

# Organization and targets of the prior informed consent notification scheme.

## Part II. Field operation

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**Summary.** - The problems associated with the misuse of pesticides are numerous and have been well documented. These are mainly the result of lack of regulations on: a) the introduction and use of pesticides; b) inadequate training of regulators, distributors and users; c) shortage of appropriate information on the nature and impact of pesticide use; and d) inadequate facilities for enforcement of control measures. To address these issues, including the issue of the export of pesticides which have been banned or severely restricted in industrial countries, the *International code of conduct on the distribution and use of pesticides* was adopted in 1983 by the FAO Conference and amended in 1985 to incorporate provisions for prior informed consent (PIC) procedures. Field activities on the code of conduct and on PIC are described.

*Key words:* toxicology, hazardous substances, pesticides.

**Riassunto** (*Organizzazione e obiettivi dello schema di notifica del "prior informed consent". Parte II. Operazioni in campo*). - I problemi associati all'uso improprio dei pesticidi sono numerosi e ben documentati. Derivano soprattutto dalla mancanza di norme sull'immissione e l'uso dei pesticidi, dall'inadeguata esperienza di coloro che devono vigilare, dalla carente e non appropriata informazione circa la natura e l'impatto dell'uso dei pesticidi e, infine, dalle inadeguate strutture preposte all'osservanza delle misure di controllo. Per affrontare questi problemi, fra cui quello dell'esportazione dei pesticidi banditi o sottoposti a notevoli limitazioni nei paesi industrializzati, nel 1983 fu adottato dalla Conferenza della FAO l'*International code of conduct on the distribution and use of pesticides* (Codice internazionale di condotta sulla distribuzione e sull'uso dei pesticidi), rivisto nel 1985 per includere i provvedimenti per le procedure sul "prior informed consent" (PIC), consenso preliminare informato. In questo contesto sono descritte le attività che vengono svolte nell'ambito del codice di condotta e del PIC.

*Parole chiave:* tossicologia, sostanze chimiche pericolose, pesticidi.

### Introduction

The increasing use of pesticides and their frequent misuse in many developing countries, despite large-scale efforts to institute regulations and to implement alternative pest control strategies, continue to cause concern in the international community. The problems associated with misuse of pesticides are numerous and have been well documented on human and animal poisoning: deleterious effects on the environment; pest resistance problems, etc. These are mainly the result of lack of effective national regulations on the introduction and use of pesticides; inadequate training of regulators, distributors, users and others concerned; shortage of appropriate information on the nature and impact of pesticide use; and inadequate facilities for enforcement of control measures [1].

To address these concerns, including the issue of the export of pesticides which have been banned or severely restricted in industrialized countries, the *International code of conduct on the distribution and use of pesticides*

was unanimously adopted in 1983 by the FAO Conference and amended in 1985 to incorporate (article 9) provisions for prior informed consent (PIC) procedures.

### Field activities on the code

FAO has given the highest priority to the implementation of the code of conduct, especially in strengthening regulatory infrastructures, harmonization of registration procedures and information systems as well as in the operation of PIC procedures [2]. Independent surveys conducted by FAO and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have shown that a large number of developing countries have difficulty in effectively enforcing pesticide regulations due to lack of technical and financial resources, inaccessibility of important information, lack of proper legal and administrative infrastructures and inadequate systems for monitoring pesticide poisoning cases and for training of pesticide handlers.

Through various regional and international conferences, workshops and seminars dealing with pesticide problems and issues, the need for more effective control measures for pesticide trade, distribution and use has been emphasized and accordingly, FAO has been requested to provide technical assistance to developing countries to cooperate with them in their efforts to promote safer alternatives to protect the health of the users and the environment.

Since the adoption of the code in June 1986, a number of important initiatives have been taken in promoting its implementation and in assessing its impact through national, sub-regional and regional projects, e.g.:

- technical assistance to establish national pesticide registration and control schemes, appropriate infrastructure and training of personnel on the various provisions of the code;

- national, regional and sub-regional training courses to extension staff and other technical personnel on the various provisions of the code with emphasis on the safe and efficient use of pesticides for plant protection;

- national and regional survey missions on laboratory infrastructures for pesticide analysis. Priority is given to pesticide quality control facilities;

- technical assistance and advice to member countries on harmonization of procedures for registration and control of pesticides and on the organization of pesticide information exchange systems;

- joint activities with post-harvest projects on the relevance of the code of conduct on pesticides in post-production systems;

- introduction of the code into the syllabus of faculties of agriculture in national universities;

- technical assistance through consultancies on various specific disciplines, e.g. agromedicine (prevention and control of pesticide intoxications), programming of information exchange, etc.;

- training at regional and national level on the implementation of prior informed consent (PIC) procedures.

