

Seasonal Climate Watch

September 2026 to January 2027

Date issued: 31 August 2026

1. Overview

The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO), which is currently in an El Niño state, has strengthened and current predictions indicate that it will continue strengthening towards a very strong El Niño state within the next couple of months and last at least until the end of the 2026/27 summer season. The typical signs that El Niño will affect South Africa are starting to materialise over the Pacific Ocean and it is expected that South Africa will experience the typical impacts of dryer and warmer conditions during this coming summer.

Predictions indicate that during spring favourable rainfall conditions over the eastern coastal areas as well as the eastern interior could still be expected. However, moving towards early summer, significant areas are expected to receive below-normal rainfall, especially the central interior and the far north-east. Even though there are indications that the eastern parts of South Africa can expect above-normal rainfall during early summer, caution is advised for the potential change in the forecast due to the developing El Niño.

Minimum and maximum temperatures are largely expected to be above-normal for most parts of South Africa during the spring and early summer seasons.

The SAWS will continue to monitor the weather and climate conditions and provide updates on any future assessments that may provide more clarity on the current expectations for the coming season.

2. South African Weather Service Prediction System

2.1. Seasonal Forecasts for South Africa From the SAWS Seasonal Prediction System

The COLA-RSMAS-CCSM4 system (part of the North American Multi-Model Ensemble System) for South Africa, as issued with the Jul 2026 initial conditions, is presented below (district names can be seen in the appendix indicated in Figure A4):

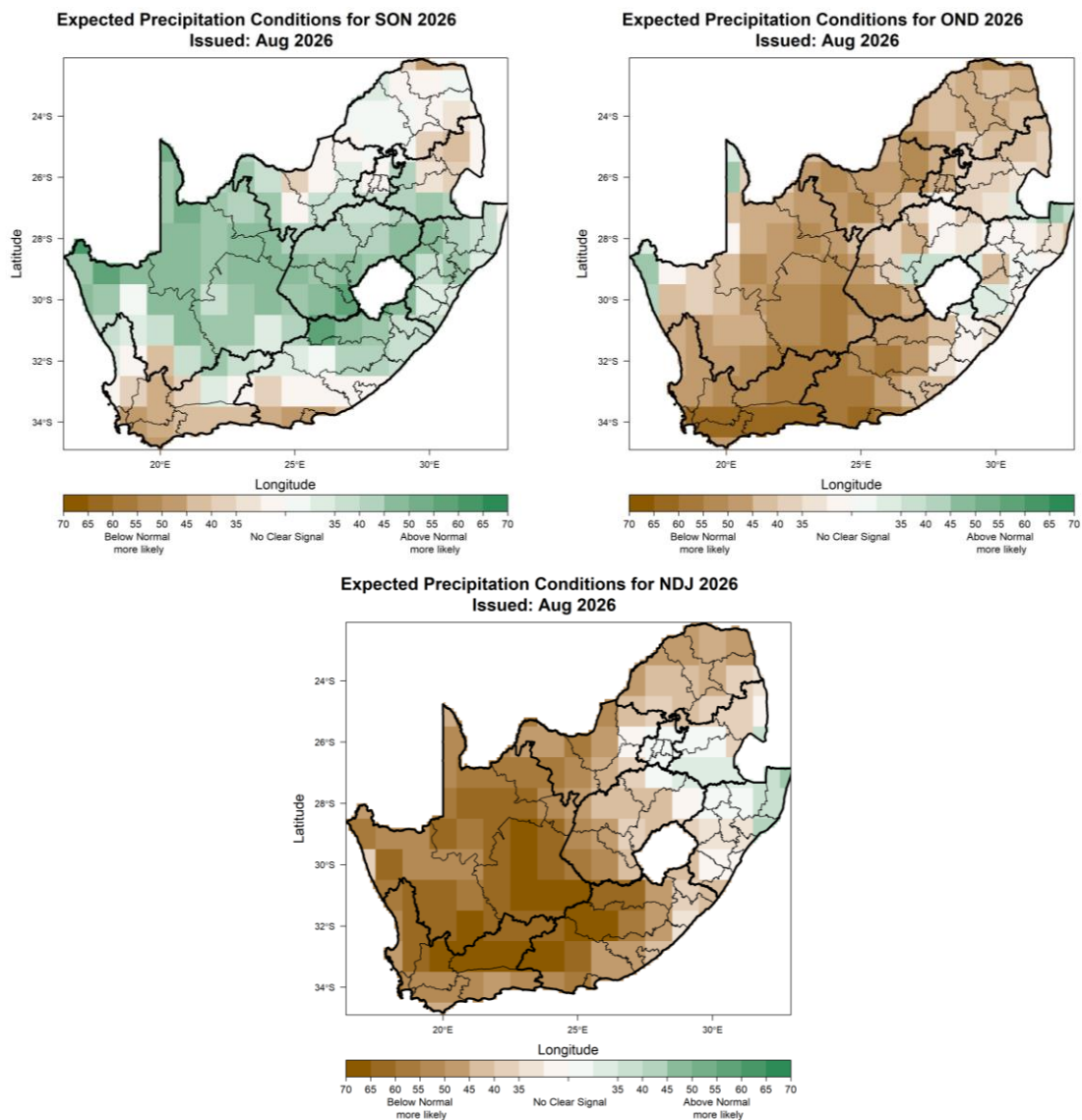


Figure 1: September-October-November 2026 (SON; left), October-November-December 2026 (OND; right), November-December-January 2026/27 (NDJ; bottom) seasonal precipitation prediction. Maps indicate the highest probability of the above-normal and below-normal categories. Please refer to the appendix, Figure A1 for forecast skill levels.

