Madagascar locust update for the second dekad of February, 2011 and a forecast for the next dekads

Meteorological conditions

The passage of cyclone Bingiza on February 17th and 18th in Tuléar and the surrounding areas south of the country generated strong winds exceeding 15 m/s and heavy rains well above the optimum moisture level for the Malagasy locust. The gusty winds and heavy rains temporarily halted survey and spray operations from 18-20 February.

Locust situation

During this dekad, most of the 2nd generation hoppers fledged and groups of fledglings (immature adults) were observed at densities ranging from 10-30 insects/m^2 in the transient multiplication and gregarization areas in the Belomotra plateau. A similar situation was reported in Bekily-Fotandrevo. In the lowlands of Tuléar, 5-10 insects/m^2 - mating adults and gregarious 4th and 5th instar hoppers were observed. The solitary and transient populations that were reported during the previous dekad on some 20,000 ha north of the mouth of Mangoky River were observed further developing. Early instar hoppers of the red (nomadic) locust were reported on areas measuring up to 60m^2 scattered over the 2,000 ha on the Belomotra plateau.

Impacts of current locust populations

Significant impact was not reported as most locusts were still in their natural habitat. However, as the locusts continue maturing and populations begin increasing, swarms will begin forming moving between outbreak and invasion areas and pose threats to crops and pasture.

Interventions

During this dekad, 38 800 ha were reported infested and 12 800 ha were sprayed with 12,800 liters of Chlorpyrifos 240 ULV by air. The current operation logged close to 16 flight hours and so far, more than 456 hours have been logged. As of February 20th, 2011, 40,540 ha have been sprayed and/or protected.

As part of an effort to ensure the safety of vulnerable populations and protect the environment, one hundred and sixty six (166), 200 l empty pesticide containers (metal drums) have been temporarily stored at the pesticide storage facility in Tuléar under the direct supervision of the CNA pesticide manager. The empty containers will be safely disposed at a latter date.

Forecast

During the next two dekads, hoppers are expected to fledge and mature in the Bekily-Fotadrevo, Mahafaly plateau and the surroundings of Androvo. This will be followed by mating, laying and the appearance of a more robust and persistent 3rd generation.

Given the favorable breeding conditions created by the recent rains and the rate at which the locusts are currently developing, there is a likelihood of the need for increased spray operations over the coming months. Vigilance and timely interventions are essential to avoid any major impacts to crops and pasture.

FAO-CNA plans for the next dekad

Aerial survey and control operations that were temporarily halted during the 2nd dekad in Tuléar and the surrounding areas due to Cyclone Bingiza and compounded by a two-day scheduled maintenance of the spray helicopter will resume as soon as conditions improve. Control operations will commence in the transient multiplication and concentration/gregarization zones along the mouth of the Mangoky River and the lowlands of Tuléar. Survey will proceed on the high basin of Mangoky, the Belomotra plateau, Befandriana-Sud and Androvo.

FAO-CNA team will finalize pre-positioning pesticides in Befandriana-Sud.

Inventory of resources

As of February 20th, CNA reported 77,460 l of *Chlorpyrifos* 240 ULV, 17,200 l of *Nomolt* 50 UL (IGR) and 600 kg of *GreenMuscle* (a biopesticide) in its inventory. Two helicopters are strategically placed in Tuléar and in areas close to most spray operations (source: FAO-CNA, A. Kamara, 02/21/2011).

OFDA/TAG will continue monitoring the situation and issue updates and advice accordingly.