

New crop-destroying locust swarms threaten east Africa, where 35 million people already face food shortages

A new generation of locust swarms is threatening to wipe out the livelihoods of farmers and herders across eastern Africa – deepening a food crisis in a region where 35 million people are already hungry, the United Nations warned on [Dec 16].

...

[W]idespread rains in Ethiopia and flooding caused by a cyclone in Somalia [in November] have created favorable breeding conditions, allowing locust infestations to increase, said the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

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Locust swarms are already forming in Somalia and Ethiopia and threaten to re-invade northern Kenya, while breeding is also underway on both sides of the Red Sea, posing a new threat to Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen.

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Habib Mahmud, an environmental activist in Galkayo town in Somalia’s semi-autonomous northern region of Puntland, said farmers and pastoralists had been severely affected.

“There were close to 5,000 pawpaw trees in this farm located on outskirts of Galkayo. The trees were completely stripped bare by locusts in a few hours. No tree survived,” Mahmud told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone.

“The owners of that farm told me they lost their entire source of living, there was nothing left for them.”

Puntland authorities estimate that almost one-third of farmers have gone out of business and more than 35,000 families have lost jobs and income due to the devastation caused by the insects.

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