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Information bulletin

East Africa: Desert locust, food security and livelihoods situation

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Date of issue: 7 February 2020
Affected countries: Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan
At-risk countries: South Sudan, Uganda

This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current status of the desert locust situation across East Africa. The information and details available are accurate at this time. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) are not seeking funding or other international donations at this time.

The situation

The current desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*) activity in Eastern Africa is extremely alarming. The Horn of Africa remains the worst-affected area with an unprecedented threat to food security and livelihoods. Swarms have increased in Ethiopia and Somalia, moving southwest to Kenya and are within 200 km of northeast Uganda and southeast South Sudan.

Aerial and ground operations by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) are underway, but remain insufficient due to the size of the swarms. Favourable weather conditions forecasted over the coming months will enable further survival, reproduction and



Theophilus Mwendwa, a local farmer in Kitui County, Kenya tries to chase away a swarm of desert locusts. Photo: EPA

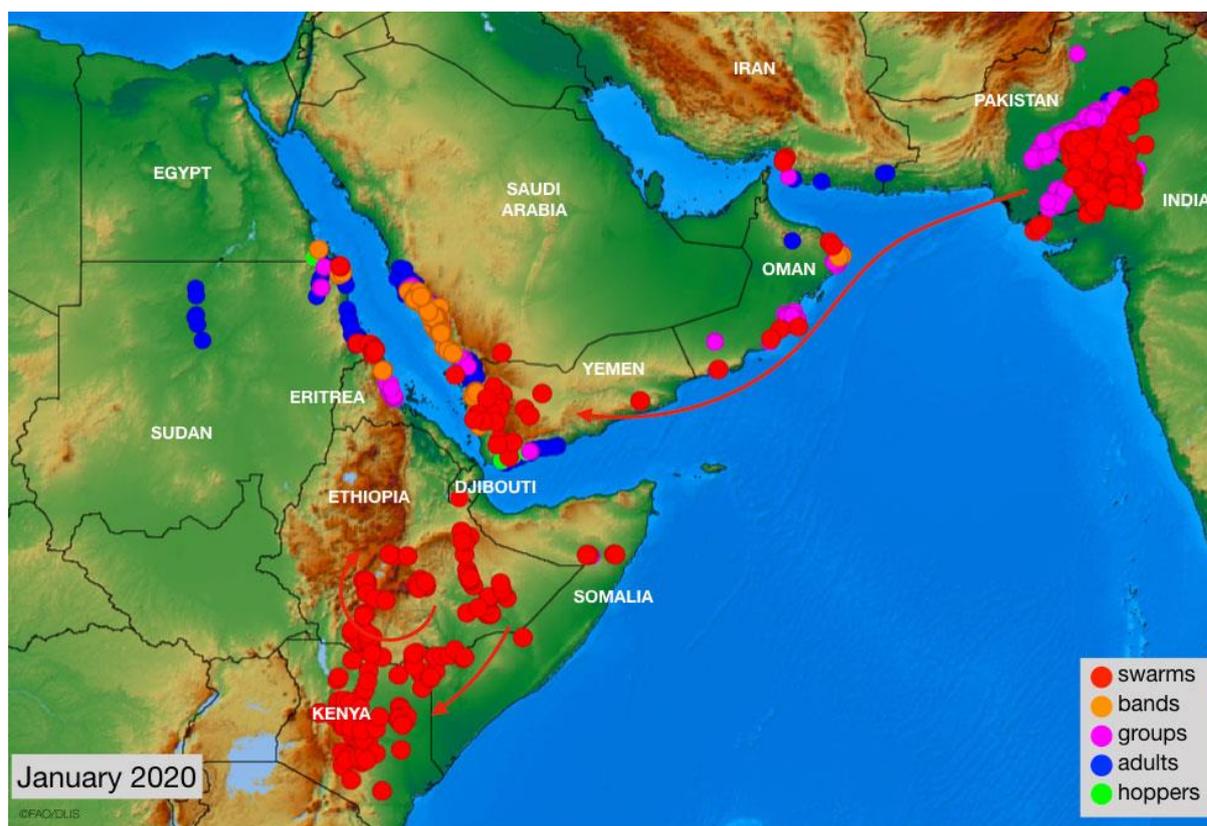
and movement of the locusts. This could result in an increase of locusts in the three affected countries with the possibility of swarms spreading to Uganda and South Sudan. A swarm also has formed on the coast near the Sudan-Egypt border with immature swarms arriving in Djibouti.

Forecast information per country is available below.

- **Ethiopia:** Swarm movements are likely to occur across eastern and southern Ethiopia, also reaching parts of central highlands. Cross-border swarm movements along the Somali and Kenyan

border will augment their size. Substantial breeding is expected to occur across eastern and southern Ethiopia causing hopper bands¹ to form.

