



MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES
Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services

DISTRICT-SPECIFIC RISK FOR STRONG EL NIÑO EVENT

District-Level Preparedness Briefing — Malawi, 2026/27 Season
15 July 2026

1. Background

Climate monitoring indicates that a strong-to-very-strong El Niño event is developing over the tropical Pacific Ocean and is likely to persist into 2027. International climate prediction centres estimate the probability of a strong-to-very-strong El Niño occurring at above 80%. The current updates indicate about 24% chance of surpassing the 2015/16 El Niño, which is the strongest event recorded since 1982.

This report consolidates the Department of Climate Change and Meteorological Services' area-specific advisories for all 28 districts of Malawi, grouping them into risk tiers to support national and district-level contingency planning, and provides the complete district-by-district reference in the Appendix.

2. National Risk Overview

The impact of strong El Niño varies markedly by region. The Northern Region districts generally face low overall risk, with dry spell and extreme rainfall hazards minimal and drought risk low to moderate. Central Region districts face a mixed picture of moderate dry spells and moderate drought, with extreme rainfall risk elevated in a cluster of districts around Ntchisi and Dowa. The Southern Region carries the highest and most compound risk: twelve districts face the combination of moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk simultaneously, meaning both drought and flood contingency measures must be planned together rather than treated as separate hazards.

3. Risk Tier Classification

Districts have been grouped into five tiers based on the combination of dry spell risk, drought risk, and extreme rainfall risk described in the area-specific advisories:

Risk Tier	Districts	Characteristics & Guidance
Tier 1 — Low Overall Risk	Chitipa, Karonga, Rumphi, Mzimba, Likoma (5)	Low drought risk with no significant dry spell or extreme rainfall signals. Standard water conservation preparedness is sufficient.
Tier 2 — Low-to-Moderate Risk	Nkhata Bay (1)	Low dry spell risk but moderate drought conditions possible; moisture-stress preparedness is advised.
Tier 3 — Moderate Risk	Nkhotakota, Kasungu, Mchinji, Lilongwe, Salima, Ntchisi, Dowa, Dedza (8)	Moderate dry spells and moderate drought conditions during JFM, with extreme rainfall risk ranging from low to severe (highest in Ntchisi and Dowa). Requires moisture conservation and localized flood monitoring.

Risk Tier	Districts	Characteristics & Guidance
Tier 4 — High Risk	Machinga, Zomba (2)	Moderate dry spells combined with severe drought conditions; extreme rainfall risk is low (Machinga) to moderate (Zomba). Drought preparedness should be the leading priority.
Tier 5 — Critical Risk (Compound Hazard)	Ntcheu, Mangochi, Balaka, Neno, Mwanza, Blantyre, Phalombe, Mulanje, Thyolo, Chiradzulu, Chikwawa, Nsanje (12)	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk. These 12 districts face compound hazard exposure requiring integrated drought and flood contingency planning.

4. Key Recommendations

- Tier 1–2 districts (Northern Region): maintain standard water conservation awareness and continue routine monitoring of rainfall onset and distribution.
- Tier 3 districts (Central Region): prioritize moisture conservation practices and climate-resilient agricultural options; districts with severe extreme rainfall risk (Ntchisi, Dowa, Dedza) should also strengthen localized flood monitoring.
- Tier 4 districts (Machinga, Zomba): prioritize drought mitigation and water conservation, while maintaining flood awareness in Zomba.
- Tier 5 districts (Southern Region): implement integrated drought-and-flood contingency plans; pre-position agricultural inputs and water resources ahead of the dry spells while establishing early-warning systems for extreme rainfall and flooding.
- **All districts should continue to use updated seasonal forecasts as the event develops, given the high (>80%) probability of a strong-to-very-strong El Niño.**

5. Appendix 1: Full District-by-District Advisory

The table below reproduces the complete area-specific advisory issued for each of Malawi's 28 districts.

District	Area-Specific Information
Chitipa	Low drought risk, with no significant indication of dry spells or extreme rainfall hazards during strong El Niño events. Communities should prepare for water conservation strategies.
Karonga	Low drought conditions with minimal risk from dry spells and extreme rainfall. Communities should prepare for water conservation strategies.
Rumphi	Low drought conditions, while dry spell and extreme rainfall risks remain minimal. Communities should prepare for water conservation strategies.
Mzimba	Low drought risk, with no major dry spell or extreme rainfall signals. Communities should prepare for water conservation strategies and monitor rainfall onset and distribution.
Nkhata Bay	Low dry spell risk and moderate drought conditions. Communities should prepare for possible moisture stress and promote water conservation practices.
Likoma	Low drought risk with no significant indication of dry spells or extreme rainfall. Continued monitoring of water availability is advised.
Nkhotakota	Low dry spell conditions during OND but moderate dry spells during JFM, together with moderate drought conditions. May affect crop development and water availability, requiring early preparedness and water conservation.

District	Area-Specific Information
Kasungu	Moderate dry spells during JFM and moderate drought conditions. Farmers should consider moisture conservation practices and climate-resilient agricultural options.
Mchinji	Moderate dry spells extending into JFM, moderate drought conditions, and low extreme rainfall risk during JFM. Prepare for reduced rainfall reliability while remaining alert to isolated heavy rainfall.
Lilongwe	Moderate dry spells, moderate drought conditions, and low extreme rainfall risk during JFM. Water conservation and early warning monitoring important for agriculture.
Ntchisi	Moderate dry spells, moderate drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk during JFM. Prepare for both moisture stress and possible damaging rainfall events.
Dowa	Moderate dry spells, moderate drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk during JFM. Address both crop water shortages and localized flooding risks.
Salima	Moderate dry spells, moderate drought conditions, and low extreme rainfall risk during JFM. Water resource management and agricultural advisories important.
Dedza	Moderate dry spells, moderate drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk. Prepare for rainfall variability, including crop stress and heavy rainfall impacts.
Ntcheu	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk during JFM. Significant agricultural and water resource impacts possible; enhanced preparedness required.
Mangochi	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk. Prepare for significant agricultural stress alongside possible heavy rainfall impacts.
Machinga	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and low extreme rainfall risk during JFM. Priority on drought preparedness and water conservation.
Balaka	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk. Prepare for serious impacts on crop production, water availability, and rainfall-related hazards.
Neno	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk. Enhanced preparedness required due to possible prolonged dry conditions and damaging rainfall events.
Mwanza	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk. Implement drought mitigation measures while monitoring extreme rainfall warnings.
Blantyre	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk. Prepare for possible water stress and rainfall-related impacts.
Zomba	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and moderate extreme rainfall risk during JFM. Focus on drought impacts while maintaining flood awareness.
Phalombe	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk during JFM. Prepare for reduced rainfall availability and possible heavy rainfall events.
Mulanje	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk. Integrated drought and flood preparedness measures recommended.
Thyolo	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk. Agricultural and water management interventions important during the El Niño season.
Chiradzulu	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk. Prepare for both crop moisture stress and intense rainfall events.
Chikwawa	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk during JFM. Focus on water shortages, crop stress, and possible rainfall extremes.
Nsanje	Moderate dry spells, severe drought conditions, and severe extreme rainfall risk during JFM. Strengthen drought preparedness while remaining alert to extreme rainfall events.

6. Appendix 2: Risks associated with Strong El Nino Conditions in Malawi

