

Issue 01 Season: 2007–2008 Release date: 10–01–2008

Highlights

- ❑ Serious floods occurring in Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe, over 80,000 people affected
- ❑ Further flooding expected - Flood alerts and concerns across Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe
- ❑ Regional trade routes affected

1. Regional Overview

Sustained heavy rains were received in the central parts of the SADC region throughout the month of December (Figure 1). In particular, Malawi, Mozambique, southern Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe received very high, above normal rains during this period. The sustained high rains have led to flooding in parts of these countries, claiming lives, and destroying property and infrastructure. Estimates suggest that over 80,000 people have so far been affected across the region, and over 30 deaths related to the flooding. Unconfirmed reports of potentially extensive waterlogging have been received from a number of countries, with implications for significant reductions in crop yields for this season. The road from the port of Beira in Mozambique to Zimbabwe has been severely damaged by flooding, and there are fears that the key Beira-Caia transportation route could also soon be affected.

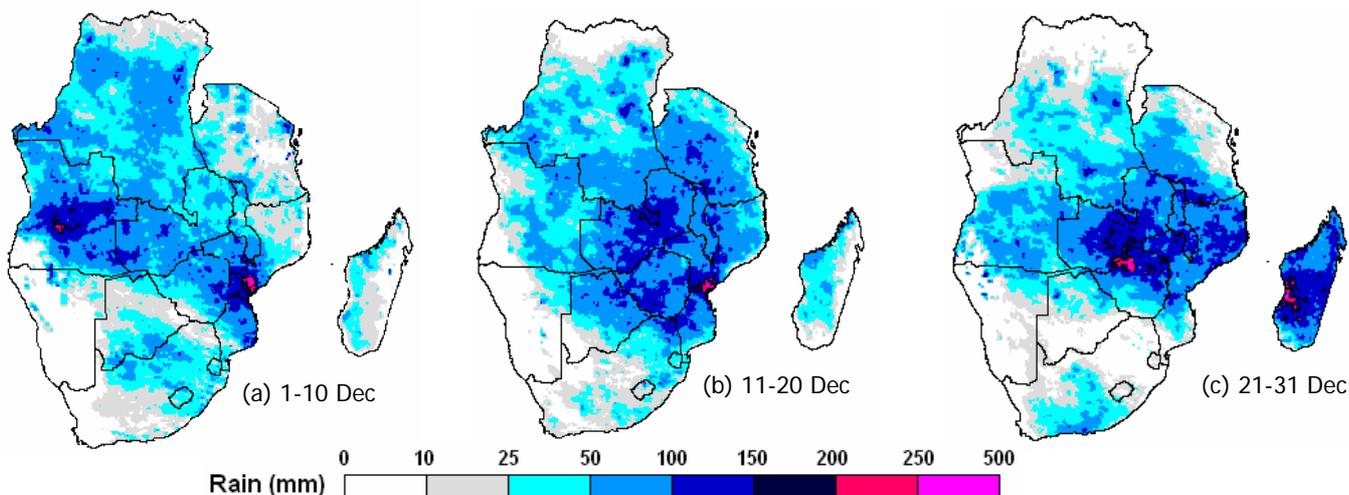


Figure 1. Rainfall for (a) 1-10 December (b) 11-20 December 2007 and (c) 21-31 December 2007, from rainfall estimates (data source: NOAA/FEWSNET)

Seasonal Rainfall for 1 Oct - 31 Dec 2007

Analysis of the rainfall between 1 October and 31 December 2007 (Figure 2) indicates that most parts of the region have received above normal rains (green colours, Figure 2). Dark green colours in figure 2 shows areas which have received more than twice their normal rainfall, and these are some of the areas where flooding has already been recorded, and is a major concern, particularly in the Mozambique/Zambia/Zimbabwe area. Malawi is currently facing flood threat due to recent heavy rains there but serious flooding has not yet been recorded since December.

Rainfall Forecast and latest rainfall updates

The latest seasonal forecast update for the December-January-February period called for enhanced chances of normal to above normal rainfall for nearly the entire region, excluding Mauritius.

