2026/2027 Agricultural Season

Key Messages

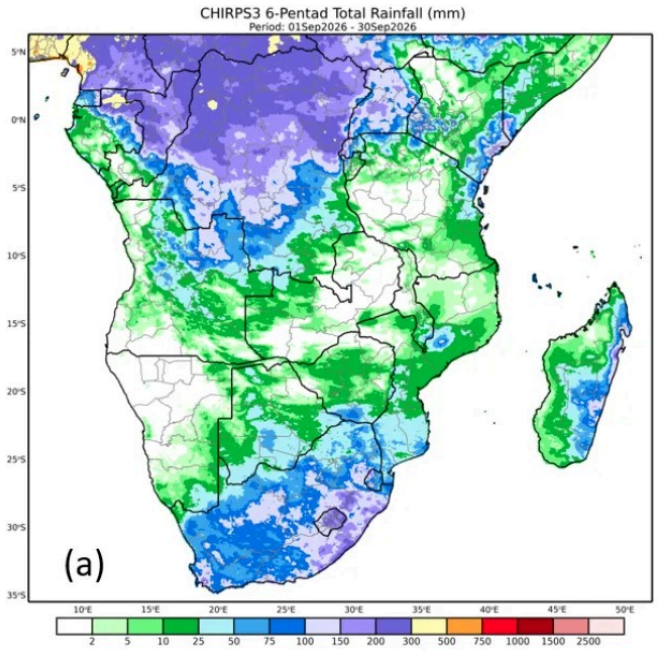
- As of dekad 1 of October 2026, many areas had not yet recorded an effective rainfall onset. September rainfall over the early-onset areas in the north of the region was uneven: mostly above average in northern DRC, and below average in parts of western and central DRC as well as northern Angola. The onset of effective rainfall typically begins from October and November in many areas.
- Vegetation and grazing conditions are above-average in southern areas following a wet October 2025 to May 2026 rainfall season and an earlier than typical onset of the 2026-2027 rainfall season in some parts. Contrasting below-average conditions are observed in parts of Namibia, eastern and central Zambia, Malawi, central and northern Mozambique, Tanzania and Madagascar. The forecast warmer and drier than normal October 2026 to May 2027 season is expected to lead to further deterioration of pasture conditions in these areas, reducing grazing availability for livestock.
- As of the end of September, soil moisture was above average across much of the south and eastern parts of the region, and below average in much of Angola and Madagascar. Water resources are also favorable following a generally average to above-average 2025-2026 rainy season. Major hydropower reservoirs recorded notable increases after the near-record lows in late 2024 that followed the 2023-2024 drought.
- El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is in a strong El Niño phase, which is expected to peak at very strong intensity and remain strong into early 2027. SARCOF is forecasting below-normal rainfall across much of the central and southern parts of the region, while the northern areas, including northern Angola, much of DRC, Tanzania, northern Zambia, and northern Malawi, are likely to receive normal to above-normal rainfall.
- Above-normal temperatures are forecast for much of the region from October 2026 to April 2027. Coupled with rainfall deficits, higher temperatures will increase evapotranspiration and crop water demand. This heightens the impact of delayed onset and prolonged dry spells on vegetation and crops, particularly over central and southern areas.
- Well below-normal tropical cyclone activity is forecast for the 2026-2027 South-West Indian Ocean season, with a significantly reduced risk of landfall over Madagascar, Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. However, reduced regional activity does not rule out cyclonic activity, and tropical cyclone preparedness remains essential.
- In light of the forecast below-normal rainfall and above-normal temperatures across much of the region, the potential adverse impacts on crop and livestock production call for the strengthening of anticipatory and response mechanisms as well as the prioritization of monitoring and early warning initiatives to inform timely and targeted interventions and mitigation of adverse impacts.

