

MILD TO MODERATE EL NIÑO LIKELY

NEED FOR COORDINATED MULTI-SECTORAL INTERVENTIONS BASED ON THE MOST-LIKELY CLIMATIC SCENARIO'S FOR SEPT 2012-FEB 2013

Current Status: The El Niño/La Niña–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) Alert System is currently on “El Niño Watch” status, with all leading Global Climate Centre’s (GCC’s) indicating increased likelihood for its occurrence by September 2012. The El Niño would be expected to continue into early next year.

Triggers and Declaration: Current sea surface temperatures (SST’s) in the Pacific Ocean have passed +0.5°C. The current three-month moving average stands at 0.0°C. This average must exceed +0.5°C before an El Niño is officially declared with increased likelihood for a late-start El Niño event.

Predictions: The consensus Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF32) seasonal forecast indicated the increased likelihood for the occurrence of a mild to moderate El Niño event coupled with weak but positive trends of the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) during the October to December seasonal rains in the Greater Horn of Africa.

Diverse Impacts: The El Niño phenomenon is associated with wetter-than-normal seasonal rainfall patterns, though the specific impacts depend on the intensity and duration of the El Niño episode coupled with response of the Indian Ocean conditions. Though flooding often occurs, El Niños generally have favourable impacts on food security in East Africa.

MOST-LIKELY CLIMATIC SCENARIO'S AND EXPECTED IMPACTS

Most-Likely Climatic Scenarios: A mild to moderate El Niño event is expected to be declared by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) by mid-September 2012.

Mild to Moderate El Niño: The anticipated mild to moderate El Niño is expected to translate into above normal October–December seasonal rains in the eastern sector of the region, areas which were recently devastated by the 2010/11 severe drought and are yet to fully recover from its adverse impacts. These areas include: southern Somalia, eastern and northern Kenya, and south-eastern Ethiopia. Other areas expected to receive wetter-than-normal conditions are eastern and central South Sudan, eastern Sudan, western and northern Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi, Lake Victoria basin and its environs, and western and coastal strip of Tanzania. The rest of the region is expected to receive normal to above normal rainfall amounts. The regional seasonal forecast statement can be sourced from the following websites: <http://www.icpac.net> and <http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/east-central-africa/en/>

Opportunities

Based on the recent past mild to moderate El Niño events, the forecast offers opportunities for increased agricultural (crop and livestock) production, water resources replenishment, hydro-power generation, and improved biodiversity conditions. However, deliberate and immediate action and resources to take advantage of the expected favourable conditions are needed. These favourable conditions are likely to be short-lived and are often followed by less favourable seasons, especially in the arid and semi-arid pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihood zones. Overall, the food insecurity situation is likely to improve in the short-term in the eastern Horn by early to mid-2013. Please refer to the FEWS NET special report on the El Niño: (http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/El%20Nino%20Special%20Report_2012_08_final.pdf).

Challenges

El Niño events are largely beneficial, but there are associated challenges owing to episodic widespread flooding and the associated escalation of diseases (malaria, Rift Valley Fever, cholera), pests and crop losses, human and livestock deaths and displacements, property and infrastructure destruction. The current alert provides adequate lead-time, as the peak of the El Niño rains are expected to occur from November 2012 into early 2013.

Economic impacts: The adverse impacts of the forecast event (i.e. flood impacts) are expected to be relatively less than the 1997/98 severe El Niño event but is expected to range between the 2006/7 to 2009/10 (mild-moderate) events. Overall, the benefits outweigh the adverse effects, if “no-regrets” mitigation measures are implemented to avert known adverse impacts.

Recommendations: The regional FSNWG has set up a proactive multi-sectoral Taskforce to develop contingency and response plans for appropriate early preparedness and action. The El Niño Taskforce is composed of regional early warning and response experts working under the auspices of the IGAD Executive Secretariat to ensure better coordinated mitigation measures in the region. The FSNWG will provide continuous updates on the evolving situation.

IGAD Secretariat: IGAD will coordinate and also provide updates at decision-making and policies level to ensure appropriate and timely response based on endorsed regional and national framework’s for disaster risk reduction and mitigation strategies.

EL NIÑO IMPACTS: “HOT-SPOTS” MAPPING

Tracking El Niño impacts: In support of improved decision-making, contingency and response planning, the El Niño Taskforce is in the process of developing El Niño vulnerability maps for known El Niño good and adverse “hot-spots”:

- Flood prone areas, estimated affected populations and potential transport network constraints/damages.
- Potential Rift Valley Fever locations and regional potential economic trade implications based on recent past El Niño events.
- Malaria and other water-borne disease locations and health centres.
- Locations of current harvest silos and identified needs to avert huge post-harvest losses (risk of aflatoxins, etc).
- Crop & rangeland models outputs to simulate anticipated crop production opportunities and potential losses through floods.
- Most-likely food security outlook scenario’s including an assumption matrix.

The FSNWG’s El Niño Taskforce will endeavour to provide regular updates on the evolution episode, impact assessments and on-going interventions in the region through the website: <http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/east-central-africa/en/>