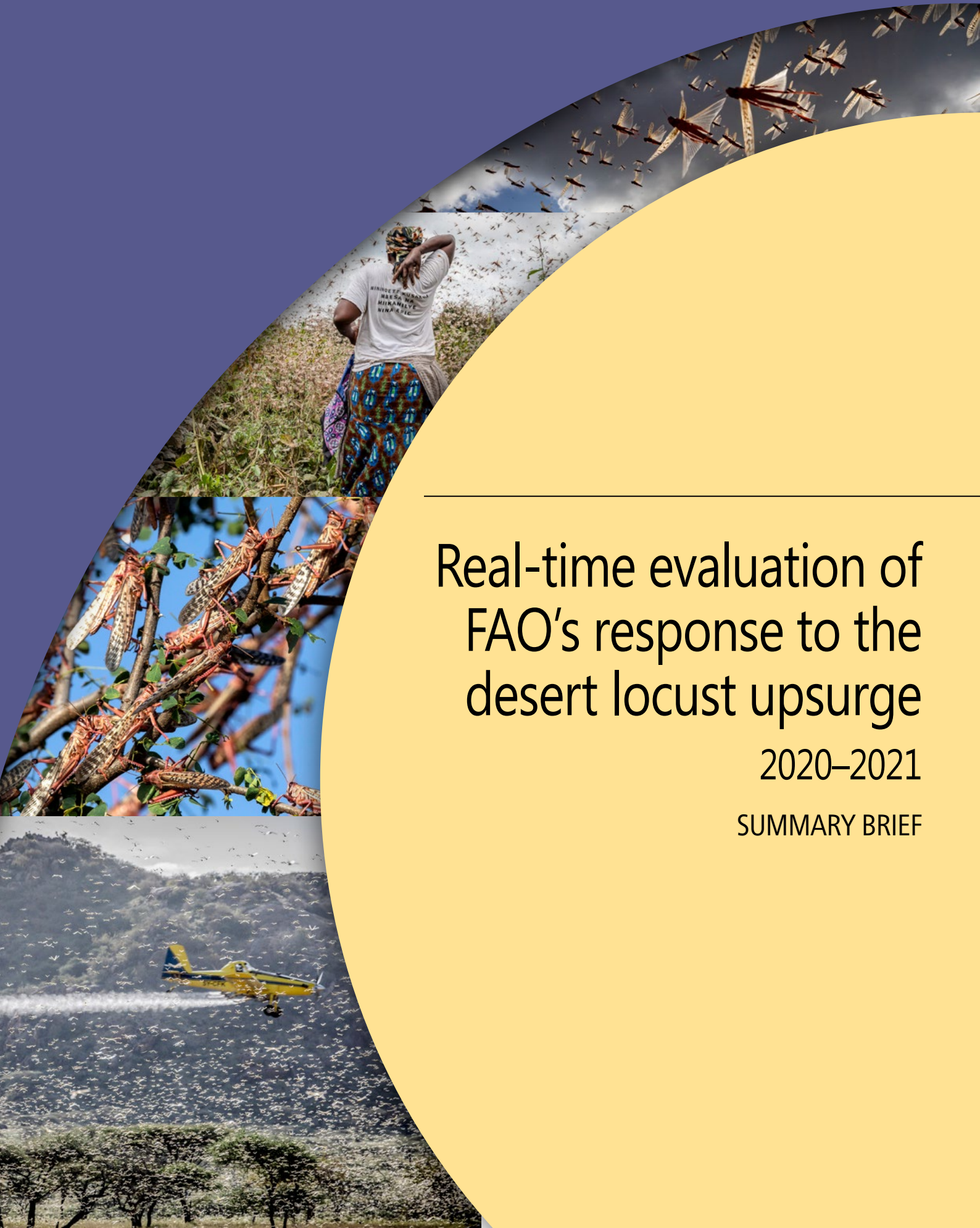




Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



# Real-time evaluation of FAO's response to the desert locust upsurge

2020–2021

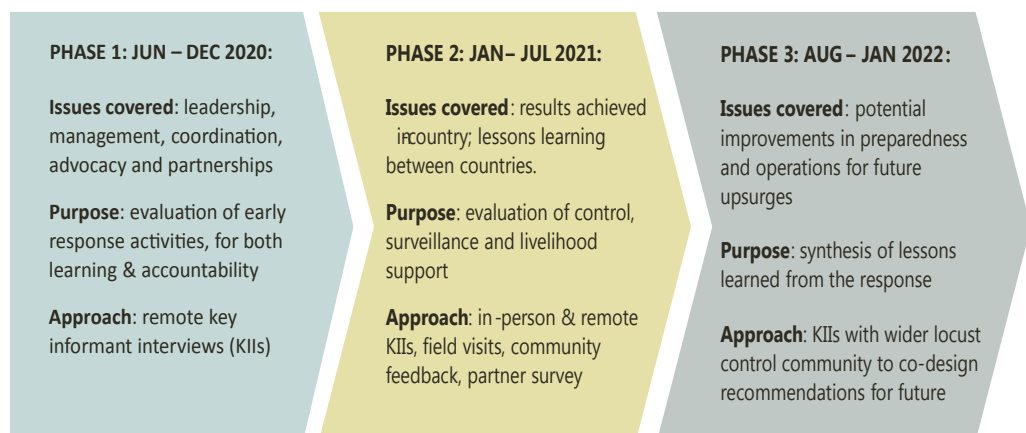
SUMMARY BRIEF



# 1. Introduction

- 1 Over the course of 2020–2021, the world witnessed the most devastating desert locust upsurge of the past 25 years, with several generations of desert locust breeding in parts of the Near East, the Greater Horn of Africa and Southwest Asia. The upsurge posed an unprecedented risk to livelihoods and food security in some of the most food insecure countries in the world. In the years preceding the upsurge, consecutive shocks, including poor rainfall, flooding, macroeconomic crises and armed conflict contributed to a significant level of vulnerability across the countries most affected by the desert locusts. In 2020, this was exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the global response to it. In May 2021, 36.6 million people in locust-affected countries faced crisis-level food insecurity (IPC 3+).
