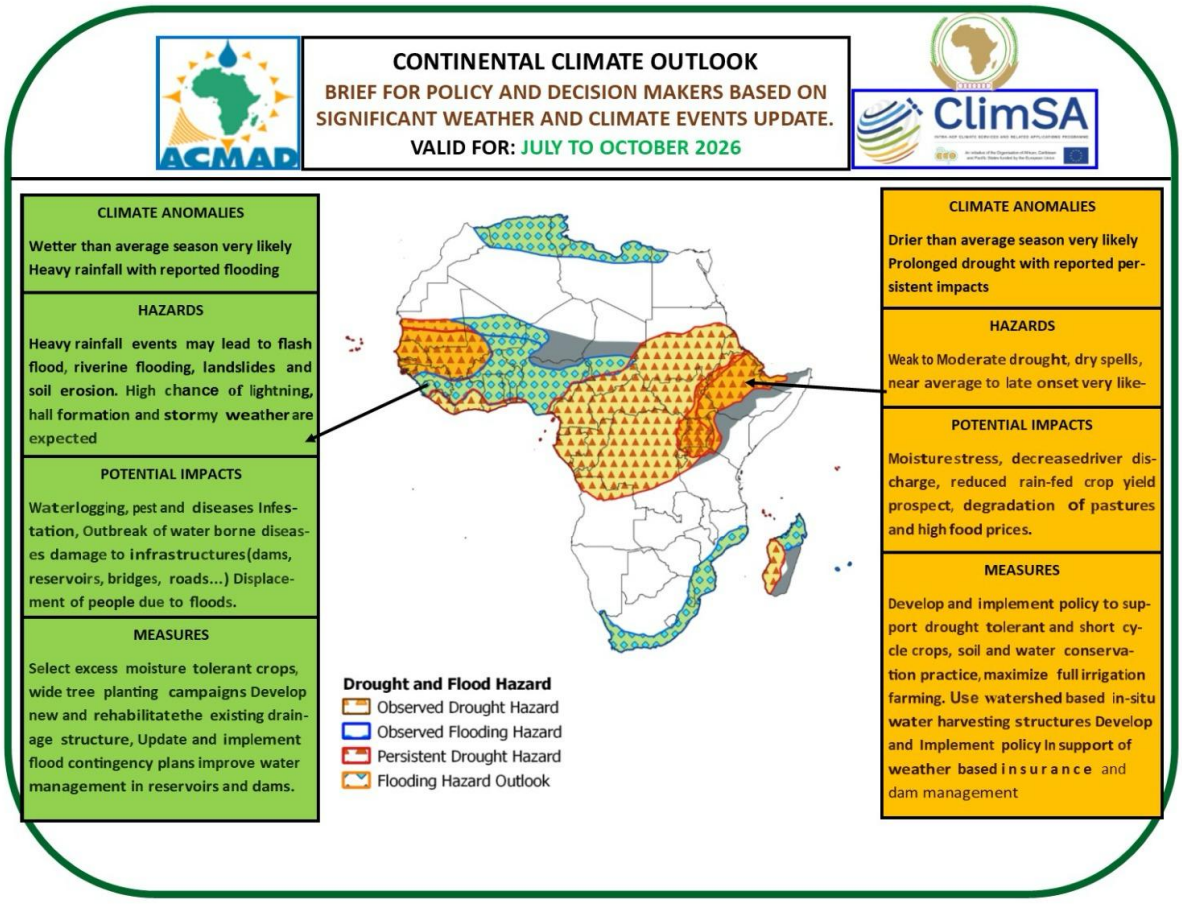
Policy Brief

Africa must take Organized, Coordinated Actions against Climate Hazards due to the 2026 El Niño

Executive Summary

The 21st African Continental Climate Outlook Forum (ACCOF21) brought together about 70 experts from climate institutions and the user communities from all the regional economic communities of Africa from 15-19 June 2026 in Lusaka, Zambia. The forum co-produced the climate forecast for July to October 2026 for the entire continent of Africa. This policy brief is a summary of the climate forecast. The document intends to serve as a decision support tool for policy and decision-makers to take early anticipatory actions. The graphic below summarizes the expected climate scenario, possible hazards, potential impacts on multiple sectors, and required possible anticipatory actions.