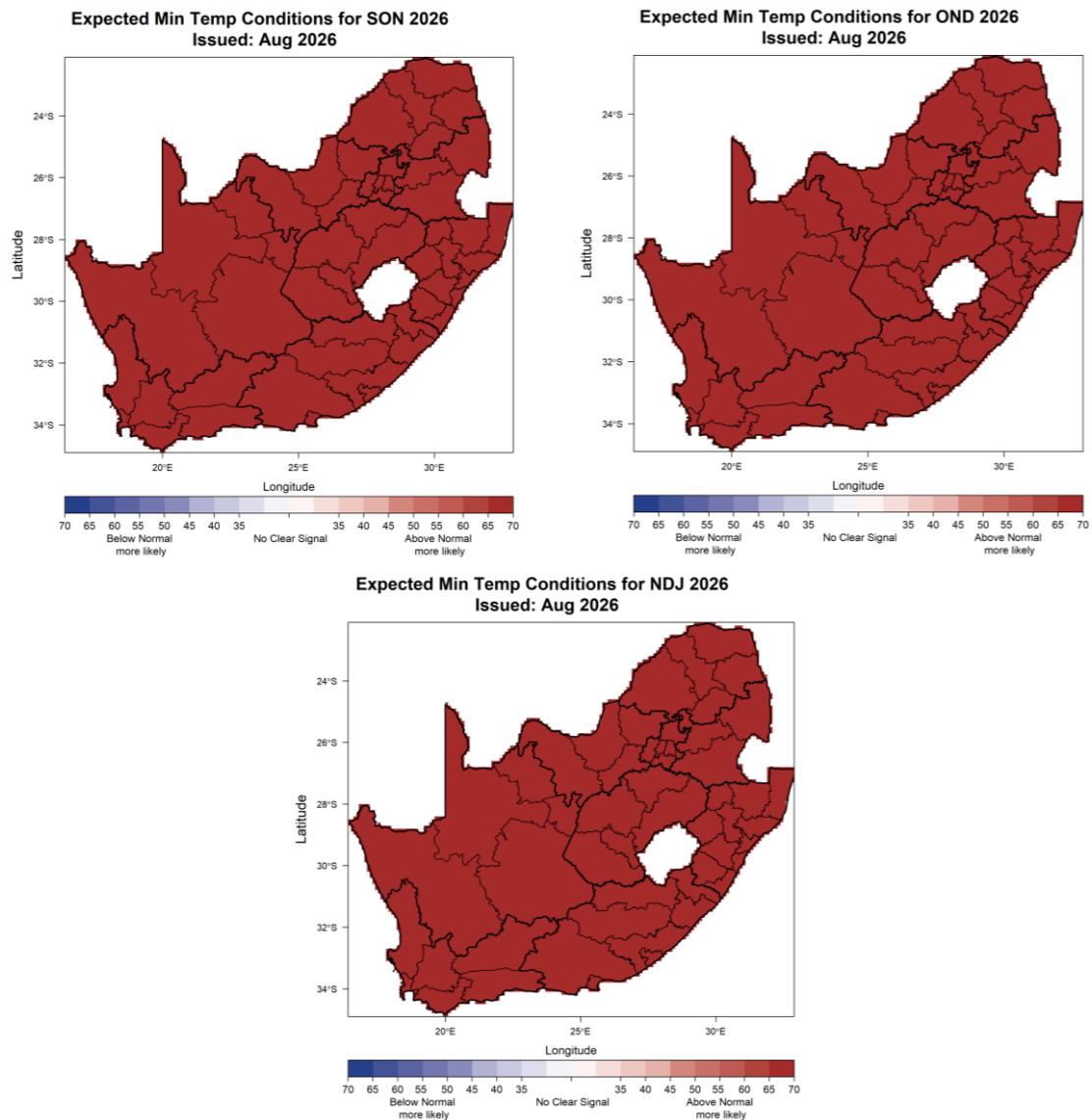


Figure 2: September-October-November 2026 (SON; left), October-November-December 2026 (OND; right), November-December-January 2026/27 (NDJ; bottom) seasonal minimum temperature prediction. Maps indicate the highest probability of the above-normal and below-normal categories. Please refer to the appendix, Figure A2 for forecast skill levels.

