



What is happening?

At the end of June 2019, spring-bred swarms invaded the horn and eastern parts of Africa (into northeast Ethiopia, northern Somalia) from the Arabian Peninsula.

Breeding and invasion by locusts was spurred by one of the wettest rainy seasons in the region in almost four decades.

Swarms of locusts in Ethiopia damaged **500,000** acres of cropland and led to approx. **10 million** people requiring emergency food aid.

COVID-19 has compounded the locust crisis and caused an unprecedented **threat to food security** and livelihoods in upcoming planting and harvest seasons. The UN predicts that the locust swarms could increase **500 times** and with personnel numbers down due to corona regulations, the government is struggling to provide the necessary relief.

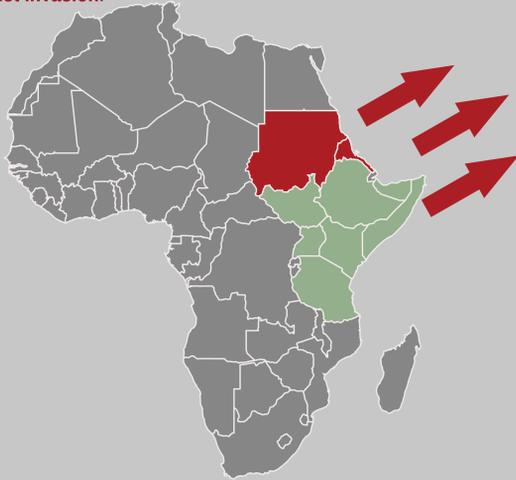
Loss of **sorghum, wheat, and maize** vastly reduces the amount of available land for cattle grazing.

In Uganda, many people have no other form of income apart from their farms and the locusts are currently hitting the **poorest regions** of the country the hardest.



Which areas have been impacted?

The East and Horn of Africa is home to **over 14 million displaced people**. Most of them rely on **humanitarian aid** to survive. Without the locust threat, funding was already falling short of what was needed to support these communities. The UN World Food Program (WFP) **cut rations to refugees in the region by a third** and Governments and aid organisations have turned their focus and funding towards the management of **COVID-19**, thereby **deserting efforts to contain the locust invasion**.



Worst impacted countries, so far:

Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Somaliland, South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania

Other hotspots:

Sudan, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan

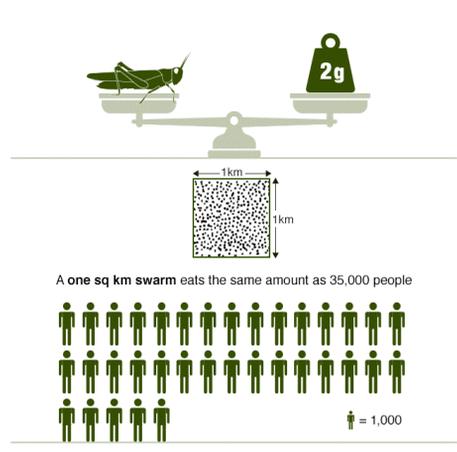


According to the **Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)**, **more than 10 million people** in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Sudan - are already facing severe food insecurity, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse - live in areas currently affected by the desert locust infestations.

A further **3.24 million severely food insecure people** in Uganda and South Sudan, are also under threat, bringing the total number at risk to **over 13 million**.

Facts about locusts

Locusts are related to grasshoppers, and although the two insects look similar, grasshoppers are solitary insects and locusts have a behavioral phase called the **gregarious phase**. When environmental conditions produce many green plants and promote breeding, **locusts can congregate into thick, mobile, ravenous swarms**.



