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Minimizing Risk through Science

ZIMBABWE NATIONAL CLIMATE OUTLOOK:

No.1

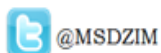
OCTOBER 2026 TO MARCH 2027

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the 2026/27 seasonal rainfall outlook (October 2026 – March 2027), the primary oceanic and atmospheric drivers influencing the SADC region were assessed, including the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO). ENSO is currently in its warm (El Niño) phase and is projected to persist throughout the forecast period. The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is also positive and is expected to remain so until the end of January 2027, before transitioning to neutral in February 2027. Collectively, these phenomena increase the likelihood of below-normal rainfall across Zimbabwe.

Consequently, the forecast indicates a high probability of below-normal rainfall nationwide for the October–December 2026 period. From January to March 2027, the southern and western parts of the country are expected to receive normal rainfall, although with a bias toward below-normal totals, while the rest of the country is likely to experience below-normal conditions. Although this outlook is based on global climate drivers, actual rainfall distribution will ultimately depend on the response of local and short-term weather systems to these large-scale drivers. The MSD will therefore continue to monitor both global and regional climate signals and provide regular updates to support short-term decision-making by all stakeholders.

Despite the elevated chances of a drier season, the risk of violent storms and flash floods remains significant. Proactive measures including water harvesting, irrigation planning, drainage maintenance, and public health preparedness are strongly advised. The public is encouraged to rely on the MSD's continuous short-term guidance and regular updates, as the department will actively track evolving climate and weather systems throughout the season



Meteorological Services Department of Zimbabwe



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1.0 SUMMARY TERMINOLOGY

Table 1: Seasonal Forecast Terminology.

Tercile Category	Colour Codes	Percentage of Normal
Above Normal	Above normal	Above 125% of long-term average rainfall accumulation
Normal category	Normal to above	100-125% of long-term average rainfall accumulation
	Normal to below	75% - 100% of long-term average rainfall accumulation
Below Normal	Below Normal	Below 75% of long-term average rainfall accumulation

2.0 THE RAINFALL SEASON FORECAST

The seasonal rainfall forecast is probabilistic indicating the likelihood of receiving rainfall within, below or above the long-term average accumulative rainfall for the forecast period for each place across the country. The rainfall zones are dynamic. Places with same forecast signal in each forecast period will fall in same zone.

2.1 OCTOBER-NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2026.

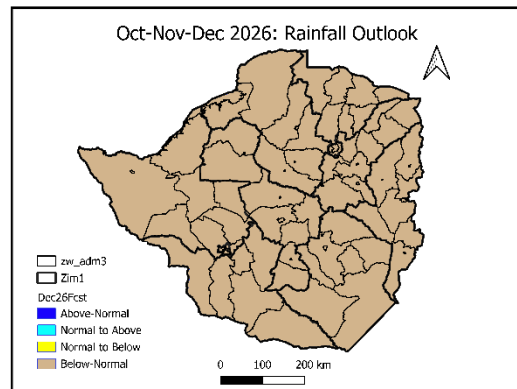


Figure 1: There is an increased chance of below normal rainfall across the country during the October to December 2026 period.

2.2 JANUARY-FEBRUARY-MARCH 2027

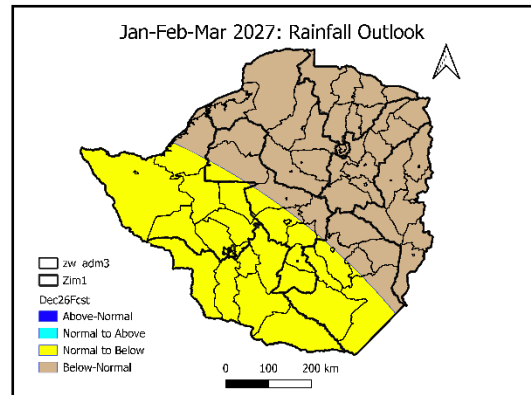
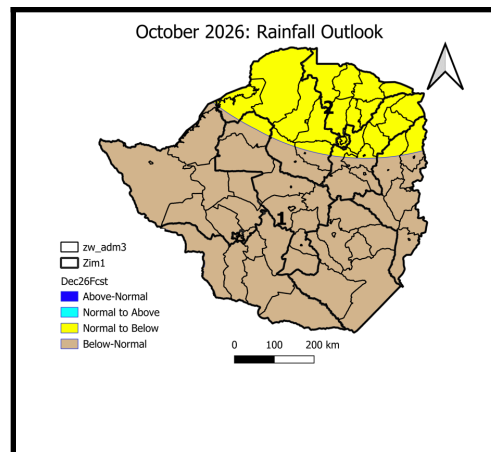


Figure 2: There is an increased chance of normal to below normal rainfall in the southern and western parts of the country (yellow region) and remaining parts should expect below normal rainfall for the period from January to March 2027 period.

3.0 MONTHLY FORECASTS

An increased chance of normal to below normal rainfall is expected October and December 2026 across the country.

