

Niger, Mali on alert to Desert Locust risk

Insecurity and conflict hinder control efforts



Regional coordination is crucial to locust control.

5 June 2012, Rome – Croplands in Niger and Mali are at imminent risk from Desert Locust swarms that are moving southward from Algeria and Libya, FAO warned today.

Groups of locusts have recently been found in northern Niger, arriving from infestations further north.

FAO says locust-control efforts in the region are being hindered by continued insecurity along both sides of the Algerian-Libyan border. Political insecurity and conflict in Mali could also hamper monitoring and control efforts if the locusts reach that country.

Locust infestations were first reported in southwest Libya near Ghat in January 2012 and in southeast Algeria.

In late March, FAO warned that swarms could arrive in Niger and Mali by June. Continued rains and the resulting growth of vegetation led to the formation of swarms by mid-May.

"How many locusts there are and how far they move will depend on two major factors – the effectiveness of current control efforts in Algeria and Libya and upcoming rainfall in the Sahel of West Africa," said Keith Cressman, FAO Senior Locust Forecasting Officer.

Both Algeria and Libya have been working hard to treat infested areas, covering a total of 40 000 hectares in Algeria and 21 000 hectares in Libya as of the end of May.

"In a normal year, Algeria and Libya would have been able to control most of the local swarms and prevent their movement towards the south, but insecurity along both sides of the Algerian-Libyan border is getting in the way of full access by local teams and by FAO experts who need to assess the situation. Libya's capacity to carry out control efforts has also been affected in the past year," Cressman explained.

Niger last faced Desert Locust swarms during the 2003-05 plague that affected farmers in two dozen countries.

The FAO Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Western Region (CLCPRO) has provided \$300 000 in funding to tackle locust infestations in Libya, and FAO has added an additional \$400 000 to address the problem.

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Preparedness

FAO's Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Western Region (CLCPRO) ensures coordination among countries in the region. In addition, FAO's Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases programme (EMPRES) helps the 10 member countries (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Senegal and Tunisia) to improve their emergency preparedness and prevention mechanisms. In October 2011, these countries participated in a simulation exercise designed to test and improve Mali's state of preparedness in the event of a Desert Locust crisis.

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