

El Niño impacts leads to poor production across East Africa's high potential zones

Key Messages

- Harvesting is complete across the bimodal regions of Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi, with average to below-average production.
- Below-average crop production is expected across western Kenya, Karamoja region of Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, and the Kiremt-growing regions of western Ethiopia.
- Pasture and surface water remain available across eastern Kenya, much of Somalia, and southeastern Ethiopia, but rapidly deteriorating following rainfall cessation and above-average temperatures.
- A well-established El Niño is expected to enhance the October–December rainfall season across much of Eastern Africa, increasing the likelihood of above-average rainfall.

March – May Season

Context: Between March and May, the following are the areas and names of the rainy seasons underway in parts of East Africa: Gu rains in Somalia; long rains in unimodal Uganda (Karamoja) that extends to September and Kenya (areas of western Kenya) that extends to November; bimodal Kenya; Season B rains (mid-February to May) in Burundi; belg rains (mid-February to May) in Ethiopia, as well as the diraac/sugum rains in the northern pastoral areas and gu/genna rains in the southern and southeastern pastoral areas of Ethiopia; and the first season rains in the bimodal areas within southwestern Ethiopia, southwestern South Sudan, and Uganda.

Harvesting is complete across the bimodal cropping regions of Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi, with overall production ranging from average to below average. The End of Season Water Requirement Satisfaction Index indicates generally near average crop water availability across much of the region, with localized deficits in parts of Kenya, southern Somalia and Uganda. Seasonal outcomes have mostly been influenced by the timing of planting and the distribution of rainfall throughout the season. Farmers who planted with the first rains in February generally benefited from favourable conditions during germination and overall crop establishment. In Kenya, early-planted crops performed well in parts of Bungoma and Kakamega in the west and Tharaka-Nithi within the Central highlands with crop statistics indicating average production for Bungoma and above-average production for Kakamega and Tharaka Nithi counties. Similarly, in Uganda, favorable harvests were reported in parts of the central and southwestern bimodal zones, including Masaka, Mbarara, and Bushenyi, where rainfall onset and planting was timely. Generally, production in bimodal regions of Kenya, Uganda and Somalia was characterized mainly by poor in-season rainfall distribution with extreme moisture deficits occurring at critical phenological stages from April onwards. Similar mixed conditions can be observed across Rwanda and Burundi.



June – September Season

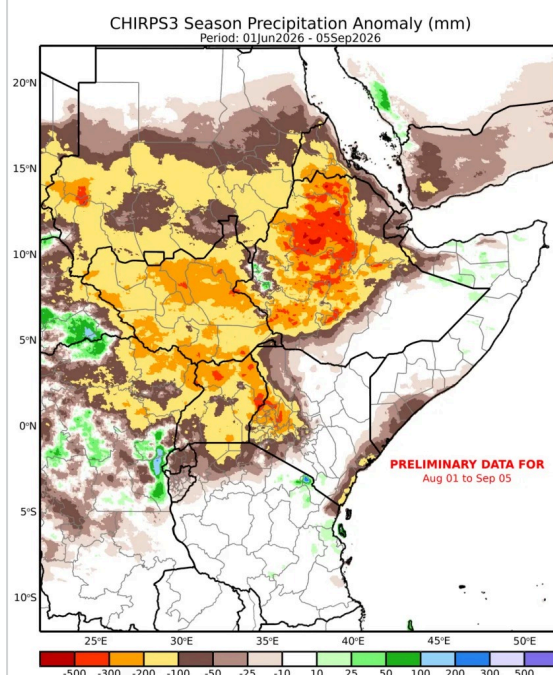
Context: Between June and September, the following are the areas and names of the rainy seasons underway in parts of East Africa: Kiremt rains (June to September) in Western, Central, Northern, and Eastern Ethiopia; main rainy season (June to September) in the unimodal zones of South Sudan and Sudan; long rains in unimodal Uganda and Kenya; Karan/Karma rains (July to September) in northern pastoral areas of Ethiopia, Sitti and Fafan zones of Somali (Ethiopia), the northern sector of Somalia and Djibouti; and second rains (July to November) in South Sudan bimodal zone.

