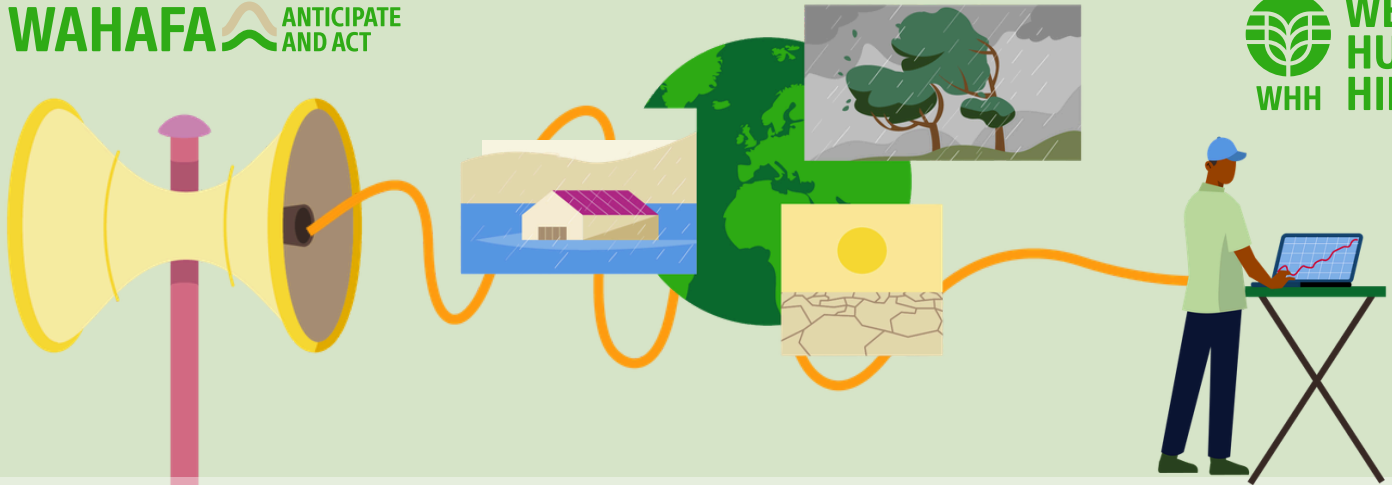




## Briefing Note

# Strengthening 2026 El Niño: Potential Implications for Regional Climate Risks, Agriculture, Food Security, Humanitarian Preparedness, DRR and Anticipatory Action

## Purpose and scope

Published: 17 September 2026  
Analysis based on information available as of late August-early September 2026

This briefing synthesizes recent climate outlooks and early-warning information from WMO and the WMO Coordination Mechanism for humanitarians, NOAA/NMME, ICPAC/GHACOF, national meteorological services, GEOGLAM Crop Monitor, FEWS NET, FSNWG and related humanitarian early-warning sources.

It supports humanitarian, disaster risk reduction, preparedness and anticipatory action discussions on the evolving 2026 El Niño, with a focus on:

- regional rainfall and temperature outlooks and current hazard conditions;
- possible implications for agriculture, livestock, food security and displacement;
- priority countries and regions for enhanced monitoring; and
- operational preparedness and anticipatory action considerations.

## Key messages

**El Niño is firmly established and highly likely to become very strong.** The August official NOAA CPC ENSO probabilistic strength reports about a 90% chance of a very strong event during September 2026-January 2027, with El Niño conditions forecast to persist through May 2027.

**A positive IOD remains likely** but had not yet developed by late August. Its eventual strength remains uncertain; this is particularly important for East Africa and the Maritime Continent.

**East Africa remains the highest-priority changing-risk region.** June-September drought and agricultural stress persist in parts of the western and northern region, while the GHACOF-74 consolidated OND outlook favours above-

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 outcomes will depend on the timing and strength of El Niño, interaction with other climate drivers such as the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), sub-seasonal rainfall variability, local hydrological and agricultural conditions, exposure, vulnerability and existing humanitarian stressors.

normal rainfall across most rain-receiving parts of the Greater Horn. The **strongest wet signal (>90% probability)** is over southern Ethiopia, central to southern Somalia and northeastern Kenya.

