



Did you know?

El Niño is not only a climate concern—it is a food-system challenge for cities.

Expected to peak between September and December 2026, its effects on planting, production, and future harvests may continue through 2027. The World Food Programme estimates that [El Niño-related shocks could push at least 49 million additional people into acute food insecurity globally by the end of 2027](#).

In the [WHO South-East Asia Regional Healthy Cities Network](#), countries are responding through various combinations of emergency measures, climate adaptation, agricultural planning, and supply-chain resilience.

1. Bangladesh

Bangladesh is focusing on protecting the Boro rice season from drought and irrigation pressures.

- **Irrigation:** Approximately [Tk 9,750 crore has been requested to ensure uninterrupted electricity](#) for irrigation pumps.
- **Agricultural inputs:** Around [2 million tonnes of fertiliser are being imported](#) ahead of the Boro/Rabi season.
- **Drought resilience:** Approximately [20,000 km of canals, rivers, and water bodies are being excavated or re-excavated](#), alongside agro-meteorological advisories for farmers.

For Healthy Cities: Protecting rice production can help safeguard urban food availability and prices, providing food security for the population.

2. Bhutan

Bhutan is embedding drought resilience into broader agrifood transformation rather than treating El Niño solely as an emergency.

- **Agrifood transformation:** The [13th Five-Year Plan](#) includes approximately US\$180 million for climate-resilient agriculture, irrigation, value chains, and market access.
- **Water and risk management:** Investments include water harvesting, irrigation, spring-shed management, and crop and livestock insurance.
- **Early action:** A national agriculture drought watch is being developed to anticipate drought and support earlier intervention.

For Healthy Cities: Resilient food systems require investments in water, agriculture, markets, and risk management, preventing food scarcity when crisis hits.

3. India

India is combining agricultural contingency planning with measures to limit potential impacts on food prices.

- **Contingency planning:** [ICAR](#) and the Agriculture Ministry have updated district plans and issued SOPs for El Niño-related risks.
- **Rabi crop preparedness:** States are assessing soil moisture, reservoirs, and groundwater to identify areas needing alternative or short-duration crops.
- **Economic buffers:** The Finance Ministry has flagged potential food-inflation risks, while identifying irrigation, procurement, and food stocks as key buffers.

For Healthy Cities: Protecting agricultural output can help reduce risks to food access and ensure affordability for all.

4. Maldives

With heavy reliance on food imports, the Maldives is focusing on preparedness and continuity rather than domestic crop production.

- **Climate risks:** Below-normal rainfall is forecast in parts of the country, alongside above-normal temperatures nationwide.
- **Continuity planning:** The [National Disaster Management Authority](#) has called for institutions, businesses, and the public to review vulnerabilities and prepare for disruptions.

For Healthy Cities: Food-system resilience depends on the readiness of all stakeholders and systems.

5. Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has developed a multi-sector response linking food security, water, agriculture, and livelihoods.

- **Coordination:** A ministerial panel and [Special Cabinet Sub-Committee on El Niño have been established](#), with a proposed cross-sector response task force.
- **Food and water:** Buffer stocks of essential imported foods are being maintained, while approximately [Rs 4.48 billion has been allocated to provide water to around 72,000 people in drought-affected districts](#).
- **Agricultural adaptation:** Measures include shorter-duration paddy, drought-resistant crops, alternative food sources, and accelerated crop insurance payments.

For Healthy Cities: Multi-sectoral mechanisms need to be well-established for efficient and effective response.

6. Thailand

Thailand is combining direct farmer support with broader water-management measures.

- **Farmer support:** A [THB 2 billion El Niño fund](#) has been approved for FY2027, covering production, marketing, and price stabilisation.
- **Water management:** Drinking water is prioritised, followed by ecosystems, agriculture, and industry, while water is retained for dry-season reserves.
- **Agricultural impact:** [Estimated losses could reach approximately THB 62 billion through H1 2027](#), including around THB 43 billion in rice.

For Healthy Cities: Protecting agricultural production and water resources can help reduce pressure on staple food prices and availability.

What This Means for Healthy Cities

Across the six countries, three approaches stand out:

1. **Protecting production** — Bangladesh and India are focusing on irrigation, inputs, crop planning, and drought-resilient production.
2. **Building resilience** — Bhutan and Thailand are strengthening water, agriculture, and longer-term climate resilience.
3. **Protecting access** — Sri Lanka and the Maldives are focusing on food stocks, livelihoods, water, and supply-chain continuity.

The key takeaway: urban food security begins beyond the city itself. Climate shocks can move through water systems, farms, markets, supply chains, and household incomes before appearing as changes in food prices and access.

As El Niño continues into 2027, Healthy Cities will need to look not only at how food is produced, but also at how food systems can remain resilient, connected, and accessible when climate conditions change.

Editor's Pick



Water-Resilient Cities

Read the story and discover how cities across South-East Asia are building resilience from the ground up—from Bua Yai's underground water bank to Pune's health-centred disaster planning.

[Read more](#)

Stay tuned for more inspiring stories from our healthy cities network in our next update!

Share with us your city's best practices!

[Email Us](#)

WHO South-East Asia office and Regional Laboratory on Urban Governance for Health and Well-being are pleased to invite you to join South-East Asia Region Healthy Cities Network.

More information and details [here](#)

Recommended Resources

Selected resources supporting this issue's theme

[Ministerial dialogue on Drought Resilience - UNCCD COP17](#)

[World Meteorological Organization El Niño/La Niña Update](#)

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