

Managing empty pesticide containers in Perú

Remnants of pesticides cling to the insides of empty containers making them difficult to dispose of. An innovative project in the Mantaro Valley of Peru involved the local community in both decision-making and in the actual work of removing waste pesticide containers from local farmland. The project provides a model for other regions in Peru. Ymelda Montoro Zamora, Rocio Moreno Alvarado and Luis Gomero Osorio of PAN Peru report.

In the Mantaro valley in Peru's mountain zone pesticides contaminate the soil and water supply and empty pesticides containers can often be seen dumped near farmland. Farming is important for the livelihoods of thousands of smallholders and one of their most important crops is the potato. Significant amounts of pesticides are often used in its production.

In 2002 studies by the Action Network for Alternative Agriculture (RAAA; PAN Peru) showed that most farmers were not disposing of containers properly. There were no suitable facilities and no commercial collection scheme. The study showed that 41% of farmers left containers in their fields, while 28% burnt them. The prohibited POPs pesticides DDT and aldrin were circulating in agricultural markets years after Peru had banned these substances (banned in 1991). RAAA's work also showed that local authorities and the farming sector had very little idea of the legal status of bans and restrictions on POPs nor of correct handling and disposal procedures for pesticide containers. Neither local authorities nor agricultural input distributors carried out any training on risk management or monitored the situation.

RAAA have subsequently held talks with

farming communities, who recognise high levels of environmental contamination in the valley, mainly from mining and farming. Farming families have noticed changes as they have increased their pesticide use over the years. They related their increased pesticide use to higher levels of cancer and to a noticeable reduction in wildlife, especially amphibians in irrigation ditches. They identified contamination of water courses and irrigation channels as one of the commonest hazards for human health as many people depend on these for drinking and washing water. Careless disposal of pesticide containers was a major concern as children can pick these up and risk poisoning.

Tackling the problem

With funding from the Global Environment Facility, RAAA carried out a pilot project to test how POPs were being managed at community level in the Mantaro Valley in Junín. The project was carried out between March 2005 and December 2007 and was supported by CEDEPAS Centro (a local NGO affiliate of RAAA) and the provincial municipalities of Chupaca and Concepción. The long-term goal of the project was to reduce emissions of



Banned POPs pesticides bought in agrochemical stores in Huancayo

Photo: RAAA

the highly carcinogenic and persistent dioxins and furans liberated when farmers burn empty pesticide containers.

The project sought to involve smallholders in the environmental management of POPs by cleaning up the valley environment via pesticide container management and reducing the use of these toxic pesticides, helping to recover ecological stability and reduce health and environmental risks, to benefit local communities. The project activities covered eight districts in the provinces of Chupaca and Concepción in Junín Department. Public awareness of the issue and the project was raised through radio broadcasts, posters, booklets and talks with local farmer irrigation committees.

Container collection centre

A container collection centre was set up at the Centre for Ecotourism and Environmental Protection run by the Concepción municipality. Containers collected from farmers are triple rinsed and stored, pending possible recycling. The project also set up mini-collection points in the communities where farmers can store empty containers under lock and key before they are taken to the main collection centre.

In addition, 469 collection bags were distributed to farmers in Concepción and Chupaca for the 2007-2008 crop season. Farmers can place empty containers in these after they have been triple rinsed. In total 1,792 male and female farmers have been trained and are committed to implementing triple rinsing and using the local collection bags to dispose of their empty containers.

Training and development

For the training and campaign outreach activities, RAAA used an approach which was participatory and practical to build both technical skills and the ability of those involved to promote agroecological approaches. The pilot project explored methods of participatory management involving the key players in the Concepción and Chupaca local government, staff in the agricultural and health authorities, both male and female farmers and



Pesticide containers which generated dioxins and furans through incomplete burning in fields

Photo: RAAA

the private sector. A total of 209 male and female farmers were trained in Concepción and Chupaca and 103 extension agents trained about POPs and pesticide problems in their localities, the health and environmental risks and the importance of triple rinsing and container management.

Other achievements

During the project information was gathered on specific sources of POPs in the region, their sales, use and the health and environmental impacts of both POPs and other pesticides. The information now forms an important reference document for the main local authorities.

Two POPs and Pesticides 'watchdog' committees were set up, made up of farmers and local authority officers, to carry out control and neighbourhood vigilance [can you give details of what they are looking for?]. The Concepción committee has now been officially established by municipal resolution in November 2007.

Four provincial-level decrees were drafted [by who? RAAA or local farmers? or ?] on reducing risks from pesticide use and promoting organic farming in Chupaca and Concepción and submitted to the provincial councils. One of these decrees *Reducing risks from pesticide use in Concepción* has already been approved in September 2007.