**Central America and the Caribbean** remain a major drought and heat concern. Much of the western corridor of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua received only around 30-60% of average rainfall between 1 April and 20 August, and September-November forecasts continue to favour below-normal rainfall.

**Southern Africa is entering a critical preparedness window.** Current multimodel guidance gives roughly 50-60% probabilities of below-normal rainfall during October

2026-January 2027 across important central and southeastern areas, with risks from delayed onset, dry spells and heat.

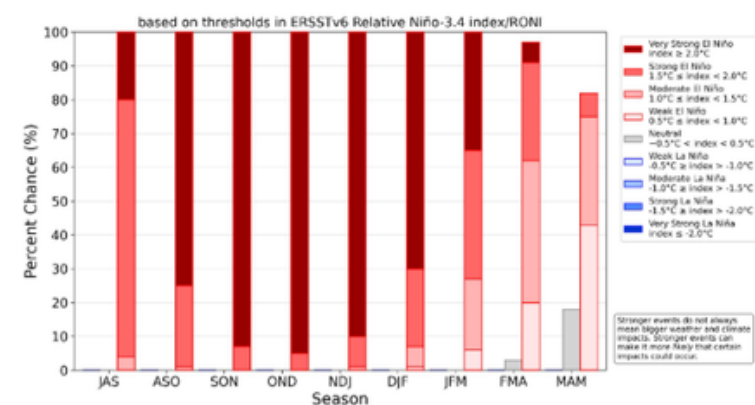
**South and Southeast Asia** generally retain a dry and hot seasonal signal, while West Africa remains spatially mixed

## Current ENSO and IOD situation

### El Niño

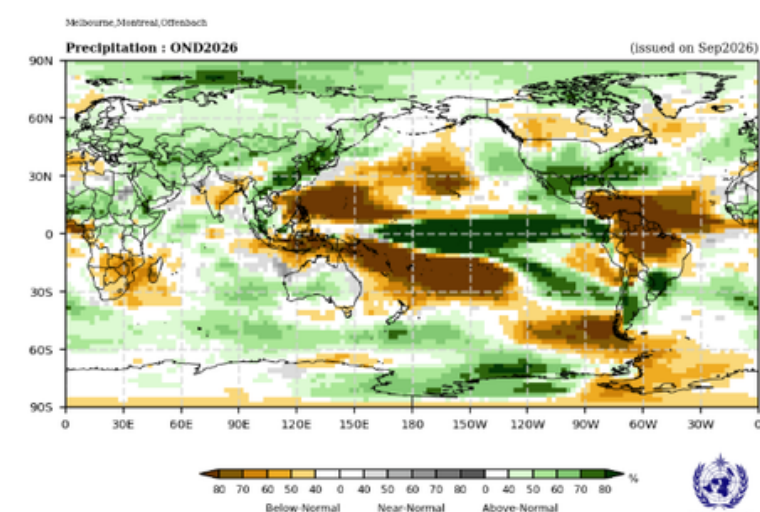
El Niño is well developed and continuing to strengthen. According to NOAA CPC ENSO Strength Probabilities (issued August 2026), there is about a **90% probability of a very strong event** during September 2026-January 2027, ranking it among the strongest events since 1950. El Niño conditions are forecast to **persist through May 2027** with an 82% probability. WMO similarly expects the event to intensify through September-November and peak toward the end of 2026.

