

V

JUDGEMENT 5 OF 7

HOW SURE WE ARE: OBSERVED

Africa's largest emergencies were almost absent from the speeches

IN BRIEF

- The Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is the largest in the country's history, and a very strong El Niño is building over southern Africa.
- Neither was prominent in the leaders' speeches in New York, and the UN's plan to prepare for El Niño is about 80% unfunded.

Both emergencies needed a government to champion them in New York and bring others to pay. For Ebola, that role fell to the United States. For El Niño, nobody took it. Africa's own leaders spoke about other things, although both crises fall on African people first.

The reasoning

By 23 September, WHO had counted 7,890 confirmed cases of Bundibugyo Ebola and 3,799 deaths in seven provinces of the DRC. Almost half of those infected have died. WHO declared it a global health emergency, its highest level of alarm, on 17 May. No vaccine is approved for this type of Ebola. A trial of a vaccine made for a different type began in Ituri province on 21 September, with 20,000 doses for front-line workers. The DRC's own speech to the Assembly dwelt on Rwanda and on minerals. The money to fight the outbreak came from a meeting in the margins called by the United States.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) puts the chance that El Niño lasts until February 2027 at close to 100%. The UN's regional alert gives a 70% chance that rain in southern Africa from October to December will be lower than in any El Niño year since 1950. The UN has a plan with 84 actions to reach 11.9 million people before the worst arrives. It costs \$111.3 million and is about 80% unfunded. Only 13 of the 84 actions have money set aside in advance. The region does have grain in

store. South Africa expects a record maize harvest of about 17 million tonnes, and Zambia has about 2.5 million tonnes available to export. Each month without money leaves less time to protect harvests and water supplies.

Both emergencies are cheaper to deal with now than later. Neither needed a speech from the podium to be funded. Each needed a sponsor, and in New York Africa's own leaders did not act as that sponsor for either crisis.

The evidence

- WHO: 7,890 confirmed Ebola cases and 3,799 deaths in the DRC to 23 September [Source](#)
- UN: the \$111.3 million El Niño preparedness plan for southern Africa is about 80% unfunded [Source](#)
- UN News: the DRC's statement to the General Assembly [Source](#)
- UN News: a trial of the Ervebo vaccine began in Ituri on 21 September with 20,000 doses [Source](#)
- IOL: South Africa expects a record maize crop of 17.26 million tonnes [Source](#)
- Zambia Monitor: Zambia has 2.49 million tonnes of maize available for export [Source](#)

The strongest argument against

Speeches are a poor measure of how a crisis is handled. The Ebola response rests on the coalition's money, WHO's work in the field and vaccine trials in the region. African leaders may also have pressed for both crises in private meetings away from the podium.

Sector briefings behind this judgement

Sector · Strong inference

Health

Health money for Africa now comes through one-to-one deals, and patients' data is part of the price.

[Open the briefing](#)

Sector · Observed

Food and agriculture

Africa's hunger stopped rising in 2025 at the highest rate of any region, and the price of food, fertiliser and transport now decides who eats.

[Open the briefing](#)

Sector · Strong inference

Climate and energy

Money to help Africa cope with climate change is shrinking, while Africa sells its minerals and carbon credits on terms it has not yet set.

[Open the briefing](#)

Recommended moves

30 DAYS · BY 28 OCTOBER 2026

REGIONAL

Pay for southern Africa's El Niño plan with African money before the rains fail

Leads: The SADC secretariat and African foundations, with the African Development Bank holding the money; Zimbabwe and Mozambique go first

100 DAYS · BY EARLY JANUARY 2027

REGIONAL

Keep grain trade open in southern Africa and buy before the hungry months

Leads: SADC ministers of agriculture and trade, with Zambia's Ministry of Agriculture going first

2 YEARS · BY SEPTEMBER 2028

CONTINENTAL

Pay first salaries for jobless nurses and midwives while governments take over

Leads: WHO's Africa office under the Charter, with African foundations and public development lenders; Kenya and Zambia go first

Words used on this page

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Africa's second-largest country by area, in central Africa. Its east has seen armed conflict for three decades, and it holds much of the world's cobalt. [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

El Niño

A warming of the Pacific Ocean every few years that changes weather worldwide. In southern Africa it usually brings drought, and in the Horn of Africa it often brings floods. [Our recommendation on this](#) · [Food and agriculture briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

World Health Organization (WHO)

The UN's health agency. It sets health standards and coordinates responses to outbreaks. The United States left it in January 2026. [Health briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: who.int](#)

Bundibugyo Ebola

One of several types of Ebola virus. Unlike the more common Zaire type, it has no approved vaccine or treatment. [Health briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: who.int](#)

WMO

The World Meteorological Organization, the UN's agency for weather, climate and water. It coordinates forecasts and early warnings. [Food and agriculture briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: wmo.int](#)

UN General Assembly

The meeting of all 193 UN member states, each with one vote. It meets every year from September. It can make statements, elect members of other bodies and approve the UN budget, but most of what it says does not bind governments. [Glossary](#) · [Source: un.org](#)