Pesticide Use Practices and Effects on the Wetland Biodiversity of Ndop, North West Region of Cameroon

Nkwatoh Therese Ncheuveu¹,²*, Patricia Bi Asanga Faï¹,³, Martin Ngankam Tchamba⁴ and Francis Ngealekeloeh³

¹College of Technology, University of Bamenda, Cameroon. ²Catholic University of Cameroon (CATUC), Bamenda, Cameroon. ³Department of Animal Biology, Faculty of Science, University of Dschang, Cameroon. ⁴Department of Forestry, Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Science, University of Dschang, Cameroon.

Authors’ contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author NTN designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors PBAF and MNT managed the analyses of the study. Author FN managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

ABSTRACT

Aims: The aim of this study was to evaluate farmer’s pesticide use practices and their effects in the wetland of Ndop.

Study Design: A cross sectional study was carried out from January to August 2019 in Ndop, North West Region of Cameroon.

Methodology: Questionnaires were administered separately to 382 rice and 100 vegetable farmers, and descriptive statistics was used in analyzing the results. Specifically, the Chi-squared statistic was used to determine the nature of the relationship between the variables.

Results: The results showed that most of the crop fields (95.6%) lack a buffer zone since most farms were adjacent to water bodies (0 ≥farm ≥1 m). Farmers (100%) washed and rinsed
1. INTRODUCTION

Wetlands play a substantial role in ecosystem functioning and services because of their high productivity, rich species biodiversity, and contributions to global food security [1,2,3]. Across the globe, most freshwater wetland ecosystems have been transformed into crop fields to boost agricultural productivity. This wetland transformation alters their rich natural species composition and structure, though their rare and characteristic secondary species are worth protecting [1]. Generally, agricultural intensification, including pesticide usage, degrades the wetland habitats and reduces or changes their species biodiversity [4]. Globally, pesticides remain the most effective, reliable, and economical method of pest control [5]. Nevertheless, they cause undesirable effects such as; ozone depletion and biodiversity losses, as well as air, soil, and water pollution. Also, pesticides affect non-target organisms in the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems [6,7,8]. In the wetland agro-ecosystems, pesticides affect non-target organisms through undesirable exposures to contaminants in water bodies, runoffs, and spray drift [9]. Lately, the chances of pesticide contamination in the Ndop floodplain of Cameroon are very high since crop cultivation has become very intensive to meet the urban food demands. Moreover, the government now subsidizes or provides pesticides to farmers who have never undergone official training on pesticide use practices [10]. These factors have encouraged the frequent and indiscriminate use of pesticides, resulting in toxic concentrations in the fragile wetland ecosystem of Ndop. Several studies in Cameroon have explored the farmer’s pesticide use practice, knowledge or perception and the human and environmental effects of pesticides [11,12,13]. Such comprehensive information can assist in designing a pesticide post-registration management plan for risk reduction, sustainability, and biodiversity conservation. However, limited research has been done on the environmental effects of pesticides on the Ndop paddy wetland – the second-largest rice-producing scheme in the country. This study evaluated pesticide use practices and impacts in the wetland ecosystem of Ndop, North West Region of Cameroon.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Site

The Ndop floodplain in the North West Region of Cameroon (Fig. 1) is an inter-basin (13000ha) that stretches from latitudes 5°42’ and 6°10’N to longitudes 10°11’ and 10°40’E [14]. The floodplain lies between West of Mt. Bamboutous, Northwest of Mt. Sabga, North of Mt. Oku, the Northeast of Wainamah hills and East of the Mbam Massif [15]. These mountains discharge numerous rivers and streams that flow to recharge the Baminjim dam, giving the wetland, characteristics that favour crop production throughout the year [14]. The Ndop floodplain has two seasons - short dry season (from mid-November to mid-Match), and a long rainy season (from mid-March to mid-November). The mean annual temperature is 26°C, and rainfall is the subequatorial monsoon type with an annual average of between 2,500 and 3,000 mm per year and a mean value of 1,540 mm/year [16]. The floodplain has about 13,123 rice farmers, grouped under 188 Common Initiative Groups (CIGs) [3]. Apart from agriculture, fishing is one of the main activities in the paddy fields, and Clarias gariepinus (catfish) and Oreochromis niloticus (tilapia) are the main fish species harvested from the wetland.
2.2 Determination of Sample Size

