Republic of Liberia

Ministry of Agriculture

CATERPILLAR INFESTATION RESPONSE SITUATION REPORT#2

Reporting Period:
June 17 – 25, 2023

Release Date:
June 25, 2023

HIGHLIGHTS

- Seven (Margibi, Bong, Lofa, Nimba, Bomi, Gbarpolu and Rivercess) of the fifteen counties in Liberia have reported infestations of the **Achaea catocaloides Guenee**.
- **33** new (in Bong, Nimba, Gbarpolu and River Cess) plus **54** previous affected communities reported.
- Because the caterpillars eat any kind of green leaves, the potential for crop losses is very high, especially during the ongoing planting season.
- A team of experts from Europe, East Africa and Southern Africa regions visited caterpillar affected communities to provide technical assistance to MOA in the short, medium- and long-term remedies.
- MOA, CARI and partners collaborating with international scientists are conducting sample testing and study for training and capacity building of local staff.
- Damages to forest trees and tree crops; and pollution of some creeks and waterways in affected communities have been reported.
- Weather patterns and seasonal variations are influencing the caterpillar infestation dynamics.
- Adapting control measures and response strategies to account for changing weather conditions and season fluctuations is necessary but posing implementation and timing challenges.
- Several teams have been deployed across the affected counties.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Caterpillar invasion has become endemic to Liberia. 12 out of 15 counties have experienced periodic caterpillar invasion since 1990. The **Achaea Catocaloides Caterpillar** - first showed up in Bong, Lofa, Nimba, and Margibi Counties in 1990. The second caterpillar invasion happened in 2009 affecting Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Bassa, Rivercess, Sinoe, Maryland and River-Gee Counties. In June of 2020, the invasion of **Achaea Catocaloides Caterpillar** was reported for the third time in Gbarpolu and Maryland counties.

The spread of the pest was curbed and contained by spraying exercises and by deploying best cultural practices. The caterpillar can contaminate water sources by its feces and thereby depriving rural dwellers from accessing safe drinking water from creeks, rivers, pond, streams, etc. The caterpillar damages forest trees particularly Dahoma species and tree crops. It is aggressive and feeds on plant leaves. The damaging stage of the pest is the larva (caterpillar) which continues its attack on plants and young vegetable fruits for 21 to 22 days.

The current infestation was first confirmed on June 1, 2023 in Bong county and has spread in 7 counties (Margibi, Bong, Lofa, Nimba, Bomi, Gbarpolu and Rivercess) to a combined total of 87 communities.

BACKGROUND

In January 2009, huge groups of caterpillars were found destroying forest trees and the leaves of crops such as cocoa, coffee, rubber, vegetables, etc, and also polluting water sources with their black feaces (Black Pupa) in Bong County.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, this was the first major appearance of the insects in Liberia.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. **Q. What is this insect's name?**
   Ans: *The scientific name is Achaea Catocaloides Guenee*
2. **Q. Where did it start in Liberia?**
   Ans: *Zota District, Bong County*
3. **Q. How can people recognize this insect?**
   Ans: *The caterpillars have three pairs of legs near the head and three pairs toward the back. The head is small and black and the caterpillars themselves change from green to black with long lines along the body as they grow*

ASSURANCE

Do not be afraid, the caterpillar appearance is not a curse or a witch-craft. This might be the result of climate change.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF THE INSECT

The insect has four stages of development: eggs, larva, pupa and adults.

Egg stage

Caterpillar stage

Pupa Stage

Adult Moth (Wings opened)

Adult Moth (Wings closed)

Larva stage – Caterpillars

The caterpillars are the babies of a butterfly-like insect. They hatch from eggs which are laid in tall forest trees where their mothers like to lay eggs. These trees are usually found near water and even around towns.

Pupal stage

After a few days, the caterpillars hide under dry leaves on the ground where they remain until they become pupa (Cocoon).

Adult stage

The Pupa remains under the leaves until they develop into adults which emerge and fly off to lay eggs on tree leaves.

HINTS

- Do not drink water that is polluted with caterpillar toilet (pupa).
- Do not be afraid, the caterpillar business is not witchcraft.
- Brush around your towns and villages.
- Everyone should watch out for these caterpillars and get rid of them.
- When you see these caterpillars and pupa, put dry leafs and burn them.
- Wash your hands with soap or ashes with clean water after burning the caterpillars.

A caterpillar on cocoa leaves

MOA & PARTNERS

WHAT TO DO

If you see any large number of caterpillars in your area, give the information to the Community Leader, Health Worker, Agriculture Agent or call Nos. 0777088861-522983; 0886408600/0770286104/0770136992; 0776390617/0777023043/0886843898; 0725503482; 0770182453/0886598781;

Produced by: Ministry of Agriculture

FACTS ABOUT THE CATERPILLAR INFESTATION IN LIBERIA

February 2009

MOA working with CARI and partners is facilitating the visit of a team of experts from Europe, East Africa, and Southern Africa regions in some of the affected communities to gain a comprehensive understanding of the caterpillar infestation on the ground and to provide technical assistance in the short, medium and long term. The International Scientists are now conducting sample testing and study for training and capacity building of local staff.

