Before withdrawal from the Kenyan market in 2009, Furadan had reportedly decimated wildlife in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania and was associated with the rampant poisoning resulting in the deaths of 187 African white backed vultures (Gyps africanus) in 2004 alone, two dozen lions and a general decline by 77 per cent of vulture population in Laikipia, Kenya.

By WANJOHI KABUKURU

They are hazardous, portend grim and fatal implications and adversely affect all living things. And East Africa is still stocking them.

These are obsolete pesticides, defined as “stocked pesticides that can no longer be used for their original purpose or any other purpose and therefore require disposal.”

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that three million people are poisoned and 200,000 die each year from these pesticides. Majority of victims are vulnerable, poverty stricken populations, agricultural workers and children.

According to Pesticides Action Network (PAN) “causes are many and include banning of pesticide products after import into the country, supply of banned products to countries in the form of aid, oversupply or duplicate supply by different aid agencies, poorly packaged or labeled products and inappropriate formulations of pesticides for local use.”

East African governments are not candid about current stocks. Attempts to get this information hit a brick wall. DEA fared better with the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). According to FAO estimates, the amount of obsolete pesticides in East Africa currently stands at around 3,000 tonnes. Not a single East African Community country is free from the ignominy of these poisons.

“In Eastern Africa we estimate that there are in the region of 3,000 tonnes of obsolete pesticides. We are working in Tanzania and in discussions with Kenya and Malawi. We have pretty much completed the clean-up in Mozambique and do not have a great deal of current information from Uganda.

Rwanda has some known stocks that were buried some time ago, we have no information on Burundi,” Mark Davis, Senior Officer at FAO’s Pesticide Management, Plant Production and Protection Division, says.

Nearly half of the 3,000 tonnes are said to be amongst the dreaded persistent organic pollutants (POPs), the blacklisted ‘dirty dozen’ pesticides which remain banned worldwide. “These pesticides seriously threaten the health of both rural and urban populations, especially the poorest.”

NOXIOUS: A compound in Kitengela, Kajiado county where pesticides are deposited. The area is under tight security.
of the poor, and contribute to land 

degradation and water pollution,” 

Ethiopian scientist, Alemanyeh Wod 

ageneh warns.

FURADAN

According to the Stockholm Con 

vention there are several sites in Ke 

nya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Comoros 

that are heavily contaminated. These 

include, Kitengela, Wajir, Mandera 

(Kenya), Dire Dawa, Addis Ababa, 

Oromiya, Ethiopia, Gisenyi and 

Gikongoro in Rwanda and Anjouan, 

Moheli and Grand Comore in Com 

oros.

The problem of disposal is slow as 

most countries lack appropriate tech 

ology. Indeed there are inadequate 

waste destruction facilities in the 

region today as these countries lack 

adequate high-temperature inciner 

ators. At the moment the cost of incin 

erating obsolete pesticides stands at 

US $3500 per tonne.

DEA visited the Kitengela site in Ka 

jiado County south of Nairobi, where 

banned, highly restricted and obso 

lete pesticides are officially stored. 

The store was built in 1967. A study 

conducted in 2005 under the auspices 

of International Persistent Organic 

Pesticides (IPEP) project found the site 

and the vicinity to be highly contami 

nated. Among the pesticides stored 

included Aldrin, Dieldrin Heptachlor, 

Endrin and the now famous Furadan.

For decades now the US agro 

chemical giant Farm Machinery 

Company (FMC) has been knowingly 

exporting for sale a highly restricted 

chemical to the East African Contin 

ity (EAC) block countries of Ken 

ya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and 

Burundi.

The chemical trading as Furadan 

but well known scientifically as carbo 

funar was on sale in Kenya until late 

2009. It is imported in Kenya as a 

'seed dressing agent for control of soil 

dwelling and foliar feeding insects' by 

FMC's local distributor, Juanco Group. 

Furadan is both an insecticide and 

nematicide and at the centre of a bitter 

row pitting environmental conserva 

tionists on the one side against agro 

chemical traders and the government 

on the other.

There are two forms of the pesti 

cide, granular and liquid. The granular 

form was phased out in the US by 

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 

in 1991.

Indeed the Furadan saga has just 

revealed the dirty dealings of western 

chemical giants with complicity of lo 

cal merchants and civil servants who 

use Africa as a dumping ground for 

banned, restricted and obsolete pesti 

cides in Africa.

Before it was withdrawn from the 

Kenyan market in 2009 the granu 

lar Furadan, which was retailing for 

$1.25, had reportedly decimated 

wildlife in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. 

Furadan has been associated with the 

rampant poisoning resulting in the 

deaths of 187 African white backed 

vultures (Gyps africanus) in 2004 

alone, other raptors, two dozen lions 

and a general decline by 77 per cent of 

vulture population in Laikipia, Kenya. 

There were reports of deaths of cam 

els, hyenas, lions and hippos.

"If Furadan is not safe enough 

for use in America, then it's not safe 

enough for us in Africa," renowned 

conservationist, Dr Richard Leakey, 

remarked.

