

MOZAMBIQUE Food Security Alert

January 11, 2010

Dryness in southern and central provinces affects planting and crop conditions

Poor rainfall distribution and cumulative deficits, combined with abnormally high temperatures, have dampened prospects for the main maize harvest in much of southern and central Mozambique. Given that large numbers of poor households depend on their own maize production to meet food needs, a below-average harvest could have serious implications for food security in these parts of the country. Although it is still early in the season and the rains have recently picked up, close monitoring of conditions is required, given the probability of below-average rainfall between January and March.

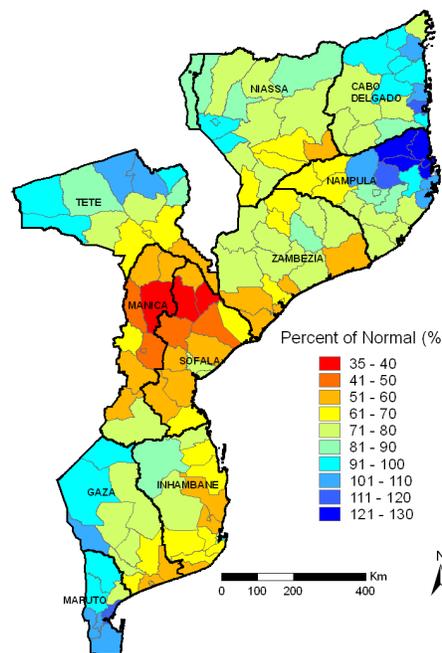
In the south and central regions, rainfall was erratic from October 1 to December 31, 2009 — when most of the planting occurs — and cumulative totals were below average (Figure 1). In the south, from mid-December to the end of the year, there were little to no rains and abnormally high temperatures (approaching 40°C); reports from the three southern provinces indicate that maize crops planted in mid-November are wilting or have totally failed. However, moderate rains in early January have alleviated some of the deficits in parts of Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane provinces, where farmers are now replanting aggressively. In coastal Inhambane and Gaza, households cultivate drought-resistant cassava both for food and income, and are less vulnerable to rainfall deficits.

In the central region, much of the maize planted in November is now starting to wilt, while maize and other crops planted since mid-December are still in good condition. Planting is ongoing in much of the central regions, where rains are favorable. Normal to above-average rainfall performance during the remainder of the season is crucial for a good harvest.

It is still early to draw conclusions about the harvest, but given the likelihood of dryness between January and March (Figure 2), particular attention must be paid to households that rely on the production of maize and other heavily moisture-dependent crops, especially where cultivation is limited to one season. These include the arid and semi-arid areas of northern Maputo, the interior of Gaza and Inhambane, and southern parts of Tete, Sofala, and Manica provinces.

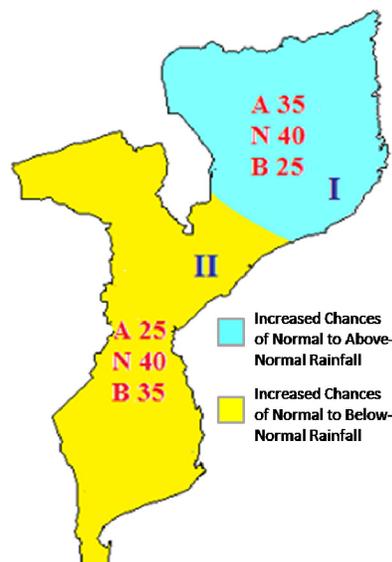
If normal rainfall occurs during the remainder of the season and is well distributed, crops can recover and replanting will be successful. If, however, below-normal rainfall occurs, the harvest may be poor and vulnerable households — especially in the central and southern parts of the country — may experience food deficits earlier than normal. FEWS NET will closely monitor rainfall during the coming months.

Figure 1. Rainfall anomalies (% of normal), October 1 to December 31, 2009.



Source: USGS/FEWS NET

Figure 2. Probabilistic precipitation forecast (January-March 2010).



Source: INAM

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