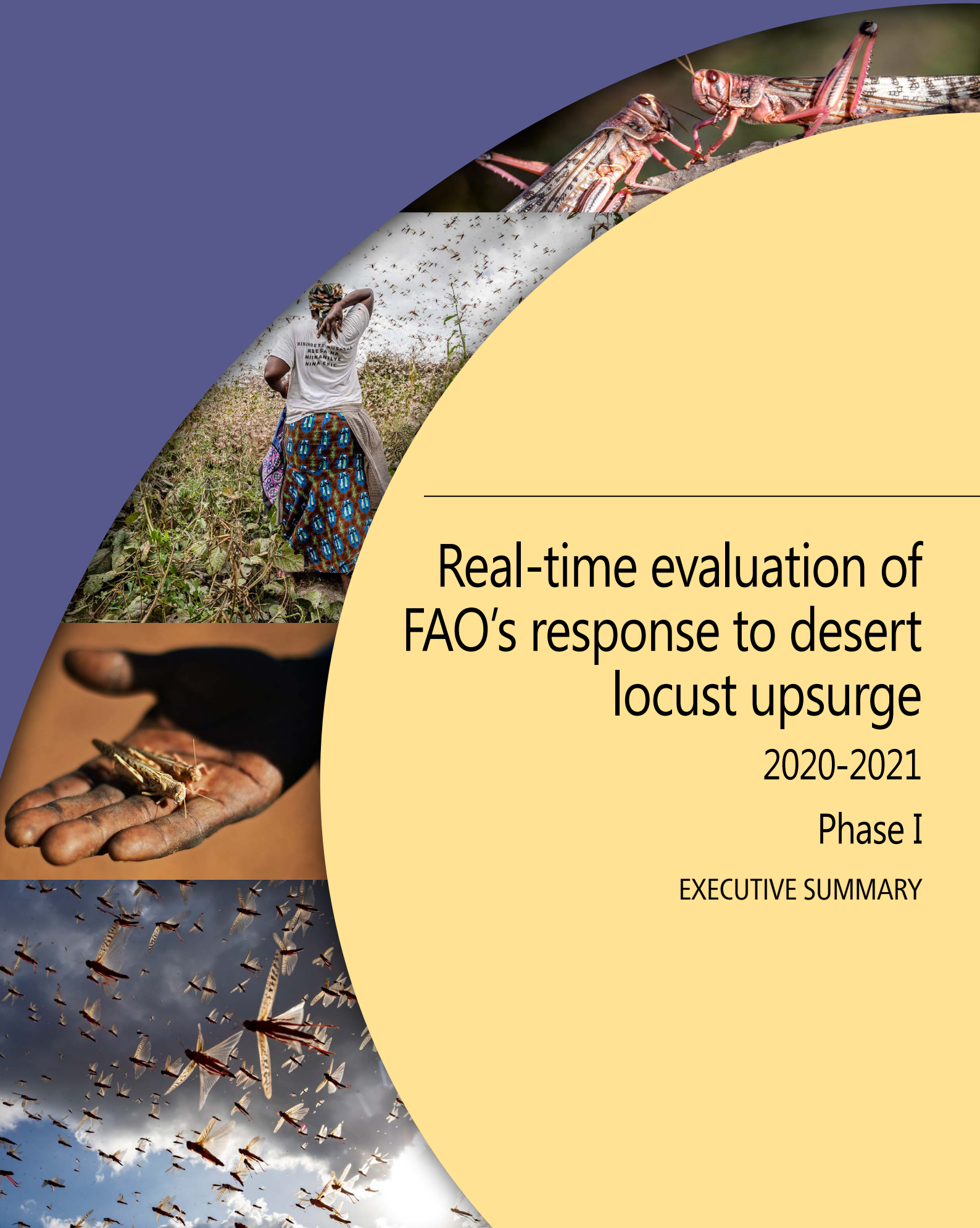




Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Programme Evaluation Series



Real-time evaluation of FAO's response to desert locust upsurge

2020-2021

Phase I

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

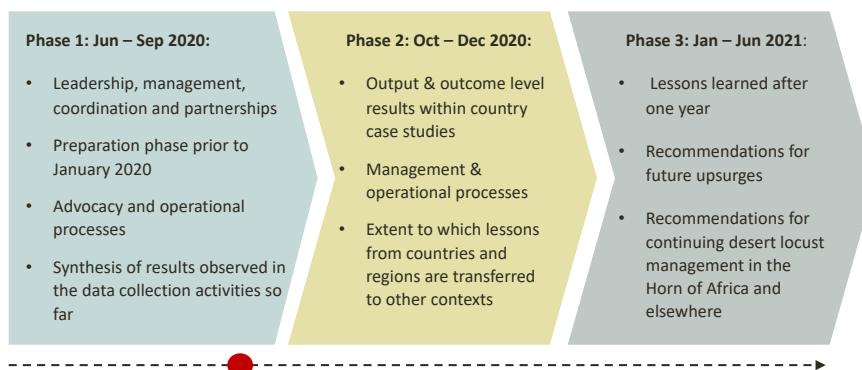
1. Introduction

Over the course of 2020, the most devastating desert locust upsurge of the past 25 years has spread across parts of the Near East, the greater Horn of Africa, and southwest Asia. The upsurge poses an unprecedented risk to livelihoods and food security in some of the most food insecure countries in the world. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and its partners have mobilized more than USD 163 million since January 2020. The response includes three key pillars: (1) curbing the spread of desert locusts (including surveillance) (2) safeguarding livelihoods and promoting recovery and (3) coordination and preparedness of the rapid surge support.

In this context, the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) has been requested to conduct a real-time evaluation (RTE), conducted across three phases spread over one year. Each phase will cover specific aspects of the response, as follows:

Figure 1 • Real-time evaluation (RTE) phases

EVALUATION PHASES: KEY ISSUES INVESTIGATED



Source: FAO Office of Evaluation (OED).

2. Phase I: Data collection activities

Given the focus on leadership, management and coordination of the response during Phase I, the evaluation team focused their activities on key informant interviews (KIIs) with the major stakeholders involved in the management of the scale-up appeal and its response. In addition, the team reviewed project documentation and a purposive sample of background literature.

Key informant interviews: the RTE team conducted 52 semi-structured remote interviews with key stakeholders from FAO Headquarters, FAO Country Representatives and country office staff involved in the response, regional locust commissions and donors. In addition, the team observed the weekly coordination meetings held by FAO with country offices in the Horn of Africa, west Africa and southwest Asia.

Literature review: the team reviewed project documentation for 50 projects funded under the Global Resilience Partnership (GRP) 2020, including Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP), Government Cooperative Programme (GCP) and Office for Special Relief Operations (OSRO) project codes. They also reviewed the GRP 2020 and subsequent revisions, the FAO Desert Locust Watch website and communications page, the FAO Desert Locust Guidelines and external sites including the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Commission for controlling the Desert Locust in the central region (CRC) and Commission for controlling the Desert Locust in the Western Region (CLCPRO).