The sample size of rice farmers was determined using the following formula [17]:

$$n = \frac{(Z^2 \times p \times q \times N)}{e^2(N - 1) + Z^2 \times p \times q}$$

Where; \(n\) = Sample size; \(Z\) = Std Variate at a given confidence limit (1.96 at 95%); \(p\) = Sample proportion = 0.5; \(q = (1 - p) = 0.5\); \(N\) = Size of population = 13,12; \(e\) = Maximum error = 0.05.

The sample size of vegetable farmers was arbitrarily chosen, since there was no reliable estimate for the number of vegetable farmers, as farmers were not grouped into CIGs.

2.3 Data Collection

A cross-sectional study was conducted from January to August 2019 in the Ndop wetland. The sampling technique was convenient, and about 382 rice and 100 vegetable farmers were interviewed separately since the two groups of farmers were not mutually exclusive. The questionnaires were semi-structured with open-and-close-ended questions, with four categories of questions; (i) household socio-economic and farm characteristics of respondent farmers (i.e., age, sex, educational background, size of the farm under cultivation, stakeholders, etc.); (ii) pesticide use practices and management (i.e., types of pesticide, application scheme, and disposal pesticide containers, etc.) iii) perception and observable effects of pesticides on the environment (the effect of pesticides on non-target organisms soil, water, and air, etc.) and iv) fishing in the Ndop wetland.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data obtained from questionnaires were input in the IBM-SPSS for Windows version 21.0. Summary statistic was used to present the means (± standard deviation) and frequency distributions of pesticide use and perceptions among farmers. The chi-squared test statistics \(\chi^2\), at a statistically significant value \(p\)-value = 0.05, was used to determine associations between variables such as; farmers’ training and either knowledge of pesticides or management practices, or awareness of the effects of pesticides on human health and the environment etc.
3. RESULTS

3.1 Farmers’ Demographic Information

About 56.5% of rice farmers were males and, 43.5% were females, while almost all vegetable farmers (97%) were males since vegetable farming is a labour intensive activity. Most rice and vegetable producing farmers were within the age range of labor force (26-45 years) (Fig. 2). Vegetable farming is a recent activity relative to rice farming. Paddy farming was the main livelihood activity for more than 90% of the farmers, and 69.6% of the farmers had been farming for 1-15 years.

Most farmers had attained only the primary education and, few farmers have reached the university level of education (Fig. 3). The mean number of years of rice farming experience was 13.48 ± 9.60 years and, the maximum was 40 years, while the mean number of years of vegetable farming experience was 3.15 (± 1.40 years) and the maximum was 15 years. The mean-plot size owned by rice farmers was 0.83 ± 0.77 ha with the maximum being 6 ha, while the mean farm size owned by vegetable farmers was 0.92 ± 0.75 ha with the maximum being 4 ha. Most rice farmers (68.8%) owned a minimum of 0.8 ha, while 62.4% of vegetable farmers owned 0.5 -1 ha of the vegetable farm. The rice fields were along the banks of water channels/streams (0≥paddy fields≥ 1 m) while most vegetable farms (90.5%) were 0.5-5 m away from water bodies during the dry season.

![Fig. 2. Age of rice and vegetable producing farmers in Ndop](image)

![Fig. 3. Level of education of rice and vegetable producing farmers in Ndop](image)
Most rice farmers (67.6%) have used pesticides for 3-6 years, and the mean duration of pesticide use was 4.06 years ± 2.03 SD and the maximum number of years of pesticide use was 20 years. Comparatively, most vegetable farmers (50.3%) have used pesticides for 5-8 years and the average number of years of pesticide use was 6.5 years ±1.40 SD (Fig. 4). Most rice farmers (94.5%) and vegetable farmers (71.3%) had poor knowledge of pesticide handling.