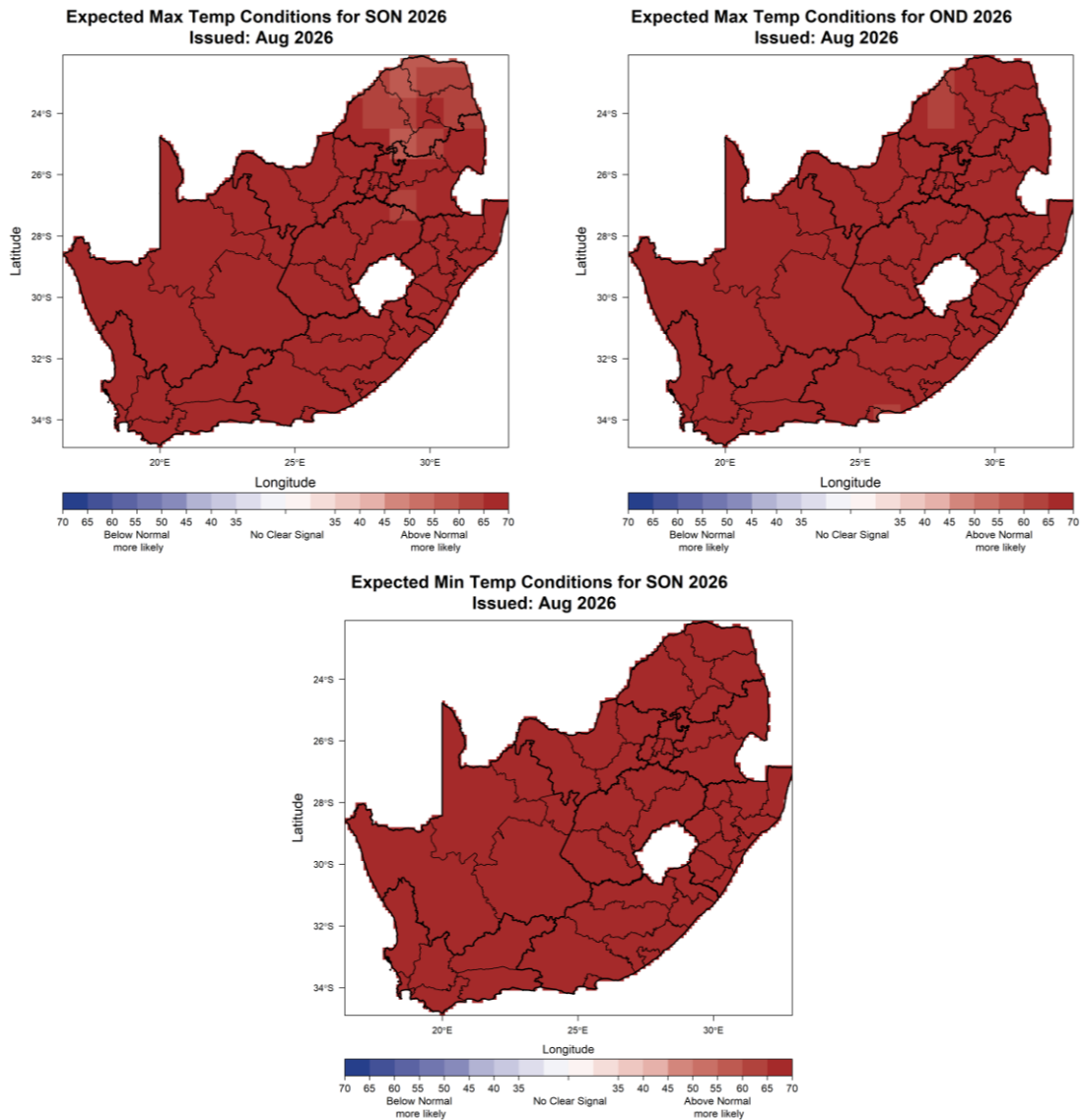


Figure 3: September-October-November 2026 (SON; left), October-November-December 2026 (OND; right), November-December-January 2026/27 (NDJ; bottom) seasonal maximum temperature prediction. Maps indicate the highest probability of the above-normal and below-normal categories. Please refer to the appendix, Figure A3 for forecast skill levels.

2.2. Climatological Seasonal Totals and Averages

The following maps indicate the rainfall and temperature climatology (minimum and maximum temperature) for the August-September-October, September-October-November and October-November-December seasons. The rainfall and temperature climates are representative of the average rainfall and temperature conditions over a long period for the relevant 3-month seasons presented here.

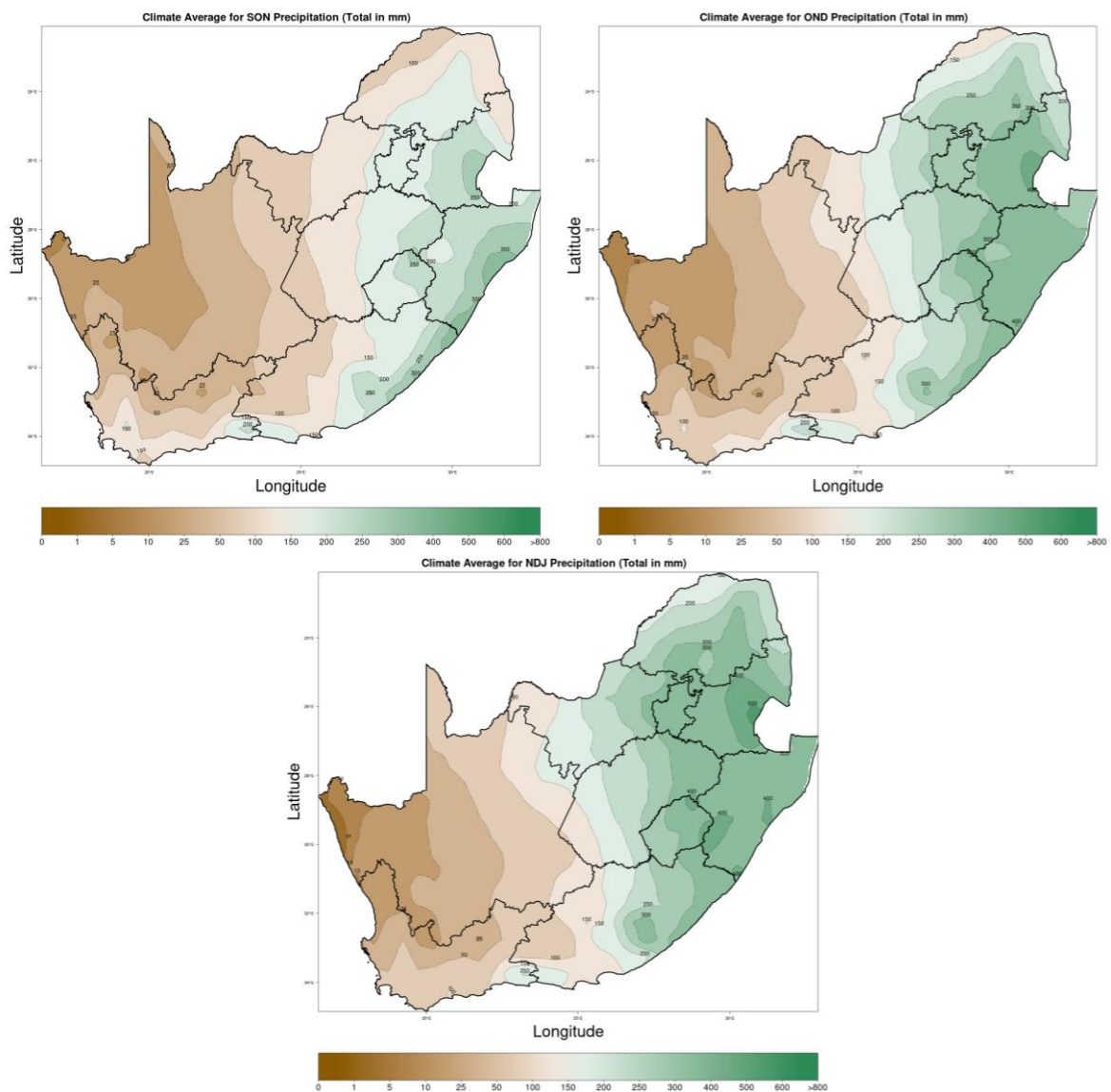


Figure 4: Climatological seasonal totals for precipitation during September to November (SON; left), October to December (OND; right) and November to January (NDJ; bottom).