### NOAA CPC ENSO Strength Probabilities (issued August 2026)



## Regional outlook and implications

### Probabilistic Multi-Model Ensemble Forecast

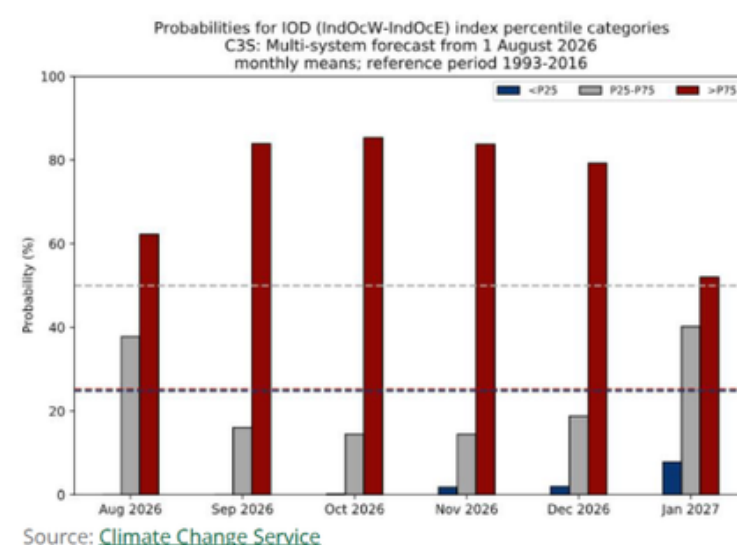


and parts of Central Asia favour wetter-than-normal conditions.

**Above-normal temperatures remain a cross-cutting concern** across much of Africa, Asia, Central America and northern South America.

### Indian Ocean Dipole

The IOD is increasingly relevant to the regional outlook. A positive phase is expected to develop during September-November, but it had not yet crossed the positive-IOD threshold in late August. GHACOF-74 notes that **IOD forecast skill has historically been low** and current models still span a wide range of possible outcomes. The timing and strength of the IOD therefore remain an **important monitoring uncertainty**.



### East Africa

#### September 2026: drought and agricultural stress remain important

Rainfall deficits remain significant across parts of Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Karamoja and western/northwestern Kenya. FSNWG reports widespread areas receiving less than 60% of normal June-August rainfall, with some locations among the driest on record. The deficits continue to affect soil moisture, crops, pasture and water availability.

#### October-December: strong wet signal and elevated flood risk

The regional risk profile changes substantially with the short rains. GHACOF-74, based on August-initialised forecasts from seven global producing centres, indicates an elevated likelihood of above-normal OND rainfall across most rain-receiving parts of the Greater Horn. The **strongest signal (>90%)** is forecast over southern Ethiopia, central to southern Somalia and northeastern Kenya; only isolated cross-border areas of southeastern Sudan and northeastern South Sudan favour depressed rainfall.

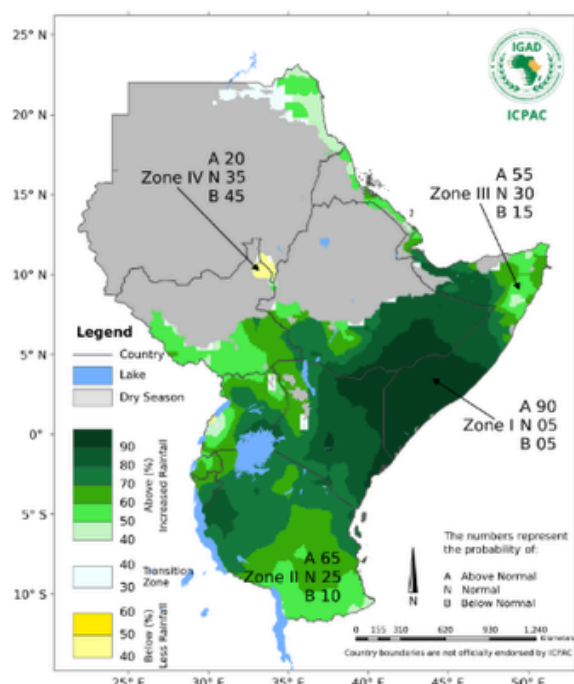
Potential benefits for pasture and water resources are accompanied by **increased risks of riverine and flash flooding**, landslides, waterlogging, infrastructure damage and waterborne disease.

