

This is my home



**The communities of the
Cerrado's struggle to build a
world without pesticides**

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Introduction

The interviews presented in this booklet are part of a special series of the podcast “This is my home”, in which children from the Cerrado speak about the impacts of the use of pesticides by agribusiness.

The podcast “This is my home” (<https://social.org.br/podcast/>) is a collaboration with traditional communities of the Cerrado, and it’s produced by Rede Social de Justiça e Direitos Humanos (Network for Social Justice and Human Rights), in partnership with Comissão Pastoral da Terra – Piauí (Pastoral Land Commission – Piauí) and Coletivo de Povos e Comunidades Tradicionais do Cerrado (Collective of Traditional Peoples and Communities of the Cerrado).

The first episode of the podcast series was released in July 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, with the goal of connecting the communities of the Cerrado who were in lockdown. The episodes of the first season used audio clips recorded during field work with communities in Piauí, Maranhão and Tocantins in 2019. The main themes were the impacts of agribusiness corporations on their territories, such as illegal land grabbing, the pollution of water sources, pesticide contamination, arson and deforestation.

Currently in its 5th season, the podcast is produced in collaboration with the communities through a series of workshops in which we

define the topics, record the interviews, and plan communication strategies. The workshops and the production of the podcast have played an important role in strengthening the leadership of women and youths in the communities.

This special series of the podcast about the impacts of pesticides on children was also created collectively. It is important to highlight that during the production process, the children themselves played a leading role in the workshops and in the interviews, sharing their perceptions and experiences.

Four traditional communities were involved in the work: Parentina (Quilombola) and Melancias (Riverine), in the municipality of Gilbués; and Barra da Lagoa (Riverine-wetland) and Vão do Vico (Akroá Gamella Indigenous people), in the municipality of Santa Filomena. The children's names and images have not been disclosed for security reasons.

The workshops used a playful approach to address the subject based on conversations about daily life, videos and educational activities, such as drawing and 'planting' dreams, in which each child expressed what they would like to see happen in their community. This booklet includes photos from the workshops and excerpts from the interviews with the children.

Building a world without pesticides

The children of the Collective of Traditional Peoples and Communities of the Cerrado in Piauí explained what pesticides are and their impacts in the territories where they live.

“Pesticides are a type of chemical product used on agribusiness plantations.”



The rain carries the agribusiness's poisonous chemicals to the communities' territories, contaminating the soil and their water supply.

“They can cause disease in crops and if an animal eats it, it can kill them. If people eat it, it’s bad for their health too.”



In the highlands of the Cerrado, where there used to be forests, lots of fruit trees and animals, agribusiness corporations took over the land to expand monocropping soy plantations, causing deforestation and pollution from pesticides. The communities of the Cerrado suffer from the serious impacts of the pesticides, often applied through aerial spraying, which is when these toxic substances are dropped from the agribusiness farms' airplanes.