3. Findings

3.1 Leadership and coordination

FAO took a visible strategic leadership role in the 2020 desert locust response, which was recognised as a contributory factor to results achieved thus far. Coordination of the surveillance and control operation was broadly successful, with communication and information sharing between FAO, donors and affected countries being highly appreciated. The challenge observed by non-FAO stakeholders was the translation of messages between regional and country levels.

3.2 Timeliness of the Appeal

The 2020 Appeal was generally viewed to be well-timed: delaying the appeal date would have carried risks to the response effectiveness, whilst bringing the response forward would have risked the effectiveness of the funding appeal. FAO put significant effort into communicating the desert locust threat from 2018 onwards, yet, prior to the Appeal launch in early 2020, the wider donor community remained largely unaware of the urgency of the situation. Some stakeholders felt, therefore, that FAO's forecast data could have been used to great advocacy effect during 2019.

3.3 Funding sufficiency and appropriateness

The appeal led to a rapid and timely scale-up of funding. All FAO stakeholders consulted felt funding was sufficient for needs, with none citing significant funding gaps. Nevertheless, there remained a short period of limited donor fund availability in the first quarter of calendar 2020, which FAO was able to fill using Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA) funding. Funding received was suitably flexible for FAO purposes. Restrictions imposed by some donors, notably around pesticides, were balanced by other contributions to ensure funding could be channelled according to need. Contributory factors behind the sufficiency of the funding response include both the press attention placed on the swarms at the start of 2020, and internal factors to FAO such as the engagement of the FAO Director General, the round of advocacy activities undertaken during the first quarter of 2020, the ongoing communications activities conducted through January to October, and the reputation of FAO for providing objective data and analysis of desert locust threats.


