

Preventing pesticide waste in Africa

The Africa Stockpiles Programme is engaged in removing and destroying obsolete stocks of pesticides from Africa. However, it is also vital to ensure that obsolete and out-of-date pesticides are not allowed to build up in the future. **Dr. Abou Thiam** of PAN Africa describes the challenges of this 'prevention' work.

In many African countries, efforts are increasing to intensify agricultural production. For many agricultural policy makers, this intensification is to be achieved through the traditional 'Green Revolution' approach - 'modernisation' of agriculture by increasing the use of agricultural inputs, specifically artificial fertilisers and synthetic pesticides. However, the increased use of pesticides has led to an equivalent increase in stocks of pesticides in these countries.

Periodic locust invasions in many African countries, especially those bordering the Sahara, result in ground and aerial spraying of huge quantities of chemical pesticides over vast areas. There is a lack of reliable data concerning the effects of these chemicals on the environment. However, the spraying of millions of litres of insecticides over vast areas to control locusts is cause for concern: the lack of research is unlikely to correspond to a lack of effects on the fragile Sahelian ecosystems.

In addition, the management of chemicals within the framework of these invasions is still inadequate. Large quantities of pesticides remain unused for various reasons - including inappropriate procurement and supply procedures, as well as logistical problems. These are then stored over several sites and eventually expire, becoming un-usable obsolete pesticides - in other words, a toxic hazardous waste. The last great locust invasion in Africa took place in 2004-2005. Large quantities of pesticides were sprayed against the Desert locust (*Schistocerca gregaria*) and demonstrate the nature of the problem. In May 2006, the quantity of pesticides remaining in the 14 countries which suffered invasions was estimated at nearly 7,900,000 litres, including 1,700,000 litres in the countries of the Sahel (Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Chad) and 6,060,000 litres in North Africa (Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia). The majority of these pesticides were manufactured in 2004 and their guarantee expired in 2006. These countries consider their stocks a major concern which requires the urgent support of the international community. Thus obsolete stocks of pesticides accumulate in many, if not all, African countries. Certain stocks date from more than forty years ago - initial estimates indicate more than 50,000 tonnes of obsolete pesticides on the continent, of which many are stored in precarious condi-

tions or in open air, threatening bordering populations and the environment.

The human, financial and technical resources required to eliminate this waste are beyond the means of most African States. An estimated 30% of African obsolete pesticide stocks are Persistent Organic Pollutants, which can potentially pollute the global environment, so a coordinated approach involving the international community is required to solve the problem in an environmentally sound manner acceptable to the international community, the African States, as well as the populations directly affected by this major health and environmental problem. Hence during the last round of negotiations of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, Pesticide Action Network UK and World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) proposed the Africa Stockpiles Programme (ASP), a continental scale programme to clear Africa of its stocks of obsolete pesticides.

From the outset, it was clear that solving the problem of current out-of-date stocks without concomitantly setting up appropriate prevention measures would lead quickly to the constitution of new stocks of obsolete pesticides. Hence prevention components were included in the design of the ASP, which need attention and support so that the programme achieves its goals fully.

It is in this area in particular that NGOs will be able to make an important contribution to the ASP by ensuring massive participation of citizens and civil society organisations. Indeed, NGOs, associations of consumers and producers and civil society organizations are essential actors who could play an important part in realizing effective prevention measures.

Awareness raising

Since 2003, PAN Africa has organized several meetings, sessions, and workshops on the problems of obsolete pesticides, aiming to build capacity among both government and non-government audiences. The latest of these meetings took place in Morocco (16-19 April 2007). For the first time, about 30 representatives of NGOs and associations coming from the seven countries in the first stage of ASP (South Africa, Ethiopia, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Tanzania and Tunisia) met to discuss the implementation of the ASP programme in their respective countries



Posters on the management of empty pesticide packaging in various languages disseminated by PAN Africa
Photo: Abou Thiam

and their needs in the various fields. The workshop allowed the participants:

- to give a progress report on the activities carried out by NGOs within the framework of the programme in all of the countries concerned
- to exchange experiences (collaboration with the national ASP Project Management Units, operation of national NGO networks, problems encountered, solutions considered)
- to be trained in project financial management, and in communications strategy development
- to work out national NGO activity plans for 2007 and the medium-term

During exchanges between the participants, the topics of prevention and communication particularly held the attention of delegates.

Preventing future waste

Preventing the accumulation of obsolete pesticides involves sound management of chemicals; reducing risks of poisoning; and reducing reliance on chemical pesticides by promotion of alternative methods for pest control. It relies on effective collaboration between national and international stakeholders on various fronts.

One of the fundamental components of a prevention strategy is undoubtedly to reinforce an adequate national legal framework which respects commitments entered into on ratification of international instruments and conventions that the countries are parties to.

