

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

WEST AFRICA: LOCUST INVASION

10 October 2004

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

In Brief

This Information Bulletin (no. 1/2004) is being issued for information only. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

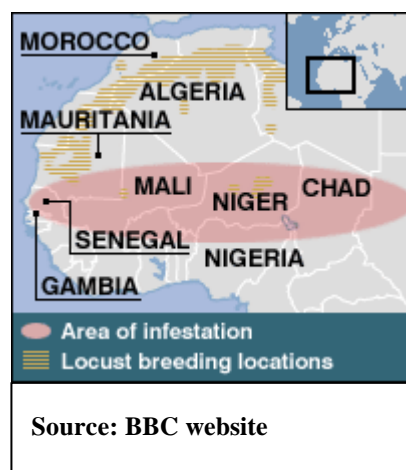
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All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the Code of Conduct and is committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for a full description of the national society profile, please access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

The Situation

Exceptional rains in 2003 have stimulated locust breeding over wide areas in West Africa, particularly the Sahel region, producing great swarms of locusts; this year witnessed the worst locust invasion in almost 20 years. Locust swarms generally vary from less than one to several hundred square kilometres and sometimes up to 80 million locust adults per square kilometre. A very small part of an average swarm consumes the same amount of food in a day as about 10 elephants or 2,500 people. According to OCHA, "the situation is serious and there is need to act quickly to avoid the risk of witnessing a serious humanitarian disaster."

Early in the summer of 2004, the locusts ravaged crops in Mauritania, Niger and Mali, spreading further into Senegal, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde and Chad. International organizations such as FAO report that the present invasion is worse than the last one which occurred in 1987-1989, leading to a serious food crisis costing the international community more than USD 300 millions. According to FAO, the countries likely to most affected by this crisis are Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Chad.



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Reports from the affected countries indicate that up to 40% of the pastures and 10% of the vegetables have been damaged, affecting the livelihoods of farmers and nomads and reducing the availability of food on the market and triggering inflation. Though the region expects an above normal harvest this year, the estimated reduction is by as much as 25%.

FAO had created an early awareness about the impending crises in October 2003; however, donor response was very slow, partly due to poor understanding of the potential impact of pesticide application on humans, livestock and the environment. The recent FAO appeal for USD 100 million for pesticides and aircrafts to undertake spraying has so far brought in about USD 30 million in pledges.



Figure 1: Locusts on crops
(Source BBC website)

Fears are high that unless the situation is quickly brought under control, the swarms are likely to migrate north to Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, Returning southwards next summer in increased numbers, they may venture into more countries such as Guinea, Gambia, Cameroon and Sudan. According to the FAO reports, up to 200 million people could thus be affected.

From 10-31 October, FAO, WFP and CILSS¹ will carry out a joint assessment of the locust impact and determine action to check the spread.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

FAO has the requisite expertise and organizational structures in place to take the lead role in controlling the locusts' invasion. In line with this and the knowledge of the potential hazard of pesticides, the Federation discourages the use of pesticides by the national societies of the affected countries. Instead, the Federation recommends maintaining close contact with the respective governments, international and national organizations and participation in meetings to discuss possible actions and contingency plans. In addition, the national societies are assessing and monitoring the situation through their volunteer network in remote communities; they are submitting reports to the Federation Sahel Sub-Regional Office and the West Africa Regional Delegation, both based in Dakar.

Coordination

The Federation, represented by the regional delegation for West and Central Africa and the Sahel regional office, is in close contact with OCHA, WFP, FAO and other organizations to define their role and input for the present situation and preparedness for a potential invasion in 2005. The delegation participates regularly in the OCHA coordination meetings and the special donors' meeting in Dakar.

Following the results of the joint assessment mission, the Federation will assist the national societies in formulating and planning programmes in food security and longer-term preparedness for potential locust invasions for select, most-vulnerable communities.

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For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeals:

- Sahel sub-region, Appeal 01.39/2004 - http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual04/013904.pdf
- West Africa region, Appeal 01.49/2004 - http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual04/014904.pdf

Please also watch for the 2005 Annual Appeals, due to be launched in Geneva on 23 November 2004.

¹ CILSS - Centre International pour la Lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel, a centre for the fight against drought in the Sahel.