All these efforts are supported by FAO everyday work at headquarters on planning, organization, technical backstopping missions, preparation and revision of documents, expert consultations, meetings, etc.

### Field activities on PIC

Although the joint FAO/UNEP programme has developed a number of specific technical documents and operational procedures, the level of actual field implementation of PIC procedures by member countries has been low. There are a number of elements that should be considered in the implementation of PIC. The most important are:

- notification of control actions by participating countries;

- determination that the nature of the control action meets criteria for inclusion of chemicals in the PIC procedure and for preparation of decision guidance documents;

- development of an FAO/UNEP computerized database containing information relevant to the operation of PIC;

- request for responses from participating importing countries concerning future importation and use;

- dissemination of import decisions;

- required actions by exporting countries.

The key players in the PIC process are the designated national authorities of importing and exporting countries, international organizations and NGOs (industry associations and environmental/consumer groups). In order to facilitate the implementation of PIC procedures, all the key players should perform their respective responsibilities under the process. The strategy for the implementation of PIC involves provision of relevant technical information, strengthening of present legal and administrative infrastructures, training of all parties concerned in the operation of PIC procedures and coordination of efforts within each country and among countries in the region. Table 1 summarizes this strategy.

This strategy also requires the collaboration of other UN agencies and various international organizations to promote the widest possible implementation of the PIC procedure. In fact, extension efforts are already underway not only by member countries of FAO, but also by a number of international organizations (WHO, IRPTC, ILO, UNITAR, OECD, etc.), to promote implementation and monitoring of particular provisions of the code and/or PIC procedure which fall within the fields of competence.

It is also necessary to seek the cooperation of NGOs which are the other "key players" in the PIC procedure. Regional and sub-regional cooperation must be encouraged through establishment of a network of national focal institutions involved in the operation of PIC.

In line with the strategy described in Table 1, the institutional framework is at the same levels summarized in Table 2.

From all these activities listed above it is expected that governments with technical capabilities can ensure:

- a) that basic legal, technical and administrative infrastructures are in place;

- b) the enforcement of regulations on pesticides, including those related to PIC;

- c) regional networks of institutions, focal points, information exchange systems, etc.;

- d) more effective institution coordination through multidisciplinary agreements and discussions of the application of the code of conduct on pesticides and PIC procedures for better pesticide management in general;

- e) specifically for PIC, a better system of control of imports;

- f) trained technical staff at all levels.

**Table 1.** - Strategy for the implementation of PIC

Level	Basic strategy	Main activities
Global	Programme development and support	Policy guidance Preparation of technical materials Coordination of responses Development of database and information system Development of training programme
Regional and subregional	Field coordination and monitoring	Coordination of country efforts in information and expertise sharing Monitoring progress of PIC implementation Testing of training modules Training of trainers
National	Country level operation of PIC	Strengthening infrastructure Policy formulation Submission of responses Enforcement of PIC decisions Monitoring and information dissemination

**Table 2.** - International framework for the implementation of PIC

Level	Basic strategy	Key institutions
Global	Programme development and support	FAO/UNEP Joint Programme on Prior Informed Consent UNEP/IRPTC Others: WHO, ILO, UNITAR, OECD, NGOs Programmes on strengthening government capabilities to implement PIC procedures
Regional and subregional	Field coordination and monitoring	Programmes on strengthening government capabilities to implement PIC procedures Regional or sub-regional network(s)
National	Country level	Project focal points (designated national authorities) Ministries of agriculture, environment, health, trade, industry, customs department; other concerned ministries/department National NGOs

### Concerned parties/target beneficiaries

The direct beneficiaries of all these applied strategy activities will be: national regulatory authorities responsible for the control of pesticides; designated national authorities and government personnel involved in the operation of PIC procedures; and national institutions which will have an improved legal and administrative infrastructure to appropriately control the importation and use of pesticides.

The ultimate beneficiaries will be all users of pesticides: the public in general; the environment; members of the concerned chemical industries by demonstrating their responsibility; and environmental groups by their continued monitoring of PIC-related problems.

Ideally, it is expected that most (if not all) participating countries will have discontinued the use of pesticides included in the PIC procedure and will have found less

hazardous alternatives. However, if they do choose to use any hazardous chemicals, they would ensure that these products are used in such a way as to safeguard the health of the users and protect the environment.

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