3.1 October 2026:



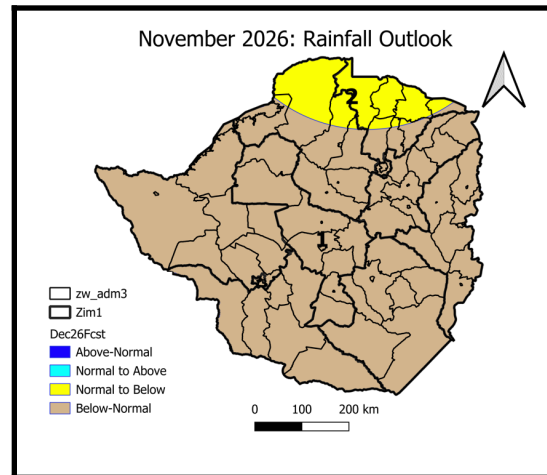
Below-normal rainfall (increased probability)

Masvingo, the bulk of Matabeleland provinces, Bulawayo Metropolitan, much of Midlands, the southern and extreme southwestern fringes of Mashonaland West, the southern parts of Mashonaland East, and the greater part of Manicaland.

Normal to below-normal rainfall (increased probability):

The extreme northern parts of Manicaland, the northern districts of Mashonaland East, the bulk of Mashonaland West and Mashonaland Central, Harare Metropolitan, and the extreme northern fringe of Midlands.

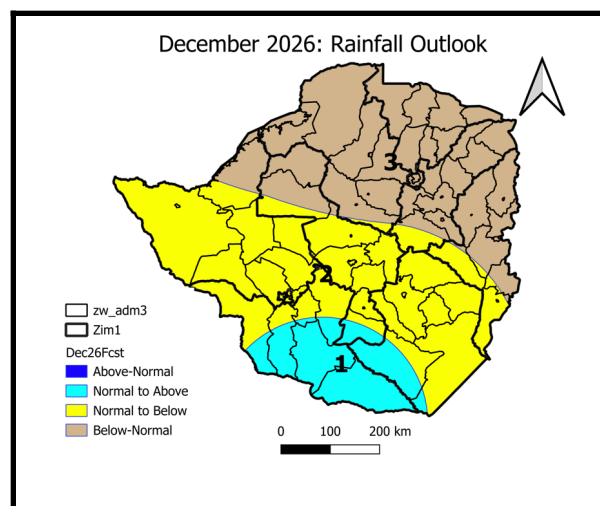
3.2 November 2026



The northern parts of both Mashonaland West and Mashonaland Central have an increased chance of normal to below normal rainfall.

The remaining parts of the country have an increased chance of below normal rainfall.

3.3 December 2026



Normal to above-normal rainfall (increased probability)

Southern parts of Matabeleland South, extreme southern parts of Midlands, and extreme southwestern parts of Masvingo.

Normal to below-normal rainfall (increased probability)

Most of Masvingo; extreme southwestern Manicaland; extreme southern parts of Mashonaland East; the southern fringe of Mashonaland West; central parts of Midlands; northern and western parts of Matabeleland South; Bulawayo Metropolitan; and most of Matabeleland North.

Below-normal rainfall (increased probability)

Extreme northern parts of Midlands and Matabeleland North; most of Mashonaland West, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, and Manicaland; as well as Harare Metropolitan

4.0 MEAN START AND END OF SEASON

The mean onset of the rainfall season in Zimbabwe usually occurs from November to early December. For the forthcoming 2026/27 season, however, rainfall patterns are projected to be highly erratic, and a significant portion of the country is expected to see no effective start to the season. Historical analogue seasons for this outlook include 2023/24 and 2015/16, both of which were characterised by a widespread failure of the seasonal onset across much of the country.

5.0 THE TEMPERATURE FORECAST

Warmer than normal conditions are expected to prevail across the first three months of the season. An update for the last three month of the season will be issued as the season progresses.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The forecast is for cumulative rainfall for the three-month periods: OND 2026 and JFM 2027. The monthly forecasts for October, November, December indicate that the rainfall in the below normal category is expected across the three months except for December where normal to above normal rainfall is expected in southern parts of Matabeleland South, extreme southern parts of Midlands and western parts of Masvingo provinces. Both OND and JFM shows a dry signal across the country.

It should be noted that below normal to normal conditions are associated with high chance of prolonged dry spells, high temperatures, erratic rain patterns and excess heat in the atmosphere also increase chances of violent storms, which may cause flash floods, strong winds lightning strikes.

The Meteorological Services Department will continue to monitor seasonal climate indicators which influence Zimbabwe's rainfall as they evolve. In addition, there are daily weather forecasts and 10-day weather bulletins that take into account any changes and are useful for short-term planning. A seasonal forecast is a long-term planning tool and therefore it doesn't replace the need for short term forecasts which are key for capturing the occurrence of short-term weather events such as dry spells, actual onset of season which cannot be captured in a seasonal forecast.