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FAO DESERT LOCUST CONTROL COMMITTEE

Thirty-ninth Session

Rome, 10-13 March 2009

How ready are we for the next emergency? (Agenda Item 14)

Background

An effective Desert Locust plague prevention strategy calls for timely and coordinated inputs from national, regional and international sources, each of which depends on accessing resources at short notice. Preventive control requires fire brigade-like national survey and control capacities maintained in all-time operational readiness, able to mobilize national, regional and international reinforcements rapidly. In addition, new technologies have to be tested, adopted, made available and incorporated into working practices.

The EMPRES/CR programme commissioned in 2002 an historical review of preparedness to help set priorities. The reviewers described the development of a two-stage plague prevention system requiring countries in the Recession Area to maintain sufficient capacity to locate and control Desert Locust populations throughout recessions and during the early stages of an upsurge, to use warnings from FAO's Desert Locust Information Service (DLIS) to initiate and mobilize regional and international reinforcements for the larger campaigns that occur later in an upsurge.

The reviewers:

- established a long history of inter-related financial, technical and organizational inadequacies at national, regional and international levels reducing preparedness;
- confirmed that inadequate finance is a perennial problem for many locust monitoring and control organizations and that funding and consequently expertise diminish as plagues end;
- found that preparedness is hampered by significant time lags between appeals being launched, external funding being made available and resources being delivered;
- noted that anti-locust technology changes during and shortly after each plague but that funds needed to re-equip and train teams do not arrive until after the next emergency has started;
- suggested that shorter plagues since plague prevention introduced combined with poor institutional memories has tended to lead to finance being moved from locust control.

The rapid deterioration of the Desert Locust situation in the Western Region in 2003 and 2004 has been explained by the lack of preparedness as well as inadequate response mechanisms to deal with

the upsurge. The independent review of the 2003-5 campaign in 2006 revealed that responses to the locust threat were hampered by obsolete equipment, limited stock of pesticides, a lack of contingency plans and reduced knowledge and capacity to deal with the threat. The affected countries were slow to acknowledge the extent of the crisis and the donor community was too slow to provide support needed to fight the Desert Locusts in the early stages of the upsurge. In short, the responses lagged behind the locust attack. Past mechanisms to bridge the gaps have been disappointing.

In conclusion, messages from recent evaluations can be summarised as followed:

- Need to streamline FAO's rapid response processes and to develop and implement a system-wide emergency cycle;
- Need to develop adequate corporate tools;
- Need of advance funding to respond quickly or to act in a preventive and preparedness mode;
- Need to build on partnerships.

The Way Forward

Emergency preparedness can be defined as actions taken in anticipation of an emergency to facilitate rapid, effective and appropriate response to a threat and aims at:

- Early warning systems provide relevant and timely information and analysis for effective decision-making,
- Governments and partners are better prepared to respond to Food and Agriculture emergencies,
- Governments and relevant partners are prepared to prevent, mitigate and respond to threats and emergencies with impact on food and agriculture.

In the context of the preventive Desert Locust strategy, the EMPRES Desert Locust component focuses since its beginnings in 1997 amongst others on emergency preparedness. By developing more pro-active control strategies, the EMPRES Desert Locust Programme could change the way that locusts were managed. The impact of improved early warning systems, support to autonomous national locust control structures in the front-line countries, continuous investment in staff training and contingency planning as part of the preparedness efforts become evident in terms of cost, area infested and treated, and rapid mobilization of additional resources.

Almost all EMPRES countries are equipped with modern locust and ecological data management tools (RAMSES¹) and are taking actively part in the global early warning system under the umbrella of DLIS.

Efforts have been made over the past years specifically by the governments of the Sahelian countries in allocating national emergency funding and substantial annual budgets to autonomous locust control entities in order to maintain the early intervention capacities also during calm locust periods.

