

Pesticide Politics in Africa

An interdisciplinary international conference
on the use, regulation and health effects of agrochemicals in sub-Saharan countries



Introduction

The current economic boom in many sub-Saharan countries is accompanied by an unprecedented increase in noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) due to industrial pollution, including pesticides. While local and international mobilizations call for more stringent pesticide control measures, African governments often refrain from adopting and enforcing strict regulations – considered as potential obstacles to “development”. This interdisciplinary conference aims at laying the foundations for a long-term scientific cooperation between African and European scholars on the management of pesticide-related occupational and environmental health hazards in Africa. It aims at exploring the trade-offs between production and prevention that underlie the expansion of chemical-intensive agriculture on the continent, to understand the relations between technique, knowledge and power that condition the inclusion of African populations in the globalized economy, and to grasp the resulting health and environmental inequalities.

As in other areas with intensive use and poor regulation and/or implementation, pesticide-related health risks are exacerbated in Africa by the inadequacy of regulatory frameworks and the weakness, or inexistence, of surveillance and control systems. As a result, the import, production, trade and use of pesticides take place without the legal safeguards and institutional counterweights ensuring that public health concerns receive adequate attention in a political context where “development”, narrowly defined as economic growth, and “food security”, with a single dominant focus on increased agricultural production, are the overriding priorities. Facing strong activism denouncing the adverse effects of industrial agriculture and corporate influence over pesticide-related public policy making, some European governments have started to backpedal at home – at least in their declarations of political intent. African governments and Western development agencies are less challenged, however, when – backed by private foundations and transnational corporations – they are calling for an “African Green Revolution”, still essentially based on the much-contested model of chemical-intensive agriculture, with pesticides as the cornerstone. In parallel, foreign agro-companies and governments are making large-scale land acquisitions in a new “scramble for Africa”, transforming the continent into the new frontier of global agro-industrial expansion.



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This conference develops upon the observation that the chemical-based intensification of agricultural production in sub-Saharan Africa, which is likely to be aggravated by climate change, bears new occupational and environmental health hazards, which are exacerbated by the use of highly toxic pesticides (often banned in Europe), by informal trade, by dysfunctional control systems, by lack of access to risk information, by the inexistence of protective gear appropriate for tropical climates, and by the diversity of exposed populations (\approx 80% of the active population has an agricultural activity – mostly on family farms, potentially exposing vulnerable populations such as pregnant women and children). As rapid population growth and trade liberalization boost domestic and international demands, these hazards confront African governments with technically and politically intricate regulatory and public policy choices. While international donors, industry players and environmentalist groups try to influence pesticide legislation and its implementation, the underlying trade-offs between productive and preventive considerations become a major political stake, and the way these trade-offs are formulated becomes an important field of scientific enquiry.

We aim at bringing together researchers from various backgrounds in human and social sciences, other sciences with an interest in public health and public policy, or environmental and health exposures, as well as members of administrations or NGOs involved in pesticide regulation who are eager to reflect on what may be done to better assess and manage pesticide-related detrimental health effects.

We welcome proposals along the following themes:

1. Producing knowledge on pesticide exposures and their health effects

Concerned about pesticide-induced hazards, researchers, health practitioners, public officials, activists and simply concerned citizens in many regions of Africa have started to gather information and produce knowledge on pesticide exposures and their suspected effects on human health. How do these players go about this and what forms of expert and/or lay knowledge do they produce: counting cases of possibly pesticide-related health conditions, registration of acute poisoning cases, forms of popular epidemiology, etc.? Do they engage in studying the toxicity of the compounds sold in African countries? What difficulties do these players face in objectivizing the phenomena they attempt to explore? Whom are information and knowledge produced for? Which alliances do information and knowledge producers engage in and, if any, which strategies of mobilization do they adopt? To what extent and how do they attempt (and possibly succeed) to draw attention to their findings, either in discreet but possibly influential spaces or in more public arenas, and with which effects? What is the political economy of attention to occupational health, environmental health, and environmental aspects of pesticide exposures? This focus welcomes presentations both by social science researchers studying these knowledge-production practices and by the very players engaged in these practices.

2. Regulatory dimensions: national and international regimes for pesticide regulation and control

The various processes leading to the international conventions regulating the safety of international pesticide trade have been studied in much detail, with a special focus on the Rotterdam Convention and its Prior Informed Consent (PIC) mechanism. However, far less is known about the actual implementation of these international agreements and the PIC in African countries. Do these international agreements and mechanisms influence domestic authorization processes? If so, in which ways? Furthermore, little is known on how pesticides are actually authorized in African Countries. Given many regulatory authorities' limited toxicological capacities, how are risk assessments carried out, and by whom? How do authorities reach the decision to register a specific pesticide – especially if it is banned elsewhere? Who are the actors involved in defining pesticide regulation? How do they interact, with which rationales? How are economic, social and

safety dimensions confronted and/or articulated? Do pro-pesticide economic actors adopt common strategies or are they competing, with specific interests and claims? How do other national or international actors (administrations, international organizations, NGOs, foundations, etc.) address pesticide regulation? What are their claims and how do they promote them? Concerning regulatory enforcement, how are data on pesticide trade and uses collected? What is known about the magnitude of illegal trade of unregistered, banned or obsolete pesticides? How are borders controlled? What is the political economy of non-enforcement? Lastly, what is the role of private standards (or soft law) in the management of pesticides' detrimental effects?

