

2026 FLOOD GUIDE FOR IMO STATE

EDITORIAL NOTE¹

Every year, flooding reshapes life across Nigeria — flooding farmlands, endangering agricultural yield, displacing communities, closing schools, and cutting off roads. The Nigeria Hydrological Services Agency (NIHSA) has mapped what 2026 will look like, and the picture is clear: with the right preparation, communities can absorb what is coming without catastrophe. We know this because 2025 proved it. Early warning and organised community action reduced flood fatalities by 76% and displaced persons by 84% compared to 2024 (ref). The goal for 2026 is to go further.

The flood year follows a predictable rhythm, and that predictability is a gift. The early rains of April through June give communities a window to act — clearing drainage channels, reinforcing riverbanks, and registering households for alerts — before the peak season intensifies in July, August, and September. By the time October and November arrive, the heaviest rains may have eased, but water that fell months earlier in Adamawa and Cameroon is still travelling downstream toward the delta states. Communities in Anambra, Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers need to stay vigilant well into November, long after they might assume the danger has passed.

The Communities That Need the Most Support:

Ten states face the sharpest risk in 2026: Kogi, Niger, Delta, Anambra, Benue, Kebbi, Rivers, Bayelsa, Adamawa, and Cross River but the threat is not abstract. Across Nigeria, 30,707 communities are at risk, along with 4,792 health facilities and 10,684 schools. When a health centre floods, patients lose access to care. When a school fills with water, children lose months of learning. These are the human costs that preparation can prevent.

In Kogi, where the Niger and Benue rivers meet at Lokoja, riverine flooding can isolate entire communities for weeks. Local governments there should be identifying high ground now,

designating safe assembly points, and making sure every community has a marked escape route. In Benue, the low-lying areas around Makurdi need the same attention before the Benue River crests. In Port Harcourt and other urban settings, where poor urban drainage compounds river and tidal flooding, the single most impactful community action is also the simplest — keeping drains clear of refuse.

With 4.2 million hectares of farmland at risk, agriculture sits at the centre of the 2026 challenge. Planting early-maturing crop varieties and using ridges or mounds instead of flat planting beds reduces both waterlogging damage and the risk of a total harvest loss. Staggered planting — sowing in batches rather than all at once means that if one batch is hit by flooding, others survive. Harvesting before October, and storing produce in elevated spaces away from floodwater, protects what has already been grown.

For northern farming communities, the challenge runs deeper, because the flood season is immediately followed by a severe dry period from December through February. The practical response is to treat flood season not only as a threat but as an opportunity — storing water in tanks, drums, and ponds during the wet months to carry livestock and households through the drought that follows.

The infrastructure of flood resilience is not complicated. It is community flood wardens who know which households have elderly or disabled residents and can reach them first. It is local radio stations broadcasting NIHSA alerts in local languages so that fishermen and farmers in remote areas receive warnings in time to act. It is traditional rulers and community leaders who have identified, in advance, which road out of the community stays passable longest. It is households that keep a small emergency kit — water purification tablets, key documents, basic medicine — packed and accessible before the rains arrive.

None of this requires waiting for government. Communities that prepare themselves reduce their own losses and make it easier for relief to reach those who need it most when flooding does occur.

Where local government is active and well-coordinated, the difference in outcomes is measurable.

The priorities for 2026 are straightforward: clear primary drainage channels before April, pre-position food and medical supplies in high-risk areas before July, and ensure that development permits are not issued for floodplain land. These are not expensive interventions. They are largely organisational — a matter of doing in advance what would otherwise be done in crisis.

Nigeria has 30,707 communities, 10,684 schools, and 4,792 health facilities in the path of the 2026 flood season. Each one is also a community that has survived flooding before, that has knowledge of its own landscape, and that can act. The science has been done. The warnings have been issued. What happens next depends on what communities, local governments, and individuals choose to do with this information — starting now, while there is still time.

Source: Nigeria Hydrological Services Agency (NIHSA) 2026 Annual Flood Outlook

UNDERSTANDING WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN IMO IN 2026

Imo State faces serious flooding in 2026, especially in its low-lying areas and communities along river courses. The state is part of the Eastern Littoral hydrological zone, which means it shares river systems with Abia, Ebonyi, Rivers, and Anambra.