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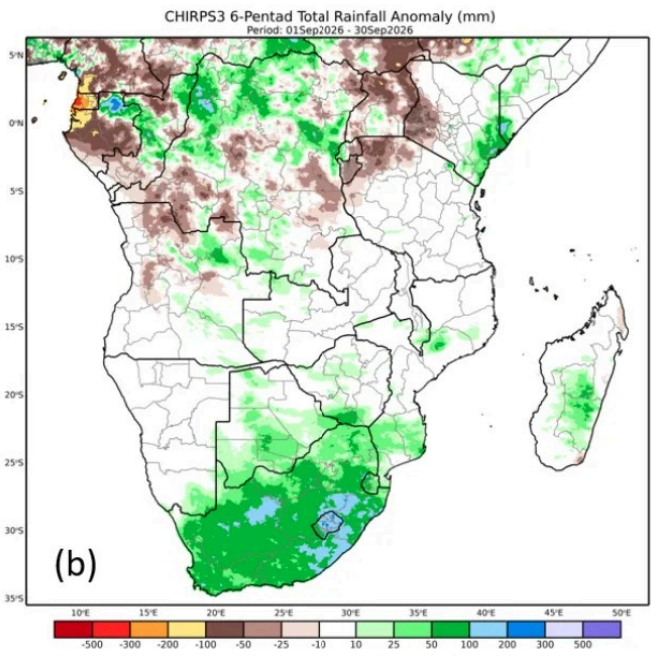
Rainfall conditions to date

Figure 1a. CHIRPS rainfall total (mm) for 1 to 30 September 2026



Source: UCSB CHC/FEWS NET

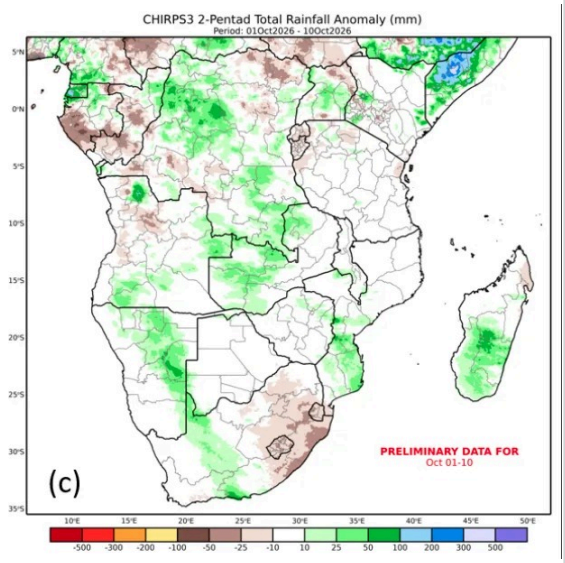
Figure 1b. CHIRPS rainfall difference from average (mm) for 1 to 30 September 2026



Source: UCSB CHC/FEWS NET

During September 2026, rainfall occurred mainly in central and northern DRC and northeastern Angola, as well as over southeastern areas, including eastern South Africa, Lesotho, southern and central Mozambique, and eastern Madagascar, which saw between 25 and 200 mm of rain (Figure 1a). For many of the southeastern areas, these rains were out of season, estimated up to 200 mm above the average in parts of Lesotho and South Africa (Figure 1b). Rainfall was also above average, by 25 to 100 mm, in parts of northern and north-western DRC. In contrast, deficits of 25 to 100 mm were recorded in north-eastern DRC, which has experienced several consecutive months of below-average rainfall. Similarly, parts of western and central DRC, northern Angola and northwestern Tanzania experienced deficits between 10 and 50 mm, and up to 100 mm in localised areas (Figure 1b).

Figure 1c. Preliminary CHIRPS rainfall total (mm) for 1 to 10 October 2026



Source: UCSB CHC/FEWS NET

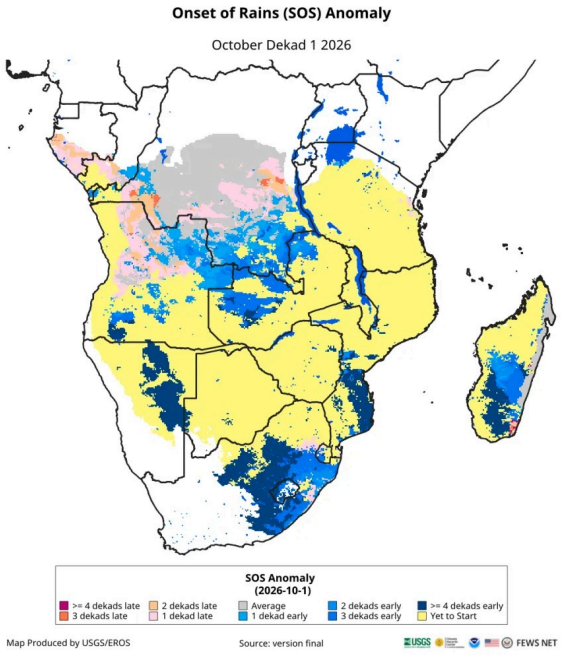
During the first week of October, rainfall continued across much of the north (much of DRC and northern Angola) where rainfall totals exceeded 25 mm (Figure 1c). Rains also extended across central and northeastern Angola, southern DRC, northern and western Zambia, Namibia, west-central South Africa, central and southern Mozambique and central Madagascar (Figure 1c).