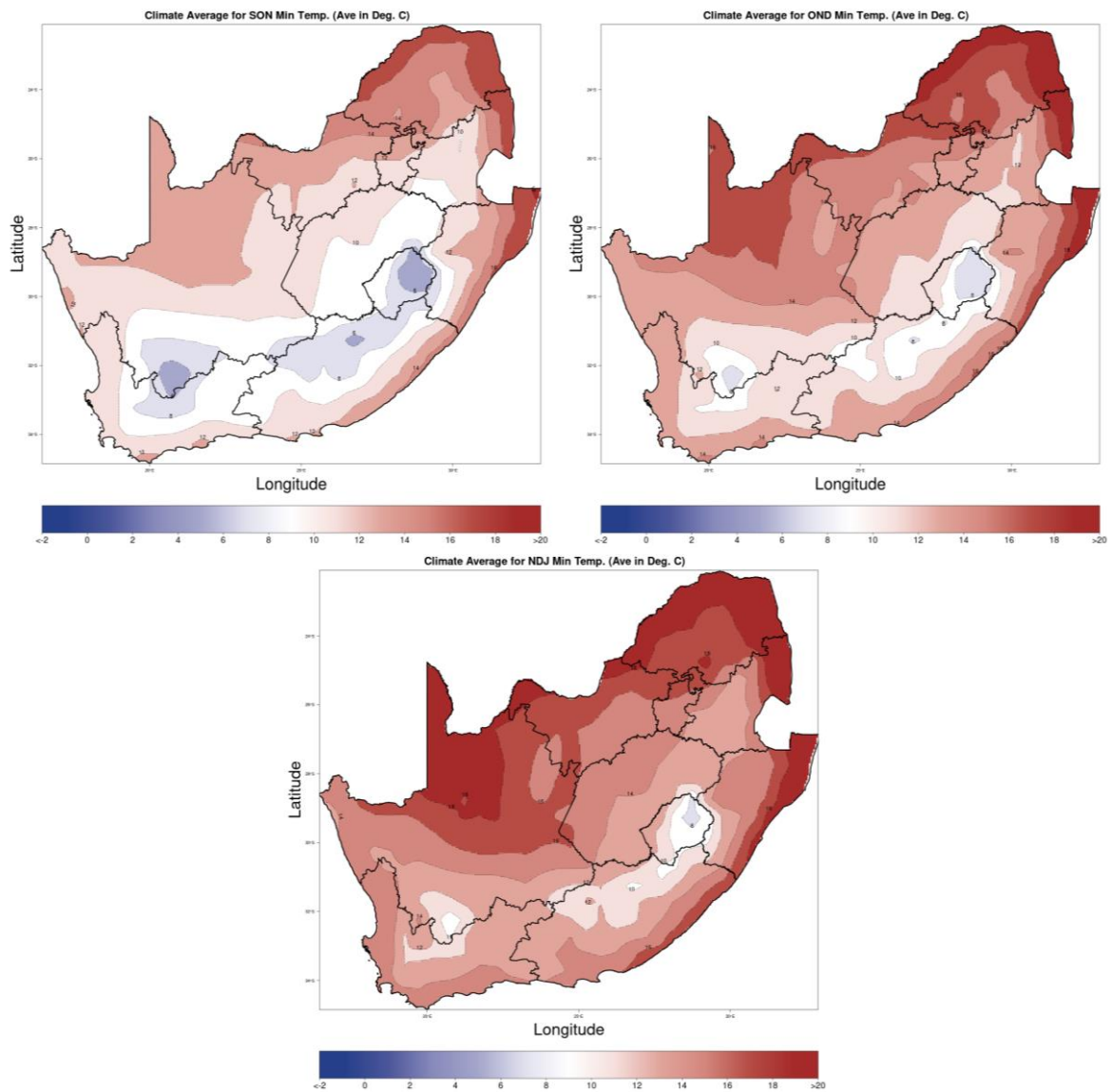


Figure 5: Climatological seasonal averages for minimum temperature during September to November (SON; left), October to December (OND; right) and November to January (NDJ; bottom).