- **Kenya:** Additional swarms will continue to arrive in the northeast from Ethiopia and Somalia, spreading west through northern and central areas. Movement further south will be limited due to headwinds. Breeding will cause further increase of the quantity of locusts in February and March.
- **Somalia:** Breeding will cause locust numbers to increase along the north-western coast. In the northeast, more hopper groups and bands will form as hatching continues and new swarms could start forming in early March. In central and southern areas, egg-laying, hatching and hopper band formation are expected to continue.
- **Sudan:** More swarms will form on the northern coast, which are likely to move to the Nile Valley. More swarms may start to form on the southern coast in March.
- **South Sudan:** There is a high risk of small swarms appearing in the southeast from southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya in coming weeks.
- **Uganda:** There is a low risk of small swarms appearing in the northeast from Kenya in coming weeks.



Current situation of desert locusts (3 February 2020). Source: [FAO](#).

The impact of the desert locust on the food and livelihood security in the region is of great concern. The FAO has warned that the desert locust outbreak is threatening the food security situation in the region as

¹ The desert locust hatches as a hopper and then passes through five or six instars, shedding a skin in each, until the final moult when they develop wings and become young adults. P.M Symmons and K. Cressman, Desert Locust Guidelines. 1. Biology and behavior, (Rome: Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2001 [1994]).

significant pasture losses across East Africa, mainly in agro-pastoral areas of Eastern Ethiopia, Central Somalia and Northern Kenya has been reported. In Somalia, over 70,000 hectares of crop land has been damaged with the swarm migrating to the southern crop producing areas, In Kenya, 13 counties are now affected threatening pastoral areas and marginal agricultural areas. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture reported that the desert invasion has affected over 65,000 hectares of land across different parts of the country in the past few months.

FAO also has warned that sustained desert locust reproduction over the next five months will likely spread to Southern Ethiopia, Southern Somalia, North-eastern Uganda and South Sudan as a result of high soil moisture, wind patterns and above normal vegetation, which have created conducive ecological conditions for the ongoing locust outbreak in the region.

The desert locust infestation is occurring in the context of consecutive seasons of climatic shocks including the 2018-2019 drought that significantly eroded the household coping capacity in the Greater Horn of Africa, leaving an estimated 18 to 22 million people facing crisis due to worsening food insecurity. Moreover, East Africa recently has experienced one of the wettest rainfall season in 40 years, causing widespread flooding, displacing hundreds of thousands of people and causing crop (70,000 hectares) and livestock losses (96,000 animal deaths) in the worst affected areas. Further heavy rains have not allowed crops to dry properly, which has led to the spoiling of some of the harvest located in household storage facilities; the rest of the produce is at risk of contamination due to aflatoxins, which would further threaten the already deteriorating food security situation. In some areas, this situation is more serious due to climatic shocks, coupled with the impact of conflict, insecurity and poor macro-economic conditions, which are the primary drivers of active food insecurity across the region.

According to the December 2019 to January 2020 Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET) report, Kenya, South Sudan, parts of Eastern and Southern Ethiopia and Somalia remain under stressed to crisis levels of food insecurity.

The breeding and spreading of the locusts in early to mid-2020 could lead to adverse impacts on cropping and vegetation conditions in the next harvesting season, starting in March to April 2020, especially in the insecure areas where aerial spraying is not possible. The Greater Horn of Africa could see escalating cases of hunger, starvation and inflated food prices in coming weeks and months. This is especially the case in South Sudan where the FAO Early Warning Early Action report on Food Security and Agriculture for the period January to March 2020 indicates that the food insecurity situation is likely to worsen with 5.5 million people likely to face crisis or worse levels of food insecurity.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Government of Kenya, in collaboration with FAO, currently is conducting the locust response (primarily aerial spraying). Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) is in the coordination team, mainly supporting the aerial operation with ground surveillance. The government will also take lead in the assessments to establish loss and damage of crops, vegetation which will then inform a way forward. Somalia Red Crescent Society (SRCS) is monitoring food and nutrition security levels in real-time via their extensive network of Primary Health Care facilities throughout the country. The SRCS / IFRC Health Centres and Clinics in all nine (six in Somaliland and three in Puntland) regions at risk of resurgent locust outbreaks are part of the FAO-led Inter agency FSNAU Food Security / Nutrition assessment and surveillance centres. IFRC, in collaboration with the IFRC in affected and at-risk countries, and the National Societies are developing enhanced monitoring tools for food security. Opportunities for National Societies to partner with FAO in areas of

assessment and community engagement are being explored. The IFRC and ICRC, supporting the National Societies through their respective delegations, are monitoring the situation and are standing by to provide technical and financial support as required. As the situation evolves and more information becomes available regarding the food security and livelihoods situation of the affected areas, further support measures to National Societies will be considered.

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All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) in Disaster Relief and the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (Sphere) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The IFRC's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

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The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
2. Enable healthy and safe living.
3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.