As of dekad 1 of October 2026, much of the region had not yet recorded an effective onset of rains except for central DRC, northeastern Angola and eastern Madagascar, where onset typically occurs from September. Other parts of the region experienced early pre-season rains during September through early October. These include northern and western Zambia, central Namibia, southeastern Mozambique, eastern and central South Africa, Lesotho, eastern

Eswatini and central and southcentral Madagascar, southern Botswana and Zimbabwe (Figure 1a). In some of these areas, onset anomaly was at least 3 dekads early (Figure 2). In parts of central DRC and northern Angola however, onset was erratic, with delays of up to 3 dekads in localised areas (Figure 2).

Across the bulk of the east-central region, onset typically occurs in November, while onset in the arid west, as well as parts of north-eastern Mozambique, central Tanzania, central Malawi, and southwestern Madagascar, is expected from December. The Climate Hazards Center 30-day precipitation forecast suggests erratic, below-average rainfall across much of the central region between 19 October to 17 November 2026, raising the likelihood of an erratic onset in areas which typically record an onset between October and November.

Figure 2. Onset of rainfall anomaly as of 10 October 2026

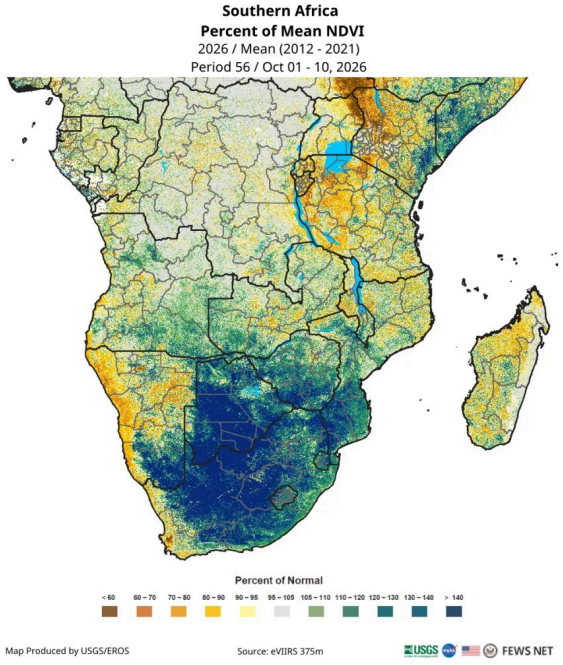


Source: USGS/FEWS NET

Vegetation, grazing, & livestock

According to the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI), vegetation conditions vary across the region: below average conditions are present in the northeast and center-west, while northern areas exhibit average to above average NDVI, with well-above average NDVI in southern parts (Figure 3). Well-above-average conditions in the south, including in southern Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and southern Mozambique, are mainly attributed to above-average rainfall during the 2025-2026 season. Recent rainfall has also supported favourable vegetation conditions in many of these areas. In the northeast, NDVI may improve slightly with rainfall expected in November; however, subsequent deterioration of vegetation conditions is likely considering the forecast below-average December to February rainfall in southern Tanzania, northern Zambia, Malawi, northern Mozambique and Madagascar.

Figure 3. Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) expressed as percent of average for 1-10 October 2026



