

15 September 2026

CONTEXT

The Philippines has entered a significant El Niño episode following the end of La Niña in March 2026. As of September 2026, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) – Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) reports moderate to strong El Niño conditions in the tropical Pacific. Current climate models indicate that El Niño may reach very strong intensity towards the end of 2026 and is likely to persist through the first half of 2027 (DOST-PAGASA, 2026a).

El Niño increases the likelihood of below-normal rainfall, dry spells and drought conditions, although impacts will vary geographically and can be temporarily interrupted by monsoon systems, tropical cyclones and localized rainfall. Current monitoring indicates limited rainfall across several monitored areas, with reported rainfall of only 0–25 mm as of 9 September 2026, corresponding to up to 40% way below normal (DOST-PAGASA, 2026b). The rainfall deficit is occurring alongside warmer-than-normal temperatures. Across much of Maguindanao del Sur, Maguindanao del Norte, the Special Geographic Areas (SGA), temperatures are reported to be slightly above average, with anomalies of 0.51–1.00°C, while in Surigao del Norte and the Zamboanga Peninsula, temperatures are reported to be 1.01–2.00°C above average (DOST-PAGASA, 2026b).

As of the latest available DOST-PAGASA (2026c) dry spell/drought assessment issued on 31 August 2026, the monitored areas were not yet classified under dry condition, dry spell or drought. However, several monitored areas are projected to enter dry conditions by December 2026, potentially escalating to dry spell conditions in January 2027 if rainfall deficits persist. The period from September to December 2026 should therefore be treated as a heightened monitoring and preparedness period, particularly for water availability, agricultural production, livelihoods, food security and climate-sensitive health risks. The greatest concern is the potential cumulative effect of prolonged heat and rainfall deficits, rather than a single dry episode.

Action Against Hunger has started to closely monitor the El Niño impact in its intervention through field level observations, interviews with communities, and consultation with local government units (LGUs) in selected areas in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Siargao Island, and Zamboanga City. This report examines the evolving El Niño situation and its observed and potential impacts across targeted operational areas in BARMM, Surigao del Norte and Zamboanga Peninsula as of 15 September 2026, with a focus on rainfall and dry conditions, temperature, water availability, agriculture, commodity prices, livelihoods, food security, nutrition, and health. It also tracks actions undertaken by Action Against Hunger, government authorities, and other stakeholders to inform early action and operations. This report will be updated on a regular basis.



IMPACT SNAPSHOT

HIGHLIGHTS		
STATUS		MODERATE TO STRONG
ESTIMATED PEOPLE AFFECTED		≈164,000 PEOPLE
AREAS UNDER MONITORING		Maguindanao del Sur, Maguindanao del Norte, SGA, North Cotabato, Surigao del Norte, Zamboanga City
BELOW-NORMAL RAINFALL		Limited rainfall since August 2026. 0–25 mm of rainfall was recorded as of 9 September 2026, corresponding to up to 40% way below normal.
WATER LEVELS DECLINING		Several monitored river reference points are below 2 meters from the normal level, with visible lower water level and reduced water flow. Communities reported declining water levels in wells (less than 50% of usual water level) and handpumps, with some handpumps already no longer producing water.
FOOD SECURITY PRESSURE		Based on interviews with communities in affected areas, some households are already reducing meals to two per day or borrowing or obtaining food from others. Reduced agricultural and fish production has contributed to at least 2% increase in basic commodity prices in monitored Maguindanao and SGA areas.
CROPS & LIVELIHOODS AFFECTED		Reduced irrigation, delayed planting, crop drying and heat stress affects at least 518 farmers served by the Pagalungan River Irrigation System, while 3,816.69 ha in Ligawasan and 691.06 ha in Tugunan in SGA could potentially be affected if dry conditions persist. Fishing catches and income have also declined in several areas, with some households shifting to alternative livelihoods.
HEAT-RELATED CONCERNS		Heat stroke, common colds and flu-like illnesses recorded in monitored areas, with reduced access to safe potable water increasing the risk of diarrhea and other waterborne diseases.
FIRE, HAZE & OTHER EMERGING RISKS		Grass and agricultural fires have been reported in Shariff Aguak and Burgos, while transboundary haze is creating additional health, transportation and livelihood concerns. The Mindanao Grid Yellow Alert, with 617.7 MW of generation capacity unavailable, presents a further risk to essential services.
Based on consolidated official reports and monitoring of Action Against Hunger Field Offices as of 15 September 2026		

Water Availability; Sanitation, & Hygiene

Water scarcity is increasingly evident across monitored communities. In all areas, most potable water is now purchased from refilling stations and in remote areas, households dig deeper wells or share water with neighbors.

