



*A smallholder farmer sprays pesticides, often with a lack of knowledge about how pesticides should be used. Photo Credit: Henry Owino.*

# Africa's pollinator decline puts pesticide imports in the spotlight

By Henry Owino

**H**IGH incidence of pests associated with the effects of climate change is prompting many farmers in Africa to resort to the use of pesticides to protect their crops.

Unfortunately, the practice is having unintended consequences, with the continuous use of pesticides threatening wild pollinators. It also compromises the health of consumers and livestock, and is hazardous to the environment and farmers themselves.

Pollinators include insects, especially bees, some species of flies, wasps, butterflies, moths, beetles, weevils, ants, midges, bats, birds, primates, marsupials, rodents and reptiles.

Joachim Paul, the director Heinrich Böll Stiftung Foundation (HBSF) Kenya Chapter, said excessive use of

toxic pesticides in Africa is eliminating wild pollinators, which play an important role in increasing crop yields and supporting food production.

Paul, a conservationist, also noted the decline of pollinators is jeopardizing their other important roles in the ecosystem, including ensuring ecosystem stability, habitat conservation, and creation of opportunities for income-generating activities.

The abundance and diversity of wild pollinators, he said, were declining, citing studies that warn that at least 17 percent of pollinators are at high risk of extinction.

Weak market regulation of the agrochemicals market in Africa is widely blamed for the threats caused by pesticide use to food production and public health.

The global pesticide market has almost doubled in the last 20 years and by 2023, the total value of all pesticides used is expected to reach nearly US\$130.7 billion.

The European Union (EU) is in the spotlight as the top exporting region, increasingly selling toxic pesticides to low- and middle-income countries where environmental, health and safety regulations are often the weakest.

The African agrochemical market accounts for only 2-4 percent of global usage, although pesticide imports into Africa have increased significantly over the past five years. South Africa's agrochemical market leads on the continent followed by Egypt, Cameroon, Ethiopia and Kenya.

The EU is the second-highest exporter of pesticides to Kenya. Many of the toxic pesticides exported are banned in the EU but are sold to Africa.

"Pesticides that are not allowed for use in countries such as Germany where they are produced are still exported to other countries. For example, in Kenya, 44 percent of the total volume of pesticides used are banned in Europe," said Paul.

The Pesticide Atlas Report shows that in 2020, a total of 25 different active ingredients were found in tomato and kale samples in Kenya.

At least 51 percent of the detected active ingredients were already withdrawn from circulation in the EU long ago. Of the total of 25 samples, 60 percent exceeded the EU maximum residue levels.

A total of 230 active ingredients are registered in Kenya, including 51 that are no longer permitted in the EU. Despite being banned in the EU, Kenyan imports in 2018 and 2019 included iprodione and acetochlorines from Belgium and 1,3-dichloro-propene from Spain.

Paul Ngaruiya, acting General Manager of Research, Strategy and Planning at Kenya's Pest Control Products Board

(PCPB), says the pesticide problem is partly linked to improper use, with some farmers often ignoring instructions on container labels.

PCPB is responsible for overseeing all pesticide-related matters, including but not limited to the regulation of pesticide importation and exportation, manufacturing, distribution, sale, and use, as well as mitigating their harmful effects on human health, animal health and the environment in Kenya.

According to a survey conducted by PCPB and the Agrochemicals Association of Kenya, one in two farmers does not wear full personal protective equipment because they are expensive. Only 11 percent understand the colour bands on labels, which represent varying degrees of danger.

Fields, schools, homes and other public amenities are normally situated close together and near waterways, which means that buffer zones cannot be observed, and pesticides can run off farms into nearby water bodies.

Dr Ngaruiya suggests the need to work closely with media and civil society organisations to sensitise and educate farmers on proper pesticide use.

"We as PCPB are calling upon all stakeholders, including the media, to work with us to ensure there is proper information reaching out there to farmers," he says.

PCB was ordered by the parliamentary health committee to undertake an analysis and legal review of toxic pesticides to withdraw them from the Kenyan market. So far, the board has reviewed only four active ingredients.

"We are committed to providing professional, efficient and effective regulatory services. PCPB inspectors work very closely with law enforcement officers in curbing counterfeit pest control products. Several fake pesticides have been impounded across the country through such collaborations," Dr Ngaruiya says.



*Experienced farmer properly protected while spraying pesticides fruit trees.  
Photo Credit: Henry Owino*