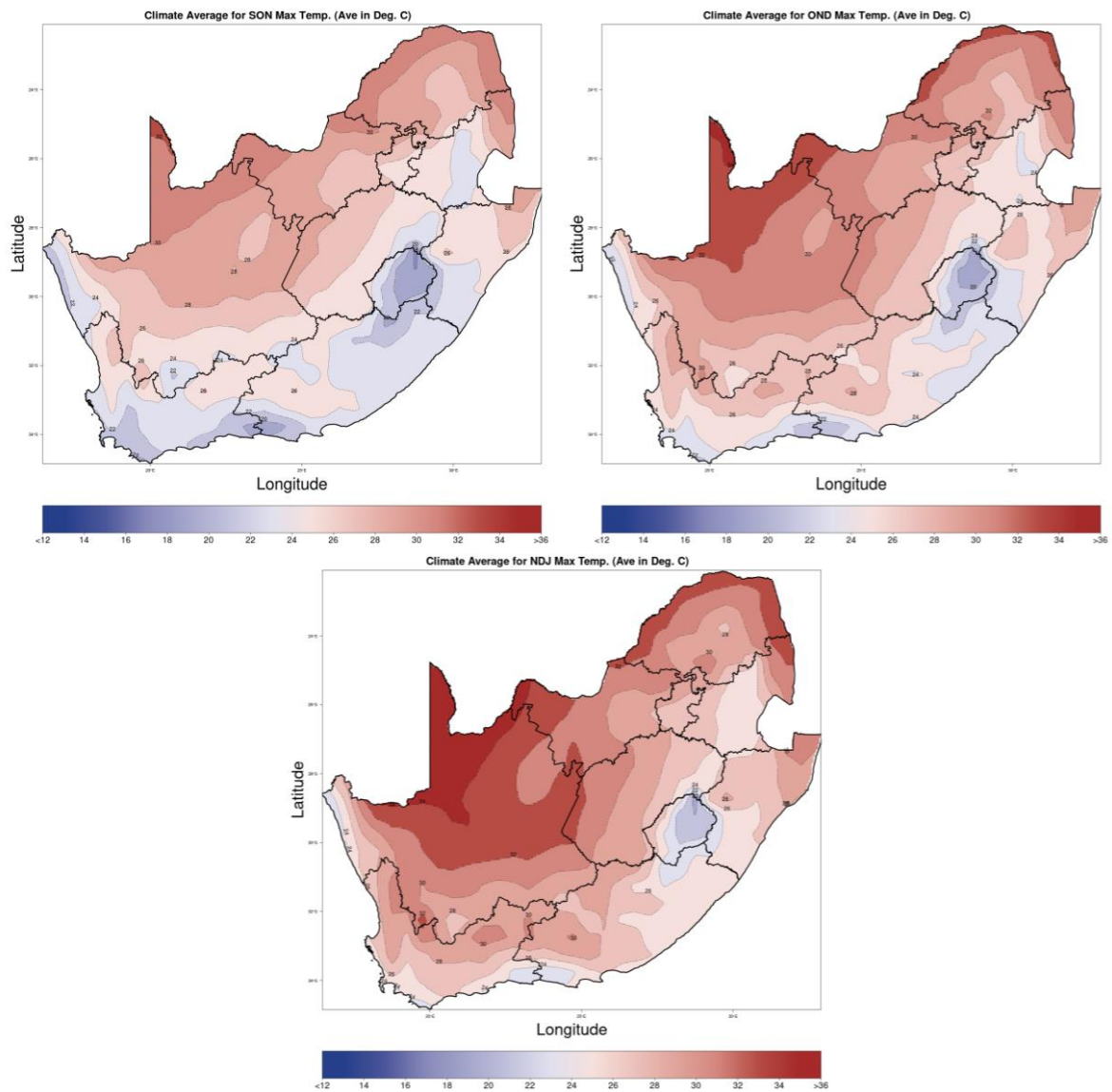


Figure 6: Climatological seasonal averages for maximum temperature during September to November (SON; left), October to December (OND; right) and November to January (NDJ; bottom).

3. Summary Implications to Various Economic Sector Decision Makers

Water and Energy

The favourable rainfall conditions forecast over the eastern coastal areas and the eastern interior during the September-October-November season are likely to boost surface runoff into dams and reservoirs, possibly improving water storage capacity and availability for household, industrial, and agricultural use. However, intense rainfall may overwhelm stormwater and sewage systems, resulting in flash floods and flooding in areas prone to floods, including low-lying bridges. In addition, the anticipated below-normal rainfall conditions during early summer, coupled with the expected above-normal temperatures, are likely to increase water loss, adding pressure on water-scarce regions over the central interior and the far north-east parts of the country. Furthermore, the expected countrywide above-normal minimum and maximum temperatures are likely to increase demand for space cooling during the forecast period. Decision-makers should note these possible outcomes and communicate with affected businesses and communities.

Health

The forecast of generally drier and warmer conditions during the 2026/27 summer season is likely to place additional pressure on water availability, hygiene and sanitation, particularly over the central interior and far north-east, where below normal rainfall is expected during early summer. The anticipated El Niño conditions may further intensify water scarcity and related sanitation challenges.

Above-normal minimum and maximum temperatures across most of South Africa during spring and early summer are likely to increase the risk of heat stress, dehydration and other heat-related illnesses. Children, older persons, outdoor workers and people with existing health conditions may be particularly vulnerable to prolonged exposure to high temperatures.

Favourable rainfall predicted over the eastern coastal areas and eastern interior during spring, together with the possibility of above-normal rainfall over eastern South Africa during early summer, may result in localised rainfall-related health risks. Where heavy rainfall or flooding occurs, poor drainage and overstretched sanitation infrastructure may increase the risk of water contamination, waterborne diseases, vector borne diseases and flood related injuries.

However, the rainfall outlook may change as El Niño continues to develop. Health authorities are encouraged to monitor rainfall and temperature conditions closely, strengthen preparedness for heat, drought and localised flooding, and communicate regularly with affected communities. Public guidance should emphasise adequate hydration, heat and sun protection, responsible water use, safe water and sanitation practices, and adherence to updated official weather and health advisories. Continued monitoring and localised communication will be essential for translating seasonal forecasts into timely public health action.

Agriculture

The forecasts indicate that above-normal rainfall is expected over the eastern coastal areas and the eastern interior regions during spring, as well as the eastern parts during early summer. These above-normal rainfall forecasts will likely have a positive impact on crop and livestock production. However, the onset of the summer season is indicating most parts of the summer rainfall regions experiencing below-normal rainfall due to the anticipated strong El Niño in the early summer. Below-normal rainfall is predicted over the central interior (parts of North West, Free State, Eastern Cape, and Northern Cape) and north-east areas of the country (Limpopo and parts of KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga) during early summer season. Therefore, the relevant decision-makers are encouraged to advise farmers in these regions to practice soil and water conservation, proper water harvesting and storage, and other appropriate farming practices.

This forecast is updated monthly, and users are advised to monitor the updated forecasts, as there is a possibility for them to change, especially the longer lead-time forecasts. Moreover, farmers are advised to keep monitoring the weekly and monthly forecasts issued by the SAWS. Farmers are also advised to keep monitoring advisories from the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development and make the necessary adjustments accordingly.