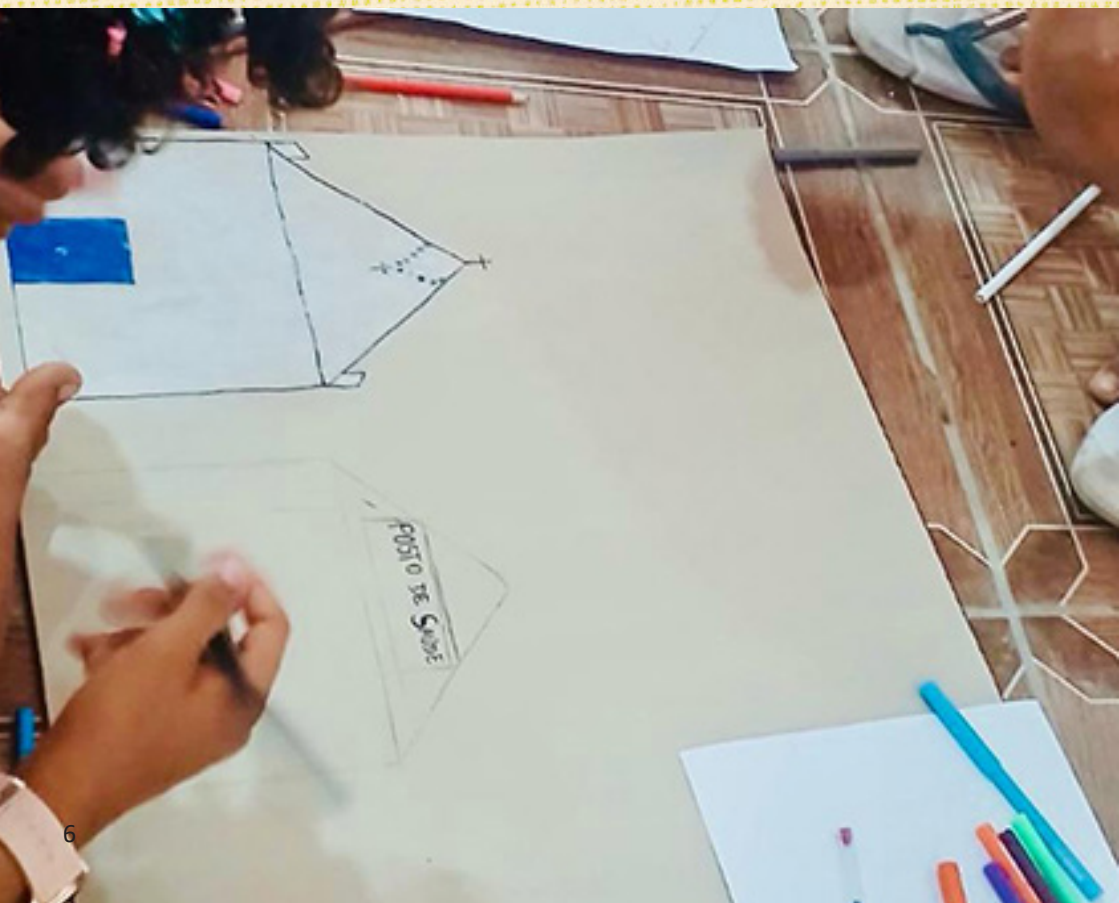
“They contaminate the water, fish, the animals. And the people’s food is contaminated, and then, the people eat them and end up getting sick”.

Data from IBAMA (the National Environmental Agency) show that in 2024, nearly 10,000 tonnes of pesticides were sold in Piauí. This amount is about 3 liters of pesticides for every person living in the state. The government stimulates these sales by not taxing the companies that sell pesticides. This fuels the destruction by agribusiness, which causes deforestation, fires and pollution in areas near the communities.



As agribusiness corporations expand soy plantations in the Cerrado, nearby communities feel the effects of poisonous chemicals, such as strong odors, air, water and soil pollution. This affects everyone's health. The children describe the impacts of pesticides on health based on their own experience in communities who are resisting the expansion of agribusiness.

“People are getting sick because their health is deteriorating. The smell is unbearable and makes you feel nauseous and short of breath.”



Farmworkers at agribusiness plantations who apply pesticides experience skin problems, such as itchiness, blisters and burns. These chemicals also cause coughing and respiratory problems. Agribusiness corporations often use drones or airplanes to spray pesticides, which drift into nearby communities, affecting their houses, clothes, food, people and animals.

“It causes cancer, kills the animals, and the soil becomes poor because of the chemicals”.

“Pesticides are dangerous because you can bring the contamination into your home, on your hands and clothes.”



Pesticides are practically unregulated in Brazil. This is true of even the most dangerous ones that have been banned in the European Union and in other countries. Brazil needs effective laws and enforcement to control the use of these chemicals and eliminate tax incentives that stimulate environmental destruction. The Brazilian government must urgently create laws banning pesticides and aerial spraying, build pesticide-free territories and invest in ecological agriculture practices.



“I had a stomach ache, dizziness and a headache. It transfers the smell to us, to our lungs”.