- 2 With a new generation of desert locusts breeding in Northeast Africa and Yemen, the upsurge continued in the Horn of Africa and Yemen through 2021. Large-scale ground and aerial control operations continued throughout the region with an emphasis on control activities in Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen to reduce the potential of swarm formations spreading more widely. The situation evolved and changed rapidly, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) had a unique mandate to respond.
- 3 FAO and its partners mobilized more than USD 243 million from January 2020. The response included three key pillars: i) curbing the spread of desert locusts through control and surveillance operations; ii) safeguarding livelihoods and promoting recovery through livelihood protection and farmer re-engagement packages; and iii) coordination and preparedness of the rapid surge support.
- 4 In this context, the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) was requested to conduct a real-time evaluation (RTE), across three phases. Each phase covered specific aspects of the response with an approach tailored to suit its specific purpose, as detailed in Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1 • Real-time evaluation phases**



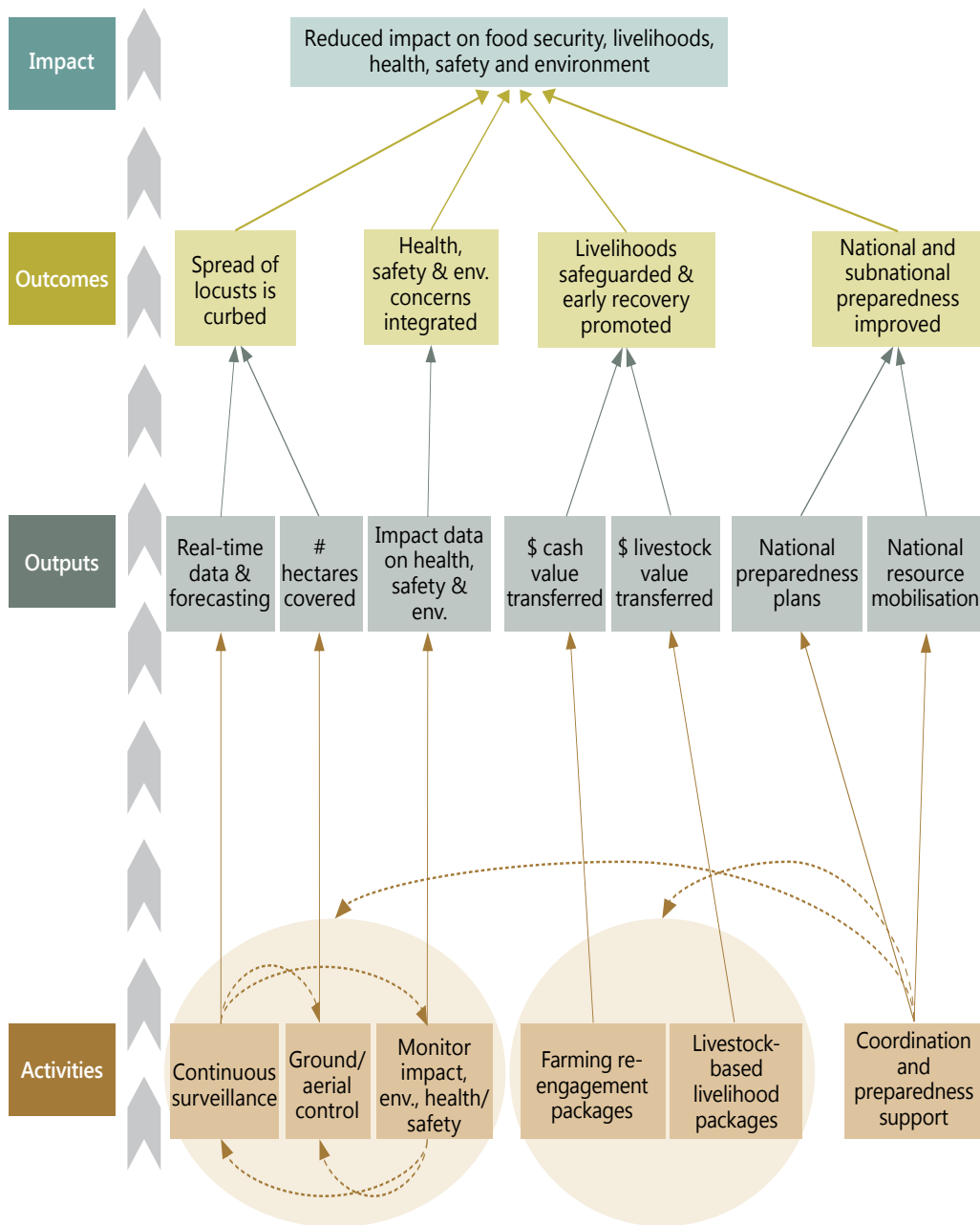
Source: developed by the evaluation team.