Key Findings

- The **strong 2026 El Niño** is amplifying climate variability, driving severe droughts in the Sahel and floods in coastal and equatorial regions.
- Multi-hazard risks are intensifying, demanding integrated early-warning and humanitarian coordination.
- Co-production of climate services is improving preparedness, but uptake remains uneven.
- Urgent, sector-specific investments and anticipatory actions are required to safeguard lives and livelihoods.

Scope of El Niño

El Niño in 2026 is one of the strongest in last decades, and it will have a significant impact on rainfall and temperature patterns throughout Africa. Its impact is increasing the risk of flooding in coastal, Horn of Africa, and equatorial areas and causing prolonged droughts in the Sahel for the targeted seasons.

Food security, public health systems, energy supply, and urban resilience are all at stake. Crops fail under erratic rainfall, hydropower inflows decline, and disease outbreaks intensify in vulnerable communities. Urban centers face flood risks that negatively affect infrastructure and displace populations. Both internal and cross-border migration may occur. This results in additional pressure on affected countries and humanitarian systems.

Without proactive measures, the cost of inaction exceeds **5 % of the annualy regional GDP**. This diminishes development efforts, worsens humanitarian crises, and undermines resilience.

Hence, the probable negative effects of El Niño 2026 require immediate, coordinated, and sector-specific action across the African continent.

Policy Recommendations

The 21st Africa Continental Climate Outlook Forum recommend the following measures for anticipatory actions to multiple sectors: Agriculture and food security, Health, Water and Energy, Disaster risk reduction, and Humanitarian Response.

Agriculture & Food Security

- **Part of Sahel and western africa (near-normal July–September, drier August–October):** Governments should prepare contingency seed distribution and expand irrigation schemes to offset late-season rainfall deficits.
- **Horn of Africa (drier July–September, wetter August–October):** Strengthen locust surveillance and pre-position food reserves, as wetter conditions later in the season may trigger outbreaks.
- **Coastal southern Africa (wetter anomalies across both quarters):** Promote smart agriculture, flood-resilient cropping systems and safeguard storage facilities against water damage.
- For the rest of the **Southern Africa Region,** late onset to be followed by reduced rainfall could result in crop failure. Farmers should go for drought-resistant crop varieties.

Health Systems

- **West Africa (persistent dryness in August–October):** Improve disease surveillance, scale up heat-health advisories and early warnings, as hot and dry conditions heighten risks.
- **Horn of Africa and Indian Ocean Region countries (above-normal rainfall August–October):** Expand cholera and malaria surveillance, and integrate climate thresholds into health early-warning systems.
- **Southern Africa and Central Africa (August- October):** Strengthen community-level health advisories, enhance disease surveillance, and pre-deploy medical and WASH supplies to flood-prone districts.

Energy & Infrastructure

- **Part of Sahel and West Africa (dry anomalies):** Diversify energy supply by investing in solar and wind to compensate for reduced hydropower inflows.
- **Southern Africa (wet anomalies):** Reinforce hydropower dams and transmission lines against flood damage, and improve drainage around energy infrastructure and enhance coordination among shared river basin organisations to support transboundary preparedness actions
- **Urban centers (Gulf of Guinea, Horn of Africa):** Upgrade flood defenses and drainage systems to protect transport corridors and housing.

Disaster Risk Reduction & Humanitarian Response

- **Coastal West Africa (dry anomalies August–October):** Integrate water-scarcity planning into urban management, including rationing and groundwater recharge.
- **Southern Africa & Horn of Africa (wet anomalies):** Establish city-level flood early-warning hubs and embed climate services into urban planning codes.
- **Humanitarian systems:** Pre-position critical relief supplies and strengthen humanitarian logistics and coordination mechanisms, in both drought-prone Sahelian zones and flood-prone southern/Horn regions to ensure rapid response.

