

World Environment Day

Beat plastic pollution

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Why kaveera ban lost steam

Enforcement. On April 15, 2015, Nema started the enforcement of the ban but in less than a month, the ban started losing steam.

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Mbale Town in eastern Uganda is beaming with activities as Uganda joins the rest of the world to raise awareness about the dangers of plastics use to the environment.

The once clean town, is currently choking on a cocktail of wastes. This partly explains why the district was chosen to host this year's celebrations running under the theme: "Beat Plastic Pollution."

World Environment Day is commemorated every June 5 and is the United Nation's principal vehicle for encouraging awareness and action for the protection of environment.

The theme urges governments, industry, communities, and individuals to come together and explore sustainable alternatives and urgently reduce the production and excessive use of single-use plastic polluting our soils, lakes and rivers, damaging marine life and threatening human health.

But does Uganda need such reminders?

In 2009, Ms Syda Bbumba, the then minister for Finance, during her Budget speech, pronounced a ban on polythene bags of less than 30 microns that were used "for conveyance of goods and liquid in order to protect our environment" and an excise duty of 120 per cent was imposed on other plastic materials.

A moratorium of six months was given to the public as a transition period as polythene bags (kaveera) manufacturers reduced the import and manufacture of the said bags.

The implementation of the ban was not immediate. This delay, led to more importation and manufacture of polythene bags in the country.

The National Environment Management Authority (Nema) estimates the 39,600 tonnes of polyethylene waste is left in the environment and do not rot easily.

Nema as the principal agency mandated to monitor, regulate, coordinate and supervise all aspects of environment management in Uganda, after considering the rationale, the scientific evidence decided that there are only two viable options for managing the plastics.

On April 15, 2015, Nema started the enforcement of the ban, seizing at least 4000kg of polythene carrier



A woman picks polythene bags from a dumping site recently. According to some experts, the enforcement of kaveera ban is hindered by some people, including those from the business community. FILE PHOTO

bags. In less than a month, however, the ban started losing steam.

A row erupted between Nema and Trade ministry over the ban and slowly Nema officials started losing the battle that had received public support.

Backed by Trade ministry officials and intensive lobbying of other senior government officials, kaveera manufacturers continued to produce the banned product in total disregard of the law.

"We understand that the business community who are primarily interested in profits have all along influenced government's decision on this matter and unfortunately, government has also chosen to side with this group as its interest seems to be on more revenue collection in taxes at the expense of people's health and the overall health of the Environment," reads part of the reaction that Mr Frank Muramuzi, the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE).

"NAPE is concerned that government has continued to interfere with the legitimate functions of Nema and against the wish of the majority Ugandans to ban Kaveera," he added.

NAPE recommended that government continues with the ban regardless of the intimidation minted on Nema by the manufacturers, other ministries desist from interfering with the technical work and mandate of Nema and the business community should work towards putting in place industries or businesses that are environmen-

tally friendly.

The other call was on the public to desist from buying and using of the kaveera.

It is hard to tell if such call was adhered to, but what is clear is that kaveera is still in circulation.

But Nema insists that the ban is on and has received commitment from some of the manufacturers to abandon the trade and resort to biodegradable carriers.

"Nema also received communi-

cation from several business entities declaring their intention to abandon the use of plastic bags for their products and use environmentally friendly alternatives," reads part of the assessment report by the environment watchdog.

Why the ban?

Polythene bags have been responsible for blockage of drainage channels and sewers, which causes floods and stagnation of water

leading to increase in incidence of diseases such as malaria.

Once integrated in the soil, it blocks the percolation of water, hence affecting soil fertility. It also kills domestic animals which ingest it while feeding.

About the law

Parliament passed a law on the total ban on the use of kaveera in 2010 but implementation has not been possible due to cries from manufacturers over claims of massive investments in industrial machinery. Section 3 of the Finance Act, Regulation 4 of SI No. 32, reads in part, "It is prohibited for a person to manufacture, import, sell, use, distribute or otherwise deal in plastics bags except plastic women bags for the packaging and conveyance of goods and plastic bags and other plastics for exceptional uses ..."

The law, however, allows the manufacturer and use of polythene bags meant for industrial purposes, agricultural use, medical, research and science, sanitation, construction and exports.

BLOCKING CHANNELS

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METGE is a Ugandan not-for-profit organization implementing the 10 Million Trees Planting Project (TPP) in the Mount Elgon region of Eastern Uganda. Key to its success has been the development of partnerships with other delivery NGOs/organisations and engaging with rural communities. The TPP aims to support communities in Mt Elgon region and achieve the planting of 10 million trees by 2020.



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