



Learning into action:

Training community groups to better protect children from pesticides

This brief presents two training modules developed and tested by ICI in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana to promote practices that better protect children from pesticide risks in cocoa-growing communities. The document outlines good practices for delivering effective training and offers practical recommendations to support sustainable behaviour change. While the modules were designed for the Ghanaian and Ivorian context, both the training content and the recommendations outlined in this brief can be adapted for similar settings.

Pesticides, children and cocoa

Pesticides are heavily used in cocoa-growing areas in West Africa. Children are exposed to these products not only while helping on farms but also in their everyday home environment.

For instance, children may inhale fumes from pesticides stored in homes or lingering in the air after fields have been treated. They may also come in contact with pesticide residues on protective equipment or in empty packaging. Pesticides can also harm unborn or breastfed babies if their mothers are exposed.

Even small doses of pesticides can pose serious health risks to children. Some effects may only become apparent in the long term. Consequences include impaired physical and mental development as well as an increased risk of cancer.

Training community-based groups to better protect children

Raising awareness and educating community members about the health risks associated with pesticide exposure and promoting safer practices is essential to promote positive behaviour change and protect children from pesticides.

While training on the safe use of pesticides already happens in many cocoa-growing communities, it primarily targets those who apply pesticides and does not always address children's health or exposure in non-farm settings.

To fill these gaps, ICI developed two training modules to promote practices that better protect children from pesticides in their everyday environment.

The first module is designed for adult labour groups, often known as Community Service Groups (CSG), while the second was developed for Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA), a common type of community group, often including women.

While both training programmes can be delivered independently of each other, implementing both in the same communities in parallel can reinforce their impact.



Good practice training for Community Service Groups

Adult labour groups and spraying service providers have a key role to play in protecting children from pesticide exposure. However, the agricultural training they receive does not typically cover children's vulnerability to pesticides or the different measures they can take to prevent children's exposure to pesticides before, during, and after spraying.

ICI has developed a training module for [Community Service Groups](#) to fill this gap. The module aims to increase their understanding of how children may be exposed to pesticides, offers practical measures to reduce these risks, and provides guidance on basic first aid procedures for potential exposure incidents.

By strengthening practices of Community Service Groups, which often serve as role models for other farmers, the training helps promote safer practices more broadly across the community.

The training may be relevant to other types of adult labour groups or local spraying service providers.



Behaviour change training for VSLA members

Children can be exposed to pesticides on farms, at homes and in the community. To protect them from pesticides, the whole community needs to be aware and involved, not only those who spray pesticides.

Women and caregivers are often excluded from agricultural training. To reach them, ICI has developed a behaviour change training aimed at [Village Savings and Loans Association](#) members. The module aims to strengthen participants' understanding of their role in protecting children from pesticides, raise awareness of the health risks associated with pesticides, and promote practical measures to reduce children's exposure in their daily environment.

This training may also be relevant for other community-based groups.

Good practices for delivering effective training sessions

- **Train facilitators** on pesticide risks for children, community mobilisation, and participatory awareness-raising methodologies. Consider recruiting multiple trainers, as having more than one trainer deliver the training can help reinforce messages. Access ICI's training manual on our website.
- **Understand the audience and context.** Understanding the groups' knowledge, practices, and context is key to being able to target the training to their specific needs and situation.
- **Use visual materials and local languages** to ensure the message gets across more effectively. Keep in mind that for some technical terms, there may not be a literal translation in local language, for example, toxicity or residue, and trainers may have to resort to paraphrasing. In addition, not all participants may know how to read, so visual supports are very helpful to convey key messages.
- **Use collaborative, participatory, and interactive approaches.** Engage participants through practical demonstrations, open dialogue, and activities that build on their existing knowledge and experiences. This approach not only reinforces learning and helps participants apply it in real life but also strengthens community ownership of safer pesticides practices. Encouraging participants to define a group resolution in the final training session fosters a shared sense of responsibility and increases the likelihood of lasting behaviour change.

For VSLA training

- **Encourage both partners in a couple to participate** in the behaviour change training for VSLA members. This helps ensure that both caregivers have a common understanding of health risks and agree on precautions to be implemented in their household.

How to increase impact and sustain behaviour change

To ensure long-term impact, training should be part of a broader strategy that supports communities to turn awareness into action. The measures below, drawn from community feedback following the trainings, can help the broad adoption of protective behaviours and build the conditions needed for sustained change:

- ✓ **Mobilise local actors to become ambassadors.** Train and mobilise community leaders, health professionals, including midwives, cooperative leaders, and teachers, among others, to help spread and reinforce messages. Use popular events, like football or handball matches, as opportunities for outreach.
- ✓ **Train health professionals and strengthen health protocols.** Provide training to health workers, including midwives, on pesticide risks and the identification and treatment of intoxication cases. Support the development of health protocols for managing pesticide exposure or poisoning.
- ✓ **Advocate for stronger enforcement.** Engage with local authorities to support the enforcement of existing regulations on the sale, storage, use and disposal of pesticides.
- ✓ **Offer Personal Protective Equipment to adults** who apply pesticides to ensure they are protected.
- ✓ **Provide practical alternatives** to prevent children from accompanying adults to the fields, which may include developing playgrounds or childcare solutions.
- ✓ **Establish community follow-up mechanisms.** Set up a local committee responsible for following up and ensuring good practices are kept in the community.
- ✓ **Raise awareness at the household level.** Combine the training with household awareness-raising and sessions targeted at children.
- ✓ **Use visual reminders.** Put up posters around the community to reinforce messages and promote protective practices.
- ✓ **Regularly follow up.** Visit the community to check in with VSLA and Community Service Group, reinforce messages, and identify further training or support needs.