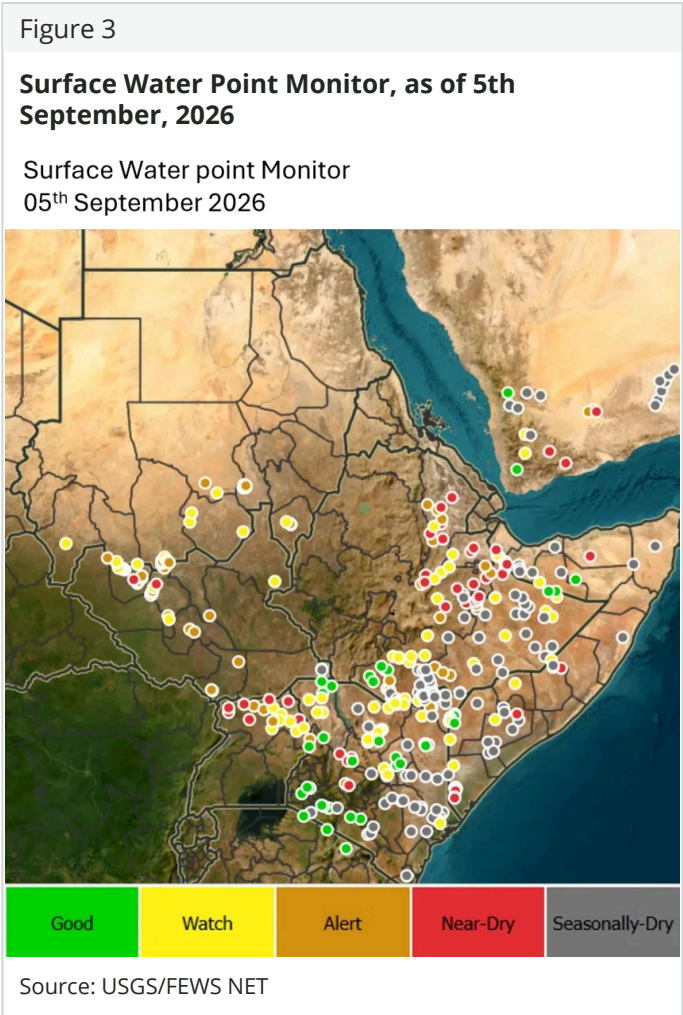
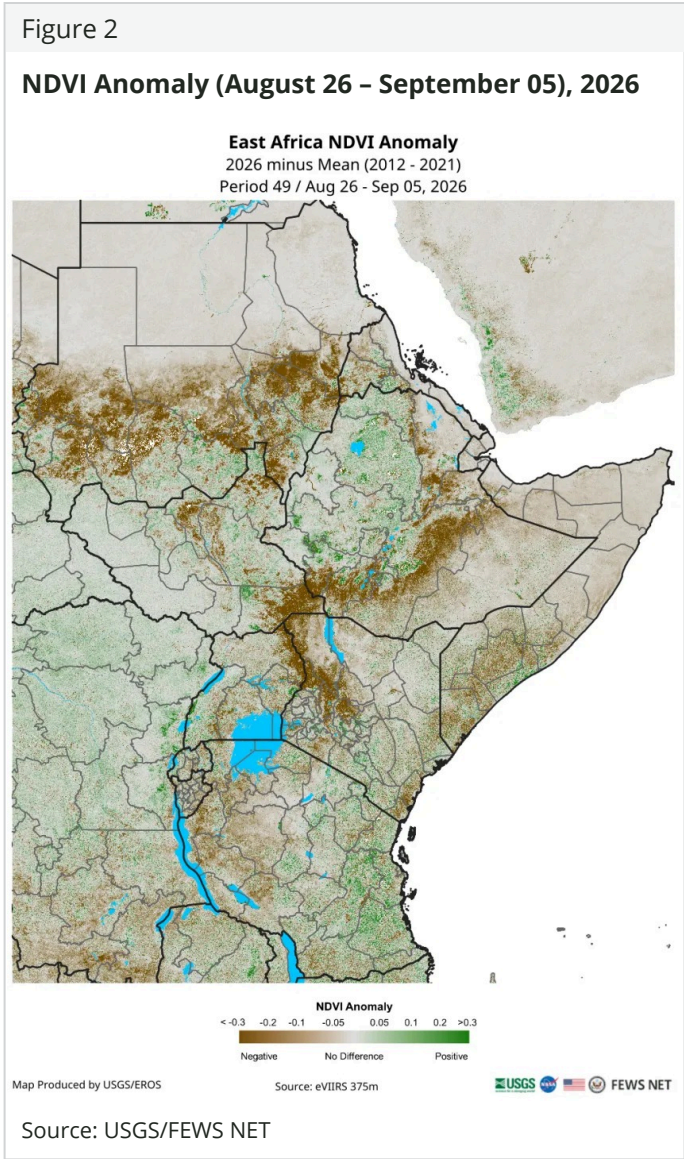
Poor crop production is expected across several unimodal cropping areas due to extremely poor rainfall performance and prolonged dry spells during the main season (Figure 1). In Kenya, poor harvests are anticipated across the high potential western counties (North Rift) including Trans Nzoia, Uasin Gishu and Nakuru counties. The moisture deficits came at a critical phenological phase during flowering and grain-filling stages. Nationally, preliminary assessments indicate maize yields deficits of around 28% while 43% loss is anticipated across the high potential counties. In the Karamoja region of Uganda, rainfall started in February which indicated an extremely early onset given that their typical season starts in April. However, persistent hot and dry conditions from April through August are likely to negatively impact sorghum production. In Sudan, recent field missions by FEWS NET key informants have indicated delayed planting and reduced area under rainfed sorghum crop in Sennar, Al Gazirah, Blue Nile and some parts of North Darfur as well as North Kordofan by up to 3 weeks. In South Sudan, below-average production is expected, particularly across the eastern cropping zones in Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Unity, where poor rainfall has been persistent throughout the season. In Ethiopia, a below-average Meher harvest is expected across the Kiremt-growing regions, especially in Tigray, eastern Amhara, Afar, and eastern Oromia. Seasonal rainfall performance was generally poor, despite slight improvements later in the season. These improvements are unlikely to substantially improve outcomes for earlier planted crops already affected by prolonged moisture deficits. Later planted crops might benefit from the current improved rainfall conditions as well as the forecasted wetter-than-average October through December rainfall season as a result of a strong El Niño.

