ISSN: 2651-6551

INFORMING POLICY AND PRACTICE

*Policy Brief Series No. 2023-11*

# Inputs in Regulating Communication Strategies of Pesticide Companies in the Province of Benguet

*by Christine Grace Sidchogan - Fuchigami*

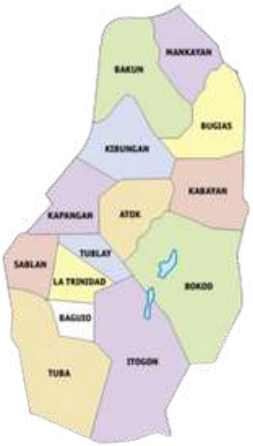
## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Farmers' use of chemical inputs in their farms are influenced by the marketing strategies employed by pesticide companies.**
- **As a result of effective marketing strategies, farmers are heavily dependent on chemical inputs as they till their farms.**
- **There remains to be information gap among the farmers when it comes to their awareness on responsible and safe use of chemical inputs.**
- **There is a need to regulate the communication strategies employed by pesticide companies to ensure that farmers are getting sufficient information about chemical inputs, especially when it comes to the farmers' safety.**
- **Ethical concerns on the marketing strategies of pesticide companies should be regulated by concerned agencies, such as LGUs and the FPA.**

## INTRODUCTION

**Communication is ideally tailored to the information needs of audiences as a process of informing and empowering people in multi-faceted strategies. In effect, the audience gets to effectively participate more; thus, facilitating both individual level and societal level changes. However, communication strategies do not always come in desirable package, especially when it is business-driven.**

Benguet has been supplying the demand for highland vegetables in the country. For decades, the countless numbers of farmers made the province a highland vegetable magnate. In effect, most farmers resorted to pesticides-use to catch up with the overwhelming demand. This is further influenced by several communication strategies applied by chemical companies to increase pesticide demand. With this warped purpose, communication strategies have become one-sided and highly persuasive for-profit motives.




The research took off from understanding how the communication strategies are planned and implemented. It validated the earlier claims that when pesticide companies communicate with farmers, their main motivation is to increase market demand for the pesticide companies. From here, the influences of these communication strategies were identified in particular attitude components of farmers. Recognizing the environmental, health, and safety risks of using chemical inputs, the farmers' welfare should be a priority. Therefore, their right to sufficient information should be upheld. Inputs from this study can be used to modify existing guidelines to enhance regulations on chemical inputs usage.

# METHODOLOGY

***Design.*** The research design is exploratory-descriptive. It employed first-hand information data gathering with key informants; and retrieval of secondary documents from concerned offices/organizations.

***Data gathering technique.*** The study employed data triangulation. The study used Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) for all of the objectives since the instrument required extensive dialogue. To further validate the communication strategies, described by individual respondents, several Focus Group Discussions were done with farmers. The FGDs were done in the areas of the study in order to acquire contextualized responses. The study also used the ocular survey of information materials used by pesticide companies and subjected these to content analysis to identify the patterns, themes or biases of message.

***Respondents and sampling.*** The study covered 46 Benguet farmers and are farming farmers for not less than 5 years, are using pesticides on their farm; have attended at least three communication activities implemented by pesticide companies, and have been exposed to any of the information materials about pesticides.

Further, LGU representatives were interviewed. Among them are the Municipal Agriculture Officers (MAO), and the the heads and members of the Committee in Agriculture under the Sangguniang Bayan Office. Company representatives or farm technicians were also included as respondents. Further, farm supply owners were also interviewed to further acquire details.

***Location.*** The areas of the study were in selected Barangays of Atok, Benguet; and Buguias, Benguet. These were chosen since these are top two municipalities with widest farming areas.

***Data Analysis.*** Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the quantitative data, and was presented in a descriptive manner, backed up by tables and percentages. The qualitative data was thematically analyzed.

# FINDINGS

## Communication strategies employed by pesticide companies in marketing their products and services

**SOURCES**

Planning/Conceptualization:
- People under the Promotions Division* plan for the communication strategies to be used

Promotion:
- People (technicians) are mobilized to use the identified channels in order to increase product demand

**MESSAGES**

1. Product promotion/presentation
2. Demand creation
3. Information drive

**CHANNELS**

1. Mass/Popular media (print, radio and TV)
2. Interpersonal media (farmers' meetings, demo-showcase to establish "farmer leaders", stewardship trainings)
3. 'Farmer Leaders' who are expected to emanate ripple effect to other farmers

**RECEIVERS**

1. Farmers
2. Other groups (LGU, Health workers, farm supply owners)

*Sources* are the employed agriculture technicians of pesticide companies. They personally sell to farmers, conduct face-to-face promotional activities on-site, and disseminate print materials.