3. Coping with contamination: pesticides and their effects in everyday life

Populations exposed to pesticides or other toxic chemicals – especially if they have low education – are often presented as unaware of the dangers they face and the risks they take. It is then assumed that safety education would contribute to reducing harm and protecting these populations. Yet, various bodies of work have shown that even untrained people are often aware of the dangers they face and develop preventive or coping strategies. Other bodies of work have also shown that top-down generalist prescriptions may not be efficient – especially if not adapted to local conditions (environmental, technical, economic, etc.). We expect contributions that address both sets of issues: 1) How do (potentially) affected populations apprehend pesticide exposures and their effects? How do they identify and characterize exposures and how do they deal with the uncertainty concerning the resulting hazards? Which preventive or curative actions do they adopt? How does the awareness to live and work in a contaminated area alter the affected populations' relations with political institutions and with their natural environment? 2) How – and with whom – can effective preventive interventions and arrangements be developed and implemented? How to best involve exposed populations? How can one avoid the transfer of responsibility to the victims that is often implicit in calls for an improved “risk culture”?

4. The political economy of pesticide use (and its alternatives): the industrialization of agriculture in Africa

Postulating that the magnitude and modalities of pesticide use are strongly influenced by the structures of agricultural production and distribution, this focus proposes to explore the ways in which national and international agricultural policies and market structures affect the use of agrochemicals in various contexts. Globally and locally, how do producers of agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizers, pesticides...) attempt to exert influence on regulators, farmers and other agricultural players? While its influence remains under-researched and often invisible, what role does agribusiness play in the conception and promotion of agricultural development projects/corridors? How do agri-food companies, as buyers of produce and structuring agents of value chains, shape modes of agricultural production – and thus pesticide use? In which ways is the production and uptake of a certain type of agronomical knowledge (at the expense of other types) conditioned by these political and economic considerations? More generally, to what extent do dominant policy frames – such as “economic growth” or “food security” – limit the resonance of considerations concerning food quality and the safety of production processes? How does this affect the legitimacy of mobilisations against pesticide use? Which factors condition the emergence of such mobilisations – or their absence? Lastly, but importantly, this focus strongly welcomes presentations on experiences of alternative (organic or less pesticide-intensive) modes of production and distribution. Drawing on individual examples, which political, social and economic factors condition the success or failure of these alternative approaches – and to what extent do they remain local forms of resistance (for instance, based on niche markets) or do they attempt to engage more structural transformations towards more sustainable agricultural *systems*?

The conference will be held from **29th to 31st May 2019 at the Tropical Pesticide Research Institute (TPRI) in Arusha, Tanzania.**

Contributions are accepted in English or French. Proposals should not exceed 500 words, include a brief presentation of the author(s), contact information of the corresponding author, and be sent to pesticidepolitics@gmail.com **by 5 January 2019 at the latest.** Authors will be informed of the selection (or reject) of their abstracts by 20 January 2019. Authors of selected proposals are expected to share a *draft* manuscript of their contribution by 30 April 2019, which will be pre-circulated to discussants only.

We may cover travel expenses in accordance to the *limited* budget of the conference. Priority will be given to African and early-career scholars.

Organizing committee:

- **Moritz Hunsmann**, associate researcher in sociology, French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), Paris, France
- **Nathalie Jas**, associate researcher in history and science and technology studies, French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA), Paris, France
- **Eliana Lekei**, registrar of pesticides, Tropical Pesticide Research Institute (TPRI), Arusha, Tanzania
- **Vera Ngowi**, senior lecturer in occupational and environmental health, Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS), Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
- **Samuel Pinaud**, associate professor in sociology, Paris Dauphine University, France

Scientific Committee:

- **Malcom Ferdinand**, associate researcher in sociology, French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), Paris, France
- **Alain Garrigou**, professor in ergonomics, Bordeaux University, France
- **Sylvain Ilboudo**, associate researcher in toxicology, National Center for Scientific and Technological Research (CNRST), Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
- **Kees Jansen**, associate professor in political ecology and agrarian studies, Wageningen University, Netherlands
- **Leslie London**, professor in public health, University of Cape Town, South Africa
- **Jessie Luna**, assistant professor in sociology, Colorado State University, USA
- **Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle**, associate professor in political science, Paris 1 – Panthéon Sorbonne University, Paris, France
- **Andrea Rother**, professor in sociology, University of Cape Town, South Africa