Introduction: Chairman of the National Disaster Management Authority Lt Gen Mohammad Afzal, while briefing the diplomatic corps at the National Locust Control Centre (NLCC), said the locust problem is likely to peak in the next three to four weeks. “Next eight weeks between July 15 and Sept 15 would be critical because of monsoon and the government's ongoing commitment with anti-Covid-19 measures.” Pakistan is on the locust migratory route and has both summer and spring breeding areas. Therefore, it is particularly prone to locust attacks and has over the years suffered several outbreaks.

Ministry of Food Security and Research Secretary Omar Hamid Khan said the swarms coming from the Horn of Africa could be 400 times more than those that came last year. Director General at the UN Division of the Foreign Office Farrukh Iqbal also warned that the situation was likely to worsen. “If steps are not taken, the situation would be a cause of concern not only for Pakistan but also for the region’s food security,” he said echoing FAO, which too has warned of growing threats to food security in South-West Asia. [https://www.dawn.com/news/1568081](https://www.dawn.com/news/1568081)

FARMER AWARENESS RAISING

Rickshaw and Mosque Announcement: REEDS team modified an auto-rickshaw on the theme of locust control and management awareness, which moved from village to village after getting approval from the district administration. Almost 10000 plus people were covered who become aware about the first aid activities and also guided to inform LOCUST INFORMATION CELLS established in REEDS and District Administration/Agriculture Extension Offices. The message delivered through Rickshaw and mosque announcements were prepared with the coordination of the Agriculture Extension Department in local and national languages.

Radio Awareness Program: Radio is a very important medium in creating awareness of issues. REEDS also used this tool and aired 4 Radio FM-105 programs, covering almost 20000 plus people. It was great that farmers have live question and answers with the experts from REEDS and Agriculture Extension Department like Mr. Shah Nawaz Sheikh, Deputy Director, Agriculture Extension Department, Ghotki, Dr. Muhammad Yousaf Ali, Project Manager, REEDS, Mr. Iqrar Ahmed, Deputy Director, Rahim Yar Khan. Mostly the sessions were regarding locust control and management while major focus was the first response of farmers when they see the locust is trying to settle in their fields.

Awareness Walks: Becoming self aware is the first step to personality development and lasting inner change. Self awareness is actively seeking to understand oneself through introspection, keeping in-view its importance REEDS along with more than 500 Staff members of Agriculture Extension, Pest Warning, District Government and male and female farmers organized 5 walks for self as well as other community members awareness holding play cards having slogans about locust control and management along with local organization and Govt. to play role saving crops of farmers and compensations.

TRAINING & CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity building of Farmers (Male & Female): REEDS along with the Pest warning and Plant Protection department organized training for 4700 participants including male and female farmers, REEDS and Agriculture Extension Department staff to strengthen the survey and control capacity along with reducing accidents with chemical pesticides. The methodology was F2F, WhatsApp Groups with participatory training techniques, and the use of visual aids. Five online trainings were also organized by using online software like “gotomeeting” and “Zoom” involving lead farmers of the areas having android mobiles, to make this more effective REEDS also provide android mobiles to 50 Lead farmers for timely response and action. The major learning activities ranged from survey methods to spray timings and other standard operating procedures of ground desert locust survey operation. Pre-existing threats and the control operations that were put in place in Sindh and Punjab to prepare for a possible attack were also presented.
**PROGRESS SHARING MEETINGS**

**District Administration:** Dr. Muhammad Yousaf Ali, Project Manager on behalf of REEDS is regularly participating progress and update sharing meeting about locust chaired by Deputy Commissioner of respective districts. Each stakeholder gives updates about available resources to combat locust. All Deputy Commissioners and Deputy Directors Appreciated the Contribution of REEDS for National cause.

**Agriculture Department:** Dr. Muzafar Saeed, Program Manager, Networking & Coordination & Dr. Muhammad Yousaf Ali, Project Manager, REEDS conducted meetings with Agriculture Extension Department of Ghotki, Rahim Yar Khan & Vehari for planning the management of locusts attack. Dr. Muhammad Yousaf Ali conducted surveillance surveys for locust attack in target districts with collaboration of Syed Burhan Uddin Shah, Additional Director, Pest Warning, Rahim Yar Khan, Iqrar Hussain, Deputy Director, Agriculture Extension Department, Rahim Yar Khan, Shahnawaz Sheikh, Deputy Director, Agriculture Extension Department Ghotki & Muhammad Sajid, Agriculture Extension Department Vehari.

**COORDINATION AND STRENGTHENING STAKEHOLDERS**

**Mock Exercise:** REEDS along with Agriculture Extension Department conducted Mock drills for tackling locust attacks continued in various districts of Punjab and Sindh like district Vehari and Rahim Yar Khan-Punjab and Ghotki-Sindh. In addition district-level officials of Agriculture Extension Department and REEDS are also reaching villages and sensitizing farmers and Deputy Commissioners continued holding meetings with officials of various departments.

Punjab and Sindh has been on an alert after locusts attacked places in different areas of Hindustan. Farmers have stocked up on pesticides/insecticides to make sprays. Besides, they have been instructed to bang utensils and burst fire crackers on spotting locusts to make them fly away and not settle down in their fields.

