



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Anticipating El Niño

Mitigation, preparedness and response
plan for Southern Africa, 2023–2025



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Key messages

- El Niño threatens the very means of survival for vulnerable communities. It poses a serious threat to food security, reducing water availability for both crops and livestock. Urgent action is needed to safeguard agricultural livelihoods and ensure access to nutritious food for all.
- Early warning systems and disaster preparedness can mitigate the worst effects of El Niño. By prioritizing preparedness actions, humanitarian actors can save lives and livelihoods.
- Strengthening agricultural resilience to El Niño and promoting sustainable agricultural practices to adapt to the phenomenon and mitigate its long-term impacts on the environment is essential to reach sustainable solutions to the climate crisis. Investing in climate-smart practices is the best defense.
- Local communities are the first to face the impacts of El Niño. As they remain on the frontlines, their empowerment is crucial for effective response and recovery.
- Partnerships, collaboration and coordination between governments, non-governmental organizations and communities is key to building resilience and adapting to the challenges posed by El Niño.

Overview

In July 2023, the World Meteorological Organization declared El Niño conditions had emerged after three years of La Niña. This transition in the central-eastern equatorial Pacific to warm El Niño-like conditions has far-reaching implications for various regions, notably in Southern Africa.

El Niño events are typically associated with wetter precipitation patterns in some areas, but they bring drier conditions to regions like West Africa, Southern Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Australia, the northern part of South America, and Central America. Historical data underscores the connection between El Niño and heat records, as well as droughts in Southern Africa.

El Niño's influence on the peak agricultural season in Southern Africa, spanning from October 2023 to March 2024, poses a significant concern due to severe water stress. Global forecasts project a substantial reduction in rainfall in the region, as indicated by the Southern Africa Regional Climate Outlook Forum and national downscaled projections.

In response to the impending crisis, adopting a systematic approach to adaptive programming is essential to build resilience and reduce disaster risks. This includes scenario-based risk analysis, contingency planning and redirecting resources to address urgent needs.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) aims to implement shock mitigation plans before the crisis' impact is felt. FAO's goal is to protect the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable populations and to contribute to efforts to strengthen the collaboration between humanitarian, development and peace actors. Drought impact assessments will utilize the subregional mitigation, preparedness and response plan and FAO's phased impact assessment framework to identify needs and prepare for different phases, ensuring adequate information for programming. The mitigation, preparedness and response plan for Southern Africa complements and further expands on the global [**El Niño: Anticipatory Action and Response Plan, October 2023–March 2024.**](#)

Addressing the impact of El Niño in Southern Africa requires a coordinated, proactive and multifaceted approach. Applying one will help mitigate the potential consequences of El Niño and safeguard the well-being of the region's populations. Furthermore, El Niño transcends borders. International collaboration is imperative to address its cross-border implications and assist impacted communities.

The moment for action is now. A delayed response could worsen the suffering of those who are most susceptible to the impacts of El Niño. By taking resolute action, the way can be paved for a more resilient future for agriculture and the communities it supports, even in the face of El Niño.



Action plan



FAO's requirement:
USD 128 million

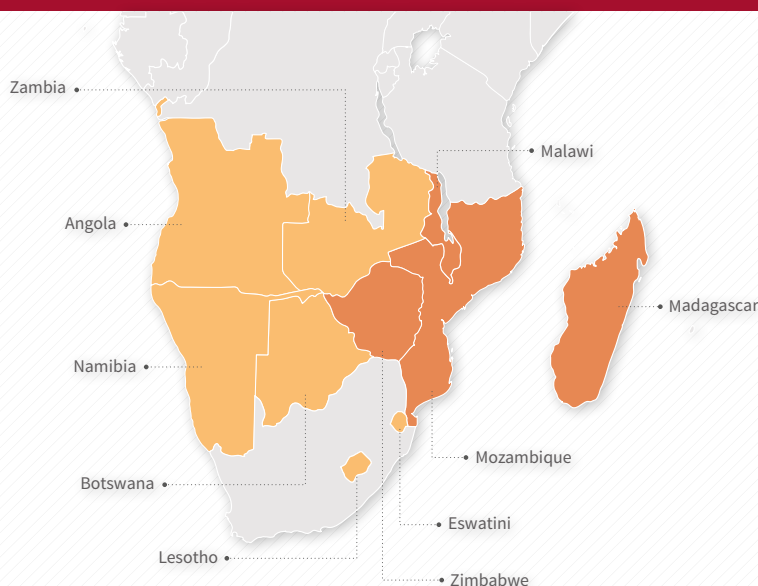


People to be assisted:
4 million households



Geographical focus:
FAO allocated **USD 2.5 million**, including internal resources, for anticipatory action to support **Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe** in preparing for El Niño-induced drought.

Other vulnerable countries that will require immediate support include **Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and Zambia**.



Source: United Nations Geospatial. 2022. Map of Africa. In: *United Nations Geospatial*. [Cited 5 December 2023]. <https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/africa-2>; modified by the Office of Emergencies and Resilience to highlight priority countries (December 2023)

Phase one: Assessment and preparedness



Funding requirement
USD 6 million



Timeline
**December 2023–
March 2024**

Outcome

Early warning and anticipatory measures enhanced, enabling FAO to assess potential impacts, identify vulnerable regions, develop robust early warning systems, and bolster crucial partnerships.

Priority areas

- Enhancing multi-stakeholder coordination: strengthening multi-stakeholder food security coordination mechanisms to foster synergies and create a collective impact.
- Boosting off-season food production: maximizing food production through small-scale irrigation to enable year-round agricultural output.

Phase two: Response and mitigation



Funding requirement
USD 84 million



Timeline
**April 2024–
December 2024**

Outcome

Food gap reduced by protecting agriculture-based livelihoods through the implementation of response plans, addressing immediate food and agriculture needs, promoting climate-smart practices, and delivering emergency relief support to affected communities based on assessment findings.

Priority areas

- Providing critical agricultural inputs: ensuring the provision of essential agricultural inputs, including drought-tolerant short-cycle cereal seeds, legume and vegetable seeds, and fertilizers.

- Improving grain storage and post-harvest technologies: scaling up smallholder farmers' access to improved grain storage facilities, post-harvest technologies, and equipment.
- Livestock support: implementing livestock restocking, supplementary feeding, and monitoring and control interventions to sustain and improve livestock health and productivity.

Phase three: Resilience building



Funding requirement
USD 35 million



Timeline
April 2024–March 2025

Outcome

Resilience of communities impacted by El Niño-induced drought conditions in Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe is strengthened. Assistance will be provided through a combination of emergency and resilience-building interventions, integrating El Niño-related resilience actions into agricultural and food security initiatives and enhancing the capacity of rural farmers.

Priority areas

- Promoting climate-smart agricultural practices: adoption of climate-smart technologies and practices, such as conservation agriculture, and water conservation and harvesting techniques.
- Ensuring livestock water access: establishing and rehabilitating community water points to secure a reliable water supply for livestock.
- Protecting fisheries and aquaculture: safeguarding community fisheries resources and aquaculture assets to sustainably manage these vital food sources.

Phase four: Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning



Funding requirement
USD 3 million



Timeline
**December 2023–
March 2025**

Outcome

Disaster Risk Reduction measures are promoted and adopted in the agriculture sector.

Priority areas

- Improving institutional frameworks, enhancing governance, and facilitating information sharing to create a more resilient environment.
- Monitoring the impact of the El Niño response, evaluating the effectiveness of interventions, and preparing for future events.

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