



Desert Locusts and its Impact on Agriculture

Desert locusts are species of locusts that aggressively feed on green vegetation, including crops, pasture, and fodder. Due to their ability to reproduce rapidly, migrate long distances, and devastate crops, desert locusts are considered the most dangerous of all migratory pests in the world. They are among the major causes of famine and starvation in communities that depend on crops for their survival. A typical swarm can be made up of 150 million locusts per square kilometer and fly in the direction of the prevailing wind. A 1-kilometer squared swarm can consume the same amount of food in a day as about 35,000 people. In 2018 and 2019, frequent and intense storms in and around the Indian Ocean caused deadly flooding in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. These extreme weather events – exacerbated by climate change – helped to create the perfect breeding conditions for the oldest and most dangerous migratory pest in the world. According to the FAO, since January 2020, more than 1.3 million hectares of locust infestations have been treated in ten countries. Though control operations have prevented the loss of an estimated 2.7 million tonnes of cereal, worth nearly \$800 million, many countries in the Horn of Africa are already hard hit by acute food insecurity and poverty. Access to quality and nutritious food is fundamental to achieving sustainable development. Secured access to food can positively contribute to achieving the developmental goals such as SDG 1 – no poverty, SDG 2 – no hunger and, SDG 3 – good health.

Effects of Desert Locust Invasion on Households and Food Security:

- According to the FAO, 20.2 million people currently face severe acute food insecurity and serious levels of hunger in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania – a number that could grow exponentially due to the combined impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the desert locust infestation.
- Due to the damage caused to crops and pastures, a cereal loss of over 356,000 metric tons has been recorded. This has led to increased cereal and livestock prices by 50 percent. In view of this, households are struggling to feed their families and this is detrimental to the achievement of SDG 2– zero hunger.
- In the affected countries, the proportion of households that reported poor food consumption deteriorated from 37 percent in August 2019 to 41 percent in February 2020.
- A study from the FAO suggests that 20 percent of the earth's land, more than 65 of the world's poorest countries, will be extremely affected if locust control strategies are not implemented. The Global Hunger Index 2019 shows that the stunting rate of children has increased to 61.1 percent.
- Combined with the effects of COVID-19, locust control measures such as spraying was delayed. This allowed for the second breeding cycle of the desert locusts which led to displacing families and driving more of the most vulnerable people into poverty and hunger.

Response of Governments in the Battle Against Desert Locust Invasions

- Watch the progress made in fighting back against [2020's massive locust swarms.](#)
- How Kenya is using technological Innovations to [combat desert locust invasion.](#)
- How Ethiopia is battling desert locusts invasion: [Watch here](#)