

TANZANIA TOBACCO SECTOR EL NIÑO TOBACCO PRODUCTION PROTOCOL 2026/27

“Early sowing tobacco seeds, keep the root zone aerated, prevent nutrient losses, establish strong seedlings, timing early seedlings transplanting in field, avoid disease build-up, harvest at the right physiological maturity, and protect leaf quality during curing and storage”

The official TMA Vuli (October - December 2026) forecast is specifically for Tanzania's bimodal rainfall areas the Lake Victoria zone, northern coast, northeastern highlands and northern Kigoma. TMA says these areas are expected to receive **normal to above-normal rainfall**, with rainfall beginning around late September/early October and an increased risk of excessive soil moisture and flooding. November 2026 is expected to have particularly increased rainfall, and some rainfall may continue into January 2027. TMA warns of strong El Niño influence, excessive soil moisture and possible flooding.

Table 1: A general overview of the selected tobacco growing areas guide

Tobacco area	Main concern for 2026/27	What to do
Serengeti	Higher relevance to Vuli rainfall/El Niño	Prepare drainage and raised nursery immediately
Geita	Extreme and potentially prolonged rainfall, flooding	Prepare for extreme rainfall, flooding
Kasulu	Extreme and potentially prolonged rainfall, flooding	Prepare for extreme rainfall, flooding
Kahama	Watch rainfall forecasts closely	Prepare for intense rainfall even if seasonal total varies
Tabora	Mainly a unimodal-rainfall production area	Don't assume the Vuli forecast automatically applies; wait for TMA's specific Nov - Apr forecast
Uyui	Unimodal	Same follow TMA 10-day/monthly and Nov - Apr forecasts
Sikonge	Unimodal	Strong emphasis on drainage and nutrient-loss control
Urambo	Unimodal	Drainage + split fertilizer particularly important
Ulyankulu	Unimodal/central-western production environment	Follow local TMA/extension advisories
Mpanda	Unimodal	Prepare for heavy rainfall events rather than relying only on seasonal totals
Manyoni	Unimodal/semi-dry environment	Watch timing and distribution of rainfall
Chunya	Seasonal Nov - Apr rainfall	Heavy-rain events can still occur; drainage important
Iringa	Seasonal rainfall	Monitor onset and heavy-rain episodes
Songea	Seasonal Nov - Apr rainfall	Monitor TMA seasonal/district forecasts closely

The above distinction is important because TMA's current Vuli forecast is not a blanket forecast for every tobacco-growing district in Tanzania. TMA explicitly says the Vuli forecast is designed for areas receiving two rainfall seasons.

For Tabora, Sikonge, Uyui, Urambo, Mpanda, Manyoni, Chunya, Songea and similar areas, TORITA would use the forthcoming November 2026–April 2027 seasonal forecast plus the 10-day and monthly agricultural forecasts rather than interpreting the Vuli warning as a prediction of the whole tobacco season. However, precaution for El nino need to be taken care as TMA specifically provides agricultural forecasts at 10-day and seasonal intervals for farm planning.

EL NIÑO TECHNICAL PACKAGE FOR ALL TOBACCO GROWING AREAS IN TANZANIA FOR 2026/27

1. SEEDBED: the first and most important intervention

TORITA already recommends that tobacco seedbeds should be elevated and not located in low-lying areas, with fertile, friable soil and good organic matter.

For an El Niño season, we would strengthen this recommendation considerably.

A. Raise the seedbed

This season we expect heavy rain, under this circumstance for more drainage-oriented design, raise the seedbed from 30 – 45 cm with 1 m x 20 m (Photo 1) instead of 10-15 cm under normal rainfall with a standard bed of 1.5 m x 20 m. Farmers should site an elevated area for setting seedbeds.

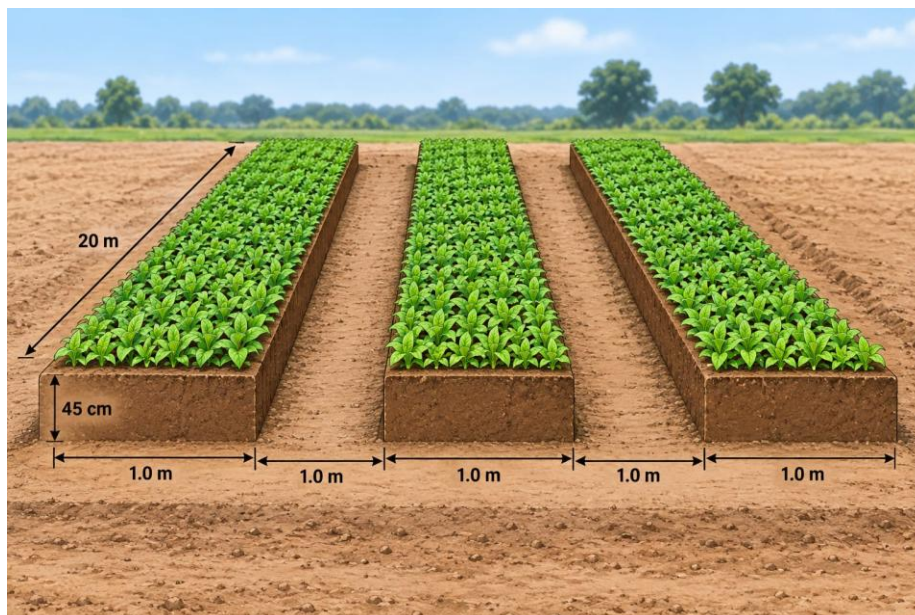


Photo 1: Raised seedbeds for drainage-oriented design

B. Put drainage channels around every bed

The raised bed alone is not enough; we recommend 1 m pathway/drain with a slight gradient so that water leaves the nursery rather than accumulating between beds as may cause fungal disease.

