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Briefing Note

Emerging 2026 El Niño: Potential Implications for Agriculture, Food Security and Anticipatory Action

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Analysis based on information available as of early July 2026

Purpose and scope

This briefing brings together recent climate outlooks and early warning products from WMO, WMO Coordination Mechanism, UK Met Office, ICPAC/GHACOF, FEWS NET, GEOGLAM Crop Monitor, CCSR/IRI and related humanitarian early warning sources.

- The purpose is to support internal and external discussions on the evolving 2026 El Niño, with a focus on:
- expected regional rainfall and temperature patterns;
- possible implications for drought, floods, heat, agriculture, livestock, food security and markets;
- priority countries and regions for enhanced monitoring;
- implications for anticipatory action and preparedness planning.
- This briefing should be read as an early warning and preparedness synthesis, not as a deterministic impact forecast.

Seasonal forecasts indicate increased probabilities, not certainties.

Local impacts will depend on the timing and strength of El Niño, interaction with other climate drivers such as the Indian Ocean Dipole, sub-seasonal variability, national and local conditions, exposure, vulnerability and existing humanitarian stressors.

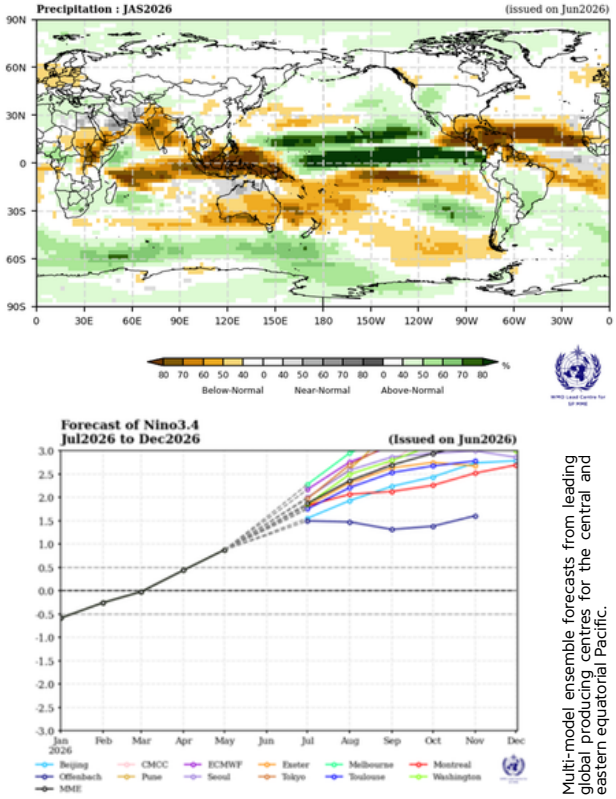
Key messages

El Niño conditions have now developed in the tropical Pacific and are forecast to strengthen rapidly over the coming months. According to the WMO press release of 3 July 2026, the WMO Global Seasonal Climate Update indicates **rapid development into a strong El Niño event during July–September 2026**, with seasonal-average sea-surface temperature anomalies expected to exceed 2°C in key monitoring regions. WMO also notes **strong model agreement and high confidence in the broad ENSO outlook.**

Current forecasts suggest that **El Niño may become strong or very strong later in 2026**. According to GEOGLAM Crop Monitor's special report of 16 June 2026, **El Niño conditions are present and likely to continue through March 2027**, with a **63% chance of a very strong event during November 2026–January 2027**.

Probabilitstic Multi-Model Ensemble Forecast

CMCC, CPTEC, ECMWF, Exeter, Melbourne, Montreal, Moscow, Offenbach, Seoul, Tokyo, Toulouse, Washington



Multi-model ensemble forecasts from leading global producing centres for the central and eastern equatorial Pacific.

The term **"Super El Niño" should be avoided in operational communication.** WMO classifies ENSO events as weak, moderate, strong or very strong, and explicitly states that "Super El Niño" is not part of its operational classification system. WMO also emphasizes that seasonal outlook maps show probability, not certainty.

