

Banned Fertilizers in the EU Should Be Banned in Africa

for Obvious Reasons

Dr. Egbe-Njie Fride | Hawaing Djamo | Henri Kouam

Research Fellow, CEPI | National Coordinator, CEPI | Executive Director, CEPI

\$117M

Cameroon fertilizer imports in 2023

6

EU-banned chemicals still used in Africa

77

Pesticides banned by Kenya in 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Cameroon imported \$117.88 million worth of fertilizers in 2023 — including agrochemicals banned in Europe such as paraquat, chlorpyrifos, and neonicotinoids, which pose documented risks to human health, soil quality, and biodiversity.
- The EU's Prior Informed Consent (PIC) mechanism effectively shifts regulatory responsibility to importing states with limited enforcement capacity, creating a 'boomerang effect' — African exporters face EU border rejection of contaminated produce while the same chemicals enter freely through imports.
- Kenya, Ghana, and Uganda have taken concrete steps to ban or restrict these substances. Cameroon has taken limited action. Regional harmonisation and access to safer, affordable alternatives are essential for a coherent continental response.



Dr. Egbe-Njie Fride
Research Fellow, CEPI



Hawaing Djamo
National Coordinator, CEPI



Henri Kouam
Executive Director, CEPI

Introduction

Fertilizers are essential to agriculture for regenerating soils and improving dangerously low crop yields that threaten food security across Africa. By increasing agricultural productivity, fertilizers help prevent further environmental degradation and deforestation while boosting rural incomes. Despite these benefits, certain agrochemicals also exacerbate land pollution and impact public health.

Cameroon imported \$117.88 million worth of fertilizers in 2023 — yet this figure includes fertilizers and pesticides banned in Europe that continue to be imported throughout Africa. These include 1,3-dichloropropene (1,3-D), chlorpyrifos, paraquat, and neonicotinoids — substances prohibited in the EU due to their documented risks to human health, groundwater, soil ecosystems, and biodiversity.

The Boomerang Effect

The EU's Prior Informed Consent (PIC) mechanism effectively shifts regulatory responsibility for banned agrochemicals to importing states — most of which have limited enforcement capacity. The result is a 'boomerang effect': African exporters face EU border rejections of contaminated produce (such as cocoa and coffee) containing residues of the same chemicals that EU-based companies freely export to Africa. This creates a deeply unfair double standard.

Section 1: EU-Banned Agrochemicals Still Imported Across Africa

Products such as paraquat, chlorpyrifos, and neonicotinoids are associated with severe human health and environmental risks — including neurological damage, carcinogenicity, and ecosystem disruption. Despite EU restrictions, these substances continue to enter African agriculture under the Prior Informed Consent mechanism, which places the burden of regulation on importing states with limited laboratory and enforcement capacity.

Chemical / Component	Primary Use	Why Banned in EU	Key African Markets
Paraquat	Potent Herbicide	Linked to Parkinson's disease; acute toxicity; no safe threshold	Kenya, Ghana, South Africa
1,3-Dichloropropene (1,3-D)	Soil Fumigant	Groundwater contamination; suspected carcinogen	South Africa, Morocco
Cyanamide	Growth Regulator	Reproductive toxicity; harmful to eyes	South Africa (vineyards)
Chlorpyrifos	Insecticide	Child neurodevelopmental	South Africa, Egypt, Kenya

		damage; endocrine disruption	
Neonicotinoids	Seed Treatment	Mass pollinator (bee) colony collapse; ecosystem disruption	<i>Kenya, Morocco, South Africa</i>
Chlorothalonil	Fungicide	Carcinogenic; persistent water and soil contamination	<i>South Africa, Ghana</i>

The presence of these chemicals in African markets reflects a structural asymmetry in global chemical governance. While the EU has determined that these substances are too dangerous for use within its borders, it continues to permit their manufacture and export — raising fundamental questions of environmental justice and the coherence of global trade standards.

Section 2: Environmental and Health Implications

Soil Degradation

Certain pesticides — particularly paraquat and chlorothalonil — gradually destroy microorganisms essential to soil fertility. Farmers who rely on these chemicals become increasingly dependent on agrochemical inputs to maintain yields over time, creating a cycle of soil depletion that undermines long-term agricultural productivity (FAO & WHO, 2014).