¹ *Reconnaissance and Management System of the Environment of Schistocerca (GIS data management and aid to decision-making)*

However, preparedness is highly dependent on the tactics adopted. Lists of staff and equipment resources as prepared by the countries are an important aspect of preparedness, but do not necessarily indicate operational readiness. Contingency planning as advocated by EMPRES is addressing these issues through regional and national workshops which include basic aspects such as:

- references to past infestations, sizes and phases that are typical for campaigns;
- permanent monitoring of the locust developments and the ecological conditions;
- knowing the work rates of the permanently retained teams, their available spray equipment and pesticides to effectively deal with a minimum size of infested area;
- permanently trained reserve staff and well maintained equipment;
- improved command and communication systems;
- mobilization and action planning,
- and if national and regional reserves are insufficient, decision mechanisms when and how to call for international reinforcements.

New partnerships in emergency response have been established, which did not exist in 2003, with WFP (World Food Programme), CERF (UN Central Emergency Response Fund) and locust affected countries in various aspects of logistical support such as rapid transportation of supplies, provision to storage capacities, procurement and lease, vulnerability assessment and mapping (VAM), rehabilitation, access to more rapid funding to take action on humanitarian emergencies, pesticide triangulation and growing regional solidarity among affected countries.

Conclusion

Countries made substantial efforts to reinforce and maintain their control capacities in many aspects and are playing a fundamental role in FAO's global early warning system. FAO acknowledges the importance of the countries in providing regular and high quality information from the field as a pre-requisite for preparedness and the success of all following actions. Not at last for this reason FAO is continuously investing in further improving locust monitoring technologies and forecasting, but is also attaching high attention to strengthening the national locust survey and reporting capacities and makes appeal to the countries to maintain their national information networks also in periods of reduced locust activities and not to reduce the efforts in providing timely reports of good quality and on a regular basis.

The lack of funding to maintain preparedness and enable early mobilization of appropriate control resources remains crucial. The degree of preparedness has proved elusive in the past and, as each upsurge develops, national locust control units require internationally funded replacement and replenishment of equipment.

The UN CERF instrument provides for the first time an adequate instrument to access funds rapidly. However, this emergency support is limited to a period of three months and not sufficient to cope with a larger upsurge unless additional donor funding is not upcoming within this timeframe. The rapid reaction of the Japanese Government to the onset of the upsurge in the Central Region in 2007 was certainly exemplary for equal situations in the future and underlines the need for a flexible multi-donor programme approach.

However, quick access to emergency funds and rapid provision of services are two sides of the same coin, and do not necessarily translate into rapid disbursement and adequately reinforced control capacities. Once an emergency warning is issued, little time remains for delivering supplies to pre-empt an upsurge becoming a plague. A recent study on FAO's emergency response capacity revealed elapsed time from procurement planning to distribution of equipment to beneficiaries of in average 139 - 149 days, enough time for successful breeding of 1-2 generations, and too long to respond effectively to a rapidly developing and dynamic pest.

Although the evaluation of the 2003-4 campaign calls for delegating responsibilities to lowest possible level, the capacities of the sub-regional offices and the FAO Representations in many of the affected countries are by far not yet equipped to support emergency assistance as necessary. Inadequate administrative procedures, the lack of market information and shortage of qualified staff are often hampering rapid delivery.

To address these issues it might not be enough to streamline FAO's administrative procedures and to strengthen the capacities at the sub-regional and national levels alone, but to take advantage of interagency collaboration with WFP. The possibility should be explored to establish strategic emergency reserve stocks at WFP's United Nations Humanitarian Response Depots in Brindisi, Accra and Dubai with standard equipment of long shelf-life, which could quickly be dispatched as soon as an emergency evolves to replenish the national locust control capacity. Support from the Committee in this aspect would be appreciated.

Donors may not always be aware of their role in preventing plagues and may be more willing to provide publicity relevant emergency assistance than investing in prevention and preparedness. Aware of the possible shift in media attention and donor commitment to other emergencies and/or natural disasters such as climate change, souring food prices etc, FAO urges the donor community to remain committed to humanitarian crises due to the Desert Locust, which could affect large populations hence requiring additional resources for building national as well as regional capacities for monitoring, preparedness and response.