

New UK support to tackle devastating locust swarms in East Africa

New UK Government support will be used to tackle this year's unprecedented locust outbreaks in Kenya, where millions of insects are destroying thousands of hectares of crops.

With locust swarms growing 20 times larger since March 2020, UK International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan today (23 July 2020) announced KES 2.5 billion of new UK aid in response to the crisis during a visit to British company Micron Group, on the Isle of Wight, which supplies pesticide sprayers to the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The impact of the plague of insects across Africa and Asia has been made worse by coronavirus, with vulnerable communities facing dwindling food supplies alongside the pandemic.

Funded by the UK, the FAO is using Micron Group's pesticide sprayers across Africa and Asia. Swarms of millions of insects can cover areas up to 100 square miles or more and these sprayers are able to cover large areas with pesticide.

Of the new funding announced today, KES 2.3 billion will go to the FAO's emergency appeal to help to control the increase of locusts across East Africa, Yemen and South West Asia, as well as reduce the risk of swarms spreading into the Sahel.

The UK will also provide up to KES 138 million to improve early warning and forecasting systems for desert locusts, so that countries can prepare for their arrival. This support, in collaboration with the University of Cambridge and weather data from the UK Met Office, will help the FAO to target locust breeding sites and control outbreaks before they're able to affect crucial crops and pastures.

British High Commissioner to Kenya Jane Marriott said:

The most vulnerable communities in Kenya are facing the effects of climate change, as the worst locust outbreak in 70 years destroys food supplies and livelihoods.

The UK is working with the Kenyan government and partners to tackle and adapt climate led disasters like the locust outbreak and build resilience across the nation to future climate shocks.

The World Bank estimates that the cost of supporting farmers and producers affected by locusts in East Africa and Yemen alone could reach \$8.5 billion by the end of 2020.

Speaking during the visit, International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

Vulnerable communities are on the brink of starvation because of the biggest locust outbreak in decades, made worse by the coronavirus pandemic.

British expertise is playing an important role in equipping companies with the right tools to combat the swarms and track where they will go next.

But unless other countries also step up and act now, this crisis will spread and cause even more devastation.

The new funding follows KES 1.1 billion provided by the UK earlier this year to the FAO appeal, supporting Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Tanzania and Pakistan to destroy these pests. A supercomputer funded by UK aid is also helping countries in East Africa to track the insects' movements around the continent.

During the visit, the International Development Secretary met with the directors from Micron Group to discuss how their sprayers have been key to tackling locusts in highly affected areas across the world. She also saw how the sprayers are assembled at their Isle of Wight factory and took part in a demonstration on how they work in the field.

Note to editors:

1. The new KES 2.3 billion of UK aid funding for the UN will be broken down as:
 - KES 1.6 billion for the Greater Horn of Africa and Yemen, to contain the spread of locusts through monitoring, surveillance and spraying activities
 - KES 670 million for the Sahel and West Africa to increase regional preparedness and coordination with early intervention
 - KES 138 million for Southwest Asia to focus on technical assistance

and coordination in the countries with the resources to lead the response themselves.

2. Additional funding of up to KES 138 million will go towards the African Crop Epidemiological Systems (ACES), a consortium which includes the Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International, CGIAR's International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre, Scriptoria and the University of Cambridge, to establish tools, technologies and partnerships needed for effective pest surveillance, early warning and response functions in plant health management in Sub-Saharan Africa. ACES is funded by DFID and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
3. UK aid will support the UN FAO emergency appeal for the locust outbreak across Africa and Asia. The FAO have asked donors worldwide for a total of \$311 million of funding of which the UK will have contributed KES 3.5 billion.
4. With UK aid backed funding, the FAO is spraying pesticides on the ground and by air to prevent further damage to crops and protect livelihoods. The FAO is also working with governments in Africa, to train experts to manage future outbreaks and to conduct research to better understand the swarms.
5. The supercomputer is being provided through the Department for International Development's Weather and Climate Information Services for Africa (WISER) programme, in collaboration with the Met Office and the Africa Climate Policy Centre.
6. Micron Group is a leading manufacturer of specialist sprayers and weed control equipment for a wide range of applications worldwide. Their portfolio also includes hand-held, vehicle and aircraft-mounted sprayers, weed wipers and applicators.