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DESERT LOCUST PREVENTIVE CONTROL STRATEGY IN THE NEAR EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA

The Desert Locust *Schistocerca gregaria* is one of the most devastating pests in agriculture. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Central Region area (of the Red Sea and Horn of Africa) is considered the source of many Desert Locust outbreaks.

The Horn of Africa is now facing the worst Desert Locust crisis in over 25 years, and

the most serious in 70 years for Kenya. The current situation – regarded as an upsurge with the potential to become a regional plague – represents an unprecedented threat to food security and livelihoods in the region.

Established in 1967, the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region (CRC) plays a key role in enhancing Member Countries' early preparedness and response capabilities with regard to Desert

Locust and to address any gaps between calm situations and emergency situations, so that emergencies can be resolved efficiently and effectively.

Concerning the current upsurge, the Commission has been raising the alarm on Desert Locust outbreaks since February 2019, and called for a High-Level Desert Locust Emergency Consultative Meeting in July 2019, Cairo, Egypt.

DESERT LOCUST MANAGEMENT AND PREVENTION

The CRC has adopted a preventive Desert Locust control strategy. This approach consists of permanently monitoring the primary habitat in which locust emergencies develop, and intervening as early as possible while they are still small.

An effective Desert Locust plague management strategy requires timely and well-coordinated actions and inputs from national, regional and international sources, each of which depends on accessing resources at short notice.

To address this challenge, locust-affected countries have developed contingency plans to cope with major outbreaks, upsurges and plagues. This is supported by financial instruments that can be invoked during emergencies. Simulation exercises are undertaken to test preparedness. The CRC established the Locust Risk Prevention Plans (LRPP) and National Locust Emergency Plans (NLEP) at national and regional levels, reinforced by the Regional Emergency Fund (REF) for Locust Risk Management. The Desert Locust Information Service (DLIS) constantly monitors environmental conditions and locust populations based on

KEY FACTS

COMMISSION FOR CONTROLLING THE DESERT LOCUST IN THE CENTRAL REGION

THE CRC ASSISTS MEMBER COUNTRIES IN MANAGING AND PREVENTING DESERT LOCUST, AND IN PREPARING FOR AND RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES CAUSED BY THE PEST

THE CRC CONSISTS OF 16 MEMBER STATES: BAHRAIN, DJIBOUTI, EGYPT, ERITREA, ETHIOPIA, IRAQ, JORDAN, KUWAIT, LEBANON, OMAN, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, SUDAN, SYRIA, THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES AND YEMEN

THE CRC'S APPROACH SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT, SHARING AND ADAPTATION OF PREVENTIVE CONTROL STRATEGIES, EXPLORES APPROACHES FOR ASSESSING IMPACT, VULNERABILITY, ADAPTATION AND PLANNING, AND ECONOMIC, INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCING ISSUES

THE CRC'S APPROACH CREATES ENABLING FRAMEWORKS FOR ECONOMICALLY AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND CONTROL PRODUCTS

CRC PLANS AND PROMOTES RESEARCH AND TRAINING AT NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

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national survey results to provide forecasts, alerts and early warning of the timing, scale and location of invasions and breeding.

To enable early actions to quickly and efficiently mitigate disaster impacts at the regional level, FAO has established a dedicated financing system within the various existing mechanisms adopted and implemented by the locust Commissions at the national and regional levels. FAO's early warning system translates warnings into anticipatory actions to reduce the impact of Desert Locust plagues.

The system is designed to have no breaks in financing. When a new phase starts or when the resources of one financial instrument are no longer sufficient, a new instrument must take over.

THE COMMISSION'S ACTIVITIES

The CRC encourages and supports national capacity building, effective exchange of information on Desert Locust and training on the latest techniques used in Desert Locust management.

In 2018, one regional training course and three regional workshops were organized, and five national training courses were conducted.

In 2019, an interregional Desert Locust Information Officers workshop was delivered in Ethiopia and a national Training of Trainers (ToT) was conducted in Sudan. A CRC/SWAC Interregional Desert Locust Sprayer Maintenance workshop was organized in Oman, while a national training course was held in Kuwait.

Additionally, the CRC promotes cooperation and coordination between its Member States and supports joint activities at the national, regional and international levels to conduct surveys and control of

the Desert Locust wherever and whenever necessary.

For example, in January 2020, locust staff from Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates participated in the Desert Locust control campaign in Saudi Arabia.

CHALLENGES

Preventive control remains a challenge because of the opportunistic and erratic nature of the Desert Locust. In addition, the need to intensify crop production systems and expand land use into marginal areas – including new ecological niches – and changes in temporal and spatial rainfall patterns due to climate change all increase the risk of more frequent locust outbreaks.

As a result, locust-affected countries will become more vulnerable.

Likewise, reduced public attention to maintain preventive control capacities during calm (recession) periods, as well as a lack of funding to further develop and maintain achievements in enabling rapid mobilization of appropriate control resources and further improving national capacity, remain issues of high concern.

The National Locust Control Units (NLCUs) often keep limited staff and control capacities during periods of low locust activity. As an upsurge develops, NLCUs usually require internationally funded replacement and replenishment of equipment.

In addition, insecurity conditions and conflicts are major constraints on preventive control.

In periods of reduced locust activities, continued efforts are nonetheless required by all stakeholders to provide all-important support to preventive Desert Locust management.