3.2 Pesticide Stakeholders and Source of Information on Pesticides

Pesticide stakeholders in the Ndop floodplain included: the government through the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINDER) and the Upper Nun Development Authority (UNVDA) - an agro-industrial corporation that supervises rice farmers; non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local pesticide vendors; farmers; bystanders and the inhabitants. The government (UNVDA) subsidized or provided pesticides to rice farmers on a credit basis. Farmers were the main pesticide stakeholders because they were the end-users who frequently uses pesticides to control insect pests and diseases of crops. The local pesticide vendors (13 vendors) have never undergone official training on pesticide management practices. Most rice farmers (81.6 %) obtained information on pesticide selection from their friends and neighbours, while some vegetable farmers (65.3 %) relied on their experience to select the pesticide. Likewise, most paddy farmers (76%) and vegetable farmers (57.5%) mostly obtained information on doses of pesticides from other farmers, their friends and pesticide dealers, who have no clear idea on the doses of pesticides application for the control of insect pests and diseases.

3.3 Types of Pesticides Used by Farmers

Farmers in the study area are now using 37 pesticide formulations containing 17 active ingredients (a.i.): three herbicides, seven fungicides, and seven insecticides (Table 1) during rice and vegetable production in the wetland. Based on the WHO classification of chemical hazards, the pesticides used were class II and III pesticides (Table 1). Glyphosate was present in seven formulations, and almost every farmer (93.2%) used glyphosate during crop field preparation. Rice farmers (100%) used only herbicides during cultivation. Paddy farmers (100%) used 2, 4-D Amine formulations (herbextra and decaplant) to control or kill broadleaf weed during rice cultivation. Comparatively, vegetable farmers (100%) used herbicides, fungicides, and insecticides during vegetable cultivation. Mancozeb (45.7%) and cypermethrin (78.5%) were the most frequently used fungicides and insecticides formulations during vegetable production.

3.4 Pesticide Application Scheme

All herbicides were applied twice a year at intervals of 180 days, during rice cultivation. During the vegetable growing seasons, fungicides and insecticides were applied 16 times, at an average time interval of 5 days (Table 2). Most farmers (60.5 %) never respected the respective standard recommended doses of pesticides. Rice farmers (98.7%) preferred individual/single herbicides application, while vegetable farmers (95%) preferred a combined application of fungicides and insecticides. Glyphosate, 2, 4 D—anime and chlorothalonil, scored the highest single-application dose, respectively (Table 2). Emamectine benzoate, fipronil, imidacloprid, metalaxyl, and paraquat dichloride had lower respective recommended doses. Farmers applied the higher concentration of most pesticides (over 70.58%). For instance, farmers doubled the single application doses of chlorothalonil, carbendazim, and lambda-cyhalothrin. Cypermethrin was applied to vegetables four times in recommended doses.

3.5 Disposal of Empty Containers and Excesses

A majority of the farmers (71.3%) buried, burnt, or threw empty pesticide containers in open fields (farms, streams, and bushes) (Fig. 5). One-fifth of the farmers burnt pesticide containers. However, some farmers disposed of the empty pesticide containers in trash houses constructed by UNVDA, and others reused the empty pesticide containers to drink water, palm wine, or to keep salt, sugar, and seasoning cube ("maggi") (Fig. 3). All farmers (100%) washed and rinsed Knapsacks in the flooded fields, water canals, nearby streams, or rivers. Farmers (100 %) either repeatedly sprayed their paddy fields with pesticide leftovers or threw pesticide leftovers in water bodies and bushes.
Table 1. Types of pesticides used by rice and vegetable producing farmers in the Ndop floodplains