Why is Imo vulnerable to flooding? Three main reasons:

First, Imo has several rivers and streams. The Imo River, Otamiri River, and other waterways flow through the state. When heavy rains fall, these rivers swell and overflow into nearby communities.

Second, Imo is in the Niger Delta flood zone for some areas. The AFO places parts of Imo in Hydrological Area V (Niger Delta). This means these areas are affected by recession flooding from the Niger River system.

Third, Imo has urban flooding problems. Owerri, the state capital, and other towns have drainage channels that are often blocked with garbage. When heavy rain falls, water pools on roads and enters homes.

The Three Flood Periods for Imo:

When?	What to Expect	How Serious?
April, May, June (Early rains)	Rains intensify. Rivers begin to rise. Urban areas with blocked drains see flash floods.	Low to Medium
July, August, September (Peak rainy season)	This is the most dangerous time. Heavy rains fill up rivers. Flooding spreads to low-lying communities. Urban flooding worsens.	Medium to High
October, November (Late flooding)	Flooding continues, especially in low-lying areas and areas in the Niger Delta zone. Recession flooding affects parts of the state.	Medium to High



WHICH PARTS OF IMO ARE AT RISK

Imo State falls within **Hydrological Area V (Niger Delta)** for some areas and **Hydrological Area VII (Eastern Littoral)** for other areas.

By the numbers (from NIHSA across both HAs):

Season	Risk Level	What This Means for Imo
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Season	Risk Level	What This Means for Imo
AMJ (April-May-June)	High	Imo is listed among High Flood Risk states in AMJ (27 states + FCT). Early flooding begins.
JAS (July-August-September)	High	Imo is listed among High Flood Risk states in JAS (34 states + FCT). This is the peak. Widespread flooding.
ON (October-November)	Medium to High	Imo is not listed in the High Risk list for ON (31 states). But the AFO says "all states are expected to experience medium flood in ON period." This means Imo is in Medium Flood Risk in ON.

From the AFO's HA-V tables (Niger Delta zone, which includes parts of Imo):

Season	Risk Level	Number of Communities (across HA-V which includes parts of Imo)
AMJ	High	531 communities
JAS	High	863 communities
ON	High	587 communities

From the AFO's HA-VII tables (Eastern Littoral, which includes parts of Imo):

Season	Risk Level	Number of Communities (across HA-VII which includes parts of Imo)
AMJ	High	1,190 communities
JAS	High	1,433 communities
ON	High	1,216 communities

Annual total for Imo: Imo is among the states with High Flood Risk in AMJ and JAS, and Medium Flood Risk in ON. This means significant flooding across the state in 2026.

For roads: Imo has **70 road sections** identified as at risk of flooding in 2026 (Table 4.26 of the AFO). This is the 8th highest in Nigeria.

THE NIGER DELTA CONNECTION (HA-V)

Parts of Imo (especially areas toward Rivers and Anambra) fall within **Hydrological Area V (Niger Delta)**.

What this means for Imo:

- Parts of Imo are in the same flood zone as Anambra, Delta, and Bayelsa
 - These areas are affected by **recession flooding** from the Niger River
 - Water that falls in northern Nigeria reaches these parts of Imo in October and November
 - Do not assume the flood season ends in September if you live in these areas
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THE IMO RIVER AND OTAMIRI RIVER: YOUR MAIN FLOOD DANGERS

The Imo River flows through the eastern part of the state, while the Otamiri River flows through Owerri and surrounding areas.

What you should know about the Imo River:

- It flows from the highlands of Imo and Abia into the Atlantic Ocean
- It is fed by rainfall from a wide area
- Low-lying communities along the river are at highest risk
- The river's floodplain includes many farming areas

What you should know about the Otamiri River:

- It flows through Owerri, the state capital
- It is a major source of water for the city, but also a flood risk
- When heavy rains fall, the river can rise quickly and flood nearby communities
- Urban development has blocked some of its natural drainage paths

What to do if you live near these rivers:

- Know the nearest high ground. Where will you go if the river rises?
- Pay attention to NIHSA warnings. Do not ignore them.
- Clear the drainage channels in your neighborhood. Blocked drains make flooding worse.
- If you see the river rising unusually high, do not wait for an official warning. Move to higher ground.

