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DESERT LOCUST CONTROL COMMITTEE

Fortieth Session
Rome, 19-22 June 2012
FAO Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in South-West Asia (SWAC)
(Agenda Item 7)

I. Introduction

This paper has been prepared to clarify a number of subject matters that play an important role in the Commission's activities and performance. Establishment of the Commission, member countries, Secretariat, responsibilities, constraints and the future orientation of the Commission will be addressed and discussed.

II. History and evolution

A. Establishment

The Commission is the first and hence the oldest of the three regional Desert Locust commissions established by FAO under Article XIV. In the past five decades, several important milestones have been achieved since its establishment.

1962. A special FAO meeting of Member Nations directly affected by the Desert Locust in the Eastern Region of its distribution area in South-West Asia, held in Tehran in October, recommended that a regional commission for the control of the Desert Locust should be established for the Region.

1963. This recommendation was confirmed by a second meeting of the Member Nations directly concerned (May) and by the FAO Desert Locust Control Committee at its Eighth Session in May. A draft Agreement was considered by the FAO Council at its Fortieth and Forty-first Sessions and approved by the Conference at its Twelfth Session (December) for submission to Member Nations for its acceptance.

1964. Afghanistan formally registered its acceptance on 14 July, I.R. Iran on 19 November, and India on 15 December. In accordance with paragraph 1, Article XX, the Agreement entered into force on 15 December, the date of receipt of the third instrument of acceptance.

1965. The Agreement was registered with the Secretariat of the United Nations on 2 April under No. 7663 as the FAO Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Eastern Region of its Distribution Area in South-West Asia. Pakistan formally registered its acceptance on 12 July.

1977. At its Twelfth Session (March), the Commission adopted amendments to the Agreement regarding membership and observers that were approved by the FAO Council at its Seventy-second Session (November)¹. These amendments entered into force for all the parties to the Agreement.

2000. At its Twenty-second Session (September), the Commission adopted further amendments to the Agreement including changing the name of the Commission to FAO Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in South-West Asia (SWAC), exchange of locust information, abolishing the Executive Committee and session frequencies².

2001. The amendments were approved by the FAO Council at its Hundred and Twenty-first Session (October-November) and entered into force immediately.

B. Member countries and contributions

SWAC is the smallest of the three FAO regional locust commissions with only four members: Afghanistan, India, I.R. Iran and Pakistan, which have been members since 1964-65.

Each member of the Commission undertakes to contribute annually its share of the budget in accordance with a scale of contributions that has been calculated on the basis of the financial contributions worked out in connection with the United Nations Special Fund Desert Locust project (1960)³. Contributions may be made partly in cash and partly in kind. The Commission may also accept contributions and donations from other sources.

¹ 1977 amendments (12th session):

Article I – Membership. Added the possibility to admit States that are situated in the Region and that are a member of the United Nations, *and of its Specialized Agencies or the International Atomic Energy Agency*.

Article VI – Observers and Consultants. Added the possibility to invite States that are situated in the Region and that are members of the United Nations, *and of its Specialized Agencies or the International Atomic Energy Agency* to attend sessions in an observer capacity.

Article X – Rules of Procedures and Financial Regulations. Clarified that the *Financial Regulations and amendments thereto* are subject to confirmation by the FAO Council.

² 2000 amendments (22nd session):

Preamble. The name of the Commission was changed to the *FAO Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in South-West Asia*. The name of the Islamic Republic of Iran should be used instead of Iran. *I.R. Iran* was the officially accepted name as used by FAO. The phrase *territories adjacent to the four Member Countries* was deleted as the terminology was no longer applicable.

Article II – Obligations of Members. Information should be regularly transmitted to the Desert Locust Information Service at *FAO, Rome* rather than London. Members should undertake to carry out all possible measures *for preventive control* rather than to control plagues.

Article III – Seat of the Commission. The text of the Establishment Agreement was amended so as not to include an Executive Committee and the functions of the Executive Committee should be included with those of the Commission.

Article V – Sessions of the Commission. Sessions should be held *once every two years in calm periods and at least once a year during Desert Locust upsurges*.

³ Current contributions are slightly less than those proposed for Afghanistan (USD 2,750), India (USD 37,500), I.R. Iran (USD 27,000) and Pakistan (USD 18,000) at the 6th Session of DLCC (Rome, 1959)

C. Secretariat and seat

The Commission determines the seat of the Commission. From 1965-1979, it was based in Tehran, I.R. Iran and there were two Secretaries during the period⁴. Since then, the seat has been at FAO Headquarters in Rome and there have been seven Secretaries⁵.

D. Role of the Commission

As per the establishment agreement, the role of the Commission is to:

- plan and implement joint action for the survey and control of the Desert Locust in the Region and to arrange means whereby adequate resources are available
- assist and promote national, regional and international survey and control efforts
- determine, in consultation with member countries, the nature and extent of assistance needed for implementing the national programme
- assist at the request of member countries in situations that exceed that national capacity of a member country
- maintain strategic locations of control equipment and pesticides
- ensure all member countries are provided with the current locust situation and relevant research result
- assist national research organizations and co-ordinate research in the Region
- collaborate on locust survey, control and research within the Region

Member Countries are obliged to exchange locust information regularly with countries and the FAO Desert Locust Information Service (DLIS), carry out all possible means to prevent plagues that include maintaining a permanent locust information/reporting and control service, holding reserves of pesticides and equipment, encouraging and supporting training and research, implementing a common preventive control strategy, facilitating the storage of Commission equipment and pesticides, providing the Commission for any information it may request to carry out its functions effectively, and to keep the Secretary informed of action taken to fulfil the previously mentioned obligations.