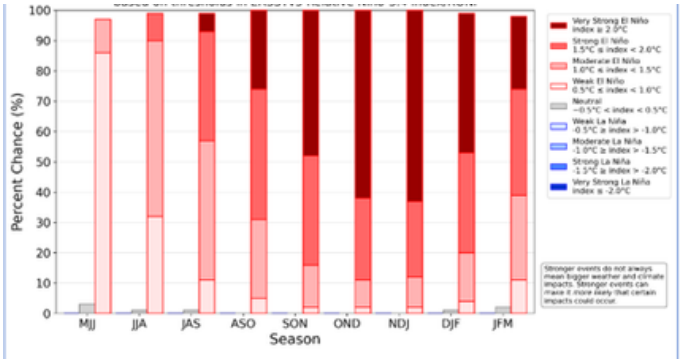
The main near-term **concern for July–September 2026 is drought, moisture stress and heat stress in several regions, especially parts of East Africa, the Sahel, Central America and the Caribbean, South Asia, the Maritime Continent and Australia**. WMO indicates widespread above-normal temperatures across most land areas, while GEOGLAM highlights Southern Africa, Central America, India and Australia as regions of **concern for negative crop yield impacts during the 2026/27 El Niño period.**

For **East Africa,** the clearest operational message is a **two-phase risk pattern**. According to ICPAC, **July–September is expected to bring a strong and expanding dry signal across the northern and equatorial parts of the region**, including South Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan and western Kenya.

This may be **followed by wetter-than-normal October–December rains** across Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, central to southern Somalia, western Tanzania and southeastern Ethiopia.

NOAA CPC ENSO Strength Probabilities (issued June 2026)

based on thresholds in ERSSTv5 Relative Niño - 3.4 index/ROMI



For **Anticipatory Action** actors, the priority is not to wait for certainty but to intensify monitoring, review contingency plans and identify where forecast signals overlap with high exposure, vulnerability and seasonal hazard calendars.

Current ENSO and IOD situation

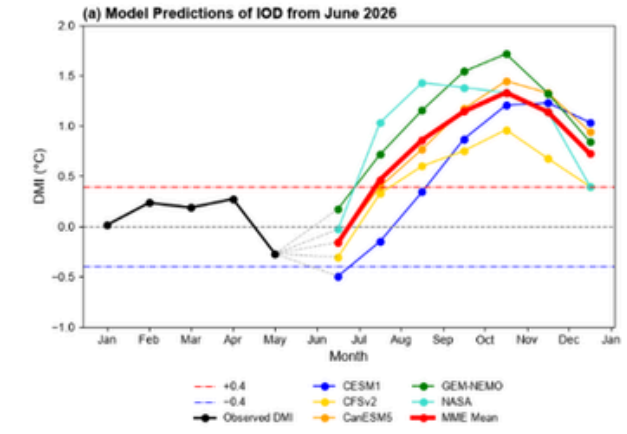
According to WMO, El Niño conditions have developed in the tropical Pacific and are forecast to strengthen rapidly over the coming months, increasing the likelihood of heatwaves, droughts, heavy rainfall and other extreme weather events in many parts of the world.

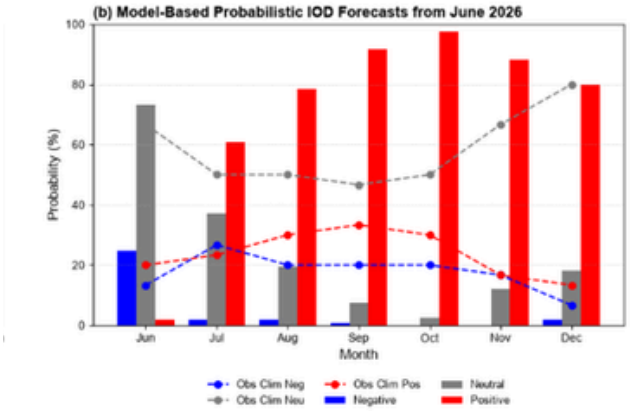
According to GEOGLAM Crop Monitor, El Niño conditions are likely to continue into 2027, with NOAA CPC indicating a 63% chance of a very strong event at its expected peak from November 2026 to January 2027. GEOGLAM also notes that stronger El Niño events tend to make crop yield outcomes more predictable, but not necessarily more severe.