4. Contributing Institutions and Useful Links

All the forecasts presented here are a result of the probabilistic prediction based on the ensemble members from the coupled climate model from the SAWS and two models from the NMME. Other useful links for seasonal forecasts are:

- <http://www.weathersa.co.za/home/seasonal> (Latest predictions from the SAWS for the whole of SADC)
- <https://iri.columbia.edu/our-expertise/climate/forecasts/enso/current/> (ENSO predictions from various centres)
- <https://iri.columbia.edu/our-expertise/climate/forecasts/seasonal-climate-forecasts/> (Copernicus Global forecasts)



**South African
Weather Service**



Appendix – Verification

The following three figures show the Relative Operating Characteristic (ROC) scores for the relevant multi-model forecasts in the main document. ROC scores are commonly used in seasonal forecasts to determine the areas where the forecasts perform well, so that the user can make more informed decisions on using the given forecast. As a general guideline, a score over 0,5 is technically better than chance; however, scores around and higher than 0,6 are considered to have significant skill to add confidence to the forecast.

From the figures there will be two ROC scores per season per variable, which indicate the score when a certain rainfall or temperature category is favoured. For example, if an area is favoured to receive above-normal rainfall, then the ROC score to look at would be the one calculated for the above-normal category (right side of the figures below). Also, make sure to look at the correct corresponding seasons indicated in the title of each map.

The aim of these maps is to add (or remove) confidence of a particular forecast over certain areas for specific seasons. Seasonal model skill over South Africa can be highly variable, highlighting the importance of knowing exactly where the forecasting system generally performs well or where it may struggle. It is important to note that the maps do not indicate where the current forecast will be correct or incorrect but rather highlights confidence levels in the forecasting system.

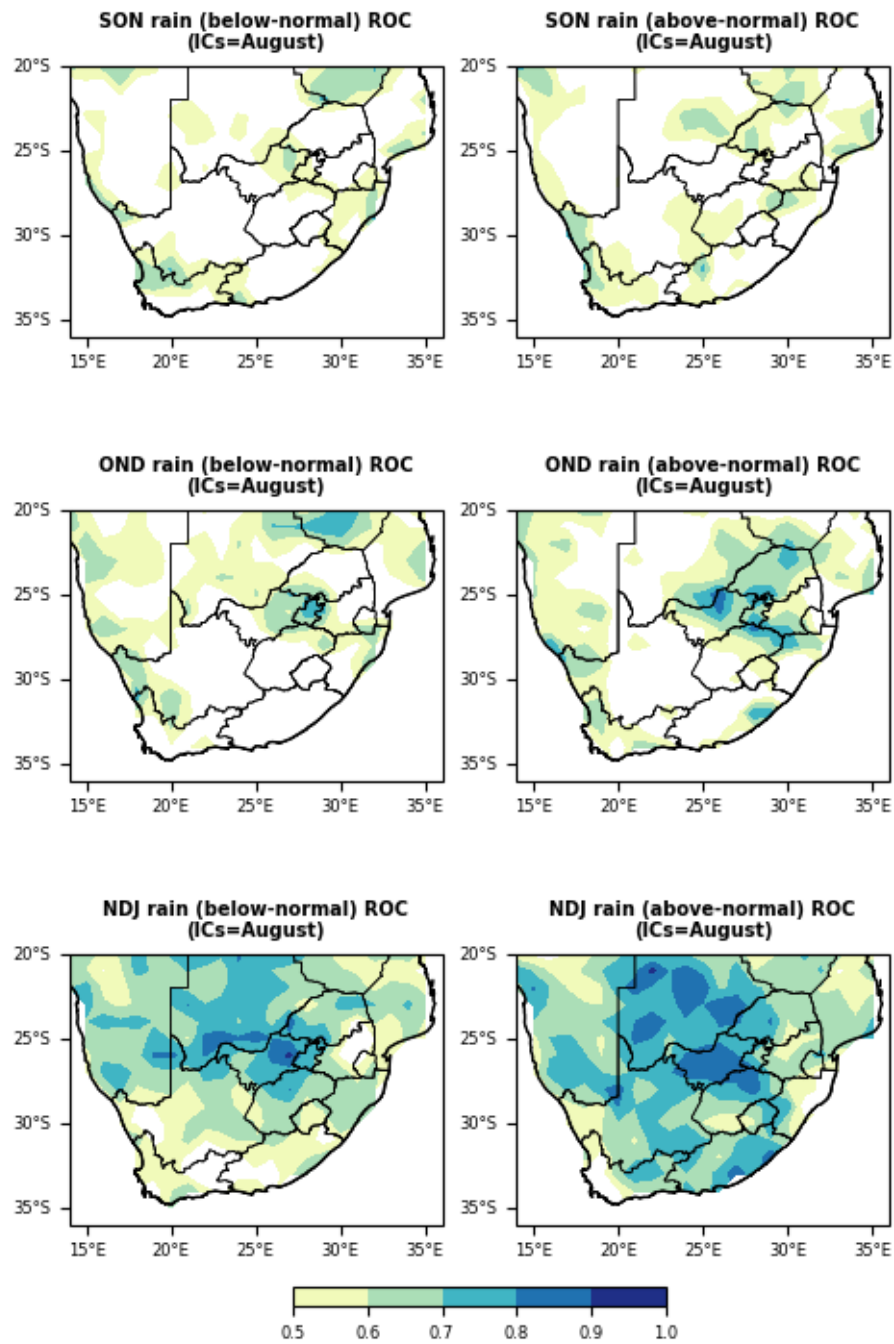


Figure A1: ROC scores for rainfall relevant to the current forecasts in Figure 1.