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URBAN FLOODING IN OWERRI AND OTHER TOWNS

Imo's cities and towns face **urban flooding** when heavy rain falls on blocked drainage channels.

What causes urban flooding in Owerri and other towns:

- Drainage channels blocked with plastic, sand, and garbage (the number one cause)
- Buildings constructed in areas where water naturally flows

- Roads that do not have proper drainage
- Rapid construction without proper planning
- The Otamiri River overflowing its banks

What the AFO says about urban flooding:

The AFO's Urban Flood Hotspots table (Table 4.27) does not list Owerri among the top 10 hotspots. However, the AFO's road risk table shows 70 road sections at risk in Imo — the 8th highest in Nigeria — and many of these are likely in and around Owerri.

Known flood-prone areas in Imo (based on historical records, not directly from the AFO but consistent with its risk assessment):

- **Owerri** – low-lying areas near the Otamiri River, areas with poor drainage
- **Orlu** – low-lying areas
- **Okigwe** – areas near rivers
- **Mbaise** – low-lying agricultural areas
- **Oguta** – areas near the Oguta Lake and Niger Delta floodplain

What you can do in Owerri and other towns:

- **Do not throw garbage into drains.** This is the most important thing you can do.
- Clear the drainage channel in front of your home before the rains begin.
- If you see a blocked drain that needs government help, report it to your local government.
- If your home is in a low-lying area, prepare sandbags to divert water away from your door.
- Do not build structures on top of drainage channels or natural waterways.

WHEN IS THE WORST TIME FOR IMO?

The **JAS period (July, August, September)** is the most dangerous for Imo. This is when:

- Heavy monsoon rains fall across the state
- The Imo River, Otamiri River, and other waterways swell and overflow
- Low-lying communities are inundated

- Urban flooding is worst

The **ON period (October, November)** also carries significant risk, especially for:

- Areas in the Niger Delta zone (toward Rivers and Anambra)
- Late-season crops still in the field
- Communities near the Imo River and Oguta Lake

Do not assume the danger is over after September. Stay alert through November.

WHAT CROPS ARE AT RISK IN IMO

Imo is a major agricultural state, known for cassava, yam, maize, oil palm, and vegetables. Here is how different crops will be affected.

Crop	When It Is Most at Risk	What to Do
Cassava	JAS (July-September) and ON (October-November)	Plant on mounds or ridges. Cassava does not like wet feet. Choose early to medium-maturing varieties (8-12 months). In low-lying areas, ensure good drainage.
Yam	JAS (July-September)	Plant on mounds in March-April. Plant in batches. Ensure good drainage in yam fields.
Maize	JAS (July-September)	Plant on ridges. Use early to medium-maturing varieties (90-110 days). Plant in batches. Second season maize is at risk in ON period.

Crop	When It Is Most at Risk	What to Do
Rice (where grown, especially in lowland areas)	JAS and ON	Rice can handle water, but too much will drown it. Plant early-maturing varieties. Clear drainage channels. Prepare small walls to hold water, but do not let water sit too deep.
Oil Palm	Year-round	Oil palm can tolerate wet conditions, but young seedlings can be drowned. Ensure drainage channels are clear in oil palm plantations.
Vegetables (okra, pepper, tomatoes, leafy greens)	JAS and ON	Use raised beds. During heavy rain, watch for fungal diseases. Improve air circulation between plants.
Cocoa (where grown)	Year-round	Cocoa does not like wet feet. Ensure good drainage. Watch for black pod disease (increased by wet conditions).

Special note for Imo farmers:

Because Imo is in **High Flood Risk** during JAS, you will see significant flooding in low-lying agricultural areas. The main dangers are:

1. **Waterlogging** in low-lying fields (standing water that drowns crops)
2. **Soil erosion** on sloping land
3. **Fungal diseases** in many crops
4. **Late flooding** in ON period for areas in the Niger Delta zone

What to do about waterlogging: Dig drainage channels in your fields to let excess water escape.

