



Food Security Early Warning System Agromet Update



2015/2016 Agricultural Season

Issue 04 mid-December update

Season: 2015-2016

21-12-2015

Highlights

- Below normal rainfall was received in Lesotho, parts of South Africa, central Mozambique, eastern Zambia and north-eastern Zimbabwe in the first half of December
- Onset of rains in parts of South Africa and Lesotho has not yet occurred, with delays of at least 50 days in some parts, as planting windows are closing in some areas
- Vegetation conditions improved in some central parts, after good rains were received there
- Very high temperatures have continued in the southern half of the region, driving up rates of water loss from surface water bodies. High temperatures are forecast to continue
- High rainfall continued to be received in much of Tanzania and central DRC

Regional Summary

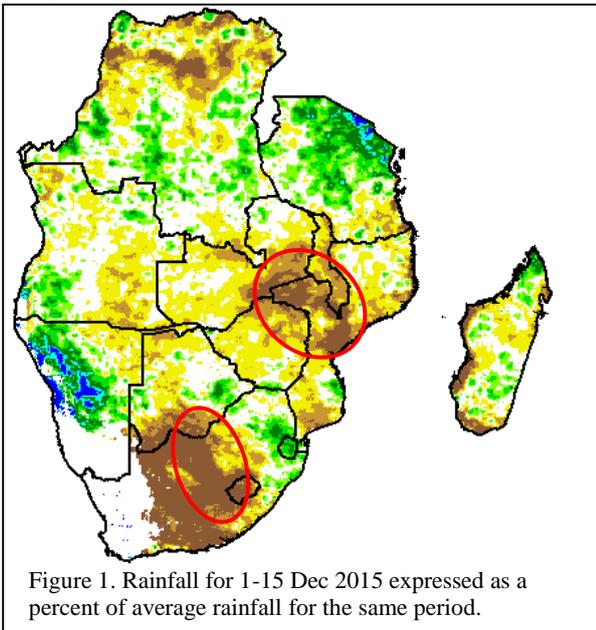


Figure 1. Rainfall for 1-15 Dec 2015 expressed as a percent of average rainfall for the same period.

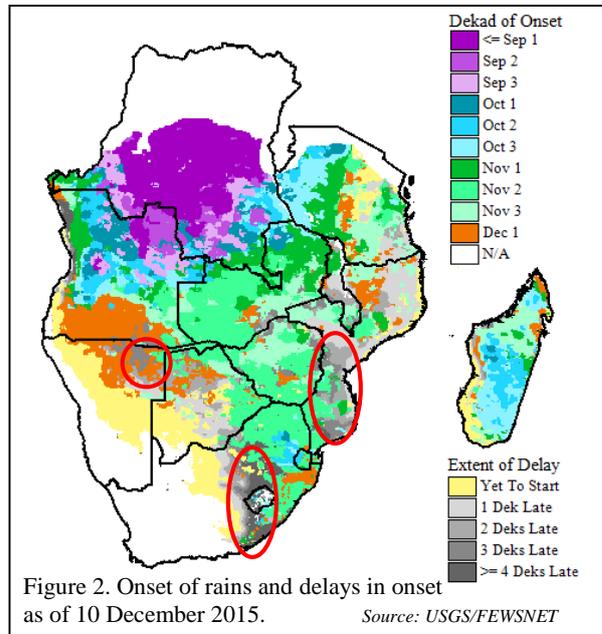


Figure 2. Onset of rains and delays in onset as of 10 December 2015.