NB: Do not construct the nursery in a depression.

C. Avoid excessive irrigation

During heavy rainfall, the objective changes from supplying water to managing water. Farmers should not irrigate simply according to the normal calendar. Irrigation should be based on actual soil moisture.

E. Harden seedlings

It is known that clipping and hardening before transplanting is essential and similar for an El Niño season, hardened seedlings are particularly valuable because transplanting into wet soil can cause severe shock and disease.

2. TRANSPLANTING: don't put seedlings into saturated soil

“Do not transplant immediately after a major rainfall event”. Transplant when soil is moist but not waterlogged. Maintain spacing 0.5 m between plants and 1.2 m between ridges with drainage furrows to keep the root zone above temporary standing water (Photo 2).



Photo 2: Ridges with drainage furrow

3. FERTILIZER: this is where El Niño can cause major losses

Excess rainfall can cause nitrogen leaching, potassium movement, nutrient runoff, poor root uptake of nutrient, denitrification in saturated soil etc. Therefore, simply increasing fertilizer because the crop looks weak is dangerous.

i. Basal fertilizer under heavy-rain conditions: Split it instead of putting at once

Put fertilizer appropriate into the root zone and consider two to three split applications depending on the weather 15 g per seedlings and after two weeks 15 g per seedlings or 10 g per seedlings for every two weeks. Do not apply fertilizer immediately before a forecast extreme rainfall event.

NB: If TMA gives a heavy-rain warning, postpone surface-applied fertilizer until the intense rainfall has passed, where agronomically feasible.

ii. Topdressing: split it instead of putting everything down at once

Place fertilizer into the root zone and focus at the appropriate conditions as stated above

4. FIELD DRAINAGE SHOULD BECOME A STANDARD EL NIÑO PRACTICE

“No tobacco field should have standing water around the tobacco root zone after heavy rainfall”

Farmers should establish ridges before transplanting, maintain drainage furrows, remove blocked drainage points, prevent runoff from neighbouring fields entering tobacco field, construct diversion drains where necessary, avoid planting in natural drainage depressions and repair erosion immediately after major storms. The objective isn't to remove all water it is to move excess water away quickly while retaining enough moisture in the root zone.

5. PESTS AND DISEASES

This may become one of the biggest hidden effects of El Niño as wet conditions favour many fungal and bacterial problems. Please report through **normal phone message or WhatsApp to the following number 0787365585 once you observe pests and diseases incidence, provide your field location, primary society, union, village, district and region.**

Therefore, inspect nurseries every day, remove diseased seedlings immediately, don't allow infected seedlings to be transplanted, avoid excessive irrigation, maintain spacing and ventilation, avoid walking through wet tobacco unnecessarily, disinfect equipment where appropriate, rotate fields, use only provided registered pesticides and follow the label instructions.

6. HARVESTING: don't allow mature leaf to sit in the field during rain

When a heavy rain event is forecast, inspect mature leaves early, organize labour in advance, harvest suitable mature leaves before prolonged wet periods where this is consistent with tobacco quality recommendations, don't leave harvested tobacco exposed to rain, move leaf quickly to the curing facility and avoid piling wet leaves tightly.

7. CURING: this could become a major bottleneck

Heavy rain creates a difficult combination:

high humidity + wet leaf + poor ventilation + difficulty maintaining curing conditions.

Therefore, farmers should prepare/renovate curing barns before the rains become intense.

Recommended preparation:

- Repair roof leaks, repair doors and ventilation controls, make sure rain cannot enter through openings, check curing equipment before harvesting, ensure adequate fuel/energy availability, keep the floor dry and prevent harvested leaf from contacting wet surfaces.
- Do not cure according to a fixed calendar during abnormal weather: During normal weather, farmers may have a fairly predictable curing pattern. During El Niño, **barn temperature and humidity may behave differently.**
- **Follow the curing schedule according to leaf condition and measured barn conditions, not simply according to elapsed hours.** Therefore, where possible, barns should have: thermometer, humidity measurement, controlled ventilation and reliable heat source.

8. STORAGE: protect the cured leaf from moisture re-entry

This becomes critical after curing. If cured leaf absorbs moisture from humid air, the farmer can have good leaf absorbing moisture and may cause mould and leaf quality deterioration.

Therefore, store tobacco leaves in a dry, clean building, repair roof and wall leaks, keep tobacco off the floor, use pallets where possible, keep walls/floor dry, prevent rainwater entering the store, avoid tightly packing excessively moist leaf, inspect regularly for mould and heating, separate suspect bales from good tobacco.