E. Sessions and meetings

Regular sessions of the Commission are convened every two years, hosted in rotation by one of the member countries. Due to unstable political circumstances and security conditions, Afghanistan was unable to host any sessions between 1969 and 2007 until the 26th session in December, 2008. The Secretary of the Commission participates in sessions of the FAO Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region (CRC) while the CRC Secretary participates in SWAC sessions.

III. The impact of EMPRES

The EMPRES programme has not reached the Eastern Region; hence, there has been no direct impact of EMPRES on the member countries of SWAC. Nevertheless, they have benefited indirectly by strengthened national locust programmes in the Central Region, which has probably led to a decrease in locust invasions in I.R. Iran, Pakistan and India from that region.

⁴ S.M. Taqi Ahsan (1965-1968) and S.S. Pruthi (1968-1979)

⁵ S.S. Pruthi (1979-1982), G. Popov (1983), Manikowski (1984-88), J. Roffey (1988-1992), A. Hafraoui (1993-1997), C. Elliot (1998-2005), K. Cressman (2005 to present)

IV. Activities

The primary activity of the Commission is the annual Desert Locust Joint Survey in the spring breeding areas of the I.R. Iran and Pakistan. The survey was conducted in the 1960s and 1970s until the revolution in I.R. Iran but then it was suspended until it was resumed in 1995 at the request of member countries at the 19th Session (1994). The survey takes place in April for two weeks in Baluchistan, Pakistan followed by two weeks in the adjacent areas of Sistan-Baluchistan and Hormozgon provinces in southeast I.R. Iran. The joint survey team consists of two locust officers, one support staff and four drivers from each country. A report is issued which the Secretary finalizes.

During the summer period, monthly joint Indo-Pakistan border meetings are held on the common border from June to about October or November. This activity was first established and funded by the Commission in 1977. More recently, both countries have assumed the costs of the meetings. The border meetings allows locust officers from both countries to exchange information of locust survey and control operations and to discuss the current locust situation regardless of any political tensions or contact limitations that may exist between the two countries.

The Commission supports national, regional and inter-regional training activities designed to improve the knowledge of locust field officers in survey and control and other officers in planning, reporting and data analysis. Such activities include national workshops conducted by nationally designated Master Trainers, annual SWAC/CRC RAMSES/eLocust2 workshops for locust information officers, inter-regional Master Trainer workshops and ad-hoc visits by regional resource persons to national locust units for improving information and reporting. National Training-of-Trainers courses are also held as a means of increasing the number of Master Trainers in a country. The 27th Session (January 2011, Islamabad) recommended that online self-learning training modules are developed for national locust staff on biology, survey, information/reporting, control, biopesticides and planning.

As another means of strengthening national capacities, the Commission provides fund for the procurement of equipment for Desert Locust reporting, survey and control, the use of eLocust2 and data transmission, and the translation and distribution of locust information publications and material such as the FAO Desert Locust Guidelines, Standard Operating Procedures, and Master Trainer Manual.

Under the treaty, member countries were obliged to exchange locust information about the situation and control campaigns with the Desert Locust Information Service in London, UK until the late 1970s. Thereafter, and once FAO assumed the role of global information and forecasting, countries share information with Rome, including survey and control results, fortnightly and monthly bulletins, annual Iran/Pakistan joint survey results, and minutes of monthly Indo-Pakistan border meetings during the summer.

V. Constraints of the Commission

The primary constraint that is faced by the Commission is the large arrears to its Trust Fund of some USD 400,000, equivalent to nearly six years of annual contributions by the member countries. Consequently, the number of activities that can be undertaken are relatively limited. This is compounded further by a lack of donor interest and support, and an EMPRES programme even though it was requested by Member Countries. Unstable political circumstances and security conditions affect the participation of delegates to the Commission sessions, regional training events and the undertaking of the joint border survey in western Pakistan. The lack of a full-time secretary in the Region is not seen to be a constraint due to the relatively small size of the Commission.

VI. Future orientation and improvements

The Commission should continue to strengthen national locust programmes and improve Desert Locust early warning and reaction in the Region, especially in the absence of the EMPRES programme and donor support. Consequently, the 27th Session (January 2011, Islamabad) recommended that:

- biopesticides are introduced for use in Desert Locust and Moroccan Locust control;
- frontline countries have at least two designated locust information officers who are active and well trained;
- more qualified Master Trainers in India and Pakistan to train the relatively large numbers of national locust staff;
- joint Indo-Pakistan monthly border meetings continue during the summer monsoon period, especially during periods of increased locust activity and such meetings should be more meaningful and useful;
- the annual joint survey of the spring breeding areas in Iran and Pakistan continue as best as possible despite uncertain security conditions;
- the Trust Fund supports the participation of the national Locust Head or Plant Protection Director (or Deputy Director) of each member country at every DLCC session.

The Commission is considering other potential means of strengthening national programmes such as the development of national contingency plans, the establishment of equipment inventory systems, and environmental monitoring in collaboration with the FAO Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region (CRC).