First regional forum of seasonal climate forecasting in the Gulf of Guinea. Abidjan. 2014

Final Communique

Climatologists and agrometeorologists from the African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development (ACMAD) and AGRHYMET Regional Center, and senior national meteorological services from Benin, Cameron, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo met from 10 to 14 March 2014 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, for the seasonal climate forecasts for March to May and for April to June 2014 in the countries of the Gulf of Guinea.

This seasonal forecast is the result of a consensus based on the outputs of static-dynamic models and current knowledge of climate variability in the Gulf of Guinea.

Thus, the results of this forecast give probable trends of rainfall accumulations over the periods March-April-Mai and April-May-June 2014, start dates and end of the growing season and the length of dry spells during critical periods of crop growth during the long rainy season of 2014.

1) Rainfalls

Rainfalls generally close to seasonal average amount for March to June 2014 are expected over most of the Gulf of Guinea. Moreover, this region could have disruptions in distribution of rainfall events during this period. Specifically:

- Normal to below normal rainfalls are expected from March to June 2014 in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. In Guinea, part of the country near the coast could be affected by rainfall deficits;
- Normal rainfall from March to May 2014 are expected on the Atlantic coast of Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, some south eastern parts and western in Nigeria, southern parts of Togo and Benin and south east of Ghana
- Excess rainfall are expected from April to June 2014 on the center of Nigeria and neighboring regions in Cameroon.

2) dates of beginning of the long season

The start dates of the long season should be normal to late in localities southwest and south-central in Côte d'Ivoire, Central-Eastern of Ghana, south-central of Benin, Togo and South West Nigeria. They could be normal to early in the coastal areas from South-eastern Côte d'Ivoire to the south of Nigeria.

A late start is expected on the coastal zone of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

3) Dry spells after start of the season

Dry spells after start of agricultural season could be equivalent to longer than those usually observed in the coastal areas of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria.

4) Dates of the end of the long season

The end of the rainy season is expected to be normal to late in coastal areas of Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria. A little further north, in the east-central Côte d'Ivoire and the Central West of Ghana, they should be normal to early.

5) dry spells after the post-flowering period

Dry spells after the flowering periods are expected to be longer than those usually observed in the south-central of Côte d'Ivoire, on the regions South-West and South-Eastern Nigeria and those coastal of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin.

6) Advice for farmers

Forecasts for the period March-April-May indicate surplus equivalents relative to normal cumulative rainfall (1981-2010) in the coastal area covering the western half of the southern part of Nigeria, southern Togo, Benin and Ghana and the eastern half of the southern part of the Côte d'Ivoire. In this same area, the season could have an early start compared to normal, late than normal and longer than those usually observed dry spells. Based on the estimation of the characteristics of the season, the following recommendations are made:

For areas where it is more probable to observe normal cumulative rainfall surplus, early season, start dates, late cessation dates and longer dry spells:

- Select crop varieties resistant to drought.
- Avoid additional inputs of fertilizer during the growing season.
- Focus on farming techniques promote the economy of the soil water.
- Take precautions to avoid or minimize flood damage, flood could be observed in any heavy rain day;

A) For areas where it is more likely to observe excess rainfall totals, normal onset dates and normal to late end of season with longer dry spell are expected. The same recommendations above are valid, with an emphasis on precautions to avoid or minimize flood damage following the possible heavy rainfall.

B) For areas where it is more probable to observe cumulative rainfall with late onset dates and normal to early end of season:

- Choose early maturing / or drought-tolerant varieties;
- Encourage land use high capacity water infiltration and moisture conservation;
- Avoid additional inputs of fertilizer during the growing season;
- Focus on farming techniques which promote soil water conservation;
- Limit the use of species whose water needs are high.

Forecasts above are likely to change during the rainy season. Therefore, it is highly recommended to follow the updates that will be made available in May, June and July 2014 by ACMAD, AGRHYMET Regional Centre and national weather services.

The meeting

March 14th, 2014