*Messages* are generally biased in favor of the chemical inputs sold by the companies because the content are intended for profit-generation. Specific topics recalled by farmers are the benefits of using chemical inputs in farming, types of chemicals, mixing and application of pesticides, and classification of pesticides based on hazard and toxicity level. Less is allotted for the risks and health hazards of pesticide use.

These *tri-media (TV, radio, print)* are used in disseminating information about the pesticide products. Information drives are done through face-to-face communication activities. Mediated communication such as placards are posted in farms, along the road or walkways, and in public bulletin boards. They also support 'farmer leaders' who would conduct farm trials and would promote the products afterwards.

The *primary audiences* are the farmers who are expected to buy the products; and farm supply owners that are expected to promote the products. Clearly, these are indicators of profit-oriented motive.

## Influences of Communication Strategies to the Decision-Making of Farmers

- Despite high price of pesticides, farmers feel positively confident in farming when they use chemicals — 52.2%
- Positively confident in using chemical inputs in their farms — 60.9%
- Feel more knowledgeable after attending promotional activities conducted by pesticide companies — 52.2%
- Farmers would buy the brands of pesticides that were promoted by technicians — 82.60%
- Farmers immediately ask for pesticides to use when problems occur in their farms — 54.34%
- Farmers would use chemical inputs when diseases or pests appear on their crops — 82.60%
- Farmers would base their decisions on the recommendations of technicians and would follow these — 60.9%

## Unsafe Practices in Applying Chemical Inputs to their Farms

- Farmers rarely familiarize themselves with hazard symbols (skull for poisonous, flame for flammable) — 89.65%
- Farmers rarely familiarize themselves with warning symbols (triangle for caution, diamond for warning, octagon for danger) — 86.95%
- Farmers seldomly consider the color symbols (green for lightly toxic, blue for moderately toxic, yellow for very toxic, red for extremely toxic) — 86.95%
- When spraying pesticides, only 26.08% use gloves; 6.52% use eyewear protection; and 30.43% use mask when spraying.
- 84.78% store the pesticides away from children's reach or in locked cabinets (80.43%); and 86.95% teach children that pesticides are poisonous and these should not be touched.
- Farmers would buy even the banned and illegally sold pesticides — 65.21%
- Farmers rarely read and understand the information (hazards and instructions) found on pesticide labels — 56.52%
- Farmers rely on their own farm trials — 76.08%
- Farmers use cocktailing (mixing of different strong pesticides, usually in the red label category) — 67.39%
- Farmers rarely follow the prescribed directions for use indicated in the labels of pesticides — 84.78%

# Inputs in Regulating Communication Strategies of Pesticide Companies in the Province of Benguet

## CALL TO ACTION

- ✓ There is a need to regulate how companies communicate their products to ensure that farmers are well-informed of both the advantages and disadvantages of using chemical inputs in their farms. Messages should be regulated to minimize skewing in favor of promoting chemical inputs only.
- ✓ As part of the social responsibilities of pesticide companies, guidelines in using chemical inputs responsibly and safely should be part of their information drive. There is a need to revise the content to balance the messages presented, and not just in favor of their profit intentions.
- ✓ There is a need to develop and implement a holistic risk communication program that would cater to the information needs of farmers in responsible farming. Concerned organizations, and SUC initiatives on responsible use of pesticides should help address information and behavioral gaps among farmers.
- ✓ There is a heightened need to expand efforts in introducing good agriculture practices and even organic agriculture to farmers to lessen their significant dependence to chemicals.

## MAJOR REFERENCES

**Albades, Marichel D. 2013.** A Data Entry on the Farming Practices of Buguias, Benguet Vegetable Farmers. Unpublished Research.

**Baskoro, Ryan Wahyu and Winarto, Yunita T. 2012.** Corporate marketing strategies of pesticide companies in Indonesia. Universitas Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia. Retrieved June 28, 2015 from http://ricehoppers.net/2012/06/corporate-marketing-strategies-of-pesticide-companies-in-indonesia/

**Batani, R., Anongos, S., Gapasin, M., De Guzman, R., Listino, B., Sa-ao, B., Sagandoy, T. & Taag, G. (2012).** Pansig'dan: Promoting Well-being in an agricultural community in Northern Luzon, Philippines. Understanding suicide in the context of cash crop farming. Benguet State University

**Cheng, Charles L. (1994).** Pesticides: Its Hazardous Effects on the Benguet Farmers and the Environment. Baguio City: Unique Printing Press.