The Indian Ocean Dipole remains an important uncertainty, especially for Eastern Africa. According to the CCSR/IRI IOD forecast published on 22 June 2026, the IOD was neutral in May 2026, but model guidance indicates a shift toward positive IOD conditions from July onward. The probabilistic forecast shows the likelihood of a positive IOD rising from around 61% in July to over 90% by September.

This matters because an El Niño combined with a positive IOD can strengthen wet-season rainfall signals in parts of Eastern Africa, particularly during the October–December season. However, the IOD forecast should continue to be monitored because the final strength, timing and interaction with ENSO remain important for regional impacts.

IOD Plume and Probabilities (June, 2026)





Forecast validity and how to interpret the outlooks

The outlooks used in this synthesis cover different time periods and should not be treated as equivalent.
The WMO press release of 3 July 2026 provides the most recent global ENSO framing and confirms that El Niño has developed and is forecast to intensify. The WMO and WCM seasonal products mainly describe July–September 2026 conditions. ICPAC's GHACOF-73 technical statement focuses on the June–September 2026 rainfall season for East Africa, while ICPAC's later "Dual climate risks" note extends the analysis to October–December 2026 using longer-lead forecasts. FEWS NET and GEOGLAM products combine current conditions, short-term hazards, seasonal outlooks and crop/food security context.

The highest confidence should therefore be placed on:

1. confirmed current ENSO status;
2. July–September 2026 seasonal outlooks;
3. observed rainfall, vegetation, soil moisture and temperature conditions;
4. country-level NMHS updates and shorter-lead forecasts.

Longer-lead outlooks for October–December 2026 and early 2027 are valuable for preparedness, but they should be updated continuously as newer forecasts become available.

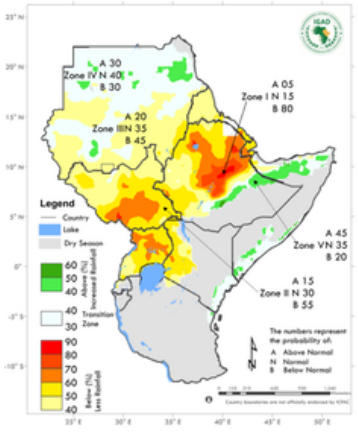
Regional outlook and implications

East Africa

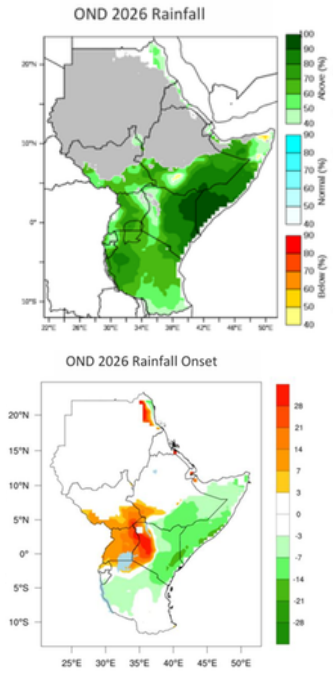
East Africa currently shows one of the strongest near-term risk signals.

July–September 2026: drought and heat concern

According to **GHACOF-73**, the **June–September 2026 rainfall outlook indicates increased likelihood of below-normal rainfall** across South Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, much of Eritrea, much of southern Sudan and western Kenya. The highest probabilities of below-normal rainfall are over central, northeastern and northwestern Ethiopia, southern Sudan and northern Uganda, with probabilities exceeding 60% and peaking around 80% in parts of Ethiopia and South Sudan.
According to **ICPAC's** later June update, the dry signal for July–September strengthens further, with widespread depressed rainfall expected across most of South Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan and western Kenya. **The strongest dry signal is in central to northern Ethiopia, where probabilities of suppressed rainfall reach 70–90%.**



Probability forecast of rainfall for various zones within the GHA region for June to September 2026. Grey shading indicated regions where JJAS is climatologically a dry season



OND 2026 rainfall (top) probabilistic forecasts and expected onset anomaly (buttom). Forecast were initialized with the June initial conditions providing long lead times.