Kenya's official NCOF13 outlook similarly favours above-average OND rainfall across almost the entire country. In Somalia, flood preparedness should focus particularly on the Jubba and Shabelle corridors, where riverine flooding depends heavily on cumulative upstream rainfall and river conditions. Some drought-affected communities may therefore face a rapid drought-to-flood transition.

GHACOF-74 further indicates a **>90% probability of OND rainfall exceeding 400 mm** in parts of central to southern Somalia, central Kenya, the Lake Victoria Basin, Burundi, western Rwanda and western Tanzania. **Early-to-normal onset** is favoured over much of the eastern region, including Somalia, central to eastern Kenya and most of Tanzania, while delayed onset is more likely in western areas. **Warmer-than-average OND temperatures** are also favoured across most of the Greater Horn, with the strongest warm signal on the eastern side.

A **high-impact flood season remains a credible scenario requiring preparedness**, but the magnitude, timing and spatial concentration of rainfall and flooding **remain uncertain**.

**Probability forecast of rainfall for various zones within the GHA region for October to December 2026. GHACOF-74 Technical Statement**



**Zone I:** In this zone (dark green), the probability for the above normal category is the highest (90%). Probabilities for the normal and below normal categories are 5% and 5%, respectively.  
**Zone II:** In this zone (green), the above normal rainfall (wetter) category also has the highest probability. For the most widespread green shade, the probability for above normal category is 65%; the probabilities for the normal and below normal categories are 25% and 10%, respectively.  
**Zone III:** In this zone (light green), the above normal rainfall (wetter) category has the highest probability (55%). The probabilities for the normal and below normal categories are 30% and 15%, respectively.  
**Zone IV:** In this zone (yellow), the below normal rainfall (drier) category has the highest probability (45%). The probabilities of the near normal and above normal categories are 35% and 20%, respectively.

## West Africa and the Sahel

West Africa remains mixed rather than uniformly dry. Crop conditions are generally favourable, but localised rainfall

deficits, poor vegetation and reduced crop-water availability persist in parts of Mali, Niger, Nigeria and especially Chad. WMO also favours below-normal September-November rainfall across parts of coastal West Africa. The key concern is rainfall distribution and dry-spell duration rather than a single regional drought narrative.

Conflict, restricted access and high input costs remain major non-climatic pressures, particularly across Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon and CAR.

## Central Africa

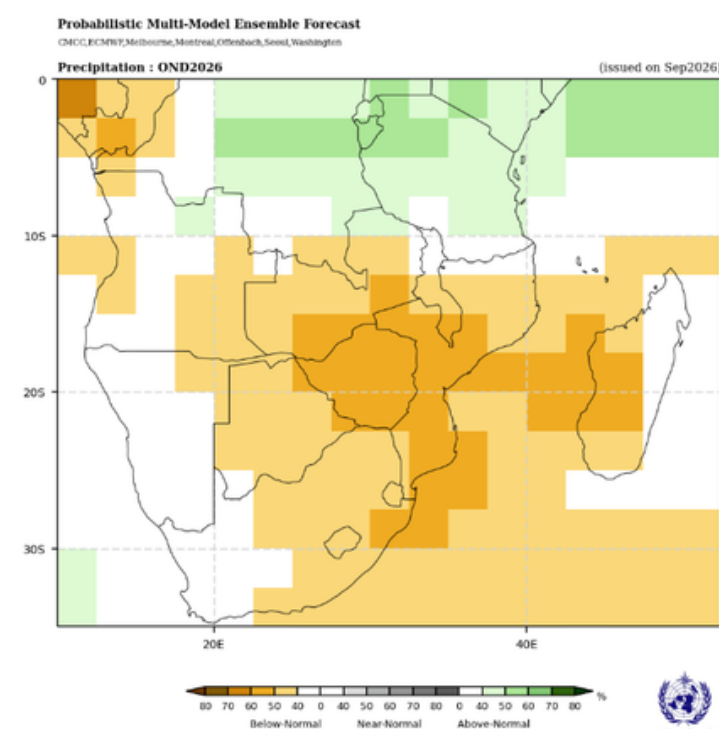
Central Africa does not show one coherent El Niño impact pattern. Localised heavy rainfall and flood risk coexist with dry spells in other areas, while conflict and displacement remain dominant constraints in several locations. The region should therefore be monitored at sub-national and hazard-specific scales rather than assigned a single drought or flood narrative.