**Croplife, 2011.** Proper Use and Handling of Pesticides and Container Management (A Study on Knowledge, Attitude and Practices among Benguet farmers). Unpublished Research

**Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).** n.d. Agricultural and Food Marketing Management. Retrieved from http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/w3240e/w3240e10.htm

**Rother, H-A. 2011.** Challenges in Pesticide Risk Communication. School of Public Health and Family Medicine, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa. Elsevier B.V.

## ABOUT THE MATERIAL

Informing Policy and Practice is published quarterly by the Institute of Social Research and Development and R & E Publications Office of Benguet State University. It synthesizes findings from research and development activities, or presents results of quick survey and opinion poll on social, economic, and policy issues and concerns affecting the Cordillera region. It also distills the key messages and provides recommendations for the information and consideration of relevant stakeholders and policymakers.

**Institute of Social Research and Development**
**Research and Extension Publications Office**
Benguet State University
2601 La Trinidad, Benguet, Philippines
em@il Address: isrd@bsu.edu.ph | repo@bsu.edu.ph
Telephone/ Fax: +63 (074) 422-1877


**Editors:** Christita P. Galagal, Karen O. Laking | **Editorial Adviser:** Gigy G. Banes, Cheryll C. Launio | **Layout and Graphics:** Raiah Ruth S. Batani

*Published by the Institute of Social Research and Development, Benguet State University | Distributed by the Research and Extension Publication Office, Benguet State University*

## Influences of Communication Strategies to the Decision-Making of Farmers

The influences were measured specifically in terms of attitudes of farmers. How the farming households think and feel towards particular instances involving the promoted goods (pesticides) of companies were measured. The highlight findings are:

- Despite the relatively high price of pesticides, farmers feel positively confident (52.2%) in farming when they use chemicals.
- 60.9% of the respondents are positively confident in using chemical inputs to their farms; and 52.2% feel more knowledgeable after attending information activities sponsored by pesticide companies.
- When it comes to the state of dissatisfaction and satisfaction towards farming, 39.1% of them feel neutrally satisfied and very satisfied if they use chemical inputs in their farms. Such imply that the state of satisfaction towards farming is dependent on the usage of pesticides. And yet, there are some respondents (4.3%) who are feeling dissatisfied towards farming upon using pesticides.
- As to the feeling of inadequacy and being equipped, 45.7% of the respondents are feeling neither inadequate nor equipped. Further, 43.5% of them are positively satisfied; and 47.88% positively felt that their income has improved when they used pesticides.
- The communication strategies are effective in creating the attitude of pesticide-dependence in farming, as exhibited by the attitude of farmers. However, this is an alarming result because it may also heighten the irresponsible use of chemical inputs in farms.

### Farming practices of farmers as influenced by the messages acquired in attending the communication activities of pesticide companies show that:

- 54.34% of farmers would immediately ask for pesticides to use when problems occur in their farms.
- 82.60% of farmers would use chemical inputs when diseases or pests appear on their crops.
- 89.13% of farmers would base their decisions on the recommendations of technicians and would follow these.
- 50% would also seek recommendations from technicians in farm supplies.
- 82.60% would buy the brands of pesticides that were promoted by technicians.

### Unsafe practices in applying chemical inputs to their farms:

- 65.21% of the farmers would buy even the banned and illegally sold pesticides believing that these are the 'strongest.'
- 56.52% rarely carefully read and understand the label and instructions in the use of pesticides.
- 84.78% rarely follow the prescribed directions for use indicated in the labels of pesticides because they rely more on their own farm trials (76.08%); and use cocktailing (67.39%) of different pesticides with the belief that the concoction becomes 'stronger' if more pesticides are mixed together. 80.43% of them even use pesticides that are not indicated in the labels.
- In terms of safe handling, 86.95% rarely familiarize themselves with the hazard symbols (skull for poisonous or highly toxic, and flame for flammable); 86.95% rarely familiarize themselves with the warning symbols (triangle for caution, diamond for warning, octagon for danger); and 60.86% seldomly consider the color symbols (green label for lightly toxic blue label for moderately toxic, yellow label for very toxic, red label for extremely toxic).
- When spraying pesticides, only 26.08% use gloves; 6.52% use eyewear protection; and 30.43% use mask when spraying.
- However, in terms of storage and disposal of 84.78% store the pesticides away from children's reach or in locked cabinets (80.43%); and 86.95% teach children that pesticides are poisonous and these should not be touched.