DANGEROUS

Though the granular carbofuran was 

phased out in 1991 in the US it 

found its way to East Africa as Fura 

dan and was only withdrawn after 

complaints from conservationists and 

farmers, according to the Kenya pes 

ticide regulator the Pesticide Control 

and Produce Board (PCPB), a statu 

tory state corporation in the Ministry 

of Agriculture, carbofuran (the main 

ingredient of Furadan) which was reg 


Questions arise. Why did PCPB 

allow the importation of a highly re 

stricted chemical after it had been 

phased out in the country of origin 

and banned in Canada and EU?

If it was phased out in 1991 why 

was it on sale up to 2009? What did 

PCPB stand to gain by allowing a 

dangerous chemical it had banned 

in 2004 to be sold under a new name? 

Was FMC dumping carbofuran in 

East Africa?

As we went to press these ques 

tions and a multitude of others com 

bined by incessant calls by this writer 

to PCPB, Kenya's Agriculture Secre 

tary Dr Wilson Songa and Na 

tional Environment Management Au 

thority (NEMA) Director General had 

not been answered.

Little has changed in the Kitengela 

site. In 2005 the International POP's 

Elimination Project undertook a study 

at the site. In its report titled Hotspot 

Report for a Contaminated Site: 

Kitengela Obsolete Pesticides Store in 

Kenya it revealed that respiratory 

disease, emission of an irritating pun 

gent smell, skin ailments and death 

of livestock was prevalent in the areas 

adjacent to the site.

The site still remains risky, espe 

cially with the increase of population, 

oblivious of the dangers.

While East African nations are 

yoked with the dangers of pesticides 

effect is, they are minnows in pести 

cide production. The five major pes 

ticide producing nations are Britain 

France, Germany, Switzerland and the 

US. China, India and Brazil are also 

hawking around the major players.

The waste management in Europe has a turnover of 100 milli 

on. So if East Africa is not a producer 

of pesticides how come the region is
THE REGION
EASTERN AFRICA BEAT

Saddled with obsolete pesticides? The answer is simple: Dumping.

Way back in 1977, during the United Nations Environmental Programme meeting, Kenya’s then Minister for Water Development Dr Julius Kiano thundered: “Stop using us as dumping ground. Kenya detests the use of developing countries as experimental dumping grounds for chemical products that have been banned or have not been adequately tested,” he warned.

In 1992, the then United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director, Dr Mostafa Tolba, accused the Italian mafia of dumping toxic waste in Somalia. Nobody took him seriously.

For years now such allegations of toxic waste dumping off Somalia by European companies were an open secret, but little action was taken and the allegations were treated as mere rumours. It wasn’t until the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that the truth of such allegations came to light when broken hazardous waste containers were washed up to Somali shores.

DEA travelled to Kenya’s northern most coastal island to inquire if the side effects of the dumping in Somali waters had been felt in the Kenyan islands.

“We have also heard about the dumping in Somalia and we have been very concerned. Together with our fisheries, police and marine officers we have been very keen monitoring aquatic life. So far we haven’t observed anything unusual,” Athman Dumila Mohd, the Lamu District Public Health Officer replies.

“Human beings can lie, but marine and aquatic beings cannot lie when exposed to any harmful toxic waste and poison. If the dumping is done in the ocean trust me dead fish will be floating all over the sea. They are very sensitive to ecological changes.”

This being a sensitive matter affecting the Western Indian Ocean shelf and more so fish stocks DEA poses the same questions of toxic dumping to the Seychelles-based authoritative Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Executive Secretary, Alejandro Anganuzzi.

“This is the first time that we hear this claim. In the past, we have heard claims about the relationship between piracy and illegal fishing, but not a relationship between toxic dumping and the depletion to fish stocks,” says Anganuzzi.

It seems the dumping wasn’t in the Indian Ocean but in the Somali hinterland.

The fixation with synthetic pesticides is a debatable axis for an agricultural economy such as Kenya, whose major foreign exchange earners are tea, coffee and horticulture. The pesticide industry is indeed lucrative business. According to Kenya’s Ministry of Trade Kenya imports some $50 million worth of synthetic pesticides annually. Conversely, it exports approximately 63 metric tonnes of pesticides valued at US$ 700,000 to Seychelles, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania.

PARADOX

Kenya, with its 50,000 tonnes of flowers is the largest exporter to the EU, controlling a tidy 25 per cent stake. For this, Kenya earns $300 million annually. The Ministry of Trade records further illustrate that Kenya’s horticultural industry is the second largest foreign exchange earner after tea and employs 500,000 and over 2 million people respectively. The tea, coffee and horticulture industries are the major consumers of pesticides.

Ironically, Kenya is the leading producer of a natural pesticide, pyrethrin, a broad-spectrum insecticide processed from pyrethrum dried flowers. Pyrethrum has been grown in Kenya for export for the last 70 years and 8,000 tonnes of dried flowers are produced annually.

Here is the paradox: 95 percent of all the crude pyrethrin is exported to the west (USA-60 per cent, Europe-35 per cent and Egypt and South Africa (2 per cent each). Only 1 per cent re-