

SUMMARY OF THE 2008 CROPPING SEASON

1. RAINFALL SITUATION

During the 2008 cropping season, sufficient rains capable of sustaining crop growth and development were first received during the first dekad of June in the Western and Middle Thirds of the country and in the Second dekad of June in the rest of the country. However, during the second dekad of June, consecutive rainless days ranging from 5 to 9 days were recorded in the western Third of the country. This dry spell caused some sowing failures in Ngain Sanjal (North Bank Region), where farmers had already sown millet and groundnut.

Generally, significant and heavy rains were recorded during the period under review. Single day torrential rainfalls of more than 50mm were recorded in most parts of the country during the months of August and September. These heavy rainfalls resulted to floods that caused damages to structures and household goods.

The number of rainy days from the first rains to date ranged from 42 at Njau in the Middle Third to 87 at Yundum in the Western Third of the country.

The Western and Eastern parts of the country recorded the highest seasonal totals with cumulative rainfall of above 1000mm in most stations. In the Middle Third only Sapu recorded rainfall of more than 1000mm, whilst the rest of the stations recorded rainfall between 700mm and 1000mm (table 1).

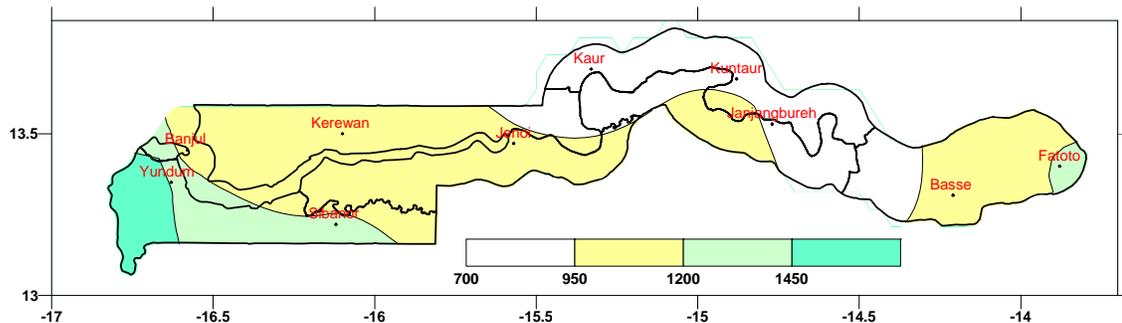


Figure 1: Cumulative Rainfall (mm) from May 1 to October 31, 2008

Compared to the same period last year, most of the stations had registered surpluses ranging from 47.1mm at Basse to 696.1mm at Yundum. Nevertheless, deficits were also recorded in Mankamang (2.5mm) and Naudeh (20.0mm).

When compared to the normal, we observe normal to above normal rainfall in the entire country (table 1).

As at October 31, 2008 the country average stood at 994.4 which is about 20% more than last year's average rainfall (829.0mm) and 27 % above the long-term mean (782.3mm).

Table 1: Cumulative rainfall (mm) amounts from May to October from selected locations in The Gambia for year 2008 compared to 2007 and the 30 year average (1971-2000).

STATION	Current Cumulative Oct. 31, 2008	Cumulative Rainfall Oct. 31, 2007	Average Rainfall Over.30-years	Comparisons		Number of Rainy Days	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1-2)	(1-3)	2008	2007
Western Region							
Banjul	1012.5	723.1	814.9	289.4	197.6	69	42
Serekunda	1,432.6	1,120.9	815.8	311.7	616.8	49	34
Yundum	1,458.2	762.1	868.1	696.1	590.1	81	56
Jambanjelly	816.4	843.6	824.1	-27.2	-7.7	28	40
Pirang	814.9	713.3	559.9	101.6	255	48	56
Sibanor	1,255.6	759.7	891.2	495.9	364.4	87	56
Ave. WR	1131.70	820.45	795.67	311.25	336.03	63	46
North Bank Region							
Kerewan	1068.4	870.6	781.3	197.8	287.1	70	53
Bakendick	912.0	737.8	483.9	174.2	428.1	69	20
Yallal	1,035.5	881.2	724.8	154.3	310.7	30	52
Ave. NBR	1005.30	829.87	663.33	175.43	341.97	59	45
Lower River Region							
Karantaba	1043.7	722.6	927.4	321.1	116.3	74	54
Kwinella	903.8	858.7	552.4	45.1	351.4	42	-
Jenoi	961.0	566.3	743.4	394.7	217.6	57	35
Ave. LRR	969.50	715.87	741.07	253.63	228.43	54	40
Central River Region (north)							
Kaur	847.2	910.6	671.9	-63.4	175.3	60	40
Kuntaur	883.1	706.1	625.3	177	257.8	55	40
N'jau	703.6	700.4	465.8	3.2	237.8	40	-
Ave. CRR /North	811.30	772.37	587.67	38.93	223.63	50.0	38.7
Central River Region (south)							
Dankunku	727.2	582.1	445.8	145.1	281.4	46	36
Sapu	1061.7	866.8	784.2	194.9	277.5	65	45
Janjangbureh	915.5	866.8	752.9	48.7	162.6	67	56
Ave. CRR/South	901.47	771.90	660.97	129.57	240.50	57	44
Upper River Region							
Naudeh	666.7	686.7	496.7	-20	170	46	38
Bansang	813.4	863.7	716.9	-50.3	96.5	44	40
Sare Soffie	883.8	829.6	766.3	54.2	117.5	51	50
Mankamang	847.4	849.9	511.2	-2.5	336.2	55	38
Basse	1,038.3	992.8	841.1	45.5	197.2	69	58
Fatoto	1214.2	839.5	749.5	374.7	464.7	59	50
Giroba	1,194.4	966.1	519.6	228.3	674.8	46	49
Ave. URR	901.47	771.90	660.97	129.57	240.50	57	44

