

# Locusts affecting Karamoja, its pastoralists, their herds and harvest

by Lucy Manang

## Introduction

The desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*) is a species of locust, a swarming short-horned grasshopper in the family Acrididae. A special type of grasshopper (Orthoptera:Acrididae) distinguished by expression of a remarkable and potentially devastating form of phenotypic plasticity, known as density-dependent phase polyhensim.

## Situation in Karamoja:

Many districts in Karamoja have recently been hit hard by about 3-4 swarms of desert locusts. This first entered Karamoja through Amudat District- Nakapirpirit, Moroto through Nakabaat and spread to parts of Abim district and Kotido hence posing distress for likely loss of pasture for animals to graze on



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Some pastoralists are traumatized and terrified since the recent hit and thinking of selling most of their livestock instead of watching them starve in the next seasons. This possess huge threat to the Karimojong only source of livelihood because it takes time for the livestock to multiply.

The pastoralist communities within the greener belts of Karamoja are scared to lose their crops and also knowing they are the source of food basket to other districts in the region.

## The following are the impacts of the recent locust's invasion in some parts of Karamoja:

All districts in Karamoja have been hit by the first swarms of the desert locusts even if just passing by meaning they have laid eggs in which ever locations they landed. This might hatch into more millions of locusts later and eat up food crops since it's now prior to the wet seasons.

Since abnormal rainfalls and hot temperatures are predicted by metrologists to start early March in some parts of Karamoja like Kaabong district and the rest of the districts in the coming three months, this might favor the breeding of locusts. Hence, even if early planting of crops is down, there is a likelihood of invasion from the nymphs of the desert locusts.

Since the locusts have so far hit many neighboring districts to Karamoja like Teso region, Lango, there is a likelihood that the livestock in Karamoja might not have enough grasses to graze on during the next few months hence creating panic among the herders.

**The following key recommendations are sought to be put in place:**

- Stakeholder engagement meeting across the region including technical teams from CSOs, line Ministries of Agriculture, Disaster preparedness and technical departments at district levels in Karamoja to come up with clear action plan and preparedness strategy to avert this
- Inclusion and awareness raising campaigns to the local communities on different management strategies of the disaster in case it hits hard should be prioritized by all stakeholders
- Establishment of national surveillance and control centers in the affected areas and drawing of better preventive management strategies should also be revised to constantly take account of the unforeseeable changes in the future