## Southern Africa

Southern Africa is entering the 2026/27 agricultural season with an elevated dry-season risk. Current multimodel guidance indicates roughly **50-60% probabilities of below-normal rainfall** during October 2026-January 2027 across important central and southeastern areas. The main concerns are **delayed or erratic onset**, early dry spells, high temperatures, reduced soil-moisture recharge and impacts on planting, labour, pasture and water availability.

Zimbabwe, southern/central Mozambique, southern Zambia, southern Malawi, Lesotho, parts of South Africa, southern Angola and southern Madagascar warrant close monitoring. Food-security impacts will depend strongly on existing livelihood deficits, prices, purchasing power and access to assistance, not climate alone.

**WMO September rainfall probability forecast for October 2026-January 2027, Rainfall tercile probability forecast by WMO multimodel ensemble, based on September initial conditions**



## Asia

### South Asia

WMO favours below-normal September-November rainfall across most of South Asia together with widespread above-normal temperatures. India carries a clear dry signal. Pakistan is more spatially mixed: FEWS NET identifies the greatest kharif production and livelihood concerns in Sindh, Balochistan, southern Punjab and parts of southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The main agricultural risk is the combined effect of rainfall deficits, dry spells and high evapotranspiration rather than seasonal totals alone.

### Southeast Asia and the Maritime Continent

The dry signal remains strong across much of the Maritime Continent and parts of Southeast Asia, with risks to rice and maize production, irrigation resources and wildfire conditions. Short-duration heavy rainfall and flooding can nevertheless still occur within an overall dry season.

### Central Asia

The signal differs from South and Southeast Asia. Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are generally expected to be wetter than normal, while temperatures remain above normal across much of the region. Monitoring should focus on winter precipitation, water resources, rangelands and winter-wheat establishment.

### Central America and the Caribbean

Central America remains one of the clearest current drought and heat areas. Much of the western corridor of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua received only around 30-60% of average rainfall from 1 April to 20 August, with many locations among the driest comparable periods since 1981. Heat has accelerated soil-moisture loss during the Primera harvest and Segunda/Postera planting period.

NMME gives a **60-80% probability of below-normal October to December rainfall** across most of Central America and the Caribbean, indicating limited prospect for sustained relief. Localised flooding remains possible during individual heavy-rainfall episodes despite the broader dry signal.

## Sectoral implications

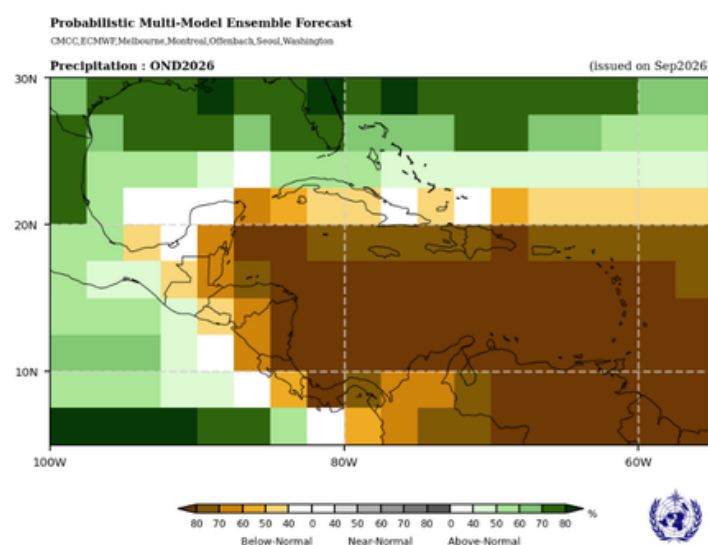
### Crops and agriculture

The main crop-risk pathways are delayed or failed planting, dry spells during sensitive growth stages, high evapotranspiration, reduced irrigation-water availability, and in wetter East African areas waterlogging, erosion and

