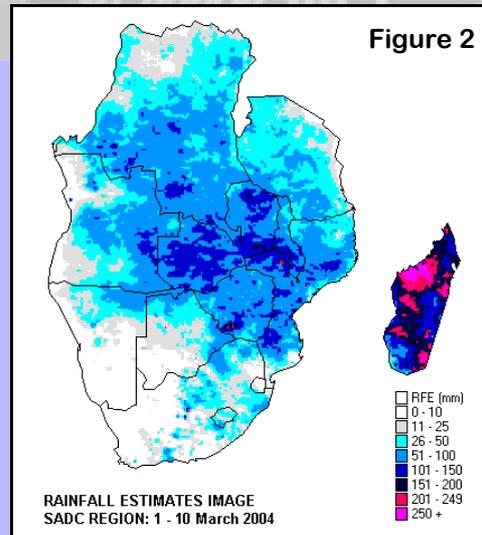
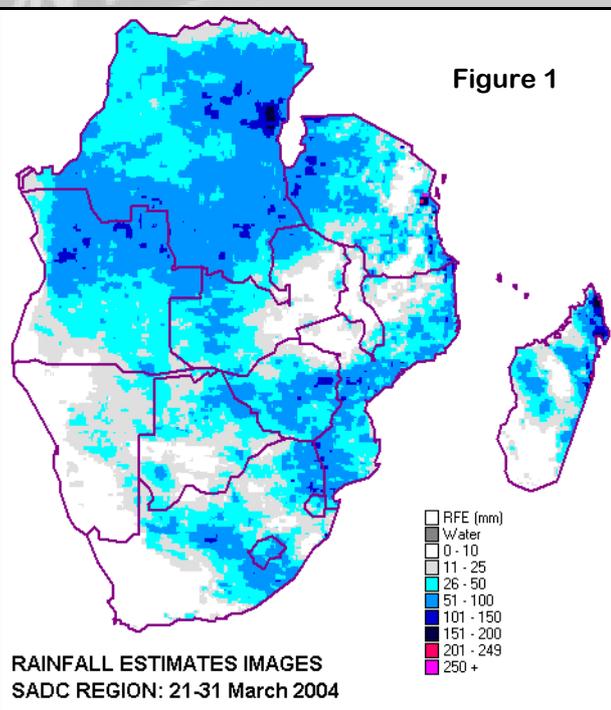
Highlights

- ♣ Moderate to heavy rains fall across most of the SADC region...
- ♣ Malawi experiences dry spell of up to 20 days in March...
- ♣ Exceptionally heavy rains occur over most parts of the Zambezi River Basin ...
- ♣ High rainfall received in the Lowveld of Swaziland...

Rainfall Performance from 21-31 March 2004

widespread rainfall across most of the sub-region. According to satellite-derived rainfall estimates (Figure 1), Moderate to heavy rainfall was experienced in most of Angola, DRC, Tanzania and western Zambia. It is this rainfall that is causing flooding situation in the Caprivi area resulting in communities being evacuated. Most parts of Malawi, Tete and Niassa provinces of Mozambique and Central Botswana had either little rainfall or were dry (Figure 1). Most of Zimbabwe experienced good rainfall except the northern parts of the country. Southern parts of Angola continue to experience little or no rainfall. South Africa experienced some good rainfall especially in parts of Limpopo, the Free State and Kwazulu-Natal provinces. Mpumalanga was dry as in the last two dekads (Fig 2 & 3). Lesotho and Swaziland also recorded some rainfall although this may not have much significant impact on the crops as the growing season draws near to the end (Figure 1). Rising water levels in the Zambezi river due to heavy rainfall has caused flooding in the Caprivi strip creating problems for local communities. The first dekad of the month

The entire month of march has experienced wide spread rainfall in all the countries (Figure 1,2 & 3). The last dekad of March had



(Figure 2) had heavy rainfall in most of the countries especially in the DRC, Angola and Zambia which have rivers that are contributing to the flooding downstream the Zambezi. Malawi has had very little rainfall in the previous (Fig 3) and current dekad while Mozambique has experienced good rainfall in the current dekad (Fig 1) compared to the previous one. As the FAO/WFP Crop and Food Assessment Missions (CFSAM) take place in the month of May 2004, in 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.