Water Contamination

Substances such as 1,3-dichloropropene can contaminate groundwater and rivers. In many rural areas of Africa where communities directly use water from wells or streams, this poses a significant risk to both environmental health and local populations. The UNEP (2019) Global Chemicals Outlook II highlights that legacy chemical contamination disproportionately affects communities in low- and middle-income countries with limited water treatment infrastructure.

Biodiversity and Pollinator Collapse

Neonicotinoids are consistently linked to the decline of bees and other pollinating insects. These insects play a vital role in agriculture and in maintaining ecosystem balance — their decline directly threatens crop yields and long-term food security (PAN Europe, 2023). Africa's smallholder food systems, which depend heavily on pollinator services, are particularly vulnerable.

Human Health Impacts

In several African countries, including Ghana, these risks are exacerbated by a lack of protective equipment, training, and oversight. Many smallholder farmers use banned pesticides without adequate protection and without a full understanding of the associated risks. Chlorpyrifos, in particular, has been linked to child neurodevelopmental damage — a serious concern given the significant involvement of children in family farming across the continent (Okoffo et al., 2016; Public Eye, 2020).

Environmental Justice

The continued export of EU-banned agrochemicals to Africa is not merely a technical regulatory question — it raises fundamental issues of environmental justice. African smallholder farmers, who bear the highest exposure to these substances, have the least capacity to protect themselves and the least political leverage to change the terms of trade.

Section 3: Policy Responses from African Governments

African policymakers have begun taking concrete action to limit the importation of EU-banned agrochemicals. Four main types of policy response have emerged:

1. Targeted Bans

Several African governments have implemented outright bans on specific substances:

- Kenya: Banned 77 pesticides in 2025, including formulations containing chlorpyrifos, propineb, and toxaphene, and restricted 202 further products to specific uses (FTAO, 2026).
- Ghana: Banned 32 chemical formulations and required all pesticide importers and distributors to be approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- Uganda: Implemented strict prohibitions on 18 agrochemicals and highly hazardous pesticides to protect rural farmers from toxic exposure (Broederlijk Delen, 2026).

2. Contamination Thresholds and MRL Standards

Where full bans are not in place, some governments implement minimum residue thresholds (MRLs) and heavy metal standards. Ghana's Plant and Fertilizers Act (2010, Act 803) requires strict threshold testing on imported inorganic fertilizers for cadmium and other heavy metals — a direct response to the risk of chemical contamination of agricultural soils.

3. Country-of-Origin Reciprocity Regulations

Some African governments are moving toward regulations that limit the import and registration of pesticides that are no longer approved in the manufacturing nation. Kenya's Pest Control Products Board (PCPB) routinely considers whether a product is still approved in its home country and in major regulatory jurisdictions such as Australia, Canada, the EU, and the US — effectively restricting substances banned by multilateral environmental treaties.

4. Regional Harmonisation Initiatives

The West African Pesticide Registration Committee (WAPRC), created under ECOWAS Regulation C/REG.3/05/2008, aims to streamline regulatory and registration systems for pesticides across the ECOWAS and Sahel regions. These regional guidelines help reduce regulatory inconsistencies that allow banned chemicals to enter one nation through neighbouring countries with weaker border controls (ECOWAS, 2008).

Cameroon's Limited Response

Cameroon has taken limited action. The most significant measure was the withdrawal of authorisation for certain chemical inputs containing metalaxyl — implemented after the EU rejected Cameroonian cocoa shipments for exceeding EU chemical residue thresholds. This reactive, export-driven approach falls short of a comprehensive domestic protection framework and leaves Cameroonian farmers and consumers exposed.

Effectiveness Constraints

Despite these measures, overall effectiveness remains heavily constrained across Africa by: poorly controlled land borders that allow restricted chemicals to enter through third countries; the absence of testing laboratories at most entry ports; and the lack of low-risk, affordable, and sustainable organic alternatives for smallholder farmers who depend on these inputs for productivity.

Policy Recommendations

To protect Cameroonian and African farmers, consumers, and ecosystems from the risks of EU-banned agrochemicals, CEPI recommends the following priority interventions:

1. Accelerate the Phase-Out of EU-Banned Agrochemicals

Progressively ban substances prohibited internationally and establish mandatory fertilizer and pesticide registration schemes before approval for local use. Cameroon should move beyond reactive, export-driven bans and develop a proactive national agrochemical regulatory framework aligned with WHO and FAO guidelines.