### Livestock and pastoral systems

Dry and hot conditions can reduce pasture and water availability and weaken livestock body condition. Where heavy rainfall follows drought, mobility constraints, animal

WMO September rainfall probability forecast for Central America and Caribbean region for October 2026-January 2027. Rainfall tercile probability forecast by WMO multimodel ensemble, based on September initial conditions.



### Middle East

The Middle East remains mixed and seasonally changing. WMO favours wetter-than-normal September-November conditions across parts of the region, alongside widespread above-normal temperatures. Country-level interpretation remains essential because much of the northern Middle East is transitioning from its climatological dry season. Yemen remains a particular monitoring concern for heat, rainfall performance, pasture and water availability. Across the Levant, humanitarian impacts remain driven primarily by conflict, displacement and economic stress; climate anomalies may compound these vulnerabilities but should not be presented as the principal driver.

### Northern South America

WMO favours below-normal September-November rainfall across much of northern South America, with widespread above-normal temperatures. The main concerns are increased evapotranspiration, water stress and agricultural impacts where rainfall deficits materialise.

## Food security and markets

Climate anomalies will interact with conflict, displacement, food and fuel prices, purchasing power, agricultural labour, humanitarian funding and market access. FEWS NET currently places the greatest El Niño-related acute-food-

insecurity concern in East and Southern Africa, while country-specific vulnerabilities remain important elsewhere.

## Floods, public health and water resources

Flood impacts depend on rainfall intensity and location, antecedent soil moisture, upstream catchment conditions, river levels, drainage and exposure. The strongest emerging seasonal flood concern is East Africa during October-December. Where flooding occurs, secondary risks include displacement, infrastructure damage, water

contamination and waterborne disease. ENSO alone is insufficient for predicting tropical cyclone impacts; basin-specific and national warning systems should remain the operational reference.

## Priority country and regional watchlist



The watchlist identifies areas where current conditions, seasonal timing and forecast signals justify enhanced monitoring and preparedness. It does not imply that impacts or anticipatory action triggers are certain.

| Timeframe          | Priority countries / regions                                              | Main issue to monitor                              | Operational focus                                                       |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Now–September 2026 | Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, western Kenya            | Drought, heat, crop/pasture and water stress       | Continue drought and agricultural monitoring.                           |
| October-December   | Somalia - Jubba/Shabelle corridors                                        | Riverine/flash flooding, displacement, disease     | Monitor upstream rainfall and river gauges; strengthen flood readiness. |
| October-December   | Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, southern/eastern Ethiopia                        | Enhanced rainfall, floods and landslides           | Use GHACOF/national forecasts to update preparedness before onset.      |
| Now-November       | Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Haiti                        | Drought, heat, crop and water stress               | Track rainfall, soil moisture, basic grains and water availability.     |
| October-January    | Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho, southern Angola/Madagascar | Delayed onset, dry spells, heat                    | Monitor onset, planting, soil moisture and labour demand.               |
| September-November | India and Nepal                                                           | Below-normal rainfall, heat and crop stress        | Monitor monsoon evolution, irrigation and crop stages.                  |
| September-November | Pakistan                                                                  | Spatially mixed rainfall; heat and moisture stress | Prioritise rainfed and water-stressed agricultural zones.               |
| September-November | Southeast Asia / Maritime Continent                                       | Dryness, crop stress and wildfire                  | Track rainfall, reservoirs, crop stages and fire indicators.            |
| Now-October        | Mali, Niger, Chad and parts of Nigeria                                    | Localised rainfall and vegetation deficits         | Focus on dry-spell duration, vegetation and pastoral conditions.        |

| Timeframe         | Priority countries / regions | Main issue to monitor               | Operational focus                                             |
|-------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| September-January | Northern South America       | Seasonal rainfall deficits and heat | Monitor water stress and agricultural impacts sub-nationally. |