An organic farmers organisation, the *9 July Association of Organic Crop and Livestock Farmers*, was created in Concepción by farmers participating in the project and is now legally recognized. [what does the organisation do?]

Outlook

The pilot activities now serve as a model of successful participatory management of pesticides and containers for the region and for Peru as a whole. One of the outcomes is that many other districts and provinces in the Junín Department are now interested in getting involved or in carrying out similar activities. Likewise, there is interest from the National Industrial Society (the association of agricultural inputs provider companies) to replicate these participatory models in other agricultural valleys in Peru's coastal and mountain regions. Challenging the conventional model of agriculture during the project has also had an impact, causing both local authorities and farmers to reflect on the need to promote more sustainable models of agriculture such as agroecology. This approach has resulted in several projects being proposed by the organic farmers' association, the Concepción authorities and local NGOs under the theme of sustainable local development.

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Peru law promotes organic farming

In January 2008, the Peruvian government approved a new law to promote organic and ecological farming. After three years of legislative discussions, the new law has finally been agreed, in recognition of Peru's rapidly growing demand for organic produce. Domestic market growth is 25%, with sales over US\$ 120 million per year. The legislation aims to promote sustainable and competitive development in organic and agroecological production, emphasizing organic farming as one of the options for the coun-

try's social and economic development. The law will open new doors for more than 33,000 Peruvian small and medium-scale organic farmers to find alternative markets under regional free trade agreements, with state support. The Network for Alternative Agriculture RAAA (PAN Peru) and other organizations welcome the new legislation which should improve the income of farming families and help conserve agrobiodiversity.

RAAA press release 14-02-08, on PAN Latin America website news at www.rap-al.org

Chile prohibits lindane

In December 2007, after a ten year campaign by PAN Chile and others, the Chilean Health Ministry prohibited all import, production, distribution, sale and application of lindane. Although withdrawn for all agricultural uses in 1998, lindane remained registered for use in human health and veterinary applications, notably in headlice and scabies treatments. Lindane, also known as gamma-HCH, accumulates in fatty tissues and is persistent in the environment, with numerous scientific studies classifying it as a persistent organic pollutant (POP). It has also been linked with cancer. The Health Ministry prohibition decision will cover all eight HCH isomers.

Also in December 2007, Chile's parliament passed a bill to prohibit the import, transport and sale of WHO Class Ia and Ib

pesticides, except those registered by the Agriculture Ministry and considered as essential and for which there are no alternatives. PAN Chile along with indigenous and peasant farmer and social rights organizations have been involved in providing evidence to justify this prohibition. If the bill is passed by the Senate, it will help protect the health of Chilean farm workers. The Health Ministry also announced a new monitoring programme to test residue levels in local and imported food and to improve pesticide poisoning surveillance, training local vigilance teams, setting up regional pesticide commissions and monitoring workplaces where poisonings have been documented.

Lindane ban, Enlace bulletin of PAN Latin America, no. 78-79, pp.28-29, January 2008.

Paraquat more severely restricted in Costa Rica

In January 2008, new and tough restrictions on the herbicide paraquat came into force in Costa Rica, following official recognition of the high risk of occupational and accidental health effects, particularly for dermal exposure of workers. All aerial spraying of paraquat is now banned, along with applications at low and very low volumes. Products containing paraquat can only be sold to those with a prescription from a qualified

professional and the formulations must contain warning colourants, odour and emetic. All paraquat handling must be done by trained personnel using protective equipment and application must respect legally-defined buffer zones around water courses. In December 2007, the insecticide monocrotophos was prohibited for use in Costa Rica.

PAN Latin America website news, posted 22 January 2008, at www.rap-al.org

Banana workers' historic victory in Nemagon lawsuit

In November 2007, a Los Angeles court ruled in favour of six banana workers in their case against Dow Chemical Company and Amvac Chemical Corporation, manufacturers of the nematicide DBCP (Nemagon). The companies were accused of having actively suppressed information on the toxicity of DBCP to the human reproductive system. Six of the 12 worker plaintiffs who took Dow and Dole fruit company to court, are to receive compensation from Dole of between US\$ 311,200 and 834,000, with the jury ruling that both companies contributed

to the health damage suffered by the workers. This is the first of five lawsuits underway in the US, on behalf of over 5,000 workers in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama, who became sterile after exposure to DBCP. The nematicide was prohibited in the US in 1979 but remained registered for use in Nicaragua until 1993. This is the first time that a US jury has ruled in favour of Nemagon-affected workers in Central America.

PAN Latin America website news, posted 14-11-07 at www.rap-al.org