



REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME

Special Agromet-Update

Analysis of a Developing Drought Situation in Southern Africa

2003/2004 Crop Growing Season



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This special bulletin looks at the performance of the 2003/2004 crop growing season so far, and the growing concerns over a developing drought situation in the SADC region and its impact on agricultural production in view of the already precarious food security situation. The first page contains a regional overview while the next two pages look at country-by-country analyses.

Concerns Over a Developing Drought Situation

There is growing concern across the southern half of the SADC region over a developing drought situation due to the poor start of the 2003/2004 season in a number of countries, and the erratic rains received so far. In a region dependent on rain-fed agriculture, a late start of the season and the continuing poor and erratic rains have led to a reduction in area planted and poor crop establishment. This could lead to a reduction in potential yields and overall crop production. The region already had grain deficits from the previous season. Drought conditions, in terms of crop performance, are currently being experienced in large parts of South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Mozambique (figures 2 & 4). Similar but less serious conditions are occurring in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Namibia and Botswana (figures 2 & 4). To compound the situation, most of these countries have had poor rains for the past 2-3 seasons. With poor rainfall performance so far, it is possible that the 2003/4 agricultural season could be derailed in these countries leading to poor agricultural production.

Analysis of Satellite Rainfall Estimate imagery suggests delayed onset of the season in parts of the region (figure 1, red colours). The poor and erratic start of season has affected sowing of crops and this will impact on the length of the growing season. According to rainfall information received from the affected countries, and collaborated satellite rainfall analyses, large areas have received less than 60% of normal rainfall so far (figure 2, brown colours). The distribution of rainfall this season has also not been satisfactory in the region. Combined with low soil moisture levels from a drier than normal winter season, the below-average and erratic rains have left crops, pastures and livestock in poor condition. Dam levels have also declined to alarming proportions, curtailing irrigation and a significant part of urban activity. South Africa, which normally produces a surplus maize crop for export to other SADC countries, is this year only expected to produce 6-7 million metric tonnes of maize, probably only sufficient for its own consumption.

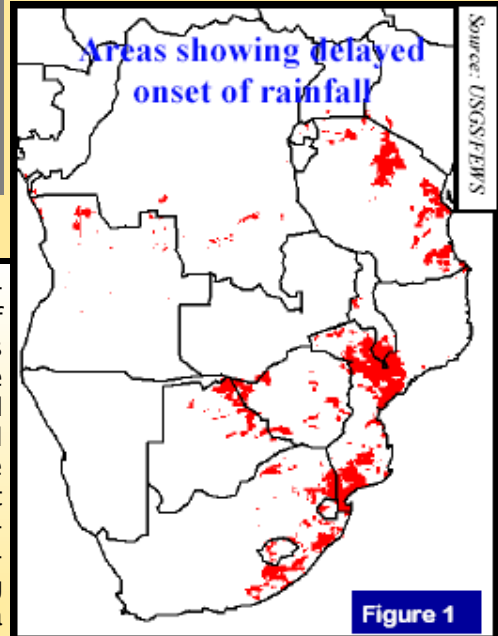


Figure 1

Percent Rainfall Received in SADC

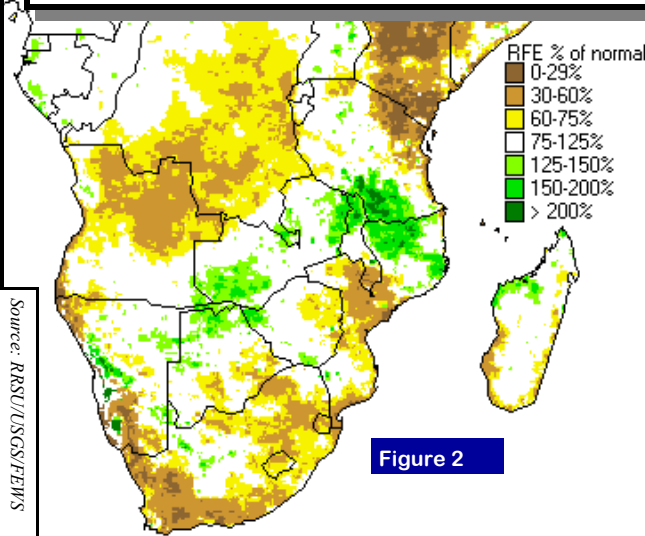


Figure 2

Announcement: Mid-season strategic assessment and disaster preparedness meeting, 4-6 February 2004, Maputo, Mozambique: SADC Technical Institutions and cooperating partners are organizing a meeting of stakeholders to assess the preparedness of SADC Member States to deal with any likely emergencies. All interested parties are invited and need to confirm their attendance by 21 January 2004. (email: rrsu@fanr-sadc.co.zw)

