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Update on the Action Plan on Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHP)

Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:

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I. Background

1. Pesticides have been one of the main tools used for pest management worldwide. Today, global pesticide consumption amounts to more than four million tonnes per year (FAOSTAT, 2019) and is still on the rise. The use of pesticides, especially cases of overuse and misuse, results in significant negative impacts to health and the environment, including poisoning incidents and suicides, chronic diseases like cancers, and severe contamination of food, water and soil. It is estimated that most harms are caused by a relatively small number of pesticides, namely the highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs), which cause particular concern in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) where capacity and resources to appropriately manage exposure to highly toxic products are lacking. In contrast, most HHPs are banned in higher income countries that have robust regulatory and enforcement programmes. As such, HHPs in LMICs undermine vital health conditions and ecosystem services, for present and future generations, and jeopardize transitions to efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems and the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. In 2006, the FAO Council endorsed FAO's participation in the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), which suggested that the activities of FAO comprise pesticide risk reduction, including the progressive ban on HHPs. This request resulted in the formulation of criteria for HHPs, the inclusion of HHPs in the revised International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management endorsed by the 38th Session of the FAO Conference (June 2013), and the publication of FAO/WHO Guidelines on HHPs to help national and regional regulators design their own risk reduction process to address HHPs.

II. Support to implementation of the FAO/WHO/UNEP Initiative on HHPs

3. The longstanding international concerns about the potential impacts of HHPs have led many stakeholders to start addressing the issue, at the global, regional and national levels. FAO has addressed HHPs as a priority of its pesticide risk reduction and integrated pest management (IPM) programmes, and has already provided support to many LMICs to promote sustainable production practices and ensure safe food. Regional regulatory bodies in Southern and East Africa and in the Caribbean are developing regional strategies and risk reduction plans on HHPs. Various countries have also started phasing out HHPs¹. In addition, both the private and public sectors have supported many initiatives to reduce the use of HHPs in agriculture.

4. The SAICM stakeholders have led the way, making HHPs a priority issue within international chemicals management policies. In June 2015, the FAO Council² was informed that FAO had been invited to lead the process of developing a proposal for action on HHPs to be presented to the fourth session of the International Conference of Chemicals Management (ICCM4), which is the decision-making forum of SAICM. ICCM4 adopted a resolution³ that recognized HHPs as an "issue of concern" and called for concerted action to address HHPs. The proposed strategy to address highly hazardous pesticides in the context of the SAICM developed by FAO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) was supported during ICCM4, aiming at taking action on HHPs through awareness raising, identification of HHPs, capacity building in regulatory control as well as piloting and mainstreaming of alternatives. The resolution adopted by governments, private sector, civil society and other stakeholders at ICCM4 also welcomed the initiative of FAO, UNEP and WHO to develop modalities for international coordination on HHPs⁴.

¹ www.fao.org/pest-and-pesticide-management/pesticide-risk-reduction

² www.fao.org/3/mn849e/mn849e.pdf

³ www.saicm.org/Portals/12/documents/meetings/ICCM4/doc/K1606013_e.pdf

⁴ www.saicm.org/Portals/12/documents/meetings/ICCM4/doc/K1606013_e.pdf

5. In 2019, as part of the third meeting⁵ of the intersessional process (IP3) considering the above-mentioned proposed strategy on HHPs and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020, a sectoral meeting on agriculture agreed to implement such a strategy. The 2019 meeting of the FAO/WHO Joint Meeting on Pesticide Management (JMPM) later supported the development of a global action plan.

III. About the initiative of an action plan on HHPs

6. As a response to the request by ICCM4⁶ to UN agencies to develop the modalities of coordination and implementation of the proposed strategy on HHPs, and to meet the widely recognized need to take concerted actions on HHPs under UN agencies' leadership as long awaited by LMICs, an initial action plan on HHPs was drafted in consultation with relevant stakeholders to develop the implementation modalities of the above proposed strategy on HHPs since 2020.

7. The main goal is to reduce the harm posed by HHPs in agriculture by 2030, by setting out three objectives: (1) to mobilize and coordinate key stakeholders; (2) to promote robust, appropriate and supportive regulatory actions on HHPs; and (3) to enhance viable alternatives to HHPs by facilitating their development, introduction and access. This action plan would provide a technical framework for FAO, WHO and UNEP to respond to countries' requests and support them towards reducing harms caused by HHPs.

8. Such implementation modalities seek a holistic approach to remove policy and structural barriers to encourage moves towards safer and more sustainable approaches to pest and pesticide management. They address relevant aspects dealing with awareness raising, policy, legislation, capacity building, and incentives to alternatives, involving and training farmers. The implementation of the action plan will need engagement of all relevant stakeholders and sectors, such as: policy makers, regulatory authorities, agricultural extension services, health services and poison centres, environmental sector, farmers' organizations and networks, trade unions and agricultural workers organizations, private sector, civil society, academics, scientists, and media.

IV. The way forward

9. During 2022-23, FAO, WHO and UNEP will continue exploring the modalities for international coordination and concerted actions on HHPs. The initiative of the action plan on HHPs will be further reviewed among the three organizations to ensure its technical soundness, before a progress report on addressing HHPs with proposed concerted actions as outlined in the draft action plan could be submitted to ICCM5 in autumn 2023. FAO Members will be kept regularly informed of further developments. The outcomes and the way forward of ICCM5 will be also reported to FAO, WHO and UNEP in due course.

10. Responding to global concerns and international attention and momentum on HHPs will remain a key priority for FAO. Based on a longstanding mandate, FAO will continue its technical assistance on HHPs with countries that seek support, in close cooperation with UNEP and WHO.

⁵ www.saicm.org/Portals/12/documents/meetings/IP3/Docs/SAICM_IP3_12_Rev_1_Meeting_Report.pdf

⁶ www.saicm.org/Portals/12/documents/meetings/ICCM4/doc/K1502177%20SAICM-ICCM4-8-e.pdf