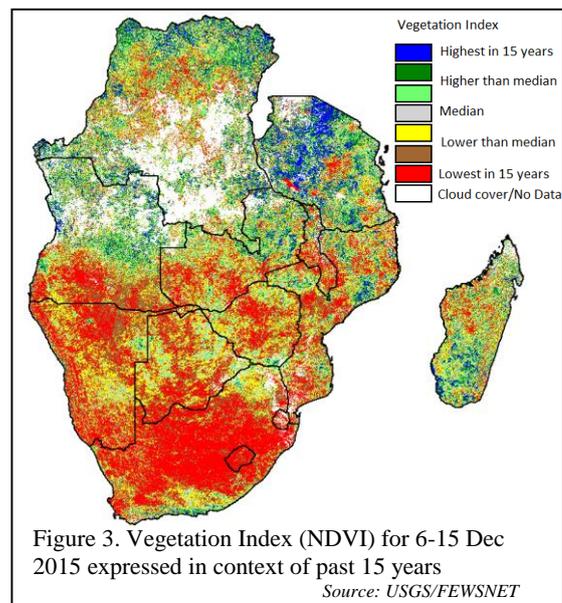
Source: USGS/FEWSNET

The slow start of the rainfall season continued in the southern half of the region during the first half of December. In particular, southern Malawi, central Mozambique, eastern Zambia and north-eastern Zimbabwe received well below normal rainfall, as well as Lesotho, central/western South Africa and southern Botswana (brown colours, Figure 1). The low rainfall in the first half of December is compounded by below normal rainfall that has generally characterized the rainfall season since October in the southern parts of the region. Other areas that also received low rainfall in early December include southern Mozambique, south-eastern Angola, parts of southern Tanzania, northern DRC and north-western Namibia. In contrast, much of Tanzania received above-average rainfall during this period, continuing a trend that has existed since the beginning of the season. A few areas that had been experiencing poor rainfall since last season received good rains, which helped reduce the rainfall deficits in these areas: these included south-west Angola, north-west Namibia, Swaziland, eastern Botswana and north-eastern South Africa. The rains in most of these areas were however not yet sufficient to eliminate the long-standing moisture deficits being experienced there.

Most areas received enough rains consider to constitute an effective start of season by early December, with parts of southern Angola and northern Namibia experiencing an onset of rains in the first 10 days of December (orange colours, Figure 2). However, many surrounding areas in south-eastern Angola and north-eastern

Namibia did not receive sufficient rains for an onset (dark grey colours, Figure 2). In some of these areas, the rains are delayed by over 30 days. In parts of Lesotho and central and south-eastern South Africa, the season is also late, with delays of 50 days or more in many areas. These delays reduce the chances of successful cropping due to the shortened period available for crops to reach maturity before the cessation of rains. Farmers also tend not to plant if they do not receive sufficient planting rains by specific cut-off dates, which differ by area. Some of the areas affected include productive maize growing areas of South Africa, with reports that in some parts, only a low percentage of the intended area has been planted to date due to the dry conditions. Parts of southern and central Mozambique and eastern Zimbabwe have also experienced a 20-to-30 day delay in the onset of rains. In some of these areas, an onset of rains was experienced earlier in November, but subsequent prolonged dryness, combined with high temperatures, led to poor germination/emergence and false starts.

The moderate rains recently received in parts of the region have helped to start improving the status of vegetation that were in very poor condition, in a few areas. Vegetation in several areas still remains the poorest observed in the last 15 years (Figure 3, red areas), with consequently negative implications for pasture in particular. Southern Angola, much of Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, South Africa, Swaziland, south-western Zambia and central Zimbabwe appear to be amongst the worst affected in terms of vegetation, according to satellite imagery. In addition, parts of Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia are also showing poor vegetation condition. Reports indicate approximately 20,000 cattle have died in Swaziland due to effects of the drought. The Botswana government has introduced a 50% subsidy on livestock feed in an attempt to reduce impacts of the drought, which has also caused cattle deaths in parts of the country. Drought-related cattle deaths have also been reported in Lesotho, South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe.



Short term forecasts through the end of December suggest continued dry conditions over most southern parts of the region. In contrast, wet conditions followed by some dryness are expected in some of the central parts of the region. Wet conditions are expected in the northern parts of the region. In the long term, seasonal forecasts for January through March are suggesting enhanced chances of normal to below normal in the southern parts of the region, and enhanced chances of normal to above-normal rainfall in the northern areas.

The water situation in many parts of the region is low and several countries are making efforts to address this. Five out of South Africa's nine provinces have officially been declared as drought-related disaster areas. A drought emergency was recently declared in Lesotho, citing prevailing widespread water shortages, water rationing, drought related livestock deaths, and farmers' failure to plant due to insufficient moisture. In Botswana's capital city, the Gaborone dam ran dry earlier in the year, and the main water supply is being provided through a 300 km pipeline sourcing water from the more humid northern areas of Botswana. The Swaziland Water Service Corporation has introduced water rationing due to the low levels in the Hawane dam, the main water supply for the capital city. Water use restrictions were announced in Windhoek, Namibia, as part of the city's drought management plan – the city's three water supply dams were collectively at 15% of full capacity by mid-December. Kariba dam, which provides hydroelectrical power for Zambia and Zimbabwe, was reported at 16% of capacity as of mid-December, with negative implications for electrical power generation for the two countries. In addition to these noted areas, some communities are being affected by low water supply, and bowser trucks are being used to supply water in some cases. Many water authorities are strongly encouraging consumers to use water sparingly, given the current low water levels, and the forecasts for below normal rainfall and high temperatures over the remainder of the season in many areas.

Acknowledgements:

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