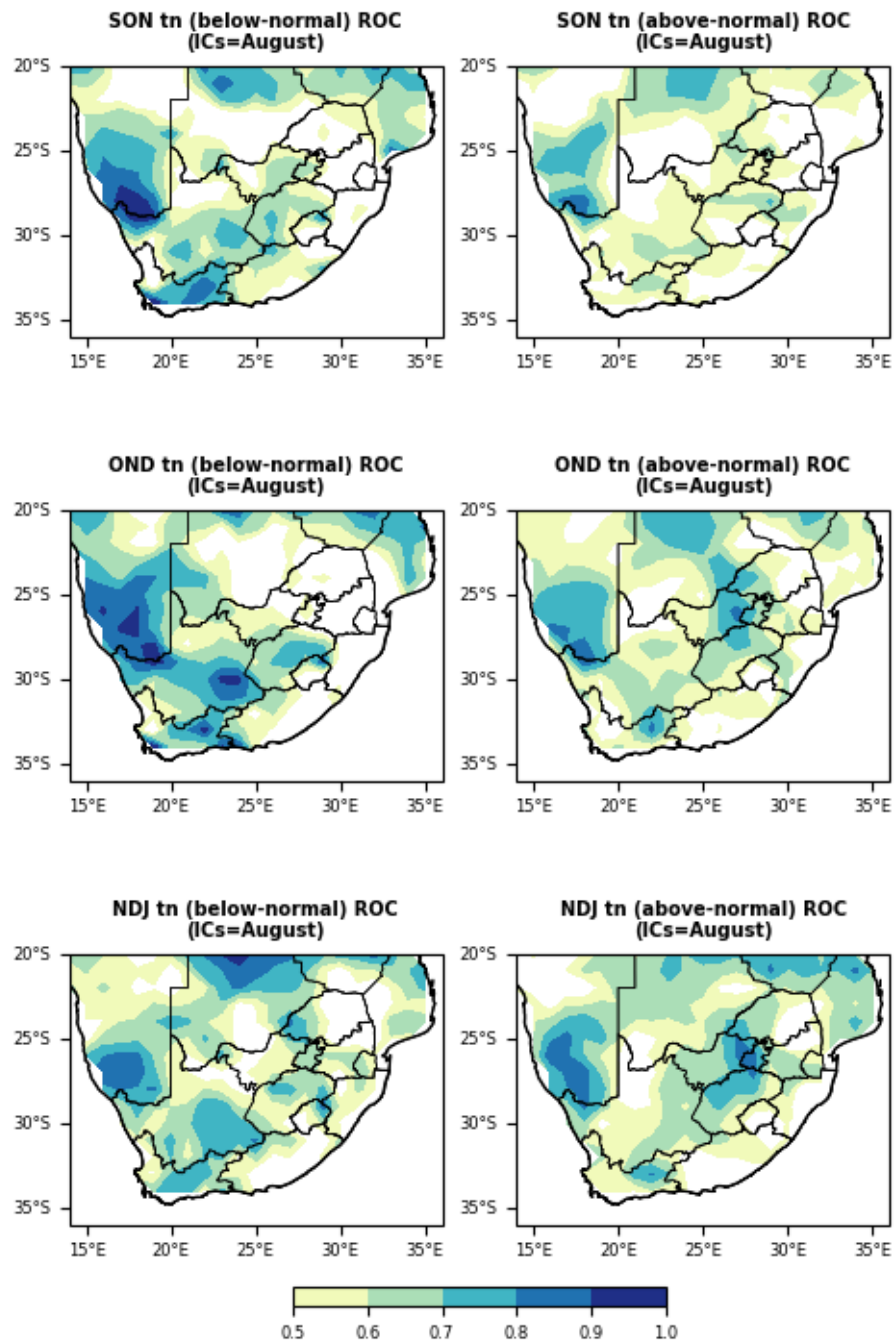


Figure A2: ROC scores for minimum temperatures relevant to the current forecasts in Figure 2.

