The triple threat of COVID-19, floods, locusts

Somalia is facing a triple threat of a COVID-19 pandemic, flash and riverine flooding and a desert locusts infestation. Within two and a half months, COVID-19 cases surged to 2,023, with 79 deaths and 364 recoveries as of 2 June, largely due to community transmission. At the same time, flash and riverine floods resulting from heavy Gu’ (April–June) rains have affected close to a million people, with 29 people killed and 418,000 displaced across the country. In addition, new swarms of desert locusts have been reported in Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug.

The confluence of multiple shocks has augmented the level of vulnerability among populations in Somalia. Already, remittances from the diaspora on which nearly half of Somali families depend have declined. Prices of basic commodities are rising following disruptions in supply chains due to COVID-19 restrictions and flood-damaged roads. A majority of humanitarians are working remotely, in restricted environments or at home. On 15 May, the World Bank1 warned that without a massive and urgent response to help absorb the blow as well as aid in recovery, millions of people in Somalia could face acute food insecurity and increased humanitarian needs in the coming months.

The Food Security Cluster analysis indicates that overall food security is deteriorating as a direct consequence of the ‘triple threat’, compounding the existing protracted crisis. Without sustained humanitarian assistance, the Cluster projects that 2.7 million people will become food insecure by mid year. That number could surge to 3.4 million during the third quarter of this year.

The Federal Government, member states and partners are working to mitigate the humanitarian and socio-economic impact of the triple threat, but face challenges especially

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regarding funding. As of 31 May, the 2020 Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan is less than 25 per cent funded.

**Pooled funds provide immediate support for humanitarian response to COVID-19**

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPF) released US$95 million and $71 million respectively to respond to the COVID-19 global pandemic in 37 countries. The CERF allocated funds to UN agencies at the global level giving them the flexibility in how and where they use the funding, within the parameters of the Humanitarian Response Plan to support national responses to COVID-19. Agencies that have dedicated funds to Somalia for COVID-related responses include WHO ($1 million), UNICEF ($1.145 million) and IOM ($0.45 million); totaling $2.6 million. All projects focus on the eight pillars of WHO’s Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan.

The Humanitarian Coordinator has disbursed $2 million from the Somalia Humanitarian Fund (SHF) reserve to IOM to provide emergency specialist staff and life-saving mechanical ventilators to Martini hospital in Mogadishu. An additional allocation of $0.17M was made to UNDP to purchase generators for Martini and Banadir hospitals.

The SHF, in line with guidance issued by the ERC for CBPFs, has developed flexibility guidelines to support its partners while retaining accountable. The guidelines will enable partners to continue delivering lifesaving response while addressing new humanitarian needs that have arisen due to the pandemic.

**Marooned families among 1,000,000 people impacted by floods**

Floods triggered by heavy Gu (April-June) rains are starting to recede in some places. As of 2 June, 1 million people have been affected by flooding in 29 districts across Somalia, of whom almost a half a million have been displaced from their homes. Belet Weyne district is severely affected by flooding for the third consecutive year.

The rains have washed away thousands of hectares of crops, exacerbating food insecurity in affected areas. Partners are also deeply concerned that the rains could escalate the current outbreak of water borne diseases particularly acute watery
diarrhea and cholera, especially among IDPs living in crowded settlements across the country.

Humanitarian agencies have ramped up efforts to mitigate the devastating effects of the rains and have reached more than 255,000 people with life-saving assistance. This includes food, clean water, emergency shelter, nutrition and medical supplies for people who were affected by the floods. To support scaled up efforts by the Federal Government and member states, the agencies are mobilising assistance within the limited resources available.

Most of Somalia’s annual rainfall (75 per cent) is recorded during the Gu’ (April-June) season. As a result, the performance of the season is critical both for crop and livestock dependent communities. On a positive note, the current heavy rainfall is expected to replenish the water catchments and subsequently boost water availability and pasture regenerations for livestock.

Desert locusts pose threat to food production

The desert locusts infestation in Somalia has reached a dangerous stage, according to FAO\(^2\), with bands of hoppers reported in breeding grounds in Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug; and laying eggs that will soon hatch into the fourth generation. Experts estimate that it will be 20 times worse than the plague that descended few months ago and includes more young adults which are especially voracious eaters.\(^1\) Ongoing rains further exacerbate the situation, to which the availability of vegetation to sustain the development of another generation of desert locust.

Unlike the December 2019 swarms, which coincided with the tail end of the Deyr rainy season and caused limited damage, the current swarms have built up at the onset of the Gu’ planting season and are likely to devour newly planted crops in large swaths of the country. FAO is working with the Federal Government of Somalia, member states and NGO partners to contain the swarms, however, the 2020 Gu’ seasonal production is likely to record a significant loss.

Locust control measures scaled up

FAO has significantly bolstered its support to the Federal Government and state authorities to scale up local capacities, surveillance, and control operations to combat the desert locust upsurge. Close to 40,000 hectares of land out of the 360,000 hectares estimated to be affected across the country, has been sprayed. In addition, 24,300 farming families in 152 villages in northern and southern areas of Somalia are receiving livelihood inputs and services including replanting packages.

The capacity for ground control has been strengthened with the purchase of 30 vehicles, along with 54 back mounted motorized sprayers and 22 vehicle-mounted sprayers. Two helicopters were delivered on 17 May with a capacity to spray 1,000 hectares daily. Of the operation utilizes bio-pesticides, principally *metarhizium*, so as to avoid the negative environmental impact of chemical pesticides. FAO has already delivered 4 000 kg with a coverage of 80 000 ha. Procurement and delivery for additional bio pesticide to cover the targeted 180 000 hectares is ongoing.

The FAO and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation Joint Desert Locust Crisis – Somalia Action Plan seeks $56.9 million to implement, of which 45 per cent ($25.5 million) has been funded.