

Pesticide policy failings in Africa a risk to health, says expert

October 30 2023



Credit: Rideep Mahato from Pexels

Africa is using more pesticides, but there aren't enough laws, rules, and policies to protect farmers from the harmful effects, Fredrick Otieno, chemicals risk manager and environmental planner at the Center for

Environmental Justice and Development in Nairobi, tells SciDev.Net.

"Although many countries have improved their regulatory frameworks on pesticides in the recent past in line with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and World Health Organization Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management, their legislation does not adequately address the risks posed, especially for highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs)," says Otieno.

HHPs are pesticides that cause severe and sometimes irreversible harm to the environment and [human health](#). They result in millions of unintentional poisoning cases each year, often in lower-income countries, according to the FAO, with women and children working in agricultural environments the worst affected.

Registration of agricultural pest control products should be required by law and farmers should be able to obtain licenses to bring registered pesticides into a country, says Otieno, adding that anyone who flouts the rules should be penalized.

But this is not always the case.

Market surveillance to curb illegal imports and use in Africa is often lacking due to limited resources and illegal sales and use of chemicals are commonplace.

To address this challenge, [government agencies](#) should work together at [border crossings](#) and within countries to ensure that pesticide registrations remain valid, says Otieno.

"Pesticide products should not maintain their registration status indefinitely," he explains.

"The law should provide for periodic reviews of registered pest control products. This ensures that pesticides that are problematic under local conditions of use can be identified and de-registered or their use restricted."

A regular review of chemicals is still a challenge in Africa. The International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management recommends that laws on pesticides should allow for approved pest control products to be reviewed. If new information emerges about how these products affect people's health and the environment, the law should allow for them to be de-registered.

Informing farmers

Many farmers in sub-Saharan Africa get pesticides through government programs and subsidies, but not all have the information at their fingertips to assess which chemicals are safe.

"To help farmers know which pesticides are registered, it is paramount that an up-to-date list of pesticides is publicly available and accessible to farmers for free," says Otieno.

He adds that farmers and other pesticides users need to know how to check if a particular product is listed. Some countries use codes for the verification of products.

"All pesticide vendors should be licensed and an enforcement program should be developed and implemented," Otieno adds.

"There is a need to strengthen market surveillance efforts to ensure illegal—unregistered and counterfeit—pesticides are identified and persons selling them prosecuted."

The government should work to gradually get rid of Highly Hazardous Pesticides because farmers, especially smallholder ones, can't protect themselves from the risks they bring.

Otieno advises that spray service programs should be funded by governments to make sure that only trained workers buy and use pesticides. "This will cut down on the illegal use and sale of pesticides," he says.

Pesticide labeling

The Globally Harmonized System of classification and labeling of chemicals sets out standards for how pesticides should be labeled, to ensure that they are used correctly.

"Most labels do have information on how to use them and what to do if you get hurt from them," says Otieno.

However, most of the time the labels don't give information about the risks and potentially [harmful effects](#) of the products—knowledge that is crucial for farmers buying and using pesticides.

Otieno says that the warnings on most pesticide labels are not enough to keep people safe from the harm they cause. He wants to see all products adhere to the global labeling guidelines.

Product re-evaluation

The Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management says that re-evaluating products is a good way to lower the harms that pesticides might cause when they are used.

"When health or environmental risks are identified for a pesticide that is already registered, such pesticides should be placed under review where the law provides for that, or the pesticide registration authority can be petitioned to re-evaluate such products by any person or organization," the code states.

In in some African countries the law already states that registered pesticides can be reviewed if new information comes to light that was unknown at the time of registration.

However, these countries rarely have the budget to re-evaluate registered pest control products when new information about health and environmental risks comes to light.

"I am of the view that the information should be reported to the authority in charge of pesticide registration and management or any other body as may be determined by using the contact information on the pesticide product label in a country," says Otieno.

"If the information is only reported to the manufacturer, sometimes it can be concealed and not released to the public or concerned authority."

Stronger regulation

To strengthen regulatory frameworks, pesticide laws, rules, and other related laws must be in line with the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management, and these laws should be regularly reviewed, Otieno believes.

He wants to see all governments ban the importation, spread, sale, and purchase of Highly Hazardous Pesticides and review registered [pesticides](#) regularly to prevent harm to people, animals, and the environment." It is very important that registered pest control products

are looked at again during the renewal process and that HHPs are defined in the law," he adds.

Provided by SciDev.Net

Citation: Pesticide policy failings in Africa a risk to health, says expert (2023, October 30)
retrieved 29 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2023-10-pesticide-policy-africa-health-expert.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.