



THE DOUBLE BURDEN OF COVID-19 AND LOCUSTS IN EAST AFRICA

Saving Millions of People From Hunger and Malnutrition



AMINO AHMED WITH IRC NUTRITION MANAGER AFTER BEING SCREENED FOR MALNUTRITION BY THE IRC AT KARAAN HOSPITA IN MOGADISHU, SOMALIA. KELLIE RYAN/IRC

Without intervention, desert locust swarms in the Horn and East Africa may cause mass crop failure, exacerbating an already serious food security situation and plunging 4.9 million people into crisis level food insecurity

Coinciding with COVID, an upsurge of Desert Locust is taking place in the Horn of Africa, Arabian Peninsula and Southwest Asia, with risk of spreading to the Sahel region if it is not stopped by July. **The Desert Locust is the world's most dangerous migratory pests.** A typical swarm can consist of up to 150 million locusts per square kilometer and can migrate as far as 150 kilometers in one day. Even a tiny, one-square-kilometer locust swarm is capable of consuming the same amount of food in one day as approximately 35,000 people. This infestation of desert locusts first arrived in East Africa last June, feeding on hundreds of thousands of hectares of crops and pastureland and causing destruction in at least eight countries — Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Sudan. **This the most serious desert locust outbreak in East Africa in 70 years** and represents an unprecedented risk to food security and livelihoods. Without a ramp up in preventative measures, there is a risk swarms will migrate to West Africa and continue to spread across the Indo-Pakistan Border.

Growing risk of famine across the horn and East Africa

Coupled with the impacts of COVID-19, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is warning of the growing risk of famine across the region. East Africa already

has 20 million severely food insecure people, who meet their basic needs each day. FAO is predicting that a 4th generation of eggs will hatch creating a new swarm in mid-June, coinciding with the start of harvest threatening current crop production, livestock pasture and crop cultivation for the following season.

- 3.5 million people are projected to face food crisis or worse in Somalia, between July and September 2020, without humanitarian assistance.
- 8,000 times population size increase, from the original swarm, is expected in mid-June if a new wave of desert locust breeding is not stopped
- Tens of thousands of hectares of cropland and pasture have already been damaged across the Horn and East Africa.

Somalia estimated to be the hardest hit

In February 2020, the Somali government was first in the region to declare a nation-wide emergency in response to the desert locust crisis. On May 18th, FAO categorized the situation as "Dangerous," representing a serious threat to crops. Communities that the IRC and partner organizations work with reported that slightly more than half of their cultivated lands (56%) were affected by the recent infestation. The locust infestation has already damaged more than 25,000km

of pastoral land as of March 2020, constituting a 55% loss of available pasture. The impact on the community is evident. As IRC's local partner Sahal Farah, Community Resilience Committee Vice Chairman for Docol, in Somalia stated,

"This is the worst locust invasion we have seen in our generation, it destroyed pastures, contaminated water sources and displaced many pastoral households. The worst of all is that we do not have the capacity to control it and so far we have not received any external support." He continued, "Huge hectares of pasture land <were> completely destroyed by the locust and as a result many pastoralist migrated and this has put extra burden to our villages as the major livelihood source was livestock products."

Without intervention FAO predicts a 50-70% cereal harvest loss in worst case, or at least 20-30% loss in the best case. This could lead to earlier than normal depletion of pasture land, forcing pastoralists to migrate further distances than normal. Below average national harvests have the potential to result in rising food prices exacerbating the already serious food security situation.

Women face increased risks

As the situation deteriorates across the Horn and East Africa, women and girls may face particular risk. Depletion of pasture lands and crop failures, will increase the distance and duration of migration for pastoralists who are primarily male. The absence of male partners and adolescent sons in pastoralist communities, increases women and girls' vulnerability to external threats, such as theft or violence. Additionally, women face an increased burden to manage the existing farms or small businesses and assume all unpaid care needs of their households and communities. Female headed households will be particularly vulnerable to crop failure and livestock needs with less mobility and access to agricultural support services. Gender-sensitive programming is necessary to address the

