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Record Super El Niño Still Strengthening — Sudan's Nile Was Already Running Low

3Bi Situation Report — Climate & Energy Desk | First edition

Research Team

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The 2026 "Super El Niño" just broke the all-time strength record and is still strengthening toward a November-January peak — arriving on top of a Nile system in Sudan that was already measurably low in August.

3Bi Situation Report — Climate & Energy Desk | First edition | Information cut-off: 26 September 2026, 12:00 UTC

Headline Fact

The 2026 "Super El Niño" has broken the all-time daily strength record in the tropical Pacific, surpassing the previous record set in 2015, according to Carbon Brief analysis published 21 September 2026 and updated 23 September. Seasonal forecast models now project the event will keep strengthening into a November–January peak far beyond any El Niño previously observed — arriving on top of a Nile system in Sudan that was already measurably low.

Timeline

- **June 2026:** The current El Niño event begins developing in the tropical Pacific, according to Carbon Brief's tracking of NOAA's Oceanic Niño Index (ONI).
- **18 August 2026:** The IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) issues its October–December 2026 seasonal outlook for the Greater Horn of Africa, forecasting wetter-than-normal conditions across the region's southern and eastern areas (Somalia, southern Ethiopia, central Kenya, the Lake Victoria basin) as El Niño strengthens — a forecast that does not disaggregate conditions for Sudan specifically.
- **22 August 2026:** AFP reports from Gedaref and areas south of Khartoum that Sudanese farmland along the Nile lies fallow and sandbars are exposed where an island "usually covered by July" remained dry. The report cites University of Tübingen satellite data showing the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam's reservoir roughly six metres lower in July 2026 than in July 2025, and quotes MIT climate scientist Elfatih Eltahir describing El Niño as "closely associated with low Nile flow." The same report notes Sudan's ongoing war and Strait of Hormuz-linked fuel and fertiliser cost spikes as compounding, non-climate factors behind the season's failures.
- **21 September 2026:** Carbon Brief reports the Niño 3.4 sea-surface-temperature anomaly reached 3.11°C, above the prior



daily record of 3.08°C set in November 2015 — reached roughly two months earlier in the calendar year than any previous “very strong” event.

- **23 September 2026:** Carbon Brief updates the analysis to confirm the event has now also broken the record under an alternative, human-warming-adjusted index (RONI).

What We Know / What We Don't

We know the current El Niño is the fastest-developing and, on one standard measure, the strongest ever recorded this early in the year, and that forecast models are in near-unanimous agreement it will keep strengthening through the northern-hemisphere winter. We know Sudan's Nile levels and GERD reservoir were already measurably depressed by August, in a season a named climate scientist linked directly to El Niño's disruption of the Ethiopian highland rains that feed the Blue Nile. We know regional seasonal outlooks for October–December point to wetter conditions for Somalia, Kenya and southern Ethiopia — a different season and a different part of the basin from the rains that failed this past summer.

We do not know how this specific El Niño will affect Sudan's own rainfall and river levels through the coming months: none of the regional forecasts we reviewed disaggregate conditions for Sudan, and ground monitoring inside the country is degraded by the ongoing conflict. We also do not know the eventual peak strength with confidence — Carbon Brief notes no seasonal forecasting system has ever been verified against an event this large, and this summer's observed temperatures already ran slightly cooler than models predicted.

Do-No-Harm Note

Reviewed per Section 7.3 of 3Bi's writing guidelines: this report names one already-published, on-the-record farmer source (quoted by AFP under his own name, in the international press) and one named academic; it identifies no unpublished individual, does not disclose locations more specific than those already public, and does not draw conclusions about any community's safety or vulnerability beyond what cited sources state directly.

What to Watch

- **November 2026–January 2027:** the projected window for this El Niño's peak; models put the likely peak anomaly around 4.1°C, roughly 1.3°C above the 2015–16 record.
- **Early October 2026:** Carbon Brief's next quarterly “state of the climate” update, which it says will address what a record



El Niño means for global temperatures in 2027.

- Whether any Sudan-specific hydrological or food-security monitoring (FEWS NET, the Nile Basin Initiative, or FAO) publishes an update that fills the country-level forecasting gap this report identifies.

Sourcing & Next Update

Sources: Carbon Brief, "Analysis: 'Super El Niño' breaks 'remarkable' all-time record" (21 & 23 Sept 2026); AFP via Business Recorder, "Sudan farms lie barren as El Nino leaves Nile banks dry" (22 Aug 2026); ICPAC Greater Horn of Africa OND 2026 seasonal outlook (18 Aug 2026); WMO/GHACOF Greater Horn of Africa seasonal rainfall outlook. Next update expected if a Sudan-specific forecast is published, or at this workflow's next scheduled edition.

3Bi Research Team. This piece was produced through 3Bi's automated daily publications workflow monitoring regional and international climate reporting.

This publication is produced with support from 3Bi's institutional donors; see the full funder list at 3bisudan.org.

Suggested citation: 3Bi Research Team, "Situation Report," 26 September 2026, Build Back Better Initiative (3Bi), 3bisudan.org

Publisher: Build Back Better Initiative (3Bi)