In **BARMM**, in the Municipality of Pagalungan, local water sources remain available but are reportedly reduced by around 50% based on community estimates in the river and well water levels. In Datu Montawal, households without sufficient means collect water from the Pulangi River by digging near the riverbank, while water from hand pumps is reportedly muddy with less water output. In Ligawasan and Tugunan in SGA, water systems and individual or communal deep wells are producing below normal levels due to reduce water in the well. Hence, potable water is being purchased in areas located approximately 10–15 km away where the nearest main markets are available, as reported in the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRRMO) local assessments. In Mamasapano and Shariff Aguak, water shortages have begun and some water pumps have dried up. In South Upi, almost all sitios are reportedly affected, with more than 1,876 families facing declining water availability. In Mamasapano, some water pumps have already dried up, making access to water

increasingly difficult for households that primarily depend on local handpumps and wells, with limited alternative water sources available within their communities.

In the Municipality of Burgos in Siargao Island, several deep wells are reportedly non-operational due to insufficient water, while the LGU-managed water supply is also affected by insufficient source availability. In General Luna, hotels and resorts are asking for water supply augmentation and local stakeholders observed that current dry period is longer than previous ones.

In Zamboanga City, water supply remains relatively stable at present, although LGU and barangay authorities anticipate possible deterioration if limited rainfall continues. In Barangays Kasanyangan and Rio Hondo, water shortages are already being felt in the resettlement site, where households purchase water by gallon and obtain drinking water from refilling stations.

Agriculture and Livelihoods

Agricultural production is also being affected by reduced water availability, declining irrigation, delayed planting, low soil moisture and heat stress.

In the Municipality of Pagalungan in BARMM, approximately 518 farmers benefiting from the Pagalungan River Irrigation System experienced **reduced agricultural production** due to reduced water availability. Farmers are delaying seasonal planting and land preparation until sufficient rainfall occurs. Receding water levels have exposed cultivated riverbeds and marshlands, while some fisherfolk have shifted temporarily to farming. However, vegetable farmers in Datu Montawal are unable to plant because of inadequate water and unfavorable soil conditions. A 34% to 78% decline in crop production is reported for rice and corn, along livestock deaths as reported by the Datu Montawal Municipal Agricultural Office (MAO) based on their local assessments. Across Ligawasan and Tugunan SGA, respectively ~3,816.69 and ~691.06 hectares could potentially be affected if dry conditions or drought persist. In Sultan sa Barongis, General Salipada K. Pendatun, Rajah Buayan, Datu Salibo and the Kabuntalan areas, drying and cracking soils are affecting rice and vegetable production, with farmers beginning to consider more heat-tolerant crops. In Pikit, Mamasapano, and Shariff Aguak, crops are reportedly drying or dying because of heat and lack of precipitation. Fish are also reportedly migrating to deeper marsh and river areas, resulting in lower catches and a higher proportion of juvenile fish, forcing some farmers and fisherfolk to shift to motored bikes (*habal-habal*) driving, domestic work, and construction as alternative sources of income.

Food Security and Commodity Prices

Food security pressures are emerging in areas experiencing reduced agricultural and fishing production. Some households report relying on less expensive food, while some families are consuming two meals per day instead of the usual three. In Datu Montawal, households without surviving crops reportedly borrow or obtain produce from other households with surplus. In parts of Sultan sa Barongis, increased incidents of crop and food theft are being reported. Basic commodity prices in monitored Maguindanao and SGA areas have increased by at least 2%, based on market validation from the first quarter to mid-third quarter of 2026. Reported drivers include recurring fuel price increases, reduced agricultural production, and lower fish catches.

Nutrition and Health

Heat-related health concerns, such as heat stroke, common colds and flu-like illnesses, are being reported in several Maguindanao and SGA communities, with a potential threat of a chickenpox outbreak. Reduced access to safe drinking water increases the risk of diarrhea and other waterborne diseases, while severe temperatures may increase hypertension risks, particularly among older people. The ongoing transboundary haze from forest and land fires in Kalimantan, Indonesia, transported toward parts of the Philippines by prevailing winds, presents an additional respiratory health concern in areas experiencing deteriorated air quality. Recent monitoring by the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) recorded elevated PM2.5 levels in several areas of Mindanao, including parts of Zamboanga City, indicating potential exposure to fine particulate pollution. No specific increase in acute malnutrition has been reported in the monitoring data.

EMERGING NEEDS

The current findings indicate a need to implement early targeted interventions in already impacted communities and strengthen preparedness before the projected transition to dry conditions, potentially dry spell conditions and drought later in 2026 and early 2027. Priority needs include:

- Safe and reliable water access, particularly in communities where handpumps and wells are drying up.

