

MPs, activists clash over kaveera

By Henry Sekanjako

Members of the civil society movement and MPs on Parliament's committee on natural resources have disagreed on the proposed total ban on the use of *kaveera* (polythene bags) in Uganda.

Appearing before the committee on Tuesday to give their views on the proposed National Environment Bill 2017, the civil society organisations (CSOs) under their body, Climate Action Network-Uganda (CAN-U) called for the implementation of the total ban on the use of *kaveera*, which MPs opposed.

"There should be a total ban on the use of *kaveera* to protect our environment and the lives of our people. *Kaveera* has now entered the hotel industry; some of these hotels are now cooking food using *kaveera*. This exposes us to the risk of cancer," Proscovier Vikman, a member of CAN-U told MPs.

In their proposals about the Bill, the CSOs called for an insertion of a clause into the Bill, which states that: "Notwithstanding any provision in this Act, there shall be no use, trade, manufacture, importation and exportation of polythene bags in Uganda."

Defending their position, the CSOs noted that plastic bags pose a great danger to both the

BETWEEN THE LINES:

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environment and public health.

They noted that plastic bags which are widely used in both rural and urban centres in cooking food, when heated, release dangerous chemicals into food or liquids that come into contact with them.

"If burnt, plastics release toxic fumes that contain chemicals such as dioxins and furans which have been linked to cancer," Godfrey Onetho, the chairperson of CAN-Uganda, said.

The CSOs also noted that polythene bags clog drainage and sewer lines, thereby increasing the cost of maintenance and if unattended, lead to flooding of urban areas during heavy rains, thus cutting off or making some roads impassable.

However, some MPs on the committee opposed the CSOs' proposed total ban on the use of *kaveera* in Uganda, saying being a developing country, it

cannot totally do away with the use of *kaveera*.

"A total ban is impossible. We should just regulate the use of *kaveera* and say only those of 50 microns and above should be used, instead of a total ban. The reality is *kaveera* is still here with us. Most of the things that are imported such as shirts and blankets are wrapped in *kaveera*," Andrew Aja Baryanga, the Kabale Municipality MP, said.

Samson Lokeris, the Dodoth East MP said: "We should come up with measures and laws to control the use of *kaveera*. A total ban cannot work."

It is nearly eight years since the ban on polythene bags on the Ugandan market was pronounced by the Government. Plastic manufacturers under their umbrella body, the Uganda Plastic Manufacturers and Recyclers Association, have since opposed the ban, saying it would close down businesses and reduce government revenue. Rather than an outright ban, they proposed establishing more collection centres and recycling plants to manage *kaveera*.

Just like the manufacturers, the MPs proposed that the Government comes up with a better plan on management and recycling of *kaveera* other than imposing a total ban on its use.