Desert locust (scientific name: *Schistocera Gregaria*)
size: male 60-75mm & female 70-90mm
weight: 2g
Composition: 62% protein, 17% fat, mineral matter
Life span: 3-5 months

Locusts can eat **their own body weight** in food each day

A **swarm** can be made up of more than **50 billion** individual insects

A swarm can travel up to **100km in a day** – eating everything before it

Without **strategic intervention**, a plague can last years

Weather plays a big role: while dry spells restrict their movements, rains cause breeding numbers to explode

Natural techniques to control locusts

DIG UP EGGS

- Observe **where** females **lay eggs** – characterised by them pushing their bodies into the ground
- Mark** the spot
- Dig up** with hoe or you can use a plow
- Leave outside to **dry up** by sun/if it is not a hot day, feed the eggs to your poultry
- Educate neighbouring farmers in using similar techniques

FOOD FOR POULTRY

- Keep ducks, guinea fowl and chickens on your farm to reduce locusts' number
- In China, they have used groups of more than 70,000 ducks and chickens to help control locust invasions*

PLANTS THAT DISTRACT/REPEL

- Distract locusts and grasshoppers by **planting other plants** around your crops that they eat
- Marigolds** are a favourite and can thereafter be sprayed with insecticide
- Marigolds are natural repellents of whiteflies and nematodes. Locusts like sorghum as much as maize and millet. Plant sorghum around the main crops to distract them
- Planting trees and shrubs (like Calendula) around cultivated areas helps to discourage breeding
- Plant trees and shrubs** on borders of fields, on shores of rivers and lakes, on barren lands, old river beds, floodplains, etc
- Trees house **natural predators** of grasshoppers and locusts, like birds and wasps
- Opposite strategies** also function well: Sahel-farmers leave 2-3m wide bare ground around fields to control locusts and keep it free from weeds. Be mindful to protect ground against soil erosion

TRAPS

- Spread out a **food-trap** (such as bran sprayed with neem or another natural insecticide), to attract grasshoppers and locusts (add molasses to boost effectiveness)
- For smaller fields, station multiple **water-filled buckets** where the insects are known to **congregate**. You can attract them by adding something sweet to the water or hanging a light over the bucket. A thin film of Keroseene added to the water, can prevent them from escaping. If the latter action is taken, refrain from feeding them to any other animal!
- Piles of straw**, stacked at the edges of fields, give off heat at night, which attracts locusts and grasshoppers
- Functioning as a location of attraction, you can then easily spray the straw with insecticide
- Better than insecticides, a new biocontrol method, the **fungus *Metarhizium acridum***, which only torments locusts and grasshoppers, could be investigated to destroy them

SWARMS

- When you know a **swarm is heading your way** and you can gauge where they will be headed, set up **barriers** to direct locusts into pits. Prepare these barriers (it can be made from fabric, wood, etc. and 33-45cm high) and trenches (preferably 40cm deep, 1m wide, and vertical walls). When many are collected in these trenches, you can burn them or bury them
- During seasons where swarms are highly probable, plant crops that grasshoppers and locusts detest, e.g. potatoes, sweet potatoes, rice, peanuts, beans, cotton, sesame, and green manure crops
- Consider **covering** smaller cultivated areas with netting to protect crops from swarms

FOOD

In many countries in Africa and South America, grasshoppers and locusts can be eaten as a source of food or used in medicines.

Warning! Be careful when you try this as many of these insects could have been **sprayed with chemicals**. Ask government officials whether **pesticides** have been used in-country. Due to them **travelling far distances in a relatively short time**, one must be vigilant for what they could have **exposed to before**.



FINAL THOUGHTS

- These techniques work for **other pests**
- Less pest-controlling **chemicals** used means **healthier soil, more helpful insects and less money spent on chemicals**
- Support **integrated pest management systems** and **spread the word** to others
- When **free of insecticides**, locusts, and grasshoppers can be an **invaluable source of food** for both poultry and people

DO YOU WANT TO HELP?

The CRN supports efforts in the affected areas through our **local partners and churches on the ground**.

We encourage **natural approaches, information and education sharing efforts, and food security relief** to the **most vulnerable**.

Your **donation** can make a difference.



Sources

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