- Water-source augmentation and household water treatment, including support for alternative sources, water rationing and conservation, and safe treatment.
- Agricultural support, particularly for farmers facing reduced irrigation, delayed planting, crop stress, and potential production losses.
- Food-security and livelihood assistance for households experiencing reduced agricultural/fishing income, reduced meal frequency, and reliance on less preferred or less expensive foods.
- Support climate-resilient and water-efficient production, through appropriate farm inputs and alternative livelihood options where traditional activities are becoming less viable.
- Heat- and water-related health preparedness, including prevention of heat illness, diarrheal disease, and other climate-sensitive conditions, particularly among vulnerable groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Based on the current situation and identified gaps, Action Against Hunger has outlined key recommendations and proposed next steps.

El Niño Assessment and Operations Monitoring		• Continue El Niño monitoring at regional, provincial, municipal and barangay levels, with particular attention to water availability, agricultural production, livelihoods, food security, and health. • Establish consistent fixed-point monitoring of water levels to strengthen comparison across monitoring periods. • Coordinate with other stakeholders and LGUs to share El Niño-related information on the situation, needs, and emerging impacts. • Coordinate to ensure that El Niño-related interventions are aligned with and complement planned and ongoing interventions of other stakeholders and government agencies.
Activation of Anticipatory Action/ Rapid Response Mechanism		• Use the ongoing monitoring findings to identify trigger points for anticipatory action and rapid response, particularly where water sources are drying, agricultural losses are increasing, or households begin adopting more severe coping strategies. • Prioritize communities already experiencing severe water shortages, while maintaining readiness in other monitored areas. • Review available prepositioned supplies and response capacity, including water treatment supplies and food stocks. • Coordinate closely with LGUs and relevant government agencies on thresholds for escalation.
Proposed Multi-sectoral Interventions	Water, Sanitation, & Hygiene	• Prioritize safe water access and water-source augmentation in communities where handpumps, wells, and local water systems are drying up. • Support household- and community-level water treatment. • Strengthen water conservation messaging and safe water-storage practices. • Assess the feasibility of emergency water trucking or alternative water-source arrangements in communities where existing water systems are no longer adequate. • Assess and support access to safe water in public places and institutions, including hospitals, markets, schools, and other critical facilities, to address current needs and strengthen preparedness. • Ensure access to adequate water for livestock in water-stressed communities.
	Nutrition and Health	• Strengthen monitoring of heat stroke, diarrheal disease, flu-like illnesses, and other climate-sensitive health conditions • Promote heat-risk prevention, including appropriate work/rest practices and protection of vulnerable groups • Strengthen health messaging and community measures related to safe water, hygiene and prevention of waterborne disease. • Monitor nutrition outcomes where reduced meal frequency and reliance on cheaper foods are reported. • Coordinate with health authorities on respiratory protection and risk communication related to transboundary haze.

	Food Security and Livelihoods	• Conduct regular validation of crop losses and livelihood impacts. • Support affected farmers with appropriate farm inputs, seedlings and water-efficient/climate-resilient production practices • Continue monitoring food prices and household coping strategies. • Encourage livestock protection measures, including access to water sources, shade structures, and feed supplementation. • Promote water-efficient household food production practices, such as home gardening and water conservation, to support food security.
	Protection	• Monitor protection risks associated with food insecurity, crop and food theft, water scarcity and potential displacement. • Monitor the situation of households in GIDA areas exposed to potential evacuation. • Strengthen protection risk assessment and referral mechanisms for households affected by food insecurity, water scarcity, livelihood losses, and potential displacement, prioritizing vulnerable households and GIDA communities.
	Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation	• Strengthening community and LGU preparedness for the potential escalation from below-normal rainfall to dry condition and dry spell. • Support LGUs and partner communities to review and, where necessary, develop or activate El Niño-specific contingency plans, building on existing disaster risk management and contingency plans. • Strengthen the capacity of LGUs and partner communities to monitor local El Niño conditions, including water levels, rainfall, agricultural conditions, and other relevant indicators, through coordination with MDRRMOs and community-level key informant interviews. • Consider tabletop exercises with municipal and provincial governments to test planning and response arrangements for El Niño, aligned with existing municipal, provincial, and regional plans. • Strengthen coordination with Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR), MAOs, and other relevant government agencies to share assessment findings from the affected communities and align preparedness and anticipatory action measures. • Update transboundary haze and potential power/utility interruptions in contingency planning as compounding risks.
	Cross-cutting activities	• Maintain regular coordination with DOST-PAGASA, LGUs, MAFAR, National Irrigation Authority (NIA), health authorities, and other relevant stakeholders. • Apply preventive and responsive gender-sensitive and environmental considerations throughout activities planning and implementation

