



MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES
El Niño Preparedness Brief
June 2026

Executive Summary

Climate monitoring confirms a strong to very strong El Niño event is developing in the tropical Pacific and is expected to persist into 2027. International forecast centres place the probability of a strong-to-very-strong episode above 80%, though it is not expected to exceed the 2015/16 event, the strongest on record since 1982. For Malawi, this points to a higher risk of below-normal rainfall in southern districts during the October–December 2026 planting season, with December carrying the highest risk (above 80% in some districts), alongside an elevated chance of dry spells in January–March 2027 (62% probability). Northern and parts of central Malawi are more likely to see normal to above-normal rainfall during October-December sub-season. Coordinated, sector-level action is needed now to protect food security, water supply, and public health.

Forecast Snapshot

Indicator	Current Outlook
El Niño strength probability	Over 80% chance of strong to very strong episode
October-December (OND) 2026 (planting sub-season)	Below-normal rainfall likely, especially southern districts; December risk is above 80% in some areas (Fig 1)
January-March (JFM) 2027 dry spell risk	Up to 62% chance of below-normal rainfall, with fewer rainy days
Lake levels	Projected decline of 0.2–0.7 m; fuller impact likely felt in second year
2015/16 & 2023/24 comparison	Prior strong El Niño episodes left 2.8 million and 4.2 million people food insecure respectively

Sector Implications and Required Actions

Sector	Key Risk	Priority Actions
Agriculture	Onset disruption, dry spells, and drought risk in southern districts threatening crop yields and food security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote drought-tolerant, early-maturing varieties• Scale up climate-smart agriculture practices• Strengthen extension and farmer advisory services• Expand irrigation and water harvesting
Water Resources	Lake levels projected to fall 0.2–0.7 m, straining irrigation and domestic supply over the next 1–2 years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhance water availability monitoring• Promote water conservation measures• Protect critical water infrastructure

Health	Potential rise in vector-borne diseases and heat-related illness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen disease surveillance • Prepare health facilities for increased demand • Run public health awareness campaigns
Disaster Risk Management.	Heightened food insecurity and vulnerability among at-risk communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update contingency plans; identify high-risk communities • Strengthen early warning dissemination • Pre-position emergency response resources

Roles and Responsibilities

Ministry of Natural Resources through DCCMS: monitor El Niño evolution; issue regular forecasts and impact-based early warnings; support sector advisories.

DoDMA: coordinate national preparedness and response planning; facilitate multi-sectoral coordination.

Line Ministries: integrate climate risk into sector planning; implement preparedness measures; strengthen monitoring and reporting.

Local Authorities: coordinate district-level preparedness and disseminate warnings to communities.

Development Partners and Civil Society: support building resilience and preparedness programmes.

Communities: adopt recommended preparedness and adaptation measures; participate in local risk reduction activities; follow official weather and climate updates.

Immediate Next Steps

- Establish a multi-sectoral El Niño Preparedness Task Team
- Conduct sector-specific risk assessments
- Issue monthly El Niño monitoring and outlook updates
- Roll out a national public awareness campaign
- Review national and district contingency plans
- Present periodic updates to the Office of the President and Cabinet

Ministry of Natural Resources Action Plan

To improve the efficacy of early warning systems, the Ministry will undertake the following initiatives:

- **Localized Advisories:** Enhance precision by downscaling El Niño Preparedness Reports to the district level.
- **Multichannel Dissemination:** Ensure the information reaches grassroots communities by translating advisories into local languages and broadcasting them through community radios, and SMS alerts.
- **Inter-ministerial Collaboration:** Establish a coordinated framework with key partners including the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Resources, to co-create actionable, sector-specific guidance for the farming community.

MONTHLY AND OND RAINFALL PROBABILISTIC FORECAST, 2026

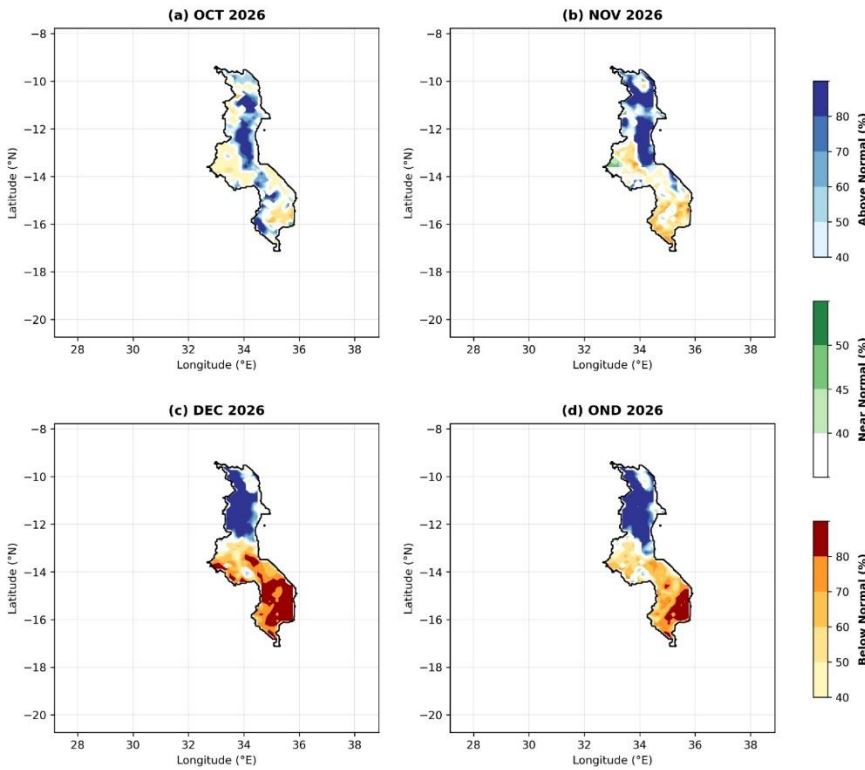


Figure 1: The rainfall probability forecast for October, November and December; and sub-season October-December (OND)

NOTE

Past El Niño events are used for the estimation of the January-March (JFM) sub-season. The actual forecast will be done as the season approaches.

These projections are early outlook; expect more accurate forecasts as the rainfall season draws nearer.

We will keep on providing monthly updates to ensure information remains current as the season unfolds.

For further information, contact:

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For area specific forecast, download: **Zanyengo App** on play store