

1. Introduction

Pesticides are widely used biologically active compounds designed to kill target organisms. A number of pesticides have also been shown to cause adverse effects on non-target organisms.



2. Why is it relevant?

Highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs) have a high potential to cause adverse impacts on human health, the environment and the sustainability of agricultural production, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).



Scientific studies have associated exposure to pesticides with chronic effects in humans, including increased risks for some cancers, birth defects, adverse effects on organs and reproduction, and pulmonary disease.



There is a very low rate at which pesticide containers are disposed in an environmentally sound manner.

Research in developing countries shows that they are frequently discarded, burned, or reused, for example, in toys or to store food or water.



Lack of enforcement is of concern, whereby uncontrolled access to HHPs has led to unintended uses, and plant protection products that are banned in high-income countries and do not meet international quality standards continue to be marketed in some low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Exposure of humans and other non-target organisms has been shown to be high if plant protection products are not used according to best practices.

Concerns over pesticides also apply to biocides, which often contain the same active ingredients as plant protection products and are applied in close proximity to humans (e.g. mosquito repellents) or in the environment (e.g. anti-fouling).

Increasing insecticide resistance is another major concern, particularly in the fight against malaria.



In 2015, the fourth meeting of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM4) adopted a resolution that recognized HHPs as an issue of concern and called for concerted action to address HHPs under the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).



Governments and other stakeholders supported “concerted action to address HHPs in the context of SAICM.”



3. Existing instruments and actions

At the international level, no overarching legally binding instruments exist for all HHPs.

Some HHPs may be identified and partially regulated under the Stockholm and Rotterdam Conventions and the Montreal Protocol. In general, the management of HHPs primarily takes place through national and regional pesticide legislation and implementation of these laws.

Meanwhile, international organisations have developed and used different instruments to support countries in managing HHPs; these include:

- Setting norms, particularly in the form of codes of conduct and guidelines for identification and sound management of HHPs under the joint leadership of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO);
- Developing guidances and tools; and
- Joint activities assisting countries in raising awareness, building capacity and managing HHPs.



4. Challenges and opportunities



One of the eight criterion for identifying an HHP remains ambiguous. The criterion is for “pesticide active ingredients and formulations that have shown a high incidence of severe or irreversible adverse effects on human health or the environment.” Whether a pesticide meets this criterion is at the discretion of national regulatory authorities.

There is a disconnect between international recognition and national action. While most countries have set up their own pesticide legislation, many LMICs still face challenges for sound management of HHPs resulting in substantial ongoing use of and exposure to HHPs.

To reduce ambiguity of the criterion while still allowing sufficient flexibility by countries, activities may include, inter alia:

- Developing practical guidance on how to identify severe adverse effects on human health and the environment;
- Fostering and coordinating international cooperation in supporting developing and transition countries to implement the criterion.

To address these challenges, concerted international actions are urgently needed in all possible forms to support developing and transition countries in managing HHPs and pesticides in general.

