A severe desert locust outbreak threatens rural food security across the Horn of Africa

- A serious and widespread Desert Locust outbreak is destroying crops and pasture across eastern Ethiopia and neighbouring areas of Somalia, parts of Sudan and Eritrea, with a high risk of further spread in the absence of immediate and significant scale up in control activities. Mature desert locust swarms first crossed to eastern and north eastern regions of Ethiopia from Yemen and Somalilands around July/August 2019 and have since invaded several pastoral and agro-pastoral areas in the Horn of Africa.

- A typical swarm can be comprised of up to 150 million locusts per km$^2$ and its daily consumption of crops can correspond to the annual consumption of 2,500 people. Affected areas can experience up to a 100% loss in crops and fodder. Given the severity of the outbreak and the limited capacities to control it, food security actors should begin preparing for the likelihood of increased food security-related needs in all the affected areas.

- In Somalia, the ongoing Desert Locust outbreak is the worst in over 25 years with over 70,000 hectares affected in Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug (Mudug), according to FAO. Migrating swarms have recently been reported as far south as Beletwyne in Hirshabelle State. Meanwhile, in the Amhara and Tigray regions of Ethiopia, about 430 km$^2$ (43,000 hectares) have been affected in the past two months with the estimated loss of 1.3 metric tonnes of vegetation, inclusive of crops and pastures. Infestations have spread to pastoral Somali region of Ethiopia where hopper bands are present that will become new swarms in the coming weeks.

- Above-average precipitation during the 2019 October-December rainy season and from the recent Cyclone Pawan provided favourable ecological conditions that are expected to allow significant locust breeding for the next six months, which would cause a dramatic increase in bands and swarms.

- Control activities are ongoing with 10,822 ha in Ethiopia, 27,165 ha in Sudan, and 6,060 ha in Eritrea treated during November. However, current operations have been inadequate to control the outbreak, and the Locust swarms have managed to migrate to southern Ethiopia (Ogaden) as well as southern Somalia (Hirshabelle). The risk remains high that it will soon reach north-eastern Kenya and Djibouti, according to FAO’s most recent Desert Locust Bulletin.

- FSNWG calls upon all relevant partners to take urgent action to significantly increase Desert Locust surveillance and control operations across the region. Additionally, under a scenario where the outbreak is not contained quickly and large quantities of crops and fodder are destroyed, food insecurity in affected areas could be worse than previously anticipated. Contingency planning for the potential of a larger number of food insecure people should begin now.

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**Figure 1.** Forecast of desert locust spread, December 2019 – June 2020

**Fig. 2:** Desert Locust swarms

2 (a): Chidhi village, Salal region, Somaliland

2 (b): Osali village, Salal region, Somaliland

*Source: FAO*

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