Pasture and surface water resources remain generally available across the pastoral and agropastoral areas of eastern Kenya, much of Somalia, and southeastern Ethiopia following the above-average cumulative totals of the March through May rainy season. However, the seasonal cessation of rainfall and persistent above-average temperatures have accelerated pasture drying and increased evapotranspiration across the region (Figure 2). In addition, significant deficits across pastoral regions of northeastern Ethiopia as well as Turkana county in northwestern Kenya have led to rapid depletion of water with most surface water resources drying up increasing the distance to the nearest watering hole for the community.

Figure 1

Rainfall Anomaly (June 01 – September 05), 2026





In Kenya, rangeland resources remain sufficient across most pastoral counties, including parts Garissa, Wajir, Isiolo and Marsabit counties and are likely to sustain until the anticipated above-average rainfall in October through December. Surface water pans are still supporting livestock, although water levels have receded (Figure 3). Across Somalia, pasture conditions are mixed but remain available in many central and southern pastoral zones. Poor conditions persist across northern and northeastern pastoral areas of Somalia following consecutive seasonal rainfall deficits. In Djibouti, extremely poor seasonal rainfall has resulted in severe pasture and water shortages across much of the country with regions reporting as little as 10mm of rainfall over 60 days leading to livestock deaths associated with thirst.

October – December Season

Context: Between October and December, the following are the areas and names of the rainy seasons underway in parts of East Africa: Short rains (October to December) in Northern, Northeastern, Southern and Coastal Kenya; Season A rains in Burundi and Rwanda; Second season in Northern, Eastern, Central, Western and Southern Uganda; Deyr rains in Somalia; Deyr/Hageya rains in Southern and Southeastern Ethiopia; Xays/Daada in coastal Djibouti.