Ministry of Agriculture with technical support from the National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL) is preparing to deploy teams in four of the seven affected counties (Bong, Nimba, Margibi & Lofa) to evaluate the level of impact on the livelihoods of affected communities and individuals.

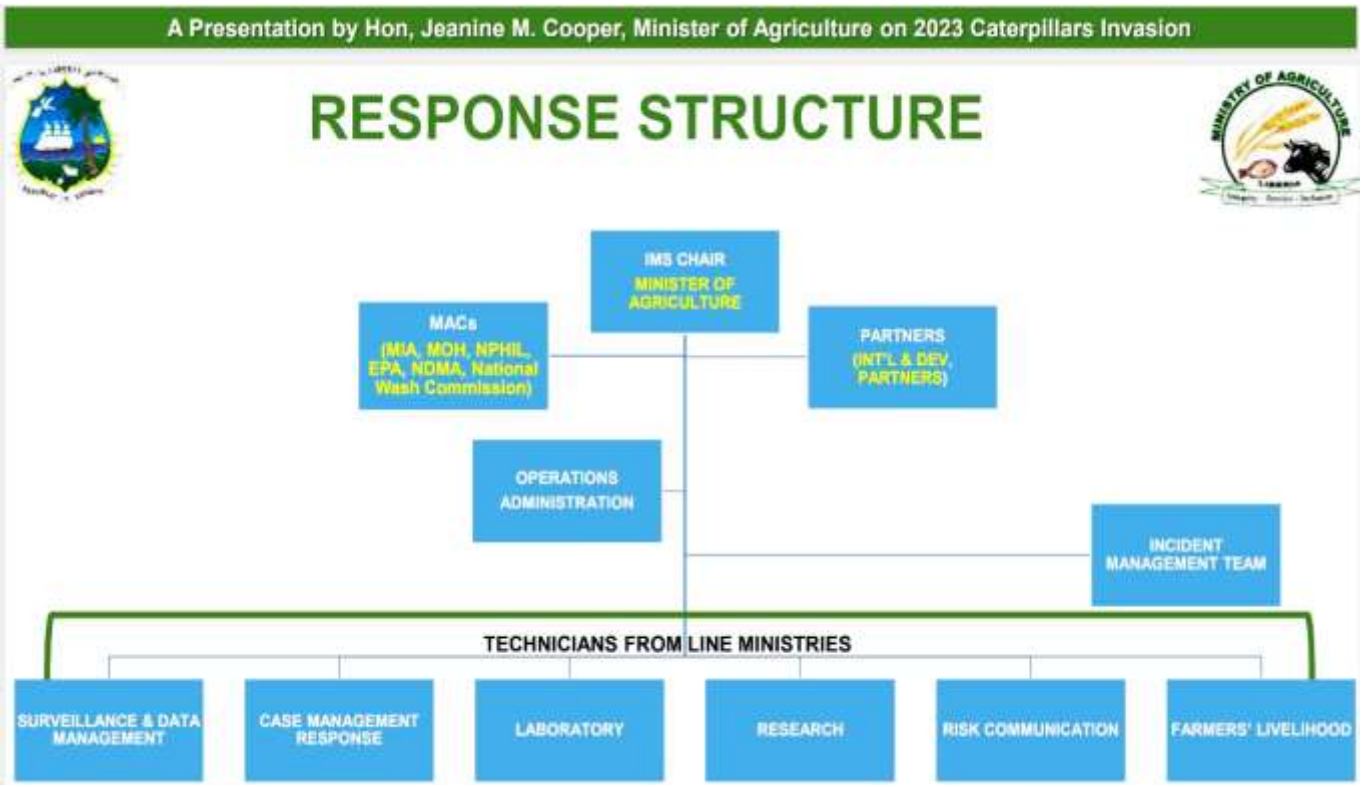
COORDINATION

The Incident Management Coordination Unit (IMCU) is the administrative, operational, and technical coordination arm of the Incident Management Systems (IMS) supporting the curbing of the Achaea caterpillar's infestation.

MOA through the IMCU's technical and stakeholder engagements and strategic planning meetings. has mobilized resources and necessary logistics (communication, PPEs, pesticides, motorized sprayers, rain suits, knapsack sprayers, safety goggles, gloves, etc. intended to support technicians in the field.

FUNDING

Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Agriculture and partners are providing the current support to the interventions.



PRODUCED BY THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

For further inquiries, please contact: +23177757024 or +231886570243

WRITERS NAME AND EMAIL: imcu@moa.gov.lr