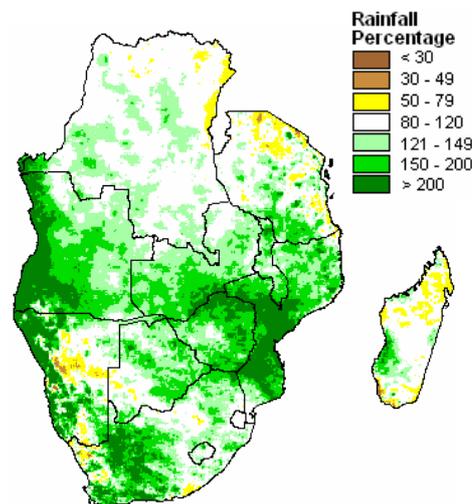


Figure 2. Seasonal Rainfall for 1 Oct – 31 Dec 2007 expressed as percentage of average, from rainfall estimates (data source: NOAA/FEWSNET)

Climatic observations and analyses have confirmed that La Niña conditions are now well established. This forecast suggests the need for continued monitoring in parts of the region affected by flooding and flood threat. More recently, sustained heavy rains fell during the period 1-6 January 2008 in Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, and particularly heavy rains were received in southern Zambia on 4 January. Short to medium-term forecasts projecting into mid-January are calling for possibility of heavy rainfalls continuing in the central parts of the region that have already been receiving heavy rains.

2. Country Summaries

Madagascar

About 420 people were displaced in the Antananarivo area after heavy rains resulted in a dam breaking. The dam has since been fixed and people are returning. According to an OCHA report, the government predicts possibility of flooding in the north and north east of the country that could affect 600,000 people.

Malawi

Malawi received heavy rains between late-December and early January. The widespread rains that were experienced over the country have prompted the issuance of flood alerts on 7 January. This was particularly directed at people living along its lakes and river banks. The warning suggested that flooding was "imminent". The high rainfall received in the catchment of Shire river has the potential to cause flooding in Shire Valley if heavy rains continue. On 9 January, OCHA reports indicated that heavy rains had caused localized damage to crops and homes in various districts including Mzimba, Dedza, Mangochi and Chiradzulu in the north and central parts of the country.

Mozambique

Most parts of Mozambique received sustained heavy downpours throughout December into early January, and have led to rising river levels in the Zambezi, Buzi Pungue and Save catchments, and subsequent flooding and heightened flood threats. The Mozambique government has declared its highest level of alert, with rivers in all 4 basins well above alert level. Significant flooding has already occurred, and an estimated 72,000 people had been affected, including approximately 34,600 people who have been moved to settlement centres to avoid deaths. 3 people have been confirmed dead as a consequence of the flooding in the Pungwe basin. 31,500 hectares of cropland are assumed to have been lost. The high rains that have been received in the Zambezi basin in upstream areas in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, are a cause of concern, and there is now great likelihood of extensive flooding especially in the Zambezi lower basin, downstream of the Cahora Bassa. Reports indicate that low-lying areas of Tete city, downstream of Cahora Bassa were inundated on Tuesday 8 January. Meanwhile, the roads connecting the Mozambique port of Beira to Zimbabwe was badly damaged by the flooding of the Pungue river.

Namibia

Warnings have been issued of the possibility of flooding in the flood prone Caprivi area in northern Namibia due to the heavy rains that have been falling in that area. Authorities warned that flooding could occur if the heavy rains persisted. The Caprivi forms part of the Zambezi basin, in which flooding has already been reported upstream in Zambia and Mozambique due to sustained heavy rains.

Zambia

Heavy rains have been received in Zambia since late November, particularly in the western half of the country. Since mid-December, the eastern half of the country has also been receiving heavy rains. The sustained heavy rains have led to flooding in some areas, concerns for extensive flooding and water logging abound, which may result in loss of lives, livelihoods, property and crops. Currently, 34 of the country's 72 districts have been placed on flood alert – nearly half the country. Unconfirmed estimates suggest that 1.5 million people could be displaced by the floods. Some areas in southern and central Zambia have already been flooded, and according to government, 800 people had been affected by early January. There are concerns about the hectareage of crops that has been lost due to the floods and to waterlogging. A full assessment of the damage is yet to be carried out.

Zimbabwe

Extensive heavy rains have been received throughout December in Zimbabwe, and have resulted in flooding in the north east and the south east of the country. Estimates suggest a total of over 8000 people have been affected. In early December, approximately 1000 people were displaced when floods occurred in north-eastern Zimbabwe. Estimates suggest that a total of 3,000 people have been displaced in the north-eastern Zimbabwe district of Muzarabani. Further flooding took place as December progressed and into early January. In south-eastern Zimbabwe, estimates suggest that nearly 3000 people at a refugee camp were marooned after heavy rains, but were subsequently rescued and now returning to their camp. The death toll related to the flooding now stands at over 30 people. The total rainfall received in December over Zimbabwe is the highest that the country has received in over 100 years during the same period. Most of the water received in Zimbabwe makes its way downstream into Mozambique via the Zambezi, Pungue, Buzi, Save and Limpopo rivers.