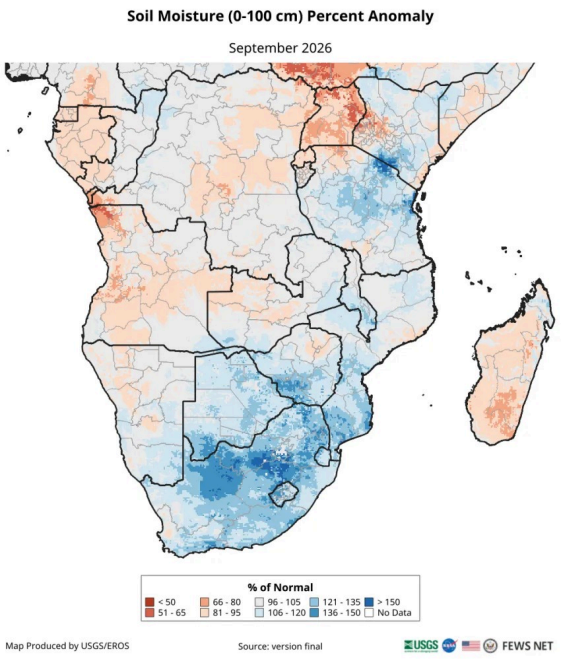
Source: USGS/FEWS NET

Soil moisture, water resources, & energy

Simulated root-zone (0-100 cm) soil moisture for September 2026 (Figure 4) shows a similar pattern to NDVI over much of the south, with above-average soil moisture across eastern Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho, Eswatini, southern Zimbabwe, southern Malawi and central and Southern Mozambique, owing to a favourable 2025-2026 rainy season. Soil moisture is also above average in central Tanzania which, combined with the above-normal rainfall forecast, raises the risk of waterlogging and flooding. Soil moisture is estimated to be below average in much of Angola, north-western Zambia, parts of northern and central Namibia, north-central Zimbabwe, northeastern Mozambique and Madagascar. In north-eastern and central DRC, soil moisture is also below average following consecutive months of below-average rainfall; however, given the typically, high rainfall in these tropical areas, absolute soil moisture is likely sufficient to support crop development.

Water resources affected by the 2023-2024 drought have improved over the past two seasons across the central areas as reflected by above-average streamflow, and increased levels in major reservoirs. Kariba Dam stood at 35.78% of usable storage (480.53 m) on 19 October 2026, compared with 11.69% on the same date in 2025 and a low of about 4.5% in November 2024 when drought-induced low water levels severely curtailed hydroelectric power generation in Zambia and Zimbabwe. Similarly, usable storage at Cahora Bassa dam, which supplies power to Mozambique and the wider region, reached 56% by the end of June 2026, up from about 27% at the end of 2025. In Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) reported a national storage level of 84.3% as of 5 October 2026, reflecting significant recovery since the 2023-2024 drought. In northeastern DRC however, months of below-average rainfall have led to slight declines in the levels of Lakes Edward, Kivu and Albert, with Lakes Edward and Kivu tracking below average.