Plant on ridges or mounds for all crops that do not like wet feet.

What to do about erosion: Plant cover crops to hold the soil. Use contour ridges on sloping land.

What to do about fungal diseases: In vegetables, space plants properly so air can flow. Remove infected plants promptly.

For farmers in areas toward Rivers (Niger Delta zone): Prepare for ON period flooding (October-November). Harvest late-season crops before October if possible.

WHAT LIVESTOCK AND FISH FARMERS IN IMO MUST DO

For all livestock owners:

Action	When to Do It	Why
Vaccinate all animals	February-March (before rains start)	Wet ground spreads diseases faster
Deworm all animals	Start of rains, then again mid-season	Worms and parasites increase in wet conditions
Provide raised housing	Before April	Animals must have dry ground to stand on. Wet ground causes foot rot and pneumonia.
Prepare for heat	March-May (hot months)	Provide shade and plenty of water
Have an evacuation plan for animals	Before flood season	Where will you take your animals when water rises?

For poultry farmers in Imo:

- Reduce the number of birds per cage. Do not overcrowd.
- Open the sides of your poultry house for ventilation.
- Feed birds early in the morning and late in the evening (cooler hours).
- Add vitamins and electrolytes to drinking water.
- Never leave birds without water. Check twice every day.
- During heavy rains, ensure housing is leak-proof and raised off the ground.
- Watch for **coccidiosis** — wet litter increases this disease. Keep litter dry.

For goat and sheep farmers in Imo:

- Raised housing is essential. Do not let animals sleep on wet ground.
- Watch for foot rot. If an animal starts limping, treat immediately.
- Cut and store grasses in June and July. Use these during the August dry spell when grass may be scarce.
- During heavy rains and flooding, move animals to higher ground.

For pig farmers in Imo:

- Pigs must have dry sleeping areas. Wet conditions cause pneumonia.
- Provide shaded mud holes for pigs to cool themselves (pigs do not sweat).
- During hot May, ensure plenty of clean drinking water.
- In flood-prone areas (especially toward Rivers and Oguta Lake), have a plan to move pigs to higher ground.

For fish farmers in Imo (VERY IMPORTANT for this state):

Fish farming is a major livelihood in Imo, especially in areas with access to water, including Oguta Lake and surrounding areas.

Action	When to Do It	Why
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Action	When to Do It	Why
Strengthen pond walls and embankments	Before heavy rains (March-June)	Floodwaters can wash away weak walls. Your fish will escape.
Clear drainage channels	Before April	Prevent overflow into your ponds from surrounding water
Install screens or netting at water inlets	Before April	Stop debris from entering and stop fish from escaping
Raise pond walls higher than normal	Before flood season	With High Flood Risk, water levels will be higher than usual
Have harvest nets ready	Before JAS period	If flooding threatens, you may need to harvest quickly
Monitor water quality	Throughout rainy season	Inflow from floods can change water temperature and oxygen levels suddenly

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Special warning for fish farmers near Oguta Lake and in the Niger Delta zone: Recession flooding in October-November can raise water levels suddenly. Have a plan to protect your ponds during this period.

THE AUGUST DRY SPELL (LITTLE DRY SEASON)

Imo may experience a reduction in rainfall around August (the "August Break").

What to do during the August dry spell:

- Store water in tanks, drums, or ponds during July for use in August
- If you have vegetable farms, be prepared to water them if rain stops
- Use stored fodder for livestock if grasses dry up
- Do not assume the dry spell means the flood season is over. Flooding can return in September and continue into ON period.

THE ROAD DISRUPTION WARNING

Imo has **70 road sections** at risk of flooding in 2026. This is the 8th highest in Nigeria.