| S/N | Trade name of pesticides | Chemical group | Active ingredient (s) (a.i) | WHO classification of pesticides by hazard* |
|-----|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
|     |                          | Fungicides     |                             |                                             |
| 1   | Agri-Fos 400 SL          | Potassium Phosphite |                             | III                                         |
| 2   | Beau champ 72 % WP       | Copper oxide; 600 g/kg |                             | III                                         |
| 3   | Platineb 80 WP           | Maneb 800 g/kg |                             | III                                         |
| 4   | Cotzeb 80 WP             | Mancozeb 800 g/kg |                             | III                                         |
| 5   | Mancostar 80 WP          | Mancozeb 800 g/kg |                             | III                                         |
| 6   | Mancozan Bleu            | Mancozeb 800 g/kg |                             | III                                         |
| 7   | PENnocezob 80 WP         | Mancozeb 800 g/kg |                             | III                                         |
| 8   | Ivory 80 WP              | Dithiocarbamate |                             | III                                         |
| 9   | Monchamp 720 WP          | Mancozeb 60 %+ | Metalaxyl 12 % | III                                         |
| 10  | Ridomil gold Plus 66 WP  | Phenylamide/Inorganic | Metalaxyl; 120 g/kg | III                                         |
| 11  | Banko plus               | Chlorothalonil 550 g/l + Carboendazime 100 g/l | Chlorothalonil 720 g/l | III                                         |
| 12  | Balear 720 SC            | Herbicides     |                             |                                             |
| 13  | Herbextra                | 2, 4-D Amine Salts 720 g/l | Glyphosate 75.7 %W/W | II                                          |
| 14  | Decaplant 720            | 2, 4-D Amine Salts 720 g/l | Glyphosate 480 g/l | II                                          |
| 15  | Gramoxone                | Paraquat dichloride 200 g/l | Glyphosate 360 g/l | II                                          |
| 16  | Clean farm               | Glyphosate acid 680 g/kg | Glyphosate 360 g/l | II                                          |
| 17  | Glycot                   | Glyphosate 360 g/l | Glyphosate 360 g/l | II                                          |
| 18  | Glyphader                | 360 g/l glyphosate | Glyphosate 360 g/l | II                                          |
| 19  | Finish                   | 360 g/l glyphosate | Glyphosate 360 g/l | II                                          |
| 20  | Plantop                  | 360 g/l glyphosate | Glyphosate 360 g/l | II                                          |
| 21  | Quick clear              | 360 g/l glyphosate | Glyphosate 360 g/l | II                                          |
| 22  | Roundup 360 SL           | Glyphosate 360 g/l | Glyphosate 360 g/l | II                                          |
|     |                          | Insecticides    |                             |                                             |
| 23  | Caiman B 50 Wg           | Avermectin     | Emamectine benzoate 50 g/kg | III                                         |
| 24  | Capsidor 50 SC           | Fipronil 50 g/l | Cypermethrin 360 g/l | II                                          |
| 25  | Cigogne 360 EC           | Cypermethrin 12 g/l | Cypermethrin 10 % | II                                          |
| 26  | Cigogne 50 EC            | Cypermethrin 50 g/l | Cypermethrin 50 g/l | II                                          |
| 27  | Cypercot                 | Cypermethrin 50 g/l | Cypermethrin 50 g/l | II                                          |
| 28  | Cypercal 50 EC           | Cypermethrin 50 g/l | Cypermethrin 50 g/l | II                                          |
| 29  | Cyperplant 50 EC         | Cypermethrin 50 g/l | Cypermethrin 50 g/l | II                                          |
| 30  | K-Optimal                | Lambda-Cyhalothrin 15 g/l + Acetamiprid 20 g/l | Lambda-Cyhalothrin 15 g/l | II                                          |
| S/N | Trade name of pesticides | Chemical group | Active ingredient(s) (a.i) | WHO classification of pesticides by hazard* |
|-----|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 31  | Killam 15 EC             | Pyrethroids    | Lambda-Cyhalothrin 15 g/l   | III                                         |
| 32  | Pyriforce                | Organophosphorus | Chlorpyrifos ethyl 600 g/l | II                                          |
| 33  | Epervier 220 EC          | Organophosphorus/Pyrethroids | Chlorpyriphos-ethyl 200 g/l + Cypermethrin 20 g/l | II                                          |
| 34  | Kunfu 50 EC              | Neonicotinoid/Pyrethroids | Imidacloprid 10 g/l + Cypermethrin 40 g | II                                          |
| 35  | Gamalin 80               | Neonicotinoid/Pyrethroid | Imidacloprid 40 g/l + Lambda cyhalothrin 40 g/l | II                                          |
| 36  | Lamida gold 90 EC        | Neonicotinoid/Pyrethroids | Imidacloprid 30 g/l + Lambda-Cyhalothrin 60 g/l | III                                         |
| 37  | Lambda                   | Pyrethroids    | Lambda Cyhalothrin          | II                                          |

