



# REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMME Agromet-Update



## Rainfall, Vegetation and Crop Monitoring

Issue Number: 12

Month: 2 Season: 2003/2004

Release date: 09-03-2004

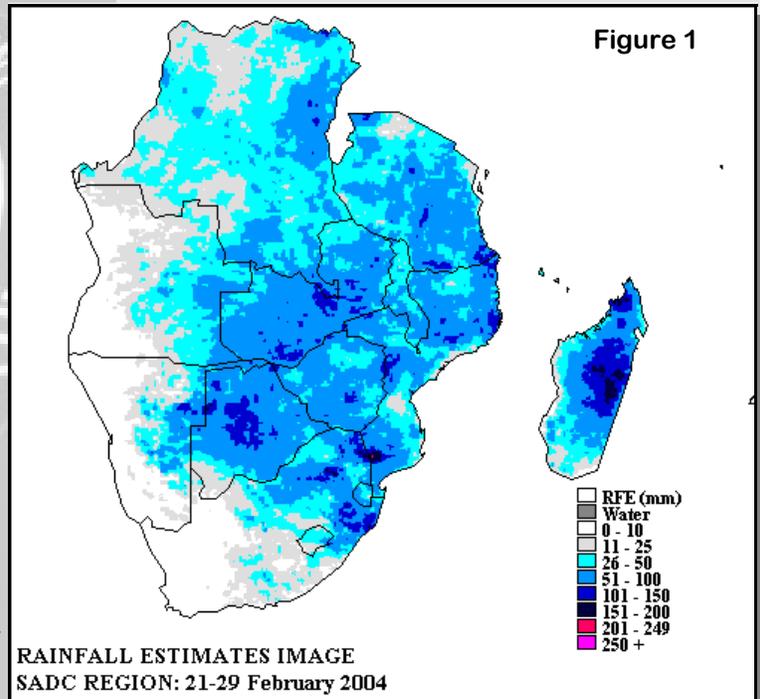
### Highlights

- ❖ Extensive coverage of rainfall in the region
- ❖ Persistent rains may improve crop yields
- ❖ Over 640 hectares of crops washed away in Malawi
- ❖ Zambia to meet its cereal domestic requirement
- ❖ Rainfall continues to improve in Tanzania

### Rainfall Performance from 21-29 February 2004

There was extensive coverage of rainfall during the last dekad of February. This has been the most extensive coverage of rainfall in the region since the beginning of the 2003-2004 season. The rainfall extended all the way from eastern DRC, eastern Angola, and northern Tanzania, to Botswana, South Africa and Swaziland (figure 1). However, western coastal areas of the region received little or no rainfall and countries affected include Angola, Namibia and South Africa. The coastal areas of Namibia and South Africa usually receive little rainfall during the summer time of the year. Amounts exceeding 100mm were received in Botswana, South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe (figure 1). The imagery indicates that Gaza province may have received rainfall above 150mm. The extensive rainfall will further improve the soil moisture and pasture condition in these areas. Botswana, with a well developed livestock industry should have its animals improve their condition thereby increasing their weight for good market value.

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### The persistent January and February 2004 rainfall; Will it improve maize crop yields?

From mid January 2004 to-date, the region has experienced very good rainfall with the last dekad of February covering the entire region. Over 90% of agricultural production in the region is dependent on rainfall and with this improvement, does that translate into an improved yield? From the beginning of the season, farmers have had to replant on a number of times. In the SADC region, varieties grown take 90-145 days to mature and these are grown in different agro-ecological zones. Depending on what varieties farmers grow, the replanting incidences were taking place against the growing period getting shorter. It is therefore important that farmers with the capacity to replant, especially in some vulnerable communities, possess information on type of variety or maturity period of the seed for replanting in order to take advantage of the late rains. Given this scenario, when the rainfall improved in January, planting an early maturing variety (90 days) has a greater chance of a good yield than a medium or late maturity variety (120-145 days). Therefore, whether the rainfall will improve yield or not will depend on the type of variety grown and the location coupled with prolonged rainfall until April 2004.