The communities who protect the Cerrado are calling on the government to take urgent action against deforestation, water and soil contamination by agribusiness. The children of the Cerrado want a future with forests, biodiversity, clean water and healthy food.

“I want a good future, with no deforestation, with food and water”.

“Forests forever, health, joy, love and peace”.

The children describe their drawings, which portray life and hope in their communities, and their efforts to preserve biodiversity in the Cerrado.



“The house, the coconut and buriti trees, the beehives, the birds. I like living in nature”.

“The trees, the bees living here in the flowers, the river and the animal living peacefully”.

The state needs to invest in public policies that value the ancestral knowledge and practices of the communities' food systems. The rights of the communities must urgently be protected to preserve the Cerrado.

"I drew a flower pot with a heart because we take care of the flowers".

"I am planting a little seed of hope here."



Impacts of pesticides in Brazil

Brazil is one of the largest consumers of pesticides in the world. This is due to the power of the agribusiness sector, which causes environmental destruction and violence against peasant, Indigenous and Quilombola (rural afro-Brazilian) communities. Agribusiness corporations receive large amounts of public funding and tax incentives to produce mono-cropping commodities such as soy and sugarcane, as part of a narrow, export-oriented trade agenda.





The expansion of agribusiness plantations in recent decades has led to an increase in the use of pesticides, which pollute the environment and cause serious harm to human health. Between 2010 and 2021, the volume of pesticides used in Brazil rose by 87%, of which over half is for soy production. Soy, sugarcane, corn and cotton monocultures account for 83% of pesticides sold in the country¹.

According to data from IBAMA (Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources), in 2024, 825,800 tonnes of pesticides were sold in Brazil, representing a 9.3% increase in comparison to 2023. Data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock reveal that in 2025 the number of pesticides approved also rose: 914 new products were registered, representing a 38% increase in relation to 2024.

¹ Various authors. *Atlas dos agrotóxicos: Fatos e dados do uso dessas substâncias na agricultura*. Fundação Heinrich Böll, Rio de Janeiro, 2024.

The agricultural commodities production chain, including the trade of seeds and chemical inputs, is heavily concentrated in the hands of transnational corporations. The global pesticides market is controlled by a few transnational corporations that also dominate the industrial seed market, most of which are genetically modified and developed to resist the pesticides produced by the same companies. Corporations such as Syngenta, Bayer, BASF and Corteva control most of this market and impose an agricultural system that is increasingly dependent on chemical inputs, patented seeds and pesticides.





The Brazilian government supports agribusiness's use of pesticides by providing tax exemptions, logistical infrastructure and subsidized farm credit. The National Congress has boosted the power of the agribusiness sector by weakening the rules on pesticide use. Many of these toxic substances are either banned or are authorized for use in much smaller quantities in the European Union (EU) than in Brazil because of the serious harm they cause to human health and the environment.

Studies by Larissa Bombardi² highlight the significant differences between Brazilian and EU legislation. For one, the EU restricts the use of pesticides in its territory, but does not prohibit them from being exported to other countries. Nor are there restrictions on corporations in the sector that are headquartered in the EU but own pesticide factories in countries where the legislation favors the use of these toxic substances, such as Brazil.

² Larissa Bombardi. "Geografia do Uso de Agrotóxicos no Brasil e Conexões com a União Europeia". São Paulo: FFLCH - USP, 2017.



This is the case of glyphosate, the most widely used pesticide in Brazil and one applied to genetically-modified crops. The IARC/WHO classify this product as ‘probably carcinogenic to humans’. Even so, the maximum permitted level of glyphosate in drinking water in Brazil is 5,000 times higher than levels in the EU. Glyphosate is associated with serious neurological problems, especially in children, and can cause motor and mental health disorders³.

As the amount of pesticides used in Brazil increases and new toxic substances are authorized, the social and environmental impacts on people’s food worsen. The impacts of pesticides affect the entire population, even in countries that have banned these substances, but import agricultural commodities or processed foods from countries where they are still used. Certain groups suffer from these impacts more intensely, such as farmworkers and rural communities located near agribusiness plantations. The effects on children exposed to this type of poisonous chemicals are very severe.

