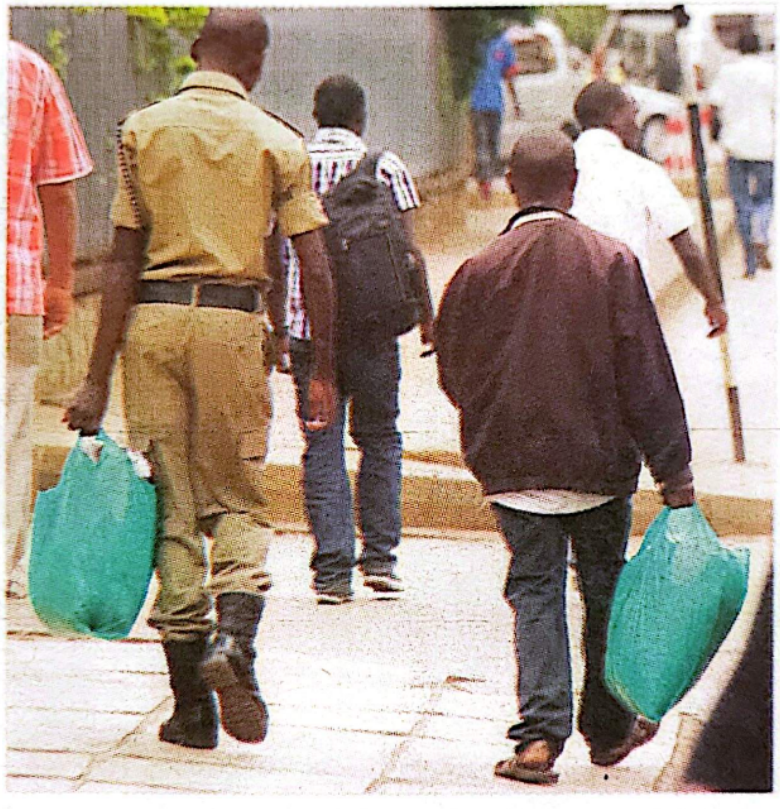
# Is ban on plastic carrier bags working?

Last week, Cabinet revisited the policy on managing plastic carrier bags. But the country's dilemma is the speedy drafting and approving of laws, without implementing such laws, **Gidieon Badagawa** writes.



**Men carry items in polythene bags in Kampala. Eight years ago, government banned polythene bags.** PHOTO BY ABUBAKER LUBOWA

Failure to manage the use of *Kaveera* (or plastic carrier bags) in Uganda is a clear manifestation of the challenge Uganda continues facing in drafting policies and laws that are sub optimally enforced or implemented, either for political or patronage reasons.

If Uganda shall get to the next level, particularly the middle income, laws, procedures, and policies must be strictly adhered to and complied with. Any contraventions must attract the due penalties as defined by the laws lest we continue in the state we are. The environment and natural capital are key drivers for economic growth and social transformation. Any country that vies to become middle income must recognise this. Uganda has set its targets for 2020 among which are, a very clean environment and food self-sufficiency.

The challenges of climate change and food insecurity however, are already catching up with us. *Kaveera* as we know, is ruining the fertility of our soils and explaining in part, the very low agricultural yield. Uganda's Agricultural productivity has fallen to well below 1.3 per cent and we cannot realise as much yield as we used to, several years ago, yet our population is growing at 3.2 per cent. Poor management of Kaveera continues to impact negatively on all sectors of the economy especially agriculture and construction.

The illusion has been that National Environment Management Authority (Nema) should address the challenge of polythelyne bags. But several stakeholders including local governments, Kampala Capital City Authority, schools, universities and the civic populations ought to appreciate this challenge and join in the effort to clean up. Nema must be commended for the fight they have put up even with very meager resources at their disposal including staff.

**BAN ON POLYTHENE MATERIALS**

In the 2009 Budget, the tehn finance minister, Ms Syda Bbumba announced a total ban on the use, importation and production of all polythene materials.

Cabinet has now revisited the policy on managing polythene bags.

## Dilemma

Uganda's dilemma, which Cabinet ought to address themselves to, is the speedy drafting and approving of laws, and on the flip side, the slow pace or non-implementation of such laws/policies. Cabinet has now revisited the policy on managing Kaveera. But the question is: How can we have Cabinet approve a policy in 2009 on Kaveera ban, it is announced through the budget speech the same year and eight years later, such policy is never implemented? And recall there are many policies and laws of this nature. Who should take the responsibility? Is anyone monitoring and evaluating government policies and programmes?

More importantly, we need to do an assessment of the impact of the ban we have instituted on the economy. Do we have a cost-benefit analysis to inform policy implementation? Are we convinced that we have invested enough in alternative packaging, for instance? Do our people understand which carrier bags we are putting a ban on and why? Is the law enforceable especially considering the kind of population using the prohibited materials? Shouldn't we run some education and awareness campaigns ahead of the law enforcement? Is the problem more to do with the manufacture or the use of carrier bags? Should we not be paying more attention to the manner in which we manage and dispose of our plastic waste?

We have seen countries that are heavy users of plastics including carrier bags, turning out to be the cleanest with better organised environments. Did they ban or have they regulated better? Policies must always be benchmarked.

**Gidieon Badagawa is the executive director of Private Sector Foundation Uganda.**

CamScanner