## 2. Summary findings of Phases I and II

- 5 Evaluation phases I and II highlighted the significant contributions made by FAO across full spectrum of preparation, surveillance and control of locust swarms and livelihood protection in the Horn of Africa and Southwest Asia. The logic of FAO's intervention covered three pillars i) locust survey and control ii) livelihood protection and iii) coordination and preparedness:

Figure 2. Intervention logic of the GRP 2020–2021



Source: developed by the evaluation team.

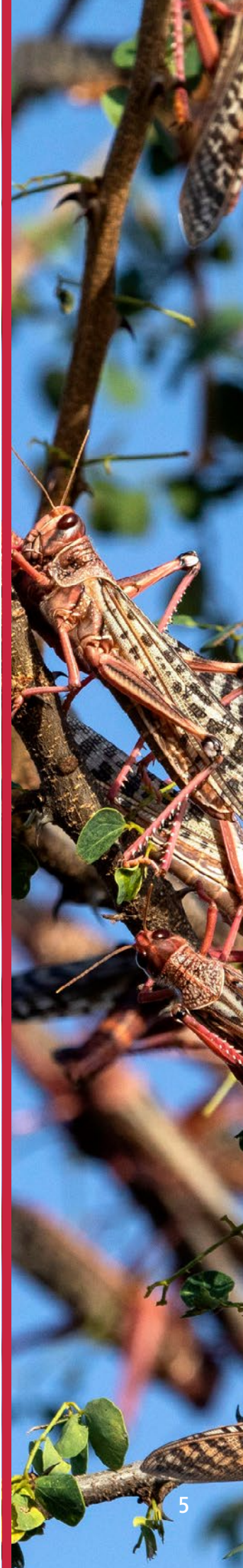


- 6 The evaluation found that FAO had made clearly observable contributions to the reduction of swarm and hopper band sizes and damage to crops and livelihoods assets in the Horn of Africa and Southwest Asia; and helped to guard against the spread of locust movements into the Sahel. Field studies in Kenya, Somalia (Puntland and Somaliland), Ethiopia, Sudan and Pakistan all highlighted the contributions of FAO's activities to swarm control through direct and indirect support to national locust survey and control campaigns, as well as design and delivery of livelihood protection packages to locust-affected communities.
- 7 FAO's support was generally well-tailored to national capacities and food security cases despite the challenges caused by political contexts in some countries. FAO also performed very well on the coordination of a highly complex and multi-actors response, building and maintaining good partnerships, including with foundations and private actors, despite the uniquely challenging external context. Some issues were observed in pesticides selection by individual countries, and procurement processes hampered FAO's effort to ensure timely supply of equipment and pesticides affecting the effectiveness of control operations. The response utilized a number of innovations in survey and control approaches, remote sensing and modelling, combined with good information sharing between countries; however, room for improvement was identified regarding the strategic approach to embedding innovation and learning across contexts.
- 8 Several areas for improvement in the preparedness for, and effective response to, future upsurges were identified during the process of Phases I and II. These areas formed the principal areas of investigation in Phase III, as outlined below.