3.4 National capacity development

Clear divergences existed between frontline and invasion country capacities in January, with significant work going into building invasion country capacities over 2020. FAO's capacity building efforts had mixed results across the different country contexts. Clear successes were observed in Kenya and Somalia, which started with minimal capacity but has drastically improved. Ethiopia, by contrast, faced a number of constraints despite longstanding desert locust experience. In this context, questions were asked around the functionality of the regional commission system to support varying national capacities in the Horn of Africa. The CRC notably sought emergency funding from member states as early as mid-2019, but did not receive necessary funds to support surveillance and control operations. Likewise, the Desert Locust Control Organization for Eastern Africa (DLCO-EA) struggled to provide necessary equipment to countries in a timely manner.

3.5 Surveillance operations

Surveillance operations were broadly successful across the breadth of the desert locust upsurge, but significant data gaps still exist in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Yemen. Challenges were faced regarding the engagement of national actors in Somalia, internet outages in Ethiopia and conflict in Yemen. Uptake and use of eLocust3 technology have been broadly successful, in particular eLocust3g the GPS version which, whilst taking time to roll out, has produced high quality data. Likewise, the use of satellite data through 51 degrees has improved surveillance





data coverage in Kenya and will be deployed in Somalia and Ethiopia. However, the eLocust3m and eLocust3w versions which use smartphone technology presented significant problems of data quality which have not been overcome. And some country offices, but by no means all, noted that surveillance data was sometimes slowed down by the centralised data verification process to the extent that it could not be used to direct country control operations.

3.6 Control operations

Challenges were observed around procurement (of both pesticides and equipment), stock management, and training capacity, particularly during the first half of calendar 2020. Purchase and transport of newly manufactured pesticides, in particular, were delayed by difficulties due to the onset of COVID-19 in China & India, from where many of the active ingredients are sourced. On the whole, however, these challenges were overcome through the efforts of FAO and its partner organisations. Notable successes were seen in Pakistan, Iran, Ethiopia and Kenya (effective control operations) as well as Somalia (extensive use of bio-pesticide), associated with higher levels of government engagement and ownership in these countries.

3.7 Livelihood protection

The GRP 2020 includes a range of support packages for farmers affected by the desert locust upsurge, with scope for tailoring according to country-level needs assessments. FAO adjusted the livelihood packages on the basis of independent assessments of the damage caused by locusts in the Horn of Africa over the first half of 2020. The number of households reported as reached by livelihoods protection activities remains low at this stage, which is mostly explained by the sequencing of livelihoods operations around seasonal rainfall. Some questions were raised about the distinction between desert-locust livelihoods support and ongoing food insecurity in the region and, whilst FAO continues to encourage country food clusters to engage in the program coordination, it remains to be seen how the balance between regional and national leadership structures will be best managed for the livelihood response.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. FAO's regional coordination mechanism has proven effective given the nature of the crisis, but it remains unclear how best to coordinate the livelihood response at this stage.

Conclusion 2. In hindsight, the 2020 appeal was well timed in that it balanced the operational need for early action with the advocacy need for donor engagement. Questions remain about the best way to turn locust forecasts into early warning and ultimately early action.

Conclusion 3. The production and dissemination of FAO's locust forecast, whilst broadly effective as a warning device at country-level, was not sufficient to sensitize donors to the risks posed by the upsurge in the months leading up to January 2020, and questions arose regarding the internal communication channels between technical and emergency teams.

Conclusion 4. The wider funding response has been unusually strong in both scale and rapidity, whilst the use of SFERA pooled allocations and an early CERF donation proved vital for the initial phases of upsurge response.

Conclusion 5. The reputation of FAO's technical capacity on desert locusts has been a critical part of both the donor response and the engagement of locust-affected countries.

Conclusion 6. The pre-existing regional capacity for locust control in the Horn of Africa was significantly lower than in southwest Asia, with concerns raised about the functioning of the DLCO and the ability of CRC to raise funds from member states in a timely fashion.