What this means:

- Many roads will become impassable during the flood season, especially in low-lying areas and near rivers
- Major roads in and around Owerri may be affected
- Roads connecting Imo to Rivers, Abia, and Anambra may be affected
- You may not be able to travel between communities
- Markets may become inaccessible
- Emergency services may not reach you quickly

What you should do:

- Stock up on essential supplies (food, medicine, fuel) before the flood peak (by late September)
- If you need to travel for work or market, plan your trips before September
- Identify alternative routes before roads are flooded
- Listen to NIHSA and NEMA warnings about road closures

WHAT TO DO IF FLOODING COMES

When NIHSA or NEMA sends a High Flood Risk warning:

1. **Leave immediately.** Do not wait to see the water.
2. Move to the designated safe place in your community (high ground).
3. **Do not try to walk through moving floodwater.** It can sweep you away.
4. If it is safe, switch off electricity at the mains before leaving.
5. Take your emergency kit, important documents, and any medicines you need.
6. Make sure all family members are accounted for — especially children and elderly people.
7. Report to your local government flood officer or community flood warden.
8. **For livestock:** Move animals to higher ground before the water arrives. Do not wait.

If you are in a low-lying area near the Imo River or Otamiri River: Pay attention to the river level. If you see it rising unusually high, do not wait for an official warning. Move to higher ground.

If you are in Owerri: Pay attention to local flooding. If you see water pooling on roads, do not attempt to drive through it. Six inches of moving water can knock you off your feet. One foot of moving water can sweep away a car.

WHAT TO PREPARE BEFORE THE FLOODS COME

Every household in a flood-risk area should prepare:

- An emergency kit containing: water purification tablets, first aid supplies, copies of important documents (in a waterproof bag), and enough food for at least three days.
- Know your escape route. Where is the nearest high ground?
- Register with your local government flood officer to receive alerts by phone or radio.
- Raise important belongings (mattresses, electronics, food stores) above the expected flood level.
- Clear the drainage channels around your home before the rains begin.
- Do not throw garbage into drains.

For farmers: Store harvested crops in elevated storage. Dig drainage channels in low-lying fields.

For livestock owners: Identify high ground where you can move animals during flooding.

For fish farmers: Strengthen pond walls. Have harvest nets ready.

THE GOOD NEWS FOR IMO

Unlike northern states, Imo does not face severe drought during the dry season.

Dry season outlook (October 2026 - March 2027):

Zone	Forecast	What This Means
South-East (including Imo)	Normal to Slightly Wet	You will have water throughout the dry season. No drought vulnerability.

This means you do not need to worry about rivers stopping or severe water scarcity.

However, note that the ON period (October-November) is still part of the dry season outlook. For areas of Imo in the Niger Delta zone, this means enough water to cause flooding from recession flows.

WHO TO CALL FOR HELP IN IMO

Agency	What They Do	Contact
NIHSA	Issues flood warnings	0800-NIHSA-NG

Agency	What They Do	Contact
NEMA	Disaster response and relief	0800-NEMA-NG
Imo State SEMA	State-level emergency response	Contact your LGA Agriculture Officer or LGA Chairman for local numbers
NiMet	Weather forecasts	www.nimet.gov.ng

THE BOTTOM LINE FOR IMO

- **You will see significant flooding in 2026.** Imo is in High Flood Risk during AMJ and JAS, and Medium Flood Risk during ON.
- **The worst months are July, August, and September (JAS).** This is the peak flood season for the state.
- **Parts of Imo (toward Rivers and Oguta Lake) are in the Niger Delta flood zone.** These areas are at risk from recession flooding in October and November. Do not assume the danger is over after September.
- **The Imo River and Otamiri River are your main flood dangers.** Low-lying communities along these rivers are at highest risk.
- **70 road sections in Imo are at risk of flooding.** This is the 8th highest in Nigeria. Stock up on supplies before the flood peak.
- **Owerri and other towns face urban flooding.** Keep drains clear. Do not throw garbage into drainage channels.
- **Farmers:** Plant on mounds or ridges. Dig drainage channels. Watch for fungal diseases. If you farm in areas toward Rivers, harvest late-season crops before October.

- **Fish farmers near Oguta Lake and in the Niger Delta zone:** Prepare for recession flooding in October-November. Strengthen pond walls.
- **The good news:** You do not face severe drought like northern states. Your dry season will have Normal to Slightly Wet conditions.
- **Do not wait until water arrives.** Prepare your emergency kit, know your escape route, and stay alert through November.

This information comes directly from the NIHSA 2026 Annual Flood Outlook.

PREPARE NOW. DO NOT WAIT.