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South Africa

South Africa is experiencing drought conditions this season which are impacting on agricultural activities and livelihoods. An analysis of rainfall records by agricultural experts for the period from January to December 2003 indicates that 27% of South Africa received the lowest rainfall in 88 years. The poor rainfall situation is confirmed by satellite data (figures 2 & 4). The affected places include the major maize-growing areas of Free State, KwaZulu Natal and Mpumalanga provinces. Rainfall prospects for the period from January to March 2004 do not look particularly bright. The South African Weather Service expect near-normal rainfall for most of the country. Due to the drought conditions, in the major maize-growing province of Free State, just about 50% of the maize area had been planted by mid-December 2003, according to South African sources. Less than 2 million hectares had been planted to maize nationally against some 2.7 million hectares intended. Maize production is expected to fall by between 20 and 35% of last season's production and this will affect possible exports into the rest of the region. Dams and water tables have receded such that there are now water use restrictions in urban and agricultural areas. Reports indicate pastures have deteriorated and animals are in poor condition and not breeding well. Government has put in place a comprehensive drought mitigation programme to provide water, food and fodder to alleviate the situation.



Mozambique

The 2003/4 agricultural season is evolving into what could give southern and central Mozambique another year of drought. Since October 2003, rains have been very poor in southern and central Mozambique. The capital, Maputo, typifies the current drought conditions in the south, having received less than 30% of normal rainfall by December 2003, according to National Meteorological Institute (INAM) figures. In southern parts of Maputo province, most of the first crops planted have failed. The surviving crops are severely water stressed. There are expectations that farmers may replant if rains improved. In central Mozambique, which is normally very productive, poor rains have also compromised the current season. Despite the poor rainfall situation in the south, people in need are getting food through various coping strategies, and these have helped to cut the number of people expected to continue requiring food assistance according to the national Vulnerability Assessment Committee's observations. The National Institute for Disaster Management (INGC) has prepared a yet-to-be-funded US\$40 million budget to cover contingency plans aimed at addressing emergencies caused by droughts, floods and cyclones.

Satellite Imagery Showing Deteriorating Conditions in December 2003 Compared to Average

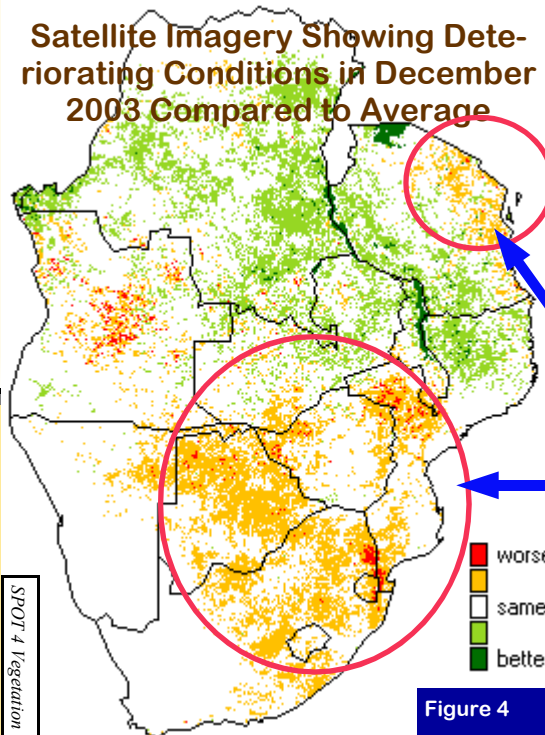


Figure 4

Developing Drought Conditions

Parts of the SADC region experiencing poor rainfall leading to possible drought conditions. Harvests in these regions are likely to be affected. Therefore, close monitoring and assessments should concentrate on these areas.



Swaziland

Swaziland has been affected by drought conditions this season. Rainfall for the 2003/4 season has divided Swaziland into two parts. The western third of the country has been wet while the central and eastern two thirds have had erratic rains and dry conditions. The moist western third has reasonable crop prospects. In general, Swaziland has received below average rainfall for the period from October to December 2003. Figures 2 & 4 show poor rainfall and vegetation performance. The country received poor rains last season as well. Figures of people in need of food assistance are likely to increase from the 217, 000 that was estimated as a result of the previous seasons' crop failure. The country, which has a domestic requirement of 204, 000 MT, is likely to have reduced grain production.



Lesotho

The 2003/2004 season has not performed well so far due to inadequate rains in the September to December period. This poor start of the season has led to significantly reduced plantings in the main grain producing lowland areas of the mountain kingdom. These drier than normal conditions go back into early 2003. Important agricultural areas, most of which lie in the lowlands, registered around 25% of normal winter rainfall, leading to a failure of the winter crop. Lesotho has had two notably failing previous rainfall seasons. Figures 2 & 4 indicate the extent of rainfall deficits and poor vegetation performance. Lesotho has a domestic requirement of 395,000 MT which was unfulfilled in the previous season and vulnerability assessments estimated that 270,000 people needed food aid in the 2003/2004 marketing year. WFP estimates that between 600 -700,000 people will need assistance in the coming months.

