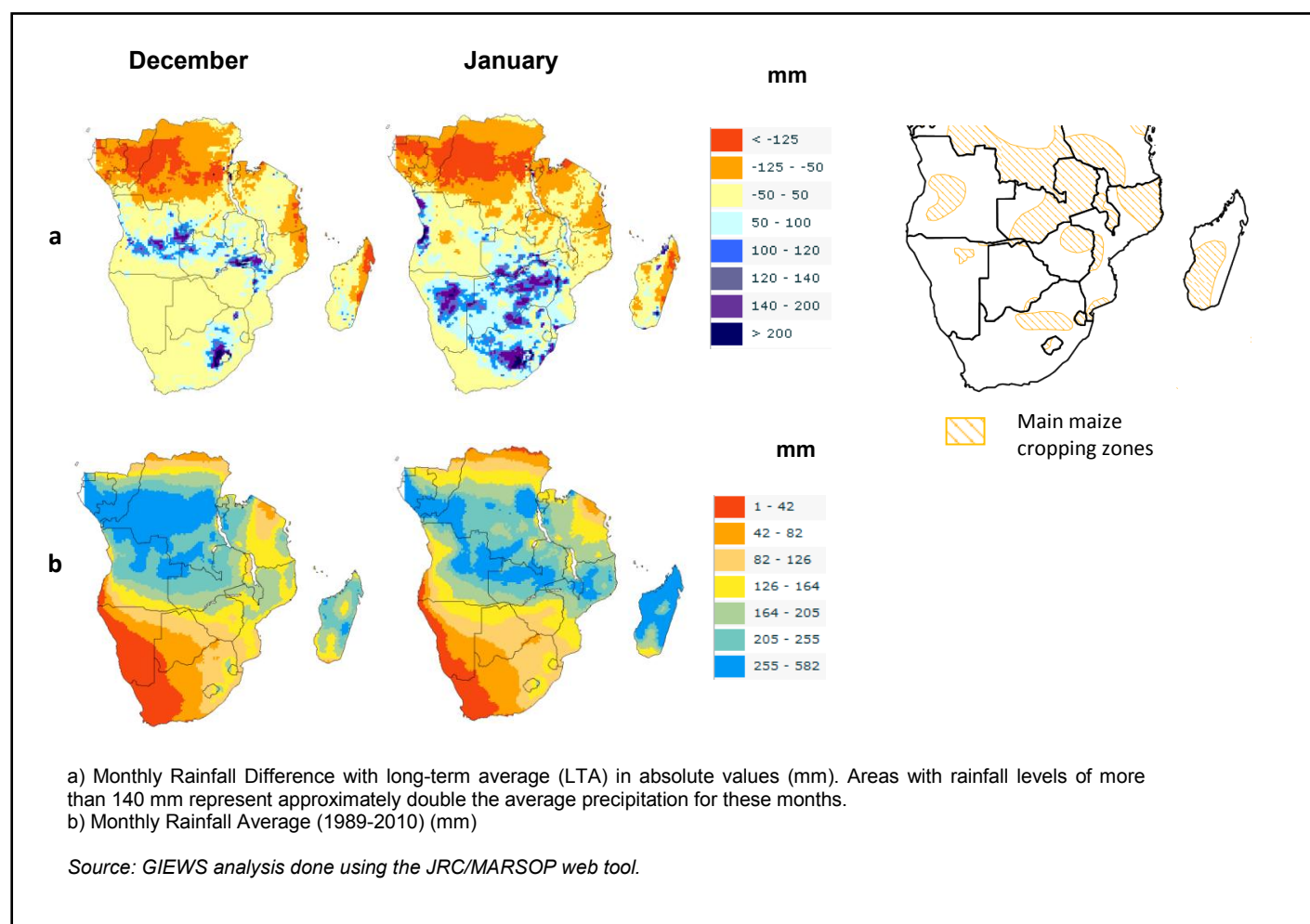


SOUTHERN AFRICA: Heavy rains and localized flooding raise concerns about the impact on the 2010/11 cereal crop in the affected areas of the sub-region

Heavy rainfall recorded in December and January (Figure 1) across Southern Africa has caused water-logging and localised crop losses in parts of the sub-region, particularly in Lesotho and across the Zambezi basin. The torrential rains have resulted in elevated river levels, with many regions remaining on alert due to increased possibility of further flooding in downstream areas. However, vegetation conditions, based on satellite images, indicate generally good crop development, benefitting from favourable precipitation during the first half of the rainy season.

