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منظمة الأغذية
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para la
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y la
Alimentación

DESERT LOCUST CONTROL COMMITTEE

Thirty-eighth Session

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EMPRES CENTRAL REGION (Agenda item 7b)

1. CURRENT STATUS AND ROLE IN THE EMERGENCY

Since the 1986 – 1989 plague large scale control operations based on chemical pesticides have caused considerable concern in relation to their economic costs, the safety and environmental impact of the pesticides used, and the capacity of existing organizations to deal with the problems in an efficient and effective manner.

In response to this concern, the FAO Council endorsed a proposal in 1994 for the development of an Emergency Prevention System (EMPRES) for transboundary pests, with a major focus assigned to the Desert Locust. In 1997 the EMPRES Central Region (CR) Programme was initiated with the aim:

To reduce the risk of Desert Locust plagues emanating from the Central Region of the Desert Locust distribution area in order to mitigate food security, economic, and environmental concerns in the Central Region and beyond.

Pilot activities started in 1995, comprising nine countries around the Red Sea (Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen). Since then, the major focus of the EMPRES/CR Programme was on:

- Developing the human capacity of locust control staff of the national Locust Control Units (LCU) to better perform survey and control operations;
- Developing more effective national and regional locust information and early warning systems which are linked to the Desert Locust Information Service (DLIS) at FAO HQ;
- Developing early preparedness and contingency planning mechanisms;
- Assisting the EMPRES/CR member countries in introducing novel control technologies which are likely to reduce the environmental risks of Desert Locust control.

Phase I of the Programme became operational in January 1997 and ended in December 2000. Phase II started in January 2001 and ended by December 2003. The programme is currently in its Phase III which will end by December 2006. A fourth phase as a donor supported programme is currently being prepared.

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Phase III has the objective to transfer the responsibility for the promotion and supervision of preventive Desert Locust management strategies in the Central Region to the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region (CRC) and the member countries. With effect of the 1st of January 2006 the EMPRES/CR Programme is being managed by the Secretary of the Central Region Commission.

The EMPRES/CR Programme has been evaluated four times with the aim to provide donors, member countries and FAO with an independent and objective view of the implementation status. The first evaluation mission took place in July/August 1999. During Phase II the Programme was evaluated twice: the first time in August 2001 as part of an overall evaluation of the whole EMPRES Programme and for the second time in February/March 2003. Phase III was evaluated in September/October 2005.

The mission observed a generally positive trend in Desert Locust prevention in the Central Region, and concluded that particularly the early warning and early reaction capacities had improved significantly in most EMPRES/CR countries as a result of numerous EMPRES efforts. Although EMPRES has made major contributions to build national locust control capacities, the adoption rate of the recommended standard approaches and techniques varied from country to country and recommended a fourth phase of three years as a consolidation phase.

In view of the additional responsibility of the Commission to sustain preventive Desert Locust management in the Central Region, the mission also indicated the need to redefine the working mode and the necessary resources of the Commission, and recommended that the CRC member countries should determine the support to be provided by CRC Secretariat. It further pointed out that at least one regional technical assistant to the Secretariat should be appointed to secure technical backstopping and follow-up.

The findings of the 4th Evaluation Mission were presented in the 6th Consultative Committee Meeting for the EMPRES/CR Programme in Cairo in November 2005. The Committee welcomed the report and strongly recommended to clearly define the areas of future support particularly with regard to making full use of early warning technologies such as RAMSES, eLocust, and remote sensing. Based on the recommendations, EMPRES/CR submitted a proposal for assistance to preventive Desert Locust management in the Central Region to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which is currently being reflected by the Saudi Government.

In general the EMPRES/CR Programme could benefit from the relatively calm period from 1997 to 2003 to develop and introduce various standard procedures, technologies and approaches as part of the operational systems of the national Locust Control Units. A key element in this matter was the close interaction with the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region in all strategic questions and contingency planning in particular during the second and third Phase.

