



Future orientation and challenges



When the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region came into force on the 21 February 1967 it was to meet the urgent need to prevent crop losses and risk to food security caused by desert locust in the region.

In spite of all the substantial national and international efforts in the past 50 years to develop the preventive desert locust control management, and although the pest is being considered by many governments in the Near East and African Region as a threat of national concern and ranks high on the political agenda during upsurges and plagues, the priority given to the problem during periods of low locust activities (recessions) usually diminishes. As a consequence of this decline of attention, countries are often ill-prepared when faced with desert locust swarms, and the situation quickly reach emergency levels because of insufficient capacities and resources to react appropriately to the rapidly expanding threat.

Challenges



Involving member countries of the Commission in the fight against desert locust in one way or another enhances the spirit of cooperation and responsibility. The Commission has achieved great success towards achieving its objectives, but there is still a need for support in the future, especially as there are existing obstacles and need sufficient attention from the member countries to overcome them.



Key facts

The Commission should be continued to be a vital forum amongst member countries for all of the issues concerning desert locust management.

The challenge to sustain motivation and activity of the Commission.

Always be ready and well prepared for Locust plagues.

A dedicated commitment will need to continue in financing the Commission from member contributions.

Member states contributions

The non-regular contribution payment by member countries to the trust fund of the Commission and the lack of extra budgetary support risk the steady erosion of the capacity of the Commission to effectively assist, particularly the breeding member countries in need of support when challenged with massive difficulties to sustain even basic field activities such as regular monitoring of important locust breeding areas. Without sufficient funding, the Commission has limited ability to support activities, which go beyond the absolute minimum within the framework of its mandate and risks to lose even more of its significance, particularly to the invasion countries.

The introduction of new or improved technologies and equipment in the context of early warning system, less harmful control technologies to the environment, pesticide stock management system, as well as contingency planning and rapid response mechanisms and training national Locust Officers on these techniques and approaches require additional funding sources and cannot be supported by the regular contributions of the member countries alone.

Decline of emergency preparedness

At the national level, the decline of political attention to preventive control strategies of desert locust impedes governments of many breeding countries to provide sufficient autonomy to the national locust control units (NLCUs). This has serious implications on the NLCUs decision making to appropriately manage and maintain the resources dedicated to desert locust control. In many cases, the desert locust resources are being used during recession periods for purposes other than locust control and are no longer available when they are needed for locust operations. The same applies to the transfer of experienced and skilled staff to other duties, who are thus no longer available to train new generations of national locust officers and pass on their knowledge and their all-important field experiences.

Strengthen interaction between the Commission and the NLCUs

A better visibility will also enhance the interaction between the Commission and the NLCUs, which would allow addressing the challenges emanating from emergencies of desert locust. More comprehensively with the aim to strengthen the national and regional early warning system and to enhance preparedness and networking among affected countries. By including desert locust issues in the new emergency response and rehabilitation system, it is believed that joining forces could better advocate regional and national efforts in preparedness and management of issues critical to desert locust emergencies.

Early detection and early warning

Rapid action based on the early detection of locust infestation in remote areas was a direct result of improved survey methods, efficient information networks, remote sensing and data management and transfer, using new technologies. Rapid intervention capacities of participating member countries have also been strengthened to ensure timely and environmentally safe control interventions.

Well organized and conducted locust surveys, skilled survey officers and efficient national information networking, that continue to work also during recession periods, are essential prerequisites to increase the likelihood of early detection of gregarious desert locust populations and hence of any successful preventive desert locust management strategy.

Promote autonomous desert locust control centres

Some of the difficulties to preserve the desert locust control capacities at the national level are still attributed to insufficient authority given to the NLCUs to manage their own resources. The necessary minimum capacity can be better maintained if governments of breeding countries grant more autonomy to their NLCUs. In return, by keeping the equipment and experienced staff constantly under the control of the NLCUs, their capacities to launch fire-brigade-like operations at any moment will increase the chances of detecting and efficiently controlling critical outbreaks in the recession areas, and thus reduce the risk of desert locust swarms invading agricultural areas and affecting regional livelihoods.

Enhanced interaction between the stakeholders

Planning and goals identification are steered jointly with all stakeholders in the Commission's sessions and during annual meetings. All member countries NLCUs are fully equipped with modern communication facilities such as e-mail, internet, fax and radios to stimulate the vertical and horizontal interaction between the stakeholders. Information and experience exchange, as well as collaboration between the member countries gained momentum in most cases and are being documented in a number of joint activities such as inter-regional seminars, workshops and joint cross border surveys.

The regional entities: the Commission and the desert locust Control Organization for Eastern Africa (DLCO-EA) are fully supporting the introduction of advanced preventive locust control strategies.

Conclusion

The active participation of member countries promotes a spirit of cooperation and responsibility. All approaches developed are designed to support and strengthen the national and regional early detection and early intervention capacities in order to prevent outbreaks. As a result, the Commission has made good progress towards achieving its targets in almost all of its activities. However, close follow-up and backstopping are still needed in the future, particularly concerning the promotion of new and more advanced technologies of early detection and environmentally safer control.

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