South-South collaboration for pesticide safety

**What is South-South collaboration?**

Many of the problems faced by countries in the south regarding pesticides are similar: lack of surveillance data on exposures and health effects; poor regulatory frameworks; lack of skilled personnel to monitor or enforce safety; pressure to use pesticides in unsafe ways; vulnerability to market pressures; lack of laboratory capacity; dumping of pesticides, and many others.

For that reason, countries of the South can share experiences of how best to address these problems; solutions developed by countries of similar economic development facing similar problems can be very helpful.

South-south collaboration therefore give researchers, scientists, policy-makers and advocates the opportunity to meet colleagues from other developing countries facing similar problems with the purposes of learning from each other to develop shared solutions to the problems of pesticide poisoning and contamination.

An example involves researchers from Southern African and Central America who have developed a network in the field of health effects associated with pesticides use. South-South meetings were held in San Jose, Costa Rica (2002); Sandton Johannesburg, South Africa (2005) and Arusha, Tanzania (2006).

**Shared experiences**

The Work and Health in Southern Africa (WAHSA) programme, a Sida-funded initiative aiming to build capacity in occupational health in Southern Africa, co-ordinated field visits in the Groblersdal area in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa (2005) and in Ngarenanyuki, Arumeru District, Tanzania (2006) where the southern researchers were able to contact small-scale farmers and get to know some of their problems with pesticides.

Two workshops on South-South collaboration on pesticides linked to international conferences were organized one in Johannesburg to review and draw lessons from global experiences of research programmes designed to build capacity in countries of the south to control hazards from pesticides. The second workshop held in Arusha to look at experiences on surveillance for acute pesticide poisoning in order to develop common tools and approaches which can be used to estimate the extent and nature of the problem in Southern Africa. A training programme was run for approximately 60 farmers from Mpumulanga, South Africa on pesticide safety and alternatives to pesticides.

Dr Aurora Aragon, from Nicaragua and one of the visitors, spoke to the farmers about her work with small farmers in her country, and how use of a fluorescent tracer in the spray material has demonstrated the extent and pattern of skin exposure amongst farmers. She also participated in the 2006 event in Arusha, Tanzania, where she shared her experience with the tracer technique with local scientists. As a result, we hope that WAHSA will facilitate project to train local farmers using these techniques to reduce their exposures to pesticides.
What can SADC stakeholders do to improve South-South collaboration?

1. Invite scientists from the region to South-south meetings hosted by SADC structures

2. Provide opportunities for networks like WAHSA to bring other experts from developing countries (such as Central America) to provide input to SADC policy discussions where they have expertise to offer

3. Lobby that development aid be used in ways that strengthens not only assistance from northern countries but also enables SADC countries to build networks within the region and networks involving other Southern countries.

4. Link trade agreements between developing countries of developing country blocs to opportunities for researchers and scientists to build parallel networks to support health, safety and related economic development.

Occupational and Environmental Health Research Unit (OEHRU)

School of Public Health and Family Medicine

University of Cape Town

South Africa

http://www.oehru.uct.ac.za

Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (MUHAS)

Dar es Salaam

Tanzania

http://www.muhhas.ac.tz

Produced August 2008