

A conversation with Centre for Pesticide Suicide Prevention, May 19, 2021

Participants

- Mark Davis – Director for Agriculture and Regulatory Outreach, Centre for Pesticide Suicide Prevention
- Professor Michael Eddleston – Director, Centre for Pesticide Suicide Prevention
- Dr. Leah Utyasheva – Policy Director, Centre for Pesticide Suicide Prevention
- James Snowden – Program Officer, GiveWell

Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Mr. Davis, Professor Eddleston, and Dr. Utyasheva.

Summary call notes

GiveWell spoke with Mr. Davis, Professor Eddleston, and Dr. Utyasheva of Centre for Pesticide Suicide Prevention (CPSP) for a quarterly update on CPSP's work.

In brief, conversation topics included:

- CPSP currently has fewer than 10 full-time equivalent staff. This includes a postdoctoral researcher that works for CPSP one day a week, two full-time employees in India, and two part-time consultants in Nepal. In the future, CPSP also plans to hire a communications employee, a videographer, and staff members to work within each of the regional pesticide regulatory bodies.
- CPSP plans to work with World Health Organization (WHO) staff, secondees from the University of Edinburgh to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and postdoctoral researchers in Pesticide Action Network (PAN) UK. The postdoctoral researchers in PAN UK will initially work to develop a document compiling alternatives to paraquat, a highly hazardous pesticide.
- WHO published an implementation guide for suicide prevention, [Live Life](#), which was recently reviewed by CPSP and published online in June 2021. The document repeatedly mentions pesticide suicide prevention as the key example of means restriction and cites CPSP as an additional source of information.
- WHO has a goal of reducing suicide rates by 15-20% by 2030. CPSP is confident that WHO is interested in collaborating with CPSP in pursuance of that goal, in part by reducing pesticide suicides.
- Collecting data from toxicology labs in Nepal has been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. On-the-ground agricultural data collection has also been difficult amid Nepal's COVID-19 lockdown. CPSP believes it will be

able to collect toxicology and agricultural data eventually and that there are unlikely to be gaps in the data once it can be collected.

- It's possible that the COVID-19 pandemic could have affected suicide rates and skewed suicide data in India and Nepal. The research that has been done so far doesn't show that the pandemic has had a large impact on suicide.
- The pesticide regulations that have recently been implemented in India should have a large impact on suicide going forward.
- CPSP is exploring the possibility of developing software with the Maharashtra state government to facilitate the transfer of data from toxicology labs to government systems for state-level policy work. So far this work has been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and by staff turnover within the government.
- Chinese regulators' work on pesticide regulation does not appear to have been derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic is currently posing less of a problem in China than in other Asian countries, although there are restrictions on traveling in and out of the country and between provinces.
- The Sri Lanka Medical Association set up a task force called the Sri Lanka's Expert Committee on Suicide Prevention, which published a [report](#) of recommendations for the Sri Lankan government in 2019. The report identified five pesticides that the group believed ought to be banned. The Sri Lankan government appears to be interested in banning all chemical pesticides. CPSP is observing how this is implemented.
- CPSP is conducting research studies in Malaysia, South Africa, and planning a study in Uganda, which together amount to a very small proportion of CPSP's annual budget. The study in South Africa is already winding down, while the study in Uganda has not yet begun, and the Malaysian study is ongoing. As part of the Uganda study, CPSP is interested in working with FAO, as well as Uganda's agricultural and health departments, to identify which pesticides are being used for self-harm in the country.
- CPSP believes that regulations enacted in Uganda, a relatively large and influential country in the region, may influence the enactment of similar regulations in other countries in the region.
- Enforcement plays a critical role in achieving regulatory impact. A study in Nepal found that a small proportion (5-10%) of pesticides used in Nepal were illegal. The transport of illegal pesticides across country borders and the availability of affordable alternatives to banned pesticides are factors in how much impact pesticide regulation will have.
- It's difficult to use market sampling to determine whether illegal pesticides are being sold, as shopkeepers will not openly display illegal goods or sell them to strangers. Looking at the toxicology results from hospital patients who have ingested pesticides is a more fruitful way of

determining whether certain pesticides are circulating in a country, since the pesticides identified will reflect those at hand or available in shops at moments of crisis.

- A 2004 trial ban of two pesticides in one Sri Lankan district, controlled with a second district where the ban was not implemented, found that after the ban was enacted, fewer patients presented to the hospital with the banned chemicals in their bodies. This indicates that enforcement can work, even when the next-door district continues to sell and use the banned pesticides.
- CPSP has published a paper on the 2006 ban of methyl parathion in Nepal, which found that there was a delay of about ten years before the impact of the ban was detectable in suicide rates, longer than the official phase-out period laid out by the government.

*All GiveWell conversations are available at
<http://www.givewell.org/research/conversations>*