³ Bombardi, Larissa. *Agrotóxicos e colonialismo químico*. São Paulo: Elefante; 2023.

Exposure to pesticides through air, water, soil and food contamination can cause acute intoxication and chronic health problems. In addition, there are frequent reports of agribusiness corporations using pesticides as a “chemical weapon” against rural communities. The Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) reports expose that peasant, quilombola and indigenous communities suffer from serious effects of contamination caused by agribusiness. In 2024, CPT registered 276 cases of contamination, which affected 17,027 families⁴.

In 2025, Brazil registered the highest number of cases of pesticide poisonings in the last 11 years, according to data from the Ministry of Health. A total of 9,729 incidents were reported, representing an 84% increase in relation to 2015. Between 2015 and 2025, the age group with the highest number of cases was 20 to 39 years old, with 23,045 reports, around one-third of the total. The second highest number was among children aged 1 to 4 years, with 17,476 cases or approximately one-fourth of the victims. Pesticide poisonings can cause nausea, vomiting, headaches, difficulty breathing and skin itching, among other symptoms. Of all the cases registered from 2015 to 2025, 89% were cases of acute poisoning⁵.

⁴ Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT). Conflitos no Campo Brasil 2024. Goiânia: Centro de Documentação Dom Tomás Balduino (CEDOC/CPT), 2025. Available from: https://cptnacional.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/CPT2024_ConflitosNoCampo-web.pdf

⁵ See: <https://reporterbrasil.org.br/2026/03/brasil-recorde-intoxicacao-agrotoxico/>

Chronic effects of exposure to pesticides include cancer, neurological disorders, impacts on reproductive health, endocrine disruptions and genetic changes. These conditions tend to appear after repeated exposure to agricultural chemicals over time, which often makes it difficult to establish a direct link to the problems and contributes to under diagnosing. Various studies point to the problem of underreporting and estimate that the actual numbers are significantly higher.

Children, especially ones living in rural areas that are highly exposed to pesticides, are one of the most vulnerable groups. There are specific factors related to both the context of exposure and children's physiological characteristics that make cases of intoxication more severe, as their bodies are still developing and their immune system is still not fully developed.



In addition, proportionally, the quantity of toxic substances ingested is significantly higher in children than in adults, due to their lower body weight and the higher relative dose of chemicals absorbed, making them particularly vulnerable to intoxication. In children, reports of nausea, vomiting, headaches, dizziness, skin irritation and difficulty breathing are common. There are also studies that show the chronic and more “silent” effects of exposure during childhood, such as alterations in neurological development, hormonal disorders, malformations, respiratory and immune system problems, as well as various types of cancer in the long term.