This has implications for:

- rainfed crops and crop establishment;
- pasture regeneration;
- livestock body condition;
- water availability;
- public health risks linked to heat and water scarcity;
- hydropower and water resource management;
- food security in already vulnerable areas.

According to **FEWS NET**'s Global Weather Hazards Summary of 2 July 2026, **drought was already emerging in parts of Eastern Africa**, with poor rainfall and abnormal dryness affecting parts of Ethiopia, South Sudan, Uganda, western Kenya, eastern CAR and parts of DRC. FEWS NET also **reports continued inundation in the Sudd wetlands of South Sudan**, showing that **dry seasonal signals and localized/riverine flood exposure can exist at the same time.**

October–December 2026: potential shift to flood risk

According to ICPAC's long-lead OND outlook, the region may shift from a dry Jul–Sept phase to wetter-than-normal Oct–Dec rains across the equatorial and southern parts of East Africa. The strongest wet signals are indicated for Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, central to southern Somalia, western Tanzania and southeastern Ethiopia, with probabilities of enhanced rainfall around 70–90% or higher. Eastern Kenya, southern and western Somalia and localized pockets in eastern Ethiopia show the highest probabilities, in some areas above 90%. This means that Eastern Africa should be monitored in two distinct phases:

- July–September: drought, heat, dry spells, crop and pasture stress;
- October–December: possible flooding, flash floods, riverine floods, waterlogging, landslides and disease risks in areas where the wet signal materializes.

For anticipatory action, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda should already be considered for flood-readiness discussions for OND, while Ethiopia, South Sudan, Uganda and western Kenya require immediate drought and heat monitoring for JAS.

West Africa and the Sahel

The West Africa picture is mixed and should not be simplified as "El Niño equals drought everywhere."

According to **FEWS NET**'s West Africa Seasonal Monitor of 26 June 2026, the Intertropical Front continued its northward movement and was north of its climatological position. March–June rainfall was mostly average to above average in the bimodal areas of West Africa, and the rainy season was gradually expanding into the Sahel under generally favourable rainfall. However, FEWS NET also **stresses that rainfall distribution and temperatures require continued monitoring**.

At the same time, **FEWS NET** notes that **El Niño events are historically associated with elevated chances of below-normal June–September rainfall across the Sahel.**

WMO and **C3S** multimodel ensembles **indicate below-average rainfall from July through October in western and eastern Sahel, including northern Central African Republic**, while **average to above-average rainfall is expected across Gulf of Guinea countries, northern/central/southern Cameroon and western/southern CAR**.

FEWS NET also warns that **abnormally high temperatures could worsen moisture loss** in rainfall-deficit agropastoral areas.

Operationally, the Sahel should be monitored through:

- rainfall onset and dry-spell length;
- WRSI and soil moisture;
- SPI/SPEI;
- vegetation conditions;
- pasture and water availability;
- staple food prices;
- insecurity-related access constraints.

Priority monitoring areas include parts of Mali, Niger, Chad, northern Nigeria, Burkina Faso, northern CAR and localized areas where rainfall deficits have already appeared. Along the Gulf of Guinea coast, flooding also remains relevant, especially where heavy rains and high runoff are forecast.

Central Africa

Central Africa shows a mixed signal, and broad statements should be avoided.

According to **FEWS NET**'s DRC Monthly Climate and Weather bulletin, El Niño developed in May 2026 and is expected to strengthen into the Northern Hemisphere winter 2026/27. However, based on historical records, El Niño is associated with near-average rainfall and above-average temperatures in much of DRC during July–September.
This means that Central Africa should be treated as a sub-national monitoring priority, not as one uniform El Niño impact zone.

Rainfall, temperature and hazard signals need to be interpreted at provincial or livelihood-zone level, particularly where climate stress interacts with conflict, displacement, disease outbreaks, food insecurity and access constraints.