**Inauguration of information cells:** Already functional information cells which are being supported by REEDS at Vehari and Rahim Yar Khan were inaugurated by officials of district governments and Agriculture Extension Department. These cells are receiving calls from farmers and other people for getting technical advice and support. During current period 7 calls in Vehari, 18 in Rahim Yar Khan, 26 in Ghotki and 21 in REEDS information cells were received and concerned department have entertained their urgent needs.

**Handing Over of machines & tools:** REEDS handed over Engine operated spray machines, plunger machines, pesticide and protection kits & double filter spray man masks to district governments and agriculture extension departments of target districts.

**District Administrations Approaching to REEDS for Support:** As the day by day locust attack and damage is increasing in the country which is escalating vulnerability and it the same time REEDS support to District Govt. is also highlighting by the electronic and print media, different district administrations especially District Rajanpur-Punjab and Dadu-Sindh approached to REEDS management seeking for support as provided in Rahim Yar Khan or Ghotki because REEDS implementing different agriculture related projects in these districts but not in position to save farmer's crops from locust attack.

**RESEARCH TRIALS & KNOWLEDGE SHARING**

**Trial of Sound Producing Machine:** REEDS has successfully conducted trials of sound producing machines to repel locust which revealed very promising results. No locust settled on the acre where the sound producing machine was running. Rohi TV broadcasted the operation of sound machine and interview of Dr. Yousaf-REEDS and Syed Burhan Uddin, Additional Director, Pest Warning, Rahim Yar Khan working and efficiency of solar operated sound producing machine designed by REEDS in their daily NEWS Channel dated June 29, 2020.

**NATIONAL INITIATIVES:**

PM Imran Khan visits National Locust Control Center in Islamabad: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Friday has paid a visit to National Locust Control Center (NLCC) in Islamabad. According to details, Federal Ministers Syed Fakhar Imam, Mr. Asad Umar, Senator Shibli Faraz, Makhdoom Khursro Bakhtiar, Finance Advisor Dr. Abdul Hafeez Sheikh, Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa, SAPM for Information & Broadcasting Lt. Gen. (R) Asim Saleem Bajwa, SAPM Dr. Shahbaz Gill, Chairman NDMA and senior officers attended the briefing. During the visit, the PM was informed that National Action Plan for Locust Control Phase-I has been completed. Engineer-in-Chief Pakistan Army / National Coordinator NLCC Lt Gen Moazzam Ijaz gave a detailed briefing on locust control measures in affected areas of the country.
SITUATION UPDATE

Figure: Total area surveyed, Total area sprayed and Total crop losses of target districts. Maximum area surveyed and Treated is for district RYK where as maximum crop losses were recorded in district Ghotki. The data is taken from NDMA and Agriculture department of these districts.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Farmer are the front liner locust damage: Ghulam Mustafa of Village 144/5-R works every year to cultivate the land with cotton and expects better than the previous year because last year at the time of picking/harvest heavy rain fall destroyed its 60-70% cotton crop. However, Ghulam Mustafa and his two brothers weep over the current situation of the farmlands and the farmers who tend to it. While talking, he stated that 90 to 100 percent of their crops were either eaten or destroyed by the locust attacks. The stressed farmer explained that the locusts had attacked their fields not just once, but more than twice. Asked about the loss in terms of money Mustafa explained that there is no gain expected from this year as there were no crops left to sell. Mustafa also said that most of the farmers in district Rahim Yar Khan are only farmers and not the owners of the cultivated lands. Therefore, the situation is worry some, especially for the farmers who used to earn money only at this time in the whole year. I am thank ful to REEDS for a compulsion package (seed & fertilizer) against damage of 6 acres of cotton crop and half acre of fodder.

Effective coordination is key to Success: Presiding over a weekly progress and updates sharing meeting about locust in June participants review the strategy for controlling locusts, the Deputy Commissioner Ghotki- Ltd (R) M. Khalid Saleem shared that the locust once again has begun attacking standing crops in Ghotki, raising alarm that if not addressed immediately, the problem would pose a threat to food security. He continued that he is seeking, the provision of aircraft, engine operated sprayers, and pesticides (lambda cyhalothrin) emulsified concentrate in sufficient quantities, besides human resources in the form of field teams, but still waiting and delay in provision of resources. However, we are grateful to REEDS-Pakistan for initiating “Locust Control and Management project” for the strengthening of District Administration and Agriculture Extension Department. No doubt very happy for being supported by provision of Pesticides, Engine Operated Spray Machines, PPEs, Establishment & Maintenance of Locust Information Cell, Awareness raising of farmers and conduction of field activities like surveillance and combat operation along with conduction of research trials. He further added, nice to got report that successful combat operations over area of about 6100 ha and saving crops by limiting damage up to 0-25% in treated area as well as REEDS support to affected farmers for compensation of damage crop although a very small number of farmers facilitated. Lastly, he concluded that District Administration is thankful to REEDS and Kerk in Actie (KIA) for their contribution in this difficult time and expecting the same in future as well for the betterment of the small farmers.

For more Information

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