Water resources management:

- **Flood-prone regions (North, West, Eastern, and Southern Africa**): Activate flood early action protocols, maintain drainage systems, and facilitate the relocation of at-risk populations from high-risk areas.
- **West Africa, Eastern Africa, and Southern Africa (below-normal rainfall areas):** Manage water reserves carefully, implement water conservation measures, and strengthen drought preparedness planning.
- **Transboundary river basins across Africa**: Strengthen cross-border water governance and joint management frameworks to reduce water-related conflicts and improve drought and flood preparedness.
- **Urban centers and water-stressed regions**: Invest in integrated water resource management, groundwater recharge, borehole rehabilitation, rainwater harvesting, and resilient water supply infrastructure.

Seasonal Outlooks – 2026 El Niño Context

The seasonal outlook for **July to September 2026** and **August to October 2026** provides evidence of how the strong El Niño 2026 is affecting the rainfall distribution (see Figure 1 and 2 respectively) and temperature (see Figures 3 and 6 respectively) across Africa. The highlighted regions expected to experience below-normal, near-normal, or above-normal rainfall. This shows how risks evolve across the highlighted locations.

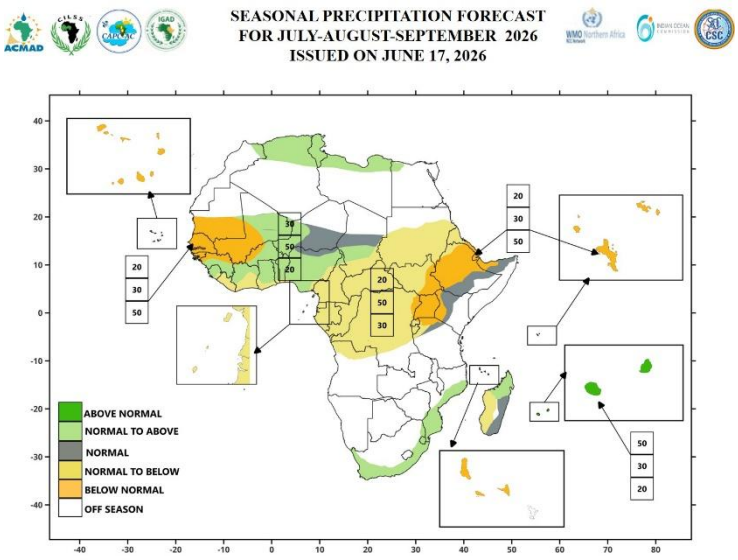


Figure 1. *Probability forecast for precipitation in Africa from July to September 2026. White shading indicates areas where JAS is typically a dry season.*

July–September 2026 Outlook:

- The central Sahel generally shows **above-normal rainfall conditions**, offering some relief compared to earlier drought signals.
- Parts of the Horn of Africa and sections of West Africa lean toward **drier-than-normal conditions**, raising concerns for crop yields and water availability.
- Central Africa and southern Madagascar also indicate **reduced rainfall probabilities**.
- Northern and southern Africa, including coastal belts and central western Africa, show near normal to **wetter-than-normal conditions**, with potential for flooding in urban centers and transport corridors.

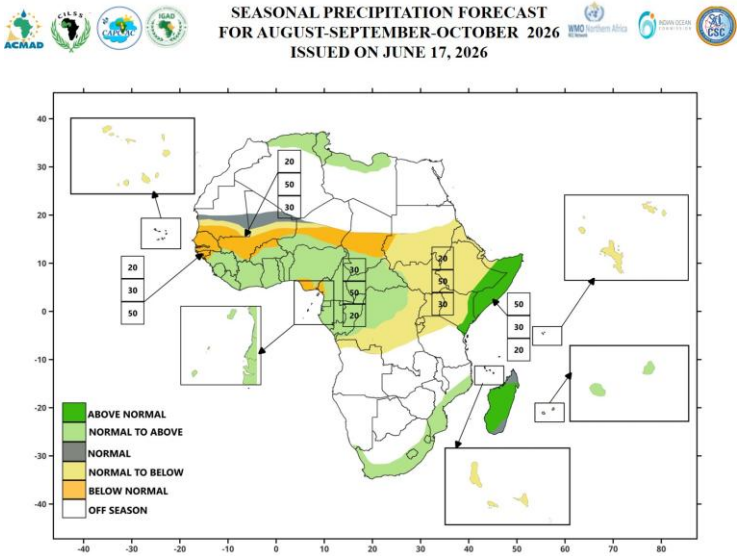


Figure 2. *Probability forecast of precipitation across Africa for August to October 2026. White shading indicates regions of off season.*