2. Crop Situation

The abundance and good distribution pattern of rainfall allowed an optimal development of most food crops in 2008 in The Gambia. Moreover, cultivated areas have increased for many crops, due to the earliness of the season and the expectation of abundant rainfall by farmers on one hand, and to the support programmes initiated by the Gambia Government (Back to the Land Initiative) and various Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to provide seeds to farmer associations, particularly the NERICA rice, on the other.

There were cases of dry spell, reported in June and July, such as for tomatoes and early millet production at Ngeyen Sanjal (North Bank Region), because the already transplanted seedling could not survive. These dry spells have also provoked the resowing of early millet in the same area. Abundant rains were also a constraint to rainy season vegetable production.

Production expectations are high, ranging from 20 to 80% surplus, compared to those of 2007. However, one of the major concerns this year, considering the current storage practices, is the risk of quality degradation of early millet and groundnuts due to the mid-October rains that fell on harvested crops.

Also, it should be kept in mind that the production levels for all crops are still below those of 2005. More importantly, there is a widening gap between net production and consumption needs for the country.

3. PESTS SITUATION

3.1 INSECTS

The successive and significant rains realised during the period under review have considerably suppressed population growth of some pest species like aphids, red spider mites, plant hoppers, and termites. Usually this rainfall pattern does not quite favour reproduction and development of many insect species. The occurrence of heavy raindrops, runoffs, splashes and strong winds had some adverse impact on eggs, larvae, pupa and adults of insects. For these reasons, no alarming and widespread insect pest incidences on field crops have been reported or observed during the reviewed period.

However, some spot outbreaks have been reported in different areas of the country. Some of these were economically important as in the case of fruit flies and mango mealy bugs particularly on mango trees. Outbreaks observed include the following:

- Diverse species of grasshoppers, including the variegated grasshopper (*Zonocerus variegatus*) on vegetables and other plants in Western Region;
- Rice locust (*Hieroglyphus daganensis*) on some swamp rice fields upstream;
- Sucking bugs on upland, irrigated and swamp rice;
- Leave eating beetles, e.g. *Nisotra sp.* on vegetables such as okra, spinach and sorrel countrywide;
- Thrips on onions and beans;
- Fruit flies, e.g. *Bactrocera invadens* on citrus, plum, pear and late-maturing mangoes in Western Region;
- Mango mealy bugs (*Rastrococcus invadens*) on mangoes and even on citrus and other plants where the population is very high in Western and parts of North Bank Region.

On the other hand, fruit flies have inflicted some significant damages on fruit trees like citrus, plum, guava, pear and particularly late maturing mangoes. Mango mealy bugs have significantly hampered the mango industry, particularly in the Western Region of the country.

3.2 WEEDS

Weeds have been the most baffling problems of farmers during the season. Consecutive rains have spectacularly enhanced weed germination, growth and survival. Numerous farms could not be weeded clean. Portions of some farms were left to the mercy of weeds. Others were altogether abandoned because of these pests.

The purple witch weed (*Striga hermonthica*) has been reported to have occurred in some sorghum fields, but the importance was not generally highly significant. Other weeds such as sedges (*Cyperus spp.*), sicklepod (*Cassia obtusifolia*), crowfoot grass (*Dactyloctenium aegyptium*), crabgrass (*Digitaria sp.*) and many economically important weeds continue to be stubborn on crops under the influence of the rains. Consequently, the time, economy and energy of farmers have been quite obstructed.

3.3 BIRDS

The village weaver birds have been relatively the most destructive on irrigated rice, early millet and maize. Parrots have inflicted negligible damages on maize. Other grain-eating birds have caused insignificant damages on especially early millet.

3.4 RODENTS

Damages caused by rodents (e.g. squirrels, rats and mice) were not generally quite important, although several households are infested with particularly rats. Foodstuffs in many stores were attacked by these pests.

3.5 DISEASES

Smut and ergot were reported to have attacked early millet in several areas of the millet growing zones in Lower River, North Bank, Central River (North and South) and Upper River Regions.