For DRC, CAR and Cameroon, the key operational message is to continue monitoring rainfall anomalies, river levels, localized flood risk, dry spells, vegetation conditions and food security indicators rather than relying on ENSO alone.

Southern Africa

Southern Africa is one of the most important regions to watch for the 2026/27 agricultural season, but the timing is important.

For July–September 2026, much of Southern Africa is outside the main rainfall season. Therefore, most drought-related anticipatory action triggers linked to seasonal rainfall performance are unlikely to activate immediately solely because of El Niño. However, this should not reduce preparedness.
According to GEOGLAM Crop Monitor, Southern Africa is one of the regions of greatest concern for negative crop yield impacts from the 2026/27 El Niño.

The report notes that the main maize season, with planting from October–December 2026 and harvest from April–June 2027, will coincide with the expected peak of the El Niño event. It also notes that during the strong 1997/98 and 2015/16 El Niño events, maize yields fell substantially below trend in parts of Southern Africa, including Zimbabwe.

For Zimbabwe, the latest country-specific FEWS NET bulletin is more cautious for the immediate period. According to FEWS NET's Zimbabwe Monthly Climate and Weather bulletin of 18 June 2026, NMME rainfall forecasts show no clear tercile signal for Zimbabwe during July 2026 or July–September 2026, while temperature forecasts favour above-average temperatures in many parts of the country.

Therefore, Zimbabwe should be framed as:

- not an immediate July–September rainfall-trigger priority based on current forecasts;
- a high-priority preparedness country from September/October onward as the 2026/27 rainy and agricultural season approaches.

For Malawi, Mozambique, Madagascar and other Southern African countries, close monitoring should begin ahead of the next rainfall season, especially for:

- rainfall onset;
- early-season dry spells;
- soil moisture;
- crop planting conditions;
- pasture and water availability;
- tropical cyclone outlooks and basin-specific updates.

For Mozambique, FEWS NET reports mixed May rainfall conditions, above-average temperatures, and no immediate July–September rainfall signal of major concern across the country, though localized crop failures were noted due to conflict and extreme climatic events.

Asia

Warmer-than-normal conditions and drier outlooks for India, Pakistan and Indonesia raise concerns for crops, irrigation and wildfire risk

According to the UK Met Office Asia Climate Outlook issued in June 2026, warmer-than-normal conditions are very likely across much of Asia during July–September.

For rainfall, the outlook indicates that large parts of India and Pakistan are likely to be drier than normal, with parts of western India much more likely to be drier than normal. Much of Indonesia is also very likely to be drier than normal, which the UK Met Office links to El Niño, increasing the likelihood of wildfires. In contrast, much of Myanmar and parts of southwest China are likely to be wetter than normal.

For South Asia, the main monitoring priorities are:

- monsoon progression;
- cumulative rainfall deficits;
- dry spells during key crop stages;
- irrigation water availability;
- heat stress;
- food price impacts.

For Indonesia and the Maritime Continent, the priorities are drought, wildfire risk, delayed wet-season planting and impacts on rice production.

For Afghanistan, FEWS NET indicates that El Niño is expected to be a key driver of the 2026/27 agricultural season. El Niño typically brings above-average October–April precipitation to Afghanistan, especially snowfall over higher elevations and rain/snow over lower elevations. However, FEWS NET also notes that above-average temperatures during July–September may adversely affect rangeland and pastoral vegetation.

Central America and the Caribbean

Central America and the Caribbean show one of the clearest current agriculture-related warning signals.

According to FEWS NET's Haiti Seasonal Monitor of 1 July 2026, rainfall remained well below average across much of Haiti for a second consecutive month, with June deficits exceeding 55% of average and localized deficits above 70% in the Southeast and West. FEWS NET also notes that above-average temperatures are accelerating evapotranspiration and increasing crop water stress.

