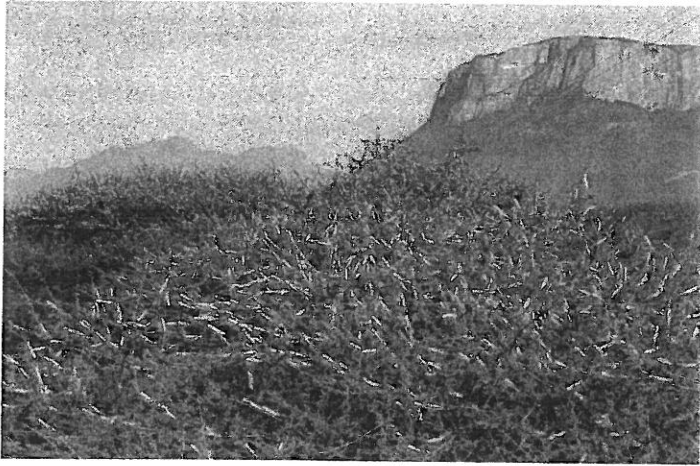


The nexus of the locust breeding is around the Red Sea plains in the borderlands between Sudan and Eritrea.

If unchecked, the locust swarms could grow by 500 times by June, when drier weather is expected to slow breeding, according to the FAO.

Kenyan officials have attempted to play down the impact. The agriculture minister, Peter Munya, said this week that only five swarms remained and the government was in control of the situation.

Locust swarms move quickly, shifting location and shape, making infestations challenging to control.



A swarm of locusts settled on shrubs in a village around 180 miles north of Nairobi last week. PHOTO: TONY KARUMBA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

For Kenya, sub-Saharan Africa's second-largest exporter of fruits and vegetables after South Africa, the stakes are high. Effects from a 2018 drought followed by flooding last year slashed Kenya's main grain harvest by around a third, pushing up food prices and stirring unrest in poorer pastoral communities. Economic growth slowed to 5.8% last year from 6.3% in 2018, weighed down in part by the decline in agricultural output.

A major locust outbreak in northern Africa between 2003 and 2005 cost nearly \$600 million to control, including some \$90 million in food aid distributed to affected nations, according to the U.N. Post-harvest losses topped an estimated \$2.5 billion, the U.N. said.

"We need to deal with the locust invasion now," said an FAO spokeswoman. "And also take forward-looking action to protect rural livelihoods and safeguard food security."

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