

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**Regional Cooperation, conducive policy and regulatory environment key in addressing Desert Locusts menace**

*Digital technology such as the use of drones can complement traditional management measures.*



*Photo: Courtesy/FAO*

**[Nairobi, March 17, 2021]:** African governments, regional economic bodies and development partners have been urged to take actions that will create a conducive policy and regulatory environment to enable access to better pesticides and pest control products as well as equipment and tools needed for efficient control of Desert Locusts such as drones.

The call to action was made by experts on migratory pests and policy during a virtual meeting hosted by AATF on 15th March 2021 to discuss emerging trends and new approaches to effectively manage desert locust invasions and, explored strategies to enhance preparedness.

The experts noted that Eastern Africa and Horn of Africa regions are currently facing one of the worst infestations of desert locusts, causing huge crop losses and worsening food insecurity in the affected countries.

Dr. Denis Kyetere, the Executive Director of AATF, noted that the locust outbreak is at a critical point after the recent off-season rains in some parts of the region that have accelerated their breeding.

“This invasion is compounding an already bleak food security situation amid the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Dr. Kyetere.

He added that Kenya is facing the worst locust invasion in 70 years, while Somalia and Ethiopia are experiencing their worst in 25 years. He further noted that in Ethiopia alone, over 200,000 hectares of cropland have been damaged, resulting in a loss of over 356,000 tons of grain.

The experts observed that the invasion is proving difficult to control because of inaccessible infested regions; inadequate resources and environmental concerns emanating from the use of some of the pesticides.

Dr. Ruth Kahuthia-Gathu, a Senior lecturer, School of Agriculture and Enterprise Development at Kenyatta University, observed the need to strengthen human capacity in the region to improve information collection, analysis and dissemination; expedite research for solutions, developing mobile applications to enhance monitoring and surveillance.

“Engagement with private sector to develop tools and systems that can boost surveillance, monitoring and response is critical in managing the locusts,” she stated.

Dr. Stephen Njoka, the Director of the Desert Locust Control Organization for Eastern Africa (DLCO - EA) stated that during the 2014 breeding season, efforts to contain the locusts failed due to lack of adequate resources.

“Locust plagues affect the most vulnerable communities in rural areas of Africa who depend on subsistence farming for their livelihood and often have no access to alternative sources of income that would allow them to replenish their losses,” he observed.

This, he clarified, can lead to food crises that often require the intervention of Governments and donors through the provision of relief food.

Dr. Yeneneh Belayneh, the Senior Technical Advisor for Pests and Pesticides at the USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, in Washington DC, noted that the priorities of development partners regarding management of Desert Locusts is to help build national and regional capacity and systems to manage the menace.

“Increased collaboration with relevant stakeholders to adopt new technologies for improved data collection, through robust surveillance and monitoring is one of the strategies Governments could employ to combat recurrence of pest invasions,” he said.

A Senior Scientist in-charge of Invasive Species at the Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI), Dr. Ivan Rwomushana, called for use of alternative methods for controlling the Locusts while safeguarding the environment.

“Biological control only kills locusts and does not contaminate the environment,” he said, noting that use of such biological pest control products such as Green Muscle has been effective in countries such as Yemen and Tanzania for the control of desert locusts and red locusts respectively.

He further pointed out that CABI has been piloting the use of drone technology to control the desert locust, to complement traditional surveillance measures.

Speaking during the event, Dr. Daniel Kyalo Willy, the Programme Officer and Policy Expert at AATF called on governments to strengthen the enabling environment in the pesticides industry to ensure timely access to quality pesticides and pest control products that have passed through the right approval processes.

“Facilitating faster testing and registration of new pesticides and pest control products while adhering to laid down protocols is one of the critical areas in the policy environment relevant for the control of Desert Locusts,” he said, adding that regional harmonization can achieve even better results.

He pointed out that future operations in control of locusts can benefit from conducting a pilot assessment on efficacy and impact of aerial sprays and other methods currently being used in the control of Desert Locusts.

The experts urged African countries to enhance regional cooperation as well as update their policy and regulatory frameworks to address desert locusts menace; utilize digital tools to track and monitor the Locusts and to draw learnings from the current invasions for future preparedness.

#####

### **About AATF ([www.aatf-africa.org](http://www.aatf-africa.org))**

Founded in 2003 to address Africa’s food security prospects through agricultural technology, AATF believes that the agricultural sector is a key foundational pillar as Africa consolidates its economic growth and carves out its new position as a major global economic powerhouse and the next growth market in the world. It was formed in response to the need for an effective mechanism that would facilitate and support



negotiation for technology access and delivery and formation of appropriate partnerships to manage the development & deployment of innovative technologies for use by smallholder farmers in SSA.

**For more information contact:**

George Achia, Communications Officer, Eastern and Southern Africa, AATF;  
[g.achia@aatf-africa.org](mailto:g.achia@aatf-africa.org); +254 785334163