The reliability of the preventive control approaches was first tested under real conditions during the emergency situation in 2003-2005, triggered by unusually heavy and widespread rainfall throughout the Sahel zone, which resulted in simultaneous Desert Locust outbreaks in the Western and Central Regions in autumn 2003. After the first alert was issued in October 2003, survey and control operations were immediately mounted in Egypt, Sudan and Eritrea, and teams were mobilized in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The operations that followed were conducted in a comparatively more systematic and coordinated manner than in the past and succeeded in preventing the development of an upsurge in May 2004. However, in the following period the Central Region faced two major invasions of Desert Locust swarms coming from Western Region through Egypt in October 2004 and Darfur, Sudan in June 2005.

As part of the regional contingency planning EMPRES played a major role in brokering timely assistance to those countries with only limited resources, namely Sudan, Eritrea and Yemen in

collaboration with AGPP and the Commission. Most significant was the bilateral contribution from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Sudan in 2004 and 2005 worth USD 2 million. This assistance essentially covered all predicted needs in terms of material and equipment as well as for operations.

Also the regional TCP project for Sudan, Eritrea and Yemen in May 2004, worth USD 390,000, added much to reinforce the level of preparedness of the Locust Control Units of the three countries. The project enabled Eritrea to shoulder first control operations against a local Desert Locust outbreak on the Red Sea coastal plains during the summer season in 2005. But because of the extent of the infestation there was a high risk of a rapid pesticide shortfall. The deficit was prevented by airlifting additional 25,000 litres donated by the Governments of Sudan and Senegal in an unusually rapid concerted action between the countries, EMPRES, WFP, TCEO and AGPP.

Other multilateral and bilateral assistance provided by FAO, IFAD, AfDB, UNDP and Saudi Arabia to Sudan, Egypt and Eritrea during the emergency amounted to a total of USD 1,393,000. It is also worthwhile mentioning that Sudan assisted Chad with 7,000 litres of pesticides and 20 sprayers.

One cornerstone in the event of managing the Desert Locust upsurge was the organisation of Ad-hoc Emergency Prevention Meetings held with the immediate concerned countries. Four meetings have been organised in collaboration with CRC and DLIS in October 2003, March and September 2004, and March 2005 to jointly analyse the situation and possible developments, and to convene appropriate countermeasures in the context of Regional Action Plans. Based on the regional action plans, more detailed National Action Plans were prepared and brought to the attention of the national authorities and local donor agencies.

The monthly National Locust Bulletins, with the aim to regularly inform the national authorities, the local donor community and the Commission of the locust situation, of actions taken and the status of the available resources, contributed much to the sensitisation and increased funding of the operations from the national budgets.

As a result of the pre-emptive actions, less than 300,000 ha have been treated during the control operations in the Central Region during the campaign 2003-2005 preventing damage to crops and the environment.

2. CONCLUSION

The events during the recent Desert Locust emergency clearly demonstrated that it is crucial to have standard approaches of preventive management in all the three Regions of the Desert Locust invasion area in place. The absence of preventive systems in one Region risks jeopardizing the approach as a whole.

Since the technological development is a continuous process, it is equally crucial to sustain what has been developed by EMPRES in the Central Region and to continue the efforts of introducing new technologies, particularly in the areas of early warning/detection and alternatives to chemical control. In addition, because of the limited capacity of the Secretariat of the Commission to follow up standards of preventive Desert Locust strategies in the member countries it is strongly recommended to find funds for appointing a Regional Technical Officer.

The experiences in the Central Region also confirmed that investment in human capacity building is worth the value for money and should continue as a long-term commitment to maintain a high standard of technical skills at the national Locust Control Units also during recession periods.

In order to sustain the early detection and early reaction capacities it is indispensable that the national Locust Control Units are autonomous from other plant protection activities and granted by their governments with enough funds for locust operations only.

The currently calm period should be used effectively by the countries, the Commissions, the donor community and FAO to extend and to further develop the Emergency Prevention Systems approach.