This Agromet Update bulletin is a joint product of SADC FANR (Regional Early Warning System), and USAID FEWSNET.



Financial assistance for the production of the bulletin is provided by the European Commission through FAO.

**Malawi** Sufficient rainfall fell during the dekad to maintain soil moisture in most parts of Malawi. Maize is mostly at flowering and cob formation stages. Early planted maize has reached maturity and some households are consuming green maize and other matured crops. Reports indicate that the general crop stand is good especially where fertilizer has been applied. Good harvests are possible particularly if rains can continue falling consistently up to end of March. However, floods caused by the locally heavy rains in Zomba and Phalombe districts in the south resulted in loss of crops, lives, property and infrastructure. According to reports by Malawi News Agency (MANA) in the Weekend Nation Newspaper, in Phalombe 5 people lost their lives, over 640 hectares of crops were washed away and 888 families were made homeless. These floods will seriously affect overall crop production in the two districts this season.

**Swaziland** Rainfall improved during the current dekad. Most of the country received above normal rainfall for the dekad except Ngwempisi, Siteki and Lomahasha which had below normal. The maize crop is reported to be doing relatively well in the highveld while in the middleveld and lowveld, the crop that reached maturity is reported to be drying. If rainfall is prolonged, the crop may also experience fungal diseases.

**Namibia** The eastern parts of the country received good rainfall including the main cereal growing areas of the Caprivi. The Caprivi continues to receive good rainfall except for low lying areas that are threatened by flooding as a result of high rainfall in parts of Angola and Zambia. However, a good harvest is expected in the area.

**Botswana** The country received a substantial amount of rainfall of more than 100mm in some districts. This was one occasion where the entire country was covered. This will improve both the soil moisture and pasture conditions. With improved pastures, livestock will have plenty to feed on and this will translate into weight gain allowing the animals to reach profitable slaughter weight. The dam levels will also be boosted by the rainfall.

**Tanzania** The country received a substantial amount of rainfall in both the bimodal and unimodal areas. The rainfall will further improve the crop and pasture conditions in the country. While the country experienced a poor vuli rainfall season, the uni-modal season is so far promising to be better.

**Lesotho** Improved crop condition has been observed over some parts of the country where substantial rains were consistently experienced in the previous dekad and the dekad under review. However, summer crops in the western part of the country have seen little improvement due to small amounts of rain received and the high temperatures that resulted in high rates of evapotranspiration. Nevertheless, summer crops (maize, sorghum) are generally at vegetative to grain filling stages and ranging from poor to good condition. Wheat is at grain forming stage to wax maturity with poor to good conditions. However, domestic maize requirement may not be met.

**Mozambique** The entire country received a substantial amount of rainfall including the southern parts of the country which have witnessed poor rainfall during the 2003-2004 season. In the central parts of the country, farmers have had to replant up to three times. Rainfall in February and March will play a critical role for production although current prospects are fairly good. In maize growing areas, crops are at various stages, ranging from vegetative to grain formation. In semi arid zones of the central parts of the country, farmers are currently planting drought-tolerant and short cycle crops, such as finger millet.

**Zambia** Widespread rainfall was received during the dekad. The rainfall received was very favourable for the crop development. Most parts of the country especially the northern half and the early planted areas in the south, have reported that the crops have reached full development. In food deficit areas, reports indicate that consumption green mealies by communities that do not have sufficient food has commenced. More sunshine is required for the crop as it approaches full maturity. A few areas in the southern half of the country have reported the crop to be at grain filling stages, especially the late planted crop. With continued favourable growing conditions, the crops will steadily be maturing in the next few weeks. It is anticipated that Zambia will this season meet its cereal domestic requirements.

**Zimbabwe** The entire country received a substantial amount of rainfall during the dekad. The country has been receiving consistent rainfall since the second dekad of January 2004. The crop is reported to be ranging from vegetative to early maturing stages and is in fair to good condition. If the rains taper off as they normally do from mid-March, more than 20 percent of the current maize crop may not reach maturity especially those planted late. However, the current persistent rains maybe conducive to the development of fungal diseases such as cob rot that might be threatening the crop at a period when they are supposed to be drying.

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