Pesticide risk reduction in Malawi

Background

As is the case in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) across the globe, Malawi has been struggling with sound pesticide management at all stages of pesticides lifecycle. One of the key challenges has been the accumulation of obsolete pesticides in the country due to poor procurement and storage practices; illegal importation and bans for environmental or human health reasons which leave large quantities of pesticides unused. Both obsolete pesticides and empty pesticide containers pose a risk to human health and the environment.

From 2005, a group of partners, including the World Bank, CropLife International and FAO rolled out the Africa Stockpiles Programme (ASP) over a 12–15 year period. The programme aimed at disposing of stockpiled obsolete persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and other pesticides. In Malawi, and as part of the ASP and its follow-on activities, CropLife International financed and implemented the CleanFARMS project, which assessed the amount and type of obsolete pesticides including POPs, repackaged them and stored them at Chirimba and Kanengo warehouses pending resource mobilization for eventual disposal. In 2009–2011 the Government of Malawi implemented a complementary FAO funded Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) to strengthen the pest and pesticide management capacity in Malawi. The draft revised Pesticide Management Bill was one of the most notable outputs of the TCP.

Project description

In 2015, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) provided funding for the Government of Malawi project ‘Pesticide Risk Reduction in Malawi’. The project is being implemented by the Pesticides Control Board (Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development), with technical and operational support from FAO. It is aimed at clearing all obsolete pesticides and putting in place measures to prevent further accumulation within the country. The overall project goal is the prevention of risks to both human health and the environment arising from obsolete pesticides and associated wastes, in order to promote sustainable intensification of agricultural production to meet the food, income and nutrition needs at both household and national level. This project initiated activities in March 2016, and will be active until June 2020.

Project focus

The project is disposing of inventoried and warehoused obsolete pesticides, including POPs and remediating pesticide-contaminated sites. It is also pioneering empty container management in Malawi by establishing an empty container management scheme for proper recycling and disposal of empty pesticide containers. The project is also focusing on strengthening the legislative and institutional capacity for sound life-cycle management of pesticides in order to safeguard against future accumulation, and is training farmers on the use of safer alternatives to conventional pesticides through integrated pest management (IPM).

Key facts

Duration: March 2016–June 2020

Donor: Global Environmental Facility (GEF)

Financial Contribution:
- Total Budget: USD 14 429 374 (USD 2 550 000 from GEF & USD 11 879 374 in cash and kind from five implementing partners)

Implementing Partners:
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development
- CropLife International/Malawi
- Pesticides Control Board (PCB),
- Environmental Affairs Department
- Malawi Bureau of Standards
- Self Help Africa.

Beneficiaries:
- Stakeholders in government ministries: i.e. Agriculture, Health, Finance, Information;
- Stakeholders in government departments: i.e. environment, legal affairs, PCB;
- Government soils technicians
- Farmer organizations, farmers and farming households;
- Private sector organizations
- Regional organizations; and
- Non governmental organizations (NGOs)
Key highlights

- The project has so far facilitated the disposal of 255 metric tonnes of POPs and other obsolete pesticides in an environmentally sound manner. This process started in 2017 and ended in 2018 costing USD 544 990 (MK397 842 700).

- Efforts are underway to establish the first empty pesticide container management scheme in the country. CropLife Malawi, the Pesticides Control Board, Malawi Bureau of Standards, the Environmental Affairs Department, Malawi Revenue Authority, Ministry of Finance and National Statistical Office are among the partners working together to establish this container management scheme.

- The project has facilitated a review of the pesticide regulations and trained staff at PCB in various technical areas such as pesticide registration following internationally accepted standards and identification and management of highly hazardous pesticides. In addition, a five-year strategic plan (2019–2024) was elaborated for the PCB.

- With the project’s support, eighteen (18) active ingredients (in 16 products) have been identified as Highly Hazardous Pesticides according to the international criteria set by the FAO/WHO Joint Meeting on Pesticides Management.

- Repackaged obsolete stocks at Chirimba warehouse ready for shipping to a disposal facility.

A knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) survey for needs and risk assessment of shortlisted HHPs and other pesticides was conducted in May 2018 targeting 1 498 farmers and other pesticide users in 23 districts covering eight agro-ecological zones across the country. The results will assist the country in putting in place appropriate risk reduction measures.

- To date, 1 341 farmers, of whom 494 are male and 847 are female, in Salima, Machinga and Shire Valley Agricultural Development Divisions (ADDs) have gained knowledge on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as a safer alternative to the use of conventional pesticides, which bring risks to human health and the ecosystem on which agriculture also depends. The project is working with the Department of Agricultural Extension Services to train the farmers on using the farmer field school extension methodology.

- The project trained over 250 extension workers under Ministry of Agriculture who are implementing various agricultural interventions in pesticide risk management through Thuchila, Lisasadzi and Mzuzu RTCs during 2017/18 and 2018/19 growing seasons.