*WHO classification, 2019 [18]

Table 2. Farmer’s dosage of pesticides and number of applications, time interval between applications in rice and vegetable farming

| Pesticide Active ingredient (a.i) | Single dose (g a.i/ha) | Recommended dose (g a.i/ha) | Average Time interval between application (day) | Total number of applications per crop cycle |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Fungicide                         |                        |                            |                                               |                                             |
| Carbendazim                       | 400                    | 200                        | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Chlorothalonil                    | 2088.1                 | 1008                       | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Copper oxide                      | 329.47                 | n.a                        | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Mancozeb                          | 2327.7                 | 1600                       | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Maneb                             | 2137.3                 | 1600                       | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Metalaxyl                         | 196.3                  | 240                        | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Potassium phosphite               | 525.3                  | n.a                        | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Insecticide                       |                        |                            |                                               |                                             |
| Acetamiprid                       | 35.3                   | 20                         | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Chlorpyrifos-ethyl                | 710.0                  | 600                        | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Cypermethrin                      | 150.6                  | 36                         | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Emamectine benzoate               | 103.5                  | 160                        | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Fipronil                          | 25.5                   | 30                         | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Imidacloprid                      | 28.0                   | 20                         | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Lambda-Cyhalothrin               | 96.0                   | 45                         | 5                                             | 15                                          |
| Herbicide                         |                        |                            |                                               |                                             |
| Glyphosate                        | 3828.1                 | 1440                       | 180                                           | 2                                           |
| 2,4 D amine                       | 2080.3                 | 720                        | 180                                           | 2                                           |
| Paraquat dichloride               | 798.5                  | 800                        | 180                                           | 2                                           |

3.6 Farmers’ Perception of Environmental Effects of Pesticides

Less than 50% of rice farmers were aware of the environmental effects of pesticides. Contrarily, 50.5% of vegetable farmers were conscious of the negative effects of pesticides on the environment. Both rice (83.5%) and vegetable farmers (100%) reported that they had noticed dead non-target organisms like birds, snakes, frogs, toads, insects, and fish species, after herbicide applications in the rice environment of Ndop, resulting into a drastic population decline. The distribution and abundance of mushrooms
have also dropped. Other observable environmental effects of pesticides reported by farmers include – soil, air and water pollution. Farmers were also able to notice a change in the soil texture (loose soil particles) and fertility. There was a significant difference between training and environmental awareness ($X^2 = 28.98, p = 0.001$).

3.7 Fishing Practices in and Around Paddy Fields

Unlike before, very few farmers (14.8%) do fishing alongside paddy farming in flooded paddy fields, nearby streams, and rivers. Catfish – *Clarias gariepinus*, and the bony fish – *Oreochromis niloticus*, were the main fish species harvested from the floodplains. Most farmers (85.2%) no longer do fishing because of the drastic fish decline following the introduction of pesticides in their area. Farmers (60.8%) who were involved in fishing had fished for more than ten years. Most fish farmers (64.1%) do fishing on daily and weekly basis. *Clarias gariepinus* constituted 56% of the fish species harvested from the paddy fields, with a mean average catch of 12.22 kg ± 7.47 SD per month. However, the maximum fish catch per month was

![Fig. 4. Duration of pesticide used by farmers in Ndop](image)

