The 2020–2021 desert locust upsurge

How anticipatory action prevented a full blown humanitarian crisis.
The desert locust upsurge

In late 2019, a massive outbreak of desert locusts swept across the greater Horn of Africa and Yemen. This pest can devour a staggering volume of crops and pastures that rural communities depend on – a major threat in a region already hit by frequent climatic hazards and high levels of food insecurity.

The situation was dire

Swarming desert locusts reproduce exponentially

- 20x after 3 months
- 400x after 6 months
- 8000x after 9 months

In one day, a small swarm of one square kilometer can consume the same amount of food as 35,000 people.
Acting fast
Mobilizing time-sensitive resources

January 2020
$10M

January 2022
$243M
Action at scale
Neutralizing the threat

- 27 aircrafts deployed
- 800 thousands of kilometers flown
- 162 vehicles procured
- 6.6 thousands of sprayers distributed
- 3.8 thousands of people trained

Innovating for results

- Biopesticides + insect growth regulators in addition to traditional pesticides
- eLocust3 app and tablets, survey drones, predictive computer modelling

Locust control operations in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia

- Total: 2,292,548 Ha

Hectares treated

- January 2020
- December 2021
Acting on all fronts
Supporting and restoring livelihoods

Enabling family food production to continue

In addition to intensive ground and aerial operations for monitoring and treating locust infestations, we worked with partners to assist 650 000+ families that lost crops, grazing, or animals, so they could resume food production.

- 107 500 households able to access food and meet basic needs
- 14M USD in cash transfers for food to replace lost crops and animal production
- 150 000 farming packages distributed
- 230 000 tonnes of cereals produced
- 750 000 core breeding animals sustained with supplementary feed...
- ...which provided 140 000+ households with milk for children under 5
An unprecedented locust threat was halted from spiraling into a plague or a food crisis.

Major losses of crops, pasture and animal production were avoided. Livelihoods were reinforced. Governments now have the tools and capacity to act fast to disrupt future infestations.

Reaping the rewards
Acting early, fast and at scale

- 41.5M people protected from food insecurity
- 4.6M metric tonnes of cereals saved from destruction
- 900M litres of milk losses prevented
- $1.8B in economic losses avoided
- 41.5M people protected from food insecurity

Greatly strengthened national locust response capacities
Staying the course
Delivering results

Working with governments during the pandemic, FAO and other UN partners scored major wins.

- In Southwest Asia, the upsurge was brought under control by late 2020.

- West Africa was spared invasion due to control efforts in the greater Horn of Africa.

- In East Africa and Yemen, the upsurge was eliminated after a long-fought campaign.

- Locust management capacity has been strengthened across all affected and at-risk countries.
Tackling future threats
Replicating a model of success

What if we invested in protecting people from disasters – rather than wait for the worst to happen?

Acting fast and early when threats like pests, droughts or animal diseases appear on the horizon can prevent food crises from breaking out in the first place and helps contain their scale and severity when they cannot be avoided.

Evolution of desert locust swarms, 2018 – 2022

2018  Late 2019  Early 2020  2021  2022
## Contacts

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