Despite the severe localised damage, overall prospects for the 2011 cereal crops in the sub-region are still satisfactory. However, the final output will depend on rains over the next two months, prior to the start of the main harvest, and the development of cyclones in the Indian Ocean. Current forecasts for the subsequent two months indicate a continuation of normal to above normal rains across most areas of the sub-region, but heavier rains are expected in the Zambezi river basin. This forecast is consistent with La Niña conditions, which tend to be associated with above-normal rains in Southern Africa. FAO/GIEWS will continue to closely monitor crop development and potential weather hazard.

Figure 1: Monthly Rainfall Levels and Maize Cropping Zones



Angola

Torrential rains in coastal areas in January and in eastern parts bordering the Democratic Republic of Congo in December have led to localized floods, resulting in the displacement of an estimated 29 904 people and crop damage in these areas. However, satellite based analysis indicates that in the large maize producing areas of Benguela and Cuanza Sul, generally average vegetation conditions prevail. Overall prospects for this year's food crops remain favourable.

Lesotho

Excessive rainfall began in November 2010 and continued through to January, particularly in the north-west districts, which constitute the main cereal growing areas of the country. In the two main cereal producing districts of Leribe and Maseru, estimates indicate that cumulative rainfall amounts between December and January were more than 100 percent above average, leading to saturation of the soils and negatively impacting crop development. A rapid assessment conducted by FAO in the country indicates crop losses from 30 to 60 percent of the total area planted in some of the worst affected areas, while an estimated 4 708 livestock (out of a livestock population of over 3 million) have been lost due to the torrential rains. The heavy rains have also caused damage to infrastructure disrupting households' access to markets.

Madagascar

As a result of localized heavy rains in northwestern areas during January, an estimated 2 256 people in Mahajanga, in Boeny region, have been displaced and some crops have been damaged. Similarly, above normal rains were recorded in some southern parts of the country during January and preliminary reports indicate localized damage to the maize and cassava crops in Betioky district. However, these rains are likely to have contributed to replenishing soil moisture in the south following the severe drought experienced last year.

Mozambique

Heavy rains in January in central and southern provinces resulted in increased river levels, causing flooding and crop losses in riverine areas. At the beginning of February, rivers had passed alert levels in Tete (Zambezi river) and Gaza (Limpopo river) provinces, heightening the risk of further flooding in downstream areas. The government has declared a red alert for central and southern provinces. Current estimates indicate that approximately 23 632 families in southern provinces have been affected by the floods, with many of these households re-locating to higher ground. In the provinces of Maputo, Gaza and Inhambane, an estimated 18 430 hectares of agriculture land have been affected (this represents approximately 6 percent of the cropped area for cereals in the south, but a small proportion at the national level). Rapid agricultural and food security assessments are underway to evaluate the impact of the rains and floods at local and national levels.

Namibia

In the communal agricultural areas of the eastern Caprivi region (an area susceptible to flooding), the Zambezi river reached elevated levels in January, nearly three times the average, and breached its southern banks causing localized flooding. Approximately 1 000 people have been re-located from flood prone areas in the Caprivi region. Many households in the area have already depleted their food reserves, following flood-affected harvests in 2010. Similarly, in the extreme south of the country, above normal rains caused flash flooding along

the Orange river, bordering South Africa, damaging some crops and leading to livestock losses.