August–October 2026 Outlook:

- **Below-normal rainfall** is expected across parts of western Africa and the central sahel, including southern Mauritania, southern Mali, southwestern Burkina Faso, and southern Nigeria, western cameroon increasing the risk of agricultural and hydrological drought.
- **Near-normal to below-normal rainfall** is forecast over parts of Central and East Africa, potentially affecting crop production and water availability.
- **Above-normal rainfall** is very likely over eastern Ethiopia, Somalia, eastern Kenya, and much of Madagascar, heightening the risk flash floods, and associated socio-economic impacts.
- Parts of the central west Afriça, golf of guinea countries and North Africa are expected to receive **near-normal to above-normal rainfall**, supporting agricultural activities while increasing localized flood risks.

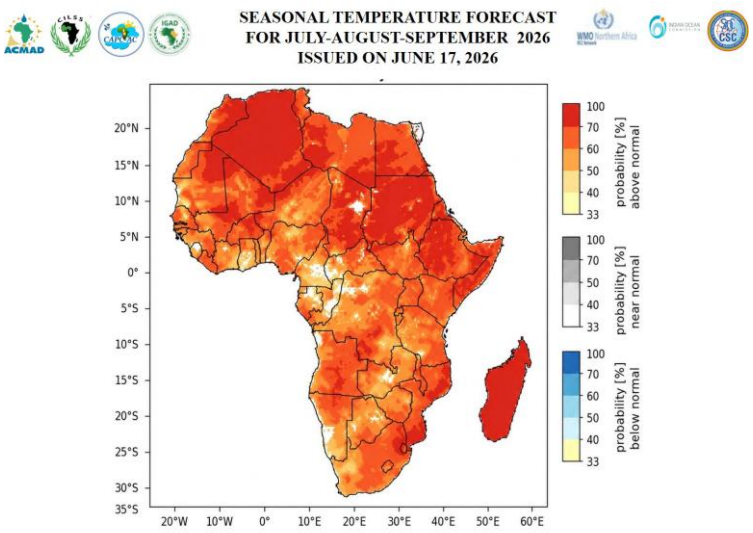


Figure 3. *Probability forecast of temperature across Africa for July to September 2026.*

From July to September 2026, near-normal temperatures are *expected in parts of Eastern Central and Southern Africa, while above-average temperatures are favoured across much of the continent*

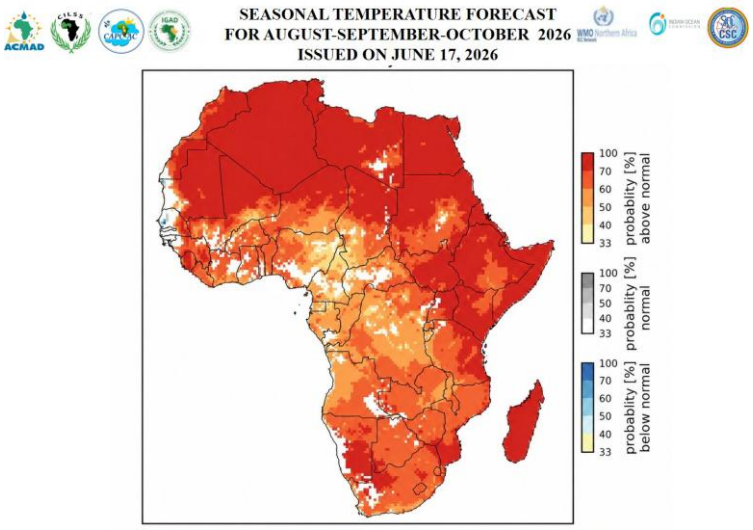


Figure 4. *Probability forecast of temperature across Africa for August to October 2026.*

Warmer-than-Normal conditions *are expected across most parts of Africa except parts of western and central Africa where near-normal temperatures are expected*

Partners

An initiative of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States funded by the European Union