Figure 4. Soil Moisture (0-100 cm) Percent Anomaly



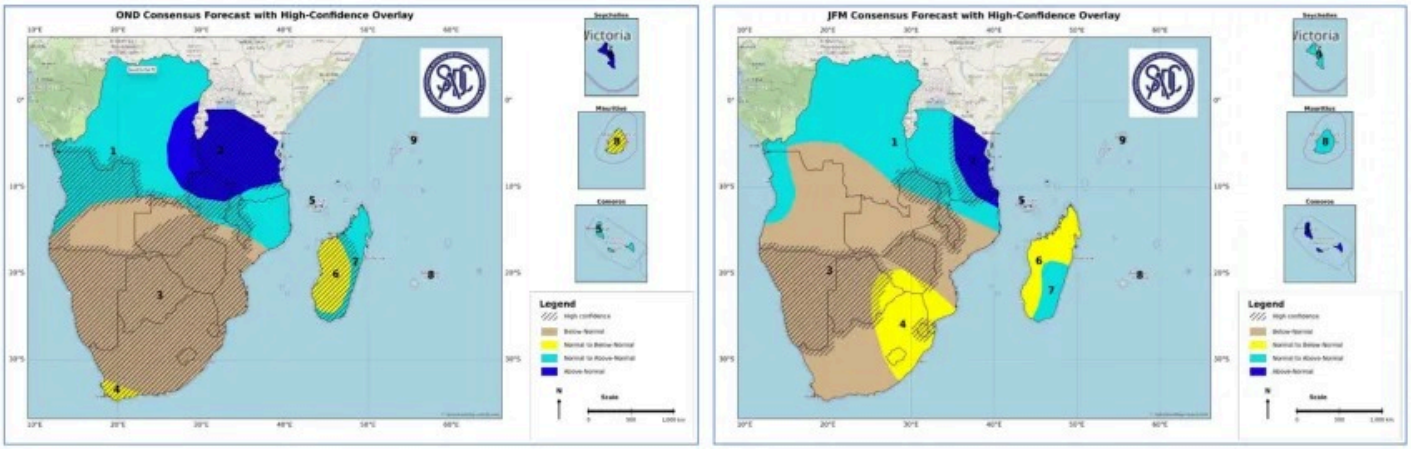
Source: USGS/EROS

Seasonal forecast and implications for agriculture

The 33rd Southern Africa Regional Climate Outlook Forum (SARCOF-33), held from 25-28 August 2026 in Namibia, forecast below-normal rainfall over much of the central and southern parts of the region, normal to above-normal rainfall over northern areas, and above-normal in the northeast for the 2026-2027 rainfall season. For the period October to December 2026 (Figure 5a), the forecast expressed high confidence for below-normal rainfall over southern Angola, southern Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana, most of South Africa, Eswatini and Lesotho. Normal to below-normal rainfall was forecast for the south-western coastal South Africa, Mauritius and western and south-western Madagascar. This suggests delayed and erratic rains during the first half of the season in these areas. For the same period, most of DRC, north-western Angola, northern Zambia, central Malawi, northern Mozambique, Comoros and northern and eastern Madagascar, were forecast to receive normal to above-normal rainfall.

For January to March 2027 (Figure 5b), the second half of the season, the SARCOF forecast projected below-normal rainfall to expand northwards into southern DRC and the bulk of Angola and Zambia, and to persist over central and southern Malawi, central Mozambique, Namibia, most of Botswana, the western half of South Africa and most of Zimbabwe. Normal to below-normal rainfall is expected over the eastern half of South Africa, Lesotho, Eswatini, southern Zimbabwe, eastern Botswana and southern Mozambique, as well as northern and western Madagascar. Most of DRC, extreme north-western Angola, extreme northern Zambia, northern Malawi, south-eastern Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles are likely to receive normal to above-normal rainfall, while above-normal rainfall is forecast for Comoros and, with high confidence, for eastern Tanzania and the extreme northeast of Mozambique. As of early October, updated forecasts by international forecasting centers indicate increased chances for below-normal rainfall during December-February over parts of the northeast, including extreme southern DRC, parts of northern Zambia, southern half of Tanzania, Malawi, northern Mozambique and Madagascar, while maintaining an above-normal rainfall forecast for much of DRC, northern Tanzania and northern Angola.

Figure 5. SARCOF-33 rainfall forecast for (a) October to December 2026, and (b) January to March 2027.



Source: SADC CSC

It is important for users to note that the SARCOF forecast is a consensus forecast designed for a regional audience. The forecast is aggregated over large zones and is applicable only at large scales and long time scales. The forecast does not account for rainfall distribution within the season that can include short-term weather events such as dry spells, tropical cyclones and intense rainfall. Users requiring higher-accuracy forecasts available at national level should contact the respective National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHS) for downscaled national seasonal forecasts, and regular updates to those forecasts, which can increase in accuracy as the forecasts are updated based on the most recent weather systems and climate drivers.

The SARCOF outlook indicates a high likelihood of above-normal temperatures across most of the region from October 2026 to January 2027.

For much of the centre and south, the likelihood of reduced rainfall coupled with elevated temperatures can intensify crop water demand. The potential for negative crop performance in light of the unfavourable rainfall and temperature forecasts raises concern for crop production this season, thus necessitating timely mobilisation of anticipatory strategies. Additionally, increased evaporation from water bodies can reduce water availability for human and livestock use. Furthermore, high temperatures are particularly concerning during dry spells, as they can reach extreme levels and negatively impact crops, livestock, and human health.

State of El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO)

As of the end of September 2026, ENSO was in a strong El Niño phase. NOAA's Climate Prediction Center gives a greater than 83% chance of a strong to very strong El Niño persisting through January-March 2027. The event is expected to peak in October-December 2026 before weakening in early 2027. The El Niño phase is typically associated with below-normal rainfall across central and southern parts of the SADC region, while western and north-eastern areas have typically recorded wetter seasons. For much of the center and south, El Niño has historically been associated with an increased likelihood of prolonged dry spells, heat and moisture stress exacerbating poor crop and pasture productivity and increasing pressure on water resources in the region.

Acknowledgement

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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**.