According to FEWS NET's Haiti Monthly Climate and Weather bulletin of 18 June 2026, the July–September NMME forecast indicates continued below-normal rainfall over Haiti, with probabilities above 70% in parts of Grande-Anse, Sud, Nippes, western Sud-Est and southwestern Ouest. The same bulletin indicates high probabilities of above-normal temperatures in northern, western and southern Haiti.

For Central America, GEOGLAM Crop Monitor reports concern for the Primera season due to erratic rains and high temperatures affecting planting and irrigation capacity.

Priority areas include:

- Haiti;
- Guatemala;
- Honduras;
- Nicaragua;
- El Salvador;
- the Dry Corridor;
- areas with limited irrigation and high dependence on maize and beans.

The key risks are delayed or poor planting, moisture stress, reduced yields, deterioration in vegetation conditions, extended lean season pressures and market impacts.

Sectoral implications

Crops

The main crop risk pathways are delayed onset, erratic rainfall, prolonged dry spells, reduced soil moisture, heat stress, waterlogging/flooding in wetter areas and yield losses where anomalies overlap with sensitive crop stages.

According to GEOGLAM Crop Monitor, past El Niño events tend to reduce global rice yields by around 1.0–1.5% below trend, while soybean yields tend to increase by around 1.5–2.0% above trend. However, the more important message is regional:

Southern Africa, Central America, India and Australia are likely to see the most negative crop yield impacts, while Central Asia, bimodal East Africa, southern South America and the United States are more likely to see positive crop yield impacts based on historical yield data.

Smallholder farmers without irrigation are particularly vulnerable where El Niño-related drying combines with above-normal temperatures and weak market access.

Livestock and pastoral systems

The key risk pathways for livestock are reduced pasture regeneration, water scarcity, longer trekking distances, heat stress, reduced livestock body condition and possible disease risks where flooding follows dry periods.

Pastoral and agro-pastoral systems in Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Kenya, the Sahel and parts of Afghanistan require close monitoring through:

- pasture conditions;
- water point availability;
- livestock body condition;
- livestock prices;
- migration patterns;
- animal disease alerts;
- conflict and access constraints.

Food security and markets

Climate shocks are likely to interact with existing drivers of food insecurity, including conflict, displacement, market disruption, high food prices, reduced humanitarian funding and limited access.

According to FEWS NET's Global Weather Hazards Summary of 2 July 2026, drought was emerging in parts of Eastern Africa, Central America and northern South America, while flooding persisted in parts of West Africa, Central America and Central Asia.

In practical terms, climate monitoring should be combined with:

- IPC/CH analysis;
- market price monitoring;
- staple food availability;
- livestock-to-cereal terms of trade;
- displacement and access constraints;
- nutrition indicators;
- humanitarian funding and response capacity.

Floods, landslides and public health

Flood risk remains relevant even during El Niño years. This is particularly important for:

- OND rainfall in Eastern Africa;
- riverine flood areas in South Sudan;
- Gulf of Guinea coastal areas;
- flood-prone parts of Central America;
- monsoon and heavy rainfall zones in Asia.

In Eastern Africa, the possible OND shift toward wetter-than-normal conditions could increase the risk of floods, flash floods, landslides, waterlogging, displacement, waterborne diseases and damage to infrastructure. This is especially relevant for Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, western Tanzania and southeastern Ethiopia if the wet signal materializes.

Tropical cyclones

ENSO alone is not sufficient to predict tropical cyclone impacts. WMO and WCM products should be complemented by basin-specific outlooks, Regional Specialized Meteorological Centres, Tropical Cyclone Warning Centres and national meteorological services.

For the Atlantic/Caribbean, WCM notes below-normal Atlantic hurricane activity in its seasonal outlook context, but this does not mean there is no storm risk. For the South-West Indian Ocean, North Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal, cyclone monitoring should continue through official regional and national products.

Priority country and regional watchlist

This watchlist **does <u>not mean</u> that these countries will trigger**. It identifies where forecast signals, seasonal timing, current conditions and vulnerability justify enhanced monitoring and preparedness.