Zambia

Abundant precipitation in central and southern parts of the country led to localized water-logging and it is reported that most crops planted along the Kafue river plains are submerged. The intense rainfall has, in addition, caused damage to infrastructure in Sinazongwe, Itezitshi and Monze districts in the Southern province, which is a large maize producing region. However, despite the localized damage, satellite images indicate that, overall, vegetation conditions are normal and crops are performing well in the Southern province. The heavy rains have led to rising water levels in Kariba dam, bordering northern Zimbabwe, and consequently the Zambezi Water Authority (ZRA) has increased the discharge rates raising the possibility of further flooding in the Zambezi basin.

Zimbabwe

During January, abundant rains particularly in Midlands, Mashonaland Central and both north and south Matabeleland provinces have caused infrastructure damage and had a negative impact on some cereal crops in parts of the affected regions. However, overall, the 2010/11 maize crop is performing well in most areas. Preliminary reports indicate an increase in the area planted from last year and favourable vegetation conditions, confirmed by satellite analysis. As yet, no impact assessment is available.

South Africa

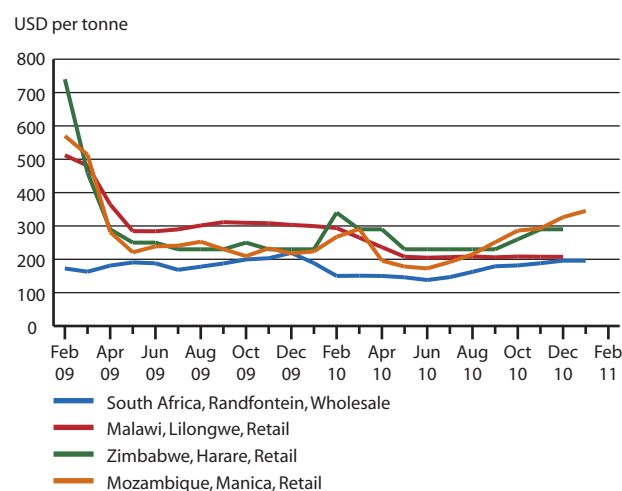
The heavy rains during December and January caused flooding across central parts of the country, with significant levels of rains observed in Free State – a large maize producing area – and in eastern parts of the Northern Cape. Preliminary reports indicate some damage to the maize crop, and other food crops, as well as agriculture infrastructure. However, a full assessment of the impact to agriculture sector is not yet available. The government declared 33 municipalities as disaster areas as a result of the floods, which has affected an estimated 16 473 households.

Adequate food supplies at the sub-regional level

Maize is the main food staple in Southern Africa countries. Following consecutive bumper cereal harvests across the sub-region in the past two years, which has instigated some countries to reverse previously restrictive export regulations for maize, domestic stocks are at satisfactory levels and have contributed to maintaining low maize prices in most markets. South Africa, the sub-region's largest exporter of maize, is forecast to retain a national stock of just under 3 million tonnes at the end of the current 2010/11 marketing year (May/April). This amount is one third higher than in the previous year. The large domestic supplies have limited any significant price increase, despite pressure from rising international prices and a strengthening Rand. This has also helped to maintain lower cereal prices in importing countries of Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia and Botswana, which source the bulk of their cereal consumption requirements from South Africa. Similarly, both Malawi and Zambia hold substantial maize reserves and have exportable surpluses. However, the competitive prices in South Africa have limited significant trade in the sub-region for these countries. As of January Zambia had exported nearly 120 000 tonnes, mainly to Zimbabwe. Overall, regional supplies are more than sufficient to cover the import requirements of cereal deficit countries.

Reflecting the good supplies, market prices of maize have remained at low levels in the past year, despite some recent seasonal increases, (Figure 2). The exception to this trend is Mozambique, where production short-falls, which were experienced last season, and depreciation of the national currency have contributed to an increase in maize and rice prices

Figure 2: Prices of maize in selected Southern African markets



Source: SAFEX Agricultural Products Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, FEWSNET, Sistema De Informação De Mercados Agrícolas De Mocambique