

SPECIAL ALERT

FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY WORKING GROUP

Southern Africa

Alert No. 1

Date: 8 February 2018

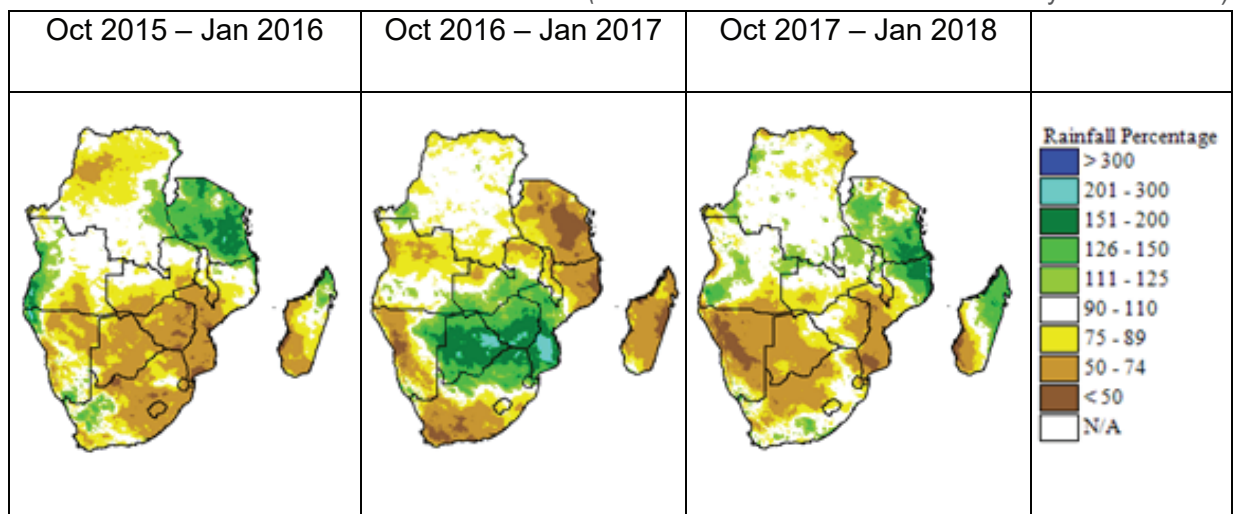
Highlights

- Erratic rainfall, high temperatures and persistent Fall Armyworm infestation lower cereal crop production prospects for 2018 in southern Africa.
- In the absence of consistent rains for the remainder of the season, dry conditions experienced in December to January will further diminish water supplies for domestic, agricultural and commercial use.
- These conditions are likely to have far reaching consequences on access to adequate food and nutrition and ability of farmers to produce in the 2018/19 consumption year.
- Urgent action is required by member states and development partners to assess the impact of the erratic rainfall on crop and livestock production, ascertain the available cereal stocks and implications on food security and nutrition and livelihoods.

Current Situation

Large swathes of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region have experienced below-average rainfall since October 2017 compared to the 2016/17 season (Figure 1). In late December, dry conditions intensified in the southern half of the region, causing moderate to severe crop moisture stress in Botswana, southern Malawi, southern and central Mozambique, South Africa, southern Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Figure 1: Percent of average rainfall for Oct to Jan for 2016, 2017 and 2018
(Source: CHIRPS and CHIRPS Preliminary Rainfall Data)



Many farmers planted late, and in some areas of Botswana, southern Mozambique and Zimbabwe did not plant at all. Dry conditions which prevailed resulted in poor germination of the late crop. South Africa, the largest producer of white maize in the region, has reported a 22 percent decline in area planted this season¹. Continuation of these conditions would have far reaching consequences on access to

¹ South Africa Crop Estimates Committee, 30 Jan 2018

adequate food and nutrition during the 2018/19 consumption year and ability of farmers to produce in the 2018/19 cropping season. In addition, it will limit income generating opportunities resulting in far reaching consequences.

In the absence of consistent rains in February, dry conditions experienced in December to January will diminish water supplies for domestic, agricultural and commercial use. In other areas, including southern and central Mozambique, parts of southern Malawi and southern Zimbabwe, mild rains only returned in late January, by which time many crops had permanently wilted. Southern and central Zambia, southern Malawi and southern Madagascar continue to experience extended periods of below average rainfall and subsequent crop moisture stress. Even if normal rains are received during the remainder of season, it is likely too late for most of the early-planted crops to recover.

The February 2018 update of the GEOGLAM Early Warning Crop Monitor also confirms the poor production prospects, it classifies crop conditions in the southern half of the region as being in “watch” to “poor” condition (Figure 2). These moisture deficits, high temperatures and a persistence of Fall Army Worm (FAW) infestation is likely to result in a below average crop and livestock production.

Urgent Actions

There is urgent need for members states and development partners to determine the scale and extent of the possible impact of the prolonged dry spell on the agricultural season (crop and livestock) to inform appropriate response actions for food security and nutrition and build the resilience of vulnerable populations in the region. Recommended actions include increased monitoring of the situation, ascertaining available cereal stocks, fast-tracking of planned crop assessments and annual vulnerability assessments for early warning and early action and increasing off season production where possible.

Figure 2: Crop Monitor (Source: GEOGLAM) (<https://cropmonitor.org/>)