Conclusion 7. National engagement in capacity-building and surge activities varied greatly, with successes observed in Kenya, and Pakistan, good progress made in Somalia, despite persistent challenges round data collection and reporting, whilst difficulties remained in Ethiopia and Yemen most critically.

Conclusion 8. The quality and breadth of surveillance data is one of the success stories of this upsurge, despite significant gaps existing in certain areas and questions about the sustainability of FAO's desert locust monitoring and forecasting expertise in the longer term. Innovations in the use of satellite imagery, whilst still embryonic, demonstrate the potential to improve data collection where access constraints and internet outages present obstacles to traditional approaches.

Conclusion 9. Control operations have been broadly successful, contributing to the limitation of potentially significant movements from Kenya towards Sudan, in conjunction with supportive meteorological conditions. But problems remain in some countries.

Conclusion 10. Procurement and pesticide triangulation was a significant barrier to timely response, with constraints arising from limited market supply and transport restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion 11. Targeting of livelihood protection activities to those most affected by desert locusts has proven challenging in the Horn of Africa, given the number of pre-existing drivers of food insecurity in the region. This could potentially impede the targeting of those most affected by the desert locust upsurge, although it is too early to say at this stage.

Recommendations

On the basis of the conclusions presented above, and the data collection activities of Phase I of the RTE, the evaluation team makes the following recommendations for FAO and its partners to build on the successes seen so far and make improvements where possible to the desert locust response.

Recommendation 1. *To FAO senior management and donor liaison teams.* Sensitize principle donors to the potential for a renewed locust upsurge between October and December 2020 following recent breeding in Yemen. (see Conclusions 1, 2 and 9)

Recommendation 2. *To FAO member countries, senior management and donor liaison teams.* Strengthen the FAO-donor relationship regarding threat prioritization and pro-active allocation of resources to better translate surveillance and forecast data into coordinated advocacy and preparedness ahead of time; whilst simultaneously reviewing internal communication between technical and emergency units. (see Conclusions 2 and 3)

Recommendation 3. *To FAO donor liaison and emergency response management.* Communicate the importance of the flexibility provided by the SFERA pooled allocations and CERF contributions to the timely and effective surveillance and control operations; linking this to advocacy for continued support from the wider community. (see Conclusion 4)





Recommendation 4. *To FAO senior management.* Review resourcing for the production of desert locust forecasts, in order to ensure FAO’s technical expertise and capacity for surveillance and objective data provision is sustainable for the long-term future. (see Conclusions 5 and 8)

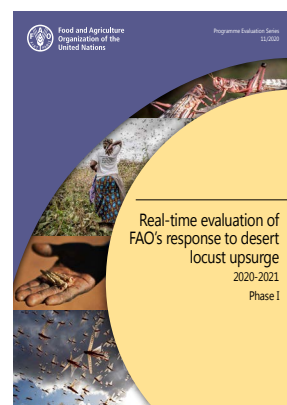
Recommendation 5. *To FAO procurement teams.* Conduct detailed annual market studies for pesticide supply and surveillance and control equipment, so as to identify and update available supplier lists ahead of time. (see Conclusion 10)

Recommendation 6. *To FAO desert locust technical division.* Extend and continue the use of satellite imagery in contexts where access or communications technology makes ground or aerial surveillance difficult, and review the benefit of using crowdsourcing technology for desert locust surveillance. (see Conclusion 8)

Recommendation 7. *To FAO emergency response team.* Review pesticide stocks across the greater Horn of Africa with a view to limiting unused stocks and maximizing triangulation within the region over the short-medium term. (see Conclusion 10)

Recommendation 8. *To FAO senior management and desert locust technical division.* Devise a strategy for the Horn of Africa regarding sustaining desert locust management capacity beyond 2020 at both country and regional level, including: the capacity to manage desert locust information systems within country without FAO HQ direct support; funding of CRC’s emergency fund in advance of desert locust threats emerging; and an open discussion on the future of the DLCO-EA. (see Conclusions 6, 7 and 8)

Recommendation 9. *To FAO emergency response team.* Prioritize coordination of the livelihood protection response with country-level actors, including country food security cluster bodies. (see Conclusion 11)



The full evaluation report can be downloaded here

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