MATI Releases: 'El Niño: Voices of the Farmers,' Smallholder Farmers in India and Zambia on El Niño and 2026 Harvest

Published during Climate Week NYC and UNGA, records what smallholder farmers saw and how they are preparing as a very strong El Niño builds into 2027

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, September 23, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- MATI today released El Niño: Voices of the Farmers, a field report available at el-nino.maticarbon.com, gathering first-hand accounts from smallholder farmers in India and Zambia on how the 2026 growing season unfolded under a strengthening El Niño. It is published during Climate Week NYC and the UN General Assembly's high-level week, where the farmers most exposed to climate disruption are rarely heard directly.

In September 2026, as forecasters upgraded the current El Niño to very strong, MATI asked farmers in both countries three questions: what changed in the weather this year, what it did to the farm and the family, and what they expect next year. The report carries each farmer's answers, in Hindi, English or Chitonga, with the recordings where they survive and a photograph taken at the interview.

"Farmers are the first to see what a changing climate does to a harvest, and they are the last to be asked about it," said Shantanu Agarwal, CEO of MATI. "This El Niño has not yet reached its peak, and farmers in India are already describing a season that cost them money before it cost them yield. We are publishing their accounts so that the people meeting in New York this week can hear directly from the people whose livelihoods are on the line."

El Niño, and why 2027 matters

El Niño is a periodic warming of the central and eastern Pacific that shifts rainfall patterns across much of the world. It typically weakens the Indian monsoon and dries southern Africa's main rains, on which Zambian maize depends. In its September 10, 2026 update, NOAA's Climate Prediction Center gave a greater than 90 percent chance of a very strong event through autumn and winter, and a 75 percent chance that October to December runs stronger than any El Niño on record back to 1950. Forecasters expect it to keep building through the end of 2026 and run into 2027.

India: the late monsoon raised farmers' costs before the harvest came in

The India Meteorological Department recorded 603.7mm of rain between June 1 and August 31 against a normal of 700.7mm, 14 percent below normal, with 348 of India's 741 districts below normal by August 25. On September 11, the Ministry of Agriculture counted 426.81 lakh hectares of paddy planted against 443.78 lakh hectares at the same point last year, a drop of 4 percent.

Most farmers describe a monsoon that came late and then came irregularly. Yogeshwar Pratap Singh, in Amadand, Chhattisgarh, put the delay at about ten days and blamed El Niño, which he had heard about on the news. They also describe extra irrigation to establish the crop, fertiliser and pesticide windows that opened and closed within a week, a stem borer outbreak in the late-transplanted crop, and a chemical bill that no one had budgeted for.

"When it should rain it does not, and when it should not, it does," said Rakesh Kumar Baghde of Ugdewada, Madhya Pradesh, speaking in Hindi. "Due to excessive heat, labourers who could normally work 4-5 hours in the field for weeding got exhausted within 2-3 hours this year," said Prashanta Mondal of Padampur, who answered in English.

Not every village had the same year. Several farmers described adequate rain, and villages within about 90km of each other on the Jharkhand and West Bengal border had opposite seasons.

The report's central finding for India is that a farmer can lose money in a season the yield figures call average.

Zambia: a good 2025/26 harvest, and an official forecast of below-normal rain ahead

In Zambia, where the main rains arrive from November, farmers in Mukuni, outside Livingstone in Southern Province, were describing the season behind them. After a 2024/25 season with too little rain, they described a 2025/26 season with enough and a good harvest, though Dominic Nyambe said waterlogging cost him part of his crop.

The season ahead looks different. SADC favours drier than normal conditions across much of southern Africa for the 2026/27 rains and flags Zambia for below-normal rainfall risk in the first quarter of 2027. Dominic Nyambe cited the Meteorological Department's forecast of below-normal rain in parts of Southern Province.

What farmers expect next

Asked about next year, almost no one in India named rain. They named heat, and they named groundwater. "Where the water stood at 40 feet it has gone to 70 or 80 feet," said Yogeshwar Pratap Singh, speaking in Hindi. Naiki Hansda, in Phulpahari, plans to grow maize or millets if next year looks dry.

About the farmers in the report

Every farmer in the report works with MATI, which has spread natural rock dust on their fields at no cost to them. In ordinary years in India, MATI's 235 paired plots, with and without rock dust, showed a median 25 percent higher yield, worth about $480 more income per farmer per season, or 32 percent of household income. These are not El Niño figures. The report does not claim rock dust protected any farmer's yield this season, and MATI has no El Niño-year control or measurement linking rock dust to water retention.

Every farmer in the report has given consent for their name, photograph and recorded voice to be published. Farmers are available for interview, with translation, through MATI's press office.

About MATI

MATI raises farmer incomes by removing carbon. Today, MATI works in seven countries to spread natural rock dust on the fields of farmers. This raises crop yields, corrects soil acidity, releases nutrients, and delivers durable carbon removal through the process of enhanced rock weathering. Carbon revenue funds the entire operation, so farmers pay nothing. For this work, MATI won the $50M XPRIZE Carbon Removal Grand Prize. https://mati.earth/

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