Recommendation: Considering that the planting window for the staple food crop (maize) is coming to an end, prospects of a good season are also diminishing. Therefore, the RRSU recommends that baseline information available should be used to plan interventions and possible projections on the households that may require food assistance.

Malawi

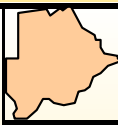
A drought situation is developing in southern and central Malawi. Soil moisture deficits continue to persist over most areas in these areas. The delayed onset of rainfall has affected planting of crops (figure 1). Wilting and loss of crops in southern and central areas have been reported. In parts of Blantyre and Shire Valley, farmers had not yet planted crops by 10 January 2004 due to unavailability of sufficient rains. Given the short remaining length of the season, it is unlikely that any maize planted in January in southern Malawi would realize a good harvest. A Regional Vulnerability Assessment Committee report of September 2003 indicated that there would be about 400,000 rural people requiring humanitarian assistance. The figure could rise with time as well as in view of the current situation. The Government has acknowledged the problem in the south of the country and UN and aid agencies have called for a more detailed assessment to establish exact numbers of households requiring assistance.

Tanzania

The vuli (short) rains (September-December) in the bimodal (two rainy seasons) region, i.e., coastal region, northeastern highlands, the southern, north-eastern and eastern parts of the Lake Victoria region, had poor rains resulting in extensive crop failure. Elsewhere, there was reasonably sufficient rainfall over the western part of the Lake Victoria Basin (Kagera) and a few highland areas of the Kilimanjaro region. Harvests from the vuli season will be smaller and this will exacerbate the food security situation. Currently the Tanzanian Government is engaged in weekly consultative fora within its ministries (permanent secretaries of Ministries of Agriculture, Water and Livestock, Energy and Minerals and Health) and with NGOs and other stakeholders so as to determine the needs of the vulnerable population and arrest the situation before it becomes a crisis. It is estimated that almost 2 million people need food assistance. It is unlikely that the food security situation will improve in the short term as the pace of donors is slow. However, the main rainfall season is just beginning and it is hoped that the rainfall during the season will be sufficient to realize a good harvest.

Zimbabwe

Dry conditions were predominant in most parts of Zimbabwe for significant parts of November and early December, leading to insufficient soil moisture and reduced plantings. The eastern and northern parts of the country have been more affected by the unsuccessful start to the 2003/2004 season. Major maize producing regions of Zimbabwe lie in the northeast of the country. Due to erratic rains, notable production reductions are expected from there. Independent sources indicated that some areas had not planted by end of December 2003 due to inadequate or no rainfall. Seed varieties distributed by NGO's may not be appropriate especially where the onset was delayed leading to a reduced growing season. This will definitely affect the harvests at the end of the season. There are also fears that planted crops could be lost if significant rains do not come in the third and fourth weeks of January 2004. Last season, the southern parts of the country experienced crop failure due to drought, among other factors. Vulnerability assessments indicated that the country had over 4 million people requiring humanitarian assistance and the figure may have risen with time and in view of the current dry conditions.

**Botswana**

Drought conditions are seriously affecting livestock in Botswana. The country is largely semi-arid and has low, erratic rainfall. Livestock production is more sustainable than crop farming. On average, Botswana produces only 20% of her cereal requirements. Analysis of satellite imagery (figure 2) suggests poor performance of the 2003/04 growing season. The vegetation imagery in figure 4 suggests deterioration of vegetation by the end of last year in December which would imply inadequate pastures for livestock.

**Namibia**

The onset of rainfall has been late in Namibia for the current season. October and November were remarkably hot and had insignificant rains. Favourable rains occurred country wide towards the end of December 2003, giving impetus to planting activities and reviving pastures. Water availability also improved but dam levels remain depressed. Lack of draught power was reported to be hindering land preparation. The success or failure of the agricultural season will depend on rainfall performance through the remainder of the season. According to Ministry of Agriculture sources, the overall picture does not indicate adequate rainfall although some isolated areas have fared well. Prospects could brighten slightly as good showers are being received and more are expected in the short term.

**Mauritius**

An above normal cyclone season, stretching from early November to mid May, is expected for 2003/4. So far, four cyclones have formed in the south Indian Ocean. The island state of Mauritius receives much of her rainfall from tropical cyclones. Less than 65% of normal rainfall was received in the October to December 2003 period.

**Zambia**

Poor yields are imminent again in southern Zambia due to drought conditions. Cumulative rainfall performance has been below normal over a large part of Zambia especially the southern half. Huge deficits of 60% below normal were reported in Kalomo, Southern province. The crop is mostly at vegetative stage over most parts of the southern Zambia. Some crops experienced severe water stress especially along the Zambezi valley. The southern province is becoming a chronic problem area for Zambia. In the previous season, the country managed to have a good harvest with a surplus of about 175,000 MT above the 1,346,000 MT domestic requirement. As of January 10 2004, most of the country had received below normal rainfall with the southern province being the worst affected.