SOURCES

1. Actual findings by the Action Against Hunger Philippine Mission – August and September 2026 El Niño Monitoring Reports and field monitoring/assessment findings.
2. DOST-PAGASA. (2026a). *El Nino Advisory No. 4. (Simplified Version)*, issued 6th of September 2026. <https://www.pagasa.dost.gov.ph/climate/el-nino-la-nina/advisories>
3. DOST-PAGASA. (2026b). *Rainfall Monitoring and Temperature Monitoring*. <https://www.pagasa.dost.gov.ph/climate/climate-monitoring>
4. DOST-PAGASA. (2026c). *Drought Dry Spell/ Drought Assessment issued 31st of August 2026*. <https://pubfiles.pagasa.dost.gov.ph/pagasaweb/files/climate/dryspell/drought/Drought%20and%20Dry%20Spell%20Assessment.pdf>
5. Local Government Units / MDRRMO / BLGU field reports and assessments, including Pagalungan, Datu Montawal, Sultan sa Barongis, South Upi, Mamasapano, Shariff Aguak, SGA municipalities, Burgos and Zamboanga City.

PHOTOS



In photo: The river's water level has receded significantly, exposing the riverbed to the extent that an individual can stand in the middle of the channel.

In photo: This parcel of land was once a part of Mindanao River Basin, connecting to Pulangi River. Crops are drying up.

Date: September 3, 2026

Location: Dimalagos Creek, located in Batungkayo, Datu Montawal, Mag-sur. This creek is connected to the Rio Grande De Mindanao also known as "Pulangi River"

Photo source: Maresa Batua; and Datoal Mangadad

Coordinates: 7°06'12" N, 124°43'57" E

Observations: The river exhibits significant siltation, with sediment deposits visibly accumulating along the river channel; water volume has decreased substantially, resulting in critically low water levels and exposed portions of the riverbed; The continued decline in water availability poses a significant risk to agricultural production, particularly irrigated crops, due to insufficient water for cultivation; reduced water levels are also likely to deplete fish populations and negatively affect inland fisheries by reducing aquatic habitat and water quality; and if dry conditions persist, these impacts may further undermine the livelihoods and food security of farming and fishing communities.



Date: September 4, 2026

Location: Macasendeg, Tugunan, SGA

Photo source: Lambra Makalimpas (BHW)

Coordinates: 7°02'34.48"N 124°35'55.55"E

Observations: The river exhibits significant siltation, with visible sediment deposits along the river channel; water volume has decreased considerably, resulting in reduced streamflow and low water levels; the reduced water volume may affect water availability for irrigation, domestic use, and inland fisheries, potentially impacting water-dependent livelihoods if dry conditions persist.



Date: September 8, 2026

Location: Dungguan, Datu Montawal

Photo source: Norhan Masdal

Coordinates: 7°04'38.43"N 124°44'51.95"E

Observations: The farmland's topsoil is almost dried up, with extensive surface cracking indicative of prolonged moisture deficiency; existing crops are exhibiting visible signs of water stress, including wilting and drying, with an increased risk of reduced yields or crop failure if dry conditions persist; water volume visibly decreasing, and showing siltation; and the continued lack of soil moisture is likely to adversely affect agricultural productivity and the livelihoods of farming households.



In photo: In the middle of the River within Talitay, silt was visibly seen, indicating low amount water in terms of volume. May be due no-to less rainfall acquire in the past several weeks.

In photo: Rice crops were drying up, due to lack of water and moisture. This may be categorized as "failing crop".

In photo: Utility/ Domestic- used water from improvised Well was depleted.

Date: September 10, 2026

Location: Talitay, Datu Montawal

Photo source: Moktar Abubakar

Coordinates: 6°59'26.42"N 124°44'34.38"E

Observations: Depleted Water supply from Localized Well; The river exhibits significant sediment deposition (siltation), with exposed sandbars indicating reduced flow velocity and sediment accumulation; Water levels appear below normal, resulting in a narrower active; the paddy field exhibits severe soil desiccation, characterized by extensive surface cracking caused by prolonged moisture deficiency; rice plants show moderate to severe drought stress, with visible leaf discoloration, drying, and uneven crop growth, indicating inadequate soil moisture; the absence of standing water and limited soil moisture suggests insufficient irrigation or rainfall, increasing the likelihood of reduced crop productivity or partial crop failure.