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Malawi

The country received little or no rainfall during the dekad under review. The dry spell which started in early March 2004 continued in most parts of Malawi till the very last days of March. This prolonged dry spell has strained crop production prospects particularly for late planted maize which was at critical flowering and silking stages in lower Shire Valley and some isolated areas in southern Malawi. In these areas, reports indicate that crops had either been written off or were under severe moisture stress. When water stress occurs at this stage, fertilisation is hampered and this affects cob size, grain size and grain number formation. Reports indicate that in some areas, maize has reached permanent wilting point although some rains were received during the very last days of March. 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 of the country than in the south. Most of the maize produced in Malawi is grown in the central region.

Lesotho

Due to substantial rains received during the dekad, there has been an improvement in moisture condition although this will have minimal impacts on crop yields. Crop (maize, sorghum) performance in some places is relatively satisfactory. However, late planted crops are likely to be affected by frost before maturing as some of them are still at early grain filling stage. Crop stages vary from grain forming to wax maturity with poor to good condition. Summer wheat is at wax maturity to full maturity with poor to good condition as well. The international organisations estimate the number of people in need of food aid to be 600,000.

Swaziland

The country received some significant rainfall although the impact on the crop performance will be very little. High rainfall was received in the Lowveld with a total of 111mm in Manage, 107mm in Siphofanemi compared with a low of 36mm in Matsapa (Middleveld) and 38.7mm in Nhlanguano which is in the Highveld. Reports from the field by analysts who visited the Low, Middle and Highveld indicate that late planted maize crops are mostly at vegetative stages while those that were planted early have actually reached maturity and in the process of drying. The rainfall situation may be good and bad at the same time as crops that have matured need to dry while those in vegetative stages require moisture to develop further.

Tanzania

The country has received a substantial amount of rainfall during the month of March. March to May constitutes an important rainfall season for much of Tanzania, determining, in part, harvest prospects for crops planted during both *msimu* (seasonal) rains in unimodal areas and *masika* rains in bimodal areas. *Masika* rains are the long or main rains in the bimodal rainfall areas from March to June. Agricultural activities during the dekad continue to be land preparation in readiness for the Masika season around Lake Victoria basin, transplanting rice in various areas, while weeding activities were progressing well in unimodal areas. The maize crop stages vary from region to region from vegetative to maturity.

Zambia

The dekad was characterized by moderate to heavy rainfall over the northern and western parts of the country. If this situation continues, it will destroy the already maturing crops in the fields. Areas that may be affected are Central, Luapula and Northern provinces if rainfall prolongs into the second dekad of April. At this time more sunshine hours are conducive for the crops to attain full ripeness. The exceptionally heavy rains that occurred over most parts of the Zambezi River Basin lying in the Western and Northwestern provinces of Zambia resulted in significant rises in the Zambezi River levels including the Barotse flood plains. It should be noted that the rainy season may be coming to an end over the southern half of the country. The northern half will experience the end of the rainfall activities in the second dekad of April.

Zimbabwe

The month of March was generally good for the country in terms of rainfall except for the second dekad which was mostly dry. The early-planted maize crop is being harvested in some parts of the country while it is yet to fully mature in parts of Mashonaland Central province. In Matabeleland 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. In Matabeleland North province, there are reports of water logging and leaching with crops showing nitrogen deficiencies. In Mashonaland West province, there is high prevalence of cob rot due to excessive rains. Generally, across all provinces, the late-planted crop is benefiting from wet spells being experienced although the season should be coming to an end by May 2004.

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