A well-established El Niño is expected to significantly enhance the October–December (OND) 2026 rainfall season across much of Eastern Africa. According to the latest outlooks, El Niño continues to strengthen, with a greater than 90 percent probability of persisting through early 2027. The Indian Ocean Dipole is positively neutral at +0.25°C and is expected to warm further, this will reinforce the wet signal over eastern parts of the region. Regional climate forecasts indicate a very high probability of above-average rainfall across southern Ethiopia, central and southern Somalia, eastern and central Kenya with probabilities of up to 90% chance of enhanced rainfall (Figure 4). The forecasted enhanced rains are likely to spread westwards towards the Lake Victoria Basin, Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda. An early onset is likely in parts of southern Somalia and eastern Kenya, based on several subseasonal forecasts indicating above-average rains during mid-September to early October, as of September 10th. There is limited confidence as to how widespread early rains will be in these areas, due to mixed rainfall outlooks across the subseasonal forecast models and the neutral state of the Indian Ocean Dipole as of September 6th. In western areas of the region, including western Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi, October to December 2026 rainfall will likely be above average. In these areas persistent light showers observed since early September are likely to trigger early planting, however, rainfall totals remain below the long-term average. Current subseasonal forecasts point to below-average rains during mid-September to early October, suggesting persistence of observed drier-than-average conditions in the near term before the anticipated wetter-than-average conditions become established.

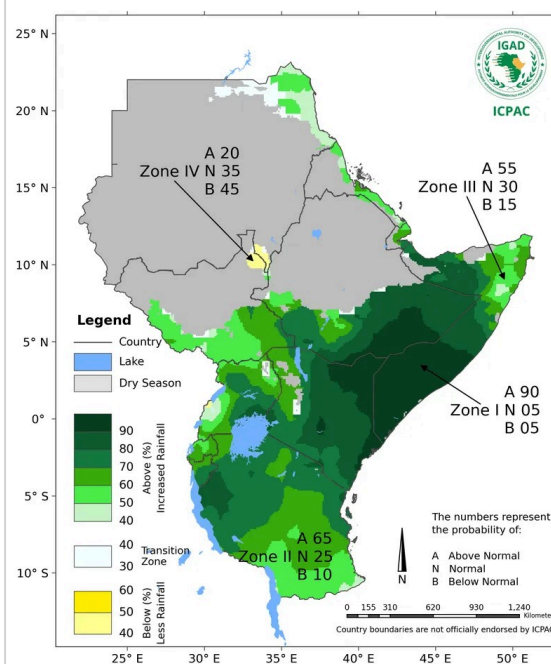
As enhanced seasonal rains become more widespread, it is expected to support early planting of second season crops across bimodal regions of Kenya, southern Somalia, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. The rains are also likely to trigger cultivation of a second crop for the unimodal regions that have been negatively affected by the extreme moisture deficits during the June through September season. The forecasted El Niño impacts will likely lead to an early regeneration of the deteriorating pasture and surface water.

However, the wetter outlook also substantially increases the risk of flooding, waterlogging, landslides, and infrastructure damage across flood-prone areas such as the Juba, Shebelle and Tana river basins as well as urban flooding in major cities and towns across the region such as Nairobi, Mogadishu, Kampala, and Addis Ababa. Excessive rainfall could disrupt planting, damage already planted crops, and delay harvesting in some areas.

Recommended citation: FEWS NET. East Africa Seasonal Monitor September 11, 2026: El Niño impacts leads to poor production across East Africa's high potential zones, 2026.

Figure 4

ICPAC Probabilistic Seasonal Forecast (October – December) 2026



Source: ICPAC

Seasonal Monitor

FEWS NET's Seasonal Monitor reports are produced for Central America and the Caribbean, West Africa, East Africa, Central Asia, and Somalia every 10-to-30 days during the region's respective rainy season(s). Seasonal Monitors report updates on weather events (e.g., rainfall patterns) and associated impacts on ground conditions (e.g., cropping conditions, pasture and water availability), as well as the short-term rainfall forecast. Find more remote sensing information [here](#).