### 3. Summary findings of Phase III

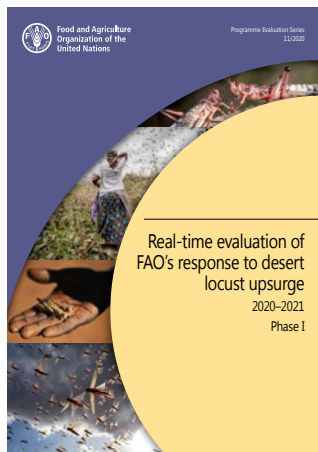
- 9 The evaluation Phase III found several areas for potential improvement in the future, in order to better prepare for, and respond to, future desert locust upsurges in the Horn of Africa and Yemen.
- 10 First, the evaluation found areas for improvement in the procurement and pre-positioning of pesticides and essential equipment for locust upsurges. Crucially, this included the full breadth of the procurement and delivery cycle, including the processes of ordering, procuring and delivering items for locust upsurges. The speed and dynamic nature of locust emergencies, combined with a limited supplier pool and a robust internal procurement procedure, presented a challenge for frontline actors as the 2020–2021 upsurge unfolded.
- 11 Second, the evaluation found that the training of national staff could be improved during remission periods, to better prepare for future upsurges and improve the first phase of upsurge response. While capacity-levels varied significantly between countries, the pre-existing technical capacity of national staff in the survey and control of desert locusts was found to be a significant constraint on operations in several countries in the Horn of Africa.
- 12 Third, national institutional capacity in the Horn of Africa could be improved. For many countries in this region, desert locust emergencies are insufficiently frequent to justify maintaining permanent desert locust units. Nevertheless, a critical factor for future upsurges in this region will be the baseline of technical capacity in invasion countries; the presence of clear plans for upscaling; and the availability of suitable regional support.
- 13 Fourth, the 2020–2021 upsurge challenged the regional architecture as it sought to serve countries across the Horn of Africa. Problems were identified with the operational capacity and funding of the Desert Locust Control Organization for Eastern Africa (DLCO-EA), as well as the geographic reach and capacity levels of the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region (CRC). Some confusion also emerged about the respective roles of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the IGAD Climate Prediction and Application Centre (ICPAC), CRC, DLCO-EA and FAO.
- 14 Fifth, challenges were observed in scaling the supply of pesticides in line with the rapid evolution of the upsurge. Biopesticides proved to be effective in Somalia and could be brought into the response strategy in a significant way to help increase the supplier-base.
- 15 Sixth, the data provided by FAO stood out as a critical success factor in the response. The major considerations for the future are i) ensuring early warning translates into early action; ii) continuing survey operations during remission; and iii) succession planning for the Desert Locust Information Service (DLIS).
- 16 Seventh, livelihoods protection activities were largely successful in 2020–2021. Areas for consideration in the future include the rapidity of scale-up and, conversely, the challenge of tailoring support to local contexts.
- 17 And eighth, several innovations were deployed in the 2020–2021 response, across areas including survey, modelling and control techniques. A more consistent approach to sharing innovations could enhance take-up and use across country contexts.
- 18 Phase III consultations were based around each of these priority areas for improvement. The evaluation identified 27 priority recommendations for follow-up by the desert locust response community, in order to improve preparedness for, and responses to, future desert locust upsurges in the Horn of Africa and Yemen. The full recommendations can be found in the Phase III report, available online at <https://www.fao.org/evaluation>.



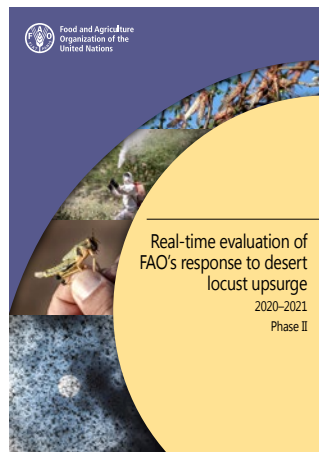




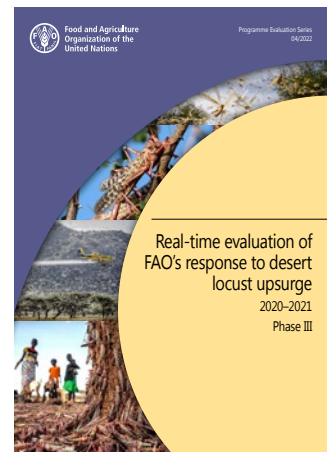
**Link to full evaluation reports:**



**Phase I**



**Phase II**



**Phase III**

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