NGO advocacy and lobbying campaigns are essential to ensure that suitable regulations are implemented as regards pesticide management, at the national and regional levels. The various international instruments can largely help in this direction (Stockholm, Rotterdam, Basel, and other conventions and international guidance such as the FAO Code of Conduct). Within this framework, PAN Africa and its partners organized several workshops and training courses in the field of advocacy and lobbying. An advocacy



Press installed in Mali to make empty metal pesticides containers unusable Photo: Abou Thiam

campaign carried out by an association (Alliance Woman and Environment) taking part in the ASP programme in Tunisia helped to start a public action cleaning the Menzal Bouguiba site in a hospital in northern Tunisia which contained a stock of almost 30 tonnes of DDT dating back more than 30 years. In this case action consisted of preparing a case study accompanied by photos of the sites and sending the report to national authorities. This example shows how NGOs can use advocacy and lobbying in their country in order to put pressure on the authorities to act more quickly and effectively in dealing with existing stockpiles. However NGOs can use the same approaches to campaign for the prevention of pollution and harmful effects from dangerous pesticides and other products, for example by applying pressure on authorities to fully adopt the requirements of international guidance and the various parts of the chemical conventions.

The prevention components of ASP projects will also aim to promote alternatives to chemical pesticides. Policy makers in the participating countries will need to be convinced of the value of investing more in the promotion of alternatives for health and environmental reasons.

In practice, prevention components can potentially cover a vast range of actions and activities depending on the exact circumstances in a particular country, but inevitably involving stakeholders from different horizons. In all the cases it will be necessary to adopt a participatory way of working to develop a national prevention plan, which should fully take into account the medical and environmental risks related to chemical pesticides. The national plan must specify the roles and competences of all the stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the pesticide management, and identify and mobilize the resources necessary to allow the national prevention plan to be effectively realized. However long-term shifts in pesticide management are not easily achieved. It is to be expected that the national prevention plans will be complex and difficult to put into practice, or simply too expensive for the

political decision makers and project managers involved in ASP. Civil society organizations in the countries and on a regional scale will have to advocate to make sure the prevention plans are widely accepted by the relevant national stakeholders, and that there is sufficient political will to carry them out. There will also be elements of the prevention plans that NGOs and civil society will be able to play a role in implementing.

There will be an important information and awareness raising element of prevention plans. Governmental authorities, the general public and pesticide users will need to be informed and made aware of a wide range of issues and problems related to pesticides in general and obsolete pesticides in particular. The development, production and dissemination of suitable didactic and teaching materials are very important in this direction. Since the official starting of the programme in 2005, PAN Africa have prepared and disseminated many publications, and posters in international and local African languages in

order to reach a large and diversified audience. These information and awareness-raising campaigns are essential.

Developing and reinforcing the capacity of various stakeholders in the use and management of chemicals, through workshops, education and training courses, has received much of our attention for several years. For example, an international 'training of trainers' in community-based monitoring of pesticide impacts on health was organized by PAN Africa and PAN Asia and the Pacific in July - August 2006 in Senegal. Twenty-six participants from Benin, Cameroon, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Morocco, Senegal, Togo and Tunisia took part. The objective of the course was to train trainers to monitor the impacts of pesticides on the health of communities, in order to eventually allow the users of pesticides to follow up these impacts themselves. A similar training for the anglophone countries took place in Tanzania, and in 2007, further trainings in ecotoxicology were also organized by PAN Africa and its partners, in particular PAN UK. All these trainings aim to make a contribution to the effective prevention of pesticide-related risks.

Ultimately, well conceived and well targeted prevention programmes are necessary to arrive at a rational management of chemicals, and pesticides in particular, in order to avoid the accumulation of stocks of obsolete pesticides. In any event, it is necessary to realize that to adopt a spirit of pesticide use reduction and reducing reliance on pesticides, the first step is to counter the perception that these products are a panacea.

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Pilot study on public access to farm pesticide spray records

On 1 March 2007 the Pesticide Safety Directorate (PSD) launched a pilot study on public access to farm spray records. The study involves approximately 150 arable farms in Staffordshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire.

The pilot will run for six months and half year results have just been circulated.

The PSD has reported that so far there have been seven requests for spray records and that all the requests have been met within one month.

PAN UK believes this to be encouraging and a sign that there is interest from the public in such a scheme. It also shows that it is possible for requests to be dealt with in a timely and efficient manner.

It is hoped that by the time the study finishes at the end of August it will be clear that there is a demand from the public to

have access to farm spray records and that the system for delivering the information does not have to be either cumbersome or time consuming.

PAN UK welcomes the pilot study and hopes it will result in an extended scheme covering the UK and giving the public the right to access farm spray records everywhere. It is essential that the public is allowed to know what potentially toxic chemical substances have been sprayed on crops in the vicinity of their homes.

Those living in the areas covered by the pilot study with concerns about access to spray records should make use of this current opportunity and ask for the relevant records. A report on the conclusion of the pilot study will appear in the next issue of *Pesticide News*.