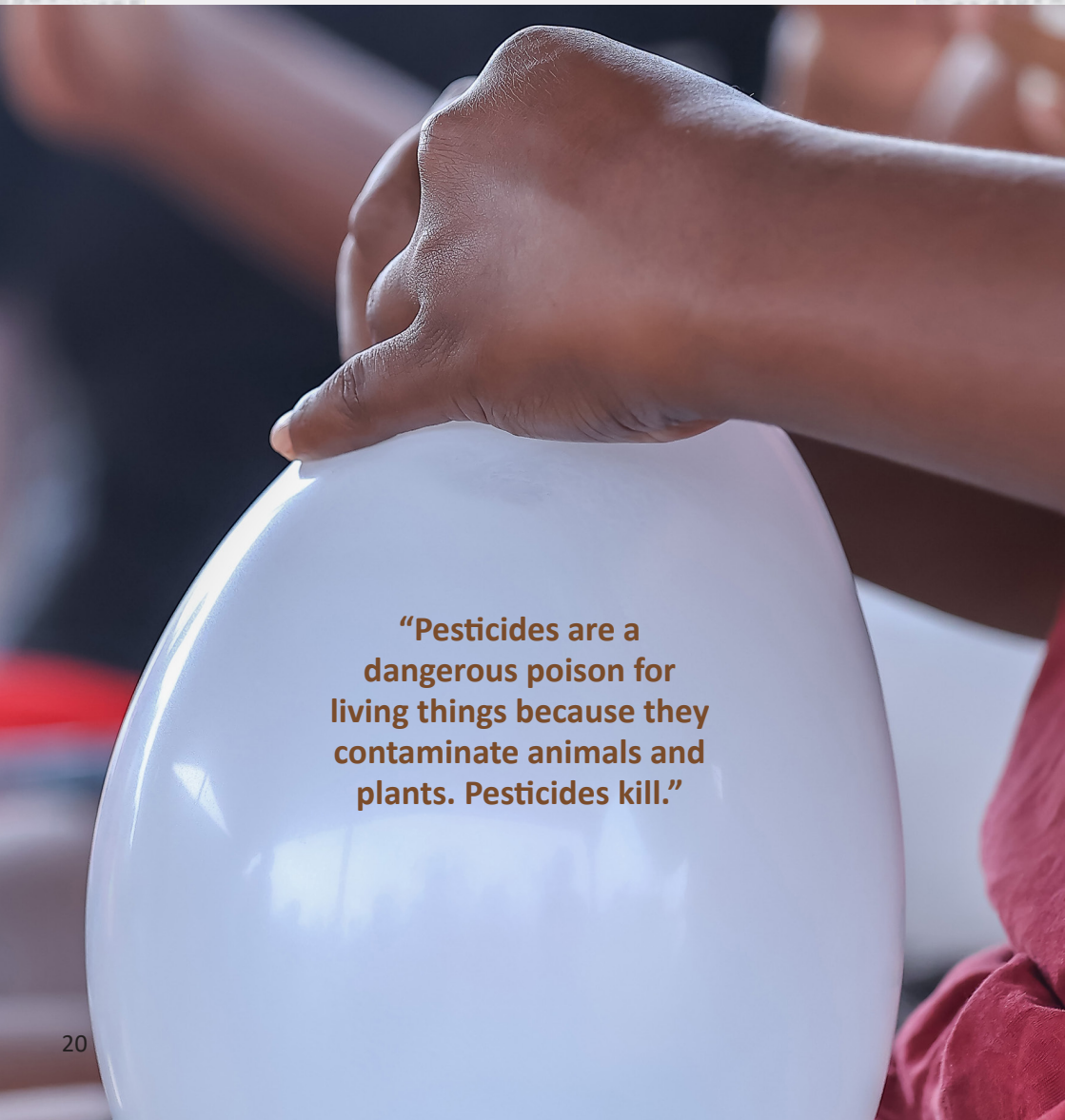
The Brazilian Association of Collective Health (Abrasco) and the National School of Public Health - Sérgio Arouca (ENSP) compiled evidence of harm to human reproductive health caused by exposure to pesticides in Brazil. In relation to child health, the main findings were grouped into outcomes such as neoplasms, genetic alterations, perinatal outcomes, endocrine disorders and reproductive changes related to fertility and pregnancy⁶.

Children can be exposed to the effects of pesticides during the prenatal period, breastfeeding and then, throughout their life time⁷. Another way children are exposed to pesticides is through the ingestion of contaminated food and water. This exposure can occur in the neonatal period, through breast milk and later in life, through the intake of contaminated food and water.

⁶ Dossiê Associação Brasileira de Saúde Coletiva (ABRASCO); Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública Sérgio Arouca (ENSP/Fiocruz). Danos dos agrotóxicos na saúde reprodutiva – conhecer e agir em defesa da vida. Rio de Janeiro: Abrasco/ENSP, 2024. Available from: <https://abrasco.org.br/>.

⁷ Abrasco and ENSP, 2026.

In rural areas, communities and schools near agribusiness plantations suffer the most severe effects of contamination. Even playing on contaminated soil poses a serious risk to children, who may ingest residues of toxic substances. The absorption of these substances is very dangerous to children's health.



“Pesticides are a dangerous poison for living things because they contaminate animals and plants. Pesticides kill.”