![Fig. 5. Disposal practices of pesticides by rice and vegetable farmers](image)
4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed that farmers were the main stakeholders of pesticides since they heavily relied on pesticides to control crop pests [19]. From this study, farmers never respected or applied higher doses of pesticides (Table 1) because the government and NGOs subsidized or provided them with pesticides to encourage crop production. Besides, farmers obtained information on pesticide doses from colleagues who had never undergone official training [20,21,22]. Furthermore, farmers owned small farm sizes (< 1 ha) that were not expensive to manage [23]. The study results are similar to the findings made by [3] who found that farmers in the Ndop floodplain applied higher doses of some pesticides during crop cultivation. Farmers (100%) used only herbicides during rice cultivation because they probably considered that weeds were the major bio-pest constraint of rice, which might have caused significant yield losses in the past. This assertion is probably true because, in sub-Saharan Africa, weeds are the most frequent and widespread biotic constraints of rice environments and caused rice yield losses of at least 2.2 million tons (Mt) per year [24,25]. However, the study result contradicts those of [26] who reported the wide use of herbicides, fungicides, and insecticides by rice farmers in Rwanda. Interestingly nematicides (Table 1) were not used either by group of farmers in the current study, even though nematodes are cosmopolitan pests that can potentially cause significant crop yield losses. This result may be because farmers consciously paid less attention to bio-pests that have never cause substantial yield losses. From field observation, farmers in this study were ignorant of the various symptoms peculiar to particular pathogens. However, vegetable farmers used fungicides, herbicides, and insecticides to control vegetable pests (Tables 1 and 2).

There were no buffer zones between farmers’ crop fields and nearby water bodies in the Ndop floodplain, increasing exposure to toxic threshold levels of pesticide residues, especially in rice fields, which became flooded lakes during peak growing season. The poor disposal practices (Fig. 3) observed in the current study was common in most developing countries [21,22,27,28,29,30]. These poor disposal practices can potentially pose environmental risks in the Ndop floodplain because pesticides may leak from the containers to pollute ground and surface waters. The empty containers can also affect non-target organisms like fish and other aquatic life, natural pollinators (bees and butterflies), livestock, birds and beneficial soil microorganisms [31,32]. Most rice (83.5%) and vegetable farmers (100%) in this study perceived or observed some effects of pesticides on non-target organisms (birds, frogs, lizards, snakes, fish, plants, and small insects such as bees, etc.) in the wetland. Interestingly, farmers were able to deduce habitat degradation resulting from loose soil particles caused by pesticides. These observations indicate that farmers effectively contribute to strategies that aim at reducing pesticides’ risks in the wetland.

Farmers (100%) associated the decline in fish catch in the Ndop paddy floodplains with pesticides use during crop cultivation. Earlier studies by [33,34] also reported a frequent fish decline resulting from pesticide runoffs from crop fields in Costa Rica. This assertion is possible because an earlier study showed that higher doses of cypermethrin posed a worse-case definite acute and chronic risk to fish in the aquatic wetland of Ndop [3]. Based on the study of [3], lower or recommended concentrations of chlorpyrifos-ethyl, mancozeb, λ-cyhalothrin, and chlorothalonil posed an acute aquatic risk. Also, the use of glyphosate-based formulations by farmers in Ndop probably contributed to the fish decline, because low glyphosate concentrations caused biodiversity loss of main phytoplankton species that supported fish production of upper trophic levels [35]. An earlier study in the paddy wetlands of Ndop showed changes in the phytoplankton biodiversity due to different land-use including pesticides [36]. However, other factors such as climate change, unsustainable fishing, and eutrophication, potentially contributed to fish production decline [30]. The significant difference between training and environmental awareness (p = 0.001) in the current study strongly suggests that designing and implementing training programs through farmer’s CIGs will consequently reduce pesticide risk in the environment of Ndop.
5. CONCLUSION

The current study evaluated farmer’s pesticide use practices and their effects on the wetland of Ndop, North West Region of Cameroon. Most crop fields (95.6%) lack buffer zones since the farms were between 0 to 1 meter from water bodies. Most farmers (71.3%) are poorly disposed of pesticide containers and 100% of the farmers washed and rinsed Knapsack sprayers in nearby water bodies. About 83.5% of rice farmers and 100% of vegetable farmers noticed observable effects of pesticides in the wetland. There was a significant difference between training and environmental awareness of pesticides ($X^2 = 28.98, p < 0.001$). Most farmers (85.2%) no longer do fishing in the rice fields because of the frequent fish decline resulting from pesticide use. The average fish catch per month in the paddy fields was 12.22 kg ± 7.47 SD. These results indicate an urgent need of implementing a management strategy to ensure sustainability and the conservation of the wetland resource of Ndop, North West Region Cameroon.

DISCLAIMER

The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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