2. Reinforce Regional Harmonisation of Regulations

Isolated national actions are insufficient against transboundary risks. Cameroon should actively participate in ECOWAS and ECCAS regional harmonisation initiatives to create a unified regulatory approach. A common approved-substance registry and shared border monitoring system would improve consistency, enforcement, and protection of shared ecosystems.

3. Ensure Access to Safer and Affordable Alternatives

Provide targeted subsidies, investment in knowledge systems, and infrastructure for the local production of organic fertilizers. Reducing import dependence requires making safer alternatives economically viable for smallholder farmers — not simply removing the dangerous ones without a replacement.

4. Sensitise Farmers on Safe Handling and Banned Substances

Train smallholder farmers on the safe use of agrochemicals and the risks of banned substances through education programs embedded in MIDEPECAM's extension services. Ensure protective equipment is accessible and affordable, and include women farmers who are disproportionately exposed to pesticide risks.

5. Improve Transparency — Publish Updated Banned Substance Lists

Publish and maintain accessible, updated lists of banned and restricted chemicals in French and English — with clear explanations of the reasons for each ban. Work with MINADER and the Ministry of Public Health to ensure lists are communicated to agricultural cooperatives, extension workers, and market vendors.

Conclusion

Fertilizers and agrochemicals play an important role in improving agricultural productivity in Africa. However, when some of these products are deemed too dangerous for use in Europe — and when their continued use in Africa results in contaminated exports that are then rejected at EU borders — it is no longer defensible to treat this as an acceptable double standard.

Protecting agricultural yields should not come at the expense of public health, soil quality, or water resources. African governments, including Cameroon, must strengthen regulations while supporting farmers in transitioning to safer, more accessible, and sustainable alternatives. Food security and environmental protection must go hand in hand.

If a chemical is too dangerous for a farmer in France, it is too dangerous for a farmer in Cameroon. Regulatory double standards in agrochemical trade are not just a trade justice issue — they are a public health emergency.

Reference List

- Broederlijk Delen. (2026). Victory: Uganda bans 18 toxic pesticides. <https://broederlijkdelen.be>
- ECOWAS. (2008). Regulation C/REG.3/05/2008 on Harmonization of the Rules Governing Pesticides Registration in the ECOWAS Region. FAOLEX. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/eco175103E.pdf>
- FTAO. (2026). Feasibility of elimination of EU-forbidden pesticides in smallholder farms in Africa: Case studies from Kenya and Ghana. Fair Trade Advocacy Office.
- FAO & WHO. (2014). International code of conduct on pesticide management. <https://www.fao.org/3/i3604e/i3604e.pdf>
- Okoffo, E. D., Mensah, M., & Fosu-Mensah, B. Y. (2016). Pesticide exposure and the use of personal protective equipment by cocoa farmers in Ghana. *Environmental Systems Research*, 5(1), 17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40068-016-0068-z>
- PAN Europe. (2023). Neonicotinoids and biodiversity collapse. <https://www.pan-europe.info/issues/neonicotinoids>

- Public Eye. (2020). Highly hazardous pesticides from Switzerland: Exports to developing countries. <https://www.publiceye.ch>
- UNEP. (2019). Global chemicals outlook II: From legacies to innovative solutions. <https://www.unep.org>

About the Authors



Dr. Egbe-Njie Fride

Research Fellow, Cameroon Economic Policy Institute (CEPI)

Dr. Egbe-Njie Fride is a Research Fellow at CEPI specializing in trade policy, environmental governance, and agricultural value chains in Central Africa. She has contributed to CEPI briefs on fisheries subsidies, palm oil policy, AfCFTA implementation, and food security.



Hawaing Djamo

National Coordinator & Policy Analyst, Cameroon Economic Policy Institute (CEPI)

Hawaing Djamo is the National Coordinator at CEPI, responsible for programme coordination, stakeholder engagement, and policy outreach. He co-authored CEPI's policy briefs on fisheries subsidies, palm oil development, and AfCFTA trade costs.



Henri Kouam

Founder & Executive Director, Cameroon Economic Policy Institute (CEPI)

Henri Kouam is the Founder of CEPI at the Henri Kouam Foundation. He is a contributor to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), was an Economic Expert for NATO, and has consulted for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

About the Cameroon Economic Policy Institute (CEPI)

CEPI is a think tank at the Henri Kouam Foundation improving economic development through fact-based research, policy advocacy, and events. CEPI has successfully led two verifiable policy reforms.

www.camepi.org | info@camepi.org | Yaoundé, Cameroon | © 2026 CEPI. All rights reserved.