Timeframe	Priority countries / regions	Main concern	Operational interpretation
Now–September 2026	Ethiopia	Drought, heat, crop stress	Strongest JAS dry signal in the East Africa, especially central and northern Ethiopia.
Now–September 2026	South Sudan	Drought/heat plus ongoing flood exposure	JAS dry and hot signal, but continued Sudd/Nile flooding means dual monitoring is needed.
Now–September 2026	Uganda and western Kenya	Drought, crop and pasture stress	Below-normal JAS rainfall signal; monitor crop, pasture and water indicators closely.
Now–September 2026	Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso	Dry spells, heat, rainfall distribution, food security	Sahel signal is mixed, but high temperatures and localized deficits require monitoring.
Now–September 2026	Haiti, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador	Crop moisture stress, delayed planting, food security	Strong evidence of rainfall deficits, heat and crop stress risk.
Now–September 2026	India, Pakistan, Indonesia	Monsoon dryness, heat, wildfire, crop stress	UK Met Office indicates drier-than-normal conditions in large parts of India/Pakistan and much of Indonesia.
September–December 2026	Somalia, Kenya, Uganda	Floods, flash floods, waterlogging	ICPAC long-lead OND outlook indicates strong wet signal, especially Somalia and eastern Kenya.
September–December 2026	Rwanda, Burundi, western Tanzania, southeastern Ethiopia	Floods, landslides, crop impacts	OND above-normal rainfall signal; update with GHACOF-74 and national forecasts.
October 2026–early 2027	Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Madagascar	Drought risk, rainfall onset, crop stress; cyclone monitoring where relevant	Main agricultural season overlaps with expected El Niño peak; preparedness should begin before the rainy season.
October 2026–April 2027	Afghanistan	Winter precipitation, snow/rain, rangeland recovery	El Niño historically favours above-average Oct–Apr precipitation, but near-term heat can stress pasture.

Operational recommendations for Anticipatory Action

1. Strengthen monitoring immediately. Track seasonal and sub-seasonal forecasts, rainfall onset, dry spells, river levels, soil moisture, vegetation condition, crop stages, pasture, water points, market prices and food security indicators.
2. Use seasonal forecasts for readiness, not automatic activation. Activation decisions should still be based on country-specific triggers, observed conditions, shorter-lead forecasts and agreed decision-making protocols.
3. Separate the East Africa risk phases. For July–September, focus on drought and heat stress in Ethiopia, South Sudan, Uganda and western Kenya. For October–December, prepare for possible flood readiness in Somalia, Kenya, Uganda and neighbouring areas.
4. Start Southern Africa preparedness before the rainy season. Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries should be high on the watchlist from September/October onward, but the latest July–September Zimbabwe forecast does not justify saying drought is already forecast for the main season.
5. For Central America and Haiti, treat the risk as already operational. Rainfall deficits and high temperatures are already affecting crop conditions and could worsen planting, production and food security outcomes.
6. Coordinate closely with NMHSs and regional climate centres. For official activation decisions, prioritize national meteorological and hydrological services, ICPAC, ACMAD, AGRHYMET, SADC/SARCOF, WMO/WCM, FEWS NET and other operationally recognized products.
7. Avoid deterministic communication. Do not communicate that El Niño will cause drought or floods in a specific country unless supported by the latest regional/national forecasts and observed conditions.
8. Avoid the phrase “Super El Niño” in formal products. Use “strong El Niño” or “possible very strong El Niño” where supported by the forecast.

Suggested communication wording

Current evidence indicates that El Niño conditions have developed and are forecast to strengthen rapidly during 2026, with a strong to very strong event possible later in the year. This increases the likelihood of climate extremes in several regions, including drought, heat stress, heavy rainfall and flooding, but it does not provide certainty about impacts in any specific location.

For anticipatory action actors, the priority is enhanced monitoring and readiness. This includes tracking seasonal and sub-seasonal forecasts, rainfall onset, dry spells, soil moisture, river levels, crop and pasture conditions, market indicators and food security trends, while reviewing relevant contingency and anticipatory action plans where forecast signals overlap with high exposure and vulnerability.

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Disclaimer: This synthesis is based on recent outlooks and early warning products from:

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