

Plastics making big profits for producers, dealers Slum dwellers thrive on waste

By Gerald Tenywa
and Martin Kitubi

The sun was playing hide and seek with the dark rain-making clouds. Betty Namulondo, a resident of Kireka, at the edge of a stream separating Kireka and Namboole, feared that the rain could interrupt her busy day. She was washing in the fast-flowing stream below her feet.

Not far from Namulondo, youth were rummaging through the heaps of rubbish. After separating plastic bags from other waste, they would pass over the dirty plastic bags to Namulondo.

"I sell the plastic bags and I get money to pay school fees for my children as well as feed them," Namulondo said.

Namulondo said plastic waste has become her lifeline. She earns at least sh10,000 daily from washing the plastic waste.

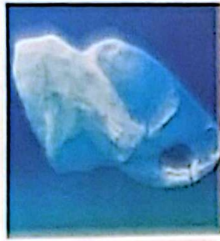
Godfrey Kawoya, the chairperson for Katooke Kireka B.L.C.I, said collecting waste for recycling has helped reduce unemployment among the youth and women as well as cleaning the environment.

He put the number of waste collectors and cleaners of waste of plastic bags at 500. He called on the Government to provide proper gear for the workers and push for a better pay.

New Vision over the weekend made spot checks on some individuals and industries that recycle plastic bags. This is part of the month-long campaign highlighting how plastic bags are recycled, the challenges and recommendations.

The campaign will support this year's UN World Environment Day, which is to be commemorated tomorrow, under the theme, "Beat plastics". The national commemoration will take place at Mbale Cricket Ground tomorrow.

A week of activities is being organised in Ivory Coast by the Africa Development Bank, starting today.



THE DAMAGE

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"Every year, over 500 billion plastic bags are used around the world, 13 million tonnes of plastic leak into the ocean, 17 million barrels of oil are used on plastic production, 100,000 marine animals are killed by plastics and 83% of tap water is found to contain plastic particles," stated the continental bank in a press release.

"This is dangerous to the environment, especially on the ocean and lakes, which are the lungs of our planet, providing most of oxygen we breathe and are a major source of food and medicines."

Ban on plastic bags

Banada Nwsa, a waste management expert, said the ban the Government imposed on plastic bags about a decade ago has failed.

"The ban is not practical because the use of plastics is inevitable," Banada said.

Rwanda and Kenya imposed bans on plastic bags and Tanzania is on the way to putting one in place. With



Polythene bags choking Nakivubo Channel in Kampala. The waste from this channel ends up in Lake Victoria

Burundi and South Sudan still embroiled in armed conflicts, Uganda remains the only country in the East African Community that has failed to get rid of plastic bags.

Waste management

Banada said plastic waste has become a problem in Uganda because the country does not have a policy on waste management.

"Do you know what would happen if all waste was recycled?" Banada asked. "We would have no waste."

He added that: "We need to reduce the waste for instance, do not pick single-use plastic bags when you can take one which can last days or weeks and then recycle the waste."

The waste expert also pointed out that waste management needs a concerted effort from policy makers, investors and communities, as

well as the local government. He also said infrastructure, such as garbage bins, are lacking in many places something which forces the waste generators to dump waste anywhere.

Banada described the practice of collecting waste and dumping it as outdated. He also said the people were not being guided on what to do with waste.

He described the Kampala City garbage ordinance, which was passed about two decades ago, as flawed. He said the people who want to process compost from waste have to get a certificate from Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA). This, Banada, said discourages

initiatives in the community. "Instead of looking for KCCA officials, I would rather give up turning waste into compost," he said.

The ordinance attempted to bring private sector into waste management, but left out the community. The city authorities are obsessed with collecting, transportation and dumping waste at Kiteezi.

"This needs to change because what is being dropped could be raw materials for other different ventures," Banada said.

"As generators of waste, the community is on its own. The policy makers do not know what is happening and do not consult. There was no consultation when the Kampala City garbage ordinance was being drafted and amended. If it happened, then it was in one big hotel in Kampala and the

communities were engaged," he said. In addition, the Government and KCCA more often look for investors for the waste from outside the country.

"What is wrong with supporting communities engaged in waste recycling machines?" he asked.

There should also be continuous sensitisation about waste management and to warning the public about littering. He said the population many years ago used to drop biodegradable, but plastics take more than 100 years to decompose.

"We need a campaign on proper waste management for about five years. The one-off approach will not work."

1% plastic bags recycled
While more than 60 local industries are producing plastic bags in Uganda, very few engage in recycling.

"The industries are recycling less than 1% of the plastic bag waste," Bob Nuwagira, the education and communications officer at the National Environment Management Authority, said.

He said the plastic bottle recyclers were removing a good amount of waste from the environment, but most of the waste from plastic bags stays in the environment.

"We risk choking our soil. Lake Victoria is endangered because Nakivubo Channel ferries a lot of plastics into it, everyday," Nuwagira said.

IN LOVING MEMORY



OF THE LATE MZEE PETERO K. BARIIRA of Rukungiri Son of KARA.
Born: 1905 Died: May 17, 1994 and Buried May 19, 1994.

It is now 24 years since you passed on to be with the Lord. We cherish the memories of your precious time you spent with us. We are grateful for the foundation you laid for us and we thank God for the time you spent on earth preaching His Gospel.

Remembered by your sons:
Rev Dr. Sam Ruteikara, Gershom Masiko, Benon Bariira Turya,
John and Moses, Daughters: Margaret, Jennifer, Lilian, Prisca,
Dinah, Prossy and Naome, grand children
and great grand children, relatives and friends.

MAY HIS SOUL REST IN PEACE!



A man and his peers collect plastic bottles. The government has been called upon to provide protective gear for the people who engage in collecting waste for recycling