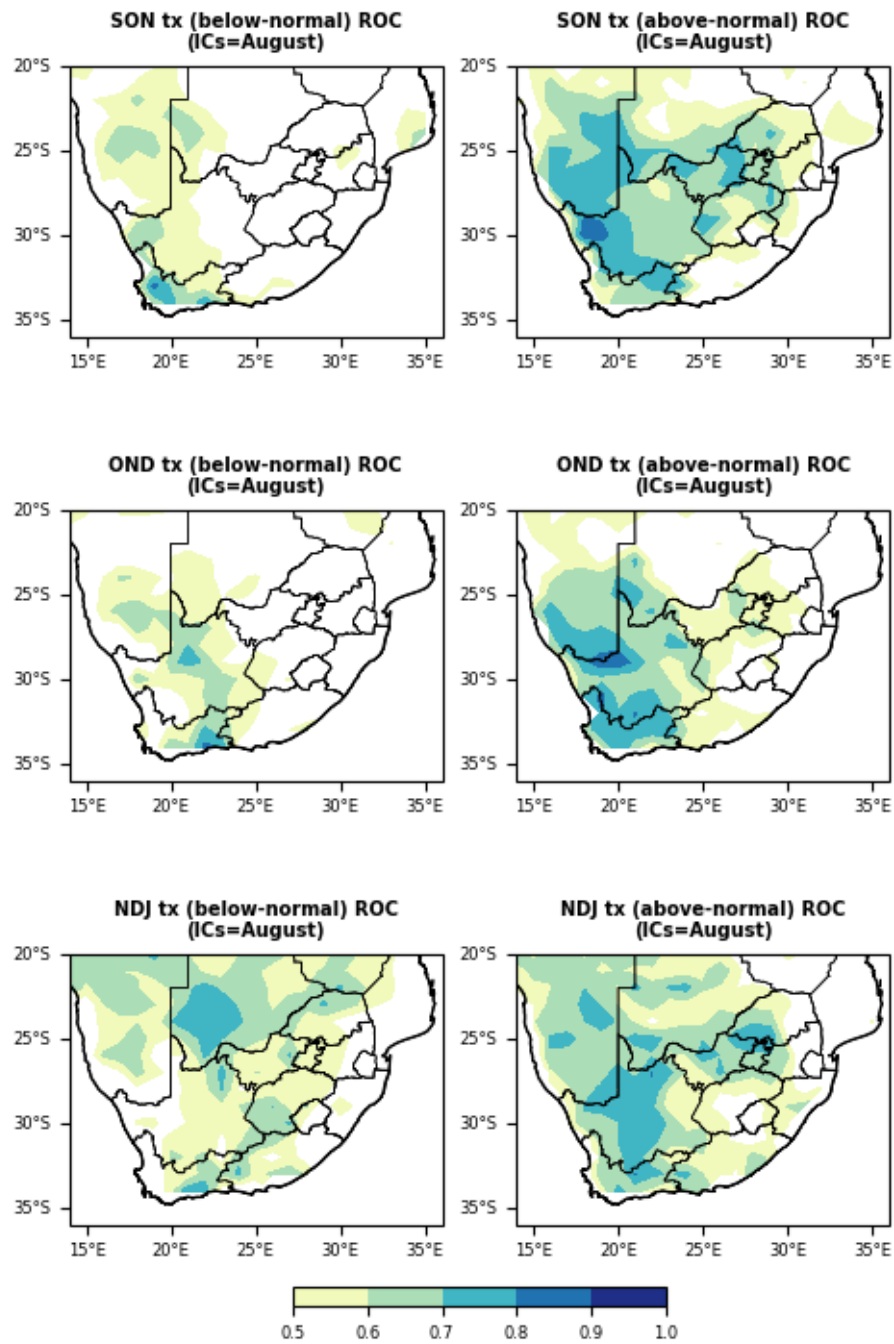


Figure A3: ROC scores for maximum temperatures relevant to the current forecasts in Figure 3.

Appendix – District Information

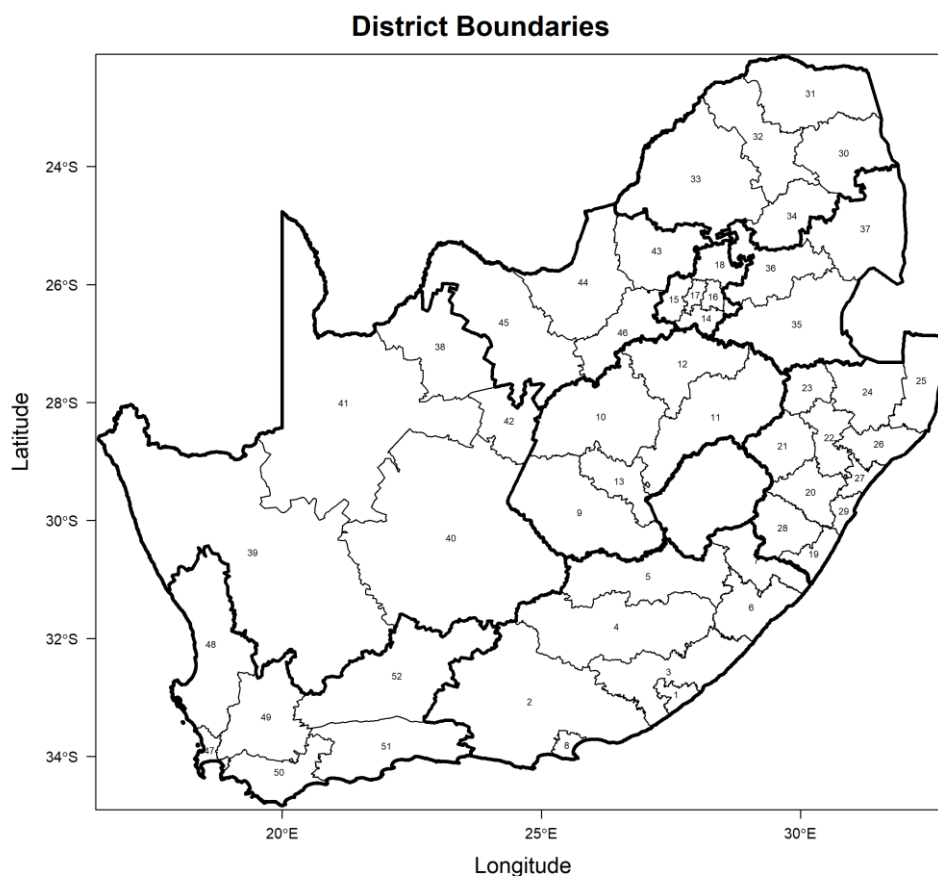


Figure A4: Local District Map with numbers corresponding to the table below with names.

Table with District Names and Numbers

Nr.	District Name	Nr.	District Name	Nr.	District Name	Nr.	District Name
1	Buffalo City	16	Ekurhuleni	31	Vhembe	46	Dr Kenneth Kaunda
2	Sarah Baartman	17	City of Johannesburg	32	Capricorn	47	City of Cape Town
3	Amathole	18	City of Tshwane	33	Waterberg	48	West Coast
4	Chris Hani	19	Ugu	34	Sekhukhune	49	Cape Winelands
5	Joe Gqabi	20	Umgungundlovu	35	Gert Sibande	50	Overberg
6	O.R. Tambo	21	Uthukela	36	Nkangala	51	Garden Route
7	Alfred Nzo	22	Umzinyathi	37	Ehlanzeni	52	Central Karoo
8	Nelson Mandela Bay	23	Amajuba	38	John Taolo Gaetsewe		
9	Xhariep	24	Zululand	39	Namakwa		
10	Lejweleputswa	25	Umkhanyakude	40	Pixley ka Seme		
11	Thabo Mofutsanyane	26	King Cetshwayo	41	Z F Mgcawu		
12	Fezile Dabi	27	iLembe	42	Frances Baard		
13	Mangaung	28	Harry Gwala	43	Bojanala		
14	Sedibeng	29	eThekweni	44	Ngaka Modiri Molema		
15	West Rand	30	Mopani	45	Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati		