

Three locust alerts in three regions

Three locust species, the **red locust**, the **Madagascar migratory locust** and the **Moroccan locust** have begun developing rapidly in three separate regions, namely Eastern Africa (**Tanzania**), the Caucasus (**Georgia**) and southern Africa (**Madagascar**), respectively. These pests are developing at an alarming rate and will require rapid interventions to avoid severe crop damages and prevent the need for massive emergency responses in these regions.

Tanzania

The International Red Locust Control Organization for Central and Southern Africa (IRLCO-CSA) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported that the current Red Locust outbreak in **Tanzania** could be more serious than what was seen last year. In previous year the pest was controlled over large areas by aerial means with an environmentally friendly pesticide (Green Muscle) in sensitive habitat, i.e., wetlands and with conventional pesticides in others. Escapee swarms from previous outbreaks further developed through late last year and continued well into this year.

The areas currently affected by the locust are mostly swampy and flood plains and can only be accessed by air. In addition, they are surrounded by extensive crop fields that are under a serious threat from the pest – a situation that could severely undermine food security and livelihood of the farming communities in these regions. Uncontrolled swarms will likely escape to adjacent areas and neighbouring countries, including DRC, Burundi and Rwanda where they could further exacerbate the humanitarian situation.



IRLCO-CSA is doing its best to prevent major threats to crops, but due to the recent tragic accident that

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took the lives of its two pilots and the only fixed-wing aircraft in its possession, its aerial capacity has been seriously undermined. IRLCO-CSA's airpower now hinges on a 30-year old helicopter with a very high maintenance-cost that is eating away the Agency's meagre resources - a situation one would hope not happen at a time when the locusts are breeding rapidly and the very organization mandated to control them is at an absolute disadvantage. IRLCO-CSA has appealed to member-countries and FAO to provide rapid assistance so that it can stand up to the ensuing challenges from the pest.

Georgia:

A recent field survey in **Georgia** revealed the presence of Moroccan locust hoppers and adults on more than 14,000 hectares south-east of the country near the Azerbaijan border. The last time a situation like this happened was nearly five decades ago (the unusual appearance of the Moroccan locust is likely associated with changes in the weather patten and the cropping system). Here, it is the Italian locust that is considered the main pest and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) normally allocates funds each year for the control of this pest normally around May-June. The MoA is not prepared for this unexpected event. However, the situation has forced it to redirect funds allocated for the Italian locust to address the Moroccan locust invasion. Given the magnitude of the current invasion by the Moroccan locust and the potential for a subsequent invasion by the Italian locust, MoA has already requested FAO for assistance.

Madagascar

According to a field report and information received from FAO, the locust situation in **Madagascar** is deteriorating. The presence of large numbers of locust swarms, some as large as 8 km long, were seen near Hioshy and considerable numbers of hopper bands were reported along the roads to Tulear, Sakara, and Beahitse. So far just a little more than 70,000 ha has been reported treated by ground means using backpack sprayers (the least effective equipment for massive locust invasion) due to lack of aerial capacity within MoA locust control unit (CNA). Up to 50% crop damage was also reported by CNA in Sakara and Mahabouke.

Given the rate at which the locust is developing, and considering the fact that backpack sprayers are the only means currently available to MoA/CNA to control the pest it is highly likely that locust numbers will rapidly increase over the coming months and pose a serious threat to crops and pasture. Therefore, it is essential that curative and preventive operations are carefully planned and rapidly executed to avoid major emergencies down the road.

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Actions being taken:

While affected countries and IRLCO-CSA are doing what they can, FAO is in constant contact with its reps, IRLCO-CSA, affected-countries and partners in all three countries and elsewhere to develop and implement preventive and emergency response interventions as rapidly as possible. Well-planned, rapid and early interventions are essential and would require sufficient resources to avoid severe crop and pasture damage and minimize the need for massive emergency responses down the road.

OFDA/TAG will continue monitoring the situation closely and issue advices and updates.

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