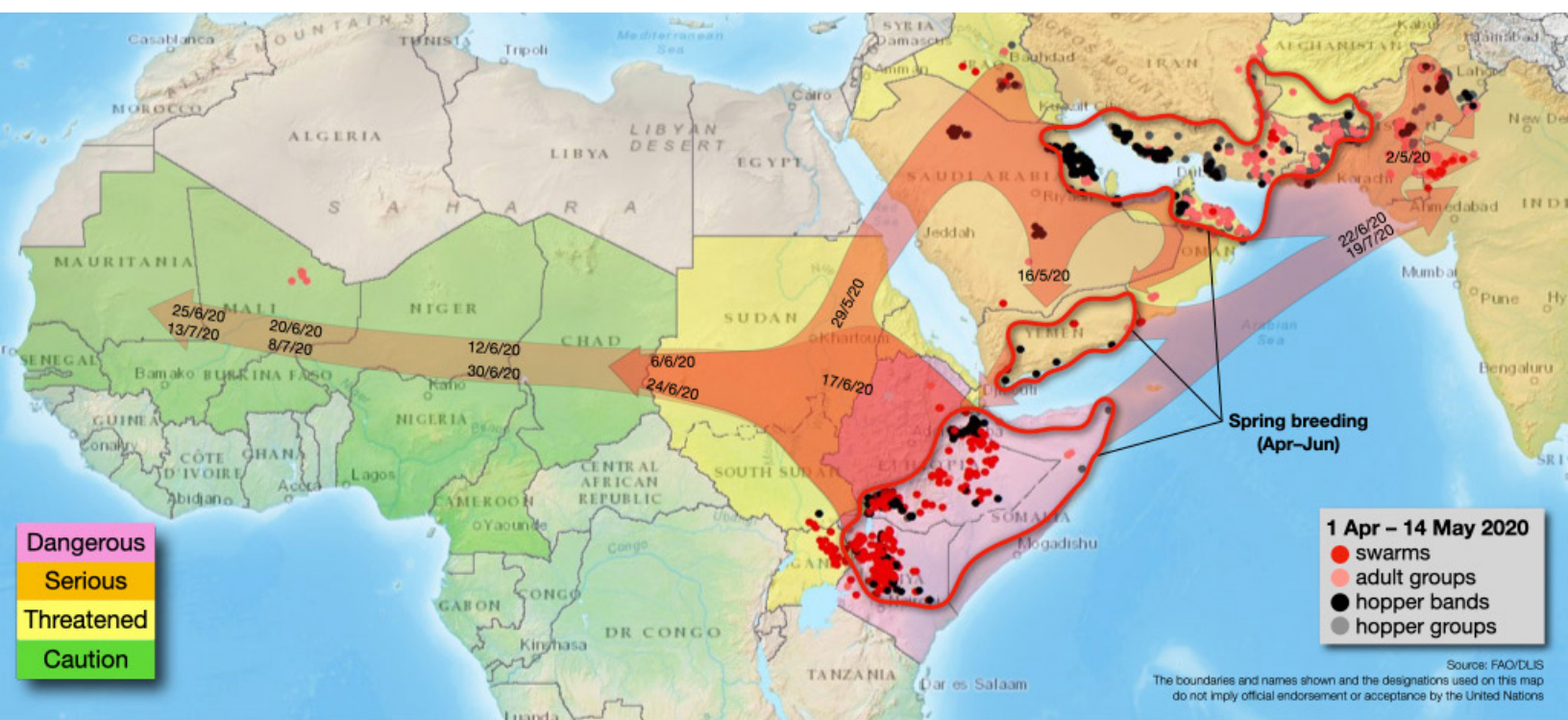
compounding factors in this crisis. More information is also needed to better understand the context-specific impacts of this crisis on women and girls.

IRC and communities are putting in control measures

IRC is engaged in desert locust task force activities in Somalia and supporting community sensitization on desert locust control measures. IRC is training Community Resilience Committees (CRC) on control measures and providing agri-inputs and fodder to locust affected smallholder farmers. IRC is currently supporting 34 communities in 4 regions and 6 districts with a total of 372 CRCs. Through assessments, IRC estimates that 5,000 households, especially female headed households, do currently or will need urgent humanitarian assistance by August if harvests fail and if market prices for food increase. IRC plans to scale up multipurpose case assistance, agri-input and fodder support to reach all 5,000 at-risk households. This is just an example of programming in Somalia, the likes that will need to be scaled up across the Horn and East Africa, if prevention measures are not immediately undertaken by the larger international community.

Larger scale funding is necessary to reduce risk of wide-spread famine

Scaling necessary response and prevention activities is essential to mitigate the risk of wide-spread famine. Yet, the lack of funding poses challenges to IRC and its local partners to adequately support communities and thus placing vulnerable affected household members, the majority of whom are women and children, at greater risk of hunger, malnutrition and death. IRC calls for 1.98M USD to respond to the desert locust emergency in Somalia for the year 2020. IRC also appeals to FAO, Government and the desert locust task forces to continue timely support to the affected communities especially in providing analysis of locust movements, technical assistance for the control of the locusts, coordination, and information sharing.





FRONT: TRILLIONS OF LOCUSTS ARE SWARMING ACROSS PARTS OF KENYA, SOMALIA AND ETHIOPIA. FREDRIK LERNERYD/GETTY IMAGES

MAP PAGE THREE: © FAO 2020, DESERT LOCUST GLOBAL FORECAST MAY-JULY 2020, [HTTP://WWW.FAO.ORG/AG/LOCUSTS/EN/INFO/INFO/INDEX.HTML](http://www.fao.org/ag/locusts/en/info/info/index.html), JUNE 2, 2020

BACK: ATHOK ATHIAN NGOG IS PICTURED CULTIVATING HER LAND AT HER VILLAGE IN PANTHOU, AWEIL SOUTH STATE, SOUTH SUDAN. CHARLES ATIKI LOMODONG/IRC

The International Rescue Committee responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and gain control of their future. In more than 40 countries and in 26 U.S. cities, our dedicated teams provide clean water, shelter, health care, education and empowerment support to refugees and displaced people.