## Operational recommendations for humanitarian preparedness, DRR and Anticipatory Action

- 1 Maintain a dual preparedness track in East Africa: continue drought monitoring while accelerating flood preparedness ahead of the short rains.
- 2 Move Somalia progressively from seasonal readiness to localized flood monitoring using upstream rainfall, river levels and FAO-SWALIM information.
- 3 Use Kenya's official OND outlook and subsequent national updates to review flood-prone settlements, river basins, drainage, evacuation arrangements and landslide hotspots.
- 4 Move Southern Africa from monitoring toward seasonal preparedness before planting, with close attention to onset, early dry spells and heat.
- 5 Treat Central America as a current impact situation as well as a seasonal risk, linking climate monitoring with water, crop and livelihood indicators.
- 6 Do not use ENSO as a stand-alone trigger. Combine seasonal outlooks with observed conditions, national and sub-seasonal forecasts, vulnerability and hazard-specific thresholds.
- 7 Maintain sub-national interpretation. National or regional averages can conceal large differences in rainfall, flood exposure, crop calendars and vulnerability.
- 8 Maintain sub-national, multi-sector monitoring and communicate probabilities and uncertainty clearly.

## Suggested communication wording

Current evidence indicates that the 2026 El Niño is firmly established and highly likely to become a very strong event during the final months of 2026, with effects on global rainfall and temperature patterns continuing into early 2027. Current concerns include rainfall deficits and heat in parts of East Africa and Central America, a dry and hot outlook across much of South and Southeast Asia, and increasing drought risk ahead of the Southern African 2026/27 agricultural season.

At the same time, October-December forecasts strongly favour above-normal rainfall across much of equatorial East Africa, increasing flood and landslide risk while also offering opportunities for pasture and water-resource recovery. A positive IOD remains likely but had not yet developed by late August. These outlooks indicate increased risk rather than certainty, and local impacts will depend on rainfall distribution, other climate drivers, hydrological conditions, exposure and vulnerability.

## References

1. WMO Coordination Mechanism for humanitarians, Global Seasonal Climate Outlook Briefing to UN and Humanitarian Agencies, 26 August 2026.
2. WMO Coordination Mechanism, Global Seasonal Climate Outlook one-page summary for September-November 2026, 26 August 2026.
3. ICPAC, Technical Statement from the 74th Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF74), OND 2026 Seasonal Climate Outlook, 17-18 August 2026.
4. GEOGLAM Crop Monitor for Early Warning No. 119, September 2026.
5. FSNWG, Strengthening El Niño Conditions: Implications for Rainfall, Flood Risk and Food Security in Eastern Africa, 19 August 2026.
6. Kenya Meteorological Service Authority, Technical Statement from NCOF13, 26 August 2026.
7. Somalia El Niño Climate Impact Outlook and related Somalia rainfall/flood-risk material.
8. FEWS NET 2026-27 El Niño Monthly Briefing, 25 August 2026, and August 2026 Food Assistance Outlook Brief.
9. FEWS NET Zimbabwe Food Security Outlook Update, August 2026-January 2027.
10. Africa Climate Outlook - August 2026; Asia Climate Outlook - August 2026; and related WMO/NMME seasonal products.
11. Humanitarian Early Warning Note - August 2026, used for contextual humanitarian risk information.

## Muhammad Fawwad

Expert Scientific Forecasting, Risk and Hazard Modelling

Welthungerhilfe Anticipatory Humanitarian Action Facility (WAHAFA)

wahafa@welthungerhilfe.de



[